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HOW TO HOLD ON: REAWAKENING LOVE

Midwestern Region American Choral Directors Association Conference

Saturday, February 10, 2024, 11:15 AM

Peter Kiewit Concert Hall, Holland Performing Arts Center



VOCALESSENCE

TOGETHER WE SING

{2023-2024 Season}

1900 Nicollet Avenue
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55403
612-547-1451 | vocalessence.org

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CONTENTS

HOW TO HOLD ON: REAWAKENING LOVE 2
 ABOUT VOCALESSENCE 7

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VOCAL ESSENCE

2023-2024 SEASON

SPECIAL THANKS FOR THE SUPPORT OF THIS CONCERT

Bob and Kathie Goodale
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SPECIAL THANKS

Ta-coumba Aiken for artwork featured on the cover
Central High School, St. Paul
Our composer friends who each shared insights into their compositions: Alysia, Brittany, Joel, Marques, Melanie, and Ysajé



HOW TO HOLD ON: REAWAKENING LOVE

**Midwestern American Choral Directors Association
Conference Performance**

Saturday, February 10, 2024, 11:15 AM

**Peter Kiewit Concert Hall,
Holland Performing Arts Center**

FEATURING:

VocalEssence Chorus
Casey Rafn, *collaborative artist*
G. Phillip Shoultz, III, *conductor*



2023-2024 VOCAL ESSENCE SEASON SPONSORS



Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation



This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a Minnesota State Arts Board Operating Support grant, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.

ARTIST STATEMENT

In the wake of the abject racism and systemic dehumanization of Black, Brown, Asian American, and Pacific Islander lives, we believe that the music we make together harnesses the power to inspire change. Over the course of time, singing has been and continues to be an integral component in the fight for civil rights and social justice—advancing the abolition of slavery, ensuring fair access to the ballot box, proclaiming that Black Lives Matter—mobilizing people, healing hearts, and changing minds.

Our ACDA performance **How to Hold On: ReAwakening Love** invites listeners to join us in our quest to live, act, speak, and work in ways that call for the revival of love, the rebirth of peace, and the emergence of a community where violence ceases. The music highlights the work of Black and Brown composers and poets, but also includes the work of allies whose creative works amplify silenced voices and support the fight for justice. Featuring compositions from the Baroque period through contemporary times and engaging expansive styles, including contemporary vocal a cappella, the program provides space for reflection, lament, truth-telling, and calls us to action around a message of hope, reconciliation, and love that is large enough for all to share.

Making room for dialogue is an important pedagogical component of our work in the VocalEssence Chorus. This all-volunteer ensemble represents many backgrounds and professions. When you turn to our roster, not only will you see this diversity of experiences, you will also see the thoughtful responses each member had to the prompt: *What role does love play in how you show up and lead the way for a world where all can thrive?* We strive to be curious and listen to one another, so that we can expand our perspectives and more deeply engage with the words, melodies, themes, and contexts at the heart of our repertoire.

After experiencing today's performance, I hope you are inspired to *ReAwaken Love* in your sphere of influence and encourage you to take some time for reflection, considering the **questions for reflection** that we have explored together over the past several weeks.



—G. Phillip Shoultz, III,
Associate Artistic Director, VocalEssence



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

How do you hold on?

- In times of uncertainty...
- Adversity...
- Challenge...
- Confusion...
- Frustration...
- Disappointment...

What are the ways that you “hold the light”?

What are the weapons that you can wield to bring about change in the world?

How will you “be a witness”?

- What commitments will you make?
- What commitments are required from our singing community?

Can you identify some of the ways we can work together to build a new world?

PROGRAM

Please hold your applause until the conclusion of the program.

<i>How to Hold On</i>	learned from composer by aural tradition	Melanie DeMore (2023)
<i>Kyrie</i> from <i>Requiem</i>	Choral Public Domain Library (CPDL)	Jose Mauricio Nuñez Garcia (1816)
<i>Say Her Name</i>	Mark Foster Music Hal Leonard (00357682)	Alysia Lee (2020)
<i>We Shall Walk Through the Valley</i>	Mark Foster Music Hal Leonard	Negro Spiritual arr. Marques L.A. Garrett (2021)
<i>Holding the Light</i>	Graphite Publishing (GP-B022)	B.E. Boykin (2022)
<i>Love</i> from <i>Truth Pressed to Earth, Shall Rise</i>	Barnwell's Music Notes Publishing	Ysaÿe M. Barnwell (2002)
<i>Who Will Be a Witness?</i>	<i>Commissioned for the 30th Anniversary of VocalEssence WITNESS</i> MusicSpoke	American Negro Spiritual arr. Joel Thompson (2020)
<i>Let Us Build a New World</i> from <i>Truth Pressed to Earth, Shall Rise</i>	Barnwell's Music Notes Publishing	Ysaÿe M. Barnwell (2002)



PROGRAM NOTES AND TEXTS

HOW TO HOLD ON?

