

The Sound of Music: Sew, a Needle Pulling Thread

The famous Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, *The Sound of Music*, has captivated audiences for generations following its release in 1965. Based on the true story of the von Trapp family's flight from the Nazi invasion of Austria at the start of the second world war, it grossed \$286 million at the box office worldwide - a record at the time.

Starring Christopher Plummer as retired naval officer Georg von Trapp and Julie Andrews as Maria (the governess who became stepmother to the widower's seven children), the musical won five Academy Awards and two Golden Globes, including Best Picture and Best Actress for Andrews.



Do-Re-Mi

"When you know the notes to sing, you can sing most anything!" The hit film features a host of memorable songs, including perhaps the most famous, *Do-Re-Mi*, when free-spirited Maria shows the children how to have fun - something that has been in short supply during their childhood.

A skilled seamstress, she makes all the children new outfits out of colourful old curtains, before taking them out to play - climbing trees, cycling and doing all the things children are supposed to do in their youth.

Adapted from the original stage musical, *The Sound of Music*, in 1959, *Do-Re-Mi* is Maria's way of teaching the notes of the scale to the children as they learn to sing - a "frivolity" banned by their stern father following their mother's death.

In the stage show, it is sung in the von Trapps' living room soon after Maria meets the children. However, in the film, the setting is outdoors, with the catchy song playing over a montage of clips showing Maria and the children having fun.

The song's lyrics are based on the solfège - the name for the collective of musical notes that make up the scale. Maria gives each of the children a note to sing and substitutes nouns and verbs for each note so they are easy to remember.

For example, "do, re, mi" becomes "doe, ray, me" - a female deer, a ray of sunlight and a "name I call myself." When Maria gets to the fifth solfège symbol, she substitutes "sew, a needle pulling thread" and this refers to her sewing

skills and making the children new clothes from curtains.

"Make do and mend"

The idea of making clothes out of unlikely materials was common during World War II, when "make do and mend" was a familiar phrase. The frugal lifestyle across Europe because of the wartime austerity saw many people making their own clothes and repairing old clothes when they became worn and ripped.

In Britain, the government released a book in 1943 called Make Do and Mend, filled with ideas on how people could recycle to make the most of minimal resources. The mentality continued throughout the war and into the 1950s, when resources were still scarce.

Britain's "waste-not, want-not" ethos led to extreme recycling, such as using waste paper to make house roofs, or pulling up park railings and even surrendering saucepans for salvage. Material and clothes were in short supply, so people would wear the same clothes for years, and even when they were worn out, they would be made into something else.

Wartime brides who wanted a beautiful wedding gown were sometimes lucky enough to get their hands on old silk and nylon parachutes to make a beautiful gown. With rationing in place, this was the only way they could make a special wedding dress. A number of wedding dresses made from parachute fabric are on display today and exhibited at places such as the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Imperial War Museum in London.

When Maria makes children's clothes out of curtains in *The Sound of Music*, she is following the common practice of the era to make the most of limited resources and a frugal existence.

Popular culture

Do-Re-Mi has appeared many times in popular culture since its first release in 1959. It appeared in *The Simpsons* animated series in 1994 in an episode called [Bart Gets An Elephant](#). Meanwhile, a flashmob performance in Antwerp railway station in 2010 was filmed for a [Belgian commercial for VTM](#) - the television channel.

Curtain dress patterns

Modern-day seamstresses even have patterns to help them recreate the famous curtain dresses made by Maria in *The Sound of Music*! The online [Edelweiss Patterns](#) describes how to make your own Liesl Curtain Dress, describing it as a cross between a dirndl style and a sundress. The original dress from the film is on display at the Planet Hollywood Restaurant.

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