



University of North Texas
College of Music

Ensemble Concert | Friday, April 11, 2025 | 8:00 p.m. | Paul Voertman Concert Hall

Jazz Singers
Jennifer Barnes, director

with special guests

Kings Return

Vaughn Faison, tenor | Gabe Kunda, bass
JE McKissic, tenor | Jamall Williams, baritone

- Eleanor Rigby (1966) Paul McCartney
(b. 1942)
arr. Reagan Garza
- Confirmation (1945) Charlie Parker
(1920–1955)
arr. Kerry Marsh
- The Thrill Is Gone (1931) Ray Henderson (1896–1970),
Lew Brown (1893–1958)
arr. Liz Townsend
- I Can't Give You Anything But Love (1928) Jimmy McHugh (1894–1969),
Dorothy Fields (1904–1974)
arr. Anthony Strong
adap. Jennifer Barnes

Selections performed by Kings Return to be announced from the stage

Program six hundred nine of the 2024–2025 season
Photography and videography are prohibited

God Speed (2016) Frank Ocean
(b. 1987)
arr. Amanda Taylor

Blue Skies (1926) Irving Berlin
(1888–1989)
arr. Jared Gravely
instr. arr. Jennifer Barnes
with special guest Rosana Eckert

-INTERMISSION-

Down With Love (1937)..... E. Y. Harburg (1896–1981),
Harold Arlen (1905–1986)
arr. Elijah Thiessen

Common Ground (2024)..... MaryAnne Muglia
(b. 1996)

Sticology (2013)..... Phillip K. Jones
(n.d.)
arr. Dan Wilson
adap. Jennifer Barnes

Superhero (2023)..... Emily Braden
(b. 2002)
adap. Lily Alter

Selections performed by Kings Return to be announced from the stage

Stardust (1927).....Hoagy Carmichael (1899–1981),
Mitchell Parish (1900–1993)
arr. Darmon Meader

Shining Star (1975).....Maurice White (1941–2016),
Larry Dunn (b. 1953),
Philip Bailey (b. 1951)
arr. James Rose
instr. adap. Jennifer Barnes

Biographies

Jennifer Barnes is the Director of Vocal Jazz at UNT, in addition to being a highly sought-after vocalist, educator, clinician and arranger throughout the U.S. and Canada. She has directed award-winning Vocal Jazz Ensembles at eight universities, won a 2016 "Jazz Education Achievement Award" from DownBeat magazine, has served as a guest conductor for District and All-State Music Festivals in 16 states, and her vocal arrangements are published by Sheet Music Plus, Anchor Music, UNC Jazz Press, and at her own website (JenniferBarnesMusic.com). In addition to her teaching activities, Jennifer is an active performing and studio vocalist, including her roles as alto vocalist, composer and arranger for the professional vocal ensemble Vertical Voices, solo and group vocals for television shows, video games and films including "World of Warcraft", "Wall-E", "Enchanted", "Ice Age (2, 3 & 4)" and "Glee". Ms. Barnes is a member of the American Society of Composers, Arrangers and Publishers, Screen Actors Guild, and the Jazz Education Network. She earned the Master of Music degree in Studio Music and Jazz Performance from the University of Miami (FL) and the Bachelor of Music degree in Piano Performance from Western Michigan University.

For more information, visit jazz.unt.edu and follow "UNT Vocal Jazz" on Facebook and Instagram. You may also write to Jennifer.Barnes@unt.edu and request to be added to the email list that will help make sure you receive information about performances and other vocal jazz events.

Dynamic and soothing four-piece vocal group **Kings Return** take pride in crafting a diverse yet supremely cohesive a cappella sound: The blend of their unique vocal timbres is so rich and so smooth that, at times, it sounds more like a full choir than a mere four men. Discovered after posting a series of bare-bones stairwell performances that went viral, their music is a balm to the soul, laced with expansive harmonies that flex the agility and effortless range of their vocal talent.

Their sound has earned comparisons to iconic acts like Take 6 and Boyz II Men. But what sets Kings Return apart is their seamless integration of a wide range of genres and styles. Drawn to the flexibility of a cappella music, they take full advantage of the genre-mixing aspects of the tradition. Their brand of R&B is entwined with free moments of jazz, soulful bursts of gospel, and bright touches of pop—all built on a solid, classical foundation. Theirs is the kind of talent that makes virtuosic performance look (and sound) like sublime, effortless playtime, defying the constraints of any single genre to explore a myriad of sonic shades and textures.

