

Freedom

PRODUCTION NOTES
by Deborah Craig-Claar

CONCEPT

Freedom is the most cherished of American ideals and the motivation behind our 225-year history. When other American perspectives hit rocky ground, the vision of freedom remains constant. Freedom has been our most defining characteristic among the nations of the world; freedom is, quite simply, who we are.

Yet we should never take our freedom for granted. Ronald Reagan offered this profound reflection on the concept of freedom:

“Freedom is a fragile thing and is never more than one generation away from extinction. It is not ours by inheritance; it must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation, for it only comes once to a people. Those who have known freedom, and then lost it, have never known it again.”

With this musical, my hope is that we might pause to reflect, to honor, and to celebrate this ideal that birthed our nation, that so many have died for, and that still represents the dream of countless people around the world. Once again my supremely gifted collaborator, David T. Clydesdale, has woven a musical tapestry that is both thrilling and poignant. The companion DVD will provide you with moving reflections of our nation and her people to enhance your own presentation. It is my hope that the words and images of members of your own congregation and community will be used in tandem with the words and images set in this musical to tell the full story of freedom. *Freedom* is not just the history of a nation, but a prayer in the hearts of a people.

At less than forty minutes, the musical has a built-in flexibility, and we hope that it might fit a variety of needs. There are more opportunities for performance than simply Independence Day. This musical is especially appropriate for Memorial Day and Veterans Day, as well as a special service that remembers September 11th.

I hope that the following set of production notes will provide you with some good, basic information concerning the mounting of productions of *Freedom*, in addition to offering some “triggers” that will help inspire your own creative ideas. I firmly believe that choral musicals should reflect the personality and mission of each individual church, and I encourage you to make this musical your own.

USE OF THE DVD

The DVD of *Freedom* was created to help visually illustrate the themes and emotions of the musical. The musical can certainly be performed without the DVD enhancement, but

we feel the particular elements in the musical—from newsreel footage to still photographs to projected lyrics to audience communication—all benefit from the powerful use of visual images.

The use of the DVD during your performance should be easy to manage. The DVD contains the full stereo, split-trax and click track (for use with live orchestra) and is designed to be played from the beginning until the end of the production. However, you may elect to pause the DVD to insert various program additions, such as live testimony or a message by your pastor.

Navigating the DVD

When you insert the DVD it will automatically take you to the main title graphic of the musical, and then move to the Main Menu page.

At the Main Menu you have two options: Audio Options or Pre-Show Loop. The Pre-Show Loop is the title graphic in a loop form that can be used on screen before your presentation. Simply select this from the Main Menu and it will stay on screen until you press the menu button and return to the Main Menu.

Selecting “Audio Options” from the Main Menu will take you to a Track Menu. Once you have indicated your audio preference you can start the musical at the beginning, or select different songs within the musical.

To begin the musical for your performance, select the desired song title. Once you select a title you will be taken to a black screen that lasts approximately four seconds. Pause the DVD at this point and you will be ready to begin your presentation. You may pause between each track as needed, or you can let the DVD continue and it will automatically advance to the next track. For this musical, we do not suggest that you stop the DVD during your presentation.

We also strongly suggest that your DVD operator have the capability of monitoring the video on a separate screen. There are times that you will want to mute the projector, such as when you go from the Pre-Show Loop to the start of the musical.

When connecting audio, you only need to connect the right and left channels to your sound system, and the video output to your video system. There is no audio recorded in the “center” or “surround” channels.

VISUAL ENHANCEMENTS FOR YOUR PERFORMANCE

Although the DVD may appear to be the visual center of your production, it is not. It is only one of many visual features that will help frame the true visual focus of your performance – your choir. Media designer Mike Dupree of Word Music has carefully crafted the DVD to visually extend and augment the musical segments of the project, and

to go to a black screen for the narrative segments. There are a number of ways in which you can add additional visual enhancement to your production.

Sanctuary Décor

Most Americans consider the central image of any patriotic celebration to be the American flag. You might put out a call to members of your congregation to donate any American flags they might own for the production. Various civic and military organizations in your community might also be willing to loan their flags. Other red, white and blue décor such as banners, bunting, and streamers might also be appropriate.

The Lobby

The lobby of your church building would be a wonderful place to pay tribute to men and women of your community who have served their country in armed conflict. You might group photographs together according to the branch of the armed services in which the individuals served, or according to the wars in which they fought. You might also ask your Sunday School classes to paint expressions of the flag and other American symbols and display them on the walls. You can also ask your entire congregation (all ages) to submit responses to the question: “What does freedom mean to you?” These responses might be mounted on a wall or hung from a large, bare-branched “freedom tree” in the lobby.

