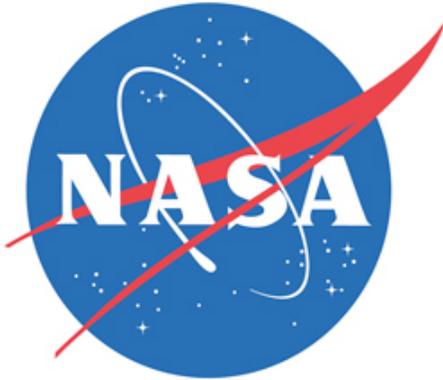


Preview: Cleveland POPS salutes NASA

by Mike Telin



For thousands of years humans believed the earth was flat and if you traveled too far you would eventually fall off the edge. It was the third century Greek scholar Eratosthenes who first began to calculate the circumference of the Earth. In the twentieth century, Ohio and specifically Cleveland, has played an important role in furthering space research. Founded in 1941 as the Aircraft Engine Research Laboratory by the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA) NASA's John H. Glenn Research Center actually predates NASA

by 17 years and is named in honor of former senator John H. Glenn, an Ohioan who was the first American to orbit Earth.

On Friday, April 25 beginning at 8:00 pm in Severance Hall, Carl Topilow will lead the Cleveland POPS Orchestra and Chorus in a Salute to NASA. "We're very excited about this concert. It's literally a cast of stars," Carl Topilow told us during a recent telephone conversation. "This is the first time we have done a salute to NASA, but they are right here in Cleveland."

The concert honors the men and women of the National Aeronautics & Space Administration for their indomitable spirit of exploration and discovery and includes a special salute to the 25 Astronauts who come from Ohio. Special guests include NASA Glenn Director James M. Free and astronauts David Thomas and Michael Foreman. "We have astronauts, the director of the center, vocalists Lindsey Mitchell and Connor O'Brien, the chorus, members of the Contemporary Youth Orchestra and footage from space shuttle missions and exhibits in the lobby, so there is a lot happening."

The concert features Peter Nero's *Voyage Into Space*, which Nero composed for John Glenn, and includes narration performed by Astronaut Donald A. Thomas. Topilow describes the piece as a first-person picture of what it's like to be on a space mission. "It's very inspirational poetry: the experience of an astronaut during lift off, looking out into space."

Making a return engagement with Cleveland POPS is vocalist and Ashtabula native [Connor O'Brien](#) performing *Impossible Dream* from *Man of La Mancha* and *Stars* from *Les Miserables*. O'Brien has been a featured soloist with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, The Rochester Philharmonic, The Akron Symphony and the Cleveland Orchestra. A finalist on the first season of ABC/MTV's *Making The Band*, O'Brien has starred on The History Channel's *Shifting Gears*, and has served as executive music supervisor and composer to The Discovery Channel for their series *The Kustmoizer*. And how does Topilow see *The Impossible Dream* fitting into the theme of the concert? "People have been looking into space for hundreds of years and had no idea what was out there. But like in the Jules Vern novels, things have suddenly become realities, and that is sort of the theme to the program."

Making her Cleveland Pops debut, vocalist Lindsey Mitchell will perform *Defying Gravity* from the hit musical *Wicked*. "Lindsey's a newcomer to Cleveland but she has sung with Bill Rudman a couple of times. She auditioned for us and we were very impressed with her,"

Another first on Friday's program is a side-by-side performance with the Contemporary Youth Orchestra, Liza Grossman, director. "They'll join us during performances of *Apollo 13* and *Across the Stars*. We've never done a side-by-side like this but I think it's a natural to do it with CYO because they are a little more oriented to what the POPS does."

Topilow also describes the program as "a combination of fiction and non-fiction. *Flintstones Meet the Jetsons* are very cute arrangements by Robert Wendall, who is a very clever guy — and I do love the music from *Star Wars*. And our 65 member Chorus under the direction of William Zurke will perform *Battle of the Heroes* and *Duel of the Fates* as well as Carl Orff's *O Fortuna* from *Carmina Burana*."

The concert also includes space-inspired favorites *Mars* from Holst's *The Planets*, *Star Trek through the Ages*, *Darth Vader March*, *Superman* and a performance of *Stardust* featuring Carl Topilow on clarinet.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com April 22, 2014.