

About *Usonia* from composer Jonathan Cohen:

At the turn of the twentieth century, several authors advocated the term Usona, or its nicer-sounding variant, Usonia, as a term for the United States. Derived from “United States of North America,” it avoided the ambiguity of the term America and possible confusion with the Union of South Africa. The name Usonia would be all but forgotten had it not been adopted by Frank Lloyd Wright, the most influential of American architects.

Wright’s Usonian houses expressed his vision for how man should live. They were ecologically conscious efficient dwellings constructed largely of local materials whose designs and careful settings made them blend with the surroundings. The Usonian house, while modest and simple, was noble, artistic, individual, integral to the locale, one with nature, and strikingly compelling. It was in concert with its use, its place, its time, and itself. Wright not only designed such houses; he designed their furnishings, decoration, and lighting, their plantings, their yards, and even their towns and cities. The Wrightian design was harmonious at every scale. (Indeed, the term Usonia has also been applied to his never-fully-realized utopian city.)

This piece began as a concert band fanfare for Montgomery Village, a planned community in Maryland, and was performed in that form by the Montgomery Village Community Band. It was then greatly expanded and scored for orchestra. At the same time, its meaning also expanded: Montgomery Village, like all planned communities, owes much to Frank Lloyd Wright’s picture of a town, and the architecture of Montgomery Village exhibits elements of his residential designs.

In its final form, this piece is inspired by generalizations of Frank Lloyd Wright’s vision. It is meant to be uncomplicated, hopeful, and bold as it celebrates the ability to start afresh, the beauty of simplicity, the power of repeated and layered simple ideas to construct the most sublime, and the twin roles of individuality and community in all. It is, of course, very much an American piece.