

Flag waving at the Proms

Some have expressed regret that someone gave out a lot of EU flags for people to wave at the Last Night of the Proms. Relax, I say. I have no problem with people coming from the continent to enjoy our traditions and wanting to wave the flag of their emerging state.

It may help to remind readers that the Last Night of the Proms has a very UK patriotic second half. The audience gets most animated in support of Henry Wood's Fantasia of seas shanties. He wrote this as a nine part celebration of the experiences of the ordinary seaman at Trafalgar, for the 100th anniversary of the battle in 1905. It included "See the conquering hero comes" and "Rule Britannia". The latter has now obtained her own slot after the sea shanties. It was good of so many to join in with the commemoration of the UK's naval traditions. His original medley has been adapted since.

The first tune is from the "Saucy Arethusa". This was written in celebration of the first English victory over the French at the start of the American War of Independence. A tough battle between the English 32 gun frigate Arethusa (captured from the French navy in 1759 and re commissioned) and the 36 gun Belle Poule, a French frigate, 30 miles off the Lizard was in practice inclusive. Both vessels were badly damaged with many dead, and both retreated to recover. The British claimed victory because they captured two smaller French vessels, having a superior force at sea. The French also claimed victory as the Belle Poule escaped from the superior force and did not have to bow to the British commands.

(The navy was still often called the English navy in the C18. At the time of this battle Scotland , England and Wales were united so it was by then the British navy. Ireland joined the Union in 1800, after this battle but before Trafalgar)