

WHARTON'S ANNUAL GALA HONORS TWO AWARDEES

BY MABEL PAIS

Wharton Arts at its Annual Gala on Thursday, March 9, 2023, honored former New Jersey Youth Symphony (NJYS) Artistic Director and Conductor Barbara Barstow posthumously with the Education Award. The award was presented by Artistic Director and Principal Conductor Helen H. Cha-Pyo and accepted by Barstow's husband, Bill Barstow. The event featured a tribute performance of Karl Jenkin's 'Palladio' by a string ensemble of current NJYS students and alumni in addition to a live auction during a three-course dinner.

Barbara Barstow was the second Artistic Director of New Jersey Youth Symphony (2000-2009) and longtime conductor (1981-2009) who spearheaded the start of the youth orchestra program's Preparatory Orchestra, Junior Strings, and Orchestral Strings Training Ensemble (OSTE), as well as the annual NJYS summer camp and Playathon. Her dedication and visionary leadership for nearly three decades helped shape the organization into the thriving musical community that it is today.

Said Cha-Pyo, "We cannot express enough our gratitude for Barbara's unwavering commitment to NJYS, which has been instrumental in transforming it into the dynamic and flourishing musical community of 15 ensembles that it is today. By honoring Barbara with this year's Education Award,



Barbara Barstow (left), husband Bill Barstow.

we also celebrate the countless musicians and music lovers whose lives she has deeply touched over the years. As we approach NJYS' 45th anniversary season, we look forward to continuing this celebration with our NJYS alumni and carrying on Barbara's legacy of excellence in music education."

The 2023 Wharton Arts Lifetime Achievement Awardee Angel Blue, Grammy award-winning opera soprano was also honored. Angel Blue has taken the opera world by storm with historic performances as Violetta in Verdi's 'La Traviata' and, despite being told it would never happen, Ms. Blue was the first black woman to ever sing the fully staged role in Italy at Teatro alla Scala. She currently

sings the role of Violetta Valéry in the new Metropolitan Opera production of 'La Traviata.'

Peter H. Gistelink, Executive Director of Wharton Arts, shared his enthusiasm for the honoree and said, "Angel Blue is not only an amazing internationally-recognized and celebrated opera singer with huge credentials, but also represents the tenacity and courage necessary to persist in the professional world of classical music. Her career and life path are testimonies to this, and she definitely is an example to all of us."



Angel Blue

"I am so honored to be recognized with the 2023 Lifetime Achievement Award of Wharton Arts, an organization I admire for their work and creative mission of offering accessible, high quality performing arts education that sparks personal growth and builds stronger communities," said Angel Blue.

The Gala was held at the Westmount Country Club in Woodland Park, NJ. To find out more about the event and tribute to Barbara Barstow, visit WhartonArtsGala.org.

WHARTON WITH YMCA INSTILLS SIGNIFICANCE OF COMMUNITY FOR SENIORS

BY MABEL PAIS

Wharton Arts, New Jersey's largest non-profit performing arts education center partners with the Summit Area YMCA to offer programs for adults aged 55 and over beginning March 20, 2023.



Seniors CAFÉ Choir.

Credit / Wharton Arts.

The Wharton CAFÉ (Creative Aging for Everyone) Choir is a free eight-week choir program that will culminate with a public performance in New Providence on May 9. The program is a continuation of a pre-pandemic rendering made possible through funding from the National Guild for Community Arts Education.

In the fall of 2017, Wharton Arts was one of 20 organizations selected for the National Guild for Community Arts Education's Catalyzing Creative Aging Program, a multi-phase initiative that supports the establishment of new creative aging programs at nonprofit arts education organizations nationwide. With the support of the Guild, Wharton Arts piloted its first CAFÉ (Creative Aging for Everyone) Choir in 2019 with 30

participants from Brighton Gardens of Mountainside and Sunrise of Madison. The free 12-week program culminated in a final concert at the Chatham United Methodist Church, where the choir performed popular standards from Rodgers and Hammerstein to Henry Mancini and Johnny Mercer.

When asked to complete a program evaluation, more than 70% of the choir respondents indicated that CAFÉ Choir increased their appreciation of the arts and their interest in learning more about singing and the performing arts. The majority of respondents also indicated that the program increased their confidence, mental engagement, and confidence in creating art, and half of the respondents indicated that this program encouraged them to take part in other community activities.

"In response to the growing community's need for more and better opportunities to improve quality of life and outlets to stay fulfilled and connected throughout one's lifetime, Wharton Arts cultivated several avenues of creative expression for adults of all ability levels," said Cha-Pyo.

This season's CAFÉ Choir differs from the initial rendition in that it is a shorter, 8-week course open to the public, but the program is still completely free to participants. Classes take place at two area YMCA locations: the Summit Area Y and the Berkeley Heights YMCA.

Said Summit Area YMCA Program Coordinator Mary Grace McCann, "As a member of the Diversity, Inclusion and Global Innovation Network, the Summit Area YMCA is committed to bridge building and encouraging a welcoming atmosphere within the community. The Y is made up of people from all walks of life who are joined together by a shared commitment to ensure that everyone

has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive."

Both Wharton Arts and the Summit Area YMCA hope that promoting this free opportunity among their over-10,000 combined members in an area spanning the communities of Berkeley Heights, New Providence, Millburn, Springfield, Short Hills, Summit, Gillette, Stirling, and beyond will offer meaningful social engagement with peers, family, and communities, further contributing to an improved quality of life for participants to feel valued and empowered as they make connections between art and their own life experiences.

As the older adult population in NJ increases exponentially in the coming years, the development of accessible, high-quality programs and resources that improve quality of life are essential. Research shows the positive impacts of arts participation for older adult audiences who often experience extreme social isolation. For example, Dr. Gene Cohen, a leader in the field of geriatric psychiatry, demonstrated that older adults who participate in community-based cultural programs report better physical health, fewer doctor visits, less medication use, and higher morale than study participants who did not engage in such programs. The sense of empowerment that comes with skill development is also linked to improvements in physical and mental health in older adults.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the need for engagement and connection among these audiences, and Wharton Arts hopes to meet this incredible need by engaging adults 55+ through a variety of Lifelong Learning programs. For more information about the Wharton CAFÉ Choir, visit WhartonArts.org.

Wharton Arts

Learn more about Wharton Arts at WhartonArts.org.

(Mabel Pais writes on Social Issues, The Arts and Entertainment, Health & Wellness, Cuisine and Spirituality)