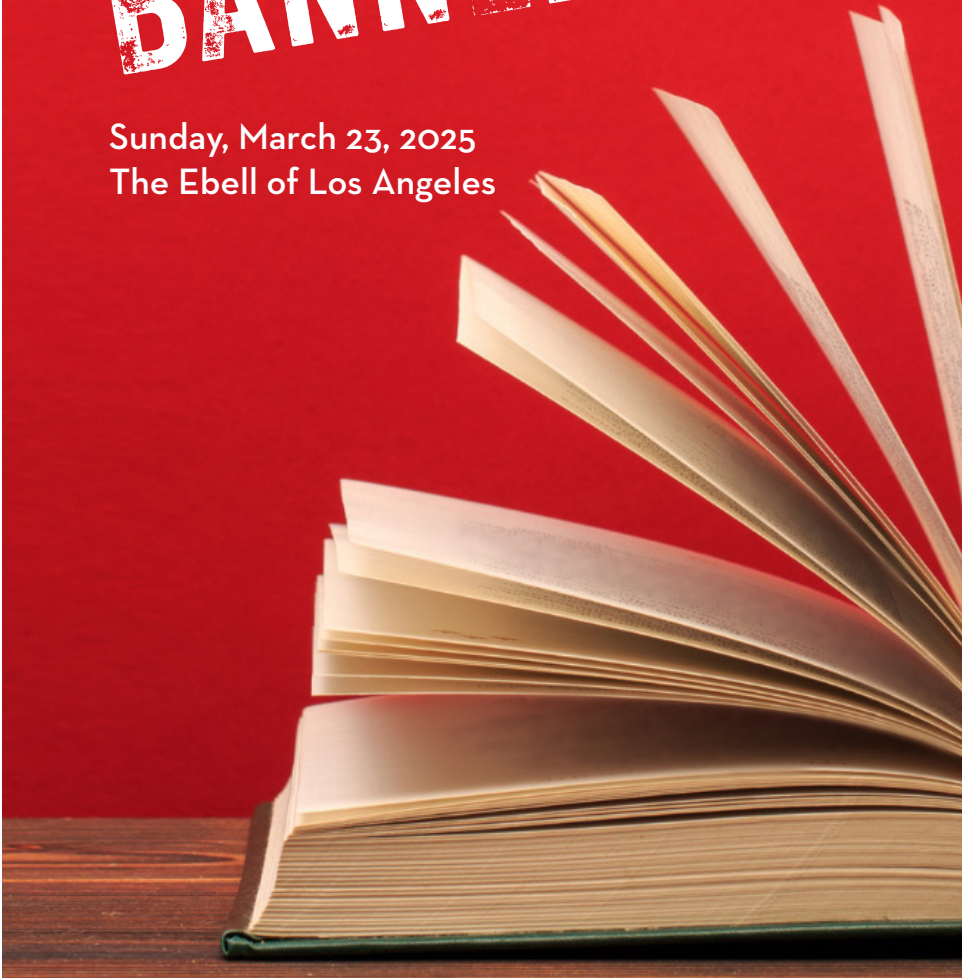


VOX
Femina
LOS ANGELES

BANNED!

Sunday, March 23, 2025
The Ebell of Los Angeles



VOX FEMINA LOS ANGELES

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Dr. Iris S. Levine
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Rebecca Wink
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Associate Conductor

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Sopranos
Natalie Anibal
Desiree Balfour
Ann Bowden
Suzy Brown
Kate Burns
Catherine Card
Ashlyn Collins
Caroline Diehl
Rhonda Dillon
Bethany Encina
Shannon Fish
Cynthia Glass
Kristen Hamilton
Sibongile Ngako
Hillary Ngo
Sonia Ohan
Rachel Paterno-Mahler
Natalia Ramos
Jessica Rau
Mary Read
Lori Marie Rios

Altos
Sara Austin
August Barringer
Lesili Beard
Emma Benatar
Zellie Berry-Owen
Gillian Bieler
Casey Burgess
Evi Desser
Eileen Dorn
Brianna Estrada
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Welcome to the second concert of VOX's 28th season!

