

Proud Supporter of Music in our Community.



 **Long & McQuade**  
MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS   
l o n g - m c q u a d e . c o m

981 Prospect St  
Fredericton  
(506) 458-5858

sales · rentals · repairs · financing · music lessons · online shopping

ATLANTIC CANADA'S LEADER IN MENS & WOMENS FASHION

**Peter Roberts**

Inc.

FOR ANY REASON  
YOU NEED TO LOOK YOUR BEST

155 SMYTHE ST  
FREDERICTON, NB  
506.458.8476

PETERROBERTSINC.COM



 @PETERROBERTSINC



**Bel Canto**  
Singers of Fredericton

Scan for virtual  
program & scores

*Without  
a Net*

An a cappella journey through  
five decades of performance

Artistic Director  
Kathrin Welte  
Accompanist  
Thomas Gonder

Soprano  
Carolyn MacDonald  
Kate Rogers  
Rachel Savidge  
Ruth Savidge  
\*Olivia Spahn-Vieira  
Lindsay Underhill  
Mary Walker  
Vivien Zelazny

Alto  
Jane Blakely  
Sabina Horton  
Anne Hunt  
Lisa Mitchell  
Carolyn Nielsen  
Margaret Savidge  
\*Beth Snow  
Debbie West

Tenor  
Matthew Dinan  
\*Alex Good  
Brad Horncastle  
Roger Smith  
Vince Zelazny

Bass  
\*John Ball  
Anthony Brown  
Mike Francis  
Thomas Gonder  
Joe Horton  
Kit Hunt  
Leo Macneil

\*Soloist

## 1974: Is fifty years a major milestone?

Geologically speaking, no. But with well over two hundred concerts under eight unique directors, a throughout of hundreds of singers, and a vast library of performed works, fifty years does represent a considerable accomplishment, and the choir has, at times, had three generations represented in its ranks. In celebration, Bel Canto's current director, Kathrin Welte, has selected music from concerts given at the beginning of each decade that reflect both directorial styles, and the dizzying variety in the choir's resume.

In a nod to the choir's reputation (and in no small way to Kathrin's own ambitions for us) it is a wonderfully eclectic program of beautiful and challenging *a cappella* arrangements from the Renaissance to the present day.

We begin with a salute to the madrigal; the *raison d'être* of Neil Houlton's original group of singers in 1974. Beautiful and bawdy meet four-on-the-floor Renaissance word painting in these selections from the choir's very first concert.



**Neil Houlton**, Organist & Choirmaster at Christ Church Cathedral forms *The Cathedral Singers* out of a love of late Renaissance madrigals.



**David Davis** takes over the Cathedral's top music spot and re-names the choir *Bel Canto*, expanding the size of the group and scope of material.

### O oochi, manza mia Orlando De Lasso

This *villanella* pokes fun at lustful migrant Spaniards, trying to woo *belle donne* using only a dim grasp of Italian grammar to extol the virtues of female body parts.

### The Silver Swan Orlando Gibbons

Arguably Gibbons' ode to the death of the English Madrigal School, using the "swan song" myth as an analogue. A testament to his skill as both a brilliant, soulful composer, and innovative wordsmith.

### Shoot, False Love, I Care Not Thomas Morley

The master of the Italian-inspired English madrigal speaks of the silliness of taking a toddler with wings and a bow too seriously. Fa la la la la, la, la, fa la fa la la.

### Matona, mia cara Orlando De Lasso

Another *villanella*, this time mocking Germans trying to seduce Italian ladies, once again, with only a cereal box-level grasp of the language. Turn off safe search if you're looking for the original lyrics.

## 1984: Not such a dystopian nightmare after all

Beginning in 1978, David Davis, who not only bestowed on the choir its name, but filled out the ranks and the repertoire, elevated the choir with his infectious energy and skill. But 1984 saw the arrival of Tim Cooper, who was to lead the group for the next twenty-six years, and become the most influential and innovative director to date. Tim had a weakness for Ralph Vaughan Williams (who doesn't?) and introduced the *Five English Folk Songs* for one of the very first concerts under his baton in 1984.

