

## NORUMBEGA HARMONY AT THE CONGREGATIONAL LIBRARY & ARCHIVES OPEN HOUSE

NOVEMBER 2, 2024

*Let tyrants shake their iron rod, and slav'ry clank her galling chains;  
We fear them not; we trust in God—New England's God forever reigns.*

*We fear them not; we trust in God—New England's God forever reigns.*

[Applause]

**STEPHEN MARINI:** Thank you.

We are Norumbega Harmony. I am Steve Marini, and that was William Billings, the aforesaid William Billings, he of "The New England Psalm Singer," published in 1770.

This too was from that publication. And it is the most popular revolutionary hymn from this Boston composer who was a singing master. He was a tanner. He was a hog reeve. He was an aromatic fellow. [LAUGHTER] Apparently so. And he was also part of Samuel Adams' circle at the White Horse Tavern. So he was very much involved in the whole Patriot Sons of Liberty thing.

He was a singing master, and that meant that he conducted singing schools at parishes to teach the congregation, especially their youth, how to sing and how to read music. In so doing, he had a bunch of literate singers, and singing masters then wrote their own tunes, published them, and sold them back to their students. And that's how music education happened in early New England.

He is the first, and his first publication has 135 original tunes in it, which was... just blew the doors off.

Everybody was singing English stuff. And in his introduction he says, I reject all the previous rules. This is an American's, an American voice. I don't believe in rules. I do not accept them, nor do I impose them. Every composer should be his own carver. You carve your turkey however you want if you compose.

What that... And he was hugely influential. Dozens and dozens and dozens of singing masters followed his lead, came out of the woodwork and started composing.

He composed independent musical lines. So that this is not like a didley-didley accompaniment and that there's a melody on top. The melody is in the tenors. And they will sing their parts, but all the other parts have to... have compositions that are also musically interesting. And wherever they landed, was where they landed.

And every once in a while you're going to hear dissonance. And this is experimental, American, original rules or not rules kinds of music. And that is indicative of the fact that America's first great popular democratic art was music. And it's this music, and you are getting it from the horse's mouth, so to speak.

All right, enough of that.

We're going to do three parts, three sections. Faith first, then war, then victory. Faith is the reformed tradition, the Calvinist tradition of an interlinked state and church, which was very much the case in Revolutionary New England and Congregationalism.

They could actually do it. The Presbyterians wanted to, but couldn't because they weren't in charge of anywhere. The Congregationalists were.

And so we're going to sing two of these. One is to God, and God as a ruler of nations. Ruler of nations. This is written by Oliver Holden, a Boston lawyer, actually, a Baptist convert. That's all right. He was brought up Congregationalist.

And then "Russia," a tune from Abigail Cleaveland's manuscript. And it's, also, not the one that it's open to. And this is a much more... it's a Connecticut tune. It's written, it's written by Daniel Read, and both lyrics are by Isaac Watts. And listen, it's a psalm, supposedly, paraphrased into English.

But it has very powerful political content. Don't trust the rich. Don't trust the high and mighty. Because Watts was an English dissenter, and they were still being screwed by the Anglican control of Parliament.

So here's "New Canaan," and you can, if you want to... Followed by, the next one. "Russia."  
Thanks.

[Norumbega Harmony prepares for the next song.]

*The Lord Jehovah reigns, and royal state maintains,  
His head with awful glories crowned;  
Arrayed in robes of light, begirt with sov'reign might,  
And rays of majesty around.*

*Upheld by thy commands, the world securely stands,  
And skies and stars obey thy word.  
Thy throne was fix'd on high before the starry sky;  
Eternal is your kingdom, Lord.*

*In vain the noisy crowd, like billows fierce and loud,  
Against thine empire rage and roar:  
In vain, with angry spite, the surly nations fight,  
And dash like waves against the shore.*

*Thy promises are true; thy grace is ever new;  
There fixed, thy church shall ne'er remove:  
Thy saints, with holy fear, shall in thy courts appear,  
And sing thine everlasting love.*

*Thy saints, with holy fear, shall in thy courts appear,  
And sing thine everlasting love.*

[APPLAUSE. Norumbega Harmony prepares for the next song.]

*My spirit looks to God alone; my rock and refuge is his throne.  
In all my fears and all my straits, my soul on his salvation waits.*

*Trust him, ye saints, in all your ways; pour out your hearts before his face.  
When helpers fail and foes invade, God is our all sufficient aid.*

*False are the men of high degree; the baser sort are vanity;  
Laid in the balance, both appear light as a puff of empty air.*

*Make not increasing gold your trust, nor set your hearts on glitt'ring dust.  
Why will you grasp the fleeting smoke and not believe what God hath spoke?*

*Why will you grasp the fleeting smoke and not believe what God hath spoke?*

[APPLAUSE]

So that's what it sounds like.

