

Hold These Truths

LARA DOWNES & FRIENDS



PENTATONE

HOLD THESE TRUTHS

Lara Downes

with

9 Horses & Invoke

HOLD THESE TRUTHS

Edmar Colón

1 Welcome 2. 01

Shawn Okpebholo

2 Wondrous Free 4. 01

Oscar Peterson

3 Hymn to Freedom 4. 12

Willie Nelson

4 Changing Skies 3. 45

Elie Siegmeister

5 Lusty and Joyful (from
American Sonata) 6. 46

H.T. Burleigh

6 On Bended Knee 3. 11

7 The Frolic 2. 37

Charles Ives

8 In the Mornin' 3. 20

Daniel Gilliam

9 Jubilee 3. 06

Traditional

10 In the Sweet By and By 3.19

Caleb Burhans

11 In Time of Desperation 6.16

Stephen Foster

12 Hard Times Come Again No More 6.18

Christopher Tin

13 Hope is the Thing with Feathers 4.28

Carlos Simon

Hold Fast to Dreams

14 Dreamy 1.34

15 Animated 1.19

16 Funky 1.15

Leonard Bernstein

17 Lucky to Be Me 3.24

Jeff Beal

18 Elation 2.35

Howard Hanson

19 Joy 4.36

Ricky Ian Gordon

20 Finding Home 3.01

Aaron Copland

21 Simple Gifts 1.46

Total playing time: 73.00

Lara Downes, piano

9 Horses, ensemble

Invoke, ensemble



What a ride.

The American road trip that inspired and generated this album took me from Northern California to the last stop on the L train in Brooklyn and from Brattleboro, VT to Tuskegee AL, zigzagging around the crazy-quilt of this country for almost two years. A soul-searching, soul-baring adventure through big cities and small towns. A journey of many thousands of miles, pulling a heavy suitcase and carrying a fragile package of hope.

I travel with music as my passport, granting me expedited entry to community and communion with people I might never otherwise encounter. Music introduces me, tells my story and invites others to share theirs. It opens a pathway to honesty, empathy and the recognition of shared human experience. On great concert stages, in grade school classrooms and community centers, radio stations and rehearsal studios and even a 200-year-old barn, I've shared music and words with hundreds of my fellow Americans, reflecting on the challenges of the present, confronting the legacies of the past, and - most importantly and urgently - voicing our hopes for the future. These conversations inspired the music I've collected on this album, and produced the personal reflections that introduce each track.



What a time.

A time of desperation - of crisis and chaos, uncertainty and instability, division and devastation. What a year to be observing this 250th anniversary of our nation's founding, to be considering how we got here, and wondering what comes next.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident...” Truth, these days, is endangered by the manipulation of information, the silencing of history, the banning of books, the dismantling of archives. The American promise is fraying at its seams, pulled apart by the unbearable tensions of this moment. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness - all at risk. It's hard to imagine a way out of this darkness. But everywhere I go, I find new fragments of hope to add to my collection. Everyone I've met on this journey has given me something generous and beautiful, some piece of their heart, some measure of their faith and strength and courage. Spend a day, as I've spent many, in a middle school classroom. You'll learn that the future is bold and bright, that our young people are getting ready to change the world in ways that we can't even imagine. Spend time with our elders, and you'll realize that the wisdom of their years offers a broad perspective

on today's troubles. You'll remember your responsibility to persist and resist, as they did, to believe in the future enough to make the sacrifices it requires. I have learned so much on this journey.

The music on this record goes all the way back, with Shawn Okpebholo's reimagining of the song *My Days Have Been So Wondrous Free* - a song that predates the founding of these United States by seventeen years. It was written in 1759 by a young composer named Francis Hopkinson, a first-generation American born in Philadelphia who, on July 4 of 1776, became one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. H.T. Burleigh's music draws from songs of enslavement, essential expressions of survival, resistance, faith, and community. Stephen Foster's *Hard Times Come Again No More* was an expression of suffering and hardship during the Civil War, and Oscar Peterson's *Hymn to Freedom* became an anthem of the Civil Rights era.



But this album starts with something brand new. My dear friend Edmar Colón was born and raised in Puerto Rico and now lives in the Boston area, where he's raising a young son. He's saddened by the state of the nation and the world, worried about what the future holds for his little boy. But he wrote this little piece called *Welcome* to celebrate the potential of new life. A tender and gentle piece of music - a bit fragile, like our hope, and as wide open as our future. It's the perfect beginning to this musical journey through America's history and deep into its heart and soul, contemplating the

beauty of our collective voice and vision, and the power of the truths we hold.

Lara Downes



AMERICAN POSTCARDS

The quotes that introduce each track on this album come from people I've met as I've traveled across America with my national initiative "The Declaration Project." I've hosted dozens of encounters in concert halls, community centers, classrooms and other spaces, offering prompts for reflection and conversation with those who join me.