### (Four) English Folk Songs Ralph Vaughan Williams

Ralph Vaughan Williams arrangements are to choral concerts as lemon butter is to steamed asparagus spears: just fine without it, but *so* much better with. The fifth song in this famous series, "Wassail!" has been omitted out of respect for it being early May, but as some will remember, was the eponymous title and theme song of a Bel Canto Christmas tradition, started by Cooper, that ran for almost twenty years.



Moving the choir to a secular setting at UNB, **Tim Cooper**, a music educator, steps in and begins to explore a wider range of works, and experiment with collaborations and composition.

### I The Dark Eyed Sailor

A meet-cute between a sailor and a forlorn lass turns out to be the reunion of betrothed lovers. How it is that, so ravaged by his ordeals at sea as to be unrecognizable, she's still up for it, we'll leave to the mystery of true love.

### II In The Spring Time of The Year

An adaptation of a Norfolk ballad, *Lovely On The Water*, of which Williams only uses the first two of its eight stanzas. Originally, another impassioned maritime couple reflects on the inevitable parting of ways (this time due to war) but Williams' expurgation turns it into an evocation of spring.

### III Just As The Tide Was Flowing

Williams' treatment of the music remains true to the traditional, but his words portray a sailor meeting and wooing his true love. Authentically, a sailor and a girl get jiggy, she falls for him, and then offers up twenty pounds as incentive for a more meaningful relationship, which he then spends on rum and loose(er) women.

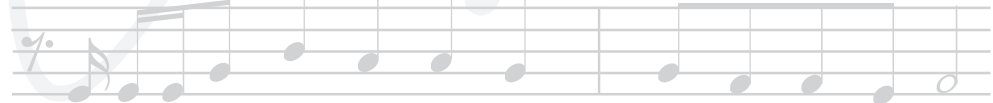
### IV The Lover's Ghost

Taken from a 17th century ballad *A Warning For Married Women*, this tells the story of yet another woman besotted with, and betrothed to a sailor who goes off and drowns, but this time she gets herself back out there and marries a local carpenter, only to have the spirit of the sailor come back and haul her out to sea in his ship, which he then sinks, sending her adulterous soul to hell. Williams' version is much, *much* nicer.

1974 1975 1976 1977 1978 1979 1980 1981 1982 1983



1984 1985 1986 1987 1988 1989 1990 1991 1992 1993



## 1994: Some of us have refrigerators older than this

Tim Cooper, who received his doctorate in Choral Conducting in 1987 (using *Bel Canto* in his final test) established the group as one that took chances, and explored a wide range of choral works across a broad spectrum of time and styles. A few of our current members recall when he passed out Debussy's only *a cappella* choral composition, for a concert in 1994.

### Trois Chansons de Charles D'Orleans Claude Debussy

Alex Ross, writing in *The New Yorker* in 2018 said that, in general, Debussy is "easy to love, but hard to explain." *Bel Canto* as a whole, in 2024, say that his *Trois Chansons* are "easy to love, but hard to sing." Sixteenth note triplets, free tempos, Mixolydian, Lydian, and Dorian scales - all components of Debussy's unique style - combine to create music that is best summed up by the composer himself:

"There is no theory. All you have to do is listen. Pleasure is the law."



**Tim Cooper** continues to establish *Bel Canto's* reputation for innovation and education, travels the choir around the Maritimes, and introduces the annual "Wassail!" Christmas concert and sing-along.

I Dieu! Qu'il la fait bon regarder  
D'Orleans, a prince and poet imprisoned after the battle of Agincourt in 1415, wrote this about the beauty of his wife. Debussy himself was a hopeless romantic, and paints it as a dream, increasing the complexity of harmony throughout, but resolving to the gentle theme at the end as the vision comes to a close.

