
Summer Sundays

PRESENTS

A Journey through American Folk Music

August 4, 2024 | 3:00 p.m.
Bethany Lutheran Church | Sanctuary
76 W Crystal Lake Ave

Introduction

“What we often forget about folk songs is that someone wrote them. We assume that they were always there, hovering in the air. But they did have composers, and those composers, whose names are lost to us, had genuine talent. The melodies are catchy, memorable. The lyrics are at turns, powerful, tender, playful, and bawdy. And as these songs were handed down through the generations, sung from [parent] to child, or among cow[hands] around the campfire, or on shipboard, they were honed, altered, and embellished, so that each generation added their own unique touch. What has persisted is their timelessness, their epic quality.” – Steven Mark Kohn (2000)

Ethnomusicologist and scholar Mark Slobin (2010) said “Folk music is not a set of songs and tunes; it is more of a working practice. People take available musical *resources* and develop *strategies* to make good use of them. Behind this work lies *aims*, reasons for giving music its share of your life and energy. Ordinary folksingers make music to enhance work with animals and crops, to raise children and keep family ties, to give voice to their beliefs, hopes, and identities, or to signal that they understand their place in society.”

When we sing, play, listen to, or otherwise engage with folk music, we are communing with all of the musicians who sang, played, or listened to these songs before, sharing in their lives, sorrows, dreams, and hopes. Today’s selection of American folk songs touches on a range of emotions as it explores experiences ranging from those leaving England to make a new life in America and the struggles and survival of enslaved Black people to attempts to capture the spirit of America, now known as ‘Americana’ music.

“Ten Thousand Miles Away” | arr. Steven Mark Kohn (b. 1957)

“Wanderin’” | arr. Steven Mark Kohn

“The Bachelor’s Lay” | arr. Steven Mark Kohn

Aaron Knodle, tenor | Ayesha Casie Chetty, piano

A note from the arranger: “What attracted me to these songs were the stories they told. They are mini-dramas. Something is happening in each one of them. Someone is traveling, working, or suffering. Their messages are universal to the human experience. They still resonate. I did extensive editing of the available texts (which I felt was my right, being the next “folk” in the line), to keep the storytelling succinct. I arranged these songs, but I did not write them. Our ancestors, storytellers with great musical talent, did that many years ago.” – Steven Mark Kohn (2000)

“**Ten Thousand Miles Away**” is an 18th century sea shanty and bush ballad whose writing and composition are attributed to Joseph B. Geoghegan. “**Wanderin’**” grew out of an Irish melody and the experiences of wayfaring Americans at the turn of the 20th century. Not much is known of “**The Bachelor’s Lay**,” but a “lay” may be a song, a melody, a simple narrative poem, or a ballad.

“Wade in the Water” | arr. Stephen DeCesare (b. 1969)

“I want Jesus to walk with me” | arr. Stephen DeCesare

“Joshua fit the Battle of Jericho” | arr. Stephen DeCesare

Rich Nielsen, trombone | Aaron Knodle, piano | Jack Heisler, string bass

Spirituals are a genre of Christian music that is associated with African Americans, which merged varied African cultural influences with the experiences of being held in bondage in slavery, at first during the transatlantic slave trade and for centuries afterwards, through the domestic slave trade. Spirituals encompass the “sing songs”, work songs, and plantation songs that evolved into the blues and gospel songs. In the 19th century, the word “spirituals” referred to all these subcategories of folk songs. The lyrics to “**Wade in the Water**” were first co-published in 1901 in *New Jubilee Songs as Sung by the Fisk Jubilee Singers* by Frederick J. Work and his brother, John Wesley Work Jr., an educator at the historically Black college in Nashville, Tennessee, Fisk University. While it has not been proven, it is believed that “Wade in the Water” was one of the songs associated with the Underground Railroad (a network of secret routes and safe houses used by slaves in the United States to find freedom). Traditionally attributed to the African American spiritual tradition, there is no record of the spiritual “**I want Jesus to walk with Me**” in early collections, which results in an undetermined first publication date and has led to some divergent scholarship on its origin. A variant of the spiritual does appear, however, in a collection of hymns and spirituals published in 1929. “**Joshua fit the Battle of Jericho**” (“fit” meaning “fought”) is believed to have been composed by enslaved peoples in the first half of the 19th century. Some references suggest that it was copyrighted by Jay Roberts in 1865. In 1882, the song was published in *Jubilee Songs* by M. G. Slayton and in *A Collection of Revival Hymns and Plantation Melodies* by Marshall W. Taylor.

