

Chorus pro Musica takes flight at 70 Celebrates 70th anniversary season and the Year of the Bird with the world premiere of CpM commission ‘Audubon,’ a multimedia oratorio about John James Audubon

BOSTON | In celebration of [Chorus pro Musica](#)’s 70th anniversary season, the chorus, under the direction of Music Director [Jamie Kirsch](#), has commissioned and will perform “**Audubon**,” a work by [James Kallembach](#) celebrating the works and legacy of artist, naturalist, woodsman, showman and nature writer **John James Audubon**, premiering on November 9, 2018, at Jordan Hall in Boston. This multimedia performance combines chorus, chamber orchestra and baritone soloist **Sumner Thompson** with visual projections of Audubon’s art by videographer **Kathy Wittman** of **Ball Square Films**. The work is presented in partnership with [Mass Audubon](#), an independent organization and the first Audubon Society established in the United States in 1896.

The Origin

Inspired by a PBS documentary in 2011, Kallembach approached long-time friend and past collaborator Kirsch to bring a work on Audubon to life. “Audubon came to me when I saw a PBS documentary shortly after my son was born in 2011. I didn’t know he was this larger-than-life character. I immediately thought he would make a great subject for a comic opera,” said Kallembach.

“I discussed this with Jamie (Kirsch). He wanted an oratorio, of course, not an opera, so I looked for texts and found that Audubon was a vivid, expressive and prolific writer. I was so taken by his journals and writings from his publications I decided to base the whole piece on that — his writings of birds and other writings linked to his life events. That is the story of Audubon: his own migration. He leaves behind everything he loves to pursue the monumental task of writing and illustrating his epic ‘Birds of America’ and then returns home.”

The completion and premiere of the work has come at an opportune time, as 2018 marks the centennial of the [Migratory Bird Treaty Act](#), the most powerful and important bird-protection law ever passed. In honor of this milestone, nature lovers around the world have joined forces to celebrate the **Year of the Bird** and renew their commitment to protecting birds today and for generations to come.

About ‘Audubon’

“Audubon” delivers music that evokes the romantic visions of the U.S. frontier inspired by and embodied in Audubon’s depictions of birds from his various published works. Wittman worked closely with Kallembach to produce visuals synced to the music and themes of the piece that will be projected live at the performance.

Audubon’s “Birds of America” has been celebrated throughout the world since it first appeared over 150 years ago. His writings, in published accounts and in his journals and letters, have enjoyed a resurgence of popularity owing not only to the valuable glimpses of a disappearing American frontier, but also his vivid and gripping storytelling. He wove anecdotal evidence with lavish descriptions laced with tales that range from the adventurous to the comical to the downright doubtful tall tale.

Underappreciated by the scientific community in a then young United States, he risked all and sailed to Britain. There he presented himself to potential advocates, subscribers and printers much as he was: the exotic image of the American explorer, complete with animal-hide coat, trusty rifle and long hair kept in place with bear grease. It was this “American exoticism” that eventually attracted enough attention to enable the printing of his masterwork. His showmanship and entrepreneurial zeal allow us to enjoy his work today, and those traits inspired CpM’s music director to take on such a project.

“This is CpM’s second collaboration with James (Kallembach). He and I go back to the early 2000s, when we were in the same doctoral program at Indiana University. We kept in touch in the years that passed, and in 2014 CpM commissioned him to write a piece called “The Tryal and Examination of Old Father Christmas” for our annual Candlelight Christmas at Old South. The piece was originally supposed to be 8-10 minutes, ultimately it was almost twice as long because James had an amazing idea and ran with it. It included text from an old English pamphlet of the same name and incorporated psalms from the Bay Psalm Book, which Old South owns copies of, so he also connected it to the church, which was amazing. We have been looking for another opportunity to collaborate again, and we could not be more excited to be able to present this work on such an inspiring American figure.”

Chorus pro Musica’s 2018-19 Season

CpM’s season will continue with their annual holiday celebration, Candlelight Christmas at Old South, on December 14, and Brahms Requiem and works by Purcell and others on March 16 at First Baptist Church, Newton Centre. The season concludes with “Eternity,” featuring Frank Martin’s “Mass for Double Choir” and Bach’s “Lobet den Herrn,” May 31 at Distler Hall, Tufts University, Medford. Tickets and information for all concerts are available at www.ChorusproMusica.org.

About Chorus pro Musica

CpM has built a reputation as one of the great choruses of New England, known for innovative programming and high-quality performances. The Chorus, now in its 70th season, has collaborated with such famed organizations as the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Boston Philharmonic, the Boston Ballet and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. In recent years, the Chorus has sung at Symphony Hall, Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center.

The Chorus consists of more than 100 highly talented musicians selected by audition. Repertoire consists of choral music from the Renaissance to the present, with emphasis on new and rarely performed choral music, as well as major works in collaboration with other music organizations.

Founded in 1949 by the late Alfred Nash Patterson, the Chorus has become one of the most influential forces in choral music in New England, earning two Grammy Awards along the way.

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Chorus *pro Musica*

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