The Mission of VocalEssence

VocalEssence champions choral music of all genres, celebrating the vocal experience through innovative concerts, commissions, and community engagement programs.

Our Core Values

- We believe that music is a living art and are committed to its continual discovery through innovative concerts and commissions.
- We believe in the importance of quality in everything we perform and do. We strive to be a cooperative partner and leader in our field.
- We advocate for the choral art in Minnesota, nationally and internationally.
- We present culturally authentic education programs that engage participants of all ages.
- We believe in fostering the talents of composers, conductors, and artists.
- We believe in financial responsibility. We are committed to operating on a sound financial basis and building a legacy for our future.

From the Executive Director

The VocalEssence 2011-2012 season was marked with programs and initiatives celebrating the future and reflecting on our past. We embarked on an organic and “real-time” strategic planning process that considered our 43-year history and opportunities for future growth tempered by the realities of today’s economic climate. The result is a living document with five key goals:

1. Present innovative, high quality choral music concerts in an array of venue sizes and locations in the Twin Cities, Minnesota, nationally and internationally
2. Introduce choral music at its finest and most innovative to expanded audiences
3. Raise the visibility of VocalEssence nationally and internationally as a training ground for exceptional artistic directors, arts administrators and artists who become renowned for their own innovations and leadership in choral music
4. Expand the role of VocalEssence in advocating for the choral art form
5. Build on organization and financial strengths of VocalEssence

Key accomplishments informed by the planning process included national or world premieres of five new major choral works from internationally recognized composers William Bolcom, Jonathan Dove, Michael Daugherty, Hannibal Lokumbe and Tarik O’Regan.

In the fall, we embarked on The North Star Tour, a five-community tour supported by Minnesota State Arts Board Legacy funding. In the course of eight days the Ensemble Singers engaged more than 2,000 Minnesotans in Luverne, Marshall, Montevideo, St. Cloud and Duluth in concerts, master classes, student workshops, retirement home visits and community sings. We not only championed the richness of the choral art form within these communities, but also celebrated the artistic and ethnic diversity of our state.

Our advocacy goals were realized on the local level through a series of performance partnerships with sixteen choral and instrumental groups ranging from Magnum Chorum to The Rose Ensemble to Monroe Crossing.

We focused national attention on the Twin Cities by hosting the Chorus America National Conference, attracting more than 500 choral artists and administrators to our community to join us in celebrating the richness and strength of our art form.

The crowning achievement of our community engagement programs this year was the Joyce Foundation funded world-premiere of Hannibal Lokumbe’s *In the Spirit of Being*. Electrifying performances were complimented by Hannibal’s extensive work with young men in the juvenile justice system — many of whom came to terms with their past and legacies for the future through with journey with Hannibal.

I continue to marvel at the impact VocalEssence has in our community powered by the generous support of our many friends acknowledged in this report — thank you for your continued investment in our work.

Mary Ann Pulk
Executive Director
2011-2012: The Year in Numbers

19 commissions and premieres in the 2011-2012 concert season

765 community members participated in the North Star Tour outreach events

5,741 students attended the WITNESS Young People’s Concerts

11,233 people attended VocalEssence 11-12 season concerts

1,472 Greater Minnesota audience members attended one of the North Star Tour concerts

Email newsletter reaches 4,105 in 39 countries

20 members of the Young Singers Group, the new young professionals group for VocalEssence

80 at-risk students and adults attended intense Genealogy sessions with composer Hannibal Lokumbe

500 students performed on stage for the ¡Cantaré! Community Concert at Burnsville Performing Arts Center
From the Artistic Director

I am very pleased to mention just a few of the artistic successes of the 43rd VocalEssence season:

• Sigrid Johnson’s 20th season as Assistant Director
• An amazing Minnesota tour as the Ensemble Singers traveled the length of Highway 23
• The always-anticipated Welcome Christmas concerts, bringing back the beautiful cantata by Stephen Paulus, So Hallow’d is the Time
• WITNESS composer Hannibal Lokumbe gave us an hour-long, moving work that celebrated the miracle of life for each of us
• And, finally, hosting for the second time the Chorus America Conference which brought more than 500 choral enthusiasts to Minneapolis for four great days of music-making including a grand opening night with eight Minnesota choirs. The following night featured the VocalEssence Ensemble Singers performing Carol Barnett’s The World Beloved: A Bluegrass Mass and celebrating Dominick Argento’s 85th birthday with his eloquent Walden Pond.

