

FORBES CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY®

presents

The King's Singers

featuring

**Patrick Dunachie
Edward Button
Julian Gregory
Christopher Bruerton
Nick Ashby
Jonathan Howard**

with

The Madison Singers

**Dr. Jo-Anne van der Vat-Chromy, *artistic director*
Amy Robertson, *collaborative artist***

**Saturday, February 26, 2022
Concert Hall**

There will be one 15-minute intermission.

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Songbirds Program

Songbirds combines music written about some of our favorite feathered friends—spanning the last 500 years—with music by modern-day songbirds from recent decades. These singers and songwriters have changed the course of popular music with their voices and musical ideas, inspiring and lifting the next generation of musicians to new heights.

Songbird	Fleetwood Mac, arr. Nicholas Ashby
Blackbird	The Beatles, arr. Daryl Runswick
She's Like the Swallow	Traditional, arr. Bob Chilcott
The Cuckoo in the Pear Tree	György Ligeti
The Phoenix and the Turtle	Huw Watkins
Flucht	Franz Schubert
Trois beaux oiseaux du Paradis	Maurice Ravel
Pilons l'orge	Francis Poulenc
Le chant des oiseaux	Clément Janequin
Come, Blessed Bird	Edward Johnson
Il bianco e dolce cigno	Jacques Arcadelt
Il est bel et bon	Pierre Passereau
The Musicians of Bremen	Malcolm Williamson

15-Minute Intermission

We Are with The Madison Singers	Bob Chilcott
Call Me the Breeze	Beth Orton, arr. Christopher Bruerton
Father Father	Laura Mvula, arr. Eric Whitacre
Good Old-fashioned Lover Boy	Queen, arr. Nicholas Ashby
Hallelujah with The Madison Singers	Leonard Cohen, arr. Philip Lawson

Songs in close-harmony

Throughout The King's Singers' history, the group has created a treasure trove of arrangements of pop, jazz, folk, and spiritual songs that span the globe and celebrate the amazing variety of music in our world today. Incorporating songs from recent EPs in our *The Library* series, we want to shine a light on all kinds of songbirds from around the world in this final set—and make you smile too.

Songbirds Program Notes

Songbirds combines music written about some of our favorite feathered friends—spanning the last 500 years—with music by modern-day songbirds from recent decades. These singers and songwriters have changed the course of popular music with their voices and musical ideas, inspiring and lifting the next generation of musicians to new heights. Although this programming idea is new to our group, the phenomenon of birdsong has been an inspiration to composers and songwriters for centuries. In medieval England, the 12th-century folksong “Summer is y-cumen in, loude sing cuckoo” is a good example of the sounds of birdsong finding their way into popular culture. In other places within the Western canon, Beethoven, Rachmaninov and—particularly—Messiaen used birdsong to inspire and color their creations. Today’s program looks much further than just medieval or even just classical music—into pop songs, folksongs, and avant-garde compositions. In all parts of the *Songbirds* program, we hear the inspiration and influence of birdsong on musicians across the world and across the centuries. This inspiration has in fact led to the use of songbird as a term to describe songwriters in the present day.

Christine McVie (b. 1943), one of the long-standing members of Fleetwood Mac, wrote our title song for this program for the band’s 1977 album *Rumours*. “Songbird” came to McVie late at night during recording sessions. With no one else awake to record her creation, she simply stayed awake all night to ensure she remembered the song—and put it on record the following morning. Since its release, the song has been covered by many artists—most famously Eva Cassidy. Nine years earlier in 1968, The Beatles recorded and released *The White Album*, which contained the next song in our program. “Blackbird” is the first of a trio of songs we are including, covering three birds: the blackbird,

the swallow, and the cuckoo. Our arrangement of “Blackbird” was made by our long-term collaborator Daryl Runswick; he wrote many of the most iconic King’s Singers arrangements in our history and continues to work with us to this day. “She’s Like the Swallow” is a folksong that came from Newfoundland, Canada. It was collected in 1930 by Maud Karpeles, who first published it in a compendium called *Folksongs from Newfoundland*. It has been arranged hundreds of times, including this version by composer and conductor Bob Chilcott (b. 1955) written while he was a member of our group in the 1990s. The final folksong in this set comes from the visionary Hungarian composer György Ligeti (1923–2006). Between 1988 and 1993, he wrote a set of six pieces for us called *Nonsense Madrigals*, setting fantastical and eccentric texts including some from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. The second movement of the set is “The Cuckoo in the Pear Tree,” setting a text by William Brighty Rands. Through the brief but complicated piece, humor comes from an insistent and irritating cuckoo who never fails to interrupt whatever is going on around him!