II Quant j'ai ouy le tambourin  
Debussy has set this text to a solo voice, wishing to "sleep a little longer," above the Choir's sound of a distant tambourine, "summoning us to go maying." Aeolian in mode, the sound dances on the edge of irritating in its atonality and persistence, until the protagonist drifts back to sleep.

III Yver vous n'estes qu'un villain  
Anyone who has lived through February in New Brunswick can relate to this, and probably doesn't need a translation. "Summer is pleasant and kind...but you, winter...you need to be exiled." Debussy's composition is segmented, juxtaposing all that is nice - a sweet quartet sings of the purity of spring - with the choir's rapid melodic descents and chromaticism spitting out disdain: "Yver! Yver! YVER!!"



*Bel Canto* turns twenty-five, and nobody bothers to make a big deal out of it.

1994 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003



## 2004: When reality started getting questionable

Google, Facebook, iPods, Blogs, Bluetooth, Skype - while the world's population was sinking deeper into cyberspace, *Bel Canto* continued to embrace live performance, and expanded its own horizons; traveling outside the province, exploring exchanges and collaborations, and premiering some of Tim Cooper's own compositions.

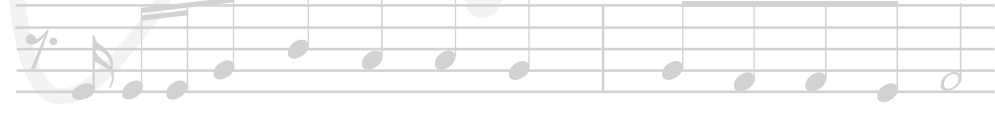
### On a Spiritual Note Moses Hogan

The incomparable Moses Hogan's arrangements - responsible for the mid-1990's revitalization of interest in the spiritual - have provided much joy to us, and our audiences over the years, and have punctuated set lists from many of our directors. Kathrin picked *Steal Away*, from a concert given in 2004, just one year after Hogan's untimely death, and the same year his definitive *Oxford Book of Spirituals* was published.



Cited by many as a "necessary step" in the evolution of the choir, **Anne Sessa** takes over from Tim Cooper in 2007, and establishes herself as a musical sculptor; shaping and moulding the choir's sound into a unified whole.

2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013



**Tony's Music Box**  
Find Your Sound

Drums Guitars Piano

Repairs Pianos Live Sound

9396 Queen Street Fredericton, NB E3B 1B2  
506.458.8286 [R](#) [@](#) [P](#) [f](#) [t](#) [v](#) [h](#) [a](#) [tonysmusicbox.ca](#)

### Steal Away Wallace Willis Arr. Moses Hogan

Unlike most spirituals, this composition isn't anonymous. Wallace Willis, who with his wife, Minerva, walked the 400-mile "Trail of Tears" from Mississippi to Oklahoma in 1831 - not to freedom, but to further slavery in the cotton fields along the Red River - penned this (and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" among others). The text, and Hogan's treatment of it, combines the visceral pathos of slavery, and the grotesque notion of having to "steal" oneself away from an owner, with the hope-filled promise of eventual deliverance in Jesus.

## 2014: Pretty serene and innocent, in retrospect

Before Covid, before TikTok, before every second movie was about a super hero - heck; back then we thought we'd seen the last of AI after Microsoft finally killed "Clippy" the Office Assistant.

Replacing Tim Cooper had seemed an impossible task, but the first time Anne Sessa shrugged one shoulder and winced as the choir's pitch started sliding, it was clear that we'd found not a replacement, but something different, and marvelous. Anne was our most influential director with regards to an *a cappella* sound. Moving voices around in the choir, both on the staff, and physically, she sculpted as she directed, and her influence on the group was profound.

Anne passed away last July, and we remember how much we loved singing these with her back in 2014.

