



2024 Top 30 Professionals

of the Year The Movers & Shapers of the Performing Arts

musical
america
SPECIAL REPORTS
January 2025



ON THE COVER

1. **JANE BROWN**
Co-Head of Artist Management
HarrisonParrott
2. **IMELDA TECSON JUAREZ**
Manager of Group Sales and Grassroots
Marketing
Strathmore Hall Foundation
3. **MATTHEW OZAWA**
Stage Director and Chief Artistic
Administration Officer
Lyric Opera of Chicago
4. **JONATHAN MARTIN**
President and CEO
Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra
5. **ERIC J. RUBIO**
Director of Finance and Administration
The Washington Chorus
6. **KATHERINE POWERS**
Executive Director
Pacific Opera Project
7. **ANNIE BURRIDGE**
General Director & CEO
Austin Opera
8. **LOKI KARUNA**
Executive Producer and Host, Trilloquy
President, TrillWerks Media
Director of Artist Equity, American Composers
Orchestra
9. **ALEJANDRA VALARINO BOYER**
Director
Ravinia Steans Music Institute
10. **JAMES WEIDNER**
Board Chair
Chicago Sinfonietta
11. **AYANNA COLE**
Director of Social Impact Programs
Carnegie Hall
12. **ANNE FITZGIBBON**
Founder, Executive Director
Harmony Program
13. **ALICIA HORWITZ**
Director of Booking & Artist Management
MKI Artists
14. **ROB DAVIDSON**
Photographer and Videographer
Rob Davidson Media
15. **HANAKO YAMAGUCHI**
Artistic Producer and Consultant
16. **DONNA WENG FRIEDMAN**
Pianist, Curator, Educator
Director/Producer of *Never Fade Away*



17. **RUSSELL STEINBERG**
Founder and Artistic Director
Los Angeles Youth Orchestra
18. **JAMES BARRY**
Vice President of Artistic Planning
and Operations
Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra
19. **ROQUE DIAZ**
Senior Director of Diversity, Equity,
and Inclusion
MacPhail Center for Music
20. **MICHAEL EGEL**
General and Artistic Director
Des Moines Metro Opera
21. **SUSANN McDONALD**
Harpist, Educator, Founder & Artistic
Director (Emeritus)
USA International Harp Competition
22. **CHI CHI NWANOKU**
Founder and Artistic Director
Chineke! Foundation
23. **ALEXANDER SERIO**
Executive Director
Sitka Music Festival
24. **ADRIAN ANANTAWAN**
Artistic Director, Shelter Music Boston
Music Chair, Milton Academy
Founder, Music Inclusion Ensemble,
Berklee College of Music
25. **KORI COLEMAN**
Founder and Executive/Artistic Director
D-Composed
26. **VÉRONIQUE FIRKUSNY**
Executive Director
Avery Fisher Artist Program
27. **ARYO WICKAKSONO**
Senior Manager of Membership,
National Engagement & Outreach
PEN America
28. **ORLI SHAHAM**
Pianist, Educator, Radio Host
The Juilliard School, Kaufman Music Center,
Pacific Symphony
29. **JOSHUA ROBISON**
General Manager
MTT Inc.
30. **LOUIS SCAGLIONE**
President, CEO and Music Director
Philadelphia Youth Orchestra Music Institute

Introduction



Welcome to my all-time favorite Musical America Special Report: Our annual tribute to the people who keep this business not only up-and-running but charging ahead. Most of the names will be unfamiliar; all of them deserve recognition for the work they do. They are educating and building future audiences; supporting and managing artists and arts groups;

overseeing DEI initiatives; raising funds, taking photos, hosting radio shows—it's an impressive and wonderfully varied cohort of 30, nominated by their peers and chosen by the editors.

One of our honorees figured out a way to connect his orchestra's concert to this year's total solar eclipse and attract thousands to the city's 7,400-seat arena. Another honoree oversees a festival on a tiny island off the coast of Alaska whose three-week cello seminar sends students to perform in non-traditional venues, from locals bars to retirement homes. There's a pianist (a name you might well recognize) who chairs a NYC community music school, hosts an interactive concert series for the very young, and oversees a new-music chamber series. Another pianist doubles as a filmmaker whose documentary about immigration features New York City Ballet's first Chinese principal dancer.

A significant segment of our Top 30 pros are either graduates or members of the two-year Sphinx LEAD (Leaders in Excellence, Arts & Diversity) Program. If they represent the younger end of the spectrum, there's a board chairman headed to retirement who helped build a uniquely themed orchestra in Chicago. Joining him in the senior division is a Distinguished Professor of Music who founded the USA International Harp Competition. She's a world-class, internationally known harpist; she's also a would-be novelist who harbors an ambition to write a thriller about "a good-natured harpist who travels the world and solves cases."

What an amazing group of people; we are proud to bring every one into the limelight.

Regards,

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PUBLISHED BY

**Performing Arts
Resources, LLC**
Your source for news and information

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2024 Top 30 Professionals

of the Year

The Movers & Shapers of the Performing Arts

The Top 30 Professionals of 2024 are a sterling group, all nominated by their peers, all noteworthy for reasons you will discover as you read. In a business based on the artistic gifts of performers, these are the people who present, promote, and nurture those gifts. There are management specialists, financial gurus, educators, a pianist who doubles as a documentarian, radio hosts, a photographer, DEI overseers, a star violinist and disability advocate, and more. It's a hugely varied assemblage, and we are proud to put a spotlight on every one of them.



ADRIAN ANANTAWAN

Artistic Director, [Shelter Music Boston](#)

Music Chair, [Milton Academy](#)

Founder, Music Inclusion Ensemble, [Berklee College of Music](#)  

Adrian Anantawan is busy. He chairs the music department at [Milton Academy](#) and serves as artistic director of [Shelter Music Boston](#), a nonprofit providing some 80 live music opportunities to unhoused Bostonites annually.

Earlier this year, he took on yet another responsibility, founding [Berklee College's Berklee Music Inclusion Ensemble](#), the first ensemble at a major conservatory to make accessibility for disabled musicians central to its mission.

The topic is personal for Anantawan, 40: The Thai-Chinese-Canadian violinist and Curtis grad was born without much of his right forearm. He still plays as a soloist and with ensembles like A Far Cry, aided since childhood by an artificial bow holder attached to his arm through a cast. He was the subject of an hour-long documentary about his life in 2008.

"I went through the conservatory process and emerged the other side in a professional context, but I always felt like there was a bit of a dissonance in how I could express my identity in the

context of disability. I was always working in a two-handed world and was successful because I could, in some ways, participate in that environment of the able-bodied," Anantawan says. "It led me to see where younger conservatory students are at in terms of their access needs."

That access, in some cases, means changing how rehearsals are run and structured. Some of the students in the ensemble are neurodiverse—while their disabilities may not be visible, the way they process and internalize repertoire may differ from usual conservatory practice.

"They need a little bit more time to learn the repertoire; they need accessible formats," Anantawan says.

For the ensemble's inaugural season, it worked with violinist Gaelynn Lea, a composer, singer, and violinist with brittle bone disease whose *Tiny Desk Concert* for NPR was an overnight sensation, and Molly Joyce, a composer with a left-hand injury who now works prolifically in the music disability space.

continued on p. 5

continued from p. 4

Anantawan admits his days are brutal—working 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. tends to be his norm. But it all flows into one another, whether that’s inviting volunteers from the nearby Henderson Inclusion School

to work with disabled students or taking an accessibility-first approach to his work at Shelter Music, where he serves a population particularly vulnerable to COVID. —Hannah Edgar

JAMES BARRY

Vice President of Artistic Planning and Operations



[Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra](#)



James Barry has faced two once-in-a-lifetime challenges during his more than 20 years as a classical music administrator.

Before joining the Rochester Philharmonic in 2021, he spent 13 years with the League of American Orchestras. When the COVID 19 pandemic hit in March 2020, he was senior manager of artistic and learning programs. Barry quickly organized online sessions for League members, connecting large and small orchestras to brainstorm ways to stay afloat over the many months of shutdown. He also landed a \$25,000 grant that the League parceled out to musicians struggling to establish a digital presence.