Melanie DeMore

Melanie DeMore uses her voice as “a weapon of mass connection” in her work as a vocal activist. One of our most beloved collaborators, Melanie challenges us to be honest, find our center, and ground ourselves as we begin work towards justice and reconciliation.

How to hold on? How to hold on in the storm.

—Melanie DeMore

KYRIE

from *Requiem*

José Maurício Nuñez-García

The prodigious works of José Maurício Nuñez-García have become more widely known in recent years. Writing in a style reminiscent of the Viennese composers, Nuñez-García, was a leading contributor to the development of classicism throughout the Americas. In his Kyrie from Requiem, we lament the human condition and express profound sadness, confessing the ways we have been silent in the face of injustice and committing to do better.

Lord, have mercy on us.

Christ, have mercy on us.

Lord, have mercy on us.

SAY HER NAME

Alysia Lee

Alysia Lee is an artist, educator, administrator, and advocate whose methods center on youth leadership, anti-racism, creativity, and justice. Say Her Name brings the powerful libation ceremony to the concert stage with a call to action. The #SayHerName movement resists police brutality against Black women. If you say the name, you’re prompted to learn the story, and if you know the story, then you have a broader sense of all the ways Black bodies are made vulnerable to police violence.

Say her name. She cannot be forgotten by us.

Say his name. He cannot be forgotten by us.

Say their names. They cannot be forgotten by us.

Put her name in the air. Say her name.

Put his name in the air. Say his name.

Put their names in the air. Say their names.

—Alysia Lee

WE SHALL WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY

Negro Spiritual, arr. Marques L.A. Garrett

Marques L.A. Garrett is an accomplished vocalist and composer, currently serving on the faculty of the University of North Texas. He is known for his work highlighting the compositions of Black composers. Combining the “Agnus Dei” from the Roman Catholic liturgy with the message of hope found in this timeless spiritual, Garrett creates a space for us practice the presence of peace—for ourselves and for that great cloud of witnesses that transitioned before us. The peace we envision is courageous, challenging us to embrace difficult conversations as we seek to be conduits of positive change.

Lamb of God, grant us peace.

We shall walk through the valley in peace.

If Jesus Himself will be our leader.

There will be no more weeping there,

There will be no more sorrows there,

If Jesus Himself will be our leader.

We shall walk through the valley in peace.

We will meet our loved ones there,

If Jesus Himself will be our leader.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil.

We shall walk through the valley in peace.

—Additional text from Traditional Latin liturgy and Psalm 23:4

HOLDING THE LIGHT

B.E. Boykin

Brittany (B. E.) Boykin is an accomplished pianist, composer, and choral director currently serving on the faculty of the Georgia Institute of Technology. Using the poetry of Maine’s poet laureate, Stuart Kestenbaum, as the guide, Boykin invites us to reflect on the light that lives within us and consider the ways we can show up to support one another across the dimensions of division in Holding the Light.

Gather up whatever is
glittering in the gutter,
whatever has tumbled
in the waves or fallen
in flames out of the sky,

for it’s not only our
hearts that are broken,
but the heart
of the world as well.
Stitch it back together.

Make a place where
the day speaks to the night
and the earth speaks to the sky.
Whether we created God
or God created us

it all comes down to this:
In our imperfect world
we are meant to repair and stitch together
what beauty there is, stitch it

with compassion and wire.
See how everything
we have made gathers
the light inside itself
and overflows? A blessing.

—Stuart Kestenbaum

LOVE

from *Truth, Pressed to Earth Shall Rise*

Ysaÿe M. Barnwell

Equally beloved as a composer, singer, and leader of communal singing, Ysaÿe Barnwell set the words of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as a musical invitation to lead with our hearts as we seek to enter into beloved community with one another.

At the center of non-violence
is the power of LOVE.
So, if we must choose a weapon
let it only be LOVE.
Power at its best is LOVE,
Implementing the demands of justice.
Justice at its best is LOVE,
correcting everything that stands against LOVE.
At the center of non-violence is the
power of LOVE.
So, if we must choose a weapon
let it only be LOVE,
Redemptive LOVE.

—Adapted from the writings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
by Ysaÿe M. Barnwell

WHO WILL BE A WITNESS?

American Negro Spiritual, arr. Joel Thompson

Emmy award winning composer, pianist, conductor, and educator, Joel Thompson evokes the names of Old Testament figures who pushed through adversity to witness to the truth found in their God. As we seek to cultivate a more just and equitable world, we lift our voices to speak on behalf of those whose voices have been silenced and inspire seeds of change by actively taking a stand against the injustices that surround us. Will you be a witness?

Who will be a witness for my Lord?

Read the Scriptures and you'll
understand that Samson was the strongest man.
Read a little further and you will find
God gave him the vict'ry o'er the Philistines.

Samson was a witness for my Lord,
so, who will be a witness for my Lord?

