

Salt Lake Choral Artists: Americana music  
Concert » Salt Lake Choral Artists plans down-home musical journey.

By Celia R. Baker

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Walt Whitman wrote famously of "The Open Road," a pathway through his nation's broad landscape toward a democratic utopia. The Salt Lake Choral Artists will explore that uniquely American dream through a musical journey Saturday.

Along the way, the audience will hear folk music, minstrelsy, and Broadway and jazz tunes composed or arranged by iconic American musicians such as Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein and Randall Thompson.

Norman Dello Joio's setting of Whitman's poem is on the program, prompting SLCA conductor Brady Allred to comment: "We're on the open road. We're traveling America -- seeing all the different places and hearing the music associated with them."

For Allred, that trip logically begins with the music of Copland, a hero he first met at a high-school music festival in his hometown of Memphis. Later, Allred worked with Copland at the Aspen Music Festival as a music coach.

SLCA's combined choirs will perform folk song settings by Copland and choruses from his opera "The Tender Land." "They are having a good time with 'Stomp Your Foot,' " Allred said, despite its old-fashioned view of gender roles:

Ladies love their fine amusements,

Putting patches in a quilt;

Men prefer to bend their shoulder

To something that will stand when built.

One of the first stops on the journey is Appalachia, represented by the "Gloria" movement of "The World Beloved: A Bluegrass Mass" by contemporary composer Carol Barnett, who lives in Minnesota.

The piece is a bluegrass riff on the chorale tune "Praise God, From Whom All Blessing Flow" and will include musicians playing banjo, guitar and violin. SLCA's concert choir will sing it, along with other music from the American heartland.

"It's a cheery Mass -- quite a wonderful fusion of classical and country," said Jo Davies, the research librarian who provided material for the script broadcaster Spence Kinard will use to narrate the program.

The SLCA women's choir's take on musical Americana includes music from Bernstein's "West Side Story" and the popular tune "Mr. Sandman." The SLCA chamber choir will contribute songs of jazz great Duke Ellington and a jazzed-up arrangement of Stephen Foster tunes.

No program of American music would be complete without spirituals, and Saturday's concert includes several that Davies describes as "a mix of Hebrew narrative, African spirituality, Christian doctrine and the extreme experience of human suffering."

Folk music associated with the American West caps the evening, as arranged for choir and two pianos by John David Earnest. "These are almost-symphonic, expanded, fantastic arrangements that help portray all the different moods of the stories," Allred said.

The gold-rush song "Sweet Betsy From Pike" includes colorful verses not taught to the schoolchildren who usually sing the song, Davies said.

Even the well-known song "Clementine" has surprises, said Allred -- including the fact that the hapless heroine falls into a swamp and dies -- but is not mourned for long by her lover. The song ends this way: "But I kissed her little sister and forgot my Clementine."

The varied program represents Allred's wish "to do some familiar things, but find different areas of the country and feature musical styles of those areas."

In doing so, the program harks back to words of Whitman's "Open Road," in which the American traveler sings of himself and his country:

I inhale great draughts of space;

The east and west are mine, and the north and south are mine.

I am larger, better than I thought;

I did not know I held so much goodness.  
Singing, American style

The Salt Lake Choral Artists present "Made in America," a program of American choral music. Conductors are Brady Allred and Jane Fjelsted; Spence Kinard will narrate the program.

When » Oct. 17, 7:30 p.m.

Where » Libby Gardner Hall, 1375 E. Presidents Circle, University of Utah campus,  
Salt Lake City.

Tickets » \$19.75; \$16 for students; children under 8 are not admitted. Call 801-581-  
7100 or visit [www.kingtix.com](http://www.kingtix.com).