

# MARK O'CONNOR'S APPALACHIAN CHRISTMAS



**Thursday, December 8th | 7:30 p.m.**

**Stephen B. Humphrey Theater  
Saint John's University**

Mark O'Connor's eclectic combination of jazz, bluegrass and classical influences carries his vision of an American school of string playing. In this much-loved holiday performance, O'Connor — accompanied by his wife, Maggie, and son, Forrest, both award-winning instrumentalists in their own rites — fashions a wondrous mix of instrumental and vocal music in bluegrass and other American music genres. Mark O'Connor has collaborated with many well-known musicians, including James Taylor, Yo-Yo Ma, and Allison Krauss.

## TERMINOLOGY

**Appalachia** (*pronounced: Apple-at-Cha*): a cultural region in the eastern United States that stretches from the southern part of New York to northern Alabama and Georgia.

**Americana music** (*American roots music*): a genre of music made through combining musical traditions in the southern United States— specifically genres of folk, gospel, country, jazz, and bluegrass.

## ENGAGE

American roots music features many kinds of string instruments, including the guitar, mandolin, fiddle, and banjo. Mark O'Connor has created a string theory based on his style of playing. He teaches it to others in string camp, or a seminar/workshop setting where he invites renowned musicians to help him instruct.

- What are different ways these string instruments are played during the performance?
- What kinds of instruments did you see being used during the performance?
- How is Mark's style of playing similar and different from other types of performance you have experienced?

Mark O'Connor often plays music with his family. His son is a guitarist, and his wife is a violinist and fiddler. Performing traditional Appalachian carols is one way that the O'Connors celebrate the season.

- The holidays are a time of traditions and family connection. Does music and song play a role in your family's traditions? What holiday traditions do you share with your family?
- How do traditions connect families throughout generations?
- How does an outcome change when an individual works on a project compared to when a group works on a project?

Folk, bluegrass, and country genres have an emphasis on storytelling. The carols in this performance are retellings of Christmas origins or stories that carry values of the holiday.

- How does storytelling change when music is added to the narrative?
- Can you identify songs in your holiday traditions that reflect who you are?

The history of Appalachia has strong connections to logging and coal mining industry, isolation, poverty, and civil war. The music that comes from this place, reflects the diversity of its cultures, ranging from African American blues to Scots Irish fiddles, the Cherokee, Johnny Appleseed and Mothman.

- How do you see/hear these cultures contributing to the music you hear in this performance?