

University of Maryland Madrigal Singers 1964 Tour *Transcript*

[archival clip]

Radio Host: Well it's been an exciting five days and immensely enjoyable. And I doubt if I can find a better way to suggest something that's quality than by ending this edition of *A Woman's World* with a little of another song by the Maryland Singers. A foretaste as it were of the pleasures to come in later programs. They sing "To All, To Each" by William Schuman.

[excerpt of Madrigal Singers performance]

Eric Cartier: That was the Madrigal Singers, a student choral group from the University of Maryland, singing in 1964. The Madrigal Singers existed from 1958 until 1974 and they specialized in madrigals, a Renaissance song form. Secular compositions for four to six voices unaccompanied, each part melodious. In their repertoire of 200 plus songs, they also included Baroque, Classical, early American, folk, and spiritual songs. I learned about the Madrigal Singers when the University of Maryland Libraries digitized its sound recordings in 2013. And when I helped upload them to Digital Collections the following year. Although the bulk of the recordings are Christmas songs and performances, not my cup of tea, I became interested in this batch from 1964, recordings made in Lebanon, Iraq, Ireland, Tunisia. What were these kids doing over there? So, I swapped my librarian cap for a researcher hat, got into the reading room at the Performing Arts Library, and started to discover the tale of their tour. The university Archivist, Anne Turkos, has since told me I'm touching the tip of the iceberg here. But let's hear more about the origins of the group from people who know them best.

Vincent Novara: I'm Vincent Novara. I'm the curator for special collections in performing arts at the University of Maryland. The Madrigal Singers were a really fascinating group at Maryland. They were founded in the 50s and they were sort of a byproduct of Rose Marie Grentzer coming to the University of Maryland to initiate the graduate program in music. She started this group, I actually forget her motivation for starting this group, as it wasn't a sort of standard ensemble that you would have in a school of music, like say the concert band, or the string orchestra, or a choir, or something like that. But they very quickly became one of the more popular groups that we had, they launched some professional singers. It's a group with a very devoted alumni base who are still active and still engaged today. Even though they haven't performed together as a group for decades. And the group just quickly developed a very strong local reputation, performing at the White House with a lot of frequency, performing on campus, and then also their reputation just grew internationally.

Eric Cartier: Here's Rose Marie Grentzer, the founder and director of the group, and a professor in the school of music at the University of Maryland.

[archival clip]

Rose Marie Grentzer: This group I organized about six years ago and I must say we've had really phenomenal success. We've been very, very fortunate.

Interviewer: They're very, very good.

Rose Marie Grentzer: Well thank you. This group originated from a conducting class which I taught at the University of Maryland. And in conducting, we study music of all periods and when we studied the music of the Renaissance, they were so interested in it they wanted to continue singing more music. So after the course was over, we met the second semester during the noon hour, because not everybody could meet with us. Some of the students brought students from other universities, from other colleges I should say, not universities. And this is really the reason we have some music students, but only six music students in the group, and the other students are from medicine, science, history, English, business administration, mathematics. So we really have quite a cross-section.

Narrator: Now how did a choral group comprised of students from the University of Maryland end up across the Atlantic in the spring of 1964? Well, they were remarkably accomplished at that point. They had already performed, as Vin mentioned, at the White House numerous times. They were on NBC, CBS, they performed at the Folger Shakespeare Library. They were on a program called *The Great Choirs of the World*, and this alerted a Department of State program called Cultural Presentations Program in 1963. And they had a panel of experts select the Madrigal Singers, along with four other groups, to send to various areas of the world. "American creative and performing artists demonstrate U.S. cultural achievement and will assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic, and peaceful relations between the United States and other countries of the world." That's the mission of this group, whose motto is Arts are the common language of humanity.

[archival clip]

"Let Us Break Bread Together" [Madrigal Singers performance]

Eric Cartier: This honor required going above and beyond giving dozens of performances in numerous countries. The group and its director, as U.S. ambassadors of goodwill and culture, were expected to attend forums and workshops and seminars, to visit schools and hospitals, to attend parties at the U.S. embassies. They also gave interviews, they did radio broadcasts, they did television broadcasts. And additionally, they squeezed in a course, History 151: The History of Ancient Orient and Greece.

[archival clip]

Interviewer: Would you please tell us, sir, what kind of instruments you, they play?

Rose Marie Grentzer: Well, at first we started, when we first began our group we specialized in music of the Renaissance period, but gradually we got more demands for varied programs, and we've included music of the American, early American and contemporary Americans. With the Renaissance music, we use instruments that were used in the Renaissance times like the harpsichord, the lute, and recorders. And of

course with American music, occasionally we use a piano if we need to, but we sing mostly without accompaniment.

Eric Cartier: The Madrigal Singers celebrated Shakespeare's 400th birthday with a special section in their set. This is a tune I particularly like.

