



The New Canon Project: Bringing New Voices to the Canon



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This is a project developed on a napkin while sitting on a patio. Lynn Tuttle, the Director of the American String Teachers Association, and I found ourselves at a conference together almost three years ago. While we did not know each other before this meeting, we quickly found kindred spirits in each other. Through conversation, we recognized that each of our organizations had a similar need: more works for developing ensembles written by composers of the global majority. At the same time, the Sphinx Organization had a call for proposals open for ideas that supported artists of Black and Latine backgrounds with a focus in classical music. We knew we had matching ideas and the potential for funding!

Unfortunately, we didn't save the napkin, but we do have the results of that work. Three years ago, ACDA, in partnership with the American String Teachers Association (ASTA), Rising Tide Music & Arts (RTMP), and with generous support of \$100,000 from the Sphinx Venture Fund, launched the New Canon Project—a groundbreaking initiative designed to build a vibrant new body of repertoire by commissioning

works from Black and Latine composers specifically for school-based choral and string ensembles.

As choral educators, we understand the power of music to shape identity, build community, and reflect the world around us. Yet when we look at the repertoire most commonly found in our developing school music classrooms, it can tell a narrow story—one that fails to fully reflect the diversity of voices in our communities or the richness of musical expression that exists beyond the traditional canon.

This project is not just about creating new music. It's about shifting systems.

Why Now?

There continues to be awareness in our profession about the need to diversify the music we teach and perform. But simply wanting to program more inclusive repertoire is not enough; we need to create the conditions in which that repertoire is created, supported, and sustained. The New Canon Project addresses these needs head-on by specifically supporting composers starting from the commission through professional development, workshopping, and all the way through publication and distribution. This project has created a pipeline for composers and their works.

Composing for school ensembles—especially developing ones—requires a specific skill set. Composers must understand voicing, ensemble size, technical abilities, and performance contexts. Yet many brilliant Black and Latine composers have not had the opportunity to learn how to write effectively for these ensembles. Without that training and a pathway to publication, their music remains out of reach for teachers and students.

The New Canon Project was created to purposefully close that gap. And now, with the help of experienced mentors and school ensemble partners, twenty-one composers have written new works (ten choral and eleven strings) that are available for your school music classroom. Visit www.risingtidearts.org/ncp-collection to learn more.

A Network of Collaboration

At the heart of this project is collaboration between composers and mentors, teachers and students, national organizations and publishing partners. ACDA and ASTA were joined by Rising Tide Music & Arts Press, Hal Leonard Publishing, and the Sphinx Venture Fund to bring this vision to life.

The project began with a call for composers. Selected composers were divided into Year 1 and Year 2 cohorts. Each cohort met together monthly for inspiration, guidance, and support. Through workshops, mentoring, and school-based collaborations, the composers worked to bring their compositions to life.

As a unique feature, each composer had a composition mentor and also worked closely with educators and student ensembles in real classrooms, getting hands-on feedback and the rare opportunity to workshop their drafts with actual performers. These interactions not only strengthened the final compositions but allowed students to engage with the creative process in a meaningful way—demystifying composition and showing young musicians that their voices matter.

The first cohort works are completed and are published through Rising Tide Music Press and distributed by Hal Leonard's ArrangeMe. The pieces can be purchased directly through RTMP but also through Hal Leonard. This ensures the music reaches a wide audience of educators and becomes part of the living

repertoire we all have access to. Composers retain the rights to their works and receive sales income from both RTMP and Hal Leonard, creating sustainable career support beyond the scope of the initial commission. You can view the works at risingtidearts.org under Rising Tide Music Press or by looking for the titles on ArrangeMe.com. Please check back often for the newest works.

Centering Equity Through Structure

Importantly, the project is intentionally designed to address systemic inequities in how music is created and shared in our profession. Too often, commissioning and publication processes privilege programs with the most resources, visibility, or skill. In contrast, the New Canon Project lifts up developing school programs—those that may not have historically been selected for participation but have students and educators who are ready, willing, and able to participate in this kind of project.

By inviting smaller, developing skills, or less-resourced programs into the commissioning process, we're not just diversifying who writes music—we're also expanding who gets to be part of shaping it.

Meet the Composers

We want to celebrate our ACDA composers in the project. They are:



Andrés Ballesteros is a Boston-based composer, educator, and administrator whose work chases threads of curiosity and social justice. His compositions blend classical with diverse genres and narrative arcs. He often collaborates with youth and community groups in centering themes of immigration, climate justice, and more. A graduate of Harvard University, Andrés holds an artist diploma from the Academy's Gabriela Ortiz Composing Studio and has been recognized as a Boston Latino 30 Under 30 honoree, spoken at the League of American Orchestras National Conference, and been profiled in Ana Francisca Vega's book *Corazón de Mexicanos Como Yo*.

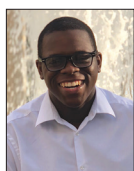
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Evan Blaché is a non-binary choral composer and artist based out of San Marcos, Texas. Never known to mince words, Evan has composed a lot of work combining the classical style with topics of social justice. They are currently in their undergraduate program at Texas State University for their bachelor's in music studies and composition while singing in the Texas State University Chorale under the direction of Joey Martin and studying composition with Dr. Jack Wilds. Evan currently sings in the groups Tinsel Singers, San Antonio Chamber Choir, Inversion Ensemble, and is an insight fellow in Conspirare.