The British composer and pianist Huw Watkins wrote “The Phoenix and the Turtle” in 2014 for the British vocal ensemble Stile Antico, who premiered it at London’s Wigmore Hall. It sets an unusual text by Shakespeare in which the two birds—a phoenix and a turtle (turtle dove)—die. At their funeral, the death of love itself is mourned through the presence of many different birds. Watkins plays with different textures and complicated rhythms to breathe a modernity into an ancient and complicated poem. For this program, the piece provides insight into the well-known symbology associated with many birds in the Middle Ages, among which the phoenix (love) and the dove (loyalty) were two of the most important.

Songbirds Program Notes (cont'd)

The next trio of pieces in the program belong to major figures from the classical canon. Franz Schubert (1797–1828) wrote “Flucht” in 1825 as the third in a set of works for unaccompanied male chorus; the text plays with the idea of flight as flying, but also escaping. The poet Karl Lappe (1773–1843) depicts birds as having a freedom that we should all envy.

“Trois beaux oiseaux du Paradis” by Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) is the first in a series of French works. It comes from his only *a cappella* choral work, *Trois chansons* (1914–1915), which was written in response to the outbreak of war in France in 1914. In “Trois beaux oiseaux du Paradis,” Ravel focuses on the vivid colors of three birds of paradise, which reflect the red, white and blue of the French flag. In “Pilons l’orge” by Francis Poulenc (1899–1963), we hear the babble of gossiping farmhands blending into the manic tweeting of birds in the sky above them. The song comes from his *Chansons françaises* (1945–1946), written in the heady days of France immediately after the Second World War.

The earliest work in the program is also one of the most extraordinary. Clément Janequin (1485–1558) wrote his madrigal “Le chant des oiseaux” in 1529 using unusual and imaginative techniques to capture the sound and character of various birds, including the nightingale and the cuckoo. Much like with his other epic madrigal “La Guerre,” this madrigal fuses sentences of recognizable French text with vocal sound effects to create a virtuosic masterpiece that would have been particularly remarkable in its time.

These works by Janequin had a huge influence on the whole genre of madrigals (or, in France, chansons), which were a hugely popular musical form all over Europe for at least another 100 years after Janequin’s death. In France, Pierre Passereau (1490–1547) was a contemporary of Janequin who was

almost as famous for his chansons. His “Il est bel et bon” has proved popular right through to the modern day. Its startling and hilarious depiction of chickens clucking in a courtyard has made it a favorite with choirs all over the world and an irresistible selection for this *Songbirds* program. The madrigals by the Englishman Edward Johnson (1572–1601) and the Flemish composer Jacques Arcadelt (1507–1568) are slightly more dignified and restrained examples of the same madrigal form that had exploded in medieval France decades earlier.

The final work before the intermission is another extended work, which was written for The King’s Singers in 1972. “The Musicians of Bremen” was one of the group’s earliest major commissions and remains popular to this day. Its composer Malcolm Williamson (1931–2003) was born in Australia but spent much of his working life in the U.K., eventually holding the coveted position of Master of the Queen’s Music from 1975 until his death. This piece is a setting of the ancient folk story about mistreated animals who decide to get together and travel to the German city of Bremen to join an orchestra. They have many adventures along the way, picking up new animals and encountering some dangerous robbers too!

After the intermission, we explore the other interpretation of the word songbird, selecting songs by some iconic singers and songwriters from the last 50 years—from Freddie Mercury to Laura Mvula. There will be a few familiar songs for everybody and certainly a few old King’s Singers favorites included too...

The King's Singers

The King's Singers has represented the gold standard in a *cappella* singing on the world's greatest stages for over 50 years. Renowned for its unrivalled technique, versatility and skill in performance and consummate musicianship, the group draws on its rich heritage and pioneering spirit to create an extraordinary wealth of original works and unique collaborations.

What has always distinguished The King's Singers is its comfort in an unprecedented range of styles and genres, pushing the boundaries of its repertoire, while at the same time honoring its origins in the British choral tradition. The group is known and loved around the world—and has appeared regularly in major cities, festivals and venues across Europe, North America, Asia and Australasia including Carnegie Hall, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Mozarteum Salzburg, Tonhalle Zürich, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Edinburgh International Festival, Helsinki Music Centre, Sydney Opera House, Tokyo Opera City, and the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing. The ensemble also works with orchestras, recently including the NDR Radiophilharmonie and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, with whom The King's Singers performed a specially commissioned work by Sir James MacMillan.

The King's Singers' extensive discography has led to numerous awards including two Grammy Awards, an Emmy Award, and a place in *Gramophone* magazine's inaugural Hall of Fame. As part of its 50th anniversary celebrations in 2018, The King's Singers undertook a series of major tours worldwide, supporting the release of a special anniversary album *GOLD* (also nominated for a Grammy Award) that featured important works in the group's history and new commissions by Bob Chilcott, John Rutter, and Nico Muhly.

