

VocalEssence introduces new assistant artistic director

Written by



Minnesota-based choral organization, VocalEssence has a new first assistant artistic director.

Tesfa Wondemagegnehu was hired after a global search to fill the position. Wondemagegnehu comes to VocalEssence from Orlando, Fla., where he was director of choral activities at Freedom High School (FHS). He will serve under VocalEssence artistic director and founder Philip Brunelle, and associate conductor and vocal coach Sigrid Johnson. In his new role, Wondemagegnehu will help the non-profit expand its artistic vision, provide programmatic growth opportunities and spread its reach nationally. Wondemagegnehu will officially join VocalEssence in late summer, in time for the start of the organization's 45th season.

During his five years at FHS, Wondemagegnehu was named Orange County Public School Teacher of the Year and received the Macy's National Gift of Teaching Award. The new assistant artistic director holds a master of music degree in choral conducting and vocal performance from Florida State University and a bachelor of music in vocal performance from the University of Memphis.

"We are fortunate and honored to have Tesfa on board with VocalEssence. From the moment I saw his audition video, I found him very inspiring," said Philip Brunelle, VocalEssence artistic director and founder. "You can just tell how passionate he is about choral music. And our Ensemble Singers responded enthusiastically when he came to Minneapolis for his final audition earlier this year. I'm looking forward to working closely with him on all aspects of artistic direction – from community engagement, to fundraising and marketing – and, of course, conducting."

"The assistant artistic director position offers me a chance to collaborate with some of the finest choral musicians in the country, while still able to connect with students in the VocalEssence ¡Cantaré! and WITNESS outreach programs," said Wondemagegnehu. "This opportunity to

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learn from Philip Brunelle and Sigrid Johnson is once-in-a-lifetime. The position is the perfect marriage between educational outreach and choral artistic excellence, and to say that I am excited about becoming a part of the VocalEssence family would be a huge understatement.”

Wondemagegnehu is said to be widely in demand as a guest conductor and lecturer, and has presented workshops and conducted honor choirs in Florida, Tennessee, Ohio, and Costa Rica. As a tenor soloist, he has performed both in the United States and internationally under the batons of such conducting luminaries as André Thomas, Anton Armstrong, Krzysztof Penderecki, Rodney Eichenberger, Judy Bowers, Kevin Fenton, and Pu-Qi Jiang.

VocalEssence is comprised of the 100-voice VocalEssence Chorus, the 32-voice Ensemble Singers, as well as guest soloists and instrumentalists. Called “one of the irreplaceable music ensembles of our time” by Dana Gioia, past chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, VocalEssence was founded in 1969. Beyond performances and recordings, VocalEssence impacts thousands of students, singers, and composers each year through its initiative programs, contests, and support for innovative art.