"How do you define Life, Liberty, the Pursuit of Happiness?"

"What does it mean to be an American today?"

"What is your hope or wish for the American future?"

These are responses that came my way, with honesty, vulnerability and generosity. Some of the people included here wrote the music you hear; others inspired it. They all changed my life, and gave me a much-needed measure of hope for the future of my country.



Edmar Colón: Welcome

“I wish for a future where my son can aspire to become the best version of himself and thrive while doing so. I hope this world allows him and his generation the opportunity to learn from one another, care for this planet, and build a more welcoming future rooted in dignity, joy, and belonging.”

Edmar – Boston, MA



Shawn Okpebholo: Wondrous Free

“I believe in freedom of expression, freedom of authenticity, the freedom that we have when we’re healthy and educated and in community, the freedom to have purpose. What if that freedom can be unlocked? What if we create spaces and opportunities where that freedom is unleashed in our human souls and in our bodies?”

Shawn – Wheaton, IL



Oscar Peterson: Hymn to Freedom

“Liberty means the right of all people to determine how they express themselves and how they express their love — the dignity to be respected and addressed in the way that they choose. Liberty means that every person has equal access to the pursuit of happiness.”

Johanna – North Adams, MA



Willie Nelson: Changing Skies

“To be American is to be a changemaker. When we thought that we were being unfairly ruled by the British, we fought a revolution. When we started to recognize how terrible slavery was, we fought a war to end it. When Jim Crow laws were implemented, people like MLK and Malcolm X rallied people together and fought to change it. I think it’s our job to remember that we are the changemakers. If the system is broken, it’s our job to fix it.”

Griffin – New York, NY



Elie Siegmeister: Lusty and Joyful

“Life is about breath and energy. It’s about purpose and it’s about desire. And it’s actually about grit and determination. You get out of it what you put in.”

Webster – Knoxville, TN



H.T. Burleigh: On Bended Knee

"I pray for an America where poems of this kind don't exist. I pray for an America where injustice is lost from our minds, into the abyss. I pray for an America where justice is real, every life matters, and wounds can finally heal, where equality reigns not just in name, and every soul is valued, not judged, and not blamed. Where the burdens of the past no longer bind, and the future is bright, with compassion in mind. I dream of a land where we can all be free, in truth, spirit, and equality. I pray for an America that isn't waiting to attack, and I pray for an America that finally loves me back."

Laina – Tuskegee, AL



H.T. Burleigh: The Frolic

“I pursue happiness by hanging out with my family and friends, and playing with my dogs.”

Lyla – Woodland, CA



Charles Ives: In the Mornin'

“My hope is to wake up each day knowing that my thoughts, my dreams and my identity do not need permission to exist.”

Darion – Tuskegee, AL



Daniel Gilliam: Jubilee

“When you’re free, you can really be happy, and you don’t have to force a smile or anything like that. I feel happy when I play music.”

Ayden – Philadelphia, PA



Traditional: In the Sweet By and By

“My wish is that we return to the America I learned about in my childhood — not perfect, but welcoming, diverse, respectful and democratic. A place where disagreement was not insurmountable and where we led with compassion.”

Bert – Reston, VA



Caleb Burhans: In Time of Desperation

“Begin with the beginning, which is between visions of liberty and the reality of enslavement and the oppression of indigenous people. That’s the very beginning of the country. And oftentimes we want to move past it... but the fundamental tension is there and we have to work it out as best we can during the course of our lives here individually, but also in community with other people. My hope is that, with enough of us working to tell a true, complex, rich, beautiful and also devastating story of this country, that we inspire the young to reimagine the very best of who we are, and to abandon the worst of who we are.”

Imani – Cambridge, MA



***Stephen Foster: Hard Times Come
Again No More***

“When things are hard, we can still
make it work if we empathize
and help others.”

Alina – New York, NY



***Christopher Tin: Hope is the Thing
with Feathers***

“My hope for America is that it rediscovers the principles upon which it was founded: rule by consensus, rejection of tyranny, and a noble vision of prosperity, peace, and advancement of a civil and just society, not only for its own citizens, but as a model for the rest of the world.”

Christopher – Los Angeles, CA



***Carlos Simon: Hold Fast to Dreams:
Dreamy; Animated; Funky***

"I see an outline of a dream, an unprecedented unknown unliked idea our forefathers stood on, this very land the soil beneath my bare toes, the life they believed it held, the purpose they could sense under the blades of grass. What is liberty? Is it a state of being? A title someone can strip from you, rip away from your begging hands as you follow what you believe to be right? I believe it is unalienable, a word so many use but so few understand."