The Persian king could be so mean,
still, the Lord told Esther she would be the queen.
When Haman started making his evil plans,
Ester let him know who was in command.

Esther was a witness for my Lord,
so, who will be a witness for my Lord?

I am a witness for my Lord!
Yes, I am a witness for my Lord!
My soul is a witness for my Lord!
I will be a witness for my Lord!

—*American Negro Spiritual*

LET US BUILD A NEW WORLD

from *Truth, Pressed to Earth Shall Rise*

Ysaÿe M. Barnwell

If we are to be successful in our aspiration to reawaken love, we must be willing to stand together—eye to eye, shoulder to shoulder, side by side and accept the role each of us are called to play in shaping a new world where all can thrive.

Oh, come let us build a new world together.

It may not come today.

It may not come tomorrow.

But it is well within our hearts.

—Adapted from the writings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
by Ysaÿe M. Barnwell



ABOUT VOCALESSENCE

For more than five decades, VocalEssence has provided opportunities for singers from the Twin Cities area to create incredible music together and build connections as part of the vibrant arts community in Minnesota. VocalEssence is known for introducing audiences to music and artists who are not yet known, often welcoming guest artists, composers, and conductors who are emerging, have unknown works, or represent a variety of cultures. Welcoming all members of the greater community, VocalEssence embodies the motto: *Together We Sing*.

MISSION

VocalEssence draws upon the power of singing together to nurture community, inspire creativity, affirm the value of all persons, and expand the influence of choral music.

VISION

VocalEssence seeks to be forward-thinking—a singing community where all find belonging. Aspiring to inspire, we discover, celebrate, and build lasting experiences that transform hearts and minds. We strive to create connections that honor dimensions of difference and to serve as a catalyst for change among singers, audiences, choral organizations, and communities.

CORE VALUES

- Curiosity & Discovery
- Artistry & Creativity
- Innovation & Inspiration
- Collaboration

As a professional choral organization, we live our values in order to:

- Bridge societal difference,
- Remain open to continuous learning,
- Celebrate singing as an essential human expression

OUR ARTISTIC STAFF



PHILIP BRUNELLE *Artistic Director and Founder*

Philip Brunelle, artistic director and founder

of VocalEssence 55 years ago, is an internationally-renowned conductor, choral scholar, and visionary. Philip has conducted symphonies, choral festivals, and operas on six continents; at age 19 he was the youngest member of the Minnesota Orchestra and for 17 years was Music Director of the Minnesota Opera. He holds five honorary degrees, served 9 years as Vice President of IFCM (International Federation for Choral Music), and has been recognized for his commitment to choral music by the governments of Norway, Hungary, Sweden, Mexico, and the United Kingdom. In 2019, he was awarded the American Prize in Choral Conducting and, in 2020, was given the Honorary Member Award by the Society for American Music. In 2022 Philip was appointed a National Arts Associate of the Sigma Alpha Iota Music Fraternity. Philip is also Organist-Choirmaster at Plymouth Congregational Church, Minneapolis. During the pandemic Philip recorded 300 “Musical Moments” which can be accessed at <https://www.vocalescence.org/what-we-do/virtual-projects/musical-moments-with-philip-brunelle/> and his thoughts on music are at RenaissanceManpodcast.com. Philip and his wife Carolyn, a studio artist, have 3 children (Tim, Christopher and Elise) and 7 grandchildren.



G. PHILLIP SHOULTZ, III *Associate Artistic Director*

G. Phillip Shoultz, III, associate artistic director,

uses the power of the spoken word and song to foster community and inspire action among people of all ages and

abilities. Phillip conducts festival choirs and leads workshops across the United States and beyond. He serves on the faculty of the University of St. Thomas and guides the ministries of worship, music, and the arts at Westwood Lutheran Church. An accomplished curator of multi-disciplinary community collaborations, Phillip is the Artistic Director of the University of Minnesota Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Tribute Concert. The Minnesota Orchestra regularly engages Phillip to host their Young People’s Concerts and his online presence continues to grow as his pandemic livestream, Take 5 with GPS, recently reached the 500-episode milestone. The winner of numerous honors, including the ACDA Graduate Conducting Competition and multiple Teacher of the Year awards, Phillip founded “Table for More” in the summer of 2020 to help organizations address issues related to innovation, equity, racial justice, and belonging in the arts. Phillip lives in St. Louis Park with his wife, Michelle, and their two children (Malachi and Lydia Grace).



CASEY RAFN *Collaborative Artist*

Pianist Casey Rafn enjoys a varied career as a collaborative

pianist both in the United States and abroad, in Europe and Latin America. He is a member of “Trés”, whose saxophone-piano trio was just nominated for a Latin Grammy for Best Instrumental Album for their new album “Romance al Campesino Porteño.” Casey often collaborates in concert or recordings with members of the Minnesota Orchestra, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, and University of Minnesota School of Music faculty. As a piano soloist he took top prizes at the International Liszt-Garrison Competition in Baltimore, has appeared with the Duluth-Superior Symphony Orchestra, and has taught at both the University of Minnesota School of Music and the St. Paul Conservatory for Performing Arts.

