

The Connection Series: A Collaborative Concert Experience

The Connection Series is the vision of Dr. M. Nicole Davis, Associate Director of Choral Activities at The University of Arizona. Through this series, Davis hopes to foster an interdisciplinary relationship between choral music and non-musical bodies of knowledge. University Community Chorus (UCC) will premiere a newly commissioned choral and instrumental work each Spring to mark the occasion. Featured speakers from across the University of Arizona campus and the greater Tucson community will supplement the musical experience. The inaugural Connection Series Concert of 2024 is a collaboration between the University Community Chorus and the Alfie Norville Gem and Mineral Museum. In 2025, the chorus partnered with the Pima County Cooperative Extension Program.

This year, UCC is collaborating with Reid Park Zoo, highlighting conservation and preservation efforts, the passion of the education department, and the soon-coming “Pathway to Asia” Expansion. Reid Park Zoo is dedicated to connecting people with animals, inspiring the protection of wild animals and wild places. With accreditation by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), Reid Park Zoo prioritizes conservation and animal well-being at its core.

Reid Park Zoo’s Education team strives to ensure every guest leaves the Zoo having learned something new and exemplifies how the Zoo works to create a space that is welcoming and inclusive for all. Through daily animal presentations, camps, behind-the-scenes tours, outreach programs, and programs for children, the Education team reached 31,483 people, 22% of whom received Zoo education experiences for free due to grant funding or programs provided at no cost.

The Zoo is preparing for the opening of the 4.5-acre addition, Pathway to Asia, to connect our community to the breathtaking beauty of some of Asia’s most endangered and threatened animals. This addition was made possible by a one tenth of one percent sales tax approved by Tucson voters in 2017 along with private donors and is set to open late 2026.

University Community Chorus is a mixed choir of university faculty, staff, students, and members of the Greater Tucson community. The non-auditioned membership performs music of a variety of styles and traditions. They are overjoyed to present the world premiere of Patrick Chiu's newly commissioned work, *A Suite for the Journey Home*, in Crowder Hall on Thursday, April 23, 2026.

MEMORY

Wanting Memories

One of Dr. Ysaye Barnwell's most performed works, *Wanting Memories* is unaccompanied and utilizes vocal percussion typical of the music performed by her iconic group Sweet Honey in the Rock. The text speaks to how the relationships we hold throughout our journey can influence our perspective. By fondly remembering the impact they make on us, we use those memories to recognize the beauty in our lives today.

*I am sitting here wanting memories to teach me
To see the beauty in the world through my own eyes.*

*You used to rock me in the cradle of your arms,
You said you'd hold me till the pains of life were gone.
You said you'd comfort me in times like these and now I need you,
And now I need you, and you are gone.*

*And I am sitting here wanting memories to teach me
To see the beauty in the world through my own eyes.*

*I thought that you were gone, but now I know you're with me;
You are the voice that whispers all I need to hear.*

*I know a "please," a "thank you," and a smile will take me far,
I know that I am you and you are me and we are one,
I know that who I am is numbered in each grain of sand,
I know that I've been blessed again and over again.*

*And I am sitting here wanting memories to teach me
To see the beauty in the world through my own eyes.*

To Daffodils

To Daffodils is an English part-song by Agnes Zimmermann. A late-19th century German composer, she found much greater appreciation and success in England. Zimmermann employs much text painting of Robert Herrick's poetry, emphasizing life's brevity through the imagery of a flower's quick bloom and sudden decay, serving as a stark reminder to appreciate every day.

*Fair Daffodils, we weep to see
You haste away so soon;
As yet the early-rising sun
Has not attain'd his noon.
Stay, stay,
Until the hasting day
Has run
But to the even-song;
And, having pray'd together, we
Will go with you along.*

*We have short time to stay, as you,
We have as short a spring;
As quick a growth to meet decay,
As you, or anything.
We die
As your hours do, and dry
Away,
Like to the summer's rain;
Or as the pearls of morning's dew,
Ne'er to be found again.*

CONNECTION

Dos Oruguitas from Encanto

“Dos Oruguitas” from Disney’s *Encanto* reflects a relationship shaped by both closeness and separation. Written in a folk-like style, it tells of “Two Little Caterpillars” that emphasizes the idea that growth sometimes requires letting go, suggesting that allowing personal transformation is a necessary part of connection.

