

2026 Festival Orchestra Concert Notes

AMERICAN PORTRAIT

Friday, February 27, 2026



Lincoln Portrait

Aaron Copland

Born: November 14, 1900

Died: December 2, 1990

Composed: 1942

Referred to by his peers as the “Dean of American Music”, Aaron Copland wrote music with open, slowly changing harmonies that seemed to evoke the vast American landscape. His most popular works were written during the 1930’s and 40’s written in a deliberately accessible style that he referred to as his “vernacular” style.

During World War II conductor Andre Kostelanetz commissioned Copland to write a musical portrait of an eminent American and Copland chose Abraham Lincoln. The piece is written for speaker and orchestra and uses quotes from Lincoln’s speeches and letters. Of the piece Copland wrote, “The composition is roughly divided into three main sections. In the opening section I wanted to suggest something of the mysterious sense of fatality that surrounds Lincoln’s personality. Also, near the end of that section, something of his gentleness and simplicity of spirit. The quick middle section briefly sketches in the background of the times he lived. This merges into the concluding section where my sole purpose was to draw a simple but impressive frame about the words of Lincoln himself.”

Program Notes by Naomi G. Martinez-Goldstick



Porgy and Bess Selections for Orchestra

George Gershwin, arr. Bennett

Born: September 26, 1898

Died: July 11, 1937

Composed: 1935

Porgy and Bess is an English-language opera written by George Gershwin. First premiered in Boston in 1935, it featured a cast of classically trained African American singers - and unusual and daring choice for the time - and soon moved to Broadway in New York City. In 1976 the Houston Grand Opera production helped *Porgy and Bess* gain renewed popularity and it is now one of the best known and most frequently performed operas. It tells the story of a disabled beggar, Porgy, who attempts to rescue and protect his beloved, Bess, from her violent former lover, Crown, and a drug dealer, Sportin' Life.

In 1942 Robert Russell Bennett arranged melodies from the opera into *Selections for Orchestra*, including "Bess You Is My Woman Now", "I Got Plenty o' Nuttin'", "It Ain't Necessarily So" and "Summertime".

Program Notes by Naomi G. Martinez-Goldstick



Liberty for All
Jim Beckel
Born: July 16, 1948
Composed: 2000

From composer Jim Beckel

Liberty for All is an orchestral piece with narration which was made possible through the American Composers Forum as part of the *Continental Harmony* program. Continental Harmony links communities with composers to celebrate the new millennium through the creation of original musical works. The program is a partnership of American Composers Forum and the National Endowment for the Arts, with additional funds provided by the John S. & James L. Knight Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, William & Flora Hewlett Foundation and Land O'Lakes Foundation. Continental Harmony is an Associate Partner of the White House Millennium Council.

Liberty for All uses quotes from the Declaration of Independence, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and John F. Kennedy in a very stirring musical setting that arouses the patriotic spirit in any American who listens to it.

The piece has been slightly revised to allow orchestras to use a video of a portion of Kennedy's inauguration speech as part of the performance.

The Carmel Symphony is responsible for requesting the grant that made it possible to write this piece. The dedication is in memory of musician and arts administrator, Fran Shoup.