

Norman Scribner, Founder and Artistic Director Emeritus

February 25, 1936 – March 22, 2015



Considered an institution among his choral contemporaries, **Norman Scribner** was one of Washington's most versatile and respected musical figures. In 1965, Scribner founded The Choral Arts Society of Washington, an ensemble of more than 170 singers who performed for 47 years under his direction in regular concerts at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and other D.C.-area venues. As Founder and Artistic Director Emeritus, Scribner developed Choral Arts into one of the major symphonic choruses in the United States, leading for hundreds of performances with the world's leading conductors and orchestras, making television appearances, producing recordings, and performing on national and international tours.

At the request of Leonard Bernstein, Scribner assembled a professional choir to perform in the world premiere of Bernstein's *MASS* for the opening of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in 1971 and the subsequent original cast recording. The chorus, named the Norman Scribner Choir, returned to the Kennedy Center numerous times, most memorably for the Center's Tenth Anniversary concert broadcast on PBS. The Choir performed on a Grammy-nominated recording of Haydn's *Mass in Time of War* in 1973 under the direction of Bernstein, recorded on the Columbia label.

An accomplished pianist, Scribner began as the staff keyboard artist for the National Symphony Orchestra, playing from 1963-1967. He has also served as guest conductor of the NSO on several occasions. He was a member of the Choral Panel of the National Endowment for the Arts from 1974-76, and produced the annual free Christmas and Spring Festivals at the Kennedy Center from 1972-76. For a season he served as Chorus Master of the Washington National Opera (formerly The Washington Opera), and for eleven years prepared the Handel Festival Chorus. In 1981, Scribner traveled to England to conduct a performance of Handel's *Alexander's Feast* as part of the European Symposium Choral Masterworks Tour.

Scribner was also well known as a composer. His choral symphony *Love Divine* was commissioned by the United Methodist Church and received its premiere performance at the church's 1984 General Conference in Baltimore with Scribner conducting. In addition, The

British Institute commissioned a choral work entitled *Song for St. Cecilia*, which was performed in concert at the U.S. Supreme Court in May 1988. Scribner also wrote numerous shorter instrumental, solo vocal, and choral works.

Scribner's musical presence in Washington began immediately after graduating with honors from Baltimore's prestigious Peabody Conservatory, when he became conductor of the American University Chorale, Assistant Organist of Washington Cathedral, and Organist-Choirmaster of St. Alban's Episcopal Church, a position he held from 1960-2007. He has taught at American University, George Washington University, and the College of Church Musicians of Washington National Cathedral.

For his many outstanding achievements and contributions to the life of the city of Washington, Norman Scribner was named a 1984 Washingtonian of the Year. Other honors include the 1998 Mayor's Arts Award for "Excellence in an Artistic Discipline," the Cultural Alliance Founder's Award in 2001, an honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters from the Virginia Theological Seminary in 2002, and the Peabody Distinguished Alumni Award in 2006.

After his August 31, 2012 retirement from Choral Arts, Scribner continued composing, served on the Board of Directors for The Morris & Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, and managed the publication and recording of a translation of the Wesley Methodist hymnal. Norman Scribner passed away peacefully and unexpectedly at home on Sunday, March 22, 2015.