

VOCALESSENCE Ensemble Singers



The *Oxford Times* (UK) has declared that the [VocalEssence Ensemble Singers](#) “have a blend that could—and should—be the envy of every choir in the business.” Founded in 1991, the Ensemble Singers are acclaimed for their “superbly blended sound” (*Birmingham Post*, UK) and “exemplary technique” (*Minneapolis Star Tribune*). Lauded by the *Times* of London as “polished, bright and brilliantly balanced,” this 32-voice professional chorus is directed by VocalEssence Artistic Director and Founder [Philip Brunelle](#) and Associate Conductor [G. Phillip Shultz, III](#).

Striving always to create perfection in their choral sound, the Ensemble Singers engage the audience with their vivid personality and expressive singing. They are equally at ease with works dating from the Baroque era to the modern day, approaching each musical endeavor with originality and freshness. Dominick Argento, Sir Richard Rodney Bennett, Aaron Jay Kernis, Libby Larsen, Stephen Paulus and Alvin Singleton are among the many composers who have written world premieres expressly for their voices. The Ensemble Singers completed an Asia Pacific Tour in 2014 that included performances in Seoul, South Korea, and in Beijing and Nanjing, China.

Well-known to public radio listeners as the “house choir” on *A Prairie Home Companion*, the VocalEssence Ensemble Singers are featured on three CDs with Garrison Keillor: *Over the River & Through the Woods; Hymn to Potatoes (and other choral masterpieces from A Prairie Home Companion)*, and *Gratitude, Gravy & Garrison*. Having completed a tour across Minnesota in 2011, the group recorded a CD in honor of Minnesota’s choral heritage, *From the Land of Sky Blue Waters*.

Two other recent albums on the Clarion label feature the voices of the Ensemble Singers. *The World Beloved: A Bluegrass Mass* is the world premiere recording of a work by Carol Barnett commissioned especially for the group to sing with bluegrass ensemble. *The Songs We Sang – Favorite American Folksongs* is a collection of charming choral arrangements with guitar, harmonica, accordion, bass and piano.



Philip Brunelle, Artistic Director & Founder

Philip Brunelle, artistic director and founder of VocalEssence, is an internationally-renowned conductor, choral scholar and visionary. He has made his lifelong mission the promotion of choral art in all its forms, especially rarely heard works of the past and worthwhile new music. Under his leadership, VocalEssence has commissioned more than 200 works to date. Philip has conducted symphonies (New York Philharmonic, Seattle Symphony, and Minnesota Orchestra among others) as well as choral festivals and operas on six continents. He is editor of two choral series for Boosey & Hawkes and chairman of the review committee for Walton Music. Philip is also Organist-Choirmaster at Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis.

Over the past decade Philip has been deeply involved with the International Federation for Choral Music (IFCM). He served as president of the Sixth World Symposium on Choral Music, held in Minneapolis in 2002. He is a Vice President of the IFCM Board and served as Executive Director for the 2014 World Symposium on Choral Music in Seoul, South Korea. In 2017 he will serve as Artistic Advisor for the 2017 World Symposium in Barcelona, Spain.

Philip is the recipient of the Weston H. Noble Lifetime Achievement Award, given by the North Central American Choral Directors Association; the F. Melius Christiansen Lifetime Achievement Award, American Choral Directors Association-Minnesota Chapter's highest honor; and the Michael Korn Founder's Award for Development of the Professional Choral Art, Chorus America's highest lifetime achievement award.

Philip holds five honorary doctorates and has been recognized for his commitment to choral music by Norway (Commander of the Royal Norwegian Order of Merit), the United Kingdom (Honorary Member of the Order of the British Empire), Hungary (Kodály Medal), Sweden (Royal Order of the Polar Star) and Mexico (Ohtli Recognition Award).



G. Phillip Shoultz, III, Associate Conductor

As associate conductor of VocalEssence, G. Phillip Shoultz, III serves as artistic leader for the VocalEssence WITNESS and iCantaré! programs, rehearses with the Chorus and Ensemble Singers, and will conduct the 2015-2016 River Songs and Tales tour. This year, Phillip will work with the group part-time as he finishes his doctorate.

The winner of the 2015 National American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) Graduate Conducting Competition, Phillip is pursuing a doctorate degree in conducting at the University of Minnesota where he conducts two choral ensembles. He sings professionally, adjudicates vocal festivals, and frequently appears as a guest clinician and workshop leader. He was awarded an F. Melius Christiansen Graduate Study Scholarship by the Minnesota chapter of ACDA, participated in the inaugural Weimar Bach Cantata Academy with Helmuth Rilling, and was

selected as one of six Conducting Fellows for the 2015 Oregon Bach Festival. Phillip is also director of music, worship, and the arts at Good Samaritan United Methodist Church, Edina, Minnesota.

Phillip earned degrees with high honors from the University of Georgia (B.A. and B.M.) and Georgia State University (M.M.). In Atlanta he was artistic director to an adult community choir (Gwinnett Choral Guild) and a youth organization (Atlanta Institute for Musicianship and Singing); founding director of the Georgia Young Men's Ensemble, a part of the Grammy Award-winning Gwinnett Young Singers, and assistant director for the professional chamber choir Coro Vocati. Phillip's work in public schools garnered school- and county-level Teacher of the Year honors on three occasions by separate organizations.