As always, thank you for your support in 2011-2012!

Philip Brunelle
Artistic Director

The North Star Tour

The VocalEssence Ensemble Singers traveled to Luverne, Marshall, Montevideo, St. Cloud, and Duluth in October and November 2011 to perform concerts and work with local groups.

“I was re-invigorated about my own musical pursuit. Thank you!” — Prairie Arts Chorale singer

“We can’t all come to Minneapolis/St. Paul to participate in fine arts programs. Thank you for coming to our community.” — Marshall audience member

“I LOVED this tour, because we had a connection with the people. We, as an ensemble, have been transformed because we have sung so much together, eaten together, lived & traveled together. We are a better group for it.” — VocalEssence Ensemble Singer
Kay and Mike McCarthy’s lifelong commitment to choral music yields many new works — including a little bluegrass

Minnesota is the “Mecca” of choral music in the United States. Its long-standing tradition of developing, nurturing, promoting, funding — and even innovating — this beloved music genre has a storied history here that is unique to the Great Lakes state. So it should be no surprise — or maybe it is — that the land of 10,000 choral music movers, shakers and lovers also boasts some of the most ardent supporters. They not only serve tirelessly on boards, religiously attend performances, and enlist others to the cause with an evangelical fervor, they also commission singularly unique works.

Kay and Mike McCarthy are two such choral music devotees of VocalEssence, arguably one of the premier purveyors of choral music in the country, founded by the inimitable Philip Brunelle in 1969. Kay and Mike, self-described as a “recovering attorney” and “a man of eclectic musical tastes,” met in a church choir. Kay’s father was a prominent choral music director in the Minneapolis public schools. Mike, who has an affinity for the vocal tradition and the banjo, owned “almost all of Norman Luboff’s records.”

As the McCathys moved forward in their respective professional careers, they never lost sight of their love of choral music. While Kay was teaching high school, practicing law and creating quilts, Mike’s business career included stints at General Mills and Parker Brothers before he returned to Williams Steel and Hardware, which was founded by his great-great-grandfather in 1860. His involvement with professional choral music began as the treasurer and board chair of the Dale Warland Singers in the 1980s. It continues today, as he serves as treasurer of both VocalEssence and Chorus America.

“I’ve always loved the collegiality and cooperative nature of choral music,” Mike allows, “that doesn’t put an emphasis just on a soloist — it’s a group-focused endeavor.” But what he sees in Philip Brunelle, who has become a good friend over the years, transcends Brunelle’s role as artistic director of the renowned organization and that of the choral tradition itself: “I really respect his progressive ability and intensity to produce concerts that invariably leave everyone entertained and enriched by new music. That’s very difficult to do year after year, but Philip does it better than anyone else. He’s also a delight to work with professionally.”

Perhaps it was destiny — given the couple’s love of the VocalEssence mission, its benchmark programs WITNESS and ¡Cantaré!, and Mike’s love of the banjo and bluegrass music — that they would commission a bluegrass mass by Carol Barnett and librettist Marisha Chamberlain for VocalEssence and bluegrass quintet Monroe Crossing in 2007.

“At first, Philip didn’t know whether bluegrass would fit with choral music! But he never said no, and that’s part of his talent. He’s willing to explore new ideas, even radical ones like a bluegrass mass.”

“As commissioners of The World Beloved: A Bluegrass Mass, we were unusually involved in the creative side of the process,” Mike recalls fondly. “There are different pieces like ballads that can be performed separately or as a whole,” adds Kay, “and there are still the very traditional aspects of the mass, too.”