And that spirituality is both reformed and evangelical because we're past the great. And although Billings himself was a member of the Brattle Street Church, which was liberal and progressive at the time, he, and Daniel Read, and the Connecticuters who are more traditional, knew that their textual ace was Isaac Watts. He is the paramount, preeminent evangelical poet all the way through to the Civil War and even beyond.

In the fundamentalist Bible Baptist church when I was a kid, we sang Watts all the time. So that's like, post-war, anyway.

So, but, we will see as we go into this concert more and more texts that were actually written by the singing masters, or by deacons, or by more lay folks than ministers who just were doing patriotic and religious poetry because it was a very common thing for people to do. Because poetry was a meditative art. And people prayed over Watts, with Watts. And they wrote their own poetry in response to their own faith.

So one thing I want to say about heightening the emotiveness of these texts, which are powerfully that way, starting with Watts and all the way through, is the way they are expressed in the singing.

And you heard different parts entering at different times. That's called fudging. If you know anything about baroque music, anything about Bach, you know that he's the master of the fugue, the art of the fugue.

And so these rustic composers, and even though they were from Boston, a lot of these folks were literally from nowhere, you know, Medway, whatever. I'm sorry if you're from Medway. Never mind. I live in Dover, so... Were influenced by baroque. This is, like, popular, early American baroque singing.

They knew this technique. So you'll hear it again and again along with those dispersed harmony parts, you get this constant fugal sound.

And this is great if you're running a singing school with a bunch of young people because they get to show their stuff. And they get to bounce off of each other. And they sat in a square. The guys got to look at the girls, and they just had a great time with this.

And this became the most popular kind, musically the most popular style in Revolutionary New England.

So now we're going to turn to the war itself. And Tricia told you about "The American Hero" by Nathaniel Niles, and his background as a Connecticut minister. And we're going to sing this text twice. That's because it's 15 verses long. And we're not gonna sing all 15. So I picked out a few for one setting and a few for another setting.

And the first one comes directly from Andrew Law, as she said, the pioneer Connecticut singing master and publisher of music, original music. And Niles, the same year, soon as Niles published it, he wrote a setting, 1781.

And you have the text, and it speaks for itself. It is the Battle of Bunker Hill. And it's, and it's the thought, prayer of the hero facing the guns, or sitting in the trenches defending the hill.

And it became hugely popular. And it is fair to say that it is the most popular poetic text as opposed to Billings', which is popular too. But this is more of a literary style.

It's in Sapphick mode, which is a very unusual meter, very unusual meter. And it challenged the composers, and they liked it for that reason. So, here is Law and Niles with their original.

[Norumbega Harmony prepares for the next song.] This is the tune to which the manuscript is open. It's the alto part.

*Why should vain mortals tremble at the sight of death and destruction in the field of battle,  
Where blood and carnage, where blood and carnage clothe the ground in crimson, sounding  
with death groans?*

*Death will invade us by the means appointed, and we must all bow to the king of terrors;  
Nor am I anxious, nor am I anxious, if I am preparèd, what shape he comes in.*

*Infinite goodness teaches us submission, bids us be quiet under all his dealings,  
Never repining, never repining, but forever praising God our creator.*

*Life for my country and the cause of freedom is but a trifle for a worm to part with.  
And if preserved, and if preserved in so great a conquest, life is redoubled.*

*And if preserved, and if preserved in so great a conquest, life is redoubled.*

[APPLAUSE]

So, when I was here consulting with Tricia and Kyle, and he didn't quite remember this, but I do, because I was thinking, gosh, you know, we're talking about hymn books, and part books, and music, and we go way back talking about all that.

And so I said, well, did you know that William Billings wrote an anthem, and it starts, "by the waters of Watertown," [LAUGHTER] "we wept." It's a version of Psalm 137, by the waters of Babylon we wept while Zion, we thought of it. And he wrote it in 1778 for *The Singing Master's Assistant*, his second book, which also includes the later lyrics to his triumph, to "Chester," which we started with and we'll finish with.

But this is the lament over Boston. And he's... the city is still suffering, even after evacuation day. New England is still suffering. It's still threatened if Burgoyne comes down from Canada. They don't know what the hell's gonna happen. They have gotten rid of the fleet, but it's still a problem.

And he's very upset about folks who might be Bostonians who now have turned against the people and are Tories. So that's in there, too. And so it's a long and very serious anthem, one

of the longest ones he ever wrote. And we're... so I told Kyle, you know, and he just fell for it. He said okay, let's do it. Let's book it. So that's why we're here.

And here's why we're here. Good luck to us.

[Norumbega Harmony prepares for the next song.]

