



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Jersey Symphony Presents Concert Weekend Examining ‘The American Dream’

Includes World Premiere of *We Came to America* by Rob Kapilow

**Symphony Joined by Special Guests: JCC Young People’s Chorus @ Thurnauer,
Young People’s Chorus of New York City® and Ember Choral Arts**

**Also Features the Music From
Leonard Bernstein’s *West Side Story* and *On the Town***

Newark, NJ—The New Jersey Symphony will present a concert program called “The American Dream,” focused on the many facets that make up the long-held idea of the American Dream, the stories of those who have immigrated to America, and the differences found in the American experience through different cultures.

The Saturday and Sunday concerts will include the world premiere of a new piece by Rob Kapilow, titled *We Came to America*, commissioned by the Thurnauer School of Music at the Kaplen JCC on the Palisades. “The American Dream” will be performed Thursday, January 18, 2024, at 1:30 pm and Saturday, January 20, 2024, at 8 pm at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark; and Sunday, January 21, 2024, at 3 pm at the Mayo Performing Arts Center in Morristown.

Thursday’s performance is conducted by New Jersey Symphony Music Director Xian Zhang, and features a piece by Resident Artistic Catalyst Daniel Bernard Roumain called *i am a white person who ____ Black people*. The piece, written originally for strings and percussion, was commissioned during the COVID-19 pandemic by New Jersey Symphony in 2020, to be performed on its virtual season. This performance features an updated version of the work that includes winds and brass.

Saturday's performance will feature the world premiere of *We Came to America* by Rob Kapilow, the artist-in-residence at the JCC Thurnauer School of Music, who will also conduct his work on Saturday and Sunday's concerts (Music Director Xian Zhang conducts the rest of the program). The work was inspired by Faith Ringgold's 2016 children's book of the same name, which chronicles the country's rich history of immigration and diversity and celebrates the unique gifts and stories of the many cultures that make up America.

Rob Kapilow says, "I'm looking forward to bringing this wonderful four-year journey, inspired by our intergenerational interviews with immigrant families about their experiences of coming to America, to musical life with our three choirs—Ember Choral Arts, Young People's Chorus of New York City, and Young People's Chorus @ Thurnauer—and the New Jersey Symphony. The five-movement piece looks at the immigrant experience from multiple perspectives past and present, with our own intergenerational interviews turned into a libretto by Sokunthary Svay along with additional texts from the Bible, Walt Whitman and multiple U.S. immigration statutes. The issue of how we welcome or exclude others has been with us since Biblical times, and it is my hope that the piece will honor the extraordinarily challenging experience of coming to America in an affirmative, thought-provoking way."

The commission of *We Came to America* is part of a larger project the Thurnauer School of Music has undertaken, which also includes an educational curriculum for students of all ages and backgrounds about the value of immigrants and diversity; a research study led by St. John's University which builds upon both the performance and the educational experiences connected to the project; and a new *We Came to America* music education scholarship fund for students who wish to study music but lack financial resources.

We Came to America is written for chorus and orchestra, and the New Jersey Symphony will be joined by three choral groups for the performances on Saturday and Sunday: JCC Young People's Chorus @ Thurnauer, the Young People's Chorus of New York City and Ember Choral Arts.

In keeping with the theme, all three performances include *Darker America*, written by composer William Grant Still in the 1920s to depict the struggles of his fellow Black Americans, aiming to show the "triumph of a people over their sorrows;" three dance episodes from the musical *On the Town*, by Leonard Bernstein; and the Symphonic Dances from Bernstein's famous *West Side Story*. Of note, the original production of *On the Town* on Broadway was known for its racially diverse cast, and its insistence on avoiding racial stereotypes commonly found in 1940s media. *West Side Story* is equally famous for the tragic love story between teenagers from two different cultures, as well as its focus on social issues in the 1960s.

The JCC Young People's Chorus @ Thurnauer (YPC@T) is Bergen County's premier youth choir. Ranging in age from 6-18 years and performing diverse and challenging repertoire, the

choristers perform frequently and work with professional artists and composers. YPC@T is an affiliate of the award-winning Young People's Chorus of New York City.