We kicked off our 2024-2025 season in October with a hugely successful get-out-the vote tour at Universities in Arizona and Nevada, featuring Andrea Ramsey's stunning "Suffrage Cantata." Along with our moving November concert, My Voice Be Brave, these concerts served as a reminder that it remains as important as ever to make your voice heard and fight for what you believe in. This afternoon's concert, and our continued programming for this season, stays true to the mission on which VOX was founded. VOX has held social justice at the core of its mission since its inception, and our commitment to giving women voice and singing for justice remains steadfast.

We continue to prioritize telling the stories of our communities through new commissions for women's voices, including today's multi-movement composition based on Margaret Atwood's chilling novel, "The Handmaid's Tale." In June we will present a major work by sought-after composer Rollo Dilworth, featuring lyrics from Claudia Rankine's moving poem, "Weather" about the murder of George Floyd. We are also thrilled to include collaborations, both new and old, with our favorite string players, the Orchid Quartet, returning to our stage today while in the lobby today we are pleased to partner with local bookshop Chevalier's Books as well as PEN America. And you don't want to miss three-time Grammy-nominated vocal activist Melanie DeMore appearing in June, to inspire us all!

Our focus on the next generation through VOX's Music Education programs continues to evolve and expand, serving over 1400 under-resourced students annually throughout Los Angeles and beyond. Over 100 high school students attended our Open Dress Rehearsal for the November concert, while last month's second annual High School Treble Choir Festival doubled in size, and the Justice Choir program, now in its third year, is partnering with five public schools as well as community center Heart of Los Angeles.

As always, we are so grateful to you, our patrons and donors, for your continued support of our music and our mission and we look forward to sharing this wonderful season with you!

With gratitude,



Iris S. Levine
Founding Artistic Director



Rebecca Wink
Executive Director

Dr. Iris S. Levine, Founding Artistic Director



Nationally recognized for her excellence in choral conducting, Dr. Iris S. Levine is founder and artistic director of VOX Femina Los Angeles, L.A.'s premier women's chorus. Through her extensive experience with women's choral literature, and innovative concert programming, Dr. Levine has charted VOX Femina on an impressive journey, building its prominence in the choral community by way of numerous appearances at ACDA (American Choral Directors Association) conventions, Chorus America conferences, GALA Chorus conferences, and over 300 appearances throughout the United States, Mexico, and Canada.

Dr. Levine is faculty emerita at California Polytechnic University in Pomona where she served as the Interim Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs. Dr. Levine previously served as Dean of the College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences, Interim Dean of the College of Education and Integrative Studies, and Department Chair and Professor of Music at Cal Poly Pomona. As faculty, she conducted the Kellogg Chamber Singers, taught Beginning Conducting, Choral Conducting and Music Education courses. Dr. Levine earned her Doctorate in Choral Music from the University of Southern California under the tutelage of Rod Eichenberger and James Vail, and she holds a Masters degree in Choral Conducting from Temple University in Philadelphia, where she studied with Alan Harler.

Dr. Levine is an active member of ACDA where she has served the organization in many leadership roles, including state, regional, and national Repertoire and Standards chairs for Women's Choruses. She currently serves on the California Choral Directors Association board. Dr. Levine has presented at numerous regional and national conferences.

Dr. Levine is the editor for the Iris S. Levine Treble Choral Series with Pavane Publishing. She authored the chapter on "Working with the Women's Community Choir" in the GIA publication: *Conducting Women's Choirs: Strategies for Success* and she is a contributing author in *Choral Reflections: Insights from American Choral Conductor-Teachers*. Dr. Levine is highly sought as guest clinician and adjudicator for choral festivals throughout the country.

Lori Marie Rios, Associate Conductor



Lori Marie Rios is a highly accomplished conductor, soloist, educator and voice teacher. She currently serves as Associate Professor of Music at College of the Canyons, Valencia where she is the music director of the Chamber Singers and Voices of the Canyons Community Chorus. She also teaches voice and administers the applied music program. Prior to her appointment at COC, she directed the choral program at La Cañada High School. Ensembles under her direction have sung all over the United States. Her choirs have appeared at the American Choral Directors Association Regional Convention in Las Vegas in 2004 and in 2007 were selected to appear at the ACDA National Convention in Miami. The choirs at La Cañada also performed at the California Music Educators Conference. Lori Marie also is an adjunct professor at Pasadena City College where she conducts the Concert Choir. She is also on faculty at California State University, Los Angeles Summer Graduate Program where she teaches voice and graduate level conducting. Lori Marie is on the choral-vocal faculty of the Idyllwild Arts Summer Program where she serves as Assistant Director.