Leah – Austin, TX



***Leonard Bernstein (arr. Bill Evans):
Lucky to Be Me***

“To me, the pursuit of happiness is the attempt to attain ultimate joy, a joy that looks different for everyone. It can be expressed through the clothes you wear, how you style your hair, the choice to wear makeup, who you love, the music you enjoy, and the goals you set for your life.

It relies heavily on authenticity, making choices that are truly yours, rather than conforming to the expectations of others or society. It requires the freedom to make choices that align with your sense of self that is forever evolving.”

Thomas – Tuskegee, AL



Jeff Beal: Elation

“For me, happiness has two faces. First, a private interior side, which comes from being free to create, explore, dream, or simply just enjoy being alive in each moment.

But second, an even deeper sense of happiness comes from being in service and community with each other — this deep joy which affirms the power of our shared humanity and connection to each other.”

Jeff – New York, NY



Howard Hanson: Joy

“To me, the true pursuit of happiness requires a presence of mind and body in the absolute present, whether that’s the sweet breeze outside the car window on a drive up the California coast or the verdant scents of spring and summer trees in full bloom, sunlight warm on skin unrushed by urgency, content with existence and the abundance of choice.”

Abigail – Los Angeles, CA



Ricky Ian Gordon: Finding Home

I hope in the future to have a country that is a safe home for everybody, regardless of their race or religion.

We should keep fighting for it, no matter how difficult it is."

Sara – New York, NY



Aaron Copland: Simple Gifts

“My interpretation of the pursuit of happiness is discovering, exploring, and figuring out what your true gift is. If we can all find what our true purpose is on this planet, in this body, in this lifetime, then we inspire each other to find our happiness and our truth.”

Sangeeta – Austin, TX

Guest Artists & Arrangers

9 Horses:

Joseph Brent, mandolin

Sara Caswell, violin

Andrew Ryan, bass

Invoke:

Nick Montopoli, violin & banjo

Zach Matteson, violin

Karl Mitze, viola & mandolin

Geoff Manyin, cello

Changing Skies, arr. by **Nick**

Montopoli & Jeremy Siskind

In the Mornin', arr. by **Joseph Brent**

Jubilee adapted by **Jean Ritchie**

In the Sweet By and By, arr. by

Joseph Nimoh

Hard Times Come Again No More,

arr. by **Joseph Brent**

Hope is the Thing with Feathers,

arr. by **Austin Ali**

Lucky To Be Me, arr. by **Bill Evans**

*This album was recorded between 23-25
October, 2025 and on 11 January, 2026 at
Abeshouse Studios, South Salem, NY, USA.*

Special Thanks to:

The Temejos Foundation
and to everyone who contributed music
and words to this project

We the People

Acknowledgements

PRODUCTION TEAM

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Photography

**AmaYah Harrison, Yun Ying Low
& Lara Downes**

Product management & design

Ana Milovanović & Karolina Szymanik
(PENTATONE)

PUBLISHER INFORMATION

Edmar Colón: *Welcome*

published by **Borikén Music**

Shawn Okpebholo: *Wondrous Free*

published by **Yellow Einstein Press**

Oscar Peterson: *Hymn to Freedom*

published by **Torni Music/Westbury Music**

Willie Nelson: *Changing Skies*

published by **Sony Music Publishing**

Elie Siegmeister: *Lusty and Joyful*

(from *American Sonata*)

published by **Edward B. Marks Music Corp**

H.T. Burleigh: *On Bended Knee & The Frolic*

published by **Theodore Presser Co.**

Charles Ives: *In the Mornin'*

published by **Associated Music Publishers, Inc. (BMI)**

Daniel Gilliam: *Jubilee*

published by **Geordie Music Publishing/
Fictive Music**

Caleb Burhans: *In Time of Desperation*
published by **Burning Hands (ASCAP)**

Christopher Tin: *Hope is the Thing
with Feathers*
published by **Hal Leonard**

Carlos Simon: *Hold Fast to Dreams*
published by **CSJr. Music**

Leonard Bernstein: *Lucky to Be Me*
published by **Boosey & Hawkes**

Jeff Beal: *Elation*
published by **Post Meridian Music (BMI)**

Howard Hanson: *Joy*
published by **Carl Fischer**

Ricky Ian Gordon: *Finding Home*
published by **Public Doves Music**

Aaron Copland: *Simple Gifts*
published by **The Aaron Copland Fund
for Music**

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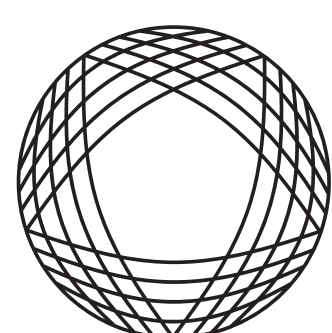
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