Mary Jo Gothmann, Accompanist

Mary Jo Gothmann, pianist, enjoys a varied career as a chamber musician, soloist, opera coach and organist. She is the founder and artistic director of the JOYA chamber music series at Zion Lutheran Church in Anoka, Minnesota. She has performed with the Chamber Music Society of Minnesota, Bakken Trio, Hill House Chamber Players, Music at Trinity, Colonial Chamber Music Series, Lakes Area Music Festival, JOYA, and the Taos Chamber Music Group. Mary Jo performs frequently with The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra and the Minnesota Orchestra, and has appeared with EOS Orchestra in New York City and as piano soloist with the New Mexico Symphony Orchestra and the St. Paul Civic Orchestra. She has

worked for some of the most prestigious opera companies in the United States, including the Metropolitan Opera, Santa Fe Opera, and Minnesota Opera and has performed recitals with singers from the Metropolitan Opera as well as with instrumentalists from many of the country's major symphony orchestras. Mary Jo is a graduate of the Metropolitan Opera Lindemann Young Artist Program, the University of Minnesota, New England Conservatory, and St. Olaf College.



Mary Ann Aufderheide, Executive Director

Mary Ann Aufderheide joined VocalEssence as managing director in 2003. Under her leadership she has firmly established the VocalEssence brand name as representing excellence in choral music and community engagement programs. During her tenure the organization has expanded its core of professional singers who tour regionally and internationally; released seven recordings on the Clarion label; expanded the **WITNESS School Program** and created **iCantaré!**, a exploration of the music of Mexican composers; and mounted a major festival celebrating the music of William Bolcom.

A free-lance professional oboist and teacher, Mary Ann received a bachelor of fine arts in music education from Ohio University; master's work has included studying music history and literature at Florida State University. At Stanford University, she participated in the inaugural class of the national Executive Nonprofit Leadership training program for arts administrators.

Mary Ann is active as a leader and mentor in the national choral music scene, serving as a regular member of Chorus America's Choral Management Institute faculty. In 2007 and 2009 she served as a music panelist for the National Endowment for the Arts.

VOCALESSENCE Ensemble Singers

Press Quotes

“VocalEssence have a blend that could – and should – be the envy of every choir in the business.”

—Alexandra Coghlan, *Oxford Times (UK)*

“The VocalEssence Ensemble Singers are fully paid-up members of America’s choral Ivy League.”

—Alexandra Coghlan, *Oxford Times (UK)*

“A superbly blended sound.”

—Terry Grimley, *Birmingham Post (UK)*

“Polished, bright and brilliantly balanced.”

— *London Times (UK)*

“Thank you. You sing magnificently.”

—Mick Jagger, *The Rolling Stones*

“Exemplary technique...This small group produced a luxuriant sound...They performed the music with tonal purity and technical mastery.”

—William Randall Beard, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*

“The state’s foremost choral ambassadors have just released a CD that lends their lush, full-voiced sound to an expansive variety of Minnesota-made music.”

—Rob Hubbard, *St. Paul Pioneer Press*,
CD Review: *From the Land of Sky Blue Waters*

“... One of the finest and most versatile choral groups in the country. Their artistic range extends from the earliest Renaissance motets to a John Lennon tune with visits to everywhere else in between. The voices of this ensemble are well tuned and beautiful.”

—Ann Stahmer, *Audiophile Audition*,
CD Review: *Hymn to Potatoes and other choral masterworks from A Prairie Home Companion*

“The choir sings with a rich, full-bodied, full-vibrato-ed American sound that’s very well-balanced and warm-toned. The ensemble technique is superb, the podium leadership exemplary...Don’t miss this.”

—David Vernier, *ClassicsToday.com*,
CD Review: *Got the Saint Louis Blues: Classical Music in the Jazz Age*





ENGAGE



INSPIRE



ENTERTAIN

Founded in 1969, Minneapolis, Minnesota-based VocalEssence has decades of history as a leading arts organization. Despite its global influence, VocalEssence has kept its focus local—consistently pioneering ways to strengthen Minnesota’s community through thrilling musical experiences and engaging all ages and cultures in singing.

What We Do

At VocalEssence, we engage people of all ages and cultures in our community through innovative, enticing choral music programming, such as:

Performing Ensembles—Called “one of the irreplaceable music ensembles of our time” by Dana Gioia, past chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, our two performing groups—the **Ensemble Singers** (32 professionals) and the **VocalEssence Chorus** (100 volunteers)—are made up entirely of local residents.

School Curricula—Our pioneering music education curricula highlight the contributions of the diverse cultures in our community. Our flagship program, **WITNESS**, celebrates African American culture, while **iCantaré!** brings the vibrancy of Mexican music to the classroom. More than 5,000 students participate in these programs each year.

Elder Learning Initiatives—Since 2006, we’ve been helping older adults rekindle their passion for choral music. We offer **Choral Pathways**, which helps older adults get access to quality arts programming, and **Vintage Voices**, an exciting new program that fosters the creation of choirs in assisted living homes and senior centers.

Advocacy Projects—From commissioning new choral music to standing up for music education in schools, we take on a wide variety of advocacy projects to help communities understand and enjoy the benefits of choral music.

Commissions and Recordings—VocalEssence makes new works possible through commissioning composers from around the world. VocalEssence celebrates living composers through the commission of more than 240 new works and has presented more than 250 world premieres. The organization also provides opportunities to composers to create and publish new works through the **VocalEssence Music Press**, the **Welcome Christmas Carol Contest**, and **VocalEssence ReMix**—a new mentorship program for 4 emerging Minnesota songwriters to create new works. VocalEssence offers 16 commercial recordings available through Gothic Records.