

The King's Singers

FRIDAY | JULY 8 | 8 PM
THE BREAKERS



This concert is dedicated to **Ms. Terry Morgenthaler and Mr. Patrick Kerins** in recognition of their generous support of Newport Classical.

MAKIKO KINOSHITA *Ashita no uta* (Song for tomorrow)
(Approximate duration 3 minutes)

TRAD., ARR. GOFF RICHARDS Songs from the Auvergnès
Là-bas dans le Limousin
Une gente bergère
Le Baylère
À la campagne
(Approximate duration 11 minutes)

THOMAS WEELKES *Thule, the period of Cosmography*
(Approximate duration 3 minutes)

ELLIS GIBBONS *Long live fair Oriana*
(Approximate duration 3 minutes)

MICHAEL CAVENDISH *Come gentle swains*
(Approximate duration 3 minutes)

THOMAS MORLEY *Hard by a crystal fountain*
(Approximate duration 4 minutes)

EINOJUHANI RAUTAVAARA *Legenda*
(Approximate duration 3 minutes)

HUGO ALFVÉN *Aftonen*
(Approximate duration 4 minutes)

HUGO ALFVÉN *Och jungfrun hon går i ringen*
(Approximate duration 2 minutes)

GABRIELA LENA FRANK *Hechicera* (from *Tres Mitos de mi Tierra*)
(Approximate duration 7 minutes)

INTERMISSION

TRADITIONAL, ARR. BOB CHILCOTT *L'habitant de Saint-Barbe*

(Approximate duration 1 minute)

BOB CHILCOTT *Five ways to kill a man*

(Approximate duration 6 minutes)

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 music from around the world in this final set – and make you smile too.

Do you know that feeling when you go to a restaurant and look at the menu, and as you read, you realize that you want to eat almost everything on the menu? How do you choose? Well, that's a little bit of how we feel when designing programmes: our existing music library of over 3000 pieces is full of gems which we would love to sing, and that is without mentioning all of the new compositions and arrangements being written every year. Luckily for us, our 'Live in Concert' programme is a chance to create something of a 'sample menu', bringing together several different elements of our library into a programme with variety and contrast at its heart. As with so many of our programmes, the music spans more than 400 years and many countries and languages but bringing it all together is how perfectly all of this music works for six human voices in harmony.

The distinguished Japanese composer Makiko Kinoshita (b.1956) wrote *Ashita no uta* (*Song for tomorrow*) for us in 2020, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. There was a period of that year when we were due to be touring Japan but were unable to; instead, we filmed a digital concert which celebrated the cultural links between Japan and the UK, and Kinoshita wrote *Ashita no uta* to be premiered in that digital concert, 'Heiwa'. Her spiralling harmonies and lyrical melodies reflect the optimism of the text, which was written by the poet, singer, and conductor Masumitsu Miyamoto (b.1972). The text reflects on the earth's spinning, replacing each day with a fresh new dawn; this optimism felt particularly potent at the height of the pandemic, but is also a glorious note on which to begin this *Live in Concert* programme.

The following section, 'Le Coeur de la France', contains arrangements of a set of four folk songs from the Auvergne region in the centre of France. It is a green, rural area, full of mountains, forests, and farmland. This landscape is reflected in the folksongs which Goff Richards (1944 - 2011) arranged for The King's Singers in the early years of the group's history. *Une gentie bergere* (*The gentle shepherdess*) and *Le Baylere* (*The Shepherd's Song*) are the slowest songs in the set and reflect on the business of farming this verdant land. Whilst *Une gentie bergere* is an ode to a beautiful young shepherdess, sung predominantly by a single voice, *Le Baylere* features conversation between a pair of shepherds across the hills who are helping each other find good grass for the sheep to eat. *A la campagne* (*In the countryside*) and *Le-bas dans le Limousin* are the more boisterous songs, with the latter making clear how much better the men and women are in the Auvergne, compared with the people in neighboring Limousin. In both instances, Goff Richards' arrangements fire off the French text at lightning speed, capturing the joy and eagerness of the original songs.

'The Age of Discovery' takes us to the earliest music in this *Live in Concert* programme, from a period in time when the horizons of the world seemed to expand with every voyage of exploration and discovery. At the court of Queen Elizabeth I, explorers such as Sir

Francis Drake and Sir Walter Raleigh reported discoveries of 'new' countries, animals, foods, and civilizations, firing up the popular imagination and inspiring a sense of optimism and patriotism amongst those who learned of the discoveries. The latter three madrigals in this section of the programme all come from a publication, *The Triumphs of Oriana* (1601), collated by Thomas Morley (1557 - 1602) to celebrate Queen Elizabeth, whose nickname was 'Oriana'. The first madrigal in this section - Thule, the period of cosmography by Thomas Weelkes (1576 - 1623) - is truly remarkable and is a perfect example of this atmosphere of exoticism in Elizabethan England. It contains mentions of 'flying fishes', 'Fogo' (a West African volcano), 'Etna', and of course 'Thule', which was an Ancient Greek word for the most northerly region in the world (which, at that time, may have been perceived as an island off Norway or Scotland). The dramatic musical figures and ever-shifting harmonic centres reflect this sense of the new and alien discoveries of the time.

