

Common Thread's 25th Anniversary concert season focuses on the role of music in advocating for social change and justice.

Te quiero

"Te quiero" ("I adore you") is the poignant setting of a poem by Mario Benedetti, a renowned Uruguayan poet, with music composed by Alberto Favero, beautifully arranged by Liliana Cangiano. This song transcends the boundaries of love and patriotism, carrying a powerful message deeply rooted in the socio-political landscape of Latin America.

Mario Benedetti's poetry has always been a mirror reflecting the social and economic challenges faced by the people of his region. "Te quiero" is no exception. At first glance, it may appear as a love song, but it conceals a dual meaning that allowed it to bypass censorship during a turbulent time. Beneath the romantic façade lies a profound commitment to one's homeland, making it a potent protest song in disguise.

The song, with its emotionally charged verses, serves as a reminder of the struggles faced by Latin American people and their enduring love for their homelands. In a world where art and activism often intertwine, "Te quiero" stands as a testament to the power of artistic expression in addressing societal issues and advocating for change, much like our mission to weave together voices for a better world.

Ah! Si mon moine voulait danser

"Ah! Si mon moine voulait danser" is a delightful and lively traditional French-Canadian folk song that has deep cultural roots in Quebec. The song is known for its playful lyrics and spirited melody, making it a cherished part of Quebec's musical heritage.

The title of the song, which translates to "Oh, if my monk wanted to dance," sets the tone for the song's whimsical and humorous theme. The lyrics humorously depict the desire for a monk, a symbol of solemnity and restraint, to break free from convention and join in the joy of dancing. This unexpected twist adds a touch of rebellion and merriment to the song, challenging traditional norms and expectations.

"Ah! Si mon moine voulait danser" has been performed and enjoyed by generations of Quebecois and French-Canadian people, serving as a symbol of cultural identity and a celebration of the region's vibrant musical traditions. Its infectious energy and light-hearted lyrics make it a favorite at gatherings, festivals, and celebrations, where people come together to dance, sing, and revel in the shared joy of music.

This folk song captures the essence of French-Canadian culture, emphasizing the importance of community, music, and the spirit of breaking free from the ordinary. It continues to be a beloved

piece of Quebec's musical tapestry, reminding us of the power of music to bring people together and inspire a sense of unity and happiness.

The song aligns with our mission of celebrating the diverse tapestry of global folk music traditions, as it embodies the joy of life and the human spirit, transcending language barriers to convey universal emotions and stories from ordinary lives.

Siod Mar Chaidh an Càl a Dholaidh

"Siod Mar Chaidh an Càl a Dholaidh," arranged by Gary Ewer, is a spirited and lively composition that encapsulates the vibrant spirit of Scottish culture. Sung in Gaelic, this uptempo choral piece playfully recounts a humorous tale. It narrates how a seemingly simple cabbage dish met its comedic demise, with the flour settling at the bottom of the pot, and all the women dancing - all thanks to a meddling company of lively young lads (enticing the cooks with stories, music, and dancing). The refrain emphasizes the comical disaster, echoing the chorus, "That's how the cabbage was ruined by the French Emperor."

Gary Ewer, known for his exceptional choral arrangements, brings out the vivaciousness of the story in the music, infusing it with energy and enthusiasm. This composition is a delightful addition to choral repertoires, inviting singers and audiences alike to revel in the rich heritage of Scottish storytelling.

So, whether performed on a concert stage or at a community gathering, this song is a joyful celebration of culture, history, and togetherness.

Vichten

"Vichten" is a dynamic a cappella piece with optional body percussion and spoons, exuding high energy and playfulness. Inspired by Acadian folk traditions and resembling Scottish "mouth music," the lyrics consist entirely of whimsical, nonsense syllables and vocal percussion.

Originating on Prince Edward Island in the mid-1900s, "Vichten" has undergone various name changes like MicMac Song, Vichten Song, Vishten Song, and Mi'kmaq Song as it passed through generations. Arthur Arsenault composed it for his children, influenced by traditional Acadian folk and Mi'kmaq language (Mi'kmawì'simk) sounds.

Beyond its musical charm, "Vichten" unravels a complex history between the Acadian and Mi'kmaq peoples in the Maritimes, marked by both collaboration and conflict. It sheds light on sensitive topics like cultural appropriation and the impact of colonial history, encouraging essential conversations. Understanding this context enriches the musical experience and promotes respectful engagement with the cultures influencing the song.

Vem kan segla förutan vind?

This traditional Swedish folk song, meaning "Who Can Sail Without the Wind?" poses thought-provoking questions about the challenges of navigating life's journey and the profound impact of separation from loved ones.