The Young People's Chorus of New York City (YPC) is an internationally renowned multicultural youth chorus founded by Artistic Director Francisco J. Núñez, a MacArthur Fellow and Musical America's 2018 Educator of the Year. YPC's mission and values are deeply rooted in an innovative model of diversity, which provides children of all cultural and economic backgrounds with a unique program of music education and choral performance.

Ember Choral Arts (formerly Schola Cantorum on Hudson) is a semi-professional choral ensemble whose mission is to extend the role of art beyond that of its own intrinsic value, leveraging it to bring visibility and expansive thinking to issues of human significance. Ember accomplishes this through innovative programming designed to touch lives and of almost exclusively living composers.

We Came to America is generously presented by Eva Holzer.

The Richard H. Holzer Memorial Foundation is a partial sponsor of Ember Choral Arts, the adult choir in performances of Rob Kapilow's *We Came to America*.

The American Dream

Featuring Music from Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story* and the *On the Town*
Includes World Premiere by Rob Kapilow (Jan 20 & 21 only)

Xian Zhang conductor

Rob Kapilow conductor (Jan 20 & 21 only)

JCC Young People's Chorus @ Thurnauer | Emma Brondolo, artistic director (Jan 20 & 21 only)

Young People's Chorus of New York City® | Francisco J. Núñez, artistic director and founder (Jan 20 & 21 only)

Ember Choral Arts | Deborah Simpkin King, artistic director (Jan 20 & 21 only)

New Jersey Symphony

Daniel Bernard Roumain *i am a white person who_____ Black people* (Jan 18 only)

Still Darker America

Rob Kapilow *We Came to America* (World Premiere, Commissioned by the Thurnauer School of Music at the Kaplen JCC on the Palisades) (Jan 20 & 21 only)

Bernstein Three Dance Episodes from *On the Town*

Bernstein Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story*

New Jersey Symphony

The Emmy and Grammy Award-winning New Jersey Symphony is redefining what it means to be a nationally leading, relevant orchestra in the 21st century. The Symphony is renewing

its deeply rooted commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion by championing new, and often local, artists; engaging audiences for whom the inspiring depth and breadth of classical music will be a new experience; and incorporating the broadest possible representation in all aspects of our organization—all to better reflect and serve our vibrant communities. Since 2021, Music Director Xian Zhang has worked together with composer, violinist, educator and social-justice advocate Daniel Bernard Roumain, the orchestra's Resident Artistic Catalyst, to offer programming that connects with diverse communities in Newark and throughout New Jersey.

Internationally renowned Chinese American conductor Xian Zhang began her tenure as the New Jersey Symphony's current Music Director in 2016. Since her arrival at the New Jersey Symphony, Zhang has revitalized programming with an industry-leading commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion in mainstage concerts. In its second century of bringing concerts to the people of New Jersey, the Symphony will present audience favorites in 2023–24 including Dvorak's "New World" Symphony, Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, violinist Joshua Bell leading the orchestra in Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto and pianist Daniil Trifonov playing Gershwin's Concerto in F. New Jersey Symphony co-commissions include works by internationally-renowned living composers: Anna Clyne's *ATLAS* and Jessie Montgomery's *Snapshots*. Composers Rob Kapilow and Daniel Bernard Roumain will present world premieres.

For more information about the New Jersey Symphony, visit www.njsymphony.org or email information@njsymphony.org. Tickets are available for purchase by phone 1.800.ALLEGRO (255.3476) or on the Orchestra's website.

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The New Jersey Symphony's programs are made possible in part by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, along with many other foundations, corporations and individual donors.

Thurnauer School of Music at the Kaplen JCC on the Palisades

The Thurnauer School of Music, located at the Kaplen JCC on the Palisades, is renowned as a center of artistic and educational excellence open to all. Membership at the JCC is not required for participation or financial assistance at the Thurnauer School of Music.

Since 1984, under the direction of Dorothy Kaplan Roffman, the school has inspired thousands of students and families – transforming lives and sharing the joys of music. Through outstanding instructions, concerts, master classes, community events and

partnerships with local schools, Thurnauer offers opportunities for everyone in our community –from infants to seniors – to connect with the world of music.

At Thurnauer, over 400 students are immersing themselves each year in the love and study of music, mentored by extraordinarily faculty, inspiring a global music community of children and adults.

The *We Came to America* project raises important scholarship funds for children who wish to study music but may lack the financial resources. This year alone, 34% of students taking lessons received need-based financial assistance.

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