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Series: Cavalcade of America Show: Listen to the People Date: Jul 05 1943

ANNOUNCER:

DuPont, Makers of Better Things for Better Living Through Chemistry, salutes one hundred sixty-seven years of American freedom as it presents "Listen to the People" by Stephen Vincent Ben?t, starring Ethel Barrymore, on the Cavalcade of America!

MUSIC:

DRUM ROLL ... CAVALCADE THEME ... THEN IN BG

ANNOUNCER:

On this day, when every American rededicates himself to those things for which America stands, Cavalcade presents "Listen to the People" by the great American patriot and poet, the late Stephen Vincent Ben?t. "Listen to the People" sounded a prophetic warning when it was first presented on the Fourth of July two years ago. Tonight we hear it in retrospect. At the end of the program, Miss Barrymore will read a salutation to Stephen Ben?t by another American poet, Carl Sandburg. DuPont presents "Listen to the People," starring Ethel Barrymore, on the Cavalcade of America!

MUSIC:

FOR AN INTRODUCTION, THEN A MARCH, THEN AGREEING WITH NARRATOR, IN BG

NARRATOR:

This is Independence Day, Fourth of July, the day we mean to keep, Whatever happens and whatever falls out of a sky grown strange; This is firecracker day for sunburnt kids, The day of the parade, Slambanging down the street. Listen to the parade! There's J. K. Burney's float, Red-white-and-blue crepe-paper on the wheels, The Fire Department and the local Grange, There are the pretty girls with their hair curled Who represent the Thirteen Colonies, The Spirit of East Greenwich, Betsy Ross, Democracy, or just some pretty girls. There are the veterans and the Legion Post (Their feet are going to hurt when they get home), The band, the flag, the band, the usual crowd, Good-humored, watching, hot, Silent a second as the flag goes by, Kidding the local cop and eating popsicles, Jack Brown and Rosie Shapiro and Dan Shay, Paul Bunchick and the Greek who runs the Greek's, The black-eyed children out of Sicily, The girls who giggle and the boys who push, All of them there and all of them a nation. And, afterwards, There'll be ice cream and fireworks and a speech By Somebody the Honorable Who, The lovers will pair off in the kind dark And Tessie Jones, our honor graduate, Will read the declaration. That's how it is. It's always been that way. That's our Fourth of July, through war and peace, That's our Fourth of July.

MUSIC:

TO A CLIMAX, THEN IN BG

NARRATOR:

And a lean farmer on a stony farm Came home from mowing, buttoned up his shirt And walked ten miles to town, Musket in hand. He didn't know the sky was falling down And, it may be, he didn't know so much. But people oughtn't to be pushed around By kings or any such. A workman in the city dropped his tools. An ordinary, small-town kind of man Found himself standing in the April sun, One of a ragged line Against the skilled professionals of war, The matchless infantry who could not fail, Not for the profit, not to conquer worlds, Not for the pomp or the heroic tale But first, and principally, since he was sore. They could do things in quite a lot of places, They shouldn't do them here, in Lexington. He looked around and saw his neighbors' faces ...

MUSIC:

OUT

AN ANGRY VOICE:

Disperse, ye villains! Why don't you disperse?

A CALM VOICE:

Stand your ground, men. Don't fire unless fired upon. But if they mean to have a war, let it begin here!

MUSIC:

IN BG

NARRATOR:

Well, that was that. And later, when he died
Of fever or a bullet in the guts,
Bad generalship, starvation,
dirty wounds
Or any one of all the thousand things
That kill a man in wars,
He didn't die handsome but he
did die free
And maybe that meant something. It could be.
Oh, it's not pretty! Say it all you like!
It isn't a bit pretty. Not one bit.
But that is how the liberty was won.
That paid for the firecrackers and the band.

A YOUNG VOICE:

(RADICAL) Don't you know this is an imperialist, capitalist country, don't you?
Don't you know it's all done with mirrors and the bosses get the gravy, don't you?
Suppose some old guy with chin whiskers did get his pants shot off at a place called Lexington?
What does it mean to me?

AN OLDER VOICE:

(CONSERVATIVE) My dear fellow, I myself am a son of a son of the American Revolution,
But I can only view the present situation with the gravest alarm.
Because we are rapidly drifting into a dictatorship
And it isn't my kind of dictatorship, what's more.
The Constitution is dead and labor doesn't know its place,
And then there's all that gold buried at Fort Knox
And the taxes--oh, oh, oh!
Why, what's the use of a defense-contract if you can't make money out of your country?
Things are bad--things are very bad.
And, if you let the working classes buy coal, they'll only fill bathtubs with it.
Don't you realize the gravity of the situation, don't you?
Won't you hide your head in a bucket and telegraph your congressman,
opposing everything possible, including peace and war?

