

GWYNETH WALKER



Mid-Atlantic Region: *Ring the Bell of Liberty*

Southeast Region: *Capriccio on the Beach*

Southwest Region: *Bayou Blues and a March*

West Region: *Open Spaces*

Great Lakes Region: *A Boat Upon the Water*

North Central Region: *Ancient Rivers*

Northeast Region: *Our Pilgrim Past*

One Land

duration: 19 minutes

*Commissioned by the American Guild of Organists
for the Biennial National Convention in St. Louis, Missouri, 2026.*

Premiered July 6, 2026, St. Louis, Missouri

Notes from the composer

These are musical portraits, created in an American vernacular language by an American composer who has spent a lifetime's career traveling the country, collaborating with American musicians. This musical journey is a fond revisiting of the many concert adventures, with renewed greetings and thanks to cherished AGO colleagues.

One Land was designed to be played consecutively, as a seven-movement suite, or separately, one or two movements at a time. The overall flow of tonalities was structured to create smooth connections between movements. And there is a variety of styles intended to sustain an extended work. Yet, each movement can stand on its own.

A note on organ registration and notation

It was a pleasure to assist the composer with some of the organ editing for this wonderful new suite of characterful pieces celebrating the regions of the USA. An important part of the composer's concept from the beginning was that these pieces would be accessible and effective for organists of different experience levels and "organ circumstances." As a result, we have taken a simple approach to the marking of manuals and registrations. For each piece, a basic registration and manual distribution plan is provided for a typical two manual organ. When the organist has a larger instrument or greater resources at their disposal, they should feel very free to explore the additional musical possibilities their instrument may offer.

– Carson Cooman

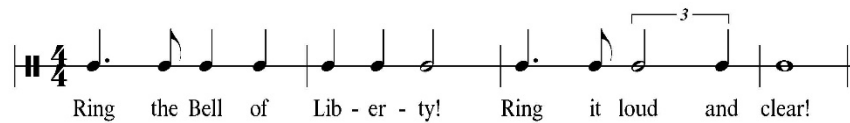
The Composer

Widely performed throughout the country, the music of American composer **Gwyneth Walker** is beloved by performers and audiences alike for its energy, beauty, reverence, drama, and humor. Dr. Gwyneth Walker (b. 1947) is a graduate of Brown University and the Hartt School of Music. She holds B.A., M.M. and D.M.A. degrees in Music Composition. A former faculty member of the Oberlin College Conservatory, she resigned from academic employment in 1982 in order to pursue a career as a full-time composer. For nearly 30 years, she lived on a dairy farm in Braintree, Vermont before returning to live in her childhood hometown of New Canaan, Connecticut.

Program Notes

One Land is a suite of seven musical portraits for organ inspired by the seven geographical regions of the American Guild of Organists. The occasion for this commission is to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States: 1776-2026. Therefore, the musical topics range from historic to contemporary.

Appropriately, the suite opens with “Ring the Bell of Liberty,” in honor of the Liberty Bell at Independence Hall in Philadelphia, PA. The introductory section features numerous *back-and-forth* patterns in the pedal, suggestive of the ringing of a bell. These lead into the triumphant theme, with rhythms associated with the words:



An interlude follows with rapid sparkling *sextuplet patterns*, the theme returns beneath, and the music closes with the ringing of the bell sounds.

Ring the Bell of Liberty! Ring it loud and clear!
For we are one, and we are free! Ring, ring, ring for all to hear!



A New England composer (such as Gwyneth Walker), while on travels to the Southeastern US, may encounter fascinating, unfamiliar creatures, large and small. A walk along the beach yields sightings of sand crabs. As the tide flows out, the crabs rush onto the beach, depositing their little balls of sand. Then back into the ocean. How quickly they scurry! They perform a *capriccio* on the beach!



Louisiana musical style brings to mind *swing rhythms*, featuring trumpet soli, and *lazy tempi*. This is the language of the bayou. The theme slowly states itself twice, and then...(marked: “very slowly, with suspense”)...there is a *surprise!* The tonality switches from minor to major, and the tempo picks up. A hint of a familiar theme is heard. Yes! this is the New Orleans song: “When the Saints Go Marching In!” The composer plays with this tune, ending with a “pseudo Baroque” cadenza and optional improvisation.



The Western United States are often viewed as the *Land of Open Spaces*. Vast stretches of prairie extend beyond eyesight, unrestricted by fences or boundaries. Thus, the musical notation begins with no bar-lines = no fences. The opening chord is sustained, as the landscape unfolds slowly. Heard above is a solo voice, expressing what John Muir (Yosemite naturalist) writes: *the spirit has led me into the wilderness*. As the spirit/solo proceeds, one hears an echo, calling out across the distance. The voices answer one another, until fading into an openly-spaced final chord.



The Great Lakes beckon us for recreation and inspiration. Even when the family sailboat is small, the joy of setting out on the water is magnificent. This is a time of *light*: the *sunlight* bounces off the waves, the boat rides *lightly* on the water, and the beauty of the lakes reflects a Heavenly *light*. In this musical portrait, the waves are expressed through 8th-note oscillating patterns and arpeggios, while the boat rocks more slowly, in quarters and halves. As the waves increase, a song is heard, with the (imagined) lyrics:

*As a boat upon the water, as a bird across the sky,
My heart will soar with the dancing waves – light on light, light on light!*



Many of the states in the North Central Region are bounded by rivers – huge, ancient rivers – the Mississippi and the Missouri. In the words of the poet, Langston Hughes (1901-1967, b. Joplin, MO), “My soul has grown deep like the rivers.” These sentiments have inspired this new music – *deep, soulful* music – with phrases descending to the lowest range of the organ, and with harmonies mingling major and minor variants of 3rds and 7ths in *blues* style. At the end, a weary traveler sings:



Thoughts of Early American history in New England bring to mind our Pilgrim forefathers and foremothers. They had undertaken a journey of hardship and uncertainty to arrive in the New World – a place with hopes of religious freedom. Perhaps for strength, they sang the hymn “Our God, Our Hope in Ages Past” (St. Anne). “Our Pilgrim Past” honors these brave Americans with hymn quotation, lively celebratory passages and rising scales. Near the end, the scales extend over three octaves, leading into the *sparkling sextuplets* from “Ring the Bell of Liberty.” *For we are one, and we are free!*