Ms. Rios has presented workshops for the American Choral Directors Association and this past year presented three workshops for the Nevada Music Educators Association. She is in much demand as a clinician and adjudicator. She has conducted district and state wide honor choirs. She also sits on the Los Angeles Bach Festival Board of Directors. She made her Walt Disney Concert Hall debut in 2006 as the soprano soloist in Mozart's Requiem.

Lisa Edwards, Collaborative Pianist



Following her undergraduate studies in piano performance at University of North Texas, Lisa Edwards earned her Master of Music degree in the Keyboard Collaborative Arts program at the University of Southern California with honors. While at USC, she was awarded the Gwendolyn Koldofsky Scholarship.

Currently, Ms. Edwards is the pianist/music assistant for the Los Angeles Master Chorale, under the direction of Grant Gershon and performs regularly on stage at the Walt Disney Concert Hall. Her concert credits include performances with the Los Angeles Master Chorale, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and the Santa Barbara Symphony. On disc, Lisa can be heard on two Nonesuch recordings of Steve Reich's music - "You Are (Variations)" and "Daniel Variations".

Previous faculty positions include California State University Long Beach, Glendale Community College, and Pasadena Community College. In addition to being the pianist for VOX Femina Los Angeles, Ms. Edwards holds positions with San Marino Community Church, Stephen S. Wise Temple in Bel Air, and Congregation Kol Ami in West Hollywood. Lisa travels throughout the United States as a vocal/chamber music pianist.

Jennifer Lucy Cook



Jennifer Lucy Cook (she/her) is a composer and lyricist based in Los Angeles. Jen specializes in music for the stage and screen, choral work, and pop songwriting. Recent choral commissions include Phoenix Chorale, the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus, and Vox Femina. She is the recipient of the Chorus Austin Composition Prize, the Cantus Emerging Composer Award, the HerVoice Female Composer Prize, and the Edwin Fissinger Composition Prize. Her piece "Time" received the J.W. Pepper Director's Choice for 2024 and her arrangement of "What Was I Made For" and "Time" both received a J.W. Pepper Editor's Choice for 2024. She is an alumnus of the Johnny Mercer Foundation Writer's Grove with Goodspeed Musicals. Other theater commissions include Full House Theatre Co., British Youth Musical Theatre, and Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London, and her musical recaps of the Bachelor recently went viral on TikTok. She earned a Master's degree in Musical Theater Writing from Goldsmiths University in London and a Bachelor's in Media Music from Brigham Young University. Despite writing music in such a wide range of genres, Jen's music is united by a keen love for storytelling with song. She prioritizes specific, highly emotional lyrics, melodic earworms, and infectious rhythmic grooves, and conceives of every piece from a dramatic, narrative-driven perspective.

Orchid Quartet



The artists of Orchid Quartet became inseparable friends while on tour with the Japanese rockstar Yoshiki of X Japan across the US, Mexico, Europe, and Asia. While traversing the globe, it became increasingly clear that the foursome had a truly special musical connection and chemistry, and in 2016 Orchid Quartet was formed.

Quickly gaining in popularity, Orchid Quartet was invited to perform in China, where they embarked on a successful month-long chamber music tour in 15 stunning concert halls across the country, during which they presented a 90 minute program including many of their own arrangements.

Since then, members of the quartet have toured with Ariana Grande, Adele, Panic! at the Disco, Hans Zimmer, and Game of Thrones Live featuring Ramin Djawadi. They have performed or recorded for numerous recording artists including Eminem, David Foster, Andrea Bocelli, Miley Cyrus, Alicia Keys, and more. Quartet members have performed on the soundtracks to major motion pictures such as *The Jungle Book*, *The Lion King*, *X-Men: Dark Phoenix*, and many more, as well as TV programs such as *The Mandalorian*, *The GRAMMYS*, and *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon*.

Orchid Quartet continues to perform live, record for artists, composers, and producers, and release music videos together. You can currently see them perform chamber music concerts regularly through the Fever Candlelight Concert series.

