Northwest Girlchoir







Who We Are

SUNDAY, MAY 31, 2026 | 2:30 PM

Everett Civic Auditorium

Liebe, Yǒu Yì, Raku, Tarab,
Sangat, Amore, and CorAzón

Who We Are

Liebe

Little Bird — American Folk Song;
Kristen Orien Wortmann, piano — Arranged by Leo M. Wanenchak

Little Bird is a traditional American folk song that has been passed down through generations via singing, dancing, and play. The song's simple, repetitive melody and lyrics have invited Liebe singers to wonder and imagine how the song came to be, what the lyrics and music may have meant to the people who created them long ago, and what they can mean to us now. Liebe keenly observed that animals and nature are referenced frequently in folk repertoire, especially children's folksongs, which opened a rich conversation about how children often experience the natural world with a sense of curiosity and connectedness that adults don't always understand. Students reflected on how, before smartphones and modern technology became a constant part of daily life, people likely spent more time outdoors and with greater attention to the rhythms of animals, plants, weather and seasons.

This arrangement reimagines the familiar folk tune as a lullaby, transforming its playful energy into something gentle and reflective. Flowing phrases and reharmonization in the piano accompaniment evoke the rocking motion of soothing a child (or animal, or grown-up!) on their journey into dreamland. Through this new interpretation of a historical folksong, students explore how music can evolve and take on new meanings while remaining rooted in historical traditions.

Little bird, little bird, fly through my window
Fly through my window my sugar lump,
Buy molasses candy
And buy molasses candy

Yǒu Yì

When I Grow Up — Tim Minchin (b.1975);
from *Matilda the Musical* — Arr. by Roger Emerson
Kristen Orien Wortmann, piano

The 1988 Roald Dahl novel, *Matilda*, inspired a musical in 2011, from which this song comes. It is a favorite among our choristers, especially thanks to the musical's recent 2022 film adaptation. This song features rebellion against unjust authority, finding the courage to change one's destiny, and the power of imagination and knowledge. Almost every member of Yǒu Yì was thrilled to try out for the opening solos, and this arrangement features a few echo moments to create harmony, which was a great step toward learning the canon singing that happens in our next piece.

Friendship Canon — Mark Burrows (b. 1971)
Kristen Orien Wortmann, piano

This sweet piece taught us many ways to say the word "friend," which is fitting for a choir whose name translates to "friendship." It features Spanish, Greek, Swahili, Russian, Japanese, Cherokee, Hebrew, Hindi, German, Korean, among others, some of which are spoken by members of our choir. Spoken solos and duets at the end of the piece will feature more translations that the choristers chose to research and share. Additionally, this song is a canon, also known as a round. We are pleased to demonstrate the choristers' hard work and passion as they sing in two parts to close our portion of the year's final concert.

Raku

The Music Is You — John Denver (1943-1997)

Jim Angell, guitar

Music makes pictures and often tells stories
All of it magic and all of it true
And all of the pictures and all of the stories
All of the magic, the music is you

This piece opened up a rich conversation as Raku students have reflected on the question of "Who We Are." How does "who we are" connect to "the music is you?" We went on a quest to explore that by doing some fill in the blanks about us as individuals, and us as a group. Here are a few samples of what the students wrote.

About themselves:

"I am a kind and loving person, and a good friend."
"Singing is important to me because it makes me feel free, comfortable, and creative."
"A hope I have for the world is that everyone gets to express themselves in the loudest way possible."

About our choir:
"When I think of NWGC, I think of being in a community where I am respected for who I am."
"When I'm in rehearsal, I feel like I belong."
"At NWGC, I feel happy, happy, included, oh and did I say happy??"

These students bring their kindness, curiosity, silliness, and joy to rehearsal each week and make this space the one that you see reflected above. They are actively creating the world that they want to exist in together. Each song is infused with their energy; they can't exist separate from one another. We are the music, and the music is us!

Old Betty Larkin — American Folk Song; Arr. by Alice Parker

Youngjin Joo, piano

If there's one thing that this group of singers loves to do, it's *play!* We first experienced this song through the accompanying dance and game. To begin, students skip around the room in a circle two by two while one person waits in the middle during "hop around, skip around." Then, the person in the middle weaves through each pair as the "needle in the haystack." When we sing "steal, steal," the needle in the haystack does just that! They steal one person's partner, and the person without a partner goes to the middle as we start again ("you take mine and I'll take another…"). Learning and experiencing music through play and movement is one of this group's favorite ways to be in community with one another, and this song sounds even more beautiful with the accompanying percussion of giggles throughout the room. It's a joy to see these students connect not only to music, but to one another, through song, movement, and play.

Tarab

Begone Dull Care — Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

from *Friday Afternoons, Op. 7*

Youngjin Joo, piano

Britten's collection of 12 songs known as *Friday Afternoons* were written in unison and composed for his brother's preparatory school. "Begone, Dull Care" is the first piece in the set. Many of the songs from *Friday Afternoons* have simple and charming melodies; each piece has a distinct character and sound. It was fun to revisit *Friday Afternoons* since many Tarab choristers sang "Lone Dog," another in the set, in the Spring of 2024!