“That was probably one of the most impactful things I did, just listening,” he says. “A lot of people reached out to me. A grant could be a small honorarium, \$250, to buy a piece of equipment or whatever. We were all just listening closely and responding where we could.”

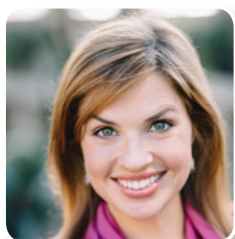
The second challenge was literally cosmic. The orchestra celebrated its centennial season in 2023–24, and in April 2024

Rochester was in the path of the total solar eclipse. The city was expecting 500,000 visitors for the Big Event. On April 7, backed by a giant video screen and laser lights, the Philharmonic shared the stage of Rochester’s 7,400-seat Blue Cross Arena with local artists, among them a madrigal chorus, gospel choir, actors, combat artists, R&B singers, and aerialists. The eclipse-themed musical extravaganza drew a sold-out house with lines stretching around the arena.

“It was one of the craziest things I’ve ever done professionally,” says Barry. “We dreamed way big, bigger than we ever had.”

The orchestra is also thinking big with its new Voices of Today project, a five-year initiative that includes recordings, commissioning new music, and story-telling funded by a \$2 million donation, the largest in the orchestra’s history. It’s a daring project, so Barry is planning carefully.

“I kind of know that if we go a little bit too modernist, we’re going to lose our audience,” he says. “But so long as a piece can move you, as long as it has melody and it has harmony, people have responded very favorably.” —Wynne Delacoma



ALEJANDRA VALARINO BOYER

Director

[Ravinia Steans Music Institute](#)

When she was still a toddler, Alejandra Valarino Boyer’s family moved to the U.S. from Puerto Rico with just \$300 to its name. So any enrichment for the young Boyer would have to be free or at least inexpensive. She joined a community choir, sang throughout

grade school, and went on to pursue two performance degrees, both on significant scholarships.

Now, as director of the Ravinia Festival’s Steans Music Institute (RSMI), Boyer pays forward the same transformative educational

continued on p. 6

continued from p. 5

opportunities she enjoyed as a young singer and arts administrator. Last summer, she also hosted a [Sphinx LEAD](#) retreat at Ravinia, providing a nurturing and inspiring environment for future leaders.

"I feel like my desire is to make sure that people have what they need to fulfill their dream," Boyer says. "If I'm in a space that can help somebody further develop or showcase their skills and talent, I want to figure out the best way to do that—which is very much true of what goes on here at the Steans Institute."

Boyer entered arts administration for the first time at Lyric Opera of Chicago, as an administrative assistant for the women's board. She would stay at Lyric for nearly eight years, rising to become its director of community programs.

While working an equivalent role at Seattle Opera, the pandemic struck, and with it the global racial reckoning. Boyer had by then long tired of hearing "buts" from companies and creatives who hadn't hired a diverse staff. "I really do want to hire a lighting designer of color; I just can't find any really good ones." Her response was to found [BIPOCArts](#) (Black, Indigenous, and POC Arts), an online resource connecting opera professionals of color to recruiters.

"That's really where it came from: I was tired of writing the same email, 'here are all the people you should look at,'" she says. "If I can help in some way to get you that answer faster, then let me help you out." —Hannah Edgar

JANE BROWN

Co-Head of Artist Management

[f](#) [i](#) [x](#) [HarrisonParrott](#)



In early 2024, Jane Brown's 30 years with HarrisonParrott was duly recognized when she was named co-head of artist management. Her appointment followed on the heels of Co-Founder Jasper Parrott's decision to sell the 55-year-old agency to its employees the previous October.

"We were blown away when Jasper decided that the people who would be best placed to continue his legacy were the staff members themselves," she says. "We felt energized that the future really was in our hands." HP has about 100 employees, with offices in London, Munich, and Paris.

Alongside her new administrative duties, Brown continues to represent a group of instrumentalists and conductors on the HP roster of about 250 artists. "I enjoy conductor management because everything flows from conductors," she says. "When you have a strong conductor list, you tend to have good connections with those orchestras for other artists, whether they be guest conductors or instrumentalists."

Her list includes Sakari Oramo, chief conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, whom she has managed for more than 20 years; Dalia Stasevska, chief conductor of the Lahti Symphony

Orchestra, who frequently guests with major American orchestras and makes her Berlin Philharmonic debut in February; and Hannu Lintu, chief conductor of Finnish National Opera. Brown has long handled conducting engagements for composer John Adams, and that connection led to her management of violinist Leila Josefowicz, who made a pivotal career change under HP's tutelage.

"Leila and I met when she was playing John's Violin Concerto with him on tour," Brown says. "She was under different management and told me she was interested in playing more contemporary repertoire. When she joined HP, we devised a strategy to realign her repertoire. She gave up Beethoven and Tchaikovsky and other standard repertoire to concentrate on living composers."

Josefowicz is now the go-to soloist for violin concertos by Adams, Matthias Pintscher, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Steven Mackey, Thomas Adès, Luca Francesconi, and more. "She is invested in those pieces to the point that in the majority of cases she memorizes them, rather than using a score as most violinists do in contemporary works," Brown says. "That makes a big difference in audience perception." —John Fleming



ANNIE BURRIDGE

General Director & CEO

[Austin Opera](#)

In recent years, Austin Opera has seen record attendance—an industry anomaly—and record fundraising highs. Those achievements can be traced directly to the leadership of Annie Burridge as general director and CEO. Apart from lifting the company's artistic profile internationally, her fundraising prowess has [secured the funding](#) to strengthen ties with the region's rapidly growing Latine population. The monies enabled the appointment of a curator of Hispanic and Latine programming and a special partnership with the Consulate General of Mexico.

In her eighth-anniversary season, Burridge's most recent coup is a new venue, [announced in October](#). The 16,000-square-foot space retrofits a landmark building at 5811 Trade Center Drive to include the company's rehearsal spaces, studios, costume shop, outdoor event space, and administrative offices. Previously, the company had rented its rehearsal and office space.

"I became aware of how reasonable office inventory happens to be in the Austin market right now—I just saw a

study that said Austin has the highest percentage of work-at-home employees. But opera cannot be accomplished via Zoom," she says. "It's a very fortuitous time to take over ownership of a secondary venue for us. Austin as a city is in dire need of more performance and rehearsal space."

When the new home base opens in October 2025, the company will also rent some of the space to other local organizations, a much-needed revenue stream for an arts group facing the same mounting costs as every other in the country.

"It is a very, very tricky time for the performing arts, and what is unique about Austin is that virtually all of our funding comes from individuals. We don't have government funding; we don't have foundation funding. There isn't that generational wealth that traditionally funds classical music in a city. We've always had to work hard to keep the audience in mind with our programming and to partner with other organizations throughout the city. . . we're not doing anything in isolation." —Hannah Edgar



AYANNA COLE

Director of Social Impact Programs

[Carnegie Hall](#)

Ayanna Cole describes her path to Carnegie Hall as "winding." Maybe so—but every step along the way informed her role as the venerable institution's director of social impact programs. A Long Island native, Cole started her career producing Daytime Emmy-winning programs for A&E Television Networks, including the History Channel. But for all her years in television, she rarely saw anyone else who looked like her in the field.

"If I can accomplish this after a lot of hard work, why aren't there more women? Why aren't they more people of color?" Cole wondered.

After leaving the History Channel, Cole founded Life Light Street Productions (LLSP), a nonprofit introducing teenagers to the media production field. She launched it after successfully applying for a NeON Arts grant, a program previously co-hosted

continued on p. 8

continued from p. 7

by [Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute](#) and the New York City Department of Probation. Two years later, in 2016, Carnegie Hall sought to hire a new NeON Arts manager; unbeknownst to her, Cole had been put forward for the job.