*Dos oruguitas enamoradas
Pasan sus noches y madrugadas
Llenas de hambre
Siguen andando y navegando un mundo
Que cambia y sigue cambiando
Navegando un mundo
Que cambia y sigue cambiando*

Two little caterpillars, in love and yearning
They spend their nights and early mornings
Filled with hunger
They continue walking and navigating a world
That changes and never stops changing
Navigating a world
That changes and never stops changing

*Dos oruguitas paran el viento
Mientras se abrazan con sentimiento
Siguen creciendo, no saben cuándo
Buscar algún rincón
El tiempo sigue cambiando
Inseparables son
El tiempo sigue cambiando*

Two little caterpillars stop in the wind
As they embrace with deep emotion
They keep growing, not knowing when
To seek out a secluded place
The times keep changing
They are inseparable
The times keep changing

*Ay oruguitas, no se aguanten más
Hay que crecer a parte y volver
Hacia adelante seguirás
Vienen milagros, vienen crisálidas
Hay que partir y construir su propio futuro*

Oh little caterpillars, don't hold back any longer
You have to grow up apart and reunite
You will keep moving forward
Miracles are coming, chrysalides are coming
You have to leave and build your own future

(Woh, oh, oh)

(Oh, oh)

*Dos oruguitas desorientadas
En dos capullos bien abrigadas
Con sueños nuevos*

Two little caterpillars, disoriented
In two well-wrapped cocoons
With new dreams

*Ya solo falta hacer lo necesario
En el mundo que sigue cambiando
Tumbando sus paredes
Ahí viene nuestro milagro*

*Ay mariposas, no se aguanten más
Hay que crecer a parte y volver
Hacia adelante seguirás
Ya son milagros, rompiendo crisálidas
Hay que volar, hay que encontrar
Su propio futuro*

Now all that's left is to do what's necessary

In the world that keeps changing
Tearing down its walls
Here comes our miracle

Oh butterflies, don't hold back any longer
You have to grow apart and reunite
You will keep moving forward
You are miracles, breaking out of chrysalides
You have to fly, you have to find
Your own future

Selections from Messiah

These selections from Handel's *Messiah* broaden the idea of connection between individuals to the collective. "How Beautiful Are the Feet of Them" highlights connection through presence and compassion, while the chorus "Their Sound Is Gone Out" uses dense imitation to depict a single message spreading across many voices.

38. Aria: How beautiful are the feet

How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace,
And bring glad tidings of good things.

39. Chorus: Their Sound is Gone Out

Their sound is gone out into all lands,
And their words unto the ends of the world.

PASSAGE

Si manu la'iti'iti

Si Manu La'iti'iti, a traditional Samoan nursery song arranged by Steven Rapana, captures the image of a small bird exploring its surroundings. Its gentle, cyclical melody suggests motion, growth, and the early stages of independence.

*Si manu la'iti'iti
Sa i luga e la'au
O lo'o pese ia te a'u*

*Pese i le Rosa
Sa i luga o le la'au*

Little Bird
Atop the tree
Sing a song to me

Sing to the rose
Atop the tree

Corner of the Sky

“Corner of the Sky” from *Pippin* will be sung by Our own Gabe Nunez. This song presents a more deliberate and introspective journey. The text articulates a desire for purpose and belonging, while the music expands in range and intensity to reflect an increasing sense of conviction.

Everything has its season

Everything has its time

Show me a reason

And I'll soon show you a rhyme

Cats sit on the window sill

Children sit in the snow

Why do I feel I don't fit in anywhere I go?

Rivers belong where they can ramble

Eagles belong where they can fly

I've got to be where my spirit can run free

Gotta find my corner

Of the sky

Every man has his daydreams

Every man has his goals

People like the way dreams have

Of sticking to the soul

Thunderclouds have their lightning

Nightingales have their song

Don't you see I want my life to be

Something more than long

Rivers belong where they can ramble

Eagles belong where they can fly

I've got to be where my spirit can run free

Gotta find my corner

Of the sky

So many men seem destined

To settle for something small

But I won't rest until I know I'll have it all

So don't ask where I'm going

Just listen when I've gone

And far away you'll hear me singing

Softly to the dawn

Rivers belong where they can ramble

Eagles belong where they can fly

I've got to be where my spirit can run free

Gotta find my corner

Of the sky

The sky

[HOME](#)

- WORLD PREMIERE -

A Suite for the Journey Home

I. The Shared Horizon

We search the same moon, as we whisper who we are.

