

Hunt Country Music and Arts

October 28, 2026 .. Reach out to Editor@HuntCountryNewsNetwork.com

British choral ensemble debuts surprise piece honoring Jacquie Mars

By Leland Schwartz

The sound of surprise swept through Grace Church in The Plains when the famous British vocal group VOCES8 announced they were about to play a piece written in honor of Jacquie Mars, who was in the standing-room-only audience for the season opener of the Grace Church Concert Series.



Jacqueline Mars, right after hearing the premiere performance of 'Stepping Stones', with VOCES8 co-founder and CEO Paul Smith, and his wife, Daniela Mars.

Smith said he drafted a poem from their discussions and shared it with Mrs. Mars, "who offered thoughts and edits, and from there we turned to music," and again, "I drafted some ideas and shared them with her about a year ago, and from her feedback, we arrived at the concert premiere in The Plains."

"Mrs. Mars is such a wonderful supporter of the arts," Smith said following the concert "and to spend time talking with her about topics that are close to both our hearts was such a treat for me."

Mrs. Mars endowed the Concert Series when it was started in 1997 and has hosted the a capella octet several times since.

Lena Scott Lundh, who has chaired the Concert Series for 27 years and introduced VOCES8, said "We are very thankful to Jacquie Mars to once again enable us to present VOCES8 at our Grace Church Concert Series. It was a fabulous performance, totally sold out, and a wonderful surprise that the song on the program was for Jacquie."

In addition to performing Smith's piece for Mrs. Mars, the group sang arrangements of "You Only Live Twice," from the James Bond film, Paul Simon's "The Sound of Silence" and John Lennon's "Free as a Bird." They described Bond as being "as British as Rolls-Royce and Wimbledon."

Mrs. Mars, hearing the piece for the first time at the concert, was thrilled, and said "It was wonderful working with Paul. He is so talented and lovely." As for the piece itself: "It was fantastic," she said. "Perfect."

There was about to be a very special moment, the group's co-founder and CEO Paul Smith told the audience, because it would be the first time the group would perform the three-movement piece, let alone in front of Mrs. Mars.

Smith said the idea took shape several years ago when he and his wife, Daniela Mars (no relation), were visiting Mrs. Mars and noticed "these beautiful stepping stones" in the garden that had lovely words on them, including "welcome," "love," "give," "trust," "dream," "wonder," "nurture" and "touch."

"This gave me the idea to write a piece," Smith said, "and from there I was very lucky to spend some time talking with Mrs. Mars about the sorts of themes that could feed into this work - ideas around childhood, dreams, hope, belief, the passing of time and the cycle of life."

Photos: Leland Schwartz



Stepping Stones

*Welcome, love, give, trust,
dream, wonder, nurture, touch.*

*She stands, this gentle child,
with eyes both old and new,
surveys our world,
a welcome smile she offers
to the many, not the few.*

*The angel came, and then again,
wrapped in garb of beggar, not of Lord,
her loving touch, softest word he felt,
gave warmth and comfort,
seen and trusted, heard.*

*From open plains,
the bluest sky we see,
but narrows soon the path,
the hedgerows grow like strangling weeds
and drive away the light.*

*Cast off these bonds,
and drive now through the gloom,
the splintered crash of wood and steel
as steed and knight bear on
towards our doom.*

Yet cling to hope.

*Heed not their anguished cries.
Trust now in love and faith,
breathe deep,
cast these fears aside,
love must help us soar
and be our guide.*

*Remember, remember still our past,
lean on the ancient shoulders
as they raise us up.*

*For ours is not the last day,
but the first of those to come.
Eyes old and new,
new and old.*

Remember, love.

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Sunday, November 15, 2026 5:00 pm
Charm City Junction
In Tribute to Malcom Matheson



Charm City Junction is the Baltimore-based acoustic quartet whose music lives at the crossroads of Irish, Old Time folk music, and Bluegrass traditions. The Grace Church Concert Series proudly dedicates this performance to the memory of **Malcom Matheson**, whose steadfast generosity as a longtime Angel patron helped sustain this series for many years.