“At the River” | arr. Aaron Copland (1900–1990)

“Deep River” | arr. Moses Hogan (1957–2003)

Jackson Pierzina, bass-baritone | Aaron Knodle, piano

“Shall We Gather at the River?” or simply “**At the River**” are the popular names for the traditional Christian hymn originally titled “Beautiful River” and subsequently titled “Hanson Place,” written by American poet and gospel music composer Robert Lowry (1826–1899). The song was written in 1864 and the title “Hanson Place” is a reference to the original Hanson Place Baptist Church in Brooklyn, where Lowry, as a Baptist minister, sometimes served. From the collection *Old American Songs*, “**At the River**” (arr. 1952) is an example of what is often referred to as Copland’s “populist” music (the composer, himself, called it “vernacular” music). Deliberately intended to be accessible, the open, slowly changing harmonies in much of this style of Copland’s music is typical of what many consider to be the “sound of American music”, evoking the vast American landscape and pioneer spirit. “**Deep River**” is an anonymous African-American spiritual, popularized by Henry Burleigh in his 1916 collection *Jubilee Songs of the USA*. The song was first mentioned in print in 1867, when it was published in the first edition of *The Story of the Jubilee Singers: With Their Songs*, by J. B. T. Marsh.

“Poor Wayfaring Stranger” | arr. Steven Mark Kohn

Ayesha Casie Chetty, soprano & piano

“**The Wayfaring Stranger**” is an American folk and gospel song likely originating in the early 19th century about a plaintive soul on the journey through life. The English lyrics (presumably without melody) were published in 1858 in Joseph Bever's *Christian Songster*, which was a collection of popular hymns and spiritual songs of the time. A related melody was composed by Johann Georg Ebeling and related lyrics written by Paul Gerhardt in 1666 in Germany as “Ich bin ein Gast auf Erden” (I am a guest on earth). During and for several years after the American Civil War, the lyrics were known as the “Libby Prison Hymn”. This was because the words had been inscribed by a dying Union soldier incarcerated in Libby Prison, a warehouse converted to a notorious Confederate prison in Richmond, Virginia known for its adverse conditions and high death-rate. For some time, it had been erroneously believed that the dying soldier had originally authored the song to comfort a disabled soldier, but this was not the case since the song been published several years before the Civil War in 1858, before Libby Prison was put into service (1862).

Meditation on “Wondrous Love” | arr. Todd Marchand

Rich Nielsen, trombone | Aaron Knodle, organ

“**What Wondrous Love Is This**” (often just referred to as “Wondrous Love”) is a Christian folk hymn from the American South. Its text was first published in 1811, during the Second Great Awakening, and its melody derived from a popular English ballad. The hymn's lyrics were first published in Lynchburg, Virginia in the c. 1811 camp meeting songbook *A General Selection of the Newest and Most Admired Hymns and Spiritual Songs Now in Use*, and most sources attribute the hymn's melody to the 1701 English song “The Ballad of Captain Kidd”, which describes the exploits of pirate William Kidd (misnamed “Robert” in American versions of the ballad). The melody itself predates the Kidd usage, however, possibly by more than a century.

“Simple Gifts” | arr. Bill Holcombe (1924–2010)

“Rag-Time Dance” | Scott Joplin (1868–1917), arr. Giorgio Babbini

“American Folk Song Trio” | arr. Dewey Owens (1925–2006)

Cynara Pierzina, flute | Keith Hulen, clarinet & bass clarinet | Ayesha Casie Chetty, piano

“**Simple Gifts**” is a Shaker song written and composed in 1848, generally attributed to Elder Joseph Brackett from Alfred Shaker Village. It became widely known when Aaron Copland used its melody for the score of Martha Graham's ballet, *Appalachian Spring*, premiered in 1944. “**The Ragtime Dance**” is a piece of ragtime music first published in 1902. Ragtime is a musical style that had its peak from the 1890s to 1910s. Its cardinal trait is its syncopated or “ragged” rhythm. “American Folk Song Trio” includes the following folk songs strung together: “Arkansas Traveler,” “I’m Just a Poor Wayfaring Stranger,” “Sweet Betsy from Pike,” “John Henry,” “Mr. Froggie Went A’Courtin’,” “O My Darling Clementine,” “Turkey in the Straw,” and “Pop Goes the Weasel”.

