

INSIGHTS

from Music Director
Louis Langrée

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Welcome to the first live stream of the CSO's 2020-2021 season and our digital concert series: *Live from Music Hall!* All of us at the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra are so thankful that we can still make music together and that you can enjoy the CSO from the comfort of your own home.

Tonight's program is quintessentially American and demonstrates the versatility of this Orchestra. The musicians of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra are equally at home playing on the stage for the CSO, Pops, and May Festival as well as in the pit for the Cincinnati Opera and the Cincinnati Ballet. Tonight's program brings this aspect center stage with a concert aria, an orchestral anthem, and a ballet suite combined into a single evening of breathtaking music.

The music begins with an American violin treasure, Amy Beach's *Romance* for violin and piano. Composed for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, IL, where it was premiered by Amy Beach at the piano and American violinist Maud Powell. The *Romance* has soaring, lyrical melodies that weave effortlessly between the violin and the piano. Our own Concertmaster Stefani Matsuo and pianist Michael Chertock collaborate to bring this rarely performed piece to the stage of Music Hall.

Jessie Montgomery composed *Banner* for the 200th anniversary of the *Star Spangled Banner* in 2014, mixing together the Mexican and Puerto Rican National Anthems, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, *This Land is Your Land*, and others to form multi-layered meaning, textures, and genres that represent the complexity of modern American society. We are so excited that the Catalyst Quartet, the quartet who premiered and recorded this work, accepted our invitation to join us in bringing this contemporary American anthem to life.

Samuel Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* is essentially a concert aria for soprano with text from James Agee. Soprano Eleanor Steber commissioned the work and premiered it in 1948. Two years later, she came to Cincinnati to sing this piece while Samuel Barber sat in Springer Auditorium to hear the performance. Tonight we are thrilled that another great interpreter of this work, Angel Blue, is joining us. She has the great skill to articulate not only the music of Barber, but the musical text of James Agee. One of the special beauties of this piece is that the text contains many alliterations, onomatopoeias, and assonances that are themselves essentially musical.

In Cincinnati, *Fanfare for the Common Man* is Aaron Copland's most beloved piece. Elsewhere, *Appalachian Spring* is probably his most iconic work. *Appalachian Spring* is first and foremost a ballet, which means the piece has a narrative and a musical gesture that moves the story of the ballet forward. Copland wrote the ballet toward the end of World War II, when musicians and

venues were in short supply. Today, the viral pandemic gives us the opportunity to perform this piece in its original instrumentation for 13 players. *Appalachian Spring* tells the story of a young couple embarking on marriage and the next chapter of their life together.

Like Copland, William Grant Still has a Cincinnati and Fanfare connection, as they were both in the original group of 18 composers commissioned by the CSO to write a fanfare during World War II. We are thrilled that Awadagin Pratt, one of Cincinnati's most charismatic artists and cultural leaders, concludes tonight's inaugural digital concert with "Summerland" by William Grant Still.

We hope the joy we experienced preparing and performing tonight's concert for you resonates through the screen and brings you as much joy as it did us.