*By the rivers of Watertown we sat down and wept.  
We wept, we wept, we wept when we remembered thee, O Boston, when we remembered  
thee, O Boston.*

*As for our friends, Lord God of heaven, preserve and defend them,  
Deliver and restore them unto us, preserve and defend them, deliver and restore them unto us  
again.*

*For they that held them in bondage required of them to take up arms against their brethren.  
Forbid it, Lord, God forbid. Forbid it, Lord, God forbid that those who have suckled Bostonian  
breasts should thirst for American blood.*

*A voice was heard in Roxbury which echoed through the continent  
Weeping, weeping, weeping, weeping for Boston because of their danger.  
Weeping for Boston because of their danger.  
Is Boston my dear town, is it my native place?*

*For since their calamity I do earnestly remember it still.  
I do earnestly, I do earnestly, I do earnestly remember it still.  
If I forget thee, yea, if I do not remember thee,  
Then let my numbers cease to flow, then be my muse unkind.  
Then let my tongue forget to move and ever be confined;  
Let horrid jargon split the air and rive my nerves asunder.*

*Let hateful discord greet my ear as terrible as thunder.  
Let harmony be banished hence and consonance depart;  
Let dissonance erect her throne and reign within my heart.  
If I forget thee, yea, if I do not remember thee,  
Then let my numbers cease to flow, then be my muse unkind.  
Then let my tongue forget to move and ever be confined;  
Let horrid jargon split the air and rive my nerves asunder.*

*Let hateful discord greet my ear as terrible as thunder.  
Let harmony be banished hence and consonance depart;  
Let dissonance erect her throne and reign within my heart.*

[APPLAUSE]

It took a while to work that out. We're still working on it. But in any case, you get the idea. And thank you.

So back to Nathaniel Niles and "The American Hero," and now we're after the war. And there's a lot of, what shall I say, being a religionist, there's a lot of mythmaking going on. And this poem continues to be popular, and sung, and cited, and read, and taught in schools, and so on. So it gets more musical settings.

So the next one, the last part of war in this, in this concert, is by one of our favorite composers by the unlikely name of Supply Belcher. That is his name. Now you're all like Congregationalist, you know, experts, so you know that Supply means the Lord shall supply. And what the Lord shall supply is sons and daughters. So he was supplied, and his parents were supplied, and there's Supply. Some people call him SUP-LEE because they don't know what to do with this word. That's what it is. Trust me. It's Supply.

And he was known in his time. He's from Maine, from Farmington, Maine... up there, very frontier. He was a squire, very frontier at the time. And he was interested in music. And he was a singing master. And he had such a reputation that he was called the Handel of Maine. [LAUGHTER] Okay?

So Supply Belcher, different lyrics, some different lyrics to "The American Hero," and some very, very moving ones toward the very end. That very last verse is really very moving. So this is Supply Belcher's version, and it's called "Heroism."

[Norumbega Harmony prepares for the next song.]

*Why should vain mortals tremble at the sight of death and destruction in the field of battle,  
Where blood and carnage clothe the ground in crimson, sounding, sounding with death-  
groans?*

*Death will invade us by the means appointed, and we must all bow to the king of terrors;  
Nor am I anxious, what shape, what shape, what shape, what shape he comes in.*

*Then to the wisdom of my Lord and Master I will commit all that I have or wish for:  
Sweetly as babes sleep will I give my life up when called when call'd, when call'd, when call'd,  
when call'd to yield it.  
Sweetly as babes sleep will I give my life up when call'd, when call'd, when call'd, when call'd,  
when call'd to yield it.*

[APPLAUSE]

Okay. Always a surprise in there.

Okay. So, America wins the war. We have heroes. We have laments. We have, a lot of hymns. And so, we're gonna finish with this section of tunes about liberty, about the rise of the American empire that is going to be guided by science. Science.

Now, what science meant then, may not be what science means now, but I think it is... The "Ode on Science" that we're going to sing is kind of plea for enlightenment, balance, reason, and knowledge that everyone would share along with, of course, a proper Congregational piety.

And this new nation will step off with those two arms of its mission. So I... and the first is going to be what I actually frankly think is a novelty hymn. But it's certainly appropriate for the 2nd of November in a presidential year. It's the election hymn... Yes. They actually wrote songs about elections. From way up in Vermont. Not far from Dartmouth, on the other side of the river, the west side of the river.

And, this composer is Jeremiah Ingalls, and he is very famous for his hymnal, "The Christian Harmony," in which he included folk songs, popular songs, wrote a few of his own. And it's regarded as one of the cornerstones of, what to say? A developing alternative strand of this singing music, singing school music that really is much more popular and down and streetwise piety and thinking, as opposed to those who are keeping in the Billings, in the Billings line.

So, we're going to do all three of those.

