Exploring American Folksong:
New Arrangements for Old Songs
Leaders: Cathy Fink and Marcy Marxer
www.cathymarcy.com
info@cathymarcy.com

Description

Over 30 years of researching, recording and performing roots and traditional folk music deeply informs the new arrangements of folks songs created by Cathy Fink & Marcy Marxer. They have spent time with their musical mentors from Ola Belle Reed to Mike and Pete Seeger and from Patsy Montana to Jean Ritchie. They were invited to compose music to lyrics by Woody Guthrie for the song "Howdy Little Newly Come". They have won banjo contests, songwriting contests, GRAMMY® Awards and the adoration of three generations of fans. They have recently been tapped by the Berklee College of Music's Education and American Roots Departments for clinics and workshops.

In their dedication to finding ways to keep American Folk Music alive and well in the ongoing repertoire of families, they have created delightful, challenging and yet accessible arrangements of songs that go beyond a folk "vibe" and dig into the true harmonic structures and musical detail of songs suitable for children's chorus.

Brief Bio

TWO-TIME GRAMMY® Award Winners, Cathy Fink & Marcy Marxer are a formidable powerhouse of sound, with a repertoire of traditional and contemporary folk, old-time country and swing music. Their superb harmonies are backed by instrumental virtuosity on the acoustic & electric guitar, five-string banjo, mandolin, cello banjo, ukulele, percussion and many other instruments. The duo has been featured on NPR, the Today Show, CBS Early Show and numerous SiriusXM radio shows. In their 25+ years performing together, the Washington Area Music Association has recognized Cathy & Marcy with over 50 WAMMY Awards for folk, bluegrass and children’s music.

The duo's children's and family recordings have featured the sounds of stellar children's choruses who scat sing, yodel and sing in beautiful harmonies, encouraging children at home to join right in.

In this session, we will explore four arrangements in detail:

I RIDE AN OLD PAINT - traditional
STYLE- COWBOY SONG with YODEL

This song has a twisted journey, possibly from a black cowboy (Charlie Willis) to a white cowboy (Jess Morris) to Alan Lomax, folklorist and historian. It's been a popular song sung by Burl Ives, the Almanac Singers (with Pete Seeger).
The yodel was not an original part of this song. Here we merged an old cowboy song with the three-part harmony yodeling of the "Songs of the Pioneers", a cowboy group including Roy Rogers and Bob Nolan, known for their multi-part harmony singing and yodeling. That sound became popular in old western movies. The true old west met Hollywood in this arrangement.

The song is learned by young children in the U.S. and is still sung by all ages as a folk song. We wanted to adapt a cowboy song in ¾ time and attempt a three-part yodel with the chorus.

**THE CUCKOO - traditional  
STYLE- APPALACHIAN OLD-TIME**

One of many traditional English folk songs that traveled across the pond, this arrangement of The Cuckoo was influenced by many Southern Appalachian versions, including that of Tom Clarence Ashley, recorded in 1927 and again 1953.

The vocal parts here are based on the sound of the cuckoo bird as imitated by Ashley's old clawhammer banjo style.

**SONG- OH! SUSANNA! - by Stephen Foster  
STYLE- OLD TIME-STRINGBAND**

Stephen Foster attempted to compose popular songs and Oh! Susanna! Was first published February 25, 1848 as a comedy song. His songs are all now in the public domain and have stood the test of time, while some, including this song, have had lyrical updates to preserve the songs.

In this arrangement, we have added a 2nd chorus to emulate the structure of a square dance, played by banjo, fiddle and guitar. The verse is 2 A parts, the chorus is 2 B parts. The vocal arrangement goal was to make each verse a little different and to build on the choruses.

Though many people grow up with this song, few hear all four verses. It provides an opportunity to study one of Foster's most popular pieces and introduce students to his repertoire.

**PSALM OF LIFE - Poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow  
Arr. Cathy Fink & Marcy Marxer**

Enjoy learning this arrangement "by ear". That is how it was taught to the Children's Chorus of Washington.