

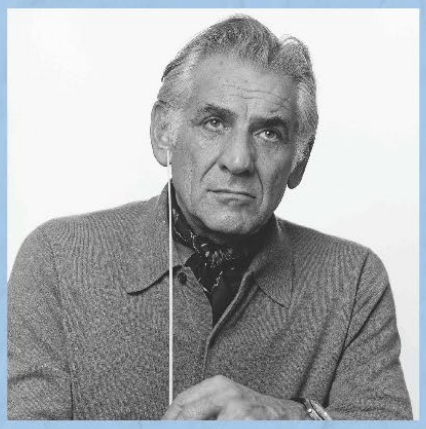


"We Hold These Truths"

Our Shared American Heritage in Music and Verse

November 16, 2025 – 3 pm

In a time of painful division, may we as a nation find healing through the arts, and remember our foundational commitments to liberty and justice for all people, freedom of speech, and care for those in need.

Samuel Barber	Bob Dylan	Poetry by:
Leonard Bernstein	Pete Seeger	Robert Frost
Duke Ellington	George Gershwin	Mary Oliver
Billy Strayhorn	Aaron Copland	Walt Whitman
Florence Price	Randall Thompson	Maya Angelou

Performances by Paul Knox, Rebecca Shrimpton, Herman Weiss, and the FPC Choir. This is a community event and admission is free.

FIRST PARISH CHURCH CONGREGATIONAL
MANCHESTER-BY-THE-SEA

10 CENTRAL STREET WWW.FIRSTPARISHCHURCH.ORG

Concert: "We Hold These Truths"
Our Shared American Heritage in Music and Verse
November 16, 2025, 3 p.m.
First Parish Church, Congregational
10 Central St., Manchester-By-the-Sea, MA

Program

Adagio – Samuel Barber (1910-1981); transcription by Jerry Lanning
Margerita Varga-Nadj, violin; Herman Weiss, piano

The Gift Outright - Robert Frost (1874-1963)
Paul Lengieza, reader

There but for Fortune – Phil Ochs (1909-1963)

***This Land is Your Land – Woody Guthrie (1912-1967)**
Paul Knox, voice and guitar

Yes! No! - Mary Oliver (1935-2019)
Bethany Woods, reader

A Simple Song – Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990); lyrics by Stephen Schwartz (1948)

Passion Flower/Fleurette Africaine – Billy Strayhorn (1915-1967) & Duke Ellington (1899-1974); lyrics by Rebecca Shrimpton & arr. by Herman Weiss

*Feel free to sing along on the refrain:
This land is your land, this land is my land, from California, to the New York Island, from the redwood forest, to the gulf stream waters - this land was made for you and me

My Soul is Anchored in the Lord – spiritual, arr. Florence Price (1887-1953)
Rebecca Shrimpton, mezzo-soprano; Herman Weiss, piano

Woman Work and **On Aging - Maya Angelou (1928-2014)**
Sue Parker, reader

Prelude #2, in C Sharp Minor – George Gershwin (1898-1937)
Herman Weiss, piano

Lincoln Portrait – Aaron Copland (1900-1990); Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) piano arrangement by Herman Weiss
Rev. Katherine Schofield, narrator; Herman Weiss, piano

O Captain! My Captain! - Walt Whitman (1819-1892)
Rebecca Shrimpton, reader

Monologue for the Working Class - Florence Price; words by Langston Hughes (1901-1967)
Rebecca Shrimpton, mezzo-soprano; Herman Weiss, piano

Alleluia – Randall Thompson (1899-1984)
First Parish Choir plus guest singers

Program Notes

Adagio for Strings, by Samuel Barber was arranged for string orchestra from the second movement of his String Quartet, Op. 11. Barber finished the arrangement in 1936, the same year that he wrote the quartet. It was performed for the first time on November 5, 1938, by Arturo Toscanini conducting the NBC Symphony Orchestra. Today we hear the piece in a transcription for violin and piano by Jerry Lanning.

“The Gift Outright” is a poem by Robert Frost that explores themes of patriotism and the historical relationship between America and its land, emphasizing the sacrifices made for freedom. Written in1941, it was recited by Robert Frost at the presidential inauguration of John F. Kennedy in January 1961.

“There But for Fortune" is a poignant song by Phil Ochs that reflects on the fragility of human circumstances and the impact of fortune on people's lives. Written in 1963, the song was recorded by others, including Joan Baez, who had a chart hit with it. Its message is still pertinent today.

“This Land Is Your Land” by Woody Guthrie is a song that embodies themes of inclusion and equality. Originally written as a response to Irving Berlin's "God Bless America," Guthrie's song critiques the idea of exclusivity in American identity and celebrates the beauty of the nation as a shared space for all its people. The song's lyrics reflect a vision of America that is accessible and welcoming, emphasizing that the land belongs to everyone. Over time, it has been embraced as a protest anthem, highlighting social justice and the need for equality. His legacy includes a profound influence on other artists such as Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan.