She has by now been at Carnegie Hall for nearly nine years, working on several different initiatives. The newest among them, the B-Side, is not unlike the work she did with LLSP a decade ago: The program introduces young people, ages 14 to 22, to various

career options in the music industry. Cole adds that her most transformative experiences on the job tend to be the ones where she's learning, too—like a panel she co-hosted earlier this year on drill, a rap subgenre that's as popular as it is subversive.

"The kneejerk reaction was, 'This music is challenging; there are some themes in the music that we don't think are safe or healthy for young people.' But this music is really important to a lot of the young people we're serving. And if it's a musical and artistic approach that's important to them, we need to understand it," Cole says. —Hannah Edgar



KORI COLEMAN

Founder and Executive/Artistic Director

[D-Composed](#)   

Look at Chicago's arts calendar, and one name crops up everywhere: D-Composed. This year alone, the all-Black string collective—which performs most often as a quartet, with cycling membership—collaborated with [bass-baritone Davóne Tines](#) and debuted at the Chicago Symphony, Lyric Opera, Chicago Humanities Festival, and Chicago International Film Festival. Earlier this year, the ensemble made its New York debut performing with Pamela Z at the Kaufman Music Center, and in November it traveled to São Paulo to share a stage with classical guitarist Plínio Fernandes.

That D-Composed is ubiquitous is thanks to the tenacity of Kori Coleman, who founded the organization in 2017. She calls herself a "retired" violinist and oboist, though her "retirement" came early and starkly. She became discouraged when, in a predominately white school district, she studied with a teacher who, she says, "did not invest in me at all. From there, I kind of became disillusioned."

It was only in adulthood that she learned Black classical composers existed. By then, Coleman worked—as she still does—full-time as a creative and brand strategist. She decided to focus her knack for experiential marketing on chamber music

series highlighting "music by Black composers, featuring an all-Black ensemble, while also centering on Black audiences."

D-Composed's early bookings accompanied wellness and yoga classes marketed to Black Chicagoans—still a facet of the organization, under the billing D-Compressed. Coleman heard from attendees that they would much rather have sat and listened to the music. With the return to live performance after the pandemic, the group started appearing in more traditional concert settings, usually as an invited guest of other organizations.

"Collaborations are our bread and butter. One of my goals is not to fully self-present—if you do it all on your own and you're trying to rent space, it's just not sustainable," she says.

But it may be soon. D-Composed's budget has grown from \$500 in its first year to \$250,000 last year, mostly from grants and earned revenue from partnerships and commissions.

"With all of our programming, it's really about meeting our community where they are and thinking about who our audience is as people, not just as demographics and neighborhoods," Coleman says. —Hannah Edgar



ROB DAVIDSON
Photographer and Videographer
 [Rob Davidson Media](#)

Eleven years ago, Rob Davidson left his job as program director for the VH1 Save the Music Foundation to become a full-time freelance photographer and videographer. Initially, photography made up most of his work.

“It was about 80 percent of my business until COVID, and then everything switched,” he says. As performing arts organizations scrambled to establish a presence on the internet, Davidson, a trained musician, was met with a huge demand for pre-recorded concerts and recitals and other online content. “Fortunately, I had been studying audio engineering and how to record music.

“There used to be such resistance, in orchestra musicians’ contracts, for example, to documenting performance, but that has changed. So videography has been the majority of what I do, although I still do concert photography and portraiture.

Based in New Jersey, Davidson concentrates on classical music and jazz and arts education. His clients include the Berlin Philharmonic, the Pittsburgh Symphony (where he started his career in the orchestra’s education department), the New Jersey Symphony, Miller Theatre at Columbia University, and Yamaha pianos.

continued on p. 10

MILLER THEATRE
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

CONGRATULATIONS TO ROB DAVIDSON!
ONE OF MUSICAL AMERICA’S TOP 30 PROFESSIONALS

“Rob is a photographer and videographer who beautifully captures significant moments in music for future generations, shaping cultural understanding through his work.”
– *Melissa Smey, Executive Director of Miller Theatre at Columbia University*

continued from p. 9

His work captures musical performance with rich expressiveness, and for that he credits his own background with a bachelor of music in vocal performance from Truman State University and graduate work in music education at Carnegie Mellon University. “I couldn’t do what I do if I weren’t a musician first,” he says. “Understanding the score and knowing

where the important moments are going to be—these are crucial to getting the good shots. Moreover, being able to talk the language and communicate with musicians on their level makes a big difference. You can see their unease with having a photographer around melt away.”

When covering a concert, his goal is to stay out of the way. “When a musician says to me, ‘Oh, I didn’t realize you were here,’ that’s my gold standard. I’ve done my job that night.”
—John Fleming



ROQUE DIAZ

Senior Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

MacPhail Center for Music [f](#) [i](#) [v](#) [x](#)

Growing up, trumpet always came more easily to Roque Diaz than schoolwork. Severely dyslexic and the first in his family to go to college, Diaz found refuge in performance, from marching band to orchestral repertoire to Latin bands and jazz.

But everywhere Diaz played, one thing stood out. “I noticed at the end of my performance career there was a lack of representation on stage and in the audience from people of color and those from minority backgrounds.”

A master’s program at the University of Manitoba, in Canada, got Diaz thinking more critically about access in the music field. That led to a Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota, which brought him to Minneapolis and, by extension, the MacPhail Center. Diaz joined the organization in 2018 as its director of school partnerships, for which the Center sends instructors to support area public music

programs. He approached his role through a DEI lens from the start. He recruited instructors of color to teach at predominantly Black and brown schools and put a premium on student mental health as operations shifted remotely during the pandemic.

The murder of George Floyd, and the region’s collective racial trauma as a result, only made Diaz’s work more urgent. By the end of 2020, he was leading DEI initiatives for the organization on a part-time basis; by 2021, he became MacPhail’s first senior DEI director. He remains a department of one, but his efforts have already been widely recognized, most recently with an [OnCon Icon Award](#) and as one of *COLOR Magazine’s* Top Diversity Officers of 2024. —Hannah Edgar



MICHAEL EGEL

General and Artistic Director



[Des Moines Metro Opera](#)

In 2013, when Michael Egel was named head of Des Moines Metro Opera, he made a promise to the board. "I told them that there would be in every season one piece, and eventually two pieces a season, that were new to the company," says Egel, a native Iowan whose first experience with the festival was a front-of-house internship as a college student in 1993. "I've moved the company away from the standard 19th-century operas, and we've had terrific success with that. In the last three seasons, our ticket sales have reached their highest levels in 15 years."

To dream up programming, Egel has a hobby that involves notecards with opera titles on them. "It's like a Tetris puzzle," he says, referring to the popular video game. "I slide the cards around together in an attempt to come up with the most fascinating combinations of pieces I can think of." The result has been summer festivals distinguished by contrasting but surprisingly complementary works. Recent inspired pairings include Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* and Prokofiev's *Love for Three Oranges* in 2023; Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* and Strauss's *Salome* in 2024; and, next season, Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen* and

continued on p. 12



continued from p. 11

Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*.

In addition to the Debussy–Strauss duo last summer, Des Moines staged Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* and the premiere of Damien Geter's *American Apollo*, with libretto by Lila Palmer, about painter John Singer Sargent and his Black model Thomas Eugene McKeller. In 2022, [the company's 50th anniversary](#), it premiered *A Thousand Acres*, with music by Kristin Kuster and libretto by

Mark Campbell, from Jane Smiley's novel that transplants *King Lear* to an Iowa farm.

With a 2024 budget of \$5.57 million, the festival presented 17 performances of four productions. They played to 94% capacity in the 467-seat theater of the Blank Performing Arts Center on the campus of Simpson College, where Egel studied vocal performance and music education. "I know some people don't want to hear a big work like *Salome* in such a small space," he says. "But I adore the intimacy and think it makes the opera better." —John Fleming



VÉRONIQUE FIRKUSNY

Executive Director

[Avery Fisher Artist Program](#)    

Every year Véronique Firkusny gets to make some of the most enjoyable phone calls in classical music.

