

About the Music.

by Curt Ebersole

It's our twelfth performance at Caramoor, and our nation's two-hundred-fiftieth birthday! We are so excited to be here with you this evening, performing inspiring music in honor of our nation's semiquincentennial. We hope you'll enjoy this extraordinary program by and for American patriots.

We are opening the program this evening with a new arrangement of ***The Star-Spangled Banner***. This arrangement, by **John Williams** — an American icon in his own right — is particularly inspiring, and we are sure it will be the perfect start to our celebration together tonight.

The ***WSW American Overture*** is written to commemorate our nation's semiquincentennial but also to celebrate for all time the historic glory of the songs and music that have come to represent the mission and character of our great country. Seeking to convey a comprehensive and definitive face of our American musical spirit, this arrangement integrates in various forms stalwart melodies such as *Yankee Doodle*, *American Patrol*, *Columbia Gem of the Ocean*, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, and *America the Beautiful* with iconic quotes from Sousa marches, military songs, works by Aaron Copland, and other important American anthems. It is our wish that this work will serve the American public for years to come, to bestir in each one of us our innate pride in being American during this milestone and beyond.

In 1917, a civic committee for the York Flower Festival in York, PA, requested that the Sousa Band perform a march based on themes from local composer Charles C. Frick's opera *Nittauinis*. **John Phillip Sousa** created ***The White Rose March*** in commemoration of White Rose Day, itself a nod to the emblem of the city's namesake, the House of York in England. However, the event was then cancelled due to the demands of World War I. Although the march was later played at a public concert and released as a recording, it never achieved widespread popularity — until its later rediscovery.

Frank Ticheli's program notes say of ***An American Elegy***: "It is, above all, an expression of hope. It was composed in memory of those who lost their lives at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999, and to honor the survivors. It is offered as a tribute to their great strength and courage in the face of a terrible tragedy. I hope the work can also serve as one reminder of how fragile and precious life is and how intimately connected we all are as human beings. The work begins at the bottom of the ensemble's register, and ascends gradually to a heartfelt cry of hope. The main theme that follows, stated by the horns, reveals a more lyrical, serene side of the piece. A second theme, based on a simple repeated harmonic pattern, suggests yet another, more poignant mood. These three moods — hope, serenity, and sadness — become intertwined throughout the work, defining its complex expressive character. A four-part canon builds

to a climactic quotation of the *Columbine Alma Mater*. The music recedes, and an offstage trumpeter is heard, suggesting a celestial voice — a heavenly message. The full ensemble returns with a final, exalted statement of the main theme.”

We are deeply honored this evening to feature vocal soloist MaryKay Messenger. I cannot imagine any other vocalist who is more perfectly suited for this semiquincentennial celebration. The American anthems she sings tonight touch both our patriotic hearts and our childhood dreams.

Originally written by **Earl Robinson** and Abel Meeropol (under the pen name **Lewis Allan**), and popularized by Frank Sinatra’s award-winning 1945 short film, *The House I Live In* uses the metaphor of a home to define the United States. It argues that a true all-American identity transcends race and religion; instead, it is rooted in neighborly tolerance, democratic values, and the shared handshake of a diverse, inclusive citizenry.

Written for *The Wizard of Oz* by **Harold Arlen** and **Yip Harburg**, **“Somewhere Over the Rainbow”** is the definitive anthem of childlike hope. Its soaring melody captures a pure, universal yearning for a land of “bluebirds” and “lemon drops,” transforming the stark reality of the Great Depression into a luminous dream where every heart’s wonder finds a place to belong.

These two songs truly capture the essence of the American dream. We hope you are stirred and moved by their combined impact.

Although its origins have nothing to do with the birth of America, **Tchaikovsky’s “1812” Overture** has become synonymous with its namesake battle, in which Russia defended itself against the Napoleonic armies of France. Battles were connected to cannons, cannons to fireworks, and fireworks to the Fourth of July — and thus, a musical tradition was born. Arthur Fiedler initiated the tradition with the Boston Pops on the Esplanade in 1974, complete with cannons, church bells, and fireworks. We hope you enjoy our special take on this battle hymn of freedom, complete with hand bell choirs, which imitate the victorious pealing of church bells.

We are closing our program today with our traditional Fourth of July encore, *The Stars and Stripes Forever* by **John Philip Sousa**. Since an act of Congress in 1987, it is the official National March of the United States of America. What better way is there to end our semiquincentennial Fourth of July celebration?

I wish to thank Gillian Fox, Kathy Schuman, Tim Coffey, and Henry Valoris at Caramoor, and Barton Green, MaryKay Messenger, all of the handbell ringers, the WSW Board of Trustees, and all the members of the Westchester Symphonic Winds for their artistry and support for our performance this evening!

HANDBELL RINGERS:

Bedford Bellringers at Bedford Presbyterian Church; Heidi Michaels, director. Emanuel Ringers at Emanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, Pleasantville; Eiko Cornelius, director. Katonah Presbyterian Church Handbell Choirs; Eunkyung “Grace” Woo, director.