
2024 PMEA

All-State Guest Conductors



CHOIR

Christopher Jackson

Now in his second season, Dr. Christopher Jackson is the seventh Artistic Director and Conductor of The Bach Choir of Bethlehem. He has worked for 17 years as a conductor, educator, professional singer and scholar. Throughout his career, he has led numerous collegiate, professional and amateur ensembles across the United States and works frequently as a guest conductor for orchestras, choirs and music festivals.

His ensembles have toured China, Canada and the continental United States. During his tenure at Lycoming College in Williamsport, PA, he co-founded the Lycoming Baroque Choir and Orchestra and designed academic courses that allowed students to travel to Germany and explore links between Baroque music, art, and architecture.

He was nominated as a finalist for the American Prize in Virtual Performance for his work with the Muhlenberg College choral ensembles during the Covid-19 pandemic. Dr. Jackson remains an active professional choral singer and soloist, with focuses in the Baroque, Renaissance and Modern eras. As a member of the Boston-based chamber choir Skylark, he has appeared on three GRAMMY-nominated albums (Best Choral Performance) and also serves as the ensemble's Director of Education. He has performed with the GRAMMY Award-winning ensemble Roomful of Teeth, the Santa Fe Desert Chorale, Artefact Ensemble, Les Canards Chantants, and Bach Vespers at Holy Trinity Lutheran in New York City.

Jackson received his Bachelor of Arts in Vocal Performance from Oklahoma State University, studying conducting under Dr. Dirk Garner (Baldwin Wallace Bach Festival). He received his Master of Music in Choral Conducting from Westminster Choir College and was the graduate assistant conductor of the Westminster Symphonic Choir under Dr. Joe Miller and Dr. Amanda Quist, as well as studying with Dr. Andrew Megill (Carmel Bach, Illinois Bach Academy). He earned his Doctor of Musical Arts in Choral Conducting from the University of North Texas, studying with Dr. Jerry McCoy and Dr. Richard Sparks. ▀



CONCERT BAND

Alfred L. Watkins

Dr. Alfred L. Watkins is Co-Founder, Musical Director and Conductor of the Cobb Wind Symphony, a premier all-adult community band. He is former Director of Bands at Lassiter High School in Marietta, Georgia for 31 of his 37 years of teaching. Mr. Watkins is a 1976 graduate of Florida A & M University. In July 2022, he was conferred an Honorary Doctorate from the VanderCook College of Music.

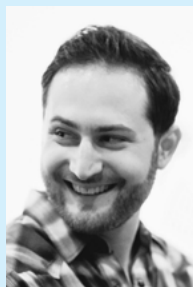
His bands have earned the Sudler Flag of Honor (concert), Sudler Shield (marching) and the Sudler Silver Scroll (community band). Concert bands under Watkins' leadership have performed at 32 invitational concert band events. He has conducted All-State High School Bands in 29 states and has worked with bands in 38 states.

Watkins is a member of the American Bandmasters Association, Florida A & M University Gallery of Distinguished Alumni and in the Hall of Fames of Conn Selmer Institute, Band of America, Minority Band Directors National Association, and the Georgia Chapter of Phi Beta Mu Band Directors Fraternity. He has received Midwest Clinic Medal of Honor, is a Midwest Clinic Legend, the ASBDA's "Edwin Franko Goldman Award," the KΚΨ "Distinguished Service to Music Award," was the ΦBM "International Bandmaster of the Year" and was awarded the "2022 Outstanding Conductor Award" presented by the Association of Community Bands.

Watkins is a Co-Founder of M.B.D.N.A. and is on the Advisory Boards of the Midwest Clinic and the Association of Concert Bands. He and his wife of 40 years, Rita, live in Marietta, GA. They have two adult sons: Christopher, a trumpeter in the United States Army Band "Pershing's Own" in Washington, D.C. and Jonathan, a businessman in Nashville. They have two grandchildren. ▀

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CONTEMPORARY A CAPPELLA ENSEMBLE

Rob Dietz

Rob Dietz is a multiple CARA winning producer who has been arranging, performing and teaching contemporary a cappella music for over twenty years.

Based in Los Angeles, Rob is best known for his work as an arranger and group coach for NBC's *The Sing-Off*. Over the course of his career, Rob has had the pleasure of arranging for some of the top talent in the vocal music world, including Pentatonix, The Swingles, Voiceplay and many more.

He has been a contributing arranger for performances by world-renowned artists including Demi Lovato, Smokey Robinson, Flo Rida, Sara Bareilles, Incubus, and Pat Benatar. His arrangements have been showcased on several TV shows, including *America's Got Talent* (NBC), *To All The Boys: P.S I Still Love You* (Netflix), and *Pitch Slapped* (Lifetime). As a performer he is an award-winning vocal percussionist, and his distinctive sound has been featured on FOX's *Glee* and *The Late Late Show* with James Corden.

Rob has a deep passion for a cappella education and is a founding co-director of A Cappella Academy (along with Ben Bram and Avi Kaplan). In addition to his work with Academy, Rob is also the director of Legacy, an auditioned, community youth a cappella group based in Los Angeles. Since the group's inception, Legacy has performed twice at Carnegie Hall, and has won the Los Angeles A Cappella Festival's Scholastic Competition, the Southwest semifinal round of the Varsity Vocals A Cappella Open, and the Finals of the International Championship of High School A Cappella at Lincoln Center. Rob is the author of *A Cappella 101: A Beginner's Guide to Contemporary A Cappella Singing* published by Hal Leonard.