As executive director of the Avery Fisher Artist Program at Lincoln Center, she gets to call young musicians and ensembles to tell them they have won a \$25,000 Avery Fisher Career Grant. Candidates, up to five a year, have no idea they are being considered. The program's 130-member recommendation board submits names to an executive committee, which makes the final selections.

And some years she will phone a more established artist, [most recently violinist Hilary Hahn](#), to tell them they have won the \$100,000 Avery Fisher Prize, given in recognition of distinguished career achievement.

"Everything that's done is done confidentially," says Firkusny. "The only call you get is if you've been selected, so there's no disappointment. I think that's very special."

An amateur violinist and millionaire radio and electronics pioneer, Fisher set up the program 50 years ago. He loathed the idea of musical competitions, says Firkusny. And from the beginning, the grants and prize have been limited to American artists or those permanently residing in the U.S.

"He felt young European artists had more opportunities, more competitions," she says. "He wanted to give American musicians a leg up."

Firkusny, the daughter of legendary Czech pianist Rudolph Firkusny, is also a highly regarded translator of Czech literature and a Czech diction coach for opera singers. She has been involved with the Avery Fisher Artist Program since 2003 and became its executive director in 2016.

Today a major focus is to "make sure the recommendation board is expanding, that it's current," she says. "And as much as possible that it reflects the diversity and scope of where talent can be found."

And musicians are taking Fisher's prizes in unexpected directions. "There was a time when really all that was expected of classical musicians was to be singularly devoted to their art form and perform it at a level of excellence," she says. "Now expectations have evolved to include a strong sense of social and community involvement." —Wynne Delacoma



ANNE FITZGIBBON

Founder, Executive Director

[Harmony Program](#)

Few classically trained musicians have years of experience working behind the scenes at New York’s City Hall. Since 2003 Anne Fitzgibbon, founder and executive director of the Harmony Program, has put those disparate backgrounds to good use. With outposts in all five New York City boroughs, the program now provides daily in-school, hands-on music education to 3,000 public elementary and secondary students every year.

“I was always interested in both music and public service,” says Fitzgibbon, who studied clarinet. “I loved music, but I was very involved with community public service. I thought those two interests were incompatible, so I chose to study public affairs.”

In 1998 she joined the New York City Mayor’s Office as a policy advisor for planning, education, and cultural affairs. The Harmony Program started as a pilot project.

“I became aware of how many students in the city had no access to music education in their schools, had no opportunity to learn to play in an orchestra or sing in a choir. It was an equity

issue for me. Music had been such an important part of my life. I wanted more kids to have access to that opportunity.”

In 2007 Fitzgibbon spent a year in Venezuela on a Fulbright Fellowship studying that country’s El Sistema program.

“It really broadened my idea of my role as a music educator. I changed everything about our model. We changed from once a week to an every-day-after-school model. We went to community-based locations. We started recruiting people who were trained teachers. We had group lessons, we had ensembles. And most importantly, we were trying to prioritize communities in need.”

The Harmony Program works with New York City’s Department of Education, City University of New York, the Juilliard School, the New York Philharmonic, and artists like Wynton Marsalis and Joshua Bell.

“If you start in our beginner programs, you can go to our Saturday programs, our summer camps, our ensemble programs, and then to scholarships. We’re making a long-term investment, which is what music requires. We are behind our students from the beginning to however far they want to go.” —Wynne Delacoma



DONNA WENG FRIEDMAN

Pianist, Curator, Educator

Director/Producer of [Never Fade Away](#)

Donna Weng Friedman’s creativity can’t be contained by 88 keys. When she’s not teaching at the Mannes School of Music or Princeton University, her alma mater, the New York–based pianist can be found crafting WQXR programs (*Her/Music: Her/Story*, on women composers, and *Heritage and Harmony*, a recital series featuring Asian artists and composers), producing a video series for the National Women’s History Museum (also called

Heritage and Harmony, interviewing pathbreaking women of color across several fields), or even designing a mobile app (The Music Bee Club, introducing children to classical music through engaging animations).

Weng Friedman’s most recent endeavor is her most personal yet. In 2023, she directed *Never Fade Away*, a short documentary that artfully recounts her father’s immigration story, using Chopin’s Waltz in

continued on p. 14

continued from p. 13

C-sharp Minor as a motif—a piece associated with her father. Chun Wai Chan, who made history in 2022 as New York City Ballet’s first Chinese principal dancer, dances in the film’s choreographic interludes.

That project, as well as both *Heritage and Harmony* series, grew out of one of the worst moments of Weng Friedman’s life. In March 2020, she was the victim of an anti-Asian hate crime while walking her dog in Central Park. Her attacker accused her of “causing the coronavirus.”

“I went back home, and I didn’t leave my apartment for seven months,” she says. “I decided that maybe people didn’t know too much about what it’s like to be Asian in this country.”

Never Fade Away has gone on to win numerous accolades at international film festivals. An excerpt of it was shown in Times

Square, and the documentary is now archived in perpetuity at the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island.

“I was receiving such incredible feedback from people who said, ‘That’s my father’s story,’ ‘that’s my grandfather’s story,’” Weng Friedman says.

Not one to rest on her laurels, she is already onto the next thing; in 2025–26, she will unveil the latest installment in the *Heritage and Harmony* series, *Brava Maestra!*, spotlighting young female conductors of color in partnership with the International Alliance for Women. She’s also working on a chamber series with erhu player Karen Han and pipa specialist Gao Hong. —Hannah Edgar

ALICIA HORWITZ

Director of Booking & Artist Management

   [MKI Artists](#)



Alicia Horwitz didn’t exactly stumble into a career working with clients like composer Jessie Montgomery and the Boston Pops. But when a hand injury threatened her rising profile as a professional flutist, she found something just as exciting at the Fordham University School of Law.

“I took a few courses in entertainment law,” says Horwitz, who spent 10 years at Columbia Artists Management Inc. before becoming director of booking & artist management at MKI Artists in New York City last year. “But my favorite courses were negotiation. One course, the Art of Lawyering, focused on how to make a settlement. I found that to be so interesting and motivating. It was the skill set: marrying the interests of two parties and coming to an agreement.”

During an internship at puppeteer Jim Henson’s intellectual property company, she also became intrigued with the operations of the sales department. “I talked to a lot of people on the sales side of things, how they took a concept like a Barney character and leveraged

that into branding deals with clothing companies, music companies. I was finding myself interested in these legally adjacent types of work.”

MKI Artists, she says, focuses on classical soloists, ensembles, conductors, and composers who are “very mission oriented.” In addition to Montgomery, the roster includes pianist Jeffrey Kahane, the Miro Quartet, flutist Demarre McGill, and clarinetist Anthony McGill—two African American brothers holding first chair positions in the Seattle Symphony and New York Philharmonic respectively.

“I think there’s a real hunger in the marketplace now, for the kinds of projects that MKI Artists are doing,” says Horwitz. “That’s been a pleasant surprise.”

Her hand injury long since healed, Horwitz is principal flute with Camerata Notturna, a New York City community chamber ensemble. The mother of two children, she also once headed up their school’s parent-teachers committee. —Wynne Delacoma



IMELDA TECSON JUAREZ

Manager of Group Sales and Grassroots Marketing

[Strathmore Hall Foundation](#)

As a violist, Imelda Tecson Juarez, 39, played in all sorts of professional settings over the course of her performance career: the Dallas Opera Orchestra, the Fort Worth Symphony, even for the ESPN NFL Draft and a national tour of *Hamilton*. But one observation nagged at her through all those experiences.

"I loved performing [classical music], but there was a disconnect between how much I loved it and how many people showed up. That was really hard to see when I was in the opera and the orchestra: When you go to *Hamilton*, 5,000 seats are sold out every night for six weeks," Tecson says. "One thing that brought me to arts admin was trying to bridge that."

