

NICKY SOHN

IS THIS THE HAPPIEST PLACE ON EARTH?

FOR ORCHESTRA

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(2025)

Instrumentation

Flute 1, 2 (doubling piccolo)

Oboe 1, 2

Clarinet in Bb 1, 2

Bassoon 1, 2

Horn in F 1, 2, 3, 4

Trumpet in C 1, 2, 3

Trombone 1, 2, 3

Tuba

Timpani

Percussion 1, 2, 3 (Triangle, glockenspiel, clash cymbals, bass drum, snare drum, cowbell, marimba, suspended cymbal, mark tree, tam-tam)

Piano

Harp

Strings

Duration - ca. 6 minutes

Program note —

For generations, Disney has defined the sound and imagery of the American dream. Its films, music, and storytelling shaped how children across the world imagine wonder, hope, and happiness. Yet beneath the shimmer lies a more complicated truth, one built on corporate mythology, idealized innocence, and the commodification of imagination itself.

So many of the images of a perfect world for me as a young girl were created by the movies and pictures made by Disney. Like countless children from my generation, I wanted the pretty dress, the castle, the prince, the beautiful life that a princess deserves. But as I grew older, I realized none of that was truly me. These ideas had been placed into my system long before I understood who I was, suggesting what I should want before I ever questioned it. And the larger idea of Disney and Disneyland being the happiest place on earth shaped how I imagined the United States, a place where endless opportunities, kind people, and constant happiness seemed to be all around.

But this dream comes at a high price. The United States and Disney are deeply capitalistic, and those endless opportunities often reveal themselves to be highly competitive, pressurizing, and exhausting. People are constantly trying to stay afloat, and especially today, many feel more isolated and misunderstood than ever. At some point, no matter what you believe, you begin to wonder if this really is the happiest place on earth.

This work explores the tension between fantasy and reality. It charts the blurred line between the magic we were taught to believe in and the truth beneath it, a portrait of Disney's empire and of America's own obsession with happiness, spectacle, and perfection.

Transposed Score

*Five American Portraits was commissioned by Orchestra Lumos,
Music Director Michael Stern, for the conclusion of the Orchestra's 2025/26 Season,
America 250 on April 18 and 19, 2026 at The Palace Theatre Stamford.*

Is This the Happiest Place on Earth?

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I. Even If You Wish Upon a Star... ♩ = 80

This musical score is for the first section of a piece, titled 'I. Even If You Wish Upon a Star...'. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 80. The score is written for a large orchestra and includes a piano and harp. The instrumentation includes Flute 1 & 2, Oboe 1 & 2, Clarinet in B♭ 1 & 2, Bassoon 1 & 2, French Horn in F 1 & 2, French Horn in F 3 & 4, Trumpet in C 1 & 2, 3, Trombone 1 & 2, 3, Tuba, Timpani, Triangle, Glockenspiel, Clash Cymbal, Piano, Harp, Violin I & II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The score is divided into five measures, each with a measure number (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) at the bottom. The key signature is one flat (B♭ major or D minor). The time signature is 4/4. The score features various musical notations, including dynamics (f, p, fp), articulation (accents, trills), and performance instructions (pizz., 8va). The piano part includes a trill in measure 3 and a 12-measure rest in measure 4. The harp part includes a trill in measure 3 and a 12-measure rest in measure 4. The strings play a steady eighth-note accompaniment throughout.

II. Hello, Bonjour ♩ = 112

Fl. 1 *tr* *fp* *ff* *sfz*

Fl. 2 *fp* *ff* *sfz*

Ob. 1, 2 *fp* *ff* *sfz*

Cl. in B $\flat$ 1, 2 *fp* *ff* *sfz*

Bsn. 1, 2 *fp* *ff* *sfz*

F. Hn in F 1, 2 *fp* *ff*

F. Hn in F 3-4 *fp* *ff*

Tpt in C 1 *tr* *fp* *ff* *f* *sfz*

Tpt in C 2 *tr* *fp* *ff* *f* *sfz*

Tpt in C 3 *tr* *fp* *ff* *f* *sfz*

Tbn. 1 *fp* *ff*

Tbn. 2 *fp* *ff*

Tbn. 3 *fp* *ff*

Tba. *fp* *ff*

Timp. *fp* *f* *ff*

Tri. *fp* *f*

Glock. *f*

Sn. Dr. *fp* *ff* [Sn. Dr.]

Pno

Hp

Vln I *arco* *fp* *ff* *pizz.* *f* *arco* *ff*

Vln II *arco* *fp* *ff* *pizz.* *f* *arco* *ff*

Vla. *arco* *fp* *ff* *pizz.* *f* *arco* *ff*

Vc. *arco* *fp* *ff* *pizz.* *f* *arco* *ff*

D. B. *arco* *fp* *ff* *pizz.* *f* *arco* *ff*

6 *fp* *ff* *f* 7 8 *ff* 9

Fl. 1,2 *f* *ff* *f*

Ob. 1,2 *f* *f* *f*

Cl. in B $\flat$ 1,2 *f* *f* *f*

Bsn. 1,2 *f* *fp* *ff* *f*

F. Hn in F 1,2 *fp* *ff*

F. Hn in F 3-4 *fp* *ff*

Tpt in C 1,2,3 *f* *f* *f*

Tbn. 1,2,3 *f* *f* *f*

Tba *f* *f*

Timp.

B. Dr. *fp* *f*

C-bell *ff*

W. Bl. *f*

Pno

Hp

Vln I *p*

Vln II *p*

Vla *p*

Vc *p*

D. B. *f*

10 11 12 13 14