



Spring
Commencement 2011



OHIO STATE

Oh! Come let's sing Ohio's praise,

And songs to Alma Mater raise;

While our hearts rebounding thrill,

With joy which death alone can still.

Summer's heat or Winter's cold,

The seasons pass, the years will roll;

Time and change will surely show

How firm thy friendship—Ohio.

—Carmen Ohio



POMP, CIRCUMSTANCE, AND OTHER SONGS OF A LIFETIME

—by Professor David Citino, 1947-2005, Late University Poet Laureate
(Originally presented as the 2000 Winter Commencement address)

If you're like me, you've got a big head, not to mention a funny robe, full of music—poems and melodies, the tunes we move to, shower and shave by, study, write to. Not just the incidental,

but the momentous music keeping time. Our histories are measures of song. Listen to your heart: drums of Africa, sea-spume of blind, far-sighted Homer, Sappho's honeyed love lyrics. Often,

music speaks for us, one note saying a thousand words. Like Rodolpho in Puccini's *La Boheme*, *Sono un poeta*. I am a poet. *Che cosa faccio?* What do I do? *Scrivo*. I write. This ceremony

is loud music—pomp and circumstance of the life you began freshman year or that first day of graduate school. In my head I press *Play*, and the CD of Big Days kicks on. I leap and linger

over moments too sweet, nearly, for words. I'll never escape rhymes from the nursery. *Up above the world so high, like a diamond in the sky*. We knew from the start our universe was aglow with wonder.

Italian, Latin, English songs in nasal accents of Cleveland. *Gaudeamus igitur, Juvenes dum sumus*. *So, let us rejoice, while we are young*. Youth is that gift we can't comprehend while we're young. This ceremony

means you all are less young than you were. Don't let the heavy knowledge gained from your studies deprive you of the gifts of youth, to be able to rejoice at the drop of a hat, to care for, be moved by others.

Now I hear golden hits of five decades. Big Mama Thornton, and that so-called *King* (King of what, fried butter sandwiches?) who stole away her hound dog. *You ain't never killed a rabbit, you ain't no friend*

of mine. As with those profs and TAs, course after course, you had to produce—kill some rabbits—to earn respect. And at times OSU may have seemed like Heartbreak Hotel, down at the end

of Lonely Street, so difficult was it to do your best. Tennessee Ernie Ford, "Sixteen Tons": *St. Peter don't you call me 'Cause I can't go. I owe my soul to the company store*.

You have been digging deep in mines of knowledge. We all owe our souls to Ohio State, company store of learning, shared experience—precious ore we have in common forever.

Now I hear Domenico Modugno's fervent urging to wish, sing, fly, *Volare, Wo-oo. Cantare, Wo-o-o-o*. My grandfather was a peasant farmer, a *contadino* in Calabria in the toe

of Italy. He knew it's the human lot to dream of flying. *Lucky, lucky, lucky me, I'm a lucky son-of-a-gun. I work eight hours, I sleep eight hours, That leaves eight hours for fun*.

Hey! He sailed in steerage across the Atlantic, came to Cleveland, where he stayed long enough to work 52 years for the B&O Railroad, before lying down to rest in good Ohio soil. So many of us

here today came from elsewhere, or ancestors did. From Tennessee, Italy, Africa, Asia, Appalachia—even, President Kirwan, the wilds of Kentucky and Maryland. Women and men with backs

supple as birch trunks. The courage it took to pick up stakes and begin again in a new world! Think of the work those older ones did. For you. You all are facing a change right now.

This sheepskin is your passport. You're bound for emigration to the next song of your life. Ohio State is the ark on which you've been sailing. You've been the precious cargo.

But, as Noah once said, *I can see clearly now the rain is gone*. The ark, our university, was filled to overflowing with the *diversity* of us. Diversity. Networks and talk shows devalue the word.

I say, rather, *the richness of us, precious difference*, the grand multiplicity of selves that balance this globe and enable it to spin true. Grandson of peasant immigrants, I was given

the opportunity to earn a doctorate in English literature from Ohio State—because my family labored long nights around the kitchen table trying to learn this arduous English. I sat where

you're sitting twenty-six years ago. Bob Dylan and Smokey Robinson got me through. Yes, it took a prophet and Miracles! My son earned an OSU Ph.D. in history. Now you, graduates, are being honored—

by degrees. We've all come together around the kitchen table of Ohio State. Ohio, *Round on the ends and high in the middle*. For the years to come we'll sing together, *Beautiful Ohio*,

in dreams again I see, Visions of what used to be. These psalms, sacred thoughts of our tribes, 78's and 33's, tapes, CD's—they take up space in shelves of our skulls, our hearts. They remind us

we want a song beyond the run-of-the-mill thrill, the moment throbbing with pleasure or bathed in the blues. We ache for something grander than pure selfishness. Songs sung for one

alone are not true music. Arias shared are music of the spheres, ways of saying to another something from the soul. Of course the Buckeye Battle Cry is there. *Drive, drive on down the field*,

Men (and women!) of the Scarlet and Gray. Well, you drove on down the field, and you drove up and down the streets, around and around crowded lots, looking for a place to park,

and you searched our dark, ancient library for a decent place to study. My wife, Mary's, father marched in the first "Script Ohio," in 1936. He's here today with us, blowing his horn, I can't help

but feel, as is the sweet mother I lost last year, the one who gave me the stars. Today's music makes us think of the debts we owe, and never can repay. So many of us would not be here

were it not for the lullabies and songs of dear parents, their parents, theirs. Some are here today in the flesh. Many are not. We mourn them with cadences of our hearts. Think how many people

sang before us, gave us a name, a voice, taught us the right words. We must cherish them by remembering every song. When we sing to others, we honor our fathers and mothers, thank them

for this day of profound scarlet and gray pomp and circumstance. *O, come let's sing Ohio's praise, And songs to Alma Mater raise*. Alma mater. Ohio State is our sweet, nurturing mother.

We came of age here, with her help. *Well, Mother, we love you, but, like, it's time we moved out, got a place of our own. You're standing there, Mom, gray hair, eyes scarlet*

from crying. We won't forget you. Now, even though this ceremony means we're being weaned, taken off the nipple, let's take care to cherish her all our days. Let's remember

the words to the songs she taught us, and pass them on. We'll remember always, Graduation Day. *Summer's heat, and winter's cold, The seasons pass, the years will roll, Time and change*

will surely show How firm thy friendship, O-hi-O. We call that little number *Carmen Ohio*. *Carmen* means *song* in Latin. You've worked hard; she is your reward; today is your reward.

You're filled to overflowing with the notes, the poems we've written together. You know the score. Continue to work hard for yourselves, and one another. Find the ones who need

you to sing to, for them, in the world. Graduates, this joyful litany, this hymn our ancestors collaborated on with us, the calling of your name today is music to our ears. Sing that name proudly

all your days, as if your life depended on it. It does, you know. It has been an honor for me to speak—and sing—to you today. Thank you, graduates, and, again, Congratulations.