Tecson only recently made the pivot to arts administration, but she's already had an outsized impact, with the Sphinx organization inviting her to join its [latest LEAD cohort](#). She got her start as an audience development assistant at Wolf Trap before coming to Strathmore last fall, where she manages the venue's group sales

and grassroots marketing strategy. Part of her job is being an ambassador for Strathmore in the Washington, DC, metro area.

"I talk to all the embassies, all the schools, all the senior living centers—people who don't necessarily know they want to go to certain programs. It's my job to make sure that as many diverse audiences as possible are made aware of what we do," Tecson says.

The diversity aspect is personal, too. Despite Texas being more than 40 percent Hispanic, Tecson, like some of her colleagues, says she was "usually the only person of color in any professional organization or youth organization" she joined from her childhood through college at the University of North Texas. She expected things to change when she decamped for the East Coast. They didn't.

"That [also] brought me to arts admin," Tecson says. "We need to diversify our audiences, but we also need to diversify organizations." —Hannah Edgar





LOKI KARUNA

Executive Producer and Host, [Trilloquy](#)
President, [TrillWerks Media](#)
Director of Artist Equity, [American Composers Orchestra](#)

Radio host. Equity advocate. Woodwind player. “Classical agitator” (*Minnesota Star-Tribune*). By whatever title or sobriquet, Loki Karuna—the broadcaster previously known as Garrett McQueen—would be equally dynamic. In 2016, Karuna left his career as a professional bassoonist for broadcast media. He co-founded the popular podcast *Trilloquy* with fellow radio host Scott Blankenship, which continues to present figures from every nook and cranny of classical music. As of this writing, recent episodes have featured composer George Lewis, pianist Lara Downes, and musicologist Tammy Kernodle.

Karuna’s radio work eventually led to a job at Minnesota Public Radio, and a move to Minneapolis. Then, George Floyd was murdered. “The first night of the uprisings, I was expecting the radio station to go into automation or something, because the city was literally burning. The decision was made for that not to happen,” Karuna recalls. “So, I used that national platform to give a perspective on what was going on—programming certain composers that would help me really engage this event.”

A few months later, MPR [terminated](#) Karuna—its only Black classical host—in a controversial decision that made headlines.

continued on p. 17

CONGRATULATIONS *Loki Karuna!*

The **Black Orchestral Network** proudly celebrates Loki Karuna on being recognized as one of **Musical America's 2024 Top 30 Professionals of the Year!**



Loki’s visionary work as a multifaceted artist, activist, and transformative voice in classical music continues to inspire and elevate our field. BON also honors the many Black professionals making waves in classical music, whose artistry and advocacy move us forward.

The mission of the Black Orchestral Network (BON) is to support Black orchestral musicians by Cultivating Community, Lifting Our Voices, and Telling Our Stories.

Become an Institutional Member of the **Black Orchestral Network!** By joining BON, your organization actively supports Black artists in classical music, fostering a more inclusive and equitable industry. Institutional supporters enjoy benefits like job advertisement, event promotion, and recognition on BON’s supporter webpage. Let’s work together to amplify Black voices in the orchestral field.

continued from p. 16

(The station's stated reasoning was that Karuna had made "unauthorized changes to playlists" that threatened its "compliance with the Digital Millennium Copyright Act;" Karuna said he made those changes to better suit the sociopolitical moment.) But Karuna more than landed on his feet. He became the American Composers Orchestra's director of artist equity, creating all-too-rare pathways for emerging composers of color to get their orchestral works heard. He continues to produce radio programs for classical stations across the country.



JONATHAN MARTIN

President and CEO

[Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra](#)    

Jonathan Martin has been presiding over a new era at the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. Last April, the [CSO chose Cristian Macelaru to succeed Louis Langrée](#) as music director, starting in 2025–26. "This was the fourth music director search I've been involved with," says Martin, who recently announced his pending retirement. "There is no question Cristi is going to continue the core sound and quality of ensemble developed by Louis. In addition, he has a track record of unlocking the assets of an orchestra to serve a broader audience."

Martin paved the way for Macelaru by reaching a five-year labor agreement with CSO musicians that took effect in September. It provides a 23 percent raise in salary over the life of the contract; base pay is \$122,087 this season. The CSO is one of the most financially stable American orchestras, with a 2023–24 operating budget of \$38 million and endowments valued at \$382 million.

It has been a leader in trying to address the lack of musicians of color in symphony orchestras, and that is covered in the new contract, which includes measures focused on audition and tenure practices

Amid a tumultuous, traumatic few years, Karuna credits Nichiren Buddhism with keeping him centered. The practice even inspired his new name: "Loki" is short for "Avalokiteshvara," which translates to "perceiver of the world's sounds," and "Karuna" means "compassion" in Sanskrit.

"I not only attach that to my Buddhist practice, but also to larger narratives surrounding liberation. . . I'm very proud to no longer, at least legally, be connected to a name that I associate with slavery, with Jim Crow, with coming from a plantation," Karuna says. —Hannah Edgar

to cultivate diversity. Since 2016, the orchestra, in collaboration with the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music and funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, has offered diversity fellowships to mentor five string players of color a year. The orchestra is a co-founder of Equity ARC, which seeks to broaden diversity in conservatories, and it and the Philadelphia Orchestra were the first major orchestras to establish a [chief diversity and inclusion officer](#).

"We have two members of color in the orchestra, and the Fellows play in almost all the classical weeks," Martin says. "We're making progress, but it's a lot slower than I'd like." The CSO diversity effort was set back by the U.S. Supreme Court's 2023 ruling that race-based affirmative action in higher education was unconstitutional. "The decision hampered our partnership with the conservatory, and Mellon is phasing out the funding. But we are continuing the fellowship program and taking the funding in-house. We're going to find our way through this because it's important." —John Fleming



SUSANN McDONALD

Harpist, Educator, Founder & Artistic Director (Emeritus)



[USA International Harp Competition](#)

According to family lore, Susann McDonald knew very early on what she would do with her life.

“In the third grade,” she said in an interview, “I wore white gloves to school. My teacher suggested I take them off, but I responded that I needed to protect my fingers as I was going to be a concert harpist.”

The Rock Island, IL, third-grader was right. At age 17, with Europe still struggling to recover from World War II, McDonald sailed to France for a summer studying with world-famous teacher Henriette Renié. After extensive lessons in France, including study at the Paris Conservatory, she returned to the U.S., where she launched a long and successful international career. Among its many highlights, she performed before 60,000 people in Chicago’s Soldier Field during the annual Chicagoland Music Festival. (Patti Page was the headliner.) She concertized in Israel, South America, and on radio and television both stateside and in Europe. In 1958, she gave

three Carnegie Hall recitals in one week, each including only music originally written for harp.

But teaching was also dear to McDonald’s heart. (She taught her first class as a teenager.) At one point she headed harp departments at the University of Arizona, University of Southern California, and California State College at Los Angeles. From 1975 to 1985 she led the harp department at The Juilliard School.

“Performing is a rather lonely way of life,” she said in an interview with *American Harp Journal*. “Teaching has always been intensely satisfying to me, with its many opportunities to directly influence and help others on a day-to-day basis.”

In 1981 she became head of the harp department at Indiana University’s Jacobs School of Music in Bloomington, eventually expanding it into the world’s largest collegiate harp department. She founded the USA International Harp Competition, and in 1989 was named Distinguished Professor of Music at IU.

Harp is not her sole focus. She loves reading thrillers and harbors an ambition to write a story about “a good-natured harpist who travels throughout the world and solves cases.”

Golf is another passion. On her bucket list: “I would love to make a hole in one.” — Wynne Delacoma





CHI-CHI NWANKOKU

Founder and Artistic Director

[Chineke! Foundation](#)

In 2015, Chi-chi Nwanoku founded the Chineke! Orchestra, which champions diversity in classical music, its name meaning God/Creator in the Igbo language of Nigeria, her father's homeland. The London-based ensemble's debut at the Southbank Centre included works by British Black composers, including the *Ballade for Orchestra* by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor.