Taking further the idea of 'Thule', the next part of the concert is focused on the frosty northern lands of Scandanaiva. In literature, in art, in film and in music, the idea of 'North' has always inspired vivid and magical imagery. Some of the most northerly inhabited countries are those of Scandinavia, an area which has a remarkable tradition of choral singing. The music from this section is taken from a full-concert programme based on the theme of *Northern Lights*. Two of the leading lights in choral composition in Scandinavia over the last 100 years have been Hugo Alfvén (1872 - 1960), who would have turned 150 this year, and Einojuhani Rautavaara (1928 - 2016). Rautavaara spent his life based in Finland, where his style of composition evolved profoundly during the 1970s. He had fallen out of love with the atonal, serialist compositional technique which he had used, and instead began writing in a new, freer style. He wrote of his own process "I have often compared composing to gardening. In both processes, one observes and controls organic growth rather than constructing or assembling existing components and elements. I would also like to think that my compositions are rather like 'English gardens', freely growing and organic". *Legenda* has a dance-like quality, and the piece is driven by the swinging - almost jazz-like - rhythms that are established in its opening few bars. Contrastingly, the Swedish composer Hugo Alfvén, from a generation earlier, was more retrospective in style. He called upon the traditions and harmonic language of the romantic composers but infused his music with a particular Nordic flavour. Whilst his orchestral music - particularly the symphonies - are his best known compositions, Alfvén's choral music has found a firm place in the hearts of choirs all over the world. *Aftonen* is one of the most celebrated of his pieces, with its enchanting wordless refrain, and its colourful depiction of calm waves, clear skies, and sunset over a quiet forest. *Och jungfrun hon går i ringen* is a traditional Swedish folk song, and this arrangement demonstrates Alfvén's interest in and dedication to the folk culture of his homeland.

The first half of the concert closes with *Hechicera*, a movement from a large work commissioned for The King's Singers in 2009, called *Tres Mitos*. It is a work by Gabriela Lena Frank (b. 1972), who turns 50 this year, and *Hechicera* is the third and final movement. All three movements have original words by Gabriela, inspired by her Peruvian heritage, and by traditional Andean dance styles which can be heard in the rhythmic energy of *Hechicera*. After the interval, we have music by another close collaborator with The King's Singers. And not just a collaborator in fact, but former member, Bob Chilcott (b. 1955), who was the tenor in our group between 1985 and 1997. During his time as a King's Singer and since leaving, he has been a prolific composer of choral music which is beloved all over the world. His setting of the Robert Frost poem *Fifty ways to kill a man* brings to life a remarkable and dark poem, which explores the various methods

humankind has used - since the dark ages - to inflict pain and death upon each other. Bob's versatility as a composer comes into his own as he morphs the musical style to reflect each of the various methods of killing, all against the backdrop of a single, insistent ostinato.

With that comes our final set of pieces, where we will explore a bit of our extensive 'close harmony' repertoire - a part of our library which we are constantly expanding and celebrating through our series of EP recordings, called *The Library*. Close harmony is one component of this musical 'feast' which we could not leave out, as it has become something of a trademark for our group. At each concert we pick a selection of these songs specifically for the audience, the venue, and the occasion. Whether it's old King's Singers classics that have done the rounds on YouTube, or brand new folk and pop arrangements by current members of the group, there will be something to tickle your fancy and perhaps tickle your funny-bone too.

The King's Singers

The King's Singers have represented the gold standard in *a cappella* singing on the world's greatest stages for over fifty years. They are renowned for their unrivalled technique, versatility, and skill in performance, and for their consummate musicianship, drawing both on the group's rich heritage and its pioneering spirit to create an extraordinary wealth of original works and unique collaborations.

What has always distinguished the group is their comfort in an unprecedented range of styles and genres, pushing the boundaries of their repertoire, while at the same time honoring their origins in the British choral tradition. They are known and loved around the world, and appear regularly in major cities, festivals and venues across Europe, North America, Asia, and Australasia. They also work with orchestras, recently including the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, with whom they performed a specially commissioned work by Sir James MacMillan.

The King's Singers were 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, and the group has maintained this formation ever since that debut. Visit www.kingssingers.com for the latest news, blog entries, video blogs, podcasts, Tweets, and YouTube updates.

The King's Singers appear by arrangement with IMG Artists; www.imgartists.com

The King's Singers' recordings are available on the Signum Records, EM Records, TELARC, RCA Victor & Red Seal/BMG Classics, and EMI/Angel record labels.

A comprehensive catalogue of The King's Singers' choral arrangements is available from Hal Leonard Corporation, 777 West Bluemound Road, Milwaukee WI 53213.