

FORBES CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS  
**JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY®**

*presents*

# **Septura Brass Septet**

*The Special Relationship  
The Contrasting Sounds of  
Britain and America*

*featuring*

Aaron Akugbo, *trumpet*  
Simon Cox, *trumpet*  
James Fountain, *trumpet*  
Matthew Gee, *trombone*  
Matthew Knight, *trombone*  
Simon Minshall, *trombone*  
Peter Smith, *tuba*

Wednesday, October 26, 2022, 8 pm  
Concert Hall

There will be one 10-minute intermission.

## Program

God is Gone Up Gerald Finzi (1901–1956)  
arr. Matthew Knight

Serenade Edward Elgar (1857–1934)  
arr. Matthew Knight  
I. Allegro piacevole  
II. Larghetto  
III. Allegretto

Time Out of Joint Pete Walton  
I. Antic Disposition  
II. When Sorrows Come  
III. All that Lives

### 10-Minute Intermission

Preludes George Gershwin (1898–1937)  
arr. Matthew Knight  
I. Allegro  
II. Andante  
III. Allegro

Appalachian Spring Aaron Copland (1900–1990)  
arr. Simon Cox and Matthew Knight

SEASON SPONSOR

The logo features a stylized 'kM' in a bold, sans-serif font, followed by the text 'kathyMoran' in a smaller font, and 'WEALTH GROUP' in a very small font below it.

The 2022-2023 Masterpiece Season is sponsored  
by Kathy Moran Wealth Group.

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## About Septura Brass Septet

Septura brings together London's leading players to redefine brass chamber music through the uniquely expressive sound of the brass septet.

By creating a canon of transcriptions, arrangements and new commissions for this brand new classical configuration, Septura aims to recast the brass ensemble as a serious artistic medium.

Currently Ensemble in Residence at the Royal Academy of Music, London, the group is recording a series of 10 discs for Naxos Records, each focused on a particular period, genre and set of composers, creating a 'counter-factual history' of brass chamber music.

The first six discs have received critical acclaim, described variously as "irresistible" (Fiona Maddocks, *The Observer*), "dazzlingly polished" (Anna Picard, *BBC Music Magazine*) and "brass playing at its most exalted" (Robert Markow, *Fanfare*). In addition, *Christmas with Septura* was released in 2016, and Septura's unique version of Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* narrated by Sir Derek Jacobi was released in 2019.

Weaving this ever-increasing repertoire into captivating live events, Septura is gaining a reputation for engaging audiences with innovative and imaginative programming. Recent and forthcoming highlights include performances in New Zealand, Japan, Germany, and the USA, and concerts at London's prestigious Wigmore Hall.

Septura's members are the leading players of the new generation of British brass musicians, holding principal positions in the London Symphony, Royal Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, Philharmonia, City of Birmingham Symphony, Basel Symphony and Aurora orchestras.

## Program Notes

The Twentieth Century saw the development of a deep political partnership between the United Kingdom and the United States. But whilst our two nations share much common ground—not least an affinity for brass instruments—they also each possess very different cultural backgrounds, played out in their unique musical styles. Septura explores this contrast through the works of four early twentieth-century composers who defined Britain and America in music: Finzi, Elgar, Copland and Gershwin, all brought to life through transcriptions for brass septet.

We begin with the characteristically “English” sound of Gerald **Finzi**, and a genre that particularly flourished in early Twentieth Century: English choral music. Finzi wrote a number of sacred choral works, despite being an agnostic of Jewish descent, and one of his most popular is the rousing anthem *God is Gone Up with a Triumphant Shout*. This elated celebration of the Ascension is ripe for brass transcription: Finzi’s fanfare-like organ opening clearly reflects the “sounding trumpet melodies” of Edward Taylor’s text. The septet plays both organ and choir roles—in the gentler and more transparent middle section (“Methinks I see Heaven’s sparkling courtiers fly”) this distinction is made clear, with the melodic voices of the choir accompanied by trickling cup-muted organ lines. The full might of the brass septet then returns for the emphatic reprise of the opening material.

