



For Immediate Release

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Chorus America's 2019 Awards Recognize Outstanding Chorus and Individuals

Chorus America has announced the recipients of its 2019 awards program, recognizing a broad range of achievements in choral music, including artistic excellence, adventurous programming, innovative education programs, and lifetime service to the choral art.

Said president and CEO Catherine Dehoney, "Chorus America is thrilled to honor these exceptional choruses and choral leaders who inspire our colleagues and enrich our communities through their outstanding work."

Independent panels selected the following individuals and choruses to receive awards, which will be presented at Chorus America's 2019 Conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania held June 26-29.

Margaret Hillis Award for Choral Excellence

This award honors the memory of Margaret Hillis, founder of the Chicago Symphony Chorus, for her more than 40 years of professional achievement and outstanding contributions to the choral field. The award is presented annually to a member chorus that demonstrates artistic excellence, a strong organizational structure, and a commitment to outreach, education, and/or culturally diverse activities.

The 2019 Hillis Award recognizes a volunteer chorus, and goes to **Chor Leoni**, led by artistic director **Erick Lichte**. The Vancouver, British Columbia men's ensemble reaches over 15,000 people through over two dozen performances annually. Chor Leoni invests heavily in the present and future of the art form, subsidizing vocal instruction for all of its members, and removing barriers to singing opportunities for young men through education programs that culminate annually in its VanMan Male Choral Summit. The chorus pursues ambitious collaborations with other art forms, holds a robust composer competition, has begun a new composer-in-residence program, and has commissioned and premiered over 50 new works for men's voices in the past three years alone. Its recent sustained growth in ticket sales, grants, and individual support—and their hiring of their first executive director, Stash Bylicki—is evidence of Chor Leoni's broad base of enthusiastic support and organizational prowess.

Chorus America Distinguished Service Award

The Chorus America Distinguished Service Award recognizes a member whose long-term service to the choral field significantly furthers Chorus America’s mission “to empower singing ensembles to create vibrant communities and effect meaningful change.”

Former Chorus America board member **Alan Harler** is the 2019 recipient of the Distinguished Service Award. Harler served as artistic director of the Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia for 27 years, leading the organization’s transition to a community board and its first full-time executive director, creating a conducting apprenticeship program, and propelling the ensemble to new levels of artistic ambition. Among 58 commissions during his tenure, the Mendelssohn Club premiered several landmark works for chorus, including David Lang’s *battle hymns* and Julia Wolfe’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *Anthracite Fields*. Celebrating perspectives that are often under-represented or overlooked in the choral canon was a hallmark of Harler’s programming. As director of choral activities of Temple University and the architect of its graduate choral conducting program, Harler trained and mentored over 100 conductors who continue to shape the choral community.

Michael Korn Founders Award for Development of the Professional Choral Art

Named after one of the founders of Chorus America, this award was established in 1978 to honor an individual with a lifetime of significant contributions to the professional choral art.

Brad Wells is the 2019 recipient of the Korn Founders Award. He is the founder and director of Roomful of Teeth, a Grammy-winning eight-voice ensemble that reimagines the expressive potential of the human voice. Wells brings in master teachers and performers from a vast range of singing traditions that include yodeling, Tuvan and Inuit methods of throat singing, Korean P’ansori, Sardinian cantu a tenore, Hindustani music, and Death Metal singing—among others—to continually expand the musical vocabulary of Roomful of Teeth’s daring singers. Most of the music that the ensemble performs is written specifically for them through intensive collaboration with leading composers in new music, including the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Partita for 8 Voices* by member Caroline Shaw. As director of the vocal program at Williams College, Wells teaches courses in conducting and voice science, and has published articles on the physiology and acoustics of non-classical vocal styles. Through his life’s work, Wells is breaking down preconceptions about classical music ensemble singers, and his unconventional approach to the creative process is a new model for the choral world.

Louis Botto Award for Innovative Action and Entrepreneurial Zeal

The **Louis Botto Award for Innovative Action and Entrepreneurial Zeal** was established in memory of Louis Botto for his artistry, selfless service to the choral art, and entrepreneurial spirit in founding the men’s vocal ensemble Chanticleer. The award is given periodically to a mid-career choral leader who, through his or her work with a member ensemble of Chorus America, has demonstrated innovative action and entrepreneurial zeal in developing a professional or professional-core choral ensemble.

Katherine FitzGibbon is the 2019 recipient of the Botto Award. As founder and artistic director of Resonance Ensemble in Portland, Oregon, Fitzgibbon has captained a bold organizational shift—from its

original mission exploring links between music, art, poetry, and theatre, to a new focus exclusively on presenting concerts that promote meaningful social change. Resonance has intentionally diversified the demographics of their board of directors, and engaged a poet-in-residence whose work highlights intersections of marginalized people. FitzGibbon invites community partners into the long-term planning process for each concert, and seeks out venues in Portland's diverse and under-represented neighborhoods. Under her vision, the organization's budget has grown almost tenfold since its inception a decade ago, and FitzGibbon has consistently prioritized paying her singers a competitive wage.