MUSIC:

FOR PUNCTUATION, IN AND OUT

A TOTALITARIAN VOICE:

(PERSUASIVE) My worthy American listeners. I am giving you one more chance.
Don't you know that we are completely invincible, don't you?
Won't you just admit that we are the wave of the future, won't you?
You are a very nice, mongrel, disgusting people--Except, of course, for your Jews.
But, naturally, you need new leadership. We can supply it. We've sent the same brand to fourteen nations.
It comes in the shape of a bomb and it beats as it sweeps as it cleans.
For those of you who like order, we can supply order. We give the order. You take it.
For those of you who like efficiency, we can supply efficiency. Look what we did to Coventry and Rotterdam!
For those of you who like Benito Mussolini, we can supply him.
Now be sensible--give up this corrupt and stupid nonsense of democracy.

RADICAL VOICE:

Forget everything but the class struggle. Forget democracy.

CONSERVATIVE VOICE:

Hate and distrust your own government. Whisper, hate and never look forward.
Look back wistfully to the good old, grand old days--the days when the Boys said "The public be damned!" and got away with it.
Democracy is a nasty word, invented by the Reds.

TOTALITARIAN VOICE:

Just a little collaboration and you too can be part of the New Order.
You too can have fine new concentration camps and shoes made out of wood pulp.
You too can be as peaceful as Poland, as happy and gay as France.
Just a little collaboration. We have so many things to give you.
We can give you your own Hess, your own Himmler, your own Goering--all home-grown and wrapped in tissue. We've done

itelsewhere. If you'll help, we can do it here. Democracy is dying. We will tear it apart with words and bombs and fear.

RADICAL VOICE:

Democracy's a fake--

CONSERVATIVE:

Democracy's a mistake--

TOTALITARIAN:

Democracy is finished. We are the future.

MUSIC:

OMINOUS, FOR PUNCTUATION ... THEN A MARCH, IN BG

NARRATOR:

The sky is dark, now, over the parade. The sky's an altered sky, a sky that might be.

There's J. K. Burney's float With funny-colored paper on the wheels Or no--excuse me--used to be J. K.'s But the store's under different management Like quite a lot of stores. You see, J. K. got up in church one day, After it all had happened and walked out, The day they instituted the new order. They had a meeting. Held it in the church. He just walked out. That's all. That's all there is to say about J. K. Though I remember just the way he looked, White-faced and chin stuck out. I think they could have let the church alone. It's kind of dreary, shutting up the church. But don't you say I said so. Don't you say! Listen to the parade! There are the pretty girls with their hair curled, Back from the labor camp. They represent the League of Strength Through Joy. At least, I guess it's that. No, they don't go to high school any more. They get told where they go. We all get told. And, now and then, it happens like Jack Brown, Nice fellow, Jack. Ran the gas station here. But he was married to a You-Know-Who. Fond of her, too. I don't know why we never used to mind. Why, she walked round like anybody else, Kept her kids clean and joined the Ladies' Social. Just shows you, doesn't it? But that's all done. You won't see her in the crowd today, Her or the kids or Jack, Unless you look six feet under the ground, The lime-washed ground, the bitter prison ground That hides the martyrs and the innocent, And you won't see Dan Shay. Dan was a Union man We don't have Unions any more. They wouldn't even let him take his specs, The day the troopers came around for him. Yet he needed specs. He had gray hair. Funny. You keep remembering things like that. Maybe he's still alive. It's hard to say.

MUSIC:

A HUGE ACCENT, FOR PUNCTUATION ... THEN MARCH CONTINUES, IN BG

NARRATOR:

(HALF-HYSTERICAL) Listen to the parade! The marching, marching, marching feet, All with the same hard stamp! The bands, the bands, the bands, the flags, the flags, The sharp, mechanical, inhuman cheer Dragged from the straining throats of the stiff crowd! It's Independence--sorry, my mistake!--It's National Day--the Day of the New Order! We let it happen--we forgot the old Bleak words of common sense, "Unite or Die." We fiddled and we squabbled and we scrapped. We led a filibuster in the Senate. We were quite ready for a sacrifice, Sometime, next Tuesday, but not yet, not now. And the clock struck--and the bad dream was here.

MUSIC:

AN ACCENT, THEN OUT

A VOICE:

But you can't do this to me! I subscribed to the Party funds!