Just as Common Thread aims to foster a sense of community and inclusivity through singing, the song highlights the importance of emotional bonds and the tears shed when parting from friends. It speaks to the universal human experience of longing for connection and the emotional richness that arises from shared experiences.

"Vem Kan Segla Förutan Vind?" reminds us that while we may sail against life's headwinds or row against the current, it is our connections and shared emotions that truly define our journey. In this way, the song embodies our mission to celebrate unity and harmony through the power of music.

English:

Who can sail without the wind?
Who can row without oars?
Who can leave a parting friend
Without shedding tears?

I can sail without the wind,
I can row without oars,
But I can't leave a parting friend
Without shedding tears.

Arirang

"Arirang" is a timeless Korean folk song that holds deep cultural significance. Its lyrical and melodic beauty has made it a cherished piece of music, often symbolizing themes of leaving and reunion, sorrow, joy, and happiness. The song's refrain, "Arirang, arirang, arariyo, Over the Arirang hill you go," captures the essence of a journey, reflecting the common human experiences of separation and longing for loved ones.

Just as our choir embraces a diverse repertoire of songs to bring people together, "Arirang" is versatile, existing in multiple traditional forms and modern arrangements. It is performed among families, friends, and communities, fostering a sense of togetherness and cultural identity, building connections through music. "Arirang" is a testament to the power of music to express emotions, bridge differences, and unite people—a sentiment that aligns with the ethos of promoting harmony through song.

Zol Zain Sholem (Let There Be Peace)

Zol Zain Sholem is a joyous and spirited Yiddish song originating from Eastern Europe. It's characterized by its call-and-response style, a hallmark of lively Hassidic music traditions. The song's exuberant melody invites active participation, making it an engaging and communal musical experience. The song carries a message of peace and harmony, transcending language and cultural barriers.

Mangwane Mpulele

Mangwane Mpulele is a captivating traditional Sotho song from South Africa, cherished for its timeless appeal and universal message. Popularized by Harry Belafonte, Norman Luboff Choir, the Kingston Trio, and others, during the global folk revival of the 1950s and 1960s, the song was one of many from that era that celebrated the beauty of indigenous music from diverse regions. The lyrics echo themes of seeking shelter from the rain, symbolizing the universal human longing for warmth and protection, "Auntie, open the door for me, I am getting wet with rain. Whether it is here, whether it is there, I'm getting wet with rain". This simple yet profound theme of seeking solace in times of need resonates with people across borders and generations. By performing this song, we honour the rich tapestry of global musical traditions, fostering understanding and connection among different communities.

We Shall Be Known

"We Shall Be Known" by Karisha Longaker of MaMuse is a heartfelt and empowering folk song that resonates with our themes of unity, community, and collective action. The song's lyrics emphasize the importance of coming together as a community to create positive change and make a lasting impact in the world. It carries a message of hope, resilience, and the belief that by standing together, we can overcome challenges and build a better future. The song is particularly relevant in the context of environmental and social activism. "We Shall Be Known" serves as an anthem for those working towards positive change and building a more sustainable and just world, making it a powerful tool for inspiring collective action and hope in the face of global challenges.

What does the songwriter mean "Into the well?" Karisha writes, "Poetry is poetry and takes us places the logical mind can't necessarily grasp... but our ancient selves know.. into the well.. into the WELL.. deep into that which feeds and nourishes us, quenches us... the wellness now that we know we are ready for. I also learned from an elder friend that in some African traditions the well is where the ancestors live... The beginning of this song was given to me in a dream by a Senegalese drum teacher and friend of mine who had already crossed over... so in that way... it's all of it.. I feel so grateful to all of us that he found me in that dream and led me to my creative place where the light was clear and warm and this song was waiting for us all. With love a gratitude for you good works in the world, Karisha"

Frobisher Bay

"Frobisher Bay," also known as "Frozen in Frobisher Bay," is a poignant folk song by James Gordon that transports listeners to the unforgiving world of whaling in the Canadian Arctic. It is a song with deep historical and cultural significance. This haunting composition has become a Canadianianana folk songbook staple.

Set against the backdrop of Frobisher Bay, an icy arm of the Atlantic Ocean on southeast Baffin Island, the song recounts the ill-fated decision of a whaling ship's captain to extend the late summer season in pursuit of "one more whale." As winter descends, the crew finds themselves trapped in the unforgiving Arctic cold, far from their homes and families. Diane Loomer's arrangement of the song perfectly captures the desolation and longing of these sailors, who face months of isolation and uncertainty.