Cristian Larios (he/él) is a composer, conductor, and educator from Joliet, IL. He currently teaches at Plainfield North High School and writes choral music that centers storytelling and connection. His work has been performed by Tonality, SWIC Chamber Singers, and others, with his piece *In This House* featured on Tonality's 2024 album *America Will Be*. Recent commissions include *Our Land* (New Canon Project) and *The Good* (William Ferris Chorale). Cristian holds degrees from Illinois State University and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and advocates for equity through music and education.



Brian Harris Jr. is currently a high school choir director in Waco, Texas. At University High School, he serves as the assistant choir director for the University Trojan Singers. Brian enjoys working with and meeting new people as a teacher and composer. Originally from Houston, Texas, he is a product of the Houston Independent School District and Wichita State University, where he earned a bachelor of music education.



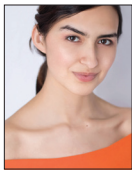
Juan-Carlos Mackay currently teaches high school and jr. high choirs in Utah. He earned a degree in music composition at Utah State University. Since then he has written for orchestras, jazz bands, and choirs. He's even written for glass bottle ensembles. Encouraged by his wife, he has recently begun writing music for developing musicians and singers. As a child of U.S. and Mexican parents, his favorite music to write celebrates cultural heritages through a Classical style. Juan-Carlos hopes that those who hear his pieces feel a sense of hope and wonder about their world.



Taleya Jordan is a senior music education student at Southeastern Louisiana University, where she studies classical, jazz, and musical theatre. She has performed for Southeastern's Mozart Opera Scenes as a featured soloist in Vivaldi's *Gloria* at First United Methodist Church of Hammond. She has performed in productions with SwampLight Theatre such as "Oliver" (Mrs. Bedwin) and "Wilber's Disco Inferno of Love" (Cabaret Performer). She also competes in the Musical Theatre Division of the NATS competition. Taleya owns "Cantante Music Lessons," where she helps both newcomers and seasoned performers achieve whatever goals they have.



Hugo Madera is a choral composer, conductor, and educator based in Nebraska. Born in Jalisco, Mexico, he brings a distinct Latin-American perspective to his works and is an advocate for social change and the diversification of the choral canon. His compositions have been performed by ensembles such as Cantus, The Nebraska Festival Singers, and the UNT University Singers. He leads choral activities at Adams Central Public Schools and is active with arts organizations across central Nebraska. Hugo holds a master's in music education from the University of Nebraska at Kearney and a bachelor of music from Hastings College.



Marina Quintanilla is an Oklahoma City-based composer and musician from the studio of Dr. Edward Knight (OKCU). Marina has sung with OKC's semi-professional choirs—Canterbury Voices and Canterbury Chamber Voices—since 2021, has had numerous performances with the OKC Philharmonic, and premiered her own works. In 2023 she began her journey with the New Canon Project and is currently working on a commission for OKCDA's 2027 All-State Treble Choir. In her free time, Marina teaches at El Sistema, an organization whose mission is to provide free music learning opportunities to students in the Oklahoma City Metro area.

Future of Music Faculty Fellow, he has received commissions from the Cincinnati Song Initiative, Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra, and MINA String Quartet. Khyle holds degrees from Lincoln University of PA (BS), Georgia State University (MM), and Florida State University (PhD).

We hope our ACDA members will explore these new pieces with open ears and hearts. These works are not “add-ons” or side projects—they are powerful, pedagogically sound additions to your repertoire library. They are written with care, tailored to the realities of school ensembles, and infused with the creative voices of composers who reflect the students in our classrooms.

Looking Ahead

We also invite you to be part of the broader movement to reimagine our repertoire. Programming these new works, offering your feedback, and advocating for structural change in your local and state networks helps carry the momentum of this initiative into the future.

In five to seven years, we envision a choral landscape where diverse, high-quality works by Black and Latine composers are not rare gems but standard options in our festival lists, state contest libraries, and daily classroom use. We hope more publishers will invest in this kind of intentional, equity-focused work, and that more composers from underrepresented backgrounds will find both a home and a livelihood in school music spaces.

And most of all, we hope our students—those sitting in choir rooms across the country—will see themselves reflected in the music they sing and understand that their stories, voices, and creative spirits belong in the canon too.

Let's continue to build that canon together. **CI**



David García Saldaña (he) is an emerging Los Angeles-based Mexican-American Chicano composer whose choral work draws on folk music and traditions. His compositions have been performed by the Los Angeles Master Chorale, SACRA/PROFANA, and The Sunday Night Singers, and he has received commissions from the Los Angeles Unified School District and Cortines High School for the Arts. He approaches Latinidad as a dynamic identity, expanding Latin American music narratives to include the U.S. Latino voice. His “Nochebuena Choral Series” features vibrant new arrangements of Latin American Christmas villancicos. He currently teaches music theory and composition at Pasadena City College. He serves as Western ACDA Composer Track Co-Chair.



Khyle B. Wooten (he/him), a Philadelphia native, is assistant professor of music performance and director of choral activities at Ithaca College. A conductor, educator, researcher, and composer, he previously served at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and taught in Philadelphia and Atlanta schools. His research focuses on Lena McLin and choral works by Black women composers. An inaugural