



BEN FOLDS

Wednesday, March 29, 2023, at 7:30pm

Foellinger Great Hall

PROGRAM

BEN FOLDS

Ben Folds is widely regarded as one of the major music influencers of our generation.

He's created an enormous body of genre-bending music that includes pop albums with Ben Folds Five, multiple solo albums, and numerous collaborative records.

He tours as a pop artist while also performing with some of the world's greatest symphony orchestras, and he is currently serving as the first ever Artistic Advisor to the National Symphony Orchestra at the Kennedy Center.

A *New York Times* best-selling author and podcast host, he frequently guest stars in film and TV and recently earned an Emmy nomination for his composition of a new theme song for a popular Peanuts TV special.

An advocate for the arts, he serves on the boards of the Arts Action Fund, Planet Word, and the Nashville Symphony, and he has launched a music education initiative for kids in his home state of North Carolina.

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PROFILE

“More than anything, I wanted to make an album that was generous, that was useful,” says Ben Folds. “I want you to finish this record with something you didn’t have when you started.”

Indeed, Folds’ masterful new collection, *What Matters Most*, isn’t so much a statement as it is an offering, an open hand reaching out to all those wounded and bewildered by a world that seems to make less and less sense every day. Recorded in East Nashville with co-producer Joe Pisapia, the album marks Folds’ first new studio release in eight years, and it’s a bold, timely, cinematic work, one that examines the tragic and the absurd in equal measure as it reckons with hope and despair, gratitude and loss, identity, and perspective. The songs are bittersweet here, hilarious at times, but often laced with a quiet sense of longing and dread: a text message goes unanswered; an old classmate descends into the dark depths of internet conspiracies; a relationship unravels in the middle of a lake. And yet, taken as a whole, the result is an undeniably joyful record that refuses to succumb to the weight of the world around it, an ecstatic reminder of all the beauty and promise hiding in plain sight for anyone willing (and present enough) to recognize their moments as they arrive.

“There’s a lifetime of craft and experience all focused into this one record,” Folds reflects. “Sonically, lyrically, emotionally, I don’t think it’s an album I could have made at any other point in my career.”

Born and raised in North Carolina, Folds first rose to fame in the mid-1990s with Ben Folds Five,

whose acerbic, genre-bending take on piano pop helped define an entire era of alternative rock. After scoring multiple hit singles and a gold record with the band, Folds launched his solo career in 2001, releasing a series of similarly acclaimed albums that would firmly establish him as one of the most ambitious and versatile songwriters of his generation. In 2010, Folds teamed up with celebrated author Nick Hornby on a collaborative record titled *Lonely Avenue*; in 2014, he composed his first piano concerto; in 2015, he recorded an album with the classical ensemble yMusic; in 2017, he became the artistic advisor to the National Symphony Orchestra at the Kennedy Center, where he began curating a series of performances marrying contemporary artists with symphonic orchestration; in 2019, he released his *New York Times* best-selling memoir, *A Dream About Lightning Bugs*; and in 2021, he launched the *Lightning Bugs* podcast, an interview series on creativity and process with guests as diverse as Jon Batiste, Sara Bareilles, Bob Saget, and Rainn Wilson. As if that wasn’t enough to keep him busy, Folds also revealed himself to be a prolific photographer with gallery shows in the US and Europe, appeared onscreen in films and television (most recently playing himself in three episodes of the hit Amazon Prime series *The Wilds*), composed music for a 25-minute stage adaptation of Mo Willem’s *Goldilocks and the Three Dinosaurs* (which premiered at the Kennedy Center), and serves on the boards of the Arts Action Fund, the Nashville Symphony, and Planet Word, a new immersive museum in Washington, DC dedicated to celebrating the power of language.

“It can be difficult jumping back and forth from

one discipline to another," says Folds, "but you learn so much from moving between worlds and collaborating with so many different kinds of artists. I performed some of the songs on this record with the National Symphony Orchestra before I finished recording them for the album, and that context gave me so much insight into how I wanted to handle them in the studio."

Working with friends Rob Moose, Ross Garren, and Tall Heights, and with Dodie and Ruby Amanfu lending vocal harmonies, Folds tackled the recording process with an orchestrator's ear, carefully arranging each instrumental element in relief to his electrifying, insistent vocal melodies. Such detailed deliberation didn't supplant improvisation or spontaneity in the room, but rather it focused the music first and foremost on supporting the lyrics, which stand front and center even in the record's most sonically wild and unexpected moments.