OUR CHOIRS

VOCAL ESSENCE CHORUS



The VocalEssence Chorus is a group of talented and enthusiastic singers from many different walks of life, united by their love of singing and community. Performing a wide variety of musical styles, premiering new works, and sharing the stage with a diverse array of guest artists, the Chorus is a welcome home for singers who wish to continue making music throughout their adult lives.

Our ensemble seeks to live out our belief that singing is an essential form of human expression and can be a powerful tool to connect us together across the dimensions of difference. We embrace a rehearsal process that is filled with exploration of body, mind, spirit, and voice. We use the entire room to feel the music in our bodies so that our voices can more freely produce what we envision.

Our rehearsals are filled with lots of dialogue and conversation about musical elements and the meaning we find in the texts we sing. We strive to create a space where all can be heard and valued, so that our singing can come from an honest, sincere, and transparent space within us.

SOPRANO

Ann Ambach (Fundraising for a nonprofit that supports victims of domestic violence), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“Leading with love encourages those around me to be vulnerable, which opens up a space for learning and building connections. This is necessary to make change and create a world where all can thrive.”*

AnnaLisa Anderson (Lead Admin, Customer Service), has sung with VocalEssence for 29 years. *“Treating people with kindness, compassion and empathy can go a long way.”*

Madison Asher (General Merchandise Expert at Target), has sung with VocalEssence for 3 years. *“Love is the feeling that guides me on where to take my next step.”*

Jessica Belt (Health care writer), has sung with VocalEssence for 6 years. *“I feel love is key to real understanding and compassion. I try to extend love beyond my immediate friends and family to people I’ve never met, to see the world from their eyes and try to make decisions from that broader perspective.”*

Christine Boone (Music Theory Professor), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“My personal life and my career are tightly integrated by love—love for music, for colleagues and community, and for the beautiful and amazing things that happen when love informs both work and life.”*

Corey Cellurale (Choir Teacher), has sung with VocalEssence for 4 years. *“Love has the power to uplift others even if they aren’t ready to receive it. Lead with love daily.”*

Lorinda Chagnon (Grants Manager), has sung with VocalEssence for 4 years. *“At its core, I believe love is about recognizing worth. I believe in the worth of all living creatures, and that all are worthy of a safe and peaceful existence. It’s our job as humans to work towards that safety and peace for each other.”*

Amanda Connolly (Teacher), has sung with VocalEssence for 13 years. *“Love shows up especially when I am teaching. I love my job, I love learning and I share that with my students so that they can become happy and excited lifelong learners.”*

McKenna Cromwell (Mental Health Practitioner), has sung with VocalEssence for 2 years. *“I think love is essential for humans, like water or air. Leading with love is leading with compassion and care for all.”*

Emily Dyrdaahl (Tech Consultant), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“In order for ALL people to thrive we need to love. Love inclusively, with no bounds, love that is to and for everyone.”*

Eva Gibney-Jones (Veterinary Assistant), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“Love is a universal language that I use to show kindness and compassion toward everyone I meet—humans, animals, and beyond.”*

Lillian Gray (Software Engineer), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“I believe change starts at the individual and cascades up to the world. By loving myself and the people around me, I believe that love can spread and be a force for positive change.”*

Kristina M. Guiffre (Director of Fine Arts, Community of Saints School), has sung with VocalEssence for 16 years. *“Love shows up in how we treat one another. Love shows up in the classroom, guiding the next generation a way forward with peace, kindness, and empathy through the arts.”*

Becca Hovsepian (Project Manager), has sung with VocalEssence for 5 years. *“Love plays a role in how I show up, by my choosing to recognize the humanity in the people I interact with. We all have our battles so we might as well recognize that other people have them too.”*

Sally Jaffray (Clinic Coordinator), has sung with VocalEssence for 11 years. *“Love is the most important part of leading the way for a world where all can thrive.”*

Elinor Jones (Education Administrator at Stages Theatre Company), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“I welcome families in to experience the joy of theater and music.”*

Magdalena Koebele (Marketing Director), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“Even in my professional life I like to approach every situation with ‘how can I lead with love and compassion?’ No matter the circumstance that question has never led me astray.”*

Laura Langan (Healthcare Consultant), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“Love appears in generosity and finding ways to lift each other up in times of strife. Love fosters community to show us that we are stronger together than we are alone.”*

Clara Lind (Director of Coaching), has sung with VocalEssence for 2 years. *“When I think about love, I think about community care—the ways that we all hold power to heal and restore*

communities who have experienced collective trauma. That can be healing through redistributing and moving our money, showing up in community together, or having authentic (and sometimes hard!) conversations with loved ones to reach a deeper level of humanity together—all of which are rooted in powerful and transformative love for community.”