When looking at the text, we discussed the meaning of "dull care" - why must it go away? At first, singers thought of the word "dull" as boring. But at the time, "dull care" was used to describe things that worry us. Tarab discussed the things that might concern us in life and how we work through them when we're feeling anxious or worried. One common response was that we all share the joy of singing. Tarab realized that coming to rehearsal and singing together (whether in the class or on stage) brings us many positive feelings like hope, joy or connection.

Sing to Me — Andrea Ramsey (b. 1977)

Youngjin Joo, piano

Andrea Ramsey is an award-winning composer, conductor, scholar, and educator with nearly 200 published works. A former professor at The Ohio State University and University of Colorado Boulder, she grew up in rural Arkansas and credits music education with shaping her life and career. *Sing to Me* is one of our favorite pieces.

This piece calls upon our singers' sensitivity in many ways: how to be aware of one another's sound when singing in a gentle unison; how to listen for balance when singing in parts; how to honor dynamics by singing with movement and direction. Finally, the text invites us to ponder to whom we sing and for whom we sing. What seasons do we go through in life and how does singing play a part? Tarab worked through all the intricate aspects of the piece, musical and nonmusical.

Colinda — French-Cajun Folk Song; Arr. by Michael Scott

Youngjin Joo, piano

Colinda is a lively French-Cajun folk song and dance tune from Louisiana. It has been passed down through generations and reflects the rich blend of French, African, and Caribbean influences that shape Cajun culture and music. This is a well-known song about a dance (most likely referring to the Caribbean 'calinda' dance). This piece gave us the opportunity to talk about how cultures mix to create art and how French is spoken differently in different parts of the world.

CorAzón

Blackbird

Paul McCartney (b. 1942);
Arr. by Deke Sharon

Paul McCartney has frequently spoken about the genesis of this song, explaining that he and the Beatles cared deeply about the Civil Rights movement in the United States. He remembers being shocked by segregation and by the violence Black people in America experienced. Later, he would meet two of the women who inspired him to write *Blackbird* – Thelma Mothershed Wair and Elizabeth Eckford, members of the Little Rock Nine who bravely integrated Little Rock Central High School. He explained that in England, young women were referred to as "birds." He wanted to write a song that, were it to get back to them, would encourage and help them through difficult times. And so the song began: "Blackbird singing in the dead of night/Take these broken wings and learn to fly/All your life/You were only waiting for this moment to arise."

McCartney acted on an injustice he saw by writing *Blackbird*; CorAzón members discussed how they show their values and inspire those around them, how they want to show up in the world, and who they want to be as positive forces in life.

Ilus Hääl (Beautiful Voice)

Margrit Kits;
Arr. by Laura Jēkabsone

Estonian	***English Translation***
Helisege helded metsad	Ring out, generous forests
Hüüdke vastu hütikesed	Shout back the huts
Minu kauni heale vastu	In return for my grateful voice
Lahedama laulu vastu	In return for my wonderful song
Kus mu healta kuuldaneski	Where my voice is heard
Kus mu laulu laksuneksi	Where my song is sung
Seal kõik metsa murduneksa	There all forests will fall
Ilma raua rabamata	Even without striking iron

Contemporary Estonian composer Margrit Kits wrote this beautiful a cappella piece to "celebrate Estonian folk music and history" and Latvian composer, singer, conductor, and artistic director of the treble vocal group Latvian Voices, Laura Jēkabsone, arranged it for choir in honor of the 100th anniversary of Estonia's first independence. Jēkabsone writes that Estonia and Latvia share a rich heritage of folk songs and a love of singing, but she does not elaborate on how powerful the act of singing was for these two countries and for the Baltic region.

In 1918, Estonia first declared itself a sovereign state. By 1940, however, it was annexed to the Soviet Union and remained under Soviet control for decades. In 1988, Estonians began to sing their cultural and national songs as part of the Singing Revolution, inspiring people in the neighboring Baltic states of Latvia and Lithuania to do the same. On August 23rd, 1989, nearly two million people from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania took to the streets, singing with clasped hands to form a chain of people – and music - that extended for over 400 miles. All three countries gained their second independence in 1991; the Baltic people sang their countries into freedom by combining nonviolent political protest with cultural expression.

We are reminded, with this piece, about the power of music, the power of voice, and the importance of working together. Songs have fueled many social movements; NWGC is committed to honoring the voices of our students and the power of singing to effect change in ourselves and in the world around us.

