

For Release: May 15, 2025

Contact: Liza Beth

202.331.7577 ext. 243

liza@chorusamerica.org



Chorus America's 2025 Awards Recognize Outstanding Choruses and Individuals

Chorus America has announced the recipients of its 2025 awards program, recognizing Chorus America members for a broad range of achievements in choral music and service to the choral field. Awards celebrate meaningful contributions from remarkable individuals, choruses, and organizations.

"Chorus America is honored to recognize these remarkable choruses and choral leaders whose extraordinary work uplifts our communities and moves us all," said Chorus America president and CEO Christopher Eanes. "Their creativity, commitment, and the passion they bring to their craft elevates the entire choral community."

Award winners will be recognized at the [2025 Chorus America Conference](#) in St. Louis, Missouri on June 5-7.

Michael Korn Distinguished Service Award: Mary Ann Aufderheide

The Michael Korn Distinguished Service Award recognizes a member whose long-term service to the choral field has significantly furthered Chorus America's mission and vision.

Mary Ann Aufderheide is the 2025 recipient of the Michael Korn Distinguished Service Award in recognition of her exemplary career as an executive leader, mentor, and advocate. Her work with organizations such as the Phoenix Boys Choir and VocalEssence has fostered artistic achievement, deepened community engagement, and built significant organizational capacity. During her more than 20-year tenure as executive director of VocalEssence, the organization grew its core of professional singers, released seven recordings, expanded the WITNESS School Program and created ¡Cantaré!, a new exploration of the music of Mexican composers. Aufderheide is known among her colleagues for her warmth, wisdom, and collaborative spirit and has contributed immensely to Chorus America as a longtime member, presenter and program faculty, and past chair of the Leadership Development Forum. Aufderheide's achievements exemplify how strong administrative leadership nurtures vibrant musical communities.

"I am deeply honored to receive the Michael Korn Distinguished Service Award and to be in the company of inspiring leaders who have elevated the choral field," said Aufderheide. "During my time at VocalEssence, I've been privileged to witness the transformative power of choral music in building community, fostering belonging, and uplifting voices across generations and cultures. This recognition affirms the vital role that singing together plays in strengthening the human spirit."

Margaret Hillis Award for Organizational and Artistic Achievement: Vancouver Youth Choir

The Margaret Hillis Award for Organizational and Artistic Achievement is presented to a member chorus that demonstrates both artistic achievement and a strong organizational structure with financial stability, as well as a commitment to access, diversity, equity, and inclusion, community engagement, and education. This award honors the memory of Margaret Hillis, founder of the Chicago Symphony Chorus, for her more than 40 years of professional achievement and outstanding contributions to the choral field.

The 2025 Hillis Award recognizes a children and youth chorus and goes to **Vancouver Youth Choir (VYC)**. In just over a decade, VYC has grown from 30 high school singers to 600 young people aged 5–24 across 12 ensembles — all rooted in the belief that inclusivity and excellence not only can coexist but fuel one another. The organization offers subsidized tuition to all, with one in three singers receiving additional financial support. Alongside its core programs, VYC reaches more than 2,000 children and youth annually through Indigenous music education initiatives, newcomer and refugee programs, and school-based outreach. The choir commissions 6–10 new works each year, with a strong focus on emerging and underrepresented composers, and curates programming that challenges and affirms both singers and audiences. These values have earned VYC invitations to perform on some of the world’s most significant stages, including the IFCM World Symposium on Choral Music in Istanbul, the ACDA National Convention, and the 2024 Jeju Island Choral Symposium. Behind the scenes, the organization has strategically expanded staff and deepened its individual and foundation support, positioning Vancouver Youth Choir for long-term artistic and community impact.

“The Vancouver Youth Choir is thrilled to have been awarded the Margaret Hillis Award for Artistic and Organizational Achievement by Chorus America,” said founder and artistic director Tennant. “This recognition would not be possible without the hard work and dedication of our staff, volunteers, and singers who believe wholeheartedly in the transformative power of artistry and community. We are truly grateful to Chorus America for this honour.”

Alice Parker Fund Award: Border CrosSing

The Alice Parker Fund Award supports the composition and thoughtful presentation of choral music based in the traditions of Black and Latinx communities. This award recognizes the exemplary work of a Black or Latinx composer or an ensemble that respectfully and authentically presents works incorporating these traditions and experiences.

Border CrosSing is the 2025 recipient of the Alice Parker Fund Award. This Twin Cities-based organization intentionally bridges historically segregated audiences, musicians, and repertoire through choral music. With a dedicated focus on elevating Latinx representation in Minnesota's classical music scene, Border CrosSing's vision comes to life through its acclaimed professional ensemble's recordings and multilingual Puentes concert series, strategic educational partnerships with local public schools, and dynamic community engagement via its inclusive Heritage Choir and bilingual Community Sing events. The organization further enhances accessibility to Latin American vocal music by publishing contemporary works and creating new performing editions of historical pieces. Border CrosSing empowers audiences and participants to expand their understanding of choral music's possibilities while deepening appreciation for Latin American musical heritage, culture, and history.