"None of us in the orchestra, made up of 62 musicians of color in that first concert, had ever played a piece by Coleridge-Taylor, even though he was born in London and studied at the Royal College of Music," says Nwanoku, also a founding member of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, with which she was principal double bass for 30 years. "That just showed how unknown the contributions of Black classical musicians were."

In the 2024–25 season, Chineke! is giving up to 24 orchestral concerts, along with as many as 14 chamber programs. It toured Germany and Belgium in November, with mostly works by Black composers, including the world premiere of Brian Raphael Nabors's *Concerto for Orchestra*. Since 2017, the orchestra has played often in the [BBC Proms at Royal Albert Hall](#). Its first appearance in the summer festival featured electrifying solo performances by

Trinidadian soprano Jeanine De Bique and cellist [Sheku Kanneh-Mason](#), a relative unknown at the time.

"Both were making their Proms debut, and they've since gone on to substantial international careers," Nwanoku says. "That basically personifies what Chineke! is all about. We do what every other orchestra in the world does, which is to play concerts. But we also have another purpose, and that is to shine a spotlight on and diversify the musicians who play and what the audience hears." The orchestra has released five CDs, and she is especially proud of a double album of Coleridge-Taylor works, including the world premiere of *Sussex Landscape* by the composer's daughter, Avril Coleridge-Taylor.

Nwanoku credits, in part, being a double bass player for her pivotal role in broadening the reach of British classical music. "In an orchestra, our instrument is the foundation and heartbeat of everything," she says. "Not just the harmonic foundation but also the rhythmic foundation. We are rarely in the limelight, we rarely get the big tune, but we are always there, supporting everything."
—John Fleming



MATTHEW OZAWA

Stage Director and Chief Artistic Administration Officer

[Lyric Opera of Chicago](#)

As a young man, Matthew Ozawa entered Oberlin College and Conservatory hoping to be a professional clarinetist. But when faced with a dire orchestral job market, his parents, of all people, offered up an alternative: What about directing?

Good call. Ozawa, 42, has become one of the most in-demand opera directors in the country for his incisive spins on

standard repertoire, although his catalog also encompasses everything from *Sweeney Todd* and *A Little Night Music* to new works by Huang Ruo (*Angel Island*, *An American Soldier*) and Matthew Aucoin (*Second Nature*).

In 2020, Ozawa lost nine productions to the shutdown, including a *Fidelio* for San Francisco Opera that starkly evoked

continued on p. 20

continued from p. 19

a migrant detention center rather than a standard prison. ([The production helped reopen SFO](#) in 2021 and has since gone onto the Canadian Opera Company and Lyric Opera of Chicago.) But the total reset of the pandemic and accompanying racial (re)awakening encouraged him to radicalize his directorial approach. One of his most well-traveled productions has become a *Madama Butterfly* that sets the opera not in Japan but in a modern-day Pinkerton's orientalist fantasy of Japan, as glimpsed through a VR headset.

"It told me that there was a way forward, like *Fidelio*. Everyone who loved the tradition still loved it, and then people

who hated *Butterfly* because [they] feel 'othered' by it, don't like the appropriation, or don't like how women are treated, came away feeling so empowered," he says.

Ozawa is keenly aware that he is one of few Asians working in the field at his level. When he began directing, he was the only Asian American opera director in the country; when he joined Lyric Opera of Chicago's staff in 2007, he says he was the first Asian to work not just in the company but in the entire building. Now, as Lyric's chief artistic administration officer—a [newly created position](#)—Ozawa is essentially the general director's "right hand."

"Ultimately, the goal is to create an experience for thousands of people that is transformative," he says. —Hannah Edgar



KATHERINE POWERS

Executive Director

[Pacific Opera Project](#)   

Last year, Pacific Opera Project's [Artistic Director Josh Shaw](#) was recognized as an MA Top 30 Professional. It speaks to the small LA-based company's creativity and moxie that this year's list honors its Executive Director Katherine Powers.

Powers's first encounters with POP were onstage. A soprano, she was cast as Fiordiligi in its 2012 *Così fan tutte*—the company's third production ever. She enjoyed the experience so much she's returned many times since.

"[Josh] has this way of taking a piece of pretty standard repertoire and superimposing upon it some immediately accessible cultural reference that most people in contemporary society are going to get. . . There's an instant understanding and enjoyment of the story," Powers says.

After honing her management skills as director of vocal arts at the California School of the Arts high school, Powers became the POP's executive director in early 2023, at what her colleagues have

described as "a challenging stage in [the company's] evolution." Because of POP's size, Powers does much more than the average executive director; as finance director, head grant writer, and development director, she has managed to secure two of the organization's largest-ever grants. On the individual donor side, she has increased individual giving by 67 percent and the company's donor pool by 47 percent.

"We're maturing as a company," Powers says. "I think people don't realize that making cheap opera is expensive."

Powers's hard work isn't going unrecognized. She was just invited to the Opera America leadership intensive, convening in New York in February.

"Having this recognition from Musical America and Opera America in the same year feels very affirming that I'm on the right track," she says. —Hannah Edgar



JOSHUA ROBISON

General Manager

[MTT Inc.](#)

Joshua Robison and Michael Tilson Thomas (MTT) have been together almost 50 years (they were married in 2014), with Thomas ever ascending as a dazzling star conductor/composer while Robison, his partner and manager, as the level-headed protector and guide behind the scenes. "I'm right in the middle of the fray," Robison says of his role amid the constellation of management companies, record labels, orchestras, and other institutions revolving around Thomas. "I don't write the contracts, but I certainly review them. A lot of what I do is nudge things

along. I make it possible for things to happen that Michael wants to have happen."

Growing up in Los Angeles in the 1950s, the two first met in their school orchestra in North Hollywood, with Robison, 11, playing cello, and Thomas, 12, on oboe and piano. As Thomas went on to pursue his musical destiny, Robison honed his talent as a gymnast at the University of California, Berkeley, winning an NCAA championship on the rings in 1967. "Because I had that moment of fame, I never felt the need to have my

continued on p. 22

CONGRATULATIONS, KATHERINE POWERS!

Pacific Opera Project celebrates our Executive Director, Katherine Powers, for being named one of Musical America's 2024 Top 30 Professionals of the Year! As a strategic leader attentive to POP's longevity, Katherine is ushering in a new era of unprecedented growth, ensuring our future sustainability and success.

This honor marks the second year in a row for POP, with our Founding Artistic Director, Josh Shaw, earning the same recognition last year.

Learn more about POP at www.pacificoperaproject.com



PACIFIC OPERA PROJECT

continued from p. 21

name in the forefront,” says Robison, whose flutist sister, Paula Robison, is a founding member of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.

Robison was closely involved in the many programs MTT initiated during his 25-year music directorship of the San Francisco Symphony, such as the [Keeping Score](#) documentaries and [MTT Files](#) radio series. Recently, he was executive producer of [Grace, a handsome four-CD box set](#) of Thomas compositions on the Pentatone label. The 1987 co-founding by MTT (with Lin

and Ted Arison, the Carnival Cruise magnate) and development of the New World Symphony in Miami, where young musicians receive post-graduate orchestra training, remains a proud achievement for Robison and Thomas.

In 2021, MTT was diagnosed with brain cancer, but he continues to conduct a select number of concerts, often of Mahler symphonies. “What we have to be careful about now is that we don’t dream too big,” Robison says. “We’re at that stage of life where you want to contribute things, and realize you still have something to offer, but we can’t be empire building at this point.” —John Fleming



ERIC J. RUBIO
Director of Finance and Administration
[The Washington Chorus](#)

In fourth grade, Eric Rubio first picked up the trombone in a suburban Chicago band program. Since then, he says he’s “never looked back.” Now the director of finance and administration at The Washington Chorus, Rubio, 36, started his career in education, teaching in schools as well as running his own trombone studio. He was first bitten by the arts admin bug as an undergraduate at Wheaton (IL) College Conservatory of Music, where he worked as a stage manager. He would return to his alma mater two years later as an assistant manager of the conservatory’s presenting series, hosting such artists as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO), Canadian Brass, and pianist Emanuel Ax. While living in the Chicago area, Rubio also served on the executive and nominating committees of the CSO Overture Council, the orchestra’s young professionals network.

