



AMERICA! FIRST AND FOREVER (1918)

HERMES ZIMMERMAN (1887-1967)

adapted by Bill Camphouse (b. 1950)

Hermes Zimmerman, composer of “America! First and Forever”, was born at Louisiana, Missouri in 1887. He spent his formative years in Pike County, Illinois as part of the New Philadelphia community founded by the formerly enslaved “Free Frank” McWorter. Zimmerman was a man of many talents, who received early musical training including piano lessons from his mother, then further developed skills as a vocal soloist, choir leader, pianist, composer and music publisher. Later in life he was called to the clergy, trained at Garrett Theological Seminary and went on to organize and serve African Methodist Episcopal (AME) congregations in Wisconsin and the Chicago area. A number of his sacred compositions provided additional opportunity to share his musical abilities.

Zimmerman's composition, America! First and Forever, is best described as a patriotic anthem originally written and published in 1918 for voice and piano in sheet music format; the typical way of marketing printed music for a growing number of music consumers. He composed and harmonized the melody, wrote the lyrics and cast the piece in two verses followed by a refrain. It was dedicated to the National Security League, an organization of prominent individuals in business and other professions whose mission was to promote America's role as a global leader early in the 20th Century. At a time when a new-found sense of nationalism swept across the country as the United States became involved in World War One, songwriter/lyricist Zimmerman expressed a positive vision for America with the closing line of his text, reading, “America, the friend of nations, the friend of all humanity”. The printed dedication on the title page of my setting reads, in part, “Honoring the Village of New Philadelphia and its founder “Free Frank” McWorter” on becoming part of the United States National Park Service in 2023.

The lyric is optimistic, the music is unabashedly bright and lively with hints of rag-time syncopation and chromatically altered harmonies to provide style and variety. My adaptation is akin to a traditional two-step march that became popular as the band movement grew during the early 20th Century. It is to be performed in a clear, crisp manner with attention to dynamic contrast, articulation, accents and steady tempo. It is cast in typical march form with one exception, it remains in the tonic key of Bb Major throughout. Following an introduction, melodic phrases at measures 8 and 27 are taken from the original verse and serve as the first and second strains; the refrain melody at measure 57 becomes the trio. In this adaptation, the scoring, repeats, break strain, transitions and *con forza* countermelody at measure 101 are of my invention; the rest is all Zimmerman.