"We are honored to receive the Alice Parker Fund Award and are grateful for the valuable support that Chorus America has given us throughout the years," said Border CrosSing executive director Matthew

Valverde. "Border CrosSing was founded on the firm understanding that choral singing can unite communities and transcend barriers; we cross borders through choral music. We share in Ms. Parker's belief in the transformative powers of group singing, and we will continue striving toward our mission in a time where it feels more important than ever. ¡Todavía cantamos!"

Education and Community Engagement Award: Mosaic Youth Chorus

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

The 2025 Education and Community Engagement Award honors an emerging program with no more than four years in operation and goes to **Mosaic Youth Chorus (MYC)**. MYC was founded in the summer of 2023 to create an inclusive space where Greater Lehigh Valley youth aged 11-18 perform with musical artistry, build community, and raise their voices for the greater good. MYC's singer-informed programming addresses relevant social concerns, integrating musical instruction with meaningful discussions on social issues and historical context. The chorus extends learning beyond traditional concerts through thematically focused performance tours and in-depth collaborations such as partnering with the Nurture Nature Center in Easton, Pennsylvania on a Youth Climate Summit this past April. The evaluations that MYC conducts with both singers and parents reveal that in less than two years, this organization is already creating transformative experiences for participating youth.

"The Mosaic Youth Chorus is incredibly honored to receive the Chorus America 2025 Education and Community Engagement Award," said MYC artistic and executive director Joy Hirokawa. "We are so grateful that Chorus America had the foresight to recognize and provide opportunities to fledgling programs like ours—programs that encourage diverse youth to give voice to issues of importance to them through music. This award will be significant for us to build support and awareness of the artistry and humanity of these amazing youth."

Louis Botto Award for Innovation and Entrepreneurship: Alex Gartner

The Louis Botto Award for Innovation and Entrepreneurship was established in memory of Louis Botto for his artistry and entrepreneurial spirit in founding the vocal ensemble Chanticleer. The award recognizes a mid-career conductor for their contributions to furthering the mission of their ensemble or organization.

Alex Gartner is the recipient of the 2025 Louis Botto Award, which honors the leader of a children and youth ensemble. As the artistic and executive director of Pensacola Children's Chorus (PCC) since 2016, Gartner has transformed the organization through innovative vision and strategic growth. Under his guidance, PCC has expanded from its flagship Resident Choir Program to encompass 14 distinct choral ensembles serving communities throughout Northwest Florida and Southwest Alabama. Gartner's "triple-A commitment" to affordable and accessible art established a sliding-scale tuition model ensuring financial circumstances never prevent participation. His collaborative approach has embedded PCC deeply within Pensacola's cultural landscape through meaningful partnerships with arts organizations including Pensacola Opera, Pensacola Symphony, and Ballet Pensacola, and community organizations like the Escambia Children's Trust.

“Alex Gartner is one in a million. He is a remarkable musician, mentor, colleague, arts advocate and leader who has transformed the Pensacola Children’s Chorus into a highly impactful organization that will continue to serve generations of youth for years to come,” said Pensacola Children’s Chorus board president Sheila Dunn. “He works tirelessly to ensure that every child in our community has access to affordable arts in ways that are both innovative and sustainable. He and his team recognize the transformative power of music, empowering each singer to unlock their full potential as young adults who lead productive, rewarding lives.”

Chorus America Philanthropy Award: Charles Berardesco and Jeffrey Thurston

The Chorus America Philanthropy Award is given to individuals, corporations, or foundations whose financial support of Chorus America and the choral art has been especially significant and generous.

Chorus America is honored to present the 2025 Philanthropy Award to **Charles Berardesco and Jeffrey Thurston** for their immense generosity and support of the choral field. As choral singers and dedicated arts participants in the communities in which they live, Berardesco and Thurston’s impact can be felt in the performance hall, in the audience, and at the board table. Berardesco currently serves as a Chorus America board member, as well as chair of the board of the Baltimore Choral Arts Society, and previously served as board chair of the Gay Men’s Chorus of Washington DC. Berardesco and Thurston’s multi-faceted support of Chorus America frequently involves matching gifts that seek to inspire philanthropy in others.

“My husband Jeffrey and I are both church choral singers, he is a professional violinist, and I’ve chaired two choral boards,” said Charles Berardesco. “For us, supporting Chorus America and its mission aligns directly with both our vocations and avocations. We are honored to be recognized for our support of Chorus America and urge everyone who loves choral music to add their support at this challenging time for our community.”

Visit chorusamerica.org/awards to learn more about Chorus America’s Awards program.

Chorus America is the advocacy, research, and leadership development organization that advances the choral field. We support and serve choral conductors, administrators, board members, and singers with tools, training, peer networking, and access so that choruses are better able to contribute to their communities. Our membership includes more than 6,000 choruses, individuals, businesses, and organizations that are part of the choral field.

Chorus America is governed by a diverse board of accomplished arts leaders from the U.S. and Canada, with staff distributed across the U.S.. Learn more at www.chorusamerica.org.

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