A VOICE:

You can't do this to me. We got laws. We got courts. We got unions.

A VOICE:

You can't do this to me. Why, I believe in Karl Marx!

A VOICE:

You can't do this to me. The Constitution forbids it.

A VOICE:

I was always glad to co-operate. It looked to me like good business.

A VOICE:

It looked to me like the class struggle.

A VOICE:

It looked to me like peace in our time.

TOTALITARIAN VOICE:

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Democracy is finished. You are finished. We are the present!

MUSIC:

A BRIEF DARK BRIDGE, THEN IN BG

NARRATOR:

That is one voice. You've heard it. Don't forget it. And don't forget it can be slick or harsh, Violent or crooning, but it's still the same, And it means death.

MUSIC:

AN ACCENT, THEN IN BG

NARRATOR:

Are there no other voices? None at all? No voice at all out of the long parade That marched so many years, Out of the passion of the Puritans, The creaking of the wagons going west, The guns of Sharpsburg, the unnumbered dead, Out of the baffled and bewildered hosts Who came here for a freedom hardly known. Rebel and exile, bond servant and outcast. Out of the bowels of the immigrant ship, The strange, sick voyage, the cheating and the scorn And yet, at the end, Liberty. Liberty with a torch in her right hand, Whoever cheated and whoever lied, Liberty for my children, Liberty slowly worked out, deceived a thousand times, But never quite forgotten, always growing, Growing like wheat and corn. "I remember a man named Abe Lincoln. I remember the words he used to say. "Oh, we can call on Lincoln and Tom Paine, Adams and Jefferson. Call on the great words spoken that remain Like the great stars of evening, the fixed stars, But that is not enough. The dead are mighty and are part of us And yet the dead are dead. This is our world, Our time, our choice, our anguish, our decision. This is our world. We have to make it now, A hundred and thirty millions of us have to And make it well, or suffer the bad dream. What have we got to say?

MUSIC:

OUT

A WOMAN'S VOICE:

I don't know, I'm a woman with a house, I do my work. I take care of my man. I've got a right to say how things should be. I've got a right to have my kids grow up The way they ought to grow. Don't stop me there. Don't tread on me, don't hinder me, don't cross me. I made my kids myself. I haven't got Big words to tell about them. But, if you ask about democracy, Democracy's the growing and the bearing, Mouth at the breast and child still to be born. Democracy is kids and the green grass.

NARRATOR:

What have we got to say, People, you people?

MAN'S VOICE:

I guess I haven't thought about it much. I been too busy. Way I figure it It's this way. We've got something. If it's crummy The bunch of us can change what we don't like In our own way and mean it. I got a cousin back in the old country. He says it's swell there but he couldn't change A button on his pants without an order From somebody's pet horse. Maybe he likes it. I'm sticking here. That's all. Well, sign me off.

MUSIC:

TO A CLIMAX ... SUBSIDES, THEN IN BG

ANNOUNCER:

You are listening to Ethel Barrymore in Stephen Vincent Ben?t's prophetic Independence Day drama, "Listen to the People," first presented on July 4th, 1941 and repeated tonight on the Cavalcade of America, sponsored by DuPont.

MUSIC:

CONTINUES IN BG ... WITH WORDLESS CHOIR

NARRATOR:

People, you people, living everywhere, Sioux Falls and Saugatuck and Texarkana, Memphis and Goshen, Harrodsburg and Troy, People who live at postmarks with queer names, Blue Eye and Rawhide, Santa Claus and Troublesome, People by rivers, people of the plains, People whose contour plows bring back the grass To a dust-bitten and dishonored earth, And those who farm the hillside acres still And raise up fortitude between the stones, Millions in cities, millions in the towns, People who spit a mile from their front doors And gangling kids, ballplaying in the street, All races and all stocks, all creeds and cries, And yet one people, one, and always striving....

MUSIC:

OUT

A MAN:

I'm on relief. I know what they say about us on relief, Those who never were there. All the same, we made the park. We made the road and the check-dam and the culvert. Our names are not on the tablets. Forget our names. But, when you drive on the road, remember us, also. Remember Johnny Lombardo and his pick, Remember us, when you build democracy, For we, too, were part and are part.

MUSIC:

FOR PUNCTUATION, THEN IN BG

NARRATOR:

One nation, one. And the voices of young and old, of all who have faith, Jostling and mingling, speaking from the ground, Speaking from the old houses and the pride, Speaking from the deep hollows of the heart.