So, how did it turn out? “We loved it from the beginning!” both exclaim. “It’s really a terrific crossover piece that works for a bluegrass group and a chorus. It’s a great juxtaposition of styles and it works beautifully,” Mike surmises. An early sign of its success was that Dale Warland was so impressed he gave it its second performance with the Cincinnati Conservatory Chorale shortly after hearing the world premiere. Philip Brunelle and the VocalEssence Ensemble Singers immediately recorded the piece with Monroe Crossing, and it remains one of the most popular recordings by VocalEssence to this day.

Now in their retirement years with grandchildren afoot, Mike and Kay see a bright future for VocalEssence, especially if others step up and support it through their own form of giving and service. “There’s really nothing like it in the country,” Mike notes, “and you would be hard pressed to find any organization whose cultural reach and educational programs in the community are as effective as those in this organization. This is an arts institution worth preserving and helping to grow. To ensure that, we’ve developed a strong succession plan so that Philip’s legacy will carry on into the future.”

Today, VocalEssence has become a McCarthy legacy of sorts, too: the parents have introduced its music to their three daughters and their children. And for Mike’s 65th birthday, Kay commissioned a work for him by composer Stephen Paulus, based on the Longfellow poem, “The Day Is Done,” performed by VocalEssence as a surprise for him.

Now there’s a perfect tribute to everything this couple has done to date. And to the next generation of VocalEssence supporters.
The first month that Dr. Susan Crockett moved to the Twin Cities from Syracuse, New York, twelve years ago, she found herself at Orchestra Hall where Garrison Keillor and Philip Brunelle were holding forth onstage. Call it a baptism by vocal and comedic affect. Together the two inimitable Minnesotans humorously prepped the audience for a sing-along of the “Hallelujah Chorus” — like a match and a flame conspiring for more oxygen — and a big explosive result.

“This ought to be interesting,” thought the new transplant to herself. To her astonishment and delight, the audience knew all of the words! “Moreover, everyone knew the musical parts. The musical expertise of that audience was astounding — and it was a lot of fun!”

Fast forward to the present. Since then, Dr. Crockett (or “Suzie” to her fellow VocalEssence Board Members where she has served for three years as Secretary of the Board and Chair of the Board Affairs Committee) has become a bona fide Minnesotan and a true champion of the VocalEssence mission.

Even though she carries a busy schedule as a Vice President and Senior Technology Officer at General Mills, she devotes much time and energy to this longtime Minnesota arts institution. She believes it serves as a beacon for choral music traditions — past, present and those yet to be created — not just in Minnesota but throughout the choral music world. “VocalEssence is an organization that inspires leadership; I think that’s why so many board members who serve the requisite three years take the obligatory year off and then want to come back on again!”

However, the VocalEssence program that consistently engages her at every level is the WITNESS program. WITNESS celebrates the musical contributions and compositions of African Americans, while building selfhood and leadership strength.

A Rare and Formidable Program Unlike Any in the Nation

The 22-year-old WITNESS program serves a variety of audiences: It combines public education and musical resources, plus commissioned works by contemporary African American composers, recordings, and an annual public concert. It is a rare and formidable program, “unlike anything in the nation,” notes Dr. Crockett. “It is producing leadership in areas where no one else is.”

“It is innovative and fills gaps that desperately need to be filled,” adds the VocalEssence supporter and perhaps the biggest champion of WITNESS. “It is so important to have artists from the African American community work in our schools — it expands our shared heritage as Americans, and is a vision that is truly inspired!”

Started by Brunelle, whom Crockett extols for his own brand of leadership and perseverance “that put Minneapolis on the choral map,” she says the program has grown over the years because of ongoing support from a board and staff that continue to raise awareness about funding needs. “It began with one artist in one school, and now we’ve reached more than 120,000 students. But we could do more.”

Crockett says if more people were exposed to any part of the WITNESS offerings, they would become donors and supporters instantly. Not one to do the talk without the walk, she has done her part to spread the word by organizing the WITNESS Community Luncheon that has been held at General Mills for the past three years. General Mills, a perfect location for this event, has been a leading supporter of WITNESS since its inception. “It is a joy for me to help share the message of WITNESS with the community,” said Dr. Crockett. “With each year I see the increasing positive impact of the program in our community.”