Dale Warland Singers Commission Award

Chorus America and the [American Composers Forum](#) partner to present this award in honor of Dale Warland's lifelong commitment to new music as embodied through his work with the Dale Warland Singers. The award is made possible by the Dale Warland Singers Fund for New Choral Music, a permanently restricted endowment fund established in 2004.

Lorelei Ensemble, a fully professional women's ensemble led by artistic director **Beth Willer**, is the 2019 recipient of the Dale Warland Singers Commission Award. Lorelei will partner with composer Jessica Meyer to bring to life *I long and seek after*, a 12-minute multi-movement work setting words from the ancient Greek lyric poet Sappho, translated to English by Ann Carson. With poetry written by a woman, composed by a woman, and sung by women, the commission will examine female identity; grapple with themes of love and lust, relationships, and mortality; and consider the unique potential for women in the 21st century to revolutionize definitions of power and humanness. After the October 2019 premiere, Lorelei will bring the work to additional locations as part of its touring program over the next two years.

Brazeal Wayne Dennard Award

The Brazeal Wayne Dennard Award honors the life and achievements of educator, conductor, and arranger Brazeal Dennard by recognizing individuals or organizations whose work builds upon his commitment to diversity, inclusiveness, and furthering African-American and other diverse choral traditions through performance, research, or the creation of new compositions of significance.

The 2019 Brazeal Wayne Dennard Award goes to **Singing City**, under the artistic direction of **Jeffrey Brillhart**. Founded in Philadelphia as an integrated chorus in 1948, and engaged in civil rights movements since the 1950s, social justice work and bringing together people of diverse backgrounds to make music has always been central to the mission of the organization. Singing City's long history of outreach through U.S. and international touring has connected the chorus to parts of the world that have experienced strife, including the Middle East, the Soviet Union, Cuba, and South Africa. Closer to home, the ensemble has forged partnerships across Philadelphia's arts diverse arts community, aiding Singing City's efforts in commissioning socially relevant works from local composers and providing free choral programs for underprivileged youth in grades 3-12.

Chorus America Education and Community Engagement Award

This award recognizes education and community engagement programs that expand a chorus's role in its community. Successful programs demonstrate mission-based program development, viable music education, effective management and fiscal integrity, a commitment to artistic excellence, and collaborations that are sustainable, beneficial, and meaningful for all partners.

The 2019 Education and Community Engagement Award honors the best emerging program less than four years in operation, and goes to **VocalEssence** for their new youth choral program, Singers Of This Age (VESOTA). Developed in consultation with leading youth choruses from around the country, VESOTA was created to give high school students an immersive choral experience that celebrates and reflects the diversity of the Twin Cities, and engages students beyond the Western European choral model. No student who wants to be considered is turned away, and all aspects of the program are free, including transportation and meals. Rehearsals include work with guest artists representing a wide range of cultural backgrounds and genres, community-building activities, and student involvement in the creative process. Program evaluations have found that participants have gained confidence, found a sense of belonging, and realized the power of music to bring people together.

Chorus America/ASCAP Awards for Adventurous Programming and Alice Parker Award

The **Chorus America/ASCAP Adventurous Programming Awards** recognize choruses that demonstrate a sustained commitment to adventurous programming through performances of choral music written in the last 25 years. The 2019 winners are:

C4: The Choral Conductor/Composer Collective

Coro Allegro, David Hodgkins, artistic director

Brooklyn Youth Chorus, Dianne Berkun Menaker, founder and artistic director

The **Chorus America/ASCAP Alice Parker Award** honors composer Alice Parker, whose career has spanned six decades and has been devoted to the creation of works for the human voice. The award was established in 2003 to recognize a chorus for programming recently composed music that expands the mission of the chorus and challenges the chorus's audience in new ways.

The 2019 Alice Parker Award goes to **Giving Voice Chorus**, a program of the Giving Voice Initiative in Minneapolis-St. Paul. Giving Voice, directed by **Jeanie Brindley-Barnett**, brings together people living with Alzheimer's and their caregivers to improve their quality of life through singing together. In 2018, Giving Voice mounted a performance of *Love Never Forgets*, a cycle of nine songs illuminating the experience of living with Alzheimer's composed by Victor Zupanc with text from Louisa Castner, derived from multiple interviews with chorus members. The project, which was a collaboration between Giving Voice, the American Composers Forum, and the MacPhail Center for Music, is believed to be the first choral work about Alzheimer's that was performed by people living with the disease. Learning and presenting a brand new work represented a major stretch for those singers—who typically perform songs that they remember from their younger years—and raised audience members' awareness of the musical contributions that those living with Alzheimer's are capable of making.

Chorus America is the advocacy, research, and leadership development organization that advances the choral field. We support and serve choral conductors, administrators, board members, and singers with tools, training, peer networking, and access so that choruses are better able to contribute to their communities.

More than 1,500 choruses, individuals, businesses, and organizations are members of Chorus America and have access to a wide array of programs, publications, research, and personal services developed for their benefit. These services strengthen their ability to build strong organizations that foster quality choral performances.

Chorus America is governed by a diverse board of accomplished arts leaders from across North America, and the executive staff is headquartered in Washington DC. Learn more at www.chorusamerica.org.

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