

# ELLIS ISLAND: THE DREAM OF AMERICA

Peter Boyer, composer

For actors and orchestra with projected images (2001-02)

## ABOUT THE WORK

Instrumentation:

Five actors (3 female, 2 male)

3 flutes including 1 piccolo, 3 oboes including 1 English Horn, clarinet, bass clarinet, alto-saxophone, 2 bassoons, 1 contrabassoon, 4 French horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, piano, celeste and strings.

***Ellis Island: The Dream of America***, Boyer's most ambitious work to date, celebrates the American immigrant experience and the American dream. Innovative in its format, the work brings elements of the theatre and multimedia into the concert hall, employing actors and projected historical images from the Ellis Island archives.

The spoken texts for the work come from the Ellis Island Oral History Project, an historic collection of interviews with actual immigrants about their experiences emigrating to America. After extensive research in this archive, Boyer chose the stories of seven immigrants who came to America through Ellis Island from disparate nations between 1910-1940. He fashioned short monologues from the actual words of these immigrants, and wove them into an orchestral tapestry which frames and comments on their stories—by turns poignant, humorous, moving, and inspiring. The work concludes with a reading of the Emma Lazarus poem *The New Colossus* (“Give me your tired, your poor...”), providing an emotionally powerful ending to this celebration of our nation of immigrants.

***Ellis Island: The Dream of America*** was commissioned by The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts, in celebration of the inaugural season of its Belding Theatre. It was premiered by the Hartford Symphony Orchestra, conducted by the composer, with actors from the New York stage, directed by Martin Charnin, at the Bushnell in April 2002. The premiere was broadcast on National Public Radio's *SymphonyCast* program in July 2002.

Since its premiere in 2002, ***Ellis Island: The Dream of America*** has gone on to enjoy tremendous success, becoming one of the most-performed large-scale American orchestral works of the last decade. As of early 2006, ***Ellis Island*** has had 40 performances, and will have had 50 by 2007. More than 50,000 people have experienced the work live, and it has received standing ovations at every one of its performances. ***Ellis Island: The Dream of America*** has consistently elicited in audiences a profoundly emotional response which is truly rare for a work of contemporary classical music.

Boyer recorded ***Ellis Island: The Dream of America*** with the Philharmonia Orchestra and a cast of renowned stage and screen actors. This recording was released by Naxos in its American Classics series in May 2005, and it has been broadcast by more than 100 classical radio stations around the United States. The recording was nominated for a GRAMMY® Award for Best Classical Contemporary Composition in 2006. Interest in ***Ellis Island: The Dream of America*** continues to grow, and all signs point to the establishment of the work as a permanent part of the American orchestral repertoire.