As to the future of WITNESS, the tireless board member and VocalEssence supporter is keenly positive and optimistic — provided the funding is there. “WITNESS is unique in inspiring national leadership, especially among African Americans. Its impact on African American youth has untold influences in ways that very few initiatives ever do,” she says. “WITNESS succeeds because it speaks to the heart, not just to the head.”
WITNESS: In the Spirit of Being challenges audiences, students to explore what their legacy will be

WITNESS: In the Spirit of Being brought composer, educator and jazz trumpeter Hannibal Lokumbe to the Twin Cities. The program not only connected people to the arts, it also challenged all who heard it to look internally to explore what their own legacy will be. The experience for many was both profound and deeply meaningful.

- 97.7% of surveyed teachers rated their experience at the concert as good or excellent.
- 100% of survey respondents answered that they see cultural benefits for their students attending Ordway performances.
- 96% of classroom teachers indicated that there was a good-to-excellent chance that they would participate in WITNESS or a similar VocalEssence program again in the future.

“This type of experience is mostly out of reach for our students’ families and to come to a performance that speaks to their cultural background, as well as to their lives, in such a beautiful hall gives these kids a chance to see and form role models and dreams that they might not have considered before.”

— WITNESS Classroom Teacher

“This WITNESS program touched the very depth of our being and our soul. Thanks for offering the community such an engaging masterpiece.”

— Dr. Reatha Clark King

Untitled
by Shomari Carter, WITNESS School Program Participant

my legacy is present im trying to be the best of me
im something like a chef and im cookin up a recipe 2 of the main ingredients are honesty integrity start takin life serious because with life we playin Jeopardy... this game is win or lose its time to wake up not hit the button labeled snooze hang with a brighter crowd instead of the average fools think of legacy as construction and in this piece inlies tools your favorite tool is respect don’t be afraid to use you gotta give it to get it or yourself you will lose if you don’t get it by now im leaving you mental clues on how to build your legacy take the advice when you choose

Bars
2011-2012 Season Highlights

July to December 2011

- VocalEssence Ensemble Singers perform at the Minnesota State Fair.
- Philip Brunelle receives an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from the University of Minnesota.
- Composer Hannibal Lokumbe speaks at the WITNESS Teacher Orientation Seminar.
- Composers Michael Daugherty and William Bolcom fly to Minnesota for their premieres.
- Celebrating her 20th year with VocalEssence, Associate Conductor Sigrid Johnson leads a community sing for women’s voices.
- VocalEssence Ensemble Singers begin The North Star Tour to Marshall, Luverne and Montevideo, MN.
- Performance of The Gift of Fire concert at Orchestra Hall with Jeffrey Biegel at the piano.
- Welcome Christmas Carol Contest winners are announced: James Kallembach and Robert Sieving.
- VocalEssence releases its new CD, From the Land of Sky Blue Waters.
- Ensemble Singers perform The World Beloved: A Bluegrass Mass at Central Lutheran Church.
- WITNESS: In the Spirit of Being public concert and four Young People’s Concerts at The Ordway.
- Música de México concert with special guests The Rose Ensemble and the University of St. Thomas Chamber Singers.
- The 2012 Welcome Christmas Carol Contest instrument is announced—concert flute.
- Brits & Brass concert with special guests Copper Street Brass Quintet and composer Tarik O’Regan.
- The BRIT BASH Gala at the Milwaukee Depot on May 5 raises more than $100,000.
- WITNESS hosts the national Chorus America Conference in downtown Minneapolis.

