

From twelfth century Georgian polyphony to Ariana Grande, the King's Singers release *Finding Harmony* as part of campaign to bring people together through music



The King's Singers © Rebecca Reid

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- 19-track album brings together music from a range of communities, countries and genres to celebrate music from throughout history
- Music from across the world, including South Africa, Georgia, Mexico, Scotland and America
- Arrangements of Kesha's *Praying* and Ariana Grande's *One Last Time* touch on more recent moments in history



2020 sees the King's Singers release their new album *Finding Harmony*, as part of a new campaign to harness the positive power of music to bring people together and effect social change. The recording explores the development of Western harmony over the last 800 years, celebrating music that has united different people all over the world, particularly in the face of oppression. The programme covers eleven significant and iconic episodes of history, from the Protestant Reformation in Europe to the 2017 Manchester bombings.

The group are known for the flexibility and diversity of their repertoire, and this album brings together music from a range of communities, countries and genres to celebrate music from throughout history. *Finding Harmony* includes arrangements by a number of leading composers, including young British composers Rebecca Dale and Toby Young, Mexican composer Jorge Cózatl, South African composer Neo Muyanga, world-famous Scottish

composer Sir James MacMillan, British singer and director Richard Wilberforce and Stacey V. Gibbs, one of America's foremost arrangers of spirituals.

Jonathan Howard, bass in the King's Singers, says *"We've wanted to make Finding Harmony for a very long time. For years, we've noticed how music brings people together in an amazing way - we see people of different nationalities and ages, with completely different beliefs and world views, coming together all over the world through music: in choirs, at concerts, and even in their regular daily lives (at everything from political marches to football matches). During many of the most turbulent periods in history, those suffering have been bound together by songs that spoke to them and their cause. For this album, we worked hard to create a really varied selection of pieces that belong to lots of different episodes, to highlight how music provides a common language for all of us when we want to make our voices heard. We feel truly honoured to have worked with musical experts for each of these episodes, who really understood the impact this music had on their cultures. We're so excited that we get to provide another platform for all of this music, and hope that everyone who listens is as moved by the songs and their stories as we are."*

The King's Singers have released over 30 albums and DVDs with Signum Classics, including their 50th anniversary 60-track album GOLD which was nominated for a Grammy Award in 2019.

The American Civil Rights Movement of the twentieth century is marked through a number of arrangements by Stacey V. Gibbs, an American arranger who grew up in Tennessee in the heart of the movement. Gibbs's arrangements include *If I can help somebody* by Mahalia Jackson who became the voice of the civil rights campaign, in addition to *This little light of mine*, an uplifting spiritual sharing a peaceful and positive message originally written by Harry Dixon Loes. *Strange Fruit* is the last song to be taken from this episode, a protest song that was written by Jewish communist Abel Meeropol, and made famous by Billie Holiday.

The Singing Revolution took place in the Baltic States, primarily in Estonia, and was a non-violent revolution to eject the occupying Soviet communist forces as the USSR collapsed. The King's Singers decided to include Gustav Ernesaks' *Mu isamaa on minu arm*, a song which was forbidden from being sung by the Soviet censors, which prompted an outburst at the end of the Laulupidu National Song Festival of July 1960 where the audience of tens of thousands began to sing the song spontaneously, leaving the authorities powerless to stop them. The programme also includes *Heliseb väljadel* by famous Estonian choral composer Urmas Sisask, who was born just two months after the 1960 Laulupidu Festival.

Georgian polyphony is now protected and recognised by UNESCO as a 'masterpiece of intangible heritage of humanity'. The west-Georgian polyphonic style that the King's Singers explore on this album features three musical parts, one of which is a drone. The programme includes two Georgian polyphony works, a traditional love song called *Tsintskaro*, and *Shen Khar Venakhi*, a work thought to have been written by King Demitius I of Georgia in the twelfth century.

The group also explored how music has held together Scottish society over the years, particularly around 1745 when Charles Edward Stuart (more famously known as Bonnie Prince Charlie) attempted – and failed – to claim the British throne, resulting in many Scottish traditions disappearing from society. 100 years later, highlander John Cameron wrote *O, chi, chi mi na mòrbheanna*, depicting the beauty of Scotland. Sir James MacMillan arranged this song for *Finding Harmony*, motivated by his own desire to break down divisions that remain within Scotland.

The Protestant Reformation in Europe began in 1517, and chorales became the musical centrepiece of the early Protestant church. Martin Luther's *Ein feste Burg*, was seen to be a message of defiance, and the King's Singers have chosen J. S. Bach's version of the piece for *Finding Harmony*. This is paired with William Byrd's *Ne irascaris, Domine – Civitas sancti tui*, a work that was heard in secret Catholic services during this time.

Another particularly significant moment in history is the dismantling of the Apartheid regime in South Africa. The King's Singers have included an arrangement of *Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika* by composer Neo Muyanga, whose childhood in Cape Town was typified by Apartheid protests. The hymn was famously sung by Nelson Mandela's supporters as he left the courtroom following his first jail sentence in 1962, and is now the South African national Anthem. Another song they've included is *Avihlome*, which played an important role in motivating and uniting those fighting for their freedom in South Africa.

