

We Wrote You a Hand-Washing Song: Listen Up

Thanks to coronavirus, the time has come for a new song to help us properly wash our hands.

By Marc Shaiman, New York Times, March 20, 2020

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If you didn't hate the Happy Birthday song already, you probably do now — it's the song that we've all been told to sing twice as we wash our hands, to make sure we've done it long enough to be effective. Last week, it occurred to Susan Dominus, a reporter at The New York Times, that there should be an alternative, to spare the Happy Birthday song from so many unpleasant associations. This is when she called my co-lyricist, Scott Wittman, and me with a proposal: Maybe we could come up with an alternative? The new song would have to be fun — and, of course, last 20 seconds.

Being self-isolated makes one happy to have a project — plus, it would feel good to write something that might put a happy spin on this situation we are in, even if for just a few moments

For the occasion, Scott and I — we wrote the songs for "Hairspray" and "Mary Poppins Returns," among others — created "Twenty Seconds," which will hopefully turn you and your children into mini Danny Kayes. (Google Danny Kaye right now, I'll wait...).

We sent the song to some Broadway friends to help perform our new hand washing anthem. And they have channeled their energy into these homemade videos.

The first is Jake Ryan Flynn from "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" and "Mrs. Doubtfire:"



Then, we have Samantha Williams, formerly from “Dear Evan Hansen,” and the forthcoming revival of “Caroline, or Change.”



But why stop at just one song? We created not one, but two songs. The second one, with a huge tip of the hat to Barbra Streisand and her lyricist Lan O’Kun, is called “Half a Minute Waltz.” Try wrapping your tongue around these new hand-washing lyrics set to Chopin’s greatest hit.

So now, dear reader, since so many of you may have some time on your hands — which hand-washing challenge can you meet?

We’ve provided the lyrics for “Twenty Seconds” and the “Half a Minute Waltz” below. And although a cappella is one way to go, we also offer [piano tracks and sheet music](#) in varying keys for all, so whether you’re a soprano, alto, tenor or baritone, you’ve no excuse!

Please make your own videos and post on Instagram at [#20secondhandwash](#) — extra points for [perfect hand-washing form!](#) At the very least, your hands will be clean.

Spread the word (not the germs)! As for Happy Birthday — let’s save it for happier occasions

Lyrics

“Twenty Seconds!”

Twenty seconds isn't long,
Barely time to sing this song.
There's no time to get it wrong,
Not in twenty seconds!
All that's left is fourteen secs,
To try to do what I must next.
I can't talk, please send a text!
I've only fourteen seconds.
Twenty seconds, now is five,
So kick it into overdrive!
Ain't it great to say that I've,
Washed my hands for twenty seconds!

“Half a Minute Waltz”

Turn the water on and start your hands a rubbin'
Now it's time to soap 'em up and start to scrubbin'
You must work it up into a lather,
Even though I know that you would rather,
Be outside where there is dirt for you to play,
But now's the time for your to send the dirt away.
So both your hands should wash away your troubles.
Let your fingers dance among the bubbles.
Keep a steady pace and please try not to fidget,
Clean your thumbs and don't forget to scrub each digit.
Now it's time to concentrate upon your nails,
For that is where the dirt can leave its secret trails.
Now it's finally time for turning off the faucet.
Use a paper towel, then in the trash you'll toss it.
To stay healthy this is what the world commands.
Bravo to you! You washed your hands!