Thank you for joining us today!

Today’s free-will donation will be directly donated to **New Directions Addiction Recovery Services**. New Directions, located in Woodstock, is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to support the process of recovery from Substance Use Disorders.

Please, come back and join us next summer for **Summer Sundays 2025!**

A huge thank-you goes out to...

- The staff and volunteers at Bethany Lutheran Church, especially Clara Solak (sound & lights)!
- Today’s performing artists as well as their friends, family, and partners!
- All of you! *Musicking* is a collective process that involves everyone! Thank you!!

Meet today's artists

Dr. Ayesha Casie Chetty is a social scientist whose primary research interests lie at the intersection of race, gender, and culture. She currently works as a researcher at M+R, doing audience research and message testing for a range of progressive nonprofits around the U.S., and is the collaborative pianist at Bethany Lutheran Church. Ayesha holds a PhD in sociology from the University of Cincinnati and is a classically trained pianist and singer holding an Associate and Licentiate in piano performance from Trinity College London.

Jack Heisler, string bass, is a lifelong member of Bethany Lutheran Church. He is a retired Corporate Human Resource Executive of over 40 years and a trained bassist who has played for more than 50 years. Jack spent more than 25 years as a professional musician in the Chicagoland area playing in orchestras and musicals as well as with jazz, rock, and folk music groups.

Keith Hulen is on faculty at Encore Music Academy as a clarinet instructor and chamber music coach. As a clarinetist, Keith has performed with the Quad Cities Symphony Orchestra, Peoria Symphony Orchestra, and Knox-Galesburg Symphony Orchestra. In 2002, he enlisted into the United States Air Force (USAF) serving as a clarinetist with the USAF Band of Mid-America, Scott AFB, Illinois. As an Air Force musician, he performed with the concert band, ceremonial band, clarinet quartet, woodwind quintet, and chamber winds. Keith was the featured soloist in tours with the band and chamber winds throughout the Midwest. He was also principal clarinetist on three (3) USAF Band of Mid-America recordings, and has performed with Christine Brewer, Hillary Hahn, Tony Bennett, The Moody Blues, Rod Stewart, and Jackson and Almida Berkey of Mannheim Steamroller. Keith holds a Bachelor of Music degree in Clarinet Performance and Music Education as well as a Master of Music degree in Clarinet Performance and Music Composition from Western Illinois University, and a Master of Arts in Reading Instruction from Aurora University. He is also a Backun Musical Services artist.

Dr. Aaron Knodle is Director of Worship and Music at Bethany Lutheran Church where he plays the church's Clarence Agnes Carlson Memorial organ, and conducts the Bethany Choir and Bell Canto Ringers. Aaron has degrees in organ performance, music education, sacred music, and choral conducting from Luther College, Boston University, and the University of Cincinnati – College-Conservatory of Music.

Rich Nielsen is a retired tool and die maker, who still teaches an apprentice training course in Schaumburg, IL. He began playing trombone at the age of ten and then, just never stopped. He studied music at Roosevelt University, and gigged around Chicago for a few years, playing bars and clubs, events, many (many) weddings, church gigs, orchestral work, musical theatre, some studio work, and once at Lyric Opera of Chicago. For the past twenty years he has played with several musical theatre groups and community bands in the northwest suburbs.

Cynara Pierzina, flutist, is the founder and Executive Director of Encore Music Academy, a not-for-profit community music school serving McHenry County and the surrounding region. She also teaches flute and coaches chamber ensembles at Encore. Cynara has performed with the Lake Forest Symphony, Park Ridge Civic Orchestra, University of Chicago summer opera orchestra, and Minstrels chamber ensemble. She received her bachelor's degree from Augustana College and master's degree from DePaul University, both in flute performance.

Jackson Pierzina, bass-baritone, is a singer and conductor with a strong passion for contemporary vocal and choral music. A graduate of Northwestern University, Jackson earned his B.M. in Voice & Opera and Music Direction under the tutelage of Professor W. Stephen Smith. Jackson is also a private conducting student of world-renowned and three-time Grammy Award winning conductor, Donald Nally. Jackson currently teaches private voice and piano lessons to students of all ages in the McHenry County area and works as the Assistant Music Director at First Congregational Church in Crystal Lake.