Alongside his work in contemporary a cappella music, Rob is an avid choral composer, with work published by Alfred Music Publishing, GIA Publications, and Hal Leonard. In 2021 his piece *The Gift* received a jury commendation as part of the King's Singers New Music Prize competition. His pieces continue to be performed by choirs from all over the world. Rob currently serves as the national repertoire and resources co-chair for Contemporary/Commercial music for the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA). Rob's work can be found online at www.robdietzmusic.com. @rdietz55 on all socials. 🍷



JAZZ ENSEMBLE

Jason Kush

Dr. Jason Kush is an active saxophonist, educator, and scholar. He has performed as a soloist and ensemble member in a wide variety of genres in the United States, Europe, Central and South America. In

addition to his membership in the Pittsburgh Jazz Orchestra, Kush has worked as a free-lance jazz/commercial saxophonist with the Woody Herman Orchestra, Barry Manilow, Common, Patti LuPone, Marie Osmond, and The Four Tops, among many others.

Kush also has extensive experience as an orchestral musician, performing with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (over two hundred services including a 2013 European tour), the Russian National Orchestra, and the New World Symphony (a five-year engagement which included a 2008 European Tour).

Kush's solo discography includes *Finally Friday* (MCG Jazz), *Intersecting Lines* (New Focus Records-Naxos) and *Sonate* (Armazi Productions). *Finally Friday*, a 2023 release, achieved top 100 status on the JazzWeek international chart. As an author, Kush's scholarly work includes a dissertation on the life and innovations of Belgian inventor François Louis, an extensive interview/article on Puerto Rican saxophonist Miguel Zenón, as well as feature articles and interviews in various magazines and journals pertaining to saxophone performance and pedagogy.

Kush earned his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Saxophone Performance from the University of Miami after obtaining his Master of Music degree in Jazz Pedagogy from the University of Miami and his Bachelor of Music degree in Music Education from Slippery Rock University. In addition to extensive performance and scholarly activity, Kush is a Professor of Music at Slippery Rock University and an Artist Lecturer at Carnegie Mellon University. Kush proudly endorses the Selmer (France) and Conn-Selmer (USA) instrument companies, as well as the fine mouthpieces and ligatures of Belgian craftsman François Louis. 🍷

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ORCHESTRA Scott Laird

Recognized string pedagogue and conductor Scott Laird serves on the faculty of the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics where he is Fine Arts Chair and Instructor of Music.

Noted for his innovative approach to ensemble development and musicianship, Laird is a frequent conductor of honor orchestras and is a sought-after conference presenter. He regularly performs on acoustic and electric violin and is known for his abilities in both the classical and improvisatory arena.

Laird was the recipient of the 2022 ASTA President's Award for Outstanding Service, 2019 UNC Board of Governors Excellence in Teaching Award, 2017 ASTA Elizabeth A. H. Green Award, and North Carolina Symphony's 2016 Maxine Swalin Award. He has served on the National Boards of the American String Teachers Association and El Sistema USA. He has served as President of the NC Chapter of ASTA, Chair of the NCMEA Orchestra Section and maintains a presence as a national leader in string education.

He earned his B.S. in Music Education and his M.A. in Violin Performance from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, where he studied violin with Prof. Delight Malitsky. He earned his National Board Certification in 2004 and recertified in 2013. His blog, "Thoughts of a String Educator," enjoys broad readership in the music education community. In addition, Laird serves as a sponsored artist and educational specialist for D'Addario Bowed Strings, Coda Bows, Conn Selmer and NS Design Electric Violins. ▼



WIND ENSEMBLE Andrea DiRenzi Strauss

Andrea DeRenzi Strauss is a native of Clarence, New York and is the Conductor and Artistic Director of the Tara Winds Community Band in Atlanta, GA. For 30 years, she taught elementary through college at both public and private

schools in Georgia. Her university ensembles have performed in Australia, China and Ireland, as well as conferences for the Southern Division CBDNA/NBA, Southern Division MENC and GMEA.

From 1992-1996, Strauss served as Associate Director of the Atlanta Olympic Band and Director of the Atlanta Olympic Concert Band with significant performances as the BBC Telecast, International Olympic Committee Gala at Symphony Hall, Southeastern MENC/GMEA Conference, Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, the U.S. Presidential Inauguration Parade, and Opening and Closing Ceremonies for the 1996 Olympic Games.

Dr. Strauss has guest conducted in Germany, Italy, Ireland and Japan and has performed or conducted at the Midwest Clinic on four separate occasions. In addition, Strauss has performed or conducted sixteen times at the GMEA In-Service Conference. She has adjudicated in Canada and Ireland and has conducted or adjudicated in eighteen states to include seven All-State Bands.

She has presented clinics on various aspects of music education in eight states to include the NAFME National Conference and twelve times at the GMEA In-Service Conference. Articles by Strauss have been published in the MEJ and NBA journals and she has served as Rehearsal Lab Technician for the 64th Annual Midwest Clinic. Strauss has served on the Board of Directors for the NBA and has served as NBA Mentor Director, Research Committee Chair, and State Chair. In addition, she served as State Chair for the CBDNA.

Dr. Strauss is a charter member of Tara Winds (35 years) and prior to her current appointment, she served as principal clarinetist and Associate Conductor with performances at the 48th and 55th Annual Midwest Clinics. Under her leadership as Conductor, Tara Winds has performed in France and in Germany, the 69th Annual Midwest Clinic, the Southern Division CBDNA/NBA Convention, the GMEA In-Service Conference, and various university band clinics and district honor bands. ▼