BANNED!

Dr. Iris S. Levine, Founding Artistic Director; Lisa Edwards, Collaborative Pianist
Orchid Quartet; Carla Capolupo, bass; Lauren Kosty, drums

Fie! Fie! Fie! (The Merry Wives of Windsor by William Shakespeare) Stephen Bouma

How Sweet the Moonlight sleeps (The Merchant of Venice by William Shakespeare)
Robert H. Young

Fancy (The Merchant of Venice by William Shakespeare) Paul Caldwell/Sean Ivory
Michelle Shin, violin

Anne Frank: A Living Voice (Diary of a Young Girl by Anne Frank) Linda Tutas Haugen
It is the Silence
Sunshine and Cloudless Sky

a survival plan of sorts (Amanda Lovelace) Melissa Dunphy

The Tale (The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood) Jennifer Lucy Cook
Once I Could Read
My Body and Me
Ahead

Commissioned by VOX Femina Los Angeles
Premiere performance

INTERMISSION

It Was You (Beloved by Toni Morrison) Maria Ellis

Wonderland (Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll) Andrea Ramsey
If Everybody Minded
Who In the World Am I?
The Little Crocodile
Poison
Long Words
Dodo's Proclamation

Wondering (This Book is Gay by Juno Dawson) Amy Burgess

Melissa unSilenced (Melissa by Alex Gino) Michael Bussewitz-Quarm
Sonia Ohan, soloist

The Color Purple (The Color Purple by Alice Walker) arr. Rollo Dilworth
Angelica Rowell, soloist

Heather's Dream Ann Hampton Callaway/arr. Chad Weirick
(Heather Has Two Mommies by Lesléa Newman)
Saira Grewal, soloist

Children Will Listen Stephen Sondheim/arr. Mark Brymer

PROGRAM NOTES

Holley Replogle-Wong

"You have to read, you have to know, you have to have access to knowledge."

Toni Morrison

Tonight's concert gives voice to works of literature that have been ignored, ostracized, or suppressed through institutional acts of censorship. Through music, we perform the memory of these writers and the words and worlds created for us, books and poems and plays that encompass a range of experiences that are alternately beautiful, resistant, melancholic, angry, and triumphant.

William Shakespeare, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *The Merchant of Venice*

Shakespeare dealt with constantly shifting censorship policies during his career; his plays were subject to constant scrutiny and he had to carefully toe the line of political criticism. Censorship of his plays continued on after his death, with perhaps the most famous incident being the Bowlder "family friendly" edition of Shakespeare plays in the early 19th century (which gave rise to the verb "bowdlerize" - to purge vulgar content in absurd or ineffective ways). *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is a bawdy comedy that ultimately turns toxic masculinity on its head, as the merry wives outsmart the scheming Falstaff. "Fie! Fie! Fie!" was a song performed by children dressed as fairies sent by the wives to pinch and scold Falstaff. Stephen Bouma's setting of this song emphasizes their righteous fury and determination with its declamatory repetition of its curse: "Fie! Fie! Fie!"

The history of American censorship of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* begins in the early years of the 20th century, where school boards across America were requested to remove the play from curriculums because of anti-Semitic content. Some teachers were forbidden to teach the play altogether, others were allowed as long as they never mentioned the controversial central character, Shylock! Paul Caldwell and Sean Ivory's "Fancy" sets a song from the play, "Tell me where is fancy bred," which takes place in a tense moment as a reminder to avoid making judgments according to external appearance. The sprightly rhythms maintained by the piano and violin help portray a sense of hope despite the tension and urgency. Robert H. Young's setting of "How Sweet the Moonlight Sleeps" musically illustrates the beautiful words uttered by Lorenzo, the man who marries Shylock's daughter. It is a piece of music about music: the melodic lines imitate the listener apprehending music arching across the night, louder here, softer there, and the ear must work harder to hear the strains.

Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl*

According to the American Library Association, *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank has been challenged or banned several times since they started tracking bans in 1990, and most of the complaints center around passages regarding her emergent sense of sexuality. Anne Frank's diary provides an invaluable portrait of the becoming of a young woman, hiding for two years with her family during the horror of the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. *Anne Frank: A Living Voice* is a haunting setting of her words by Linda Tutas Haugen. "It Is The Silence" reflects upon the horror of knowing terrible things are happening outside as she waits in the silence of her hiding place. "Sunshine and Cloudless Sky" describes a morning in the attic with her quiet friend Peter, giving thanks for beauty of the nature outside their window. The music begins with a recitative-like section, which takes on more motion as the friends contemplate the outdoors - arriving at a moment of stasis as they breathe in the air.

Amanda Lovelace, "a survival plan of sorts"

For American poet Amanda Lovelace, poetry is a medium of revolution and freedom for women. "a survival plan of sorts" draws our attention to the power of words, and the deeper the shelves, the more honed our powers become. Melissa Dunphy writes amorphous, shifting harmonies for the opening of this piece as a thoughtful meditation, with the occasional clarion of encouragement to "raid your library." This perusal of words and thoughts then takes a clearer shape - "collect words and polish them up" - as we learn to use the words as tools to transmit meaning. We return to the meditation again, as if to remind us that our reading work should never come to an end.

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

VOX Femina commissioned Jennifer Lucy Cook to write this piece based on Margaret Atwood's frequently banned book *The Handmaid's Tale*. In her notes on her composing process, Cook reflected on the prophetic aspects of the censorship of this book: "This is a truly ironic act given that the book is a dystopian story of censorship and extreme oppression. Its themes of corrupt government, religious extremes, and the controlling of women are unfortunately as relevant as ever, and it was therapeutic for me to process this relevance through music. After rereading the novel and feeling the eerie similarities with many echoes in our contemporary society, I found great comfort in envisioning singing about these from within the safety of a choir, with multiple souls musically holding each other while experiencing the emotions."

Cook writes about the first movement: "*Once I Could Read* contains a tempo marking that reads: "pragmatic and melancholy; not overly sentimental," and this sums up my approach to this movement about freedoms lost. There's a certain numbness that we use as a coping mechanism when we are not operating as full, unburdened people. I chose to express this numbness through homophonic hymnlike textures as the singers enumerate what once was, while the piano keeps time and rhythm underneath...Of course, like the very banning of *The Handmaid's Tale* itself, these happy memories become progressively more and more censored as the piece continues...I find a strange excitement and comfort in feeling deeply as an act of resistance, and with any luck, this piece might offer us all the encouragement to acknowledge our emotions as a bold, positive reaction to outside forces."

Of the second movement, *My Body and Me*, Cook writes: "This profound disconnect between the body and the self is fascinating to me, and is what I attempted to explore by creating an antiphonal choir...Disassociation as a trauma response is depicted in the way two choirs never quite agree on who has the melody, what the proper harmonic phrase resolutions ought to be, or whether the body or soul has more power. There is no clear outcome of this tug-of-war, but a few moments of unison and homophony serve as a reminder that the two halves were once whole..."

And finally, in *Ahead*: "This movement accelerates like a runner with the finish-line in sight, complete with gasps for life-giving breath. Throughout the piece are moments of quiet questioning, when we anxiously grasp for any semblance of stability. But, any plans, assurances, or answers are unknowable, and what is most important is simply to escape. The ray of light at the end of the movement is the realization that hope can guide us, even when we're not sure what we're even hoping for. We are simply moving toward something new. 'What's left? Hope, ahead.'"

PROGRAM NOTES (CONTINUED)

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

The books by Pulitzer and Nobel Prize winning author Toni Morrison are among the most frequently challenged and banned in America. During her lifetime, she fought against censorship, and advocated for libraries and open access to books. Her 1987 novel *Beloved* is a fearless reflection on slavery. Composer Maria A. Ellis based “It Was You” on the happiness that the characters must learn to choose for themselves. This self-actualization is hard-won through explorations of trauma, and Ellis draws upon the determined sounds of Gospel Swing to portray the victory of devotion.

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* has been banned all over the world for many reasons: in America for language, sexual content, drug references; in China for animals being placed “on the same level as humans” – and generally for its subversiveness in rendering a magical world that is satirically topsy-turvy and undermining, reflecting our own world in a distorted mirror. In her work *Wonderland*, Andrea Ramsey captures this marriage of whimsy with critique in snippets spoken from experience by various characters: Alice, the Duchess, Eaglet, and the Dodo.