"One thing I've taken from all of my orchestral work is that music feels best to me when it's an event," says Folds. "It's easy to lose sight of that now that you can digitally edit the life and reality out of everything, but I'm trying to take the audience on a ride with me, and a big part of that requires grounding everything in the spirit of storytelling and live performance."

That marriage of sophisticated craftsmanship and raw energy is clear from the top of the album, which opens with the defiantly optimistic "But Wait, There's More." "Do you still believe in the good of humankind? / I do I do I do I do I do," Folds sings over a minimalist keyboard sequence that lands somewhere between Steve Reich and Laurie Anderson before giving way to lush horns and propulsive drums. Like much of the album, the song revels in unpredictability, zipping when you expect it to zag as it offers an empathetic acknowledgement of just how

exhausting it is to live perpetually perched on the edge. "Not sure that we can take too much more," Folds confesses in the track's final seconds. "Pray that there's a bottom somewhere in sight / Brothers and sisters hold tight."

"The song suddenly gets a little more serious at the end," Folds reflects, "and I think that's my way of kind of ushering everyone into this journey that's about to begin."

From there, Folds wields humor and pathos with surgical precision as he walks a delicate tightrope between the ridiculous and the mundane. The playful "Exhausting Lover" spins a surreal caricature of rock and roll debauchery over an utterly addictive groove, while the melancholic "Clouds With Ellipses" ruminates on the distinctly modern rhythms and anxieties that come with sharing our most intimate, vulnerable selves via text, and the spare "Kristine from the 7th Grade" watches an acquaintance retreat into their own reality of political misinformation and culture war nonsense.

"I've seen so many people who've been torn apart from their friends and families due to all sorts of agitating things in the media and on Facebook," says Folds, who wrote much of the album in Australia, where he spends part of each year. "I wanted the song to acknowledge the sadness of that."

Folds ultimately isn't interested in simply lamenting the flaws of our times, but rather in finding ways to still connect to the magic and wonder of being alive no matter what the world may throw at us. The dreamy "Back To Anonymous" embraces the unexpected freedom of a world in which everyone is masked; the off-kilter pop of "Winslow Gardens" loses track of the passing time while isolating with a loved one; the aching title track "What Matters Most" finds

new perspective in the face of tragic loss. By the time we arrive at radiant closer "Moments," it's clear that transcendence is always within reach, no matter how unlikely it may seem.

"I come from the vinyl era, and this perhaps more than any record I've made is a true album," says Folds. "There's a very specific sequence and arc to each side, all building up to this almost surreal positive finale, and that structure was really important to me."

In the album's opening moments, "But Wait, There's More" comes off as a rather grimly sardonic tease. (We live in an age of overstimulation, overconsumption, and overwhelming self-absorption. Just how much more can we take?) But by the album's end, the line feels more like a mantra of hope and perseverance, a reminder that there's more to this life than meets the eye, more to celebrate, more to love, more to be grateful for. It's hard to imagine a more generous offering than that.



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The Youth Series features daytime performances, online media created by performing artists, and educational activities designed especially for pre-K through high-school-aged students. Children who participate learn to appreciate the performing arts, gain knowledge, build social skills, and integrate live performance experiences into classroom work. Thank you to our Youth Series sponsors. If you’d like to learn how you can become a sponsor for the Krannert Center Youth Series, please contact Krannert Center Advancement at 217.333.6700 or advancement@krannertcenter.illinois.edu.

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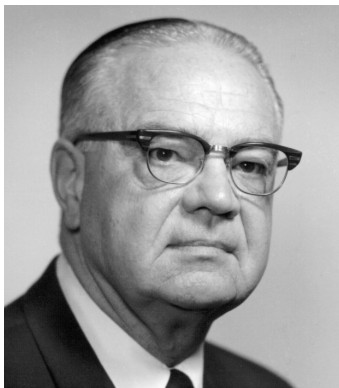
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The University of Illinois, the College of Fine and Applied Arts, and Krannert Center are profoundly grateful for the commitment of Krannert Society members. Through donations, pledges, and residual gifts of \$1 million or more, these open-hearted visionaries help build a thriving community and encourage cross-cultural understanding. Their support sustains the extraordinary vision of Herman and Ellnora Krannert to create a vibrant gathering place like no other.