Christina Pederson (Teacher), has sung with VocalEssence for 18 years. “Love comes from God, who creates all life with inherent dignity. It is God’s love that guides me to value life in all stages, of all abilities, and from all cultures.”

Emma Schlabach (Support Engineer), has sung with VocalEssence for 5 years. “While we all strive to lead with love, sometimes love isn’t convenient or free of conflict. But those are the times it is most crucial.”

Ashley Slattery (Teacher), has sung with VocalEssence for 4 years. “Love fosters empathy and compassion towards others. When individuals care about the well-being of those around them, it can lead to more understanding and support in times of need. Love promotes positive relationships and social harmony. When people approach each other with love and kindness, it creates a sense of community and cooperation. Love transcends boundaries and can contribute to a sense of global unity. Appreciating and respecting diversity fosters a world where different cultures and perspectives coexist harmoniously.”

Leah Sovick (Computer programmer), has sung with VocalEssence for 7 years. “Matthew 22:36-40”

Abbie Sulik (Bakery Team Member), has sung with VocalEssence for 5 years. “It’s easier to see the love in the people around you, family and friends, and try and bring that with you.”

Dana Terres (Regulatory Compliance Specialist), has sung with VocalEssence for 5 years. “Without love, seeing the dignity and humanity of others who are different is impossible. Leading with love instead of fear makes space for a richer life for all.”

Katie Tonn Eisinger (Grants Consultant), has sung in VocalEssence for 3 years. “I believe love is the reason we are here, and I look for ways to embody that wherever possible.”

Amanda Troolin (Educator), has sung with VocalEssence for 7 years. “I think loving each other and creating community is the most important step in creating a world where all can thrive.”

Jennifer Vickerman (Gift Planner with the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation), has sung with VocalEssence for 26 years. “Love is in the actions and words I choose. I strive to build relationships with all people in my life rooted in love, kindness, and a true desire to uniquely care for each person.”

Laura Walklet Jacobsen (4th grade teacher), has sung with VocalEssence for 8 years. “I try to be kind towards others.”

Dannika Wright (Elementary Montessori Teacher, ages 6-9), has sung with VocalEssence for 8 years. “As an educator, love shows up every day when I am working with children. Love supports them in their development, allowing them to fulfill their human potential to bring about peace in our world.”

ALTO

Akosua Obuo Addo (Associate Professor, Music Education), has sung with VocalEssence for 19 years. “I listen—make space to listen!”

Nancy Jo Aldrich (7th-12th Grade Choir Director at Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted High School), has sung with VocalEssence for 2 years. “Loving others for who they are and communicating my love for music are how I show up in an ever changing world to help and befriend those around me.”

Azure Anderson-Jayaraj (Executive Assistant/Musician), has sung with VocalEssence for 2 years. “Love is not telling people what they need, but listening, hearing, and being at the ready.”

Johanna Beaupre (Social Studies Teacher), has sung with VocalEssence for 6 years. “Love is what drives my desire to make change and fight for justice. Love for my family, my friends, my students, my neighbors I know and don’t know, and love for future generations.”

Katelyn Belden (Digital Advertising Specialist), has sung with VocalEssence for 4 years. “I seek to genuinely understand the perspectives of those around me and approach life with compassion for others.”

Mary Depew (Semi-retired non-profit administrative assistant and part-time booking agent for the Mark Kreitzer Band), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. “Love is listening, love is giving, love is caring—which is what I strive to do for all my communities. When we all feel loved - heard and cared for—we learn to pass it on and pay it forward and it goes on and on.”

Grace Dokken (Lawyer), has sung with VocalEssence for 2 years. “Love never fails. In my life, it seems that time and again showing up with love proves to be the only way to show up for change making in this world.”

Maggie Driemeyer (Administrative Intern), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. “There are many ways to show love and I think it’s important to learn how people around you best receive love and show them that you care.”

Bex Gaunt (Performer/composer), has sung with VocalEssence for 7 years. “Love is the heartbeat, the motivation to keep moving forward with hope and possibility.”

Emma Goos (Marketing), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. “Love plays the role of accepting people for who they are and all the little quirks about each and every person. As for leading the way for a world where we can all thrive, I believe love plays a role in this in a sense where love is tied to happiness, and in order for us to all thrive and be happy, love needs to be present.”

Autumn Gurgel Valentini (Marketing Director), has sung with VocalEssence for 13 years. “Love is the catalyst, the lens, the measure, the grace when we fail, and the re-igniting fire to try again.”

Marjorie Hakala (Payroll processor), has sung with VocalEssence for 9 years. “Loving community is the only way anything gets done.”

Meg Hanna (Nonprofit Fundraiser), has sung with VocalEssence for 7 years. “Every person has a say in what kind of world we create. Showing love and regard for our fellow humans empowers us to create a kinder, more equitable, more loving world.”

Dee Hein (Retired banker), has sung with VocalEssence for 25 years. “I believe that kindness is love in action, and try to express and spread kindness in mundane, everyday ways—it’s the little things that matter a lot!”