January to June 2012

- Talented Tenth Apprentice Program (TTAP) students begin rehearsals with WITNESS Teaching Artist Ginger Commodore.
- VocalEssence hosts an open chorus rehearsal with composer Hannibal Lokumbe.
- WITNESS Luncheon at General Mills with the Brooklyn Center High School Choir and speaker Robin Hickman.
- Philip Brunelle, pianist Sanford Moore and Tonia Hughes lead an Osher Lifelong Learning Institute class about WITNESS.
- VocalEssence hosts an open chorus rehearsal with composer Hannibal Lokumbe.
- Composers Hannibal Lokumbe leads genealogy workshops with Boys Totem Town, Ujamaa Place, Gordon Parks High School, and Hennepin County Home School.
- ¡Cantaré! composers visit Minnesota to refine their compositions with six local schools.
- ¡Cantaré! composers visit Minnesota to talk about Mexican culture with six local schools.
- Philip Brunelle leads a community sing of choral favorites at Plymouth Congregational Church.
- WITNESS Luncheon at General Mills with the Brooklyn Center High School Choir and speaker Robin Hickman.
- More than 500 students perform at the ¡Cantaré! Community Concert at Burnsville Performing Arts Center.
- VocalEssence Ensemble Singers perform The World Beloved: A Bluegrass Mass at Central Lutheran Church.
BRIT BASH: Biennial Spring Gala nets more than $100,000 to support community engagement programs

BRIT BASH
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Dave Mona, Gala Chair Linda Mona and Philip Brunelle
She was from Mexico. He was from Minnesota. But when Roma Calatayud met Tom Stocks at the University of Minnesota in 1983, it didn't take long for the natives of two separate countries to become romantically linked and later married. You could write a song about it.

In fact, Roma, who is also a novelist, has written many songs in her lifetime, while her husband has been a longtime “hospitalist” — i.e. physician at Ridgeview Hospital in Waconia. Recently Roma's historical novel, A Song in My Heart — complete with a musical CD of her own compositions — earned a Mom's Choice Award in multimedia experiences and the 2012 Midwest Book Award in the Arts category. It's a feat that belies her passion for music and the arts.

But the couple's generous support of the VocalEssence program, ¡Cantaré! — in which contemporary Mexican composers come to Minnesota to develop and premier new works with students — have inspired them to become active members and fundraisers for the venerable VocalEssence. The program, husband and wife admit, serves many of the ideals they have believed in individually and together.

“¡Cantaré! is the finest of all art forms,” Tom says. “It lifts the human spirit and promotes understanding between different cultures. It's something we both deeply care about, and for Roma, it clearly defines how she thinks about her own artistic mission.”

“I have always believed in honoring world cultures through music and the arts,” Roma explains. “Philip Brunelle, who created the ¡Cantaré! program in 2009, has done something very unique that's never been done before in Minnesota, which now thousands of people have fortunately experienced — making the musical traditions of Mexico stand out to Minnesotans and engaging the Latino population that lives here as well. It is a remarkable accomplishment that we are happy to be a part of, and we hope that more people — especially people from the broader Latino community — will become ardent supporters, too!”

Roma came to know the program through Ana Luisa Fajer Flores of the Mexican Consulate in St. Paul and Uri Camarena who invited her to be on the ¡Cantaré! Advisory Committee.

“One of the many things I have always loved about Minnesota is that it is such a rich place for the arts,” the writer-composer says. “But ¡Cantaré! is an exceptional arts program that needs continuing support. It is the right thing to do, given the fact that one in every four children born now in this country is Latino, most with roots in Mexico. Here is a program that speaks directly to them and helps non-Latinos connect to Mexican culture in a very positive way.”

Tom, reared on 1960s rock culture, wholeheartedly agrees. “Choral music for many people is sometimes an unknown quantity, but it's a whole other world of music that I think many would enjoy and find inspiring, especially with what happens in the ¡Cantaré! program. You just have to educate people about it and that happens by being involved in the program, from attending the concerts to making a donation and volunteering your time.”

The Stocks have certainly lived up to the challenge since they attended their first ¡Cantaré! concert in 2010 — which coincidentally featured students from Tom's old high school, Washburn. Of late, Roma has been involved in the auction part of the gala fundraising events and continues to seek out new ways to raise more support for the ¡Cantaré!, especially among her fellow Minnesotan-Latinos.