Choir Dress

How the choir is attired will depend upon the atmosphere of your performance. A more casual production might feature the choir wearing red and blue polo shirts and khaki slacks. A more formal production might feature black and white concert dress with red and blue scarves, ties and accents. In either case, you’re encouraged to “unify” your choir as to their dress. With the variety of visual activity in this production, the uniformity of the choir will aid audience focus. This holds true for the children’s choir as well. Blue jeans and inexpensive red t-shirts should do the trick.

The Narrators

The narration must be performed live. You can elect to have one person perform the role, use the two narrators as scripted, or split it between three or more individuals; the narrators can be either men or women. These individuals will function as the hosts of the production, so they should possess warm and conversational speaking voices. The narrators should be extremely well-acquainted with the DVD and the musical accompaniment track so that they can pace their delivery to coincide with the images and underscoring. The narrators might have tall stools over to one side of the platform so that they can sit when not speaking. When speaking, the narrators should move freely about the performance area and therefore should wear a wireless microphone. When the DVD is showing footage, have the narrators look up toward the screen (unless this is awkward or physically impossible.) This will help focus audience attention. The narrators should

make every attempt to memorize their sequences. This will greatly aid the pacing and communicative power of the narrative segments.

SONG-BY-SONG STAGING SUGGESTIONS

Starting the Performance (Before the DVD starts)

A dramatic and moving way to begin your performance is the ceremonial entrance and display of the American flag by a local color guard unit. This event would occur before the DVD is started. Color guards are usually provided by local military offices. They can also be performed by ROTC units and other organizations such as the Boy Scouts. This might be an appropriate time to lead the audience in the pledge of allegiance, or the audience may simply stand to honor the colors as they arrive. If you would like to extend the audience participation at this time, everyone can join in singing the national anthem. After the color guard exists, the DVD starts and the formal performance begins.

“Freedom *with* America the Beautiful”

The evocative beginning of “Cry Freedom” might be enhanced by starting the performance in the dark. A single spot comes up on the soloist, with the dramatic backdrop of the video behind him. The choir can either be on stage at the beginning of the production, or can enter down the aisles during the first chorus of “Cry Freedom.” You might also elect to let a small ensemble (your praise team) provide the back-up vocals to the solo on the verses, and have the choir join on the choruses. This will help to build the number visually as well as aurally.

“Freedom Underscore 1”

During this opening narration, the children’s choir will enter and take their place on the platform. The subsequent children’s song (“Words to Live By”) was written quite simply so that you could perform this musical with a very small group of children. If your children’s choir does not meet during the summer, this group of children can be composed of the children of the adult members of your choir who are participating in *Freedom*.

During the underscore, the narrators should speak directly to the audience in a warm, conversational manner, either from the center or the sides of the stage. The dark screen assures the focus will remain upon the individuals.

“Words to Live By *with* Yankee Doodle Dandy and America, the Beautiful”

This upbeat song allows your children to share some of the most meaningful thoughts concerning freedom from some of our greatest citizens. The children that will be speaking the famous quotations should all be in the front row so that they will be able to step forward with ease. You should be certain that there are at least two standing microphones, so that the spoken segments can “trade-off” and the children will be ready at a microphone when their cue comes. You really needn’t have the kids hold up letters to

spell “freedom” during measures 71-86 and again during measures 100-103—the video does a wonderful job of illustrating this sequence.

“Freedom Underscore 2”

At the beginning of this underscore, the children’s choir should unobtrusively leave the stage. (Because they will be returning for the final two songs in the musical, they might simply sit in the front row of the audience area.) “Freedom Underscore 2” and the narrative sequence alter the mood of the musical from celebrative to inspirational. If you are able, a subtle shift in lighting would be appropriate. A senior man, a young woman, and a child each come forward during this sequence, to express the voice of three groups of individuals who love and support those fighting overseas: parents, spouses, and sons/daughters. You may use members of your choir or actual family members of service men and women in your congregation or community. The idea is that these three individuals will also sing the solos (as notated) in the first chorus of “I Salute You” (measures 42-66).

“I Salute You *with* Battle Hymn of the Republic”

David T. Clydesdale’s moving arrangement of Dennis Jernigan’s powerful song provides the opportunity to pay tribute of all members of the armed forces in your congregation and community. The beautiful montage of photographs in the video will provide a wonderful emotional frame for this sequence.

As notated above, the senior man, young woman, and child who participated in the spoken sequence during “Freedom Underscore 2” should also sing the simple solos in the first chorus (measures 42-66). Don’t concern yourself with “solo” singing quality—this sequence is about human emotion.

