



Anne Azéma Comments on *City on the Hill*, Early Hymns and Spirituals of New England

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[The Boston Camerata](#), America's preeminent early music ensemble, will bring a new program of hymns and spirituals from the early days of the founding of America to Cambridge, MA on April 5, 2019.

City on the Hill, first commissioned by the Paris Philharmonie, and curated by artistic director Anne Azéma, debuted as part of The Camerata's Paris Philharmonie residency in September 2018. The program focuses on the music of the various religious communities who settled in New England during the 17th and 18th centuries.

Anne Azéma comments on the program's title: "I took my cue from John Winthrop. As he led the Puritans to the New World, he wrote that in this new place, this small group would be creating a city on the hill, a new and shining place, where they could live out their faith, and begin life anew."

Other groups, following the Puritans, also made their way to America, Drawing on original sources, The Camerata will perform spiritual songs from those very Puritans, to the anthem-singing Congregationalists and Universalists of the 18th and 19th centuries, to the utopian Shakers whose spirituals and dance songs were central to the American dream of the Shining City. The performance forces include solo voices, fiddle, flute, guitar, and cello.

Azéma says, "In early America, there was no professional musical class. Our emphasis is on music for congregations, on non-professional assemblies, called "singing schools," and on their distinctive musical styles. Historians have noted, in Europe, as well as America, a rising democratic tide, and renewed respect for the common man. Well, this American repertoire is, if you will, democracy in action."

"The composers themselves were non-professionals. William Billings in Boston was a tanner. Jeremiah Ingalls in Vermont was a tavern keeper. The way Ingalls, for example, incorporated popular melodies and modes, reflects the general spirit of the epoch. In Ingalls' spiritual songs, you can hear, and enjoy, how dances, jigs, and ballads were turned into religious music, in ways vastly different from the music of European cathedrals."

As [The Boston Globe's](#) Matthew Guerrieri writes, "Ingalls reflected an entire community. He was a farmer, a barrel-maker, a tavern-keeper, and, by most accounts, not terribly diligent at any of it. But music fired his enthusiasm. There are stories of Ingalls abandoning the day's errands or deliveries for a few hours' singing upon meeting a fellow music-lover. His was a life continually derailed by music — happily so, it seems."

Camerata's instrumentalists, playing violin, cello and flute crafted in the 18th century style, will perform some of the dances and ballad tunes that Ingalls and others "borrowed," and will also join with the ensemble's vocal soloists in a number of rousing tuttis.

"We want to re-create the sense of how these people gathered together, employing music to reinforce their common bonds," comments Azéma. "Voices and instruments combine for musical beauty and just plain fun."

Azéma is particularly enthusiastic about bringing this music to Cambridge, where some of the earliest works were first printed and sung, because, as she says "we discover parts of ourselves and our own roots through these songs and instrumental pieces. It's beautiful music, rewarding to performers and audience alike!"

City on The Hill

Friday, April 5, 2019 at 8pm

First Church in Cambridge, 11 Garden St, Cambridge, MA.

Tickets are \$26-\$63; student tickets are \$10 with student ID.

Tickets may be purchased at bostoncamerata.org or by phone at 617-262-2092