

## John Clanton to direct music for LMST's Show Boat

Written by Meghan Wright, LMC  
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Lees-McRae Summer Theatre is honored to have among its cast and crew renowned conductor John Clanton as the music director for Show Boat opening Wednesday in Hayes Auditorium. Retired from the U.S. Army as Lieutenant Colonel, Clanton conducted some of the military's finest musical ensembles, including the U.S. Army Orchestra and U.S. Army Chorus. In his career, he has also conducted the National, Tuscaloosa, Annapolis, San Francisco, Grant Park, Naples, Detroit, Ravinia Festival, Cincinnati Pops and London Symphony Orchestras and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Clanton is a graduate of Furman University and the Eastman School of Music.

In a long and distinguished 25-year career with the U.S. Army, Clanton recalls three experiences as the greatest accomplishments of his career; Clanton conducted the state funerals of U.S. Presidents Ronald Reagan and Gerald Ford and the White House State Dinner for Queen Elizabeth II in 2007.

"Those are the three that topped it. It's not just the music that makes it special, but the people for whom you perform," said Clanton. "I was there in the middle of history. It is unbelievable to look out at the crowd and see the heads of state. There I was in front of them conducting the 'Battle Hymn of the Republic'."

Clanton heard about Lees-McRae Summer Theatre from longtime friend, Laura Carringer, a seven-season performer for Lees-McRae Summer Theatre (LMST). "Our fathers were both Army chaplains. We've been friends since junior high," Clanton said of Carringer. "She talked to Janet [Speer] and suggested me. I did some research and asked some friends about Lees-McRae, and they all said you should do this. It all came out of the blue, but it was meant to be," Clanton said.

"It amazes me that with all John's notoriety he is one of the warmest individuals I know. It's easy to work with him and he comes to us with such a wealth of musical information," said Artistic Director Dr. Janet Speer. "His longtime friend, Laura Carringer, has been associated with Summer Theatre for years and on a 'lark' asked him if he was interested. The rest has been a glorious history. We are fortunate indeed."

The respect is mutual. Clanton said of Speer, "It has been a pleasure collaborating with Janet. She has a huge heart. She's in that rare category of people; the more you get to know her, the more you like her."

Clanton has also enjoyed working with the cast and crew of LMST. "I have been so impressed with their talent and preparedness since the first day of Seussical." Clanton also directed the music for Seussical, the musical. "Everyone has made me feel like part of the group."

Clanton says Show Boat will be a grand spectacle of a Broadway musical. "People will love it. They really will love it! If you don't enjoy Show Boat, then you just don't enjoy musical theatre," Clanton said.

After Summer Theatre concludes, Clanton will teach a semester at the Shenandoah Conservatory in Winchester, VA. "I'm booked through December. After that, I don't know. I spent the first half of my life completely structured, and the other half may be completely unstructured."

As for returning to Lees-McRae Summer Theatre, Clanton said, "I'd love to come back. This is a very different experience from the Army, but it's all music. The energy and enthusiasm has been wonderful."

"The theatre world is definitely a small one! My husband recently accepted a position in

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Washington, DC and reconnected with an old college roommate from UNCG who is a currently serving as a member of the Army's chorus. When I heard that John would be joining us as Music Director for summer theatre and that his background was with the Army Chorus, I immediately asked my husband's friend if he had known John. He grinned and responded that John had been instrumental in recruiting him to the Army Chorus, and that we couldn't possibly wish for a finer musician or a finer person to work with us," said Donna Morgan, managing director for Lees-McRae Summer Theatre. "That prediction has certainly been realized in John's work with the company this summer. He has become a member of the LMST family and has been an absolute pleasure to work with!"

Show Boat begins Wednesday night at 7:30 p.m. and continues through August 5. For tickets, visit [www.lmst.lmc.edu](http://www.lmst.lmc.edu) or call the box office at 828-898-8709.