Rubio’s first full-time job in administration was with Seraphic Fire, as finance and operations manager. But just a year after relocating to Miami for the role, the pandemic struck.

“That derailed things for the performing arts world in general, and especially choral arts,” he says, with a dark chuckle.

Little did Rubio know that in just over a year, he would find himself back in the choral world again, taking an equivalent role at the prestigious Washington Chorus in D.C. He has also joined the [Sphinx LEAD program](#) as a member of its sixth and current cohort.

continued on p. 23

CONGRATULATIONS, ALEXANDER SERIO

The Sitka Music Festival Board of Directors and Artistic Director, Zuill Bailey, extend our heartfelt gratitude for your outstanding leadership and dedication to our mission: delivering the finest classical music experience in Alaska through performance and education.



ALASKA'S PREMIER CHAMBER MUSIC PRESENTER



continued from p. 22

“The best part, honestly, is the cohort. We have a private group chat; we’re always helping each other untangle different situations or challenges we’re facing. It’s a really special experience,” he says.

Outside of his work for The Washington Chorus, he serves on the board of Embracing Arlington Arts, a “hyper-local arts advocacy organization” in his current hometown of Arlington, VA.
—Hannah Edgar



LOUIS SCAGLIONE

President, CEO and Music Director

[Philadelphia Youth Orchestra Music Institute](#)

Being the music director of a major, internationally touring youth orchestra for nearly three decades is a feat in itself. Being the organization’s president and CEO, too? That’s a rare achievement.

Louis Scaglione is in a league of his own. He has led the 85-year-old Philadelphia Youth Orchestra—expanded on his watch to the Philadelphia Youth Orchestra Music Institute, or PYOMI—to exponential growth. Today it serves about 700 students in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, and boasts 11 divisions. When Temple University announced it would cut its prep division’s brass band, Scaglione quickly moved to absorb it into the PYOMI umbrella; just last year, the organization added a jazz orchestra and a wind ensemble. It courted some \$2 million in revenue (fiscal 2023), conferring significant scholarships and financial aid for young musicians.

Scaglione also steered the organization through COVID-19, managing to avoid what could have been an existential crisis: “I think

we were the first in the region to bring students back for in-person musical activities. . . and we actually came out the other end stronger as an organization,” he says.

Scaglione first joined PYOMI in 1997 as an associate conductor, leading its junior orchestra. Shortly thereafter, in 2001, the organization’s structure changed and it named Scaglione as its very first executive director. Around the same time, PYOMI’s Music Director Joseph Primavera was preparing to step down after a record-breaking 51 years at the helm. As associate conductor, Scaglione was next in line to succeed him; he did so, changing his position to “President and CEO” and adding “Music Director” to his list of titles in the 2004/05 season.

“A ship always needs a captain; you have to chart the course. But it’s the crew that gets you there: my staff, the faculty, the Board of Trustees. They really move it in the direction I want to go,” Scaglione says. —Hannah Edgar



ALEXANDER SERIO

Executive Director

[Sitka Music Festival](#)

Physically, Sitka, Alaska—a town of 8,000 on an island off the south coast of Alaska—couldn’t be more different from Philadelphia, PA. As Alexander Serio puts it, Sitka’s stunning views of mountains and ocean feel “like living in the middle of National Geographic.”

But there’s a continuum among Serio’s work as executive director of the annual Sitka Music Festival, his ongoing role as a trumpet teacher in Philadelphia, and his previous job as director of a branch of that city’s venerable Settlement Music School. In all ways, he is trying to make music part of people’s everyday lives.

continued on p. 24

continued from p. 23

Founded in 1972 by a student of Jascha Heifetz, the month-long Sitka Music Festival has always drawn world-class performers. Since 2011 when cellist Zuill Bailey arrived as artistic director, the festival, held each June, has expanded its reach. It partners with Sitka Jazz Week and sponsors a three-week Cello Seminar that sends young cellists to perform in Sitka and beyond in venues ranging from bars to retirement homes and schools. This winter the festival will send the Galvin Cello Quartet on a 1,200-mile Alaskan tour, with performances in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Ketchikan, and Wasilla as well as Sitka.

"We try to put classical music in places you wouldn't necessarily expect it," says Serio, in the job since 2022. "Zuill played the complete

Bach Cello Suites on a street downtown during Halloween one year. We put candy in his cello case to hand out to the kids."

Starting out as a trumpet player, Serio eventually switched gears.

"I'm passionate about reaching more people. I realize that as a teacher and an administrator I can have a bigger effect, making this art form more accessible.

"People come to our concerts in their Xtrafus, which is the southeast Alaska kind of fishing boot. Some people even come in their fishing gear. Some people dress up. It's really a very accessible kind of environment. For Sitka and Ketchikan to hear chamber concerts with Grammy-winning artists, it's really incredible." —Wynne Delacoma

ORLI SHAHAM

Pianist, Educator, Radio Host

The Juilliard School, Kaufman Music Center, Pacific Symphony



At six years old, Orli Shaham first began learning a Mozart piano sonata, and now, some 40 years later, she has [recorded all 18 sonatas](#), released as a six-CD box set by Canary Classics in November. "I saw this project both as a place for me to learn

and also a place for me to suggest to other pianists where they could take this music," Shaham says. "If you experience the sonatas as a whole, they teach you an incredible amount about how Mozart developed and thought about the piano, about sonatas, about communication."

Congratulations to pianist
Orli Shaham
Canary Classics recording artist since 2007
One of *Musical America's* 2024 Top Professionals of the Year
 CANARY CLASSICS



Shaham leans on her experience playing contemporary music to inform her approach to Mozart and other historic composers. "There is no better teacher on how to play the work of a dead composer than playing the work of a living composer, because then you are immediately confronted by the reality of the human behind the notes."

In her 17 years as curator, host, and pianist of Café Ludwig, the Pacific Symphony chamber music series in California, she has programmed a generous amount of new works. She and orchestra principals have recorded a soon-to-be-released album of chamber music by 21st-century American

continued on p. 25

continued from p. 24

composers Margaret Brouwer, Reena Esmail, Avner Dorman, Viet Cuong, Jessie Montgomery, Ari Fischer, Peter Dayton, and Sarah Kirkland Snider.

Off the concert stage, Shaham, who is married to conductor David Robertson and is one of violinist Gil Shaham's siblings, is widely involved in music education. She is on the piano and chamber music faculty of the Juilliard School; she is artistic director of the interactive children's concert series [Orli Shaham's Bach Yard](#);

and in several episodes a year, she is co-host and creator of NPR's *From the Top*, on which she interviews and performs with teenage artists.

Shaham is chair of the board of trustees of New York's Kaufman Music Center, which includes the Special Music School, a K-12 public school, and the Lucy Moses School, Manhattan's largest community arts school. Also at the center is Merkin Concert Hall, where the pianist has a long history. "I recently celebrated the 25th anniversary of my debut at Merkin. I remember that I played the Schubert A-major sonata." —John Fleming



RUSSELL STEINBERG

Founder and Artistic Director

[Los Angeles Youth Orchestra](#)

The centerpiece of the Los Angeles Youth Orchestra's 25th-anniversary concert in November was Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5, just the sort of complex, challenging repertoire favored by orchestra Founder and Artistic Director Russell Steinberg.

"A youth orchestra is going to have intonation and ensemble issues—the players are still mastering technique—but they can

create an interpretation just as convincing as that of a professional orchestra," says Steinberg, a composer with a Ph.D. in music from Harvard University, where he studied with Leon Kirchner. "In fact, sometimes and in some ways, it's more convincing. A professional orchestra works on a piece for a week, and the conductor gets across whatever he can, while I have the luxury of working on it with the orchestra for a whole semester, getting the music into their bones, talking about the political context of the piece, and trying out different ideas."