Juno Dawson, *This Book is Gay*

While writing this nonfiction guidebook for LGBT teens, Dawson said she often found herself thinking about what she would have wanted to know as a teen, what information might have helped her in those formative years. Amy Burgess based “Wondering” on the complexities of identity and self-actualization, starting with a measured determination that transforms into a driving, rhythmic flurry of possibilities. Ultimately, Burgess leans into a celebration of the discovery of community -- “You’re part of something bigger now” – and the freedom that comes with being who we are.

Alex Gino, *Melissa*

Melissa is a children’s novel about a young trans girl and the challenges and support she experiences as she expresses her identity. Michael Bussewitz-Quarm and Shantel Sellers based “Melissa, unSilenced” on the narrative of the book, focusing on the thoughts of young Melissa and the allyship shown to her by her best friend. The piece enacts a musical journey through anxiety, sadness, acceptance, and joy.

Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

Alice Walker’s 1982 novel *The Color Purple* was adapted into a musical in 2005 with music and lyrics by Allee Willis, Brenda Russell, and Stephen Bray. This arrangement is a version of the title song that reprises at the end of the show, where Celie is reunited with her children and her sister, surrounded by community. Celie sings in healing and hope, with those who care for her responding to her in support.

Lesléa Newman, *Heather Has Two Mommies*

Lesléa Newman’s 1989 children’s book *Heather Has Two Mommies* was one of the first LGBTQIA+ children’s books to receive significant public attention. Ann Hampton Callway wrote “Heather’s Dream” from young Heather’s perspective, as if she is responding to the censorship to her story. Heather leads the song, as the choir joyfully backs her up with a united message: that families look different from each other, but are united in love.

Stephen Sondheim, *Into the Woods*

On its surface, Stephen Sondheim's musical *Into the Woods* (1987) is a show about what happens after happily ever after, which in itself is already an unexpected treatment of the fairy tale characters that populate the story. Traditionally, fairy tales convey moral lessons and consequences for children, but in this musical Sondheim shows that the lessons imparted are just as much for the adults. The 2014 Disney film adaptation of this musical excised some parts of the narrative in the name of "family friendliness" - taking some of the bite out of the lessons for the grown-ups. In "Children Will Listen", we confront the consequences of actions made in the previous generation and are reminded of the responsibility we have to our legacy. We are reminded that the precocious eyes and ears of children see, hear, and understand more than we realize, and since we are not alone in the world and our actions will affect others, we must be responsible for our choices and for our words - and be honest with our children.

This responsibility to honesty and truth is at the core of anti-censorship work. In her 2009 collection *Burn This Book*, Toni Morrison makes her thoughts on acts of censorship clear, and gives writers a charge to fulfill:

"The thought that leads me to contemplate with dread the erasure of other voices, of unwritten novels, poems whispered or swallowed for fear of being overheard by the wrong people, outlawed languages flourishing underground, essayists' questions challenging authority never being posed, unstaged plays, cancelled films - that thought is a nightmare. As though a whole universe is being described in invisible ink. Certain kinds of trauma visited on peoples are so deep, so cruel, that unlike money, unlike vengeance, even unlike justice, or rights, or the goodwill of others, only writers can translate such trauma and turn sorrow into meaning, sharpening the moral imagination."



Holley Replogle-Wong is a Lecturer in Musicology at University of California, Los Angeles, and the Program Director of the UCLA Center for Musical Humanities. She has taught courses on film music, popular music, American musical theater, and western music history at UC Berkeley, Chapman University, and UCLA. She is also a regular speaker for the LA Opera Connects educational outreach programs. Her research interests include topics in musical theater, voice, fandom studies, 19th- and 20th-century American cultural hierarchies, classical crossover, and film and video game music. She has music-directed musical theater productions at UCLA and for primary and secondary schools, sung with various vocal ensembles (including VOX!) and for the occasional film soundtrack.

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- Sue Stamberger
**In Memoriam*

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*Congratulations to VOX Femina
Los Angeles on the 24-25 season!*

Wolf Wallenstein is proud to support
VOX Femina's 28th season filled with powerful
performances that inspire courage, challenge the
status quo, and honor resilience, reminding us of
the strength of community and the power of
music to drive change.



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