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DURHAM, N.H. -- Between 1880 and 1930 more than 27 million people entered the United States. Ellis Island, a small island in New York Harbor in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty, was the hub of this massive immigration, with about 20 million people arriving in America through Ellis Island.

In April, the University of New Hampshire Department of Music will tell the tales of these new U.S. citizens in the production of "Vignettes: Ellis Island." Set to music by Alan Louis Smith of the University of Southern California, the production presents the oral histories of immigrants who came through Ellis Island from 1895 to 1930.

"His beautiful music poignantly sets these brief, highly personal testimonies of this vitally important part of our American heritage. Originally conceived for solo voice and piano, we have received the composer's kind permission to stage the work and have it orchestrated," said David Ripley, associate professor of music at UNH.

The production is directed by David Ripley, orchestrated by Michael Annicchiarico and choreographed by Gay Nardone, all UNH professors. Show times are Friday, April 13, 8 p.m.; Saturday, April 14, 8 p.m.; and Sunday, April 15, 3 p.m., in the Johnson Theater. All performances are free and open to the public.

A collaboration of the UNH Opera Program and the University Dialogue on Energy, "Vignettes: Ellis Island" was created by Smith at the request of the director of the Ellis Island Oral History project in 1999. UNH's orchestrated production will feature a cast of 22 singers.

"Today, all of us are very aware of the current conflicts surrounding the issue of immigration, especially illegal immigration. All of us are at the same time aware of how deeply rooted our nation's history is in the tremendous benefits that the energy and talents of immigrants -- from all over the globe and of every possible skill and expertise -- have brought to our shores. Their accomplishments have benefited our country and the world," Ripley said.

"Mr. Smith's piece is an important reminder of the grand historical sweep and significance of our immigrant history. The stories told through music and song will touch you and move you," he said.

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Immigrants who have just arrived at Ellis Island look at the Statue of Liberty.

<http://www.unh.edu/news/img/immigrants2.tif>

A cast of 22 UNH singers will featured in the production of "Vignettes: Ellis Island."

