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SING DEMOCRACY 250

Commemorating 250 Years of Democracy Through Song

***Signature Choral Performances** will feature the World Premiere of Compositions by Dr. Brandon A. Boyd and Michael Bussewitz-Quarm in Philadelphia, Minneapolis, New York, and Washington, D.C.*

*National Choral Initiative—the **All America Program**—reaches a milestone of more than 100 participating choirs for over 70 planned performances in 2026 across 30 states, the District of Columbia, and counting*

(Washington, DC) August 11, 2025— Sing Democracy 250 is a nationwide musical initiative commemorating the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence: a movement of resilience, a chorus of hope, and a celebration of the values that define us as Americans. Launching in **October 2025** in **Philadelphia, PA**, often seen as the cradle of American democracy, *Sing Democracy 250* will unfold through **four signature choral concerts** across cities important to the founding of America. These cities include **Philadelphia** and **Washington, D.C.** for their foundational roles in democratic history; **New York City**, today's modern cultural capital; and **Minnesota**, widely regarded as a leading choral center of the United States. All four concerts will be rooted in local



partnerships with community voices and celebrate the beginnings of our nation through meaningful texts and musical compositions.

Each performance will feature **two newly commissioned works**. The first piece to receive its world premiere on October 12, 2025, in Philadelphia is by **Dr. Brandon A. Boyd** titled **“Redeem the Dream,”** with text based on **Langston Hughes’** poem “Let America Be America Again.” The poem reflects on the gap between the ideals of American democracy as articulated in the Declaration of Independence and the reality experienced by many people throughout our history. The second work, **“US,”** is **composed by Michael Bussewitz-Quarm**, whose **text is inspired by Richard Haass’ book *The Bill of Obligations: The Ten Habits of Good Citizens***, offering a musical call to “We, the people” to participate in renewing American democracy.

“Throughout history, music has fueled social change, from protest anthems to solidarity tunes, forging connections and fostering community. As a universal language, music holds the power to transcend divisions, affirm diversity, and inspire hope and harmony for our nation,” **said Co-Founders Gary Aamodt and Celia Ellingson.**

Signature Concert Details:

Full concert information is available at: www.singdemocracy250.org

- **October 12, 2025:** Philadelphia, Pennsylvania – Marian Anderson Hall at the Kimmel Center; featuring the [Philadelphia Youth Choral Ensembles](#), the Together In Hope Choir, and the [Main Line Symphony Orchestra](#)
- **April 11, 2026:** Minneapolis, St. Paul – Orchestra Hall; featuring the Together In Hope Choir and [The Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra](#) (other artists to be announced)
- **May 24, 2026:** New York, New York – featuring the Together In Hope Choir (venue and other artists to be announced)
- **June 13, 2026:** Washington, DC – DAR Constitution Hall; featuring the [Congressional Chorus](#) and the Together In Hope Choir (other artists to be announced)

The newly commissioned pieces include:



- ***Redeem the Dream***, composed by **Dr. Brandon A. Boyd**:
Redeem the Dream is based on Langston Hughes' poem "Let America Be America Again," written in 1935. The poem reflects on the gap between the ideals of American democracy as articulated in the Declaration of Independence and the reality experienced by many people over our history. Yet the poem ends with hope that America can live up to its promises of freedom, equality, and opportunity for all. The poet affirms that we, the people, can and must redeem the vision of America and make America what it is intended to be. Hughes' poem is introduced by words from the Declaration of Independence.
- ***US***, composed by **Michael Bussewitz-Quarm**:
US was inspired by Richard Haass' book *The Bill of Obligations*, published in 2023, a bold call for Americans to adopt the habits of good citizenship. This piece begins with an urgent invitation, then presents, and unpacks, each of 10 obligations of good citizens with quotations from a diverse group of Americans, from founding fathers to living Americans. These quotes explain each obligation and, in so doing, demonstrate that each of these obligations has been understood and practiced throughout America's history. The piece concludes with an inspiring call to citizenship, encouraging all citizens to adopt these obligations as an action plan for renewing American democracy.

All America Program

In addition to their featured performances at each Sing Democracy 250 Signature Concert, these new works will serve as catalysts for **nationwide community participation** throughout the **"All America Program."** In this call for civic engagement through song, **choirs from across the country**, of all sizes, traditions, and backgrounds, have been encouraged to create and share their own performances as part of this commemorative event. Upon registration, participating ensembles receive **free copies of the newly commissioned pieces** ("Redeem the Dream" & "US"), empowering communities everywhere to mark America's 250th anniversary through these unique new works. As of today, the All America Program has commitments from more than 100 choirs for over 70



planned performances in 2026 across 30 states and the District of Columbia. Registration continues through October 31, 2025. To register, choirs should visit:

www.singdemocracy250.org/all-america-program

About Dr. Brandon A. Boyd

[Dr. Brandon A. Boyd](#) is the Marie M. and Harry L. Smith endowed Chair, Director of Choral Activities, and Associate Professor of Choral Music Education at the University of Missouri, where he directs multiple university choirs and the graduate choral conducting program.

In addition to his university responsibilities, he enjoys a versatile career as a conductor, appearing regularly as a composer-in-residence, collaborative pianist, and presenter for conferences, conventions, collegiate choirs, church choirs, choral symposiums, and festivals.

