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Pianist Min Kwon presents 'America/Beautiful' on Sunday, May 3

Apr 25, 2026

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Kwon, joined by some of her piano students from the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University, will perform selections from her project "America/Beautiful," which comprises 76 new piano works by American composers inspired by the iconic patriotic song "America the Beautiful."

Complementing the piano performances are text readings by former New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman and an exhibition of American landscape photography by Park Joon.

The mission of "America/Beautiful" is to celebrate the cultural melting pot that makes up the U.S., to bring together as many voices as possible and to better listen and understand the voices of others, probing the question, "What is America?" The individual pieces vary in tone, texture, and mood, but ultimately, form a united whole, much like the U.S. On Friday, May 8, a five-disc box set of all 76 "America/Beautiful" variations will be released.



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The original song "America the Beautiful" was itself collaborative. The young feminist poet Katharine Lee Bates penned the lyrics after a hike to Pike's Peak just after climbing out of her own deep depression; two years later, it was published as "America" on the Fourth of July, 1895. It wasn't until 1910 that it was published together with the tune "Materna," by the Newark church organist Samuel Ward, and titled "America the Beautiful."

The 76 variations on "America the Beautiful" result in a culturally rich musical tapestry — a portrait of the nation as it stands today, in all its complexity. As a collection, the variations resist a single narrative and instead offer diverse perspectives that question and re-imagine the American experiment, bound by the credo of E pluribus unum: out of many, one.

“In spite of all the difficulties we face, there is still profound beauty, humanity, and possibility in this country,” Kwon observes.

Like America itself, the 76 featured composers represent an enormous diversity of musical aesthetics, backgrounds, ethnicities, ages born between 1928 and 2000, and genders; they include MacArthur Fellows, Pulitzer Prize winners, Rome Prize recipients, and Grawemeyer and Grammy Award winners. What unites them, however, is that they were all educated and nurtured in the United States, where they currently live and work. Luminaries like Samuel Adler, Timo Andres, Stewart Copeland, Sebastian Currier, Richard Danielpour, Vijay Iyer, Nico Muhly, Terry Riley, Augusta Read Thomas, and Pamela Z. are represented.

For Kwon, an immigrant who came to the U.S. at the age of 14, America’s beauty lies precisely in this spirit of reflection, critique and betterment: an endless quest to form a more perfect union. Today, as the country reflects on its complicated 250-year history, Kwon offers a theme-and-variations commissioning initiative for the 21st century — a musical microcosm of a pluralistic society couched in a distinctly American context to celebrate what is most beautiful about this country.

For more information, visit <https://tinyurl.com/mrx5cdk8>.