Mary Oliver's poem **“Yes! No!”** explores the duality of human experience, celebrating both joy and sorrow. The poem reflects on the importance of awareness and engagement with the natural world, encouraging readers to appreciate the beauty and complexity of life. It emphasizes the need for opinions and the act of paying attention, suggesting that recognizing and responding to our surroundings is essential for finding meaning in life.

“A Simple Song” was sung at the beginning of **Mass,** a musical theatre work composed by Leonard Bernstein with text by Bernstein and additional text and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz. Commissioned by Jacqueline Kennedy, it premiered on September 8, 1971, directed by Gordon Davidson, conducted by Maurice Peress and choreographed by Alvin Ailey. The production used costume designs by Frank Thompson. The performance was part of the opening of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. The Kennedy Center originated from a proposal by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1955 to establish a public auditorium in Washington, D.C. It was formalized with the National Cultural Center Act of 1958. Although government support of the arts has become tenuous recently, it is hoped that the Kennedy Center will continue to foster creativity and freedom of expression.

“Passion Flower/Fleuerette Africaine” is a merging of 2 jazz melodies, the former by Billy Strayhorn and the latter by Duke Ellington. This transcription comes from the **Alchemy Project** and is a collaborative effort by Rebecca Shrimpton and Herman Weiss.

“My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord” is an arrangement of a traditional African American song. Florence Price's arrangement was made famous by the contralto Marian Anderson, who performed it on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial at the close of her famous 1939 concert.

“Woman Work” appears in Maya Angelou's 1978 collection **“And Still I Rise”.** It presents a speaker’s relentless inventory of domestic and agricultural labor—children, mending, cooking, cotton picking—then shifts to urgent appeals to weather and natural elements for rest. That contrast emphasizes exhaustion, longing for respite, and spiritual seeking. Contextually, the poem echoes Angelou’s sustained focus on the labor and resilience of Black women and resonates with her own experience as a working mother, using everyday tasks to signal wider social and emotional burdens.

“On Aging”, also by Maya Angelou**,** presents an older speaker insisting on dignity and selfhood despite physical decline. She rebukes pity and intrusive sympathy, asking others to stop treating her as helpless or stereotyped. She refuses patronizing comforts and clarifies that stiffness or slowed movement is

not laziness. Ultimately the speaker affirms continuity of identity and expresses simple gratitude for still being able to breathe and live on her own terms.

George Gershwin composed his **“Three Preludes”,** for piano in 1927. The composer performed the premier at the Roosevelt Hotel in Manhattan. The second Prelude, in C-sharp minor, has the distinct flavor of jazz.

“Lincoln Portrait”, (also known as A Lincoln Portrait) is a 1942 classical orchestral work by Aaron Copland. It involves a full orchestra, with particular emphasis on the brass section at climactic moments. The work is narrated with the reading of excerpts of Abraham Lincoln's great documents, including the Gettysburg Address. Copland became a target of the Army-McCarthy hearings of 1954. In addition to accusations about Copland’s alleged Communist Party affiliation, Lincoln Portrait became an object of derision by those in Congress seeking to abolish the annual national celebration of Lincoln’s birthday. For this program we will hear it in a piano transcription by Herman Weiss.

Walt Whitman’s elegy **“O Captain! My Captain!”**, was written in 1865 and commemorates the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln and the end of the Civil War. The poem expresses grief for the fallen Captain (Lincoln) while celebrating the Union’s victory.

“Leaves of Grass”, the poem is considered one of Walt Whitman’s most significant works and a cornerstone of American literature.

“Monologue for the Working Class” is a powerful piece by Florence Price, inspired by Langston Hughes' poem. The song reflects the struggles of the working class during the Great Depression and the resilience of the working people. It features a blues-inflected unaccompanied soliloquy in the singer’s lowest register, transitioning to a forte at "but when I unite with my neighbor, we'll make this whole world new." The piece is a musical declaration of political sympathies and a significant addition to Price's repertoire that synthesizes concert music and Black vernacular styles.

“Alleluia” is a piece for unaccompanied SATB chorus by Randall Thompson. Composed over the first five days of July in 1940, it was given its world premiere on July 8 of that year at the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood under the

direction of G. Wallace Woodworth. The work was written on a commission from Serge Koussevitzky, director of the Tanglewood Festival. Koussevitzky wanted a "fanfare" for voices to be performed at the opening exercises of the new Berkshire Music Center, and he asked Thompson to contribute such a piece.

Instead of the joyous work expected of him, the composer produced a quiet and introspective piece. Thompson was inspired by the war in Europe, and the recent fall of France; given these events, he felt that to write a festive piece would be inappropriate.

Notes by Herman Weiss, with citations from Brittanica and Wikipedia

We offer special thanks to Richard Smith and Paul Driscoll for livestreaming and recording of this event; Marty Farmer, co-chair of the First Parish music committee for her invaluable help in all aspects of concert production; Rev. Katherine for her collaboration on the poster; Nancy Klebart for her above-and-beyond admin support and each performer and reader for their immense talents and support.