

MISSOURI VALLEY CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

“A Musical Tribute to America”

September 28, 2025

Narrative script

Americans, We (March).....Henry Fillmore arr. Kenneth Abeling

Good afternoon, and welcome to the twenty-sixth season opener for the Missouri Valley Chamber Orchestra! It’s fantastic to see some familiar faces and some new ones as well.

Today, we are remembering the past and toasting the future of our great country through some of her songs. Like the march says, “Americans, We,” the whole lot of us, united by laws, land, and our love of liberty.

Our struggles are reflected in our culture. In the beginning, there was the War with England, fought over taxation and tyranny. This next medley of war songs begins with “My Country Tis of Thee.” Ironically, this tune sung in praise of our country is sung in Great Britain to the lyrics “God Save Our King”. The second tune “British Grenadiers” is a march of British soldiers who were specialists in the throwing of hand grenades. The third, “Chester,” was a hymn tune composed by William Billings in 1770 for the *New England Psalm Singer* and was used by William Schuman in his popular band work of the same name. The final tune “Yankee Doodle” was originally an insult to the colonial soldiers, whom the British called country bumpkins and dandies. The Americans spun it into a national song. Here is “American Revolutionary War Medley.”

American Revolutionary War Medleyarr. Bill Holcombe

Includes: My Country ‘Tis of Thee, British Grenadiers, Chester, Yankee Doodle

Woodwind Quartet with percussion

So...that war ended well for the Thirteen Colonies, and people started looking at what their well-crafted treaties had gotten them: all the land south of the Great Lakes, east of the Mississippi River, and north of East and West Florida went to the United States. Then in 1803, under the leadership of Thomas Jefferson, the United States obtained from France the Louisiana Purchase including, among other precious lands, the Missouri River. These lands had to be mapped and explored,

and one primary group of explorers were the fur traders. The beautiful folksong “Shenandoah” is thought to have originated with American and Canadian fur traders travelling the Missouri River in canoes in the early 1800’s. Some lyrics speak of an Iowa Chief Shenandoah who learns of a traveler who wants to marry his daughter. The name has come to be associated with Shenandoah National Park in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia.

Shenandoah.....Traditional arr. Bill Holcombe

An internal conflict threatened to derail the Great Freedom Experiment -- the Civil War. Divided over the role of slavery in the new western frontier, the North and the South fought to win the right to legislate the next chapter of American history.

Our next medley contains the song "Dixie," written by Daniel Decatur (dih-KAY-ter) Emmett in 1869, which became an informal anthem of the Southern States. It is not clear how the song arrived on the scene. Maybe the song describing the South was named for the Mason-Dixon Line separating the free and slave states, or perhaps for the French ten-dollar “dix,” (pronounced “deece”) banknotes, spelled D-I-X, which were called dixies, and used throughout the South.

The next song “Aura Lee” published in 1861 was used as a campfire song on both sides of the conflict. The tune is used today for "Army Blue" and sung by West Point cadets and was sung by Elvis Presley in his famous hit “Love Me Tender.”

The lyrics for the next song “When Johnny Comes Marching Home” were written in 1846 by military band leader Patrick Gilmore under the pen name Louis Lambert. The tune was originally a drinking song and now was used to express the hope of loved ones returning home from war safely.

“Tenting on the Old Campground” was written by a professional singer in 1863 after he received a draft notice from the Union army. He was rejected from service since he had rheumatic fever as a child, but the song which spoke of peace and weariness with war, grew in favor on both sides.

The courtship song “The Yellow Rose of Texas” is thought to have been written in 1853 about Emily West, a free woman of mixed-race, who came to Texas to work and, legend has it, distracted a Mexican leader until the U.S. army succeeded in winning the battle. There is no record of this deception happening. The tune was

originally a popular song of Texas soldiers with lyrics about their officers and has since been popularized by Elvis Presley, Pat Boone, and Willie Nelson.

“Home, Sweet, Home” came from a popular 1823 opera by John Howard Payne called *The Maid of Milan* (mill-AWN). It was banned from the Union Army camps as likely to incite desertion.