Despite devoting time to her own artistic growth, her songwriting and prose work, she has made time to make ¡Cantaré! a priority in their busy lives. It has paid back numerous joys and benefits. “It is my goal to have more people from the Latino community here in Minnesota discover how wonderful this program is for students, teachers, composers, and families alike.”
2011-2012 ¡Cantaré! program has profound impact on Minnesota schools, students

In the 2011-2012 season, ¡Cantaré! composers Rodrigo Cadet and Jorge Cózatl worked with six local schools. Our evaluations found that students had a positive experience working with the composers, learning about Mexican culture as well as building their skills and knowledge in music.

- Teachers all reported the program did well at increasing awareness of Mexican culture among students. Students who were surveyed agreed, with nearly eight in ten elementary students saying they know more about Mexico now and nine in ten high school students reporting they know more about Mexican culture now.
- In the teacher focus group, participants agreed that “Experiencing Latino culture through music” is one of the “best things” about the program.
- Nearly all students, both elementary and high school, reported in the survey that they enjoyed the performance.
- Audience members who completed a survey were nearly unanimous in agreeing that the concert helped them understand more about music in Mexico and helped them understand more about the culture of Mexico.

“Thank you so much for the wonderful gifts you’ve given us. I say gifts because you have given us great advice, a wonderful song, and unforgettable memories. I think I speak for the entire choir when I say it all has been incredible, and Pasar la Vida has become one of our favorite pieces. Thank you!” — Chad Berg, University of St. Thomas Chamber Choir

“Working with your wonderful choir was a life changing experience that I will always keep near my heart. I can’t explain with words the joy I felt when I heard my music come to life in the voices and the hands of such wonderful singers and musicians.” — Rodrigo Cadet, 2011-2012 ¡Cantaré! Composer
In 2011-2012 there were 337 active volunteers supporting VocalEssence activities. Volunteers and volunteer singers served a total of 13,223 hours.

Independent Sector, a nonprofit organization, estimates the value of volunteer time to be $21.79 per hour, putting the total value of our volunteer time at $288,129.17.
VocalEssence gratefully acknowledges all those who made gifts between July 1, 2011 and June 30, 2012.

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- Leslie Flaws
- Gerald Foley
- Emily Galusha & Don McNeil
- John Gielean & Megan Feeaney
- Susan & Tom Handley
- Tor & Sunny Hansen
- Gordon & Winifred Hed

*Includes Matching Gift Contributions + Includes In-Kind Donations * In Remembrance
2011-2012 Financials

Operating Revenues
- Contributions 59%
- Special Events 6%
- Government Grants 165%
- Performance Revenue 16%
- Endowment Draw & Investment Income 3%

Operating Expenses
- Artistic Series 58%
- Education 14%
- Special Programs 8%
- Fundraising 9%
- Management & General 9%

Notes
- Contributed and Performance revenue sources both increased over the previous fiscal year by 7% and 2% respectively
- A 26% reduction in endowment and investment income from the previous year resulted in a total negative balance of $88,000. However strong day-to-day operations led to a year-end unrestricted positive variance of $52,481
- Funding for the North Star tour and increased National Endowment for the Arts funding increased government revenue by 11%
- The biennial gala netted over $113,000 in support of education and community engagement programs

REVENUE
- Contributions .................................................. $1,039,062
- Special Events .................................................. $113,059
- Government Grants ........................................... $279,753
- Performance Revenue ......................................... $282,880
- Endowment Draw & Investment Income .................. $51,868
- TOTAL .............................................................. $1,766,622

EXPENSE
- Artistic Series .................................................. $1,084,964
- Education ........................................................... $268,195
- Special Programs .................................................. $155,148
- Management & General ......................................... $171,329
- Fundraising .......................................................... $175,607
- TOTAL .............................................................. $1,855,243

NET ASSETS COMPRISED OF:
- Operations .......................................................... $696,841
- Temporarily Restricted ........................................... $171,419
- Artistic Advancement Fund ..................................... $582,859
- Key of C Campaign ............................................... $858,495
- Endowment .......................................................... $1,321,512
- TOTAL .............................................................. $3,631,126
2011-2012 VocalEssence Season Sponsors

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