

Guitar America 250

Aaron Larget-Caplan, g
Navona 40229—54 minutes

Boston-based Aaron Larget-Caplan gives us a unique representation of the United States of America through music and the spoken word in a creative project inspired by its 250th year. Most of the music has been arranged by the performer.

Opening with Jorge Morel's excellent arrangement of 'America' from Bernstein's *West Side Story*, Larget-Caplan captures the spirit with a technically clean performance.

A rather free-form arrangement of the 'Star Spangled Banner' follows, not quite as off-the-wall as Jimi Hendrix's, but still exhibiting a unique, fantasy-like structure. The tune is certainly recognizable but with Larget-Caplan's own interpolations clearly evident.

Spoken word tracks appear at intervals. Trevor Neal's reading of 'Songs for the People' by Frances E.W. Harper is expressively delivered with an engaging and rich vocal resonance. Reader Charles Coe's sometimes gravelly but always eloquent voice pays tribute to Walt Whitman in an excerpt from 'Proud Music of the Storm'.

Arrangements of well-known patriotic songs including 'America' and 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic' are fairly simplistic and straightforward, and often include some variations. These are cleanly played without much drama. Larget-Caplan takes some rhythmic liberties but never strays too far from the original, as in the 'Battle Cry of Freedom'. Technically, while it is an appropriate addition to his arrangements, Larget-Caplan's tremolo could be cleaner on 'Over There' and 'God Bless America'.

A pleasant arrangement of Paul Simon's 'America' and Frederic Hand's fine arrangement of 'Simple Gifts' are played well. 'Adoration' by Florence Price is a heartfelt duet with violinist Irina Muersanu.

Larget-Caplan ends musically with an arrangement of an atypical, quiet piece by Eddie Van Halen, '316', before concluding the program with a reading of the Bill of Rights with some words or phrases repeated for emphasis. It is a fitting ending to remind

us of where we came from, and where we are.

Recording quality is very good but liner notes are sparse. Larget-Caplan has invested a lot of effort in this recording, and lifts it above previous projects.

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July/August 2026