

Female Foursome Leading ProMusica Arizona into the Future



*ProMusica Arizona's leadership team (left to right):
Yvonne Dolby, Jan Sandoz, Patti Graetz and Meghan Ruel*

ProMusica Arizona (PMAZ) Chorale and Orchestra's leadership has evolved into an all-women team over the last couple of years, and the rapport and productivity are palpable. Although it wasn't part of a strategic plan or any slight to the many male members who provide invaluable services to the organization, this model is working well and getting results.

Artistic Director and Principal Conductor Patti Graetz, Concertmaster Meghan Ruel, Executive Director Yvonne Dolby, and Board Chair Jan Sandoz all stepped into their roles with the organization because they had specific skills to offer. No positions were filled based on gender. It just happened that they were all women.

As Patti Graetz explains, "Our team is fine-tuned like an orchestra. We come from different backgrounds with different talents, but each of us has a defined role. We've fostered a culture of camaraderie and recognize we're all working toward the same goals. We know there's no room for divas, and we respect and welcome each other's opinions!"

A graduate of Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, Graetz was a soloist in the world-renowned Concordia Choir and has a music career spanning more than 30 years. She is a skilled conductor and an award-winning soprano having sung leading roles with major opera companies in the United States and Australia.

Graetz started as the Assistant Chorale Conductor with PMAZ in 2015 and was asked to serve as Interim Artistic Director during the 2018-19 season. During that year, PMAZ's concert attendance increased an impressive 26 percent over the prior season. In a nod to Graetz and PMAZ musicians, audience members surveyed at the end of the season revealed that people were attending because they liked the type of music being presented and the quality of the performances. Graetz was named to the position of Artistic Director and Principal Conductor at the conclusion of last season. Her connections in the music community have provided unique opportunities for PMAZ performers and audiences including last season's Arizona premiere of *Mountain Days: The John Muir Musical in Concert* by acclaimed composer, Craig Bohmler.

Meghan Ruel, PMAZ's Concertmaster and the youngest of the leadership foursome, earned a Bachelor of Music in Violin Performance from the University of Toronto and a Master of Music in Violin Performance from Arizona State University. She recently accepted a faculty position at Arizona Christian University as String Department Director and Professor of Violin.

An "out of the box thinker," Ruel proposed that PMAZ collaborate with Arizona Christian University for string students at the college to play with PMAZ and receive college credit. The partnership filled a need for some orchestra seats to be filled and gave students a chance to gain instruction and performance experience. Ruel also teaches after-school strings programs for children, and some of her young students will be featured in PMAZ's April 2020 concert, *Baroque to Bluegrass*.

With a bachelor's degree in Communications from California State University, Fullerton and years of experience managing a privately-held company, Yvonne Dolby has been with PMAZ since 2011 and is responsible for the business side of PMAZ operations including marketing, development, box office operations, and administration. While not a musician herself, she is a talented writer and has been successful in bringing significant grant support to the organization, but she acknowledges that all successes are a team effort. "For example," she explains, "When I see a grant opportunity to

pursue, I gather the other PMAZ leaders for a brainstorming session. I need their buy-in to execute the project being proposed.”

Within the last year, PMAZ has received grant funding from the Arizona Commission on the Arts, the City of Glendale, the City of Peoria, the Scottsdale League for the Arts, and the Anthem Rotary Club as well as local and national corporate and foundation support. Dolby also works closely with the Marketing Committee to utilize all methods of communication to increase audience at performances and promote the PMAZ brand.

Jan Sandoz has a foot in both the artistic and business camps of the organization. She attended a state college in Wayne, Nebraska where she received a BFAE degree with an emphasis in voice and keyboard and earned a master's degree in Management from Bellevue University in Bellevue, Nebraska. While performing has been part of her life since childhood, she also had a successful career in pharmaceutical sales.

In addition to singing with the PMAZ Chorale, Sandoz is currently serving as the Board Chair and the Development Committee Chair, roles most people shy away from. During the 2018-19 season, with the help of her Development Co-chair and dedicated special events volunteers, Sandoz spearheaded efforts that raised enough money to allow PMAZ to pay off all debt, give staff and contract musicians pay raises, end the 2018-19 season in the black, and survive the lean summer months with a financial cushion. On one occasion when PMAZ desperately needed new microphones for an upcoming performance, she called on a small group of people to make an appeal to their contacts, and the necessary funds were raised in a few days. And, the 2019 Annual Spring Fundraising Campaign, involving musician members, Board members, and staff making individual appeals to their friends and families, exceeded expectations by 24 percent.

While each member of PMAZ's leadership team has a specific role, collaboration is always at the forefront internally among themselves as well as externally to enhance performances and reach new audience members. For example, Graetz has recruited the Arizona State University Mariachi ensemble and the Carolyn Eynon Singers to join the PMAZ Chorale and Orchestra for their March 2020 concert, Latin Spice, featuring Misa Azteca. Dolby notes, “Not only do we bring additional talent to the stage and give musicians performance opportunities, but we also get the people who follow those performers to attend our concerts.”

Originally proposed by a Chorale member and quickly embraced by the leadership team, PMAZ is in the second year of collaboration with the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at Arizona State University. PMAZ offers discounted tickets to OLLI's students, and OLLI staff members promote PMAZ's concerts to senior citizens taking their classes.

PMAZ trades ad space with five other performing arts groups to promote one another's events, all agreeing that rather than being in competition, they need to support one another and recognize that people who enjoy the arts are likely to attend multiple events.

In the 2019-20 season, PMAZ is partnering with Youth for Troops, a non-profit organization that supports deployed troops with care packages and homeless veterans with sleeping mats and other needs. Youth for Troops will provide set-up and tear-down assistance at concerts, and PMAZ will send pre-concert appeals for snack, toiletry, and other donated items for troops to be collected at concerts.

PMAZ embraces diversity among its members and leadership, and while the all women-team is accidental, the age variance in team members is beneficial to bringing different perspectives. Being a multigenerational team has real advantages according to Ruel, a vibrant performer and dedicated educator. “I look up to these women and value their experience. They also turn to me as a younger professional and welcome and solicit my input. Many musicians tend to jump from one gig to another, but I'm invested in PMAZ and am committed to being part of its exciting growth.”

Sandoz feels the team is enhanced by the excellent leadership skills each member exhibits. She remarks, “They bring to the table a depth of diverse experiences, a variety of talents such as vocal and orchestral performance and teaching, and the confidence that comes from having had a plethora of opportunities in their careers. We all benefit from this interaction. Because of the respect and admiration we have for each other's knowledge, we don't feel like we're in this alone. We've got each other to depend upon.”

PMAZ was established in 2003 with 17 singers. Since then, the multigenerational Chorale and Orchestra has grown to 100 members ranging in age from mid-teens to 80-something and become a leader in bringing live music to audiences in Phoenix, Arizona. The group has performed more than 175 times for over 131,000 people. In 2017 and 2018, PMAZ singers performed for a full house at Carnegie Hall in New York City along with other exclusive choir invitees from around the country. In 2019, PMAZ singers led by Graetz, traveled to Ireland to tour and sing in cathedrals throughout the country. PMAZ is one of only a handful of performance groups in the country that has a chorale and orchestra jointly performing at every concert. PMAZ is a non-profit organization and is supported by the Arizona Commission on the Arts, which receives support from the State of Arizona and the National Endowment for the Arts.

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