While the song's primary theme centers around the challenges of whaling in the Canadian Arctic, it carries broader themes of isolation, sacrifice, and the human struggle against unforgiving elements.

We sing "Frobisher Bay" to draw attention to environmental issues and the historical exploitation of natural resources. By performing this song, we highlight the importance of respecting the fragile Arctic ecosystem and the need for sustainable practices. Additionally, we sing to recognize the hardships faced by those working in dangerous and environmentally vulnerable industries.

Luv Luv Luv

"Luv Luv Luv" by Pansy Division is a punk rock anthem that critiques society's shallow understanding of love and relationships. Pansy Division is a pioneering queer punk rock band that has consistently addressed LGBTQ+ issues in their music.

The song's protagonist expresses a desire for genuine love amidst a world obsessed with sex, decrying the commercialization of romance. Through its catchy repetition of "luv luv luv" and "sex sex sex," the song emphasizes the stark contrast between meaningful connections and mere physical desire.

By performing this song, we use cheeky humour and music as a means to raise awareness, promote understanding, and contribute to social justice efforts related to LGBTQ+ issues and the broader theme of authentic love and relationships.

Freedom is Coming

"Freedom is Coming" is a profoundly moving South African liberation anthem that transcends borders and generations with its powerful message of hope and change. Originally a gospel

tune titled "Jesus Is Coming," the song underwent a transformation in South Africa as it became a rallying cry for those dedicated to dismantling apartheid's oppressive regime.

The song's simplicity and repetition make it easy to learn and sing, inviting people from all walks of life to join in unison. With its chorus of "Freedom is coming, oh yes I know," it instills a sense of optimism and determination that resonates deeply with listeners.

"Freedom is Coming" has found its way into the repertoires of choirs worldwide, making it a cherished selection for festivals, cultural celebrations, and collaborative choir performances. Beyond its musical excellence, this song serves as a testament to the enduring spirit of humanity's yearning for justice and freedom. It stands as a reminder that, in the face of adversity, unity and perseverance can lead to profound and lasting change.

This Old Glory Train

"This Old Glory Train" is an uplifting spiritual that resonates with the soul and spirit of freedom. Its powerful lyrics proclaim, "This old glory train has been a long time coming; and there's none that can't afford it, so you'd better hop on board it." These words speak to the struggles and aspirations of a people seeking emancipation from oppression.

Rooted in the African American spiritual tradition, this song embodies a profound cultural and historical significance. It is a testament to the enduring spirit of those who endured slavery and sought solace, strength, and freedom through music.

Today, choirs like Common Thread choose to sing this song to honor the legacy and tradition of African American spirituals. These songs are not only a source of cultural heritage but also serve as codified protest songs, reminding us of the struggles for justice and equality that continue to shape our world. Singing "This Old Glory Train" is an act of preserving history, celebrating resilience, and standing in solidarity with the ongoing fight for freedom and civil rights.

Here Is My Home

"Here Is My Home" is a heartfelt song by the renowned folk singer and civil rights activist Si Kahn. With its soul-stirring lyrics and melodic composition, the song resonates with the themes of unity, friendship, and the enduring power of music.

The song opens with a poignant reflection on parting with dear friends, prompting the question of where life's journey will take them. Yet, it quickly transitions to a hopeful and uplifting chorus, declaring that the hands and voices of friends have the remarkable ability to uplift the heart, making wherever they are together feel like home.

Si Kahn's lyrics beautifully emphasize the importance of harmony, unity, and the shared experience of music in fostering lasting bonds. The song's message is clear: when people join together in song, their hearts and spirits become intertwined, creating a sense of belonging that transcends physical places.

Si Kahn's lifelong dedication to civil rights, labour, and community organizing is reflected in this song's themes of togetherness and social harmony. "Here Is My Home" is a testament to the enduring impact of music and the profound connections it forges among people, echoing Si Kahn's legacy of activism and advocacy for a just and humane society.

Common Thread

"Common Thread" is more than just our theme song; it's a timeless anthem that encapsulates the spirit of unity, diversity, and social justice. When the founders of our choir sought a name that would mirror their lofty ideals, this powerful song by Pat Humphries embodied the heart and soul of their mission.

This resonant song, sung with unwavering conviction, serves as a rallying cry at peace rallies, social justice demonstrations, and gatherings across the globe. Its verses, like threads woven into a vibrant tapestry, emphasize the importance of togetherness, shared values, and the pursuit of a better world.