I guess you should know that "Liberty" was written by another Connecticut composer, Stephen Jenks, who was very fine, and the lyrics comes from an utterly obscure person named Isaac Watts Crane. He's from Jersey, and he wrote a 4th of July poem. This is what happened... 4th... there's no 4th of July without a poem, or two, or five that are recited at the celebration. That's how they used to do it.

So we're going to add that to this, "Liberty," that's Jenks, and that'll be first.

Then the "Ode on Science," the lyrics and music by Jazaniah Sumner. From Taunton, a deacon, Congregational deacon, probably a singing leader who also got very excited about the 4th of July. And this is his.

And then there's Ingalls' "Election Hymn."

See how you like them. We're gonna just do all three.

[Norumbega Harmony prepares for the next song.]

*No more beneath th'oppressive hand of tyranny we groan,  
Behold, a smiling happy land that Freedom calls her own, that Freedom calls her own.*

*Come, celebrate with songs and praise the day which makes us free;  
Let harmony her notes upraise to sing our jubilee.*

*To sing our jubilee.*

*All hail the blest auspicious day, and every heart agree,  
To praise, and joyous honors pay to this our jubilee, to this our jubilee.*

*To this our jubilee.*

*To praise, and joyous honors pay to this our jubilee, to this our jubilee.  
To this our jubilee.*

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you.

So now, "Ode on Science."

[Norumbega Harmony prepares for the next song.]

*The morning sun shines from the east, and spreads his glories to the west.  
All nations with his beams are blest, where'er his radiant light appears.*

*So Science spreads her lighted ray o'er lands which long in darkness lay;  
She visits fair Columbia and sets her sons among the stars.*

*So Science spreads her lighted ray o'er lands which long in darkness lay;  
She visits fair Columbia and sets her sons among the stars.*

*Fair Freedom, her attendant, waits, to bless the portals of her gates,  
To crown the young and rising states with laurels of immortal day!*

*The British yoke, the Gallic chain, was urged upon our necks in vain;  
All haughty tyrants we disdain, and shout, "Long live America!"*

*The British yoke, the Gallic chain, was urged upon our necks in vain;  
All haughty tyrants we disdain, and shout, "Long live America!"*

[APPLAUSE]

Okay, well if you liked that one, you'll like this next one. [LAUGHTER] I like to think, they are catchy. You know, you can hear the Yankee Doodle thing going?

Okay. "Election Hymn," Jeremiah Ingalls and the anonymous E. Carter.

[Norumbega Harmony prepares for the next song.]

*Join, join in tuneful strains to praise our God most high,  
At whose command earth rose, and worlds above the sky.  
His sov'reign word gave nature birth,  
And form'd all things in heav'n and earth.*

*Gave nature birth, his sov'reign word gave nature birth,  
And form'd all things in heav'n and earth.  
His sov'reign word gave nature birth,  
And form'd all things in heav'n and earth.*

*He call'd our fathers forth to leave their native land,  
And in this western clime rear'd freedom's happy band.  
When we were weak, when we were weak, his goodness gave  
A Washington our land to save.*

*His goodness gave, when we were weak, his goodness gave  
A Washington our land to save.  
When we were weak, when we were weak, his goodness gave  
A Washington our land to save.*

*Hail, deathless Washington! Columbia's pride and boast,  
Whose name a bulwark prov'd, whose counsel was a host.  
Thy name embalm'd, thy name embalm'd in every heart  
Shall long survive the works of art.*

*In every heart, thy name embalm'd in every heart  
Shall long survive the works of art.  
Thy name embalm'd, thy name embalm'd in every heart  
Shall long survive the works of art.*

[APPLAUSE]

I bet no one's as juiced up for that election today.

All right. So now we're gonna go back and finish with five verses of Billings' "Chester." You heard one. Now we'll give you the whole enchilada, and, and it's... you have it there. And if, you know, we beat Burgoyne, but Cornwallis is still lurking. And it's all in here, and enjoy.

[Norumbega Harmony prepares for the next song.]

*Let tyrants shake their iron rod  
And slav'ry clank her galling chains;  
We fear them not; we trust in God –  
New England's God forever reigns.*

*When God inspired us for the fight,  
Their ranks were broke, their lines were forced.  
Their ships were shattered in our sight,  
Or swiftly driven from our coast.*

*Howe and Burgoyne and Clinton too  
With Prescot and Cornwallis join'd  
Together plot our overthrow,  
In one infernal league combin'd.*

*The foe comes on with haughty stride,  
Our troops advance with martial noise;  
Their vet'rans flee before our youth,  
And gen'ral's yield to beardless boys.*

*What grateful off'ring shall we bring?  
What shall we render to the Lord?  
Loud Hallelujahs let us sing,  
And praise his name on ev'ry chord.*

*Loud Hallelujahs let us sing,  
And praise his name on ev'ry chord.*

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you, very much.