



FROM THE CHAIR OF  
LIBERAL ARTS



## A Nation At 250

→ **IMAGINE CREATING A** concert program titled *Scenes from America*: Which pieces would you include? Now think of a history book, anthology, or podcast—which maps, paintings, photographs, stories, plays, poems make the cut? Which voices might illuminate the artistic and cultural history of a nation?

These and other questions animated the discussions I enjoyed with historian Dr. Eva Swidler, and organist and choir director Mr. Matt Glandorf (Organ '91), as we sketched out a syllabus for a team-taught seminar that would reflect on the nation's music and literature in a historical context. While our ideas might have fueled a four-year curriculum, the challenge was to create a one-semester interdisciplinary course that explores the interplay of artistic expression and history in context. As Eva noted, "The chance to take a deep breath and ponder together the multiple and varied claims about what may be called *quintessentially American*, and why, has been particularly valuable at this historical moment."

Happily, our seminar was in the good company of other courses in conversation with the All-School Project, including *Adventures in Democracy* (Philosophy and History); *Models of Leadership—Democracy within the Arts*; *Mapping Philadelphia*; *American Myths*; and *Plato's Republic*. These electives, and next year's offerings, will allow students to connect their investigations with the music curricula in deep and enriching ways. Indeed, second-year double bassist Devin O'Brien reports that, after completing his oral report on Langston Hughes, he was inspired to transcribe *Three Dream Variations* by Margaret Bonds for double bass or bass clef instruments; he plans to pair the piece with a Samuel Barber (Composition '34) work in an upcoming recording.

Student collaborations and the innovative projects they construct might be one of the best measures of educational energy on any campus. As students bring 100 years of Curtis history into rich dialogue with 250 years of an enduring and ever-new American idiom of music, we have compelling reasons to celebrate and reflect upon the connections between music, history, and art.

In this issue, contributors offer insights and inspiration drawn from our own *Scenes from America*: Jeremy Reynolds ponders the range of American music offered in concert programs' repertoire this anniversary year (cover story, p. 12), while Hannah Edgar talks to chamber musicians who work outside the mold of conventional ensemble formats (p. 18). Pianist Jonathan Biss discusses the sometimes unhealthy quest for perfectionism in classical music (see Q+A, p. 10), and five musicians tell us what makes for an effective encore (p. 6). Plus, we look at a new biography of Curtis founder Mary Louise Curtis Bok and peek inside the workshop of Curtis' luthier, Christo Wood.

*The weather's great. Wish you were here! Make that: Glad you are here.*

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