

A NOTE FROM THE MUSIC DIRECTOR: *NORTHERN LIGHTS*

*"The world is so empty if one thinks only of mountains, rivers and cities;
but to know someone here and there who thinks and feels with us,
and though distant, is close to us in spirit –
this makes the earth for us an inhabited garden."*

— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)



MCA is celebrating its Fourteenth Season this year in splendid style as it takes you on a musical journey to all corners of the globe. Tonight we are celebrating the rich tradition of music from Canada and Wales (two countries with ties to Great Britain), and from the Nordic and Baltic countries of Finland, Latvia, Norway, and Sweden. The “choral miracle,” to which the Nordic choral tradition is often referred, began in Sweden in the 1950s under the direction of the great conductor Eric Ericson and has flourished ever since. Tonight you will hear examples of the many brilliant facets of this extraordinary singing tradition.

We begin with music of the sacred traditions. **Frode Fjellheim** is known for his eclectic jazz- and *joik*-influenced compositions, but in his *EATNAMEN VUELIE*, it is the familiar that surprises. **Jan Sandström** is Sweden’s most frequently performed composer on the international scene today. His choral music is described as forming a link with an inner, gentle world and the emotional abstract. His “Sanctus” is just that: emotionally abstract, inward looking, peaceful, sublime. **Karin Rehnqvist** is one of Sweden’s best-known and widely performed composers, whose works straddle art and folk music. In particular, Rehnqvist has explored the extraordinary and dramatic vocal technique of *kulning*, an archaic style of singing/calling still used in traditional Swedish folk music. Traditionally it was employed outdoors, to call animals or to communicate with other people over long distances. The sound is intense, concentrated and piercing. With *kulning* throughout *I HIMMELEN*, the angels seem to call to one another across heaven’s vast expanse.

Themes of nature feature prominently in the next five pieces. Canadian **Harry Somer**’s *NORTHERN LIGHTS* has no text – only atmospheric sounds as a sonic descriptor of the *aurora borealis*. Finnish composer **Harri Wessman**’s works are melodic, lyrical, intimate, and brimming with Romantic warmth — features that are strictly taboo to the most austere Modernists. The lyrical *WATER UNDER SNOW IS WEARY* is one of his most famous compositions. Its direct appeal stems from Wessman’s philosophy that the communicativeness of music is of particular importance, since, as he says, “a composition is above all a spiritual message to another human being.” Canadian **Malcolm Forsyth** composed in a 20th-century idiom, but it was also of paramount importance to him to create

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music that sounded good to contemporary listeners, explaining: "I am myself a dedicated audience member, dedicated to the idea of concert music that does sweep people away." In his *AUYUITTUQ* you will be swept away in the sound of the loons of Auyuittuq National Park of Canada, where for thousands of years the ancestors of the Inuit traveled the harsh Arctic lands. In *TUNDRA*, Norwegian **Ola Gjeilo** evokes the barren beauty of the Hardangervidda mountain plateau, near his father's ancestral home in the mountains between Oslo and Bergen. He writes, "It is easy to feel that you are treading on sacred land." And in **Frode Fjellheim's** *NIGHT YOIK*, we are transported further to a sacred place, to the ancestral lands of the arctic indigenous people inhabiting Sápmi, which today encompasses parts of far northern Sweden, Norway, Finland, the Kola Peninsula of Russia, and the border area between south and middle Sweden and Norway. You can almost feel the chill in the air.

The second half of the concert juxtaposes folk and popular traditions of four countries, starting with *dainas* (folk melodies) from **Latvia**. As Latvia's State President and folklore scholar Dr. Vaira Vēfreiberģa writes, "To the Latvian, the *dainas* are more than a literary tradition. They are the very embodiment of his cultural heritage, left by forefathers whom history had denied other, more tangible forms of expression. These songs thus form the very core of the Latvian identity and singing becomes one of the identifying qualities of a Latvian." MCA features soloist Indra Brusubardis, a proud member of Milwaukee's Latvian community, in these haunting melodies so full of tradition and symbolism. **Donald Patriquin's** beautiful arrangement of the Finnish folk song, *TAIVAS ON SININEN*, follows, then Faith Danneil takes the folk tradition to its most poignant and beautiful form in a simple Swedish *LULLABY*. **Edvard Grieg's** renowned *lied*, *SOLVEIG'S SONG* from *Peer Gynt Suite*, finishes out this set.

The fabulous women's vocal ensemble *Trio Mediaeval*, having grown up in **Norway** and having heard folk music all around them, has recently recorded and transcribed a number of ethnic songs, of which the *THREE MEDIEVAL NORWEGIAN BALLADES* are a portion. They write: "We would like to see this [music] as our contribution to a living, oral tradition. Although these songs bear our musical imprint, they are colored by all those who have performed and passed on the music before us." In song and in sisterhood with *Trio Mediaeval*, MCA now passes on this beautiful music to you.

Our final piece has no country of origin – no language particular to any land – no ancestral bonds. Rather, Welshman **Karl Jenkins'** intention was that *ADIEMUS* have a sound *similar* to that heard in ethnic or world music, not belonging to any one culture. To further the universal aspect of the music, all the vocals are written as vowel and consonants sounds, not as meaning-filled words. Thus, our last piece honors the universality of all world nations.

The Milwaukee Choral Artists would like to express its thanks to the many friends and patrons of the ensemble, and to the tireless Board of Directors and Managing Director Nancy Herro, without whom the work of this organization would not be possible. Before you are singers of exceeding talent, whose musicianship and professionalism for the last fourteen years have marked a new era of choral singing in Milwaukee. On behalf of the Milwaukee Choral Artists, I hope you will enjoy the diverse palette of music you will sample this season. On the way to our 15th Anniversary, these next two years will be gloriously sung— don't miss one note of them!