

YTS 2017 Workshop Descriptions

(Not all workshops are listed — feel free to find & ask the leader to learn more about a workshop that's not on this list!)

***Please note: The workshops led by Thomas McCarthy may be canceled due to struggles with international work visas.

Staff-Led Workshops

Interpretation of Songs and Ballads (Sara Grey)

We will look at choosing songs for our repertoire, discuss what we can do physically and mentally to approach the singing of ballads and songs. We will look at style, use of decoration, balance, pace, timing, rhythm, phrasing and dynamics. It will be very interactive—participants are encouraged to bring a song on which we can work.

An Irish History in Song by an Irish Traveler (Thomas McCarthy)

Thomas will tell you about the history of Ireland from the perspective of Irish Travelers who are believed to be the ancestors of the earliest inhabitants of Ireland. He will intersperse this with songs passed down through his family illustrating the Travelling life and some historic songs. You will have a chance to ask questions and learn one of the songs.

An Irish Traveler Style of Singing (Thomas McCarthy)

A chance to learn some techniques from an Irish Traveler: The "sean nos" or "old style" of Irish singing is highly decorated and feeling. The Traveler style is even more so, having an intense and soulful sound with complex decoration and a warble or throat vibrato to add power to the delivery. Come and have a go at some of these techniques and listen to some powerful singing by Thomas McCarthy.

Lead Belly Songs (Rev. Robert B. Jones)

Huddie Ledbetter aka "Lead Belly" was a legendary African American singer in the early part of the 20th century. Famed as a player of the 12 string guitar, Lead Belly was also a powerful song leader and writer. We will be learning a number of his great songs including, "Irene," "Take This Hammer," "Rock Island Line" and "Midnight Special."

Migration Of Songs Between The United Kingdom And North America (Sara Grey)

Scots and Ulster Scots have migrated in such numbers that no other European nation has ever lost such a high proportion of its people. In the early days, these were men and women who left behind them a homeland rich in the oral tradition of song and ballad singing; an inheritance which they carried with them wherever they went. Their legacy is apparent to this day. Sara will trace the migration of songs from the United Kingdom to North America by singing a song and discussing it, or part of it, from its source and then singing the American or Canadian version showing the changes and the similarities. Sara likes to make the workshop as interactive and informal as possible by encouraging the participants to sing on choruses and refrains and ask any relevant questions.

The Singing Roots of the Blues (Rev. Robert B. Jones)

Blues songs are among the most identifiable songs associated with the American singing tradition, however the blues did not come out of thin air. In this workshop we will explore the kinds of songs that helped to form the music that would eventually become known as blues. We will explore things like field hollers, work songs, and the concept of floating verses. We will also explore the African singing aesthetic and show how it fed into the formation of the music that we now know as the blues.

Spirituals to Gospel (Rev. Robert B. Jones)

The Spiritual is a uniquely American style of music that was born in the time of slavery. Some feel that it, along with Jazz, might be among America's only original style of music. Gospel, on the other hand, was born in the 1930's and it is one of the most important and popular styles of sacred music. In this workshop we will showcase the differences and similarities between these two styles, and we will also attempt to explore the history and purposes of these two legendary styles of sacred singing.

Songs of Life, Love and Leisure, from New England and Beyond (Lisa Null)

The Northeastern United States and Eastern Canada have a rich vocal repertoire ranging from sea songs, songs of the woods, and songs associated with leisure and work. Many are rooted in Irish, Scots and English Traditions. Others recount local or New World topics and frequently draw on popular and theatrical melodies. New England gave rise to the early factory system, and Lisa usually has something to sing about the processes of early industrial change stresses and the internal dislocation and migrations. She also sing love songs, kids songs etc. and a modern country song or two from Labrador. Some of the songs have choruses, but others are meant for deep listening. Lisa will sing and also invite participants to share songs.

The Story Song (Thomas McCarthy)

In the Irish Traveler tradition there is an art form which involves the telling of a story, the final part of which comes in the form of a song. The song has no meaning without the story. Thomas will tell and sing one such example of a traditional story song. He will teach you the song, give you a chance to ask some questions and then have a go, as a group, at telling the story and singing the song.

Traditional Songs from the Logging Camps of Northern New England and Canada (Sara Grey)

The movement of the Irish into the logging camps of northern New England and Canada brought along many songs. These songs adapted, adjusting from their original forms to fit the needs of the Irish as they took on various occupations and social mores both in urban and rural environment. The workshop will deal with the Irish taking hundreds of songs and tunes to the "new world," and will illustrate what happened to them as the Irish began to integrate into different cultures.

