Announcer:

The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program, keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Nicki Donnelson:

Music, as our listeners know, has many abilities to tell stories, share history, unite cultures, and make us feel. It's no surprise that in honor of Missouri's bicentennial musicians with many ties throughout the state have banded together to present Missouri Music at 200. I'm Nicki Donnelson.

Nicki Donnelson:

Today, on the Missouri State Journal, I have Emlyn Johnson, instructor of music at Missouri State University. She is the co-director of the American Wild Ensemble. She starts by sharing about music in the American wild.

Emlyn Johnson:

The American Wild Ensemble was a project that my husband, Dan Ketter, and I dreamed up. And we really started working together on this project in 2016 to celebrate the National Park Service Centennial. That year we ended up commissioning and performing a whole bunch of new music that was inspired by the parks, and we performed in the parks. And, since 2016, we have continued to commission new music, and perform it in order to celebrate American people, places, events, stories, and anniversaries. It's a really celebratory project that tries to bring people together around exciting ideas.

Nicki Donnelson:

On July 29th, Johnson will be participating in Missouri State's Bicentennial Webinar Series that focuses on music throughout Missouri's history.

Emlyn Johnson:

American Wild Ensemble is going to be facilitating a webinar called Missouri Music Past and Present. In this webinar, we're actually going to be speaking with two composers and one historian, who all have knowledge of Missouri music, of the past, of what's happening today in really different specialized ways. So we have Mike Murray, who's a composer here at Missouri State, and he is going to be talking about his work with the Max Hunter Collection of Ozark Folk Music that's here on our campus. We also have Marcus Lewis, who is a jazz composer, trombonist and band leader in Kansas City. And he is going to be talking more, of course, about the rich history of jazz in our state. And finally, we have Andrew Wanko who's a historian at the Missouri History Museum, who is working on an exhibit coming up here at the end of August, called St. Louis Sound, looking at the history of music in that region.

Nicki Donnelson:

Then, they will begin on a statewide tour of outdoor performances for Missouri Music at 200. They will perform in Joplin, St. Louis, Kansas City, Columbia, and gray summit. And it starts in Springfield, August 4th at the Botanical Garden.

Emlyn Johnson:

In that concert, we are going to be sharing several pieces of new music that we have commissioned to celebrate and reflect on the 2021 bicentennial of the State of Missouri. So, audiences are going to hear a bunch of music that is being premiered, performed for the first time. And some of it is inspired by musical traditions like jazz, blues, ragtime, traditional old time music. And then, several of the pieces are also inspired by historic events and people in Missouri.

Emlyn Johnson:

So, we'll be sharing a program of just really wonderful, colorful new music. And also, some new poetry that has been written to celebrate this momentous occasion.

Nicki Donnelson:

Essentially, the goal of Music and the American Wild is to celebrate what makes a place special. Johnson tells about how once she became a Missourian, she almost immediately began thinking about the bicentennial, and how she could explore the area through sound.

Emlyn Johnson:

I moved to Missouri in 2018 and, at that time, when I went to the DMV to get my new license plate, I saw that I was getting a bicentennial license plate. And so, this notion of the bicentennial coming up has been there in the back of my mind for the past three years.

Emlyn Johnson:

When my husband, Dan, and I were hired here in the music department at Missouri State, we just thought, "How can we think about creating a project that really speaks to this community, and this place that we're now calling home?" And Dan also has a lot of family history in Missouri. He grew up in Kansas City, and has a lot of family roots all across the state. So, we were excited to really tie into this community.

Emlyn Johnson:

Learning more about Missouri, I have found that there is just an incredible musical tradition here. Of course, we think about jazz in Kansas City. We think about the blues in St. Louis. We think about Ozark folk music. We think about old time music across the state, all these amazing traditions. But it's also important to remember and to note that there are incredible musicians working here today. And so, we kind of wanted to bring those two things together, that idea of tradition, cultural heritage, state history, and composers who are living and working today.

Emlyn Johnson:

One thing that I'm particularly excited about with this project is that it is truly a statewide collaboration. We have composers who live and work all over the state, who are connected to the state in really different ways. We have poets, who also have long histories and relationships with the state. And it's been exciting to give each of those collaborators the freedom to reflect on this bicentennial.

Nicki Donnelson:

For more information on the Missouri Music at 200 program, visit musicintheamericanwild.com.

Nicki Donnelson:

That was Emlyn Johnson. I'm Nicki Donnelson for The Missouri State Journal.

Announcer:

For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at 417-836-6397.