**Elgar** began his musical career as a professional violinist, and so it is no surprise that his works for strings—the violin and cello concertos, the *Introduction and Allegro*, and of course the *Serenade*—form such a central part of his output. However, in his mid-forties he also took up the trombone. This came a little less naturally to him, as recalled by his close friend Dora Penny (the subject of Variation X of the *Enigma Variations*): “He didn’t do very well and often played a note higher or lower than the one he wanted, and he swore every time that happened.” Even so, perhaps this insider knowledge of brass instruments (and the difficulties they sometimes present) contributed to Elgar’s very idiomatic writing, demonstrated so clearly in the symphonies, *Enigma*, and the *Severn Suite* (written for the National Brass Band Championship in 1930). And given his affection for brass, he might have approved of our appropriation for brass septet of his favorite work, the *Serenade*, despite describing it as “really stringy in effect.” Composed in 1892 as a gift for his wife to mark their third wedding anniversary, the *Serenade* was one of Elgar’s earliest successful works—predating *Enigma*, the piece that really established him as the foremost British composer since Purcell, by six years. Nevertheless, it contains all the hallmarks of Elgar’s mature style, particularly in the elegiac slow movement, with its rising and falling lines giving way to an archetypal Elgarian tune of great

## Program Notes (cont'd)

emotional intensity. The outer movements are, by contrast, imbued with a youthful charm. The gently lilting first movement develops from uncertain shyness to youthful confidence, with the E minor key signature adding a hint of darkness and nostalgia. Reminders of the first movement's theme return in the finale, but any shadows are banished by the movement's cheerful nature, in a carefree E major.

Of course one of the principal bonds between Britain and America is a shared language, and Pete **Walton's** 2020 piece *Time Out of Joint* is inspired by the greatest British wordsmith, Shakespeare. Walton writes:

My main focus in *Time Out of Joint, Sketches From Hamlet*, was to give a feeling of the edginess that for me, is woven into the fabric of Shakespeare's extraordinary play. Written in 2020 during the global pandemic, the work is imbued with the uneasy feelings from that strange time. The first movement is mainly concerned with Hamlet (a four note ascending whole tone scale), his relationship with Claudius (usually a slyly scheming trill or a descending fifth), and how that relates to Polonius, Gertrude and Ophelia (a three quaver major third motif). The second movement brings to the fore Ophelia's theme, a sometimes gentle, sometimes nervous addition or juxtaposition to Hamlet's theme. The third movement has plenty of bold, aggressive posturing but ultimately ends in desolation, the final trumpet note fading away to nothing.

In the second half of our program, we turn to the music of America, starting with George **Gershwin's** *Piano Preludes*. Gershwin was already extremely well-known (thanks to the success two years previously of *Rhapsody in Blue*) when he wrote the preludes in 1926. Like Debussy, he intended to write 24 preludes, but in the end only three were published. Unlike Debussy's these are not overtly programmatic, and they are in a very different style: the synergy of classical forms with the harmonic and rhythmic hallmarks of jazz results in Gershwin's particularly unique musical voice. The first prelude opens with a bluesy call-and-response, which is then elaborated in an energetic movement in ternary form, dominated by feisty Brazilian *baião* rhythms. The second is more sedate—Gershwin called it “a sort of blues lullaby.” Its trudging ostinato gives way to a more upbeat middle section—in our version a tuba solo—before the opening material returns. The *agitato* finale comes as a bit of a shock, with its dramatic E-flat minor introduction. Gershwin referred to this prelude as “Spanish,” perhaps again because of the rhythmic drive. The main theme adopts call-and-response pairs of phrases, battling between minor and major harmonies, with major only triumphing in the piece's last gasp flourish.

## Program Notes (cont'd)

When, in 1943, Aaron **Copland** agreed to write the music for a new ballet choreographed by Martha Graham, his only instruction was: “This is a legend of American living.” The music for *Appalachian Spring* was largely composed (under the working title of “Ballet for Martha”) before the scenario was written; and yet audiences so often commented that it vividly conjured the Appalachians that Copland himself remarked, “I have even begun to see the Appalachians myself a bit.” The music—with its triadic harmonies and open melodies so suited to the nature of brass instruments—does seem to evoke a quintessentially American sound that perfectly fits the ballet’s Pennsylvania setting. The ballet premiered in 1944, and the following year it was arranged as a suite for 13 instruments; ours is an arrangement of this version.