The commitment to creating new repertoire has always been central to the ensemble, with over 200 commissioned works by many leading composers of the 20th and 21st centuries, including John Tavener, Judith Bingham, Eric Whitacre, György Ligeti, Luciano Berio, Krzysztof Penderecki, and Toru Takemitsu. These works join a unique body of close-harmony and a *cappella* arrangements, including those by individual King's Singers past and present. The distinct "King's Singers' sound" was informed by its early collaborators' experiences with brass bands, and many of the group's commissioned works and arrangements are available in a signature series with Hal Leonard, which have sold two million copies worldwide. A key to The King's Singers' success has been its ability to evolve and innovate over many years—and through 28 individual members—while always retaining a special sound and musical integrity.

The King's Singers also leads educational workshops and residential courses across the world, working with groups and individuals on their techniques and approaches to ensemble singing. In 2018, the ensemble founded The King's Singers Global Foundation to provide a platform for the creation of new music across multiple disciplines, coach a new generation of performers, and provide musical opportunities to people of all backgrounds.

The King's Singers was formed in 1968 when six recent choral scholars from King's College, Cambridge, gave a concert at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall. By chance, the group was made up of two countertenors, a tenor, two baritones, and a bass; the group has maintained the formation ever since.

A Message from The King's Singers on Their Global Foundation

Music is a universal language shared by people all over the world regardless of the boundaries of wealth, age, gender, race or background. Countless times through history music has been a force for good, bringing people together in times of difficulty and helping to heal divisions in societies. Today, in a world that feels more fractured than ever, the six of us are determined to do whatever we can to make a positive impact on people's lives through music. That's why we set up The King's Singers Global Foundation in 2018...

With an experienced board and an advisory panel of world-renowned musicians and educators, our Global Foundation aims to champion music as a tool for finding musical and social harmony. The Foundation has a wide remit including commissioning new music by composers of different backgrounds, arranging high-quality choral training and live music experiences for young people who cannot afford it, and harnessing technology to bring music into the lives of millions of people worldwide. In the last two years alone, the Foundation has commissioned over 15 new musical works, arranged free workshops for over 100 singers, reached an audience of over 600,000 through collaborations with musical charities online, and arranged a composition prize that inspired 350 brand new choral compositions from composers aged 15 to 70.

The Global Foundation helps our work reach far beyond just the concert platform and recording catalogues. It helps us focus on the people and places where music —particularly singing—can truly change lives, create joy, and find harmony.

You can find out more about the Global Foundation on our website at www.kingssingers.com

The Madison Singers

Dr. Jo-Anne van der Vat-Chromy, *artistic director*

Amy Robertson, *collaborative artist*

Nikos Myrogiannis Koukos, *graduate student conductor*

Megan Humes, Lindsay Marcus, Grayson Parker,

Sam Peterson, Nick Gomez-Colon: *ensemble managers*

Lyric Soprano

Bry Toll

Grace Mead

Kaitlyn Connolly

Marissa Adams

Meghan Willey

Molly van Trees

Errine Phillips

Dramatic Soprano

Amanda Aponte

Gillian Saunders

Lauren Boyle

Megan Humes

Sam Preece

Sarah Petko

Alto

Laura Bessillieu

Amy Cajigas

Camila Maric

Caroline Lynch

Grace Templeton

Hailey White

Hannah Ramsbottom

Lindsay Marcus

Marian Woodington

Tenor

Adam William

Brandon Morris

Brendon O'Donnell

Dillon Corral

Judd Blake

Logan Blatt

Nicolas Gomez-Colon

Bass

Ben Gofton

Brayden Paitsel

Grayson Parker

Nikos Nyrogiannis Koukos

Pete Berman

Sam Peterson

Upcoming Events

MARCH

Monticello Strings

Mar. 1

Once

Mar. 1–5

Book by Enda Walsh

Music and lyrics by Glen Hansard and Markéta Irglová

Based on the motion picture written and directed by John Carney

JMU Percussion Ensemble

Mar. 2

JMU Symphony Orchestra

Mar. 5

Calefax Reed Quintet

Mar. 10

JMU Treble Chamber Choir, Chorale and The Madison Singers

Mar. 11

Discovering Antarctica:

Mar. 22

The Heroic Tales of Shackleton, Crean and Scott

Starring Aidan Dooley

For tickets and further information, visit www.jmuforbescenter.com or call the Forbes Center Box Office at (540) 568-7000.

JOIN US

as we celebrate and continue the legacy of the late Dr. George Sparks and his fervent wish to see students fulfill their dreams in the arts.

IN/ovation Student Celebration

Sparks Scholarship Fund



March 26, 2022

6:30-9:30 p.m.

Forbes Center for the Performing Arts

Visit <https://j.mu/sparks> for details