We search the same stars, while stillness heals every scar.

The same sun begins to rise, to touch both your face and mine.

Warmth rests on our shoulders, wherever we stand, whatever we stand for, our spirits shine.

We breathe the same golden light, the music of breath in air,

We hear the same quiet dark, connections that we all share.

Different stories we must bear, different roads that led us there,

Yet the sky will never ask of the past's own how and where.

Different stories we must bear, different roads that led us there,

In this moment, all we share.

We share the same moon, together we found our way.

We share the same stars, as one we're here to stay.
Believe in the sun, believe in the sun,
The light of a brand new day.

The same moon.
The same stars.
The same sun.

II. The Silent Bridge

Each A to Z, a brand new stage,
We bridge the words and catch the sound.
Then turn the leaf and flip the page,
To greet the joy that walks around.

See how the home team wins the day,
We park the car in ballpark space.
Yet silent "be" stands in the way,
Which "debt" and "doubt" we all must face.

In coffee shops, "Friends" fit like glove,
A "Pivot!" through the sitcom air.
Unfold "benevolent" for "love,"
With "listen" as a "silent" prayer.
Hear Fievel's song begin to play,
A dream upon the ocean wave.
We never "give up" along the way,
But "give it up" for those so brave.

From Dvořák to "Wonderful World,"
String players must use a "bow" to play.
With banners and our hopes unfurled,
We stand and take a "bow" together today.

III. The Age of Understanding

The Age of Conflict is behind us.

The Age of Understanding grows,
As kindness in each spirit flows.
Respect for every neighbor's space
Is where our dignity finds place.

A time for Outreaching...
A time for Serving...
A time for Listening...

We make room to be silent so we can truly listen.
We make room for each other until our hearts are open.

*Entre los individuos como entre las naciones,
El respeto al derecho ajeno es la paz.*

"Among individuals, as among nations,
respect for the rights of others is peace."
Benito Juárez (1806-1872)

A time for Outreaching...
A time for Serving...
A time for Listening...
A time for Becoming

A song of home that we have heard,
In every word we learn to say.
With banners and our hopes unfurled,
We stand and take a bow
Today!

A Note from the Composer

A Suite for the Journey Home

This choral work explores the journey from shared human experience to a deep, intentional state of communal understanding. Structured in three movements, the piece utilizes celestial metaphors, linguistic play, and philosophical reflection to navigate the complexities of connection in a modern world.

The work was composed for the University Community Chorus at the University of Arizona as part of the invitational theme, *The Places We Carry*. I am deeply grateful to the ensemble and their director, Dr. M. Nicole Davis, for the invitation to write this piece. Exploring a topic that carries such profound meaning for me and my family has been a true honor.

Movement I: The Shared Horizon

The opening movement establishes a universal foundation, grounding the listener in the physical realities we all inhabit. It begins with the collective observation of the “same moon,” “same stars,” and “same sun.” This movement suggests that despite our “different stories” and the “different roads” that lead to the present, the natural world offers a neutral space for healing and reflection.

The music is inspired by the folk song “O Danny Boy,” reflecting its themes of separation from loved ones. This melodic influence underscores the “music of breath in air” and “connections that we all share,” creating a sense of unity that precedes individual identity.

Movement II: The Silent Bridge

The second movement explores the nuances of the English language, illustrating how a single word can shift meaning entirely based on its context. The movement highlights how common terms like “park” and “bow” function differently as verbs and nouns, or how the addition of a single word transforms “give up” (to quit) into “give it up” (to applaud). The lyrics also delve into the architecture of words themselves, noting that “silent” is an anagram for “listen”—suggesting a profound relationship between the two—and that the word “love” is hidden within the heart of “benevolent.”

These linguistic layers are deeply connected to the immigrant experience of navigating a new home. While attending a baseball game is a quintessential American experience, the presence of “debt” and “doubt” within the text suggests the financial and emotional challenges often faced by those navigating a new life. A double pun is utilized here: the silent “b” in these words serves as a metaphor for the internal struggle of simply trying to “be” part of a new country.

Drawing on cultural touchstones such as *An American Tail*, Dvořák’s *New World Symphony*, and “What a Wonderful World,” the movement illustrates the vast crossing of cultural oceans. Inspired by the hopeful spirit of a Disney song, the melody was composed with the legendary Lea Salonga in mind—famed for her roles in *Aladdin* and *Mulan*—to represent the universal dream of belonging. The movement ultimately concludes with an insistent emphasis on the word “today,” serving as a poignant reminder that we must use our collective voices in the present moment.

