

Michael Korn

American choral conductor and organist Michael Korn was born in Harrisburg, PA on March 6, 1947. As a young child he showed musical talent on a toy piano, began taking piano lessons at age 6, and started organ lessons at age 11. The renowned Harrisburg organist Kenneth Landis was his organ teacher and mentor. At the age of 18, Michael drew notice for a recital he gave at St. Thomas Church in New York City in October 1965. This concert led to an invitation from Leonard Bernstein himself to appear two years later on his "Young People's Concert" series on CBS Television Network, the lone organist to do so.

In the late 1960s, Michael studied organ at Westminster Choir College with Alexander McCurdy, and subsequently followed his teacher to The Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. At Curtis, he continued his organ studies as a scholarship student under McCurdy and also studied conducting under the legendary Max Rudolf.

From 1966 to 1980, Michael served as the organist/choirmaster at the First United Methodist Church of Germantown (FUMCOG) in Philadelphia. While at FUMCOG, he founded the Germantown Music Society which became well known for its excellent quality and served as his model for the formation of The Philadelphia Singers in 1972. The debut concert of The Philadelphia Singers took place in May 1972 at Friends Select School. This was followed by The Philadelphia Singers' first subscription series of concerts during the 1972-1973 season at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia.

As the Artistic Director of The Philadelphia Singers, Michael conducted an annual 5-concert subscription series. He frequently hired the Concerto Soloists (Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia) to accompany The Singers for large-scale works. The ensemble also made regular appearances at the Academy of Music on the concert series of The Philadelphia Orchestra, the Pennsylvania Ballet Company (singing Orff's *Carmina Burana* and Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream*), and the Philly Pops with Peter Nero.

In March 1985, The Philadelphia Singers and the Concerto Soloists of Philadelphia, led by Michael, appeared in a national PBS telecast from the Academy of Fine Arts. The program, called "A Celebration of Bach and Handel" marking the composers' 300th birthdays, featured a performance of Bach's *Magnificat*. That same year, they released three RCA Red Seal recordings: Handel's *Roman Vespers*, with Judith Blegen and Benita Valente as soprano soloists, *Ceremonies of Carols* featuring Christmas choral works by Britten and Poulenc, and *Gloria! Gloria!* featuring a specially commissioned orchestral medley of Christmas tunes and Respighi's *Laud to the Nativity* with soprano Benita Valente.

On March 29, 1991, Michael conducted his last concert at the Academy of Music, performing Mozart's *Requiem*. At that concert, he officially introduced the newly formed Philadelphia Singers Chorale on the concert series. He founded the Chorale as an auxiliary chorus to The Philadelphia Singers so that he could perform larger choral works not suited for the 32-voice

Philadelphia Singers. The 140-member The Philadelphia Singers Chorale continued to perform regularly with The Philadelphia Orchestra as its resident chorus until the choir was disbanded in May 2015.

In 1976, Michael founded the Basically Bach Festival of Chestnut Hill which eventually grew to become the Bach Festival of Philadelphia. He was its Artistic Director until 1988.

In addition to his busy performance schedule, Michael Korn led the efforts to help establish a national service network for the choral industry. In 1977, he convened a group of the country's leading choral conductors including such luminaries as Margaret Hillis (founder of the Chicago Symphony Chorus), Robert Page (renowned choral conductor at Temple University and Carnegie Mellon University and founder of the Robert Page Singers), and Roger Wagner (founder of the Roger Wagner Chorale). The purpose of the meeting was to establish the first national service organization for fully professional choruses. The organization born from this effort was the Association of Professional Vocal Ensembles (APVE) which later expanded and became known as Chorus America. Michael served as APVE/Chorus America's first President in 1977-1985. Today, Chorus America is based in