“Battle Hymn of the Republic” was born when abolitionist Julia Ward Howe penned new lyrics to the Civil War song “John Brown’s Body” after visiting a war camp. It became an anthem of the North and later showed up in the fight for women’s right to vote. Here is “Civil War Medley.”

Civil War Medley.....arr. James Haynor

Includes: Dixie; Aura Lee; When Johnny Comes Marching Home; Tenting on the Old Campground; Yellow Rose of Texas; Home, Sweet, Home; Battle Hymn of the Republic

Originally a piano rag, “**Cascades**” was a work by Scott Joplin for the World’s Fair in St. Louis, MO, in 1904. The real “cascades” were fourteen waterfalls emptying into a pool in front of the main performance venue, Festival Hall. The pool was surrounded by columns representing the states. In that same year, Teddy Roosevelt won the Presidency, and the U.S. gained control of the Panama Canal Zone. See if you can hear the musical imitation of tumbling water.

Cascades (Rag)Scott Joplin arr. Kenneth Abeling

The 1920’s were remembered as a time of intense prosperity. The rise of personal wealth, the proliferation of automobiles, and access to electricity were hallmarks of the era. It was the time of Prohibition and, with the 19th Amendment in 1920, a time of new freedoms for women. Jazz was flourishing, and the Harlem Renaissance nurtured a re-birth in African American arts. This song collection embodies the spirit of the decade.

The Roaring Twenties.....arr. Paul Nagle

Includes: Five Foot Two; Toot, Toot, Tootsie, Goodbye; Makin' Whoopee; Yes Sir, That's My Baby

The colors of leadership in America were changing. The first African American to conduct a classical symphony orchestra was William Grant Still. His “Miniatures,” composed in 1948, contains five movements on folk songs of the Americas. It was intended as a souvenir of the visit to the Americas by English conductor Sir John Barbirolli and his wife oboist Lady Evelyn Barbirolli. The Quintet will play the United States’ movements.

The first movement, “I Ride an Old Paint,” is a cowboy tune from Santa Fe, New Mexico. It was sung by a rider who so loved his horse he begged that, on his death, his bones should be tied to the horse and the two of them set wandering with their faces turned westward. The spiritual “Jesus is a Rock in the Weary Land” is treated rhythmically as it might have been heard in a primitive church. “A Frog Went a-Courtin’” is Still’s best version of a 400-year-old American “croak song.”

Miniatures (1948).....William Grant Still arr. Adam Lesnick
I Ride an Old Paint
Jesus is a Rock in the Weary Land
A Frog Went a-Courtin’

The Golden Age of the American musical, the 1940’s to the 1960’s, produced a more-than-skin-deep story of a Jewish family vacating their home in the wake of the Russian Tsar’s anti-Semitism. “Fiddler on the Roof” explores the theme of tradition vs. change, against the backdrop of family and faith.

Selections from Fiddler on the RoofJerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick arr. Bill Holcombe
Includes: Tradition; Sabbath Prayer; Matchmaker; Sunrise, Sunset; If I Were a Rich Man; To Life!

Before we play our last selection, we’d like to thank you for coming to our concert and sharing in the rich variety that is our musical heritage in America. Thank you to Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church, our hosts. Thank you to the volunteers and sponsors who help to make this series possible. Our next project is an outreach to an afterschool program and a senior care center. We’ll be at the *Messiah* on Nov 30 accompanying the community chorus. The winter concert “Two Worlds, One Stage” on Feb 22, will be right here at Shepherd of the Valley, and includes the Brahms “Piano Trio in B Major” and Derrick Skye’s “American Mirror” for string quartet.

The U.S. entertainment industry continues to evolve. Music creativity has moved into video game music composition. Civilization IV is a 2005 video game which challenges players to build an empire that stands the test of time while balancing the needs of their people. The main theme “Baba Yetu” was the first piece of video game music to be nominated and win a Grammy Award. The lyrics are a translation of “The Lord’s Prayer” in Swahili.

Baba Yetu from “Civilization IV”by Christopher Tin arr. Thomas Graf

Thank you. Please consider a donation if you enjoyed this program, and have a great afternoon!!