With the Shostakovich, he wanted his young musicians to develop their own interpretation of the symphony, which premiered in 1937 when the composer was at odds with Soviet authorities. "I tell the students that each of their parts is telling a story, and they need to play it with a specific idea that they're trying to get across."

LAYO has up to 120 members from 8 to 18 years old—divided between intermediate and advanced orchestras—who come to Sunday rehearsals at the

Congratulations to pianist
Orli Shaham
One of Musical America's 2024 Top Professionals of the Year

Your work in solo recital, chamber music, education, programming, radio and community outreach is outstanding, and we are very proud to represent you!

Colbert Artists Management

Photo: Pacific Symphony & Maritime Margaret Photography

continued on p. 26

continued from p. 25

Encino Community Center from all over Los Angeles County. To audition, a student needs to have had two years of private lessons. Concerts have been performed at a variety of venues through the years, including the top-flight Ambassador Auditorium. The

orchestra has gone on tour to Carnegie Hall twice, to Italy, and two times to Vienna and Prague. —John Fleming

JAMES WEIDNER

Board Chair

Chicago Sinfonietta



Founded in 1987 to champion diversity in classical music, the orchestra [announced on October 28](#) that its wunderkind President/CEO, Blake-Anthony Johnson ([a 2022 Top 30 Professional](#)), is stepping down in January. During his four-year tenure, he tripled the orchestra's staff, seasonal operating budget, and annual revenue, and oversaw the Sinfonietta's move into a new venue.

Johnson won't be the only one ending his Sinfonietta chapter on a high note. Credit for all those accomplishments is also due to the organization's board chair, James (Jim) Weidner, who served on Johnson's search committee and who, like Johnson, steps down at the beginning of the calendar year. (Weidner will be succeeded by Wendy Lewis, a former DEI professional for McDonald's and

Major League Baseball.)

Weidner, retired CEO of a major medical-insurance group, divides his time among California, Texas, and Chicago, the first of these for regular cancer treatments for his wife. So, why get so involved in an organization in his third home? Weidner grew up in Englewood, which today ranks among the poorest of Chicago's 77 community areas. "It's a bit of giving back to the neighborhood," he says.

Weidner joined the Sinfonietta board in 2013 and [was made chair in 2022](#). On his watch, community partnerships and educational programs in neighborhoods like Englewood have never been stronger, even coming out of the pandemic. The Sinfonietta took another step forward last spring when it played at historically Black colleges and universities in the South—the orchestra's first tour in decades. Weidner's term also saw the implementation of the pay-what-you-can ticket program, a daring gambit that garnered widespread media attention and has since been imitated, most recently at Opera Philadelphia.

"It's our way of attracting those that we want to come and see like-folk on stage," he says. "During intermission, you're going to hear from us, and we're going to welcome you into our family." —Hannah Edgar





ARYO WICAKSONO

Senior Manager of Membership, National Engagement & Outreach

[PEN America](#)

PEN America is most known for challenging book bans and other First Amendment violations. But in recent months, the organization has made significant strides extending its philosophy to the performing arts.

Credit goes to Aryo Wicaksono, whose work for PEN fuses his experience as a longtime arts administrator, internationally touring concert pianist, journalist, and translator. Leveraging his deep connections in the performing arts, he's developed institutional partnerships between PEN and entities like Carnegie Hall, Metropolitan Opera, Public Theater, the Theatre Development Fund (TDF), Austin Film Festival, Manhattan Theatre Club (MTC), and others.

"It's a combination of literary, cultural, and performing arts, and also human rights advocacy," Wicaksono says of his current role. "It's never a siloed thing. All of it's related."

As a boy in Indonesia, Wicaksono committed himself to piano early on but picked up freelance writing assignments to finance CD purchases and interview musicians he admired. His dual musical and literary interests would follow him into adulthood. After moving to New York, he continued to write and translate in both corporate and journalistic settings, all while teaching piano and working as a rehearsal pianist for

institutions like the Mark Morris Dance Center, Dance Theater Harlem, and NYU's Tisch dance program. (He acknowledges a special fondness for dance—his late husband was a dancer.)

Wicaksono juggled some of those gigs while working full-time for Chamber Music America as its membership manager from 2013 to 2018. The experience was an outgrowth of work organizing chamber music programs as early as his student days at the University of Arizona. Prior to arriving at PEN, Wicaksono even worked in bankruptcy law for six years.

Quite understandably, Wicaksono doesn't have much time to concertize anymore. He does, however, still remotely teach students as far flung as Indonesia, Singapore, and the West Coast. Giving back through teaching, he says, "is what separates a Martha Argerich, a Daniil Trifonov, a Yuja Wang, a Horowitz." —Hannah Edgar

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HANAKO YAMAGUCHI

Artistic Producer and Consultant

From 1989 to 2020 Hanako Yamaguchi was director of music programming for Lincoln Center with a portfolio including the Great Performers Series and the Mostly Mozart and White Light festivals. The classical music scene changed radically in those years, as did Lincoln Center's presenting priorities. Yamaguchi's did not, however, and for the last few years she has been focusing on legitimate classical arts projects as an independent producer and consultant. Clients have included the Boston Celebrity Series, WQXR, New York's Little Island, and more. Currently she is producing cellist [Alisa Weilerstein's "Fragments,"](#) a six-part project built around the 36 movements of Bach's solo cello suites with 27 newly commissioned works. Now in its third season, "Fragments 2," comes to Carnegie Hall in January and tours thereafter.

Yamaguchi reflects on the changes in classical music presenting. "When I began at Lincoln Center," she says, "the focus was on well-known artists, celebrities. Many musicians, many orchestras could fill 2,000 seats.

But of course, life is change. "We shifted our focus to repertoire, single composers. We had Colin Davis and the London Symphony in a complete Sibelius symphony cycle. We added a film, some chamber music, and discussions to create context. We did that around a lot of composers."

In the late 1990s came a multi-disciplinary series titled "New Visions." British theater director Simon McBurney and the Emerson String Quartet explored Shostakovich's final years. Director Peter Sellars staged Bach cantatas featuring mezzo-soprano Lorraine Hunt Lieberson.

In the mid-2000s the focus shifted to audience experience—Mostly Mozart concerts with audience members sipping wine at cabaret tables. "The goal was to create more intimacy."

Dearest to her heart, though, was the White Light Festival, which ran for 10 years beginning in 2010. Programs were 80 minutes long with no intermission. The idea was to immerse audiences in sights and sounds, prompting, says Yamaguchi, "contemplation, transcendence, ecstasy."

Those same prompts are vital to Weilerstein's "Fragments." Each of the six segments represents a weave of Bach and new music with little demarcation among composers.

"Unfortunately in classical music," said Yamaguchi, "we feel the need to think too much. 'Who is this piece by? What is this piece?' This project invites you to come and experience music without all of that. It's not easy at first to turn off your brain. But about half-way in, you finally let go and just let the music wash over you. We really want you to just listen." —Wynne Delacoma



Wynne Delacoma (Chicago) is the former classical music critic for the *Chicago Sun-Times* and an adjunct faculty member at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism. As a free-lance, she has worked with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Lyric Opera of Chicago, the Ravinia Festival, the *Sun-Times*, Musical America, and *Chicago Classical Review*.



Hannah Edgar is a Chicago-based freelance writer who contributes to *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Reader*, the Cincinnati Symphony's *Fanfare*, and Musical America. Bylines also appear in the *New York Times*, *VAN Magazine*, *Bandcamp*, and *ARTnews*.



John Fleming writes for *Opera*, Musical America, *Classical Voice North America*, and other publications. For 22 years, he covered the Florida music scene as performing arts critic of the *Tampa Bay Times*.

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Advertiser Index

Black Orchestral Network.....	16
Canary Classics.....	24
Colbert Artists Management.....	25
Des Moines Metro Opera.....	11
From the Top	26
Miller Theater at Columbia University	9
Pacific Opera Project	21
Sitka Music Festival.....	22
Russell Steinberg	27
Strathmore.....	15
USA International Harp Competition	18

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