Composed in 1882, Mexico's *Cielito Lindo* has played a crucial role across generations and has become a celebratory anthem. The Washington Post says the song '*is a reminder of stability, of unity, of hope*'. For *Finding Harmony*, the group sing an arrangement by Jorge Cózatl.

S'Dremlen feygl, originally a poem written by Lea Rudnicka, remembers the experiences of some of the Jewish children who escaped execution from the Nazi-established ghetto of Vilna in Lithuania during World War II in 1943. The song has been arranged by Toby Young, a British composer whose grandmother was a holocaust survivor.

Focussing on women's rights, the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, British composer Rebecca Dale arranged Kesha's *Praying* and Mimi Fariña's *Bread and Roses*. The phrase 'bread for all, and roses, too!' was first seen on banners in American women's strikes in the early 1990s.

Dale says "*in the hundred years since it was first heard, huge strides have been made towards gender equality – but with women globally still paid just 63% of what men earn, underrepresented in positions of power and more likely to suffer from violence and poverty, Bread and Roses remains as relevant today as it ever was*".

Continuing in the twenty-first century, the group reflect on a more recent moment – the 2017

Manchester bombings. Richard Wilberforce, British singer and director, arranged Ariana Grande's *One Last Time*. As the director of a youth choir in Manchester, several of Richard's singers were at the Ariana Grande concert on the night of the bombings, making this a particularly personal song for him to arrange.

Aside from these significant moments in history, the group decided to start the album with Michel Legrand's *One Day*, arranged by Richard Rodney Bennett, providing a statement of hope about the future.

The album is released by Signum on 31 January 2020.

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For more information about the *Finding Harmony* album release please contact

Rebecca Johns at Premier

Rebecca.johns@premiercomms.com

020 7292 7336 | 07715 205 196

For more information about *Finding Harmony* concerts and projects, please contact

Kate Gedge kategedge@gmail.com | +44 7754 149577

Editors' Notes

Patrick Dunachie *countertenor*

Edward Button *countertenor*

Julian Gregory *tenor*

Christopher Bruerton *baritone*

Nick Ashby *baritone*

Jonathan Howard *bass*

The King's Singers were founded on 1 May 1968 by six choral scholars who had recently graduated from King's College Cambridge. Their vocal line-up was (by chance) two countertenors, a tenor, two baritones and a bass, and the group has never wavered from this formation since. With 2018 marking the 50th birthday of the group, The King's Singers have been celebrating their GOLD anniversary, which acknowledges their amazing musical heritage, as well as the bright future of vocal music in all its forms.

What really distinguished the group in its early years was its musical diversity. The King's Singers were a weekly fixture on prime-time television, celebrating popular music never usually touched by choral ensembles, and their unique British charm, combined with their precise musical craft, captured audiences' hearts the world over. The group has consistently been welcomed on the world's great stages throughout its history – from London's Royal Albert Hall to the Opera House in Sydney or New York's Carnegie Hall – as well as being ambassadors for musical excellence across the globe. Two Grammy® Awards, an Emmy® Award, and a place in

Gramophone magazine's inaugural Hall of Fame sit among the numerous accolades bestowed upon the group. This love of diversity has always fuelled The King's Singers' commitment to creating new music. An array of commissioned works by many of the great composers of our times – including Sir John Tavener, Toru Takemitsu, John Rutter, Luciano Berio, Nico Muhly, György Ligeti and Eric Whitacre – sits alongside countless bespoke arrangements in the group's extensive repertoire. The group is determined to spread the joy of ensemble singing, and leads workshops and residential courses all over the world each season – 2019 will take them from the World Youth & Children's Choir Festival in Hong Kong to their week-long Summer School within the beautiful surroundings of Cambridge University. The world may have changed a lot since the original King's Singers came together, but today's group is still charged by the same lifeblood – one that wants to radiate the joy singing brings every day, and that wants to give life to audiences with their virtuosity and vision for an exciting musical future.

Track Listing for The King's Singers *Finding Harmony*

Title	Composer	Arranger
One Day	Michel Legrand	Richard Rodney Bennett
If I can help somebody	Alma Amdrozso	Stacey V. Gibbs
S'Dremlen feygl	Leyb Yampolsky/Lea Rudnicka	Toby Young
Tsintskaro	Traditional	
Bread and roses	Mimi Fariña/James Oppenheim	Rebecca Dale
Heliseb väljadel	Urmas Sisask	
Mu isamaa on minu arm	Gustav Ernesaks	
Cielito lindo	Quirino Mendoza y Cortés	Jorge Cózatl
Ein feste Burg	Martin Luther	Johann Sebastian Bach
Ne irascaris, Domine – Civitas sancti tui	William Byrd	
Praying	Kesha	Rebecca Dale
Puirt a' bheul (Mouth Music)	Traditional	Daryl Runswick
O, chì, chì ma ni mòrbheanna	John Cameron	James MacMillan
Shen khar venakhi	Traditional/King Demetrius I of Georgia	
Ayihlome/Qula kwedini	Traditional	Neo Muyanga
Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika	Enoch Sontonga	Neo Muyanga
One last time	Ariana Grande	Richard Wilberforce
Strange fruit	Abel Meeropol	Stacey V. Gibbs
This little light of mine	Harry Dixon Loes	Stacey V. Gibbs