MUSIC:

FILLS A PAUSE ... WITH WORDLESS CHOIR ... THEN IN BG

MAN'S VOICE:

I was born in '63. There were many then who despaired of the Republic, Many fine and solid citizens. They had good and plausible reasons and were eloquent. I grew up in the Age of Brass, the Age of Steel. I have known and heard of three wars. All through my life, whenever the skies were dark, There came to me many fine and solid citizens, Wringing their hands, despairing of the Republic, Because of an income tax or a Depression. Because their party had lost the last election. Because we couldn't do this and shouldn't do that. And yet, each time, I saw the Republic grow Like a great elm tree, through each fault and failure, The stubborn rock, the parched soil, And spread its branches over all the people. Look at the morning sun. There is the Republic. Not yesterday, but there, the breaking day.

MUSIC:

AN ACCENT ... THEN OUT

TOTALITARIAN VOICE:

But, my worthy American listeners. All this is degenerate talk. The future rolls like a wave and you cannot fight it.

A VOICE:

Who says we can't?

A VOICE:

Who says so?

A VOICE:

What's HIS racket?

A VOICE:

How does he get that way?

A VOICE:

You mean to tell me a little shrimp like that could run the world, A guy with a trick mustache and a bum salute, Run us, run you and me?

TOTALITARIAN VOICE:

You mistake me. Others have often made the same mistake. Often and often, and in many countries. I never play upon a people's strength. I play upon their weaknesses and fears. I make their doubts my allies and my spies. I have a most convincing mask of peace. Painted by experts, for one kind of sucker, and for another--I'm a businessman, straight from the shoulder, talking trade and markets and much misunderstood. I touch this man upon his pocketbook, that man upon his hatred for his boss, that man upon his fear. I offer everything, for offering's cheap. I make no claims until I make THE claims. I'm always satisfied until I'm not. Which happens rather rapidly to those who think I could be satisfied with less than a dismembered and digested world. My secret weapon is no secret weapon. It is to turn all men against all men for my own purposes. It is to subjugate men's minds before their bodies feel the steel. It is to use all envy, all despair, all prejudice for my own work. If you've an envy or a prejudice, a nicely grown, well-rounded piece of hate, I'll play on it and use it to your ruin. I won't be beaten just by sitting tight. They tried that out in France. I won't be beaten by hiding in the dark and making faces, and certainly I never will be beaten by those who rather like my kind of world, or, if not like it, think that it must come, those who have wings and burrow in the ground. For I'm not betting only on the tanks, the guns, the planes, the bombers, but on your own division and disunion. On your own minds and hearts to let me in, for, if that happens, all I wish for happens. So what have you to say? What have you got to bet against my bet? Where's your own voice?

VOICE:

We've got a job to do.

VOICE:

We've got a row to hoe.

VOICE:

We've got a land where men live free and we mean to keep it so.

VOICE:

Listen and hear us speak, through lightning in the night. This is the people's cause. We are the people's might.

VOICE:

We built Boulder Dam. We built the TVA.

VOICE:

We built the cities up so high the eagles lost their way.

VOICE:

Wasn't enough alone. Wasn't enough somehow. But we learned our trade from the licks we took. And we're building different now.

VOICE:

And that's why we turn the lathe.

VOICE:

That's why we plow the farms.

VOICE:

That's why a million of us learn how free men stand to arms. Not for the chains of lord and slave, the chains we left behind, But for all the years since Lexington And the years we've still to find.

VOICE:

Freedom to speak and pray.

VOICE:

Freedom from want and fear.

VOICE:

That's what we mean to build today. We mean to build it here. Build it and spread it out. Build it and make it stay. Till no one man shall dare to take another's hope away.

VOICE:

Justice and hope and right, growing like wheat and corn. The Old World died in its boots last night, The New World isn't born. We mean to see that it's born all right, For the decent and the free, for you and me, And the folks next door. And the great word "Liberty."