### A City Called Heaven

Arr. Josephine Poelinitz

This is a slowed down gospel arrangement of the well-known traditional "sorrow song." As such, it calls out to us to break with the concert's theme, and employ our wonderful accompanist, Thomas Gonder, to take a break from singing in the bass section for this concert, and show off his piano chops.

### Swing Low Sweet Chariot

Wallace Willis  
Arr. Peter Knight

If you've never heard this iconic spiritual, you're a) possibly the only one in the room, and b) in for a treat. Knight's arrangement is unabashedly twentieth century American soundtrack - smooth, jazz-inspired harmonies and modulations testify to his extensive resume, and prove why he was an A-lister for *The Kings Singers* (for whom this arrangement was created).

### My Soul's Been Anchored in The Lord

Arr. Moses Hogan

Moses Hogan's arrangement is a serious, but joyful romp, once again echoing the stark contrast between harsh, earthly challenges and sweet, heavenly reward.



**Vicki St. Pierre** creates "Christmas around the World," as well as a 150th anniversary concert, and a wildly popular "East Coast Kitchen Party" of traditional works with fiddle, guitar and bodhran.



**Christine Jones** takes *Bel Canto* on a tour of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery with "Luninor" - music curated to comment on ten specific artworks.

## 2024: Holy moley, did all that happen in just ten years?

After Anne Sessa moved on, the choir saw two very different directors in Vicki St. Pierre and Christine Jones, who both pushed tradition to one side and upped the choir's game. Then Covid hit, with devastating consequences. Masks were an inconvenience to everyone, but we dare you to try and sing while wearing one, or attempt to blend with your section while surviving six feet apart. *Bel Canto's* survival came down to the dedication of its members, and Justin Guignard, who directed with infectious positivity, leading the choir through the muffled darkness, to emerge from the pandemic not battered, but reinvigorated.

It was in the Spring of 2023 that a collaboration on Fauré's iconic *Requiem* with The Sussex Choral Society introduced us to Kathrin Welte, who stepped in as rehearsal conductor. Kathrin's extensive vocal experience, keen sense of shaping sound, and progressive thinking made asking her to take on the directorship inevitable. And now, here we are, diving gleefully into the next fifty years. We hope you enjoy the evening as much as we will.

### Andrew Balfour

Artistic director of the Winnipeg-based vocal ensemble *Dead of Winter*, which specializes in creating "concept concerts," Balfour is Canada's premier Cree composer, and was nominated for a 2023 Juno award for *Nagamo*, recorded with *Musica Intima* vocal ensemble.

### Gaze Upon The Trees

Balfour says this piece "reflects the fact that the poet's observations about nature are rooted in honouring, and in the traditional teachings that he has received." The Ojibway words *Noopimiing* ("In the forest") and *Mitigoog* ("Trees") signify the "whispering of the ancestors," amplifying the spiritual quality of the music.

### Music Is Vibration

In setting Dominic Gregorio's poem, Balfour creates soundscapes that build over the course of each line, before returning to quiet contemplation. Voices enter a beat, and sometimes a half-beat apart, layering in complex and sometimes dissonant chords, interspersed with homophonic, soothing sections that shimmer with resonance. The result is less an organized, prescribed work, and more of an overall experience.

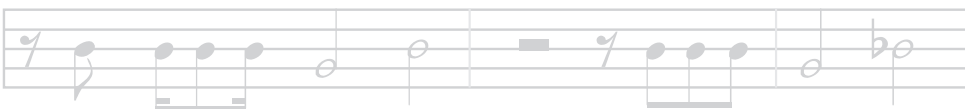


**Justin Guignard**, took Covid in stride with energy and infectious humour, leading the choir in an ambitious and triumphant mask-less performance of Puccini's raucous *Messe de Gloria* in 2023.



**Kathrin Welte's** first concert as our new director was a truly memorable collaboration on Charpentier's *Messe de minuit pour Noel* with the Elm City String Quartet last December. We're thrilled to have her at the wheel as we start off this, our fiftieth year.

2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023



2024