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March 1994



CLAIR MAE ARENDS (1912-2000)
G. WILLIAM ARENDS (1914-1997)
March 2000



MARILYN PFLEDERER ZIMMERMAN
(1929-1995)
VERNON K. ZIMMERMAN
(1928-1996)
November 2003



HELEN FARMER
JAMES FARMER (1931-2020)
April 2014

FOELLINGER SOCIETY

Demonstrating their steadfast dedication to the arts, members of the Foellinger Society have donated or pledged \$500,000 to \$999,999. Because of their generosity, everyone in this community can unite in joyful and engaging experiences. These magnanimous arts lovers celebrate the spirit of Helene Foellinger, whose memorial gift honored her sister, Loretta Foellinger Teeple, and established the Marquee Performance Endowment.



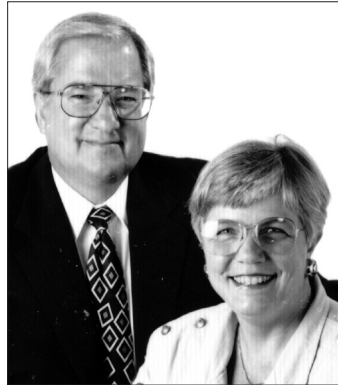
AVIS HILFINGER (1915-2004)
DEAN HILFINGER (1912-2006)
April 2000



KENNETH ANDERSEN (1933-2020)
MARY ANDERSEN
August 2009



CAROLYN G. BURRELL
April 2012



CAROLE & JERRY RINGER
April 2014



EDITH ANN STOTLER
(1946-2022)
August 2017



K. SARAH SPAULDING
(1930-2022)
Feb 2017



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SCHERER**
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June 2022

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University of Illinois President Emeritus and First Lady Stan and Judy Ikenberry have long demonstrated their love for the arts and their deep commitment to enhancing learning experiences for all University of Illinois students. Krannert Center gratefully acknowledges their steadfast support by introducing the Ikenberry Society to recognize donated gifts or pledges of \$250,000 to \$499,999.



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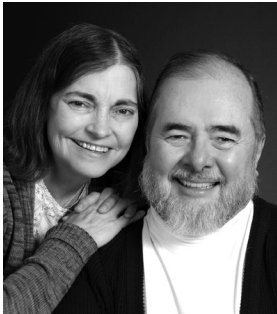
JERALD WRAY & DIRK MOL
March 2016



DAVID A. KROOKS
August 2016



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June 2016



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February 2017



ANONYMOUS
May 2018



JOAN & PETER HOOD
November 2018



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April 2019



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& IRA WACHTEL**
June 2019



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DOLORIS DWYER
(1918-1997)
April 1996



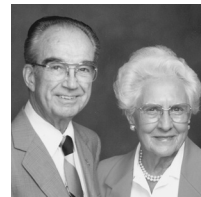
EMILY GILLESPIE
(1909-2000)
JAMES GILLESPIE
(1905-1999)
December 1996



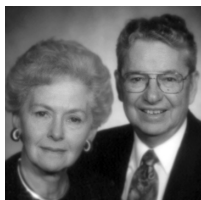
ROSANN NOEL
(1932-2018)
RICHARD NOEL
April 1997



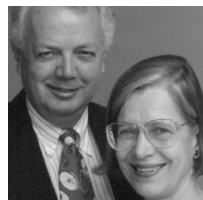
JAMES W. ARMSEY
(1917-2008)
BETH L. ARMSEY
(1918-2019)
February 1998



LOIS KENT
(1912-1999)
LOUIS KENT
(1914-1994)
October 2000



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(1928-2020)
GROVER SEITZINGER
(1925-2019)
September 2001



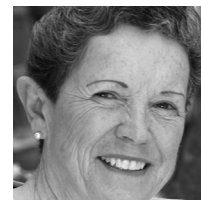
RICHARD MERRITT
(1933-2005)
ANNA MERRITT
November 2006



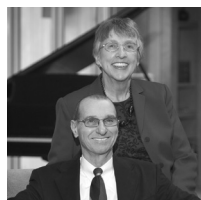
JOHN PFEFFER
(1935-2017)
ALICE PFEFFER
November 2006