Grace Alice Herberth (Student), has sung with VocalEssence for 3 years. “The ultimate thing in life is to show love to others. You love everybody even when you don’t know them or they annoy or they’re different from you. Love means even more when you choose to love everybody and not select people.”

Brianna Hill (Entrepreneur), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. “I believe in the phrase “You can only give what you have”, therefore the role that love plays first for me is in self-love, acceptance, and compassion. From there, I am able to express and show true and genuine love for others in the world, even when it is not reciprocated.”

Emma Jirele (Learning & Engagement Manager), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. “Love, a universal force, guides our collective journey towards a world where everyone can flourish, fostering unity and understanding.”

Jenny Kisner (Operations Director at the Minnesota Chorale), has sung with VocalEssence for 11 years. “Humans flourish when they have someone to love them. Humankind can’t flourish until everyone feels loved.”

Katie Kovacovich (High School College/ Career Counselor), has sung with VocalEssence for 2 years. *“Love reminds me that we are all interconnected—to one another and this earth. Love gives me the courage and support to show up when it’s hard, and I am grounded in love’s ever expanding space big enough to hold all of the people, experiences, and feelings our lives encounter.”*

Wenie Lado (Associate Director, Enrollment Success, College Greenlight @ EAB), has sung with VocalEssence for 2.5 years. *“Love is the foundation of my empathy, my compassion, and my inclination to nurture. Love is not linear, but it’s certainly inclusive.”*

Jessica Laven Johnson (Teacher of the Blind/ Visually Impaired), has sung with VocalEssence for 4 years. *“I try to convey a sense of welcome to people personally and professionally. It is always my goal to share kindness and dignity with others, especially those who are sometimes overlooked.”*

Jeenee Lee (Graphic Designer), has sung with VocalEssence for 9 years. *“I share love with others when I am full and receive it when I am empty. Love multiplies with use and when I help one person feel better, everyone is better.”*

Carly Lunden (Communications Manager), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“I love the Carl Sagan quote, ‘For small creatures such as we, the vastness is bearable only through love.’ For me, love is the guiding force that that connects us to each other and provides meaning in chaos, that compels us to see the unleashed abundance in every person.”*

Danica McDonald (Analyst), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“When I’m focused on the love and light in my life, I show up in my career and personal life in a more empathetic and compassionate way.”*

Rachel Moniz (Hematology/Oncology Pharmacist), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“Love is what grants courage to do the uncomfortable and show up in the ways that are needed.”*

Kristi Mueller (Retired Music Educator), has sung with VocalEssence for 16 years. *“Love makes us better people, empathetic people, connected people. Music is the vehicle I chose a long time ago, to connect with others. Helping my students to become people who love and who care about others has always been my goal. I hope I was able to affect my students the way my music teachers affected me to become more loving and empathetic. To make our world better every day.”*

Elizabeth Neuenfeldt (Editor), has sung with VocalEssence for 5 years. *“In a world of hatred, indifference, and suffering, love and compassion for each other and ourselves are acts of protest.”*

I hold fast to love and strive to put more love and compassion into the world no matter how bleak it gets.”

Elizabeth Raimann (Tax Accountant), has sung with VocalEssence for 2 years. *“Finding ways to access and share love helps me come to interactions with compassion. Singing is an essential part of that process for me!”*

Marty Raymond (retired), has sung with VocalEssence for 9 years. *“I love to sing with others and I love the music we share. I am not a leader, but ‘Together We Sing!’”*

Miriam Sahouani (Tax Consultant), has sung with VocalEssence for 6 years. *“Leading with love means *all* kinds of love: appreciative love, supportive love, hopeful love, and even tough love.”*

Erin Sandsmark (Artist/Education Advocate), has sung with VocalEssence for 7 years. *“I have deep and loving connections with family and friends, who help me improve as a person. I bring love, or empathy, for others with me in the work I do as an artist, and as an education advocate.”*

Katie Sandsmark (Multilingual learner teacher), has sung with VocalEssence for 7 years. *“Love is the core of showing up in solidarity with others. Loving people, regardless of beliefs or politics, is the foundation of moving the needle towards justice and peace.”*

Lisa Kathleen Schalla (Foundation network leader), has sung with VocalEssence for 2 years. *“I believe it is indispensable and means to show up ready to accept people where they are, and welcome them into our space. Co-create.”*

Forrest Schrader (Plant Store Owner), has sung with VocalEssence for 5 years. *“For me, love manifests in a variety of different forms like, compassion, respect, leadership, humor, or empathy. Leading with love allows having a deeper understanding of one’s self as well as others. This deeper understanding of one another rooted in love, allows for more vulnerability and growth.”*

Sydney Schoeberle (PR Senior Account Executive), has sung with VocalEssence for 5 years. *“Leading with love to me means embracing our imperfections and learning and growing together through empathy and kindness. It can take a lot of courage to be vulnerable like that, but when it works, it eases my anxiety and gives me hope.”*