Kings Return was first conceived in 2016, when Kunda asked some friends to perform with him for a college recital. The acappella performance captivated the crowd and soon led to local gigs, where the group cut their teeth before finalizing the lineup in 2020. Composed of tenor Vaughn Faison, bass Gabe Kunda, tenor JE McKissic, and baritone Jamall Williams, the Dallas-based quartet has since captured the hearts of millions of fans in-person and online. They earned their first taste of fame that summer, when they arranged, performed, and posted a video of their soul-stirring, a cappella rendition of "God Bless America," which went viral. The next year, they posted a more classical a cappella performance of "Ubi Caritas," which also went viral, amassing over 10 million views. A pivotal moment for the budding act, Kings Return began to shift away from a strictly gospel focus to explore a more diverse musical repertoire. They dropped their debut EP in December 2021, a warm, jazz-leaning holiday album titled *Merry Little Christmas*, followed by the June 2022 release of their stunning Bee Gees cover "How Deep is Your Love" off debut LP *ROVE*, which earned a GRAMMY nomination for "best arrangement instrumental or a cappella." Epic, expansive, and polished, *ROVE* was released in September 2022, showcasing a nuanced attention to detail and a remarkable fusion of four distinctive, classically-trained voices into one elegant and intricate whole.

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The group's name perfectly embodies their intentions as artists: "Kings" because they possess a charismatic power, moving forward with confidence to conquer whatever challenges arise. The "Return" signifies another important part of their mission: to give back to the communities that have supported them along the way. "We don't use any instruments, and it can feel very vulnerable to perform on stage alone, especially as Black men — with all stigma that entails," says Kunda. "When we come together to do this vulnerable thing called a cappella, it strengthens our bonds. It makes us tighter as a unit and as human beings. We want to be examples for other men like us." Now having released their first full-length holiday LP, aptly titled *We 4 Kings*, in November 2023, Kings Return continues to defy expectations, charming audiences with their signature smoothness and sophisticated, down-to-earth charisma.

Jazz Singers Personnel

Soprano

Georgia Barge

Sasha Garcia

Katelyn Robinson

Shelby Yount

Alto

Lily Alter

Hannah Goodwin

Margaret Nicholson

Liz Townsend +

Tenor

Reagan Garza

Elijah Thiessen

Fusen Zhang

Bass

Luke Bielfeldt

Parker Haley *

Dan Shimon

Rhythm

Jack Goode, guitar

Serim Kim, keyboards

Sarah Short, bass

Elijah Caver, drumset *

Bailey Dixon, percussion

+ Graduate Assistant

* Section Leader

The University of North Texas Jazz Singers is the premier vocal jazz ensemble within the Division of Jazz Studies in the College of Music. Under the direction of Jennifer Barnes, Jazz Singers consists of fourteen vocalists and a four-piece rhythm section who perform a challenging and varied repertoire of jazz and jazz-influenced cutting-edge repertoire, notably featuring compositions and arrangements by current students, alumni, and UNT faculty. They have performed at state, national, and international music conferences including those for the Jazz Education Network, International Association for Jazz Education, and the American Choral Directors Association, and have earned a DownBeat (magazine) Student Music Award in ten of the last eleven years. Jazz voice majors at UNT sing in one of the four vocal jazz ensembles, as well as studying both modern and historical practices of solo jazz singing, songwriting, vocal pedagogy, improvisation, jazz aural and keyboard skills, jazz theory and arranging, and jazz history. They also sing in Jazz Chamber Ensembles, Latin Jazz Lab Band, Zebras (pop/R&B/soul band), Brazilian Ensemble, and with one of the seven Lab Bands. Over the years, individual UNT vocal jazz students have received Downbeat Magazine Student Music Awards for solo singing, arranging, leading small groups, and composition. Alumni of the program have gone on to win or receive nominations for Grammy Awards, Independent Music Awards and CAsA awards, and are enjoying successful careers as recording artists, studio singers, college professors, composers, arrangers, music producers, and worship leaders.