

Music By Nature: Singers Companye Presents Concert in Cuyahoga Valley National Park

By Mike Telin and Daniel Hautzinger



A colorful mélange of sounds fills the Cuyahoga Valley National Park during summer. There are the obvious tweets of birds and rustlings of wildlife, but less natural sounds can be heard in the park as well. Strains of Sibelius and Tchaikovsky or the stadium rock of The Kings of Leon may waft over from the Blossom Music Center in the southern part of the park.

If you wander farther north a Beatles song in an a cappella arrangement may catch your ear, or a choral version of a beloved movie theme might draw you closer.

That's because on July 20 at 6:30PM, the Akron-based choral group Singers Companye will present a concert entitled "Sounds Familiar?" at the Happy Days Welcome Lodge in the National Park, as part of the Music By Nature series held there over summer.

"As the title suggests, the music will sound familiar to people, and there's something for everybody," said Samuel Gordon, artistic director of Singers Companye. Besides the Beatles songs and movie music, the group will perform "things from various folk traditions in the United States," some spirituals, and *A Little Jazz Mass* by Bob Chilcott, Gordon enumerated. "Just because it has a liturgical text doesn't necessarily mean it's going to be a long, boring piece or perceived that way," he said of the *Jazz Mass*.

Singers Company seeks to “learn new and different kinds of choral repertoire that nobody else is doing,” Gordon explained. “It’s like a continuing education program,” with twenty-plus choral conductors and music teachers in the ensemble, as well as several conducting associates who take workshops with Gordon “to improve conducting, rehearsal, and score study techniques.”

Gordon’s desire to educate may come from his own musical roots: “the person who sent me in the direction of music was my elementary music teacher, who I just adored, and who taught all of us to sight-read by the time we were in third grade.”

He was surrounded by music from an early age, laughingly answering that his career started at birth. He grew up in an Amish farming community in Pennsylvania amidst a family of country musicians. “I remember as a child listening to my grandmother play a pump organ for the hoedowns. My grandfather was the square dance caller.”

After double majoring in music and biology at Penn State, Gordon was accepted to medical school but decided instead to take a music assistance-ship at Indiana University, and has been in music ever since.

You may not have had an Amish childhood where you learned to sight-read in third grade, but you can still enjoy the simple pleasure of nostalgic music, a picnic, and a dessert reception in the idyllic Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

The Music By Nature series continues on August 3 with a program by the Cuyahoga Valley Chamber Players.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com July 14, 2014.

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