MUSIC:

A GRAND, HOPEFUL ACCENT, THEN IN BG

NARRATOR:

You've heard the long parade And all the voices that cry out against it. What do the people say? Well, you've just heard some questions and some answers, Not all, of course. No man can say that's all. But look in your own minds and memories And find out what you find and what you'd keep. It's time we did that and it won't be earlier. I don't know what each one of you will find, It may be only half a dozen words Carved on a stone, carved deeper in the heart, It might be all a life, but look and find it--Sun on Key West, snow on New Hampshire hills, Warm rain on Georgia and the Texas wind Blowing across an empire and all part, All one, all indivisible and one--Find it and keep it and hold on to it, For there's a buried thing in all of us, Deeper than all the noise of the parade, The things the haters never understood And never will, the habit of the free. Out of the flesh, out of the minds and hearts Of thousand upon thousand common men, Cranks, martyrs, starry-eyed enthusiasts, Slow-spoken neighbors, hard to push around, Women whose hands were gentle with their kids And men with a cold passion for mere justice. We made this thing, this dream, This land unsatisfied by little ways, This peaceless vision, groping for the stars, Not as a huge devouring machine Rolling and clanking with remorseless force Over submitted bodies and the dead But as live earth where anything could grow, Your crankiness, my notions and his dream, Grow and be looked at, grow and live or die. But get their chance of growing and the sun. We made it and we make it and it's ours. We shall maintain it. It shall be sustained.

MUSIC:

OUT

A WOMAN'S VOICE:

Democracy's the morning when it's new. Democracy is kids and the green grass.

MUSIC:

IN BG

NARRATOR:

We shall maintain it. It shall be sustained.

MUSIC:

TO A FINISH, THEN OUT

ANNOUNCER:

Thank you, Ethel Barrymore.

MUSIC:

FOR A BRIDGE, THEN OUT

ANNOUNCER:

In just a moment, Miss Barrymore will read a salutation to Stephen Ben?t, especially written for this performance on the Cavalcade of America by Carl Sandburg, poet of the people.

Meanwhile, we have an Independence Day message from Cavalcade's sponsor, the DuPont Company of Wilmington, Delaware.

2ND ANNOUNCER:

Only a quarter of a century younger than the republic itself, DuPont's history closely parallels that of the nation. In five wars, DuPont has placed itself unreservedly at the service of the nation to provide the essentials of battle. And now again our entire facilities are completely at the disposal of the government. DuPont was founded to provide the tools for peaceful conquest of a vast new country. Whatever success it has attained, has come in greatest measure from serving the arts of peace, not those of war. In common with all Americans, DuPont holds no brief for war, hopes fervidly for the day of universal peace. Today, it is completely dedicated to bringing that day speedily to pass through complete and unconditional victory of our arms. Tomorrow, in a free world, it will turn again to its happier pursuit of producing Better Things for Better Living Through Chemistry. ?

ANNOUNCER:

And now, the star of tonight's Cavalcade, Miss Ethel Barrymore.

SOUND:

APPLAUSE

BARRYMORE:

Many men knew Stephen Ben?t by thought fixed in print. One who knew him as a friend as well is Carl Sandburg. For this performance of "Listen to the People," Mr. Sandburg has written a salutation. I would like to read it to you now:

"Stephen Ben?t saw America standing for certain hopes and promises. Creeping towards this America he saw strange shadows. He spoke his warning. Ben?t lived long enough to see his country living up to the finest of its past. He kept a heart ready for battle and a mind and voice that fought in the arena of ideas. How well did he know that men of ideas vanish first when freedom vanishes. The seething motors of many historic forces move and shift with the writer, thinker and dreamer who is gone from us. But his voice and a brave essence of him is still alive. Stephen Ben?t was a whimsical man. It would have pleased him to know that a radio play he wrote goes marching on like John Brown's body."

SOUND:

APPLAUSE

MUSIC:

CAVALCADE THEME, THEN IN BG

ANNOUNCER:

Next week, the Cavalcade of America will present Ralph Bellamy in "Soldiers of the Cloth," an authentic and typical story of the Chaplain's Corps as it serves men in battle. Our play, by Milton Wayne, is based on the actual experiences of Chaplain Thomas M. Reardon, recently returned from the South Pacific.

MUSIC:

FILLS A PAUSE, THEN IN BG

ANNOUNCER:

Don't forget, be with us next week, when DuPont present Ralph Bellamy in "Soldiers of the Cloth," a drama of the Chaplain's Corps in battle. The orchestra and musical score of "Listen to the People" was under the direction of Donald Voorhees with a special musical score by Arden Cornwell. For permission to repeat "Listen to the People," Cavalcade is indebted to the Council for Democracy for whom Stephen Ben?t originally wrote his poem.

This is Clayton Collyer sending best wishes from Cavalcade's sponsor, the DuPont Company of Wilmington, Delaware.

SOUND:

APPLAUSE

MUSIC:

CAVALCADE THEME, THEN IN BG

NETWORK ANNOUNCER:

This program has come to you from New York. This is the National Broadcasting Company.

MUSIC:

FADES ... NBC CHIMES