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**NORTHERN MINNESOTA GETS A SONG AND STORY-FILLED VISIT**

**FROM MARK TWAIN AND VOCALESSENCE**

*Don Shelby reunites with choral ensemble plus fiddler Sara Pajunen for*

*“River Songs and Tales with Mark Twain Northern Minnesota Tour” —April 4-8*

**MINNEAPOLIS — February 1, 2018 —** Even in the land of 10,000 lakes, the Mississippi River has a magical pull—it’s a metaphor, a connector, an escape route and the source of indelibly American songs and stories. This April, [VocalEssence](https://www.vocalessence.org/) brings the flavor and spirit of the Mississippi to life with [VocalEssence River Songs and Tales with Mark Twain: Northern Minnesota Tour](https://www.vocalessence.org/what-we-do/49th-season-concerts-events/river-songs-tales-mark-twain-northern-minnesota-tour/). The five-city journey will deliver a stirring program of music from the VocalEssence Ensemble Singers, accompanied by an instrumental bluegrass combo and folk fiddler Sara Pajunen, plus journalist and actor [Don Shelby](http://minnesota.cbslocal.com/2015/02/12/don-shelby-as-mark-twain/)’s portrayal of the great American humorist and man of letters.

Supported by grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board, Bremer Bank, and the Brainerd Lakes Area Community Foundation, the entertaining and nostalgic program weaves choral masterpieces, folk song favorites, traditional spirituals, and Americana with the words of Mark Twain. The tour kicks off in Grand Rapids with a Wednesday, April 4 show in the Reif Performing Arts Center’s Wilcox Theatre.  In each city, a local high school or community choir will be featured in a prelude concert.

“It’s always an adventure when VocalEssence and Don Shelby hit the road, and past audiences have told us they love the energy of this collaboration,” said G. Phillip Shoultz, III, VocalEssence Associate Conductor who serves as Music Director for the production. “Combine tall tales from Mark Twain with the highly spirited vocal performances from our singers, and you get a formula for a truly fun program, with something for everyone. Best of all, we get to reach an appreciative audience that might not be able to catch a VocalEssence performance in the cities. We’ve been building community through the choral arts for 49 years, and tours like this are an important way of expanding that community.”

The April tour reaches a total of five cities, beginning with Grand Rapids and moving on to Hibbing, Detroit Lakes, Brainerd, and Alexandria. The schedule is:

* Wednesday, April 4, 7:30 p.m. at the Reif Performing Arts Center’s Wilcox Theatre in Grand Rapids. $25 tickets are available through the [Reif Center’s website](https://reifcenter.secure.force.com/ticket/#sections_a0F3600000B2K9DEAV), with discounts for seniors, students, and MPR members.
* Thursday, April 5, at 7 p.m. at Hibbing High School in Hibbing. This event is free and open to the public. Call Hibbing Community Education at 218-208-0852 for more information.
* Friday, April 6 at 7:30 p.m. at the Historic Holmes Theatre in Detroit Lakes. Tickets are available for $22, with discounts for students, through the [Holmes Theater box office](http://www.dlccc.org/holmes.html).
* Saturday, April 7, at 7:30 p.m. at the Central Lakes Community Performing Arts Center in Brainerd. Tickets are available for $22, with discounts for students and MPR members, through the [CLCPAC box office](http://www.clcperformingarts.com/event/73589577dd0bff74cbda1aba6c4a1852).
* Sunday, April 8, at 4 p.m. at the Alexandria High School Performing Arts Center in Alexandria. Tickets are available for $16, with discounts for students, through the [school’s box office](https://www.alexandria.k12.mn.us/Page/4887).

       VocalEssence, called “one of the irreplaceable music ensembles of our time” by Dana Gioia, past chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts—and the choral ensemble that Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones says “sings magnificently”—impacts thousands of students, singers, and composers each year through its initiative programs, contests, and support for innovative art. VocalEssence was founded in 1969 and has debuted more than 250 commissions and world premieres. For more information, visit [vocalessence.org](https://www.vocalessence.org/).

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