

# Houston composer Todd Frazier's work gets the Kennedy Center treatment with Renée Fleming

By [Joel Luks](#)

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Sunday is a special day for Houston composer, arts administration guru and all-around good guy [J. Todd Frazier](#). Soprano superstar [Renée Fleming](#) will sing one of his compositions Sunday at the 2011 Kennedy Center [Spring Gala](#) in Washington D.C., honoring Michael Kaiser's 10-year tenure as president of what is arguably one of America's most distinguished performing arts centers, also focusing on arts education.

Titled [We Hold These Truths](#), the work will be performed by the National Symphony Orchestra led by former Houston Symphony music director [Christoph Eschenbach](#) and narrated by Kennedy Center chairman David M. Rubenstein.

Frazier and Fleming have an education at the [Eastman School of Music](#) in common.

"I'm so happy to be singing Todd's piece for the first time," Fleming said in an email. "It's a beautiful work and the words of the Declaration of Independence come to life in a powerful way. It's particularly special for me to perform this in our nation's capital. I've known Todd and his family for many years. I especially admire Todd's dedication to arts education."

Quiet and composed most of the time, Frazier is the type of person who's constantly brewing up ideas and innovative collaborations, surprising family, friends and colleagues with his seemingly off-the-cuff accomplishments. But behind the accolades, colorful stories, great people and interesting coincidences abound.

*We Hold These Truths* was originally conceived for Houston violinist Henry Rubin and is the first movement of *Thomas Jefferson: The Making of America*, a larger two-part multi-movement oratorio for orchestra, mezzo-soprano, tenor, soprano, violin, narrator and actor based on the life of Jefferson. Frazier used writings by Jefferson, his friends and colleagues and quotes music popular in the president's time.

"I am inspired by extra musical sources," Frazier explained. "Thomas Jefferson, at the age of 33, composed the first draft of the Declaration of Independence in 17 days in a hotel room. We know he had his violin and a bushel of music with him. Whether playing music during this time served as relaxation, clearing his mind or mused his words, I always felt the fact that music was a handmaiden to the creation of this extraordinary document, and I wanted to find a way to tell that story."

This first movement was premiered in collaboration with the [Texas Music Festival](#) and the [American Festival for the Arts](#) in 2005 with support from the Brown Foundation. Frazier just finished the complete oratorio a few weeks ago. He placed the work in the hands of Fleming, who recommended it for performance at the gala and had the violin part looked at by [Joshua Bell](#). The Kennedy Center confirmed its inclusion on the program only last Monday.

"The complete oratorio, from the Declaration to Jefferson's first inaugural address, would be an ideal piece for Independence Day concerts for American orchestras," Frazier said. "We don't have an American piece. [Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture](#), specifically the [cannons](#), is fundamentally tied to that day but it would nice to have a more directly meaningful work and American work. [Thomas Jefferson: The Making of America](#) is a piece that people would enjoy on many levels."

Having the piece performed around Jefferson's Birthday (April 13, 1743), in the nation's capital, in the Kennedy Center by the National Symphony Orchestra, hits home for Frazier.

Known for founding the [American Festival for the Arts](#), Houston's premier institution and training program for school-age musicians, Frazier is now the executive director for [Young Audiences of Houston](#) and the managing director of the Methodist Hospital Center for Performing Arts Medicine.

The gala also honors Smokey Robinson and features music superstars Barbara Cook, Manoel Felciano, Audra McDonald, Brian Stokes Mitchell, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Cory Stearns and Paloma Herrera of American Ballet Theatre, Megan Fairchild and Andrew Veyette of New York City Ballet, Michael Cook and Elisabeth Holowchuk of The Suzanne Farrell Ballet and the Kennedy Center Opera House Orchestra with conductor James Moore.