[archival clip]

Unidentified woman: *Henry V*, act two, scene five. Bourbon: They bid us to the English dancing-schools, / And teach lavoltas high and swift corantos;
[Excerpt of Madrigal Singers performance]

Eric Cartier: The logistics of this trip were complex, and in the archives there is a great deal of paperwork and correspondence comprised almost entirely of lists, sums, and hour by hour itineraries. The U.S. Government was arranging to move 16 singers, two conductors, government tour manager and his wife, around 11 countries across the Middle East, North Africa, and Great Britain over the course of four months. So, they arranged visas, vaccinations; they secured insurance; they booked hotels and flights and bus trips; they secured per diem for meals in countries with various currencies. They also organized the movement of Madrigal Singers' equipment and there are lists with the weights and sums of their Renaissance-era costumes, their instruments, their sheet music and programs and music stands. And speaking of instruments, an official at the American Embassy in Athens, Greece—Athens being the first stop of the tour—wrote to the Department of State a couple of weeks before it began. The post questions the wisdom of bringing such a fragile instrument as a harpsichord on tour, as there are no skilled transfer personnel in the provincial cities. And reading through the papers, I discovered that, on more than one occasion, the harpsichord did not arrive in the city where the singers were, and Rose Marie had to adjust the program accordingly for those performances.

[archival clip]

Rose Marie Grentzer: It's called "Modern Music" by William Billings and we'd love to sing it for you now. [excerpt of Madrigal Singers performance]

Eric Cartier: This was 11 countries, 83 performances, 104 days on the road.

[archival clip]

Interviewer: Would you please tell us, during your tour you were previously in Morocco, Greece, the Middle East?

Rose Marie Grentzer: Yes, we were in Greece, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, United Arab Republic, Morocco, Tunis. And now we're going to Great Britain and Ireland, then home.

Interviewer: That's quite a busy tour I should say.

Rose Marie Grentzer: It's almost four months

Vincent Novara: It's an unusual tour. Even the rest of the ensembles at Maryland rarely tour internationally. Occasionally we'll send groups overseas here or there, but it's a big deal. It's a transformative event for just them to go to Scotland or something, or just go to one location. The fact that this group toured so extensively and under such conditions at a period of time when things were still really—I mean not that things are stable in those parts of the world now—but they weren't stable then either. It involved a lot of State Department advisement. But this was an unusual tour and really a testament to the type of things Rose Marie was capable of. She was a person who made huge things happen so I'm not entirely surprised that she would be the person to make this happen, but it's still a surprising result. And I'm sure that these are experiences that stayed with the students for their whole lives.

[archival clip]

Interviewer: Well you certainly reveal the fact that you've had a life of music.

Rose Marie Grentzer: Well, that's for sure, that is true.

Interviewer: It's always the new interest.

Rose Marie Grentzer: Yes, I think I found music was interesting even as a young child. My father gave me a . . . encouraged me to play violin, and actually I took my degree in violin and hoped to be a professional violinist. But my mother never approved of women being professional musicians, so I had to be a school teacher instead, and I must say I have not regretted it at all.

Vincent Novara: She was a woman who had a really strong personality and managed to rise up in the profession at a time when it was still dominated by men. It was hard for women to find their way into leadership roles like her. And the fact that an institution like the University of Maryland in the 1950s would bring on a woman to institute new graduate study programs is very, that is also a testament to the quality of person that she was and her capacity to lead and to produce. She, from all accounts, she was an extraordinary person. I, unfortunately never had the opportunity to meet her, but anyone who did always spoke very highly of her. And she's certainly been one of our greatest patrons here in Special Collections in Performing Arts. She established a fund that is still generating results today, and we use that to employ people to process music education collections. So, she's been having an impact on this school and on this archive for decades and will continue to do so for years to come.

[archival clip]

Rose Marie Grentzer: And we also have another student here, Nancy Matheny, and actually Nancy and her husband are both in the group. In fact, this is what we call one of our Maryland Singer marriages. People sometimes think they're brother and sister, but they're husband and wife. They met singing in the singing group and they're staying with us for a while.

Interviewer: How do you do, Miss Nancy? Can you please tell us what are you majoring in?

Nancy Matheny: Hello. Well I'm a graduate student in music. I want to get my master's degree in voice.

Interviewer: Oh, very interesting. Would you tell us, please, during your short stay in Tunis, what did impress you the most?

Nancy Matheny: Oh, the music. I loved the music, I really did. The songs, we've heard a lot of them at a conservatory this morning and today we sang at a school for the blind and the children sang for us there. And the music is different, I think, from other music I've heard throughout the Middle East. And also the rhythms are wonderful, how they change all the time. Oh, it's wonderful, I've really enjoyed it.

[archival clip]

Announcer: To conclude our program, the University of Maryland Singers will sing an Arabic song, "Timali Wali," followed by an American song by the contemporary composer Henry Brant, "Three-Way Canon Blues."

[excerpt of Madrigal Singers performance]

[archival clip]

Announcer: Tonight you have met the Maryland Singers. They were introduced by Tahar Manook.