Movement III: The Age of Understanding

The final movement serves as a resolution, transitioning from an “Age of Conflict” into a dedicated “Age of Understanding.” While the previous movements established historical and linguistic foundations, this movement incorporates the rhythmic energy of modern pop music to ground the message in our daily lives. This contemporary feel reflects the immediate, lived experience of seeking dignity and peace in the present moment.

The lyrics draw upon the profound words of Benito Juárez: “*Entre los individuos, como entre las naciones, el respeto al derecho ajeno es la paz*” (Among individuals, as among nations, respect for the rights of others is

peace). This movement emphasizes that true dignity is found in “respect for every neighbor’s space” and that open hearts are only possible when we “make room to be silent so we can truly listen.” Through a process of “Outreaching” and “Serving,” we discover our own identity and become who we were meant to be.

As the work reaches its conclusion, the music returns to melodic materials from the previous movements, serving as a reminder that the journey toward understanding is built upon the lessons and connections we have carried with us from the very beginning.

Patrick Chiu, Composer

Choral artist Patrick Chiu gracefully navigates the multifaceted realms of conducting, education, stage direction, and composition. Influenced by his diverse global experiences, Patrick deeply values the power of artistic collaboration across cultures, believing it fosters a more harmonious world.

Patrick's artistic journey began with a liberal arts education and formal musical training at Chung Chi College in his native Hong Kong, followed by advanced studies under esteemed professors of the Vienna Konservatorium. He furthered his expertise with a Master's in Choral Conducting from the University of Cincinnati, College-Conservatory of Music, and continued his academic pursuit with a Master's in Opera Stage Directing and a PhD in Music Education from Florida State University. In 2012, Patrick was awarded a conducting fellowship by the Oregon Bach Festival, supported by the Herbert von Karajan Musikpreis of the Festspielhauses Baden-Baden.



His collaborations with distinguished maestros such as Helmuth Rilling, Harry Christophers, Wolfgang Katschner, and Matthew Halls have enabled Patrick to infuse his distinctive artistic vision into the international arts scene. His innovative choral-physical theatre productions and award-winning compositions have made a notable impact on the global music and theatre landscape.

For over two decades, Patrick has balanced a busy global performing schedule with a commitment to nurturing the next generation of musicians. Currently, he serves as the Director of Choral and Vocal Activities at Lycoming College, where he was awarded the prestigious Makisu Award in 2024 for his outstanding service to the College community. Additionally, he is the Artistic Director of the New Jersey Choral Society.

Reid Park Zoo Team

Nancy J. Kluge, President and CEO for Reid Park Zoological Society



Nancy Kluge leads Reid Park Zoological Society, where she has served since 2009. As President and CEO, Nancy guides Reid Park Zoo in its mission to ‘connect people with animals, inspiring the protection of wild animals and wild places’. The City of Tucson owned Reid Park Zoo is the largest attended cultural attraction in southern Arizona with about 600,000 guests annually. She is committed to the Tucson community, conservation and STEM education. Nancy serves on the board of Visit Tucson, is a member of the Audit and Ethics committee for United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona, and is a member of Tucson Airport Authority. She is also a member of Southern Arizona Cultural Leaders Consortium, Women Leaders of Southern Arizona, Charter 100, and serves as a deacon for Christ Presbyterian Church. As an University of Arizona graduate who grew up in Tucson, she was honored as one of Biz Tucson’s Women Leading the Region in 2024, received an honorary membership in Beta Gamma Sigma by the Eller College at the University of Arizona and was honored with a Community Service Award by the League of United Latin American Citizens.

Brittany Caldwell,

Senior Education Coordinator and Ambassador Animal Liaison



Brittany was born and raised in beautiful Big Bear, California, and fell in love with Tucson during visits on road trips with her parents. The University of Arizona was high on her list of desired colleges, and once she learned there was a major that revolved around horses, there was no looking back. She was privileged to spend a great deal of time at the Campus Farm riding, welcoming babies into the world and bottle feeding the ones that needed a little extra help, and training foals in preparation for their future careers as high-performing athletes. She graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Equine Science and a minor in Chemistry in 2012, and shortly after graduating began an

internship at Reid Park Zoo.

