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## Composer Abbie Betinis to write new ChoralQuest work in residence with MN, WA, and PA middle-level choirs

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**American Composers Forum (ACF) has selected Abbie Betinis as the 2019 ChoralQuest® composer.** ChoralQuest, now in its ninth year, is a commissioning program designed to enhance mid-level choral repertoire with new works by notable composers. An award-winning composer, Betinis is known for her audacious vocal music often inspired by language, patterns, and play. She will be the first ChoralQuest composer to pilot a new hybrid residency model, working directly with Cottage Grove Middle School in Cottage Grove, MN, and virtually with Lakeside School in Seattle, WA, and Sister Cities Girlchoir in Philadelphia, PA. Betinis will compose one piece informed and inspired all three choirs that will have a rolling world premiere in spring 2019.

Betinis's in-person residency will be hosted by Britta Gilbertson and Reid Larsen, directors of the [Cottage Grove Middle School](#) eighth grade choir in Cottage Grove, MN. "We are excited to see what Abbie, together with the students, will come up with on this journey, musically and in other ways. This is potentially a once in a lifetime opportunity for our students."

The virtual residency sites will take place at the [Lakeside School](#) under the direction of Shekela Wanyama, director of choirs in Seattle, WA and the [Sister Cities Girlchoir](#) with director and founder Alysia Lee in Philadelphia.



*Screenshot of residency cohort's kick-off meeting. Left Larsen, Gilbertson, & Betinis; Right Wanyama; Middle Lee.*

Wanyama said, "My singers and I look forward to working with Abbie on a new piece, and to hopefully hear a bit from singers at the other sites as well. We know we are fortunate to participate in bringing a new piece to life and are grateful to ACF for facilitating this process."

Lee expressed, "This initiative is a dream come true! We are always looking for repertoire that is engaging and challenging for middle school singers. ChoralQuest is addressing that gap in choral offerings--and with the very top vocal composers of our time. It is an incredible experience to work with a composer on this two-way street. We all cannot wait to hear the final product, but are more excited to be a part of a creative process with Abbie Betinis and our fellow school partners."

The new hybrid residency model engages everyday technology to reach more young singers, some of whom may become composers. Laura Krider, ACF's Director of Education and Community Partnerships, spoke on this new approach. "Given the restricted choral program budgets in many school systems, this virtual relationship-building increases access and lowers barriers to living composers and the co-creation of new music. Abbie's energy, warmth, and expert skill make her the ideal composer to pilot this type of residency."

As Betinis works in-person with the Cottage Grove Middle School choir throughout the spring, she will also regularly video conference into the Lakeside School classroom and the Sister Cities Girlchoir rehearsals to make music with the singers, learn about what makes them tick, and craft a piece that empowers and elevates the voices of the three ensembles—a public school choir, a private school choir, and a nonprofit youth choir. Betinis voiced, "Young people have so much riding on how we build our world today. There's a passion, a relevancy, a call to action that is so palpable in a room of young people. I try to bottle that up and put that energy into the art whenever I can. With this powerful ChoralQuest team, we have an opportunity to say something together that's really relevant right now." According to Krider, "As we all sat down for the first time talk about their time together, there was tangible excitement about the project along with honest conversation about life as a middle-schooler and how it might be reflected in Abbie's piece. I have no doubt that this new ChoralQuest piece will embody all that these communities are."

Visit [www.choralquest.com](http://www.choralquest.com) to learn more about the rolling world premieres dates as they are announced.



Composer [ABBIE BETINIS](#) writes music called "inventive" (The New York Times), "joyful... shattering, incandescent" (Boston Globe), and music that "expands into ethereal realms" (Cambridge University Press). As one of America's most-performed living composers, she has been honored to attend performances of her music from Carnegie Hall to Disney Hall, school assemblies to wedding ceremonies, state prisons to capitol buildings, summer camps to the finest cathedrals.

Working largely by commission, Abbie has composed new music for world-class organizations, including the American Choral Directors Association, American Suzuki Foundation, Cantus, Chorus Pro Musica, The Dale Warland Singers, Flying Forms

Baroque, James Sewell Ballet, LyricFest, New England Philharmonic, St. Olaf Choir, Young New Yorkers' Chorus, Zeitgeist, and the Zodiac Trio.

An eager collaborator, she has worked with poet Michael Dennis Browne, soprano Carrie Henneman Shaw, choreographer James Sewell, and recently composed a rhapsody inspired by ancient Greek oratory for renowned British clarinetist Michael Collins. Often inspired by history and culture, patterns and play, other recent projects incorporate elements from early American shape-note singing, Eleanor Roosevelt's bedtime routine, Gaelic keening, Japanese origami, and the mysticism of medieval Sufism.

Her publishers include G. Schirmer, Graphite, Hal Leonard, and others, as well as her own Abbie Betinis Music Co., through which she distributes her scores to musicians around the world. An advocate for small business and artist rights, she has presented on copyright and publishing at national conferences, and is the publisher and co-editor of the Justice Choir Songbook.

A two-time McKnight Artist Fellow, Abbie has also won awards from the American Composers Forum, ASCAP, and the Minnesota Music Educators Association, among others. At age 31, she was voted

one of the nation's top 100 Composers Under 40 by New York's WQXR-FM and National Public Radio. On Minnesota Public Radio, her annual premiere of a fresh, new Christmas carol has become a beloved holiday tradition. On public television, her early career as a cancer survivor finding her voice is profiled in the regional Emmy award-winning documentary "Never Stop Singing." In July 2017, she was named Musical America's Artist of the Month, with a feature article lauding her "contrapuntal vitality" and "her ability to use her talents to effect social change."

Abbie has held Composer-in-Residence positions with New York State School Music Association, The Rose Ensemble, The Singers-Minnesota Choral Artists, and – for twelve years – The Schubert Club, where she continues to host the weekly Courtroom Concert series. In 2019, she will be the American Composers Forum's "ChoralQuest" composer, visiting schools around the U.S. to write new choral music with middle school singers.

Originally from Wisconsin, Abbie is a graduate of St. Olaf College (B.A.), the University of Minnesota (M.A.), and holds a diplôme from the EAMA Nadia Boulanger Institute in Paris, France. She lives in Minnesota, where she is Adjunct Professor of Composition at Concordia University-St Paul.

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*ChoralQuest* is a music series published by the American Composers Forum that commissions new works for middle-level choirs by world-class composers. The series is designed to breathe new life into the available repertoire for choral students in middle school and junior high, introduce students to the composition process, and give commissioned composers the unique opportunity and challenge of writing new works for young, changing voices. So far, the series features works by renowned composers René Clausen, Rollo Dilworth, Judd Greenstein, Jennifer Higdon, Alice Parker, Stephen Paulus, Rosephanye Powell, Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate, and Chen Yi. All pieces are published by ACF and distributed exclusively by the Hal Leonard Corporation. Visit [www.choralquest.org](http://www.choralquest.org) for more information. *This commission is made possible with generous support from Tom Arneson and Alfred and Ann Moore.*



The American Composers Forum enriches lives by nurturing the creative spirit of composers and communities. Through commissions, grants, mentorships, performances, publications, residencies, and hosted gatherings, we provide innovative opportunities for composers and their music to flourish, and we link communities and composers through creation, connection, and engagement. ACF facilitates an ecosystem that reflects the diversity of our world, and we partner with a variety of creative musicians and organizations to develop the next generation of new music creators, performers, and advocates. Visit [www.composersforum.org](http://www.composersforum.org) for more information.