At measures 69 and 94, narrators pay tribute to those who have lost their lives during conflict. You might print the names of those local veterans in a program or have their names and photos displayed in the lobby. At measure 121, a narrator asks that all veterans present stand when their branch of the armed forces is called. The video will help make this sequence especially clear. You can also invite a member from each branch of the armed services to your program. They should dress in full uniform and can walk to the center of the platform area and salute during the segment when their branch is honored. If you used a color guard to begin your program, they might reenter for the final chorus.

“For Freedom”

As the narration begins for the next sequence, any veterans on the platform can unobtrusively exit. A narrator will recite the moving second verse of our national anthem, “The Star Spangled Banner,” over the instrumental introduction to “For Freedom.”

A quick note concerning the use of the word “battle” instead of the original “conquer.” This was an editorial decision made so that the original intent of Francis Scott Key’s poetry would not be misinterpreted, given our current difficult and turbulent times. My guess is that many listeners may not even recognize this sequence as the second verse of “The Star Spangled Banner” (many may not even know there *is* a second verse), and the idea of “conquering” might be jarring and troublesome to many listeners. (I actually believe Key meant the word “conquer” to be understood in a far broader context than militarily, but such layered interpretation rarely comes across in a single hearing.) The final choice is, of course, yours, and you may use either word. You may also elect to not use this narration, and instead, have a veteran from your community offer a brief (30 seconds or less) testimony or prayer at this time.

The two soloists for “For Freedom” should stand center stage and be softly lit. If they will stand together in the center of the performing area, they will not compete with the video, but will help the audience take in both live performers and the media in a single vertical frame.

“Freedom Underscore 3”

The soloists from “For Freedom” will quietly exit at the beginning of this narrative sequence. During the narration, the children’s choir should rejoin the adult choir on stage.

“The Four Freedoms *includes* My Country ‘Tis of Thee, God of Our Fathers, For the Beauty of the Earth, Eternal Father, Strong to Save *and* Amazing Grace”

This musical tribute to the four freedoms described by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1941 uses five of our most beloved American hymns. I altered the lyrics to pay tribute to each of the freedoms, while trying to reflect the original character of the hymn. The final version of “Amazing Grace” offers a musical prayer for peace. The video images and the choirs’ musical performance should help convey the timeless truths in Roosevelt’s words. (If you have elected not to have the children’s choir return for the conclusion of the musical, the women can sing “For the Beauty of the Earth.”)

Four of Norman Rockwell’s most famous paintings are visual depictions of The Four Freedoms. They graced four covers of *The Saturday Evening Post* between February 20 and March 13, 1943, during the height of World War II. Although we have not included these paintings in the DVD visual enhancement of this song, you can view the art here: <http://www.best-norman-rockwell-art.com/four-freedoms.html>

If you so choose, you might elect to negotiate with the appropriate copyright owners for the use of these paintings as additional visual enhancements for your production. (This web site should get you started.)

If your pastor would like to deliver a message, invitation, or lead a time of prayer for our nation, it should occur immediately after the acapella rendering of “Amazing Grace” at the conclusion of “The Four Freedoms.” Simply pause the DVD.

“Let Freedom Ring”

The finale of *Freedom* begins with a “corporate public prayer.” God is addressed in a prayerful attitude throughout the final narrative sequence, although people are not invited to bow their heads and there is no formal “Amen.” (You are welcome, naturally, to add either or both. You may also refashion this final sequence to more directly reflect the needs and focus of your church and the specific holiday you are observing.) Several adults and children join the narrators in voicing these final hopes and prayers.

Dennis Jernigan’s stirring “Let Freedom Ring” encapsulates the heart of *Freedom’s* message. The song steadily builds, starting with two soloists, adding an ensemble (praise team), then adult choir, and finally the children’s choir.

The final chorus of this number should build to a thunderous climax. As reflected in the DVD, you can create safe “indoor fireworks” (confetti/streamer canons) to add a powerful finale to the final chorus. If you plan to close your program with indoor confetti/streamer canons or other pyrotechnics, be certain that they have been carefully tested, that you consult with the fire department concerning local regulations, and that you receive professional consultation. If you are performing outside—light up the sky!

An Offer

I’d like to offer my services to you —both as production consultant and prayer partner—concerning any aspect of your production. Nothing is more exciting for me than to hear from gifted and committed individuals, like you, who are bringing these works to life. Please write anytime (no question is too small!) to me at: deborah.claar@sbcglobal.net If I don’t know the answer, I promise to help you find the person that does! I wish you God’s richest blessings in every aspect of your ministry.