As an active composer and arranger, his music is sung regularly by ensembles throughout the United States and abroad. He performs regularly with his mentor, Dr. André Thomas, and the London Symphony Orchestra. His work has been showcased multiple times at Carnegie Hall, where he has appeared as a guest conductor, composer, and collaborative pianist. He holds two degrees from Florida State University (a Ph.D. in choral music education and an M.M. in choral conducting) and earned a B.S. in music education (emphasis in piano) from Tennessee State University.

About Michael Bussewitz-Quarm

[Michael Bussewitz-Quarm](#) is a composer whose choral music engages with pressing social and environmental issues. Her work addresses topics ranging from coral reef conservation to gun violence and the global refugee crisis. Winner of The American Prize in Choral Composition in 2021, Bussewitz-Quarm's works are performed by leading professional and educational choral ensembles across North America. Notable performances include her Carnegie Hall debut of "Where We Find Ourselves," the west coast premiere of "The Unarmed Child" by the Eugene Concert Choir and Orchestra, "I'll Fly Away" at the International Society of Contemporary Music's New Music Days in Vancouver, and "Nigra Sum" performed by The Duke University Chorale on their California tour.



About Gary Aamodt, co-founder Sing Democracy 250

Gary Aamodt has deep roots in and a deep commitment to choral music. While at college, Gary sang in the St. Olaf Choir, and in graduate school at Yale, he was a member of the Yale Russian Chorus. Professionally, Gary co-founded A-R Editions, Inc., a publisher of historical musicology. In 1979 A-R Editions issued the first large publication of text and music entirely set by computer—an historical landmark. A sister company that was created, MusicNotes, is the world’s largest online library of digital sheet music. Prior to his business involvements, Gary taught philosophy at Yale University and the University of Wisconsin—Madison. In retirement, he has been an active real estate investor and has served on several nonprofit boards. He and Celia have initiated commissions of significant musical compositions for choir and orchestra.

Gary is a co-founder of the Together In Hope Project that seeks to bring reconciliation, renewal, and healing through the transformative power of music.

About Celia Ellingson, co-founder Sing Democracy 250

Celia Ellingson is co-founder of the Together In Hope Project, a nonprofit organization that serves as a catalyst for healing and reconciliation through the transformative power of music. She and Gary Aamodt have organized major “music-with-a-purpose” projects focused on issues of our shared humanity. Through commissioning and performance of major new choral compositions, these projects raise awareness and move both singers and audiences to new understanding and action.

Previously, Celia was a philanthropy executive and business consultant, specializing in strategy and major change implementation. She served as Vice President – Strategic Development for Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies, a leading U.S. grantmaking organization, providing leadership through its initial organizational ramp-up on both philanthropic strategy and organizational development. Celia also spent many years with Arthur Andersen in marketing and as a business consultant.



About G. Phillip Shoultz, Artistic Director

Known for fostering community and inspiring action among people of all ages and abilities, G. Phillip Shoultz, III enjoys a multifaceted career as artist, educator, consultant, speaker, and pastoral musician. Phillip serves as Artistic Director of Together In Hope Choir, the anchor choir for Sing Democracy 250, and will conduct the signature concerts for Sing Democracy 250 in 2025-2026. He also serves as an advisor and resource to choral leaders who will prepare performances of the Sing Democracy 250 music program in communities large and small throughout this country, as America celebrates the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 2026.

Phillip is also the associate artistic director of VocalEssence, where he founded the VocalEssence Singers Of This Age, a choral apprenticeship program that harnesses the power of group singing to enhance community and awaken creativity in young people. He is Cantor for Music, Worship, and the Arts at Westwood Lutheran Church, and a member of the Graduate Music Education faculty at the University of St. Thomas. Phillip believes in the transformative power of shared singing experiences.

About Together In Hope Choir

The Together In Hope Choir was established in 2018. This community of 50 premier artists primarily from the Minneapolis/St. Paul area was selected through invited auditions. The choir is noted for its artistically excellent and spiritually moving performances of “music with a purpose”.

The Together In Hope Choir sings into issues of our shared humanity with new music commissioned to raise awareness and inspire action through the transformative power of music. The Choir’s first performance opened the 17th Annual International Festival of Sacred Music and Art at the Papal Basilica St. Paul Outside the Walls in Rome in 2018, at the invitation of the Vatican, to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

Its second major project focused on refugees, immigrants and displaced person with performances of “The Stranger” at the opening of Olavsfest in Trondheim, Norway, in July 2022, followed by the U.S. premiere of this work with two concerts in St. Paul in October 2022. This project was done in partnership with USA for UNHCR (the United Nations



Refugee Agency). Nearly 900 people, half the audience at the U.S. premiere concerts, were individuals from local immigrant and refugee communities, attending as guests. Queen Sonja of Norway also attended the U.S. premiere, and most eloquently expressed the universal message of “The Stranger”: “The concert made a deep impression on me, and I hope that we will keep this in our hearts; that there is more to connect us than to divide us as human beings, no matter where we live and who we are.” (*Norwegian American*, November 4, 2022)

Together In Hope Project is partnering with Sing Democracy 250 for its third major project. The Together In Hope Choir will serve as the anchor choir for the four Sing Democracy 250 Signature Concerts beginning in Philadelphia in October 2025, and continuing in Minneapolis, New York, and Washington, DC in 2026.

About Sing Democracy 250

Sing Democracy 250 is a project of Players Philanthropy Fund, a Texas nonprofit corporation recognized by the IRS as a tax-exempt public charity under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code (Federal Tax ID: 27-6601178, ppf.org/pp). Contributions to Sing Democracy 250 qualify as tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law.