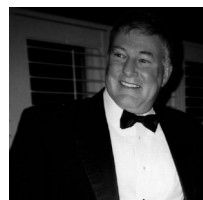
ANONYMOUS
November 2006



LINDA M. MILLS
(1940-2006)
October 2007



**JUDITH & JON
LIEBMAN**
January 2008



**MICHAEL
CARRAGHER**
(1946-2009)
September 2008

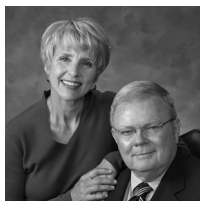


VIRGINIA R. IVENS
(1922-2008)
February 2009

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March 2011



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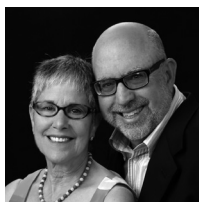
**JULIE & NATHAN
GUNN**
April 2014



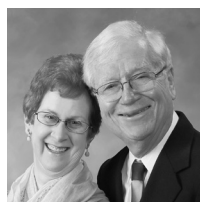
MICHAEL SWINDLE
April 2014



ANONYMOUS
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LINDA WEINER
(1944-2021)
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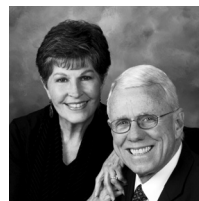
**JILL & JAMES
QUISENBERRY**
May 2017



DALE STEFFENSEN
(1922-2018)
**MARGARET
STEFFENSEN**
June 2017



**CECILE & IRA
LEBENSON**
December 2017



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IRIS SWANSON
December 2017



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ENGLAND**
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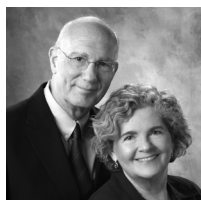


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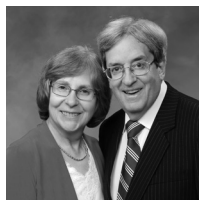
**VICTOR FELDMAN
(1935-2018)
JUDITH FELDMAN
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September 2021



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We work to create the best possible setting for the experiences you seek and find here.

NECESSARIES

Restrooms are located in the foyers of Foellinger Great Hall, Tryon Festival Theatre, and Colwell Playhouse; the east entrances on the Lobby level; and in each elevator lobby on Level 1 and Level 3. Lobby restrooms and one restroom in each elevator lobby are fully accessible and contain baby-changing stations.

Ushers will be happy to provide you cough drops courtesy of St. Joseph Apothecary, or disposable foam earplugs if the place starts rockin'.

If you or a companion needs medical assistance, contact an usher or other staff member.

Please take a moment before the performance to note the theatre exits nearest to you. If it becomes necessary to evacuate the theatre, please remain calm, follow the instructions of the house staff, and exit in an orderly fashion to the appropriate safe meeting location, which will be announced to you.

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

The use of cell phones, cameras, and recording devices during performances is prohibited unless otherwise announced from the stage.

LATE ARRIVALS

As a courtesy to performers and audience members, latecomers will be seated only at times selected in advance by the artist. Should you find that you've arrived late to a performance, our Patron Services staff will keep you informed about the earliest seating opportunity.

LOST ITEMS

If you are in need of Lost and Found, please visit the Patron Services counter. We will do our best to reunite object and owner!

TICKET RETURNS

If you find you can't attend a performance, please contact the Ticket Office in advance, preferably by 6pm the day before the performance (kran-tix@illinois.edu or 217.333.6280). We never charge a handling fee on ticket transactions.

SERVICES

Krannert Center for the Performing Arts is committed to making experiences accessible for all patrons, and we are delighted to provide a number of services to assist you. Krannert Center is equipped with an assisted listening system, wheelchair-accessible and no-step/few-step seating, and large-print programs, Braille programs, and American Sign Language interpreters are available with three weeks' advance notice.

For assistance regarding your visit, please email: Para ayuda en relación con su visita, favor de enviar un email a: Pour vous aider dans votre visite, prière de nous envoyer un courriel à:

欢迎! 如若您对您的造访需要帮助, 请发送电子邮件至:

स्वागत है! अगर आपको अपने रहने के लिए मदद चाहिए, ईमेल कीजिए:

환영합니다! 방문에 관해 도움이 필요하실 때에는...

에게 이메일로 문의하시기 바랍니다:


PATRONSERVICES@KRANNERTCENTER.ILLINOIS.EDU
217.333.9716



TH APR 13 - SA APR 15 AT 7:30PM

KRANNERT CENTER
AT THE VIRGINIA: LYRIC THEATRE
@ ILLINOIS PRESENTS

CITY OF ANGELS

 krannert center

TH APR 06 AT 7:30PM

 krannert center

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