The piece is divided into eight sections, with programmatic indications from the composer. The timeless “Introduction of the characters, one by one, in a suffused light” calls for a soft warm sound, with the whole septet using a combination of straight and cup mutes, and berets covering the bells. The ensuing Allegro (“A sentiment both elated and religious gives the keynote to this scene”) is an abrupt burst of bright, constant rhythmic movement that gives way to a broad and hopeful American theme. The “Duo for the Bride and her Intended—scene of tenderness and passion” requires a range of different colors for a raft of emotions ranging from nervousness to passionate intensity. Playful and sometimes boisterous, the folk-influenced “Revivalist and his flock” comes next, with “suggestions of square dances and country fiddlers.” The “Solo dance of the Bride” is frenetic and angular, with a huge span from the lowest tuba to the highest trumpet conveying the “extremes of joy and fear and wonder.” As the bride tires the music relaxes and the still, calm sounds of the opening return. The “Scenes of daily activity for the Bride and her Farmer husband” are made up of five variations on a Shaker theme called “Simple Gifts”: starting in a solo trumpet, the theme soon cascades through the group alongside a bustling accompaniment, before appearing in ever more vigorous and emphatic versions. Finally in the prayerful Coda “The Bride takes her place among her neighbors”—warm cup-muted trombones intone a solemn chorale before the music of the opening brings the piece to tranquil close; the couple are “quiet and strong in their new house.”

# Upcoming Events

## NOVEMBER

- JMU Percussion Ensemble Nov. 1
- Rent* Nov. 1–5  
Book, Music and Lyrics by Jonathan Larson  
Musical Arrangements: Steve Skinner  
Original Concept/Additional Lyrics: Billy Aronson  
Music Supervision and Additional Arrangements: Tim Weil  
Dramaturg: Lynn Thomson
- Fall Student Dance Concert Nov. 10–12
- The Rake's Progress* Nov. 11–13  
Featuring the JMU Opera Theater  
By Igor Stravinsky
- Songstress Sojourn* Nov. 18  
A Showcase of Local Singer-Songwriters  
In Partnership with WMRA Radio

## DECEMBER

- JMU Brass Band Dec. 1
- JMU Jazz Ensemble and Jazz Band Dec. 6
- JMU Treble Chamber Choir and University Choruses Dec. 7
- Dancescapes Dec. 9–11  
Featuring JMU's Virginia Repertory Dance Company
- Holidayfest: Winter Daydreams* Dec. 10–11

## JANUARY

- AND SO WE WALKED:* Jan. 20–21  
*An Artist's Journey Along the Trail of Tears*  
Written & Performed by DeLanna Stud
- Movie Musical Magic* Jan. 28  
A Musical Theatre Revue

For tickets and further information, visit [www.jmuforbescenter.com](http://www.jmuforbescenter.com)  
or call the Forbes Center Box Office at (540) 568-7000.

## Upcoming Events (cont'd)

### FEBRUARY

<i>Opera Spotlight: Musical Gems</i>	Feb. 8–9
Awadagin Pratt	Feb. 18
<i>Chicago</i>	Feb. 28–Mar. 5
Book by Fred Ebb & Bob Fosse	
Music by John Kander	
Lyrics by Fred Ebb	
Based on the play by Maureen Dallas Watkins	
Script adaptation by David Thompson	

### MARCH

<i>Meeting Mozart</i>	Mar. 5
Produced by CDP Theatre Producers	
JMU Symphonic Band	Mar. 7
Dublin Irish Dance	Mar. 9–10
<i>Wings: A Celtic Dance Celebration</i>	
<i>Makin' Cake</i>	Mar. 21
Written and Performed by Dasha Kelly Hamilton	

For tickets and further information, visit [www.jmuforbescenter.com](http://www.jmuforbescenter.com) or call the Forbes Center Box Office at (540) 568-7000.

## Sparks Endowed Scholarship Fund

Dr. George Sparks served as the inaugural dean of JMU's College of Visual and Performing Arts (CVPA) from 2008–2020. Dr. Sparks was renowned for his commitment to students, faculty and staff, and worked tirelessly to advance the arts at JMU and beyond. The CVPA Scholarship Endowment was renamed in honor of Dr. Sparks and represents our ongoing commitment to creating possibilities for the next generation of artists who have the talent but not the means to pursue the excellent education and training in the CVPA.

Help to continue Dr. Spark's legacy of support and generosity by donating to the Dr. George E. Sparks CVPA Scholarship Endowment. To give online, visit: <https://j.mu/sparks>