

We Hold These Truths

for Renee Fleming

Text: Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826)

Music and Narration: J. Todd Frazier (b. 1969)

To the task of composing the American Declaration of Independence from England, Benjamin Franklin, the internationally respected senior member of the Continental Congress, quickly declined, stating, "I make it a policy never to write documents subject to editing by others." John Adams, the seasoned and experienced politician, was then called upon. Adams said, "There are three reasons why I should not accept this honor: first, I am disliked and obnoxious, so the document would lack credibility; second, it should be written by a Virginian; and third, Thomas Jefferson is ten times a better writer than I." The daunting task then came to the 33 year old Jefferson, who composed the draft in 1776 over a 17 day period in a hotel room in Philadelphia. Among the activities which helped focus and inspire his mind and words during this period was music - the playing of his violin.

Jefferson said the object of the Declaration was "not to find out new principles, or new arguments, never before thought of, not merely to say things which had never been said before; but to place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent, and to justify ourselves in the independent stand we are compelled to take. Neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment, nor yet copied from any particular and previous writing, it was intended to be an expression of the American mind, and to give to that expression the proper tone and spirit called for by the occasion."

The words of the American Declaration of Independence that modern Americans most embrace, are found in the preamble, and set in **We Hold These Truths**: "*We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, and endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*"

Premiered on Jefferson's birthday weekend in April 2011 at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C. by soprano Renee Fleming and the National Symphony Orchestra, Christoph Eschenbach conductor, **We Hold These Truths** is the standalone version of the first movement of **Thomas Jefferson: The Making of America**, an large scale oratorio in two parts based on the life of Thomas Jefferson. The oratorio was commissioned by Cynthia Rubin for violinist, Henry Rubin, with support from American Festival for the Arts, The Brown Foundation, and The Immanuel and Helen Olshan Texas Music Festival.



*Delivering the Declaration to Congress. Artist: John Trumbull, Oil on canvas, 12' x 18',
Commissioned in 1817 and placed in the Rotunda in 1826.*

Orchestra:

2 Flutes, 2 Oboes, 2 Clarinets in Bb, 2 Bassoons

4 Horns in F, 2 Trumpets in Bb, 2 Tenor Trombones, 1 Bass Trombone, 1 Tuba

2 Percussionists: *marimba and chimes*

Violins I, Violins II, Violas, Cellos, Basses

Soloists:

Voice: The Vocal Solo, including optional introductory narration (or separate narrator may be used for the introduction), may be performed by either a **Tenor** (8vb) or **Soprano**. The Voice and Violin Solo represent an integral interlocking pair. The narration may be amplified, with a stand provided next to the soloist to place the microphone after speaking.

Violin: The Violin Solo represents the Soul of Jefferson and the role of music as handmaid to his words and thoughts. It may be played by the Concertmaster, sitting in traditional 1st chair position, or by a separate soloist (or Concertmaster) standing stage right of the Vocal Soloist. The Violin and Voice represent an integral interlocking pair.