"Common Thread" unites voices in harmony, reminding us that in our diversity lies our strength. Through its verses, it paints a vivid picture of a world where compassion and unity prevail, inspiring us to rise above divisions and work collectively to build a global family connected by the threads of common purpose and shared humanity. Experience the power of "Common Thread" and join the chorus for change.

The Gift to Sing

"The Gift to Sing" by Matthew Emery is a captivating musical adaptation of the poem by the revered African American poet and civil rights leader James Weldon Johnson. Emery's composition skillfully weaves together the powerful words of Johnson with emotive melodies and harmonies, creating a moving and inspirational choral piece.

The song's lyrics express the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity. Johnson's poem speaks of finding solace and strength in the act of singing, even when confronted with life's challenges and hardships. Emery's composition enhances this message, with varying musical textures and counterpoint that add depth and dimension to the piece.

The song's message about the transformative and empowering nature of music resonates with our mission to perform joyful and empowering music. "The Gift to Sing" inspires hope and positivity, aligning with our goal of creating a joyful musical experience. The song's themes of resilience and hope mirror the struggles and aspirations of individuals striving for a better world.

When We Go Rolling Home

"When We Go Rolling Home" by John Tams is a soul-stirring folk song that captures the spirit of laborers facing the challenges of life while holding on to hope and solidarity. The chorus, with its repetitive and resonant "Rolling home, when we go rolling home," serves as an anthem of unity and determination. Inviting the audience to sing along aligns perfectly with our aim of putting a song on people's lips.

The verses of the song speak to the stark divide between the privileged and the working class, highlighting the struggles and sacrifices endured by those who toil in the fields while the wealthy prosper. It speaks to the real lives of ordinary people, which is a central theme in our repertoire.

The imagery in the song paints a vivid picture of the harsh realities of labor, from enduring icy winds and driving snow to facing traps and snares on the path to contentment. Throughout it all, the song emphasizes the importance of solidarity among laborers, encouraging them to stand together and reap the rewards of their efforts.

"Rolling Home" is not just a song but a rallying cry, a reminder of the strength that can be found in unity, and a testament to the enduring hope that keeps people moving forward in the face of adversity.

We Are a Gentle, Angry People

"We Are a Gentle, Angry People" is a powerful anthem that resonates with the essence of unity, justice, and love. With words and music by American composer, Holly Near, this song encapsulates the real-life experiences of people who seek justice and change. Its lyrics touch upon themes like struggle, community, and celebration, which align with our goal of representing the full spectrum of human experiences through music.

Music can bring people together, regardless of their backgrounds, and serves as a powerful tool for social change and celebration. The song reminds us that despite our differences in age, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, we are all bound by a common purpose: the pursuit of justice. Through melodic verses, it highlights the diversity of our world, emphasizing that we are a colorful tapestry of individuals who come together to make a harmonious chorus.

Holly Near's timeless composition serves as a rallying cry for social change, a reminder that even in the face of anger and injustice, our strength lies in our gentleness and love. "We Are a Gentle, Angry People" continues to inspire and unite communities around the world, as we all sing together for a better, more just world.

Nibi Song

The "Nibi Song" is a beautiful and heartfelt tribute to water, composed by Doreen Day at the request of her grandson. Every day, as Doreen and her grandson, Mashkoonce, drove past a body of water on their way to school, they would recite these words to the water, turning it into a joyful daily ritual. Over time, Mashkoonce suggested that they sing the words in their native language, Ojibwemowin. Doreen enlisted the help of her daughter's language teacher to translate and write the lyrics.

The "Nibi Song" is a gentle and soothing melody, sung without the accompaniment of shakers or drums. It resonates like a lullaby, conveying a profound connection between people and nature, specifically with the element of water. Doreen and Mashkoonce generously invite everyone to share in this heartfelt song, encouraging us all to sing it to the water every day as a gesture of love and respect for this essential element of life.

Common Thread values music in languages other than English to reflect the linguistic diversity of Toronto. The "Nibi Song" adds to this diversity by incorporating Ojibwemowin (or Anishinaabemowin), the language of the Anishinaabe people, into our repertoire.

(Ojibwemowin is still widely spoken, although the number of fluent speakers has declined sharply. Today, most of the language's fluent speakers are elders. Since the early 21st century, there has been a growing movement to revitalize the language and restore its strength as a central part of Ojibwe culture.)

This language diversity enriches the choir's musical experience and connects us with the history and culture of Indigenous peoples. This song is rooted in a genuine daily ritual that celebrates the essential element of water and the beauty of the natural world. It captures the essence of birth, gratitude, hope, and reverence, all of which are part of the "full cup of life."