Emily Seifers (Senior Manager, Community Relations, Ameriprise Financial), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“Love is one of my top values, as everyone is need of and deserving of love. It influences the way I partner with my husband, parent my children, show up for my family and friends, and how I interact with the world around and me and the people I have yet to meet.”*

Laura Tanner (Nonprofit Fundraiser), has sung with VocalEssence for 12 years. *“Leading with love is approaching others with empathy to build meaningful connections and creating an engaged community where everyone has the opportunity to flourish.”*

Allie Wigley (Senior Financial Analyst), has sung with VocalEssence for 5 years. *“Love is at the root of honesty and empathy. I find these qualities essential to bringing my best self to my relationships, my career, and my community.”*

TENOR

Steve Aggergaard (Workplace Investigator and Attorney), has sung with VocalEssence for 19 years. *“With love comes unity. Singing is a unifying factor for those who do it, those who teach it, and those who listen to it.”*

David Ampaabeng (Cashier), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“Allowing people to be their true selves despite how it may make me feel, and doing my best to make everyone around me feel cared about and respected.”*

Brett Bacon (Attorney), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“My love and respect for those mistreated and left behind by society inspires me to do all that I can to try to make the world a more equitable and just place.”*

Larry J Brandts (Retired IT and finance professional), has sung with VocalEssence for 7 years. *“Love is a guiding principle, a core value that I seek to express in my interactions with others.”*

Cheryl Calloway (Retired Attorney), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“For me, in this context, LOVE = caring about a person or issue or a benevolent feeling towards another person or issue. The desire to be an instrument of change for the betterment of the institution or one or more persons or communities.”*

Justin Clark (PhD Candidate—Biostatistics), has sung with VocalEssence for 5 years. *“Love motivates both of those commitments!”*

Ryan Coopergard (Data Scientist), has sung with VocalEssence for 7 years. *“Love gives me the moral clarity and energy to treat others well and do the right thing.”*

Ben Demaree (CTO), has sung with VocalEssence for 6 years. *“I think love comes without judgements, and in the absence of judgment, there is usually psychological safety and curiosity, and I think both of those things are precursors to thriving.”*

Grant Dunne (Direct Support Professional), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“Leading with love gives confidence and freedom to those figuring out how to live in harmony with the world.”*

Tim Emery (IT/Tech Recruiter), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“To realize that every human deserves love and respect! Empathy is the most important thing I think a lot of people are missing.”*

Reagan Lee (Business premier service consultant), has sung with VocalEssence for 6 years. *“It doesn’t cost anything to pay it forward, nor does it cost to love your fellow human. Those are a few of the principles I live by.”*

Owen Metzger (Chemist), has sung with VocalEssence for 3 years. *“I show up in my life with the intention to build new connections and deepen existing relationships. Putting love first allows us to recognize each others’ humanity and needs.”*

Kurtis Parlin (Government Attorney), has sung with VocalEssence for 7 years. *“Love helps me strengthen authentic connections and treat other people as ends in and of themselves, rather than the means to an end.”*

Thomas Sasaki (Teacher), has sung with VocalEssence for 3 years. *“Showing care for students by meeting them where they are.”*

Barry Tikalsky (Application Developer and Data Engineer), has sung with VocalEssence for 7 years. *“Forming relationships to understand what the people around me need and giving what I can to help them.”*

Ethan Williams (Music Educator) has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“Love plays a role in my teaching job, my home life, and everything I do. It helps me stay grounded.”*

BASS

Robert Atendido (Management Analyst, State of Minnesota), has sung with VocalEssence for 9 years. *“Love can be apparent in unexpected ways; always be open to the possibilities.”*

David Castro (Professor), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“Love is a powerful force that can inspire and motivate people to achieve great things. Leading with love involves respecting individuals’ differences and their processes for growth.”*

Adam Hecker (Bartender/Server), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“Love allows us to open our hearts to everyone and see the humanity in the world.”*

Russ Kaplan (Composer, Music Teacher), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“Love is the essential ingredient! Love for the self, love for the people in my immediate world, and a real desire for humanity to have the best and lift each other*

up. Leading with competition, spite or anger just won’t get us there... and in my own life leaves me feeling empty.”