Working for some incredible Keepers helped reignite a desire to be in a career dedicated to the care and conservation of endangered species. In January of 2013 she was hired as an Apprentice Keeper at the Zoo; for a little over half the year, she was responsible for the daily care of the Ambassador animals and flamingo flock. At the beginning of 2014, she was asked to continue as an Apprentice for the Education Department and earned a permanent position a few months later. Being an Educator has allowed her to serve as a voice for animals and facilitate connections between guests and the natural world in unique ways. To do so working alongside incredible human and animal coworkers every day is truly a gift.

Abraham Gibson, assistant conductor



Abraham Gibson (he/him) is a first-year DMA student at the University of Arizona and is the Assistant Conductor of the University Community Chorus. He is also serving as Chancel Choir Director at St. Mark's United Methodist Church.

Abraham previously served as adjunct faculty at Kent State University and Music Director at Church of the Lakes in North Canton, OH. In addition, he was Assistant Director of the Youngstown Cantorum in Youngstown, OH.

Abraham currently studies conducting with Dr. M. Nicole Davis and Dr. Elizabeth Schauer. He holds a Bachelor of Music degree in Vocal Performance and Certificate of Sacred Music from Seton Hill University, where he studied with mentor Dr. Mark A. Boyle. He also completed his Master of Music in Choral Conducting at Youngstown State University,

where he studied conducting with Dr. Hae-Jong Lee and voice with Dr. Misook Yun.

James Higgs, conductor



James Higgs (he/him) is an Instructor of Choral Conducting at the University of Arizona where he directs Collegium Musicum, Arizona Baroque, and teaches graduate conducting students. He is co-director of the University of Arizona Choral Literature Intensive, a workshop dedicated to promoting the study and performance of works by historically excluded composers and populations. James's research is focused on the works of Marianna Martines, 18th century Viennese masses, and the critical editing of 18th century manuscripts. He has presented on Martines and his critical edition of Martines's Terza messa at regional and national conferences of the American Choral Directors Association, was interviewed about his research by Arizona Public Media on the Extempore series, and authored the chapter on Martines for the book *Choral Repertoire by Women Composers* (GIA Publications, 2025). His article on Martines's Terza messa was recently accepted for publication in the *Choral Journal*. Before joining the faculty at the University of Arizona, James served as Associate Faculty in Music at Cochise College.

James is passionate about community engagement, working with diverse populations of singers, and building community by providing inclusive musical experiences. James has over ten years of experience teaching in nonprofit community music schools in Los Angeles and Tucson. He is a board member of the Arizona Choral Arts Association where he assists in planning the annual community-sing events like Tucson Big Sing and One Voice Choral Festival. James is also the Artistic Director of Desert Voices, a nonprofit 115 member mixed chorus committed to promoting the ongoing and positive LGBTQIA+ presence in southern Arizona. He is also Director of Music at Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, where he has established a free community concert series that has featured members of the Tucson Symphony Orchestra, University of Arizona artist faculty, and international artists.

James holds a D.M.A. in choral conducting from the University of Arizona, an M.M. in Keyboard Collaborative Arts from The University of Southern California and a B.M. in Piano Performance from Chapman University.

M. Nicole Davis, artistic director

M. Nicole Davis, Ph.D. (she/hers) is Assistant Professor of Music, Choral Conducting, and Choral Music Education and Associate Director of Choral Activities at the University of Arizona. She conducts University Singers and University Community Chorus and teaches undergraduate and graduate students in conducting and choral music education. Her work centers on building musically excellent, collaborative choral communities that connect artistic practice with public learning.

Davis is the founding director of *The Connection Series*, an interdisciplinary concert initiative that pairs commissioned choral works with community partnerships. This project remains one of the most rewarding parts of her work each year.



As a conductor and clinician, Davis works regularly with choirs and educators across Arizona. This year she served as guest conductor for the Greater Phoenix Honor Choir and Sahuarita Choir Day, led a coaching session for Noteriet Vocal A Cappella, and presented professional development sessions for Amphitheater Unified School District music educators.

She extends sincere thanks to Dr. James Higgs and Abraham Gibson, assistant conductor of University Community Chorus, for their leadership and artistry in guiding this concert to completion.

Davis is co-founder of the UA Summer Music Camp, returning June 22 to 26, 2026. Registration is open through June 22. Learn more at <https://summercamp.music.arizona.edu/>.