Sangat

Sigh No More, Ladies! — J. Edmund Hughes and Mary Ellen Loose

from *A Shakespeare Suite*

Kay Yeh, piano

Beatrice, the razor-tongued protagonist of William Shakespeare's comedy *Much Ado About Nothing*, actively defies the restrictive gender roles of her era. In her "merry war" of wit with Benedick, which we would perhaps in modern romance genres identify as an "enemies to lovers" story arc, Beatrice reveals an uncompromising moral compass, fierce loyalty to her family, and a courageous vulnerability in pursuing love. Sangat agrees that she is profoundly compelling. This setting faithfully and playfully brings Shakespeare's words to life. The mixolydian mode feels inherently devious and defiant, and we move through 7/8 and mixed meters to align our syllabic emphasis with how the text would be declaimed. With Beatrice's feisty spirit as our inspiration, we ascribed adjectives to musical sections to help enhance our narrative as performers and bring the text to life on stage.

One Voice — Ruth Moody (b. 1975)

Jim Angell, guitar; Haley Gabler, banjo — as sung by *The Wailin' Jennys*

The lyrics in *One Voice* shift from the personal to the universal and speak to the importance of individual contribution to a greater whole. While a single voice may feel small or isolated, it is the essential starting point for any meaningful change or connection. Our singers shared with one another the things they feel empowered to change and speak out about in the world. We were reminded that our collective strength is not found in sameness, but in the harmony created when we choose to be together.

This Is Me — Benj Pasek (b. 1985) and Justin Paul (b. 1985)

from *The Greatest Showman* — Arr. by Mac Huff

Kay Yeh, piano; Joyce Kang, Ruby Lininger, Dany Foo, Saya Buckmaster, soloists

This Is Me is a powerful anthem of self-acceptance and resilience. For young people (and all people) navigating the pressure to fit in, Pasek and Paul's music offers a reminder that our unique traits can be sources of strength and pride. *This Is Me* serves as the perfect finale to celebrate Sangat's outstanding year together, where these "glorious" young musical leaders have created a community full of love and connection through music.

Amore

Seasons of Love — Johnathan Larson (1960-1996);

from *Rent* — Arr. by Roger Emerson

Youngjin Joo, piano; Jenna Del Vento, Amelia Laing, Julia Zhang, Ellen Schuster, and Erin Ealey, soloists

This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the opening of *Rent*, an update of Puccini's opera *La Boheme* newly set in New York's Lower East Side. Larson's *Rent* replaced tuberculosis with HIV/AIDS as a central theme and centered both queer and racially diverse characters. You'll note, above, that thirty years ago is also the year Jonathan Larson died; he had an aortic aneurism the night before the show was to begin previews. The cast ultimately performed to a closed house of friends and family to grieve and celebrate Larson's life. For thirty years, *Rent* has remained a cultural touchstone due to its messages of resilience, community, and the fight for dignity.

Never One Thing — May Erlewine (b. 1983)

Youngjin Joo, piano

Singer-songwriter May Erlewine is a folk and blues musician known for her work with Earthwork Music Collective in Michigan, a group of musicians who foster creative spaces to create community and social change. This song is inspired by the Walt Whitman verse, "I am large; I contain multitudes." Amore had several conversations wherein we identified aspects of ourselves that may be contradictory but still true. We discussed how society wants to put us into boxes and dictate how we "should" be in the world – and how important it is to push against those external expectations and take up space in authentic ways.

Seniors

Night Changes — Jamie Scott, Julian Bunetta, John Ryan, and One Direction
Arr. by Andrew Seifert

Amore seniors selected this song because they wanted something "nostalgic but not sad." The song reminds them of childhood; they enjoyed reflecting back and looking ahead with optimism while "so much is changing!" Most of all, they loved the song's sentiment that their friendships and this community of NWGC won't change. We'll always be here for you, seniors!

Amore

Will the Circle Be Unbroken — Traditional Appalachian
Arr. by J. David Moore

In 1908, a hymn by this name, written by Charles H. Gabriel and Ada Ruth Habershorn, was published in *Alexander's Gospel Songs*. Other than the title and text of the refrain, nothing of that original composition exists in the song we know today. The hymn's melody and rhythm were substantially reworked in the decades following its publication, and new lyrics were written in 1935 by the Carter Family (and covered by The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band in 1972). The lyrics we sing today, by Betsy Rose, Cathy Winter, and Marcia Taylor, were commissioned in 2001 by MUSE Women's Choir of Cincinnati for a concert celebrating the city's Appalachian cultural heritage. This piece has been a meaningful reminder for Amore that this community is a place where care endures.

Combined Choirs

We Are — Ysaÿe M. Barnwell (b. 1946)

The text of this song is a tribute to the possibilities within each of us. It celebrates our differences and demonstrates that we each play an important role in our community; although we are different, we also have many similarities and, in the end, we are one. In this composition, Dr. Barnwell takes these ideas and translates them into music. The buoyant melody lines have various partners in harmony while below, repeated ostinato patterns remind us to appreciate the beauty and function in everyday routines. As the choirs combined to practice and perform this piece, we were able to understand that every voice and every role is important – in choir and in life.