Evan Clay Kelly (Product Support Lead), has sung with VocalEssence for 4 years. *“I think discussions, decisions, and dialogue grounded in love for all leads us towards positive outcomes for the world.”*

Jordan Kiffmeyer (Flight Attendant), has sung with VocalEssence for 3 years. *“By trying to be an advocate within the community by lending my voice to help members of our community that experience oppression. To help share their experiences/stories within the broader community to help bring awareness and help increase empathy in our shared humanity as people.”*

Jacob Koshiol (Psychiatric Associate at M Health Fairview Adolescent Residential Treatment Center), has sung with VocalEssence for 4 years. *“Love is a feeling and expression beyond acceptance. That’s why we crave we it.”*

Philip Lowry (Physician—retired from practice but teaching at the med school), has sung with VocalEssence for 13 years. *“Love is starting to drive almost everything for me. I don’t think this leads the way but hopefully makes a ripple. I am satisfied with this.”*

Noah Lucas (Software Engineer), has sung with VocalEssence for 3 years. *“When I lead with love, it’s about creating a connection and genuinely understanding the people I work with. This isn’t just about being nice, it’s about creating a space where everyone feels they belong and can do their best work. When people feel valued and understood, that’s when we can really come together and create something amazing for the world.”*

Nicholas Marcouiller (Software Project Management), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“It’s crucial to build genuine relationships with the humans you encounter daily. These relationships are our foundation for achieving common goals, including a more prosperous future for all.”*

Thomas Mondry (Actuary), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“To love is to find a way to make every connection meaningful & intentional.”*

Nick Mroczek (Systems Administrator), has sung with VocalEssence for 10 years. *“Love acts as a centralized beacon; it’s presence like a tether providing the needed supports to wade through uncertain waters. You can always rely on love.”*

Declan O’Higgins (Accountant), has sung with VocalEssence for 4 years. *“Love for the community and all the people that live and work around me*

keeps me from turning inward. Instead, I strive to act and vote with selflessness and care, because so many people didn’t get the advantages I did.”

Milo Oien-Rochat (Research Engineer), has sung with VocalEssence for 14 years. *“I love to sing. I’m not choosy with my audience.”*

David Olson (Quality engineer with an aerospace company), has sung with VocalEssence for 15 years. *“When you lead with love you are more motivated, more engaged, and more fulfilled.”*

Brian D. Ruhl (Retired), has sung with VocalEssence for 30 years. *“I believe love is intertwined with numerous elements of living creatures and love allows me to express my humanity in all areas of my life. It’s a gift to be used/applied as we walk through this world.”*

Josh Snapp (Education Data Analyst), has sung with VocalEssence for 1 year. *“I like Dr. Brene Brown’s definition of love: A practice, a verb. I try to embody that practice in how I treat others, how I choose compassion instead of judgement, and how I hold people with patience, understanding and respect.”*

Trent Stenoien (Software Engineer), has sung with VocalEssence for 11 years. *“Lead with empathy and understanding, and remember the golden rule.”*



VOCALESSENCE ENSEMBLE SINGERS



The VocalEssence Ensemble Singers have established an international reputation because of their extensive catalog of recordings and broad range of unique repertoire. This chamber choir, whose members hail from a wide variety of professions, is bound together by their skilled artistry to create what The Times of London has described as a “flawless” sound.

VOCALESSENCE SINGERS OF THIS AGE



The VocalEssence Singers Of This Age (VESOTA) is a community of Twin Cities teenagers engaged in expanding what it means to be a choir and, encouraging a wider circle of participation in the artform. Presenting music ranging from classical to hip-hop, they use creativity and collaboration to build an accepting community, equipped with the skills to lead social change in our society.

VOCALESSENCE VINTAGE VOICES



VocalEssence Vintage Voices is an exciting choral program that integrates the arts into the everyday lives of older adults. Guided by a desire to create a welcoming atmosphere and remove barriers for participation, these choirs sing to build community, combat loneliness and isolation, and improve physical and emotional wellbeing.

OUR PERFORMANCES

The VocalEssence Concert Season features our choirs in performances celebrating music of the past and present. Over 500 new works have been premiered by VocalEssence in prominent concert spaces throughout the community and artists from John Rutter to James Earl Jones have made guest appearances. Highlights from season concerts are available on our website.

OUR PROGRAMS

VOCALESSENCE ¡CANTARÉ!

VocalEssence ¡Cantaré! connects Mexican composers to school choirs and community choruses to share Mexico’s vibrant music and cultural traditions and compose new Spanish language songs for each school. ¡Cantaré! connects composers to schools through in-person experiences and online resources. In addition, VocalEssence supports Chicago a cappella as they implement ¡Cantaré! in the Chicago metro area.

VOCALESSENCE MUSIC PRESS

VocalEssence Music Press is a dynamic music publishing company that offers a select group of emerging composers the opportunity to make their music available to choirs everywhere.

SINGING FROM THE HEART

Singing from the Heart: VocalEssence partners with Longfellow School, a community school for pregnant and parenting students and their children, to provide regular opportunities to sing together and connect more deeply with their children and to their culture through music.

SUPPORTING COMPOSERS

Supporting Composers: VocalEssence seeks to expand the impact of choral music through commissioning as well as mentoring and nurturing emerging artists.

VOCALESSENCE WITNESS

VocalEssence WITNESS celebrates the contributions of African Americans to our shared American heritage through in school and virtual workshops with teaching artists for students grades 4-12, professional development and classroom resources for teachers, and VocalEssence WITNESS Young People’s Concerts featuring VocalEssence singers



VOCALLESSENCE

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