Vocal Coaching: Your Voice as a Tool of Expression (Lisa Null)

Lisa will give this workshop twice over the weekend to allow for smaller group workshops. This workshop will be accessible to everyone, including those who don't think of themselves as "singers." Lisa's clinics deal primarily with vocal production as it relates to singing in various folk styles. She will cover aspects like vocal projection and where you place the voice, how you use diphthongs and liquid consonants, rounding vowels so that you can progress seamlessly from register to register, using your breath, and ways of emphasizing a song's narrative drama without the tempo and dynamic changes usually found in classical and popular music. She's interested in helping participants "edit" their own voices to find what works best for them, whether they want to recreate traditional songs in an individually unique manner or want to channel the old styles and sounds. She will draw on examples ranging from Joe Heaney to Frank Sinatra to Satchmo; Jean Ritchie to Ethel Merman.

Attendee-Led Workshops

Accompanying Songs: Spoons and Podorythmie (Carolyn Stallard)

Have you ever wished you could add percussive accompaniment to a song session, but didn't know how? In this session participants will learn podorythmie ("foot rhythms"), a method of percussive foot tapping common in traditional Québécois music. Once everyone has the hang of the basic pattern, we'll add spoons to the mix. Along the way, learn about the role of spoons and similar instruments in the music of Québec and other regions. Please wear sturdy shoes (sneakers are fine) and bring two metal soup spoons with you to this session (spoons with wide handles are best).

☐ Come on and Share This Jam With Me ☐ (Stacy Dickerman)

Steven Universe Sing-a-long

Deproblematicizing Your Problematic Faves (Maia McCormick)

Are your faves problematic? Probably. Want to take action to make them LESS problematic, so you can sing them with a clear conscience? Join us as we discuss some examples of what might make songs problematic, and how we as part of a living & breathing folk tradition can change words and add verses to make those songs LESS problematic and more inclusive. We'll talk a little, sing a little, and dissect + repair some songs (either altogether or in small groups).

Experimental singing, movement and group improvisation (Alex Kramer)

Participants will sing and move through various games and scores to create soundscapes and improvise as a group.

Finding Your Yodel (Debra Chesman)

This is a "skill-building" workshop for anyone interested in learning how to start yodeling. I will demonstrate Western Yodeling very briefly just so you know what the yodel sounds like and what we are aiming to do with our voices. Yodeling can not be learned quietly and it will not be pretty but we will experiment and have a laugh. If there is time at the end, we might sing a song with a yodel in the chorus. If there is more time, you can bring songs with yodels for us all to do. I am by no means an expert in yodeling or famous yodelers, or even the repertoire, but I can teach you how to get started. I initially learned from Bill Staines. I got my reputation for yodeling on the bluegrass scene in England, of all places.

I Hate This Song (April)

A discussion/song swap where you bring a song that you hate for some reason -- its message, its ethical stance, the things it does to its characters, the wrongness of its tone, or the fact that you just think it's poorly written but it's inexplicably beloved by people who are not you. It should be a song which you still know and perhaps perform, for whatever reason. Tell everyone briefly why you have this discomfort, then sing it and get it off your chest. (The point of this workshop is to discuss ugly subject matter, so I want to make it clear that it's a session where we'll talk about grimdark and problematic themes including sexualized violence.)

Infrastructure Songs (Chris Bracken)

Buildings and bridges and track-laying and tunnel digging and canal-dredging and windmills and solar panels and sewers! Bring your songs of infrastructure for a laid-back session of sharing and we'll see how much variety we can muster.

Light Come Shining: Bob Dylan, Folk Rock and Tradition (Mike Livingston and Olivia Gale)

If you're wondering -- or you know -- why Bob Dylan received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016, come swap songs and explore why they matter. We'll discuss the influence of folk rock on modern bearers of tradition; look at the roots of Dylan and the Folk Revival in traditional songs and styles; and share some lesser-known Dylan songs.

Musical Collaboration Speed Dates Round One (Jacob Deck)

Each workshop participant will be randomly assigned a partner. You and your partner must, by the end of the first workshop, have figured out at least one song/tune/dance/etc. that you could theoretically perform together in a concert. You'll have to do just that in the second workshop in this series. Participation is, due to the constraints of the workshop format, capped at 14 people (including the instructor). Good luck!

Musical Collaborations Speed Dates Round Two (Jacob Deck)

This workshop is a concert where each impromptu music group formed during the first workshop performs their collaborative hybrid Frankenstein monster of a song. Enjoy.

Sacred Harp Singing (Ben Sachs-Hamilton & Myles Dakan)

Join us for open singing from the Sacred Harp, a book of four-part hymns from the shape-note tradition.

Singing Circle: Songs of Earth, Community and Spirit (Lily Jacobson & Dana Dwinell-Yardley)

Join us to sing songs of the spirit that celebrate the land, seasons, community, justice, and the experience of living. We'll lead a meditative, uplifting, participatory workshop of rounds and short, simple songs that work well for harmonizing. This is a chance to learn new songs, perhaps sing a few familiar tunes, and experience community through mindfulness and music. After we spend most of the hour singing, we'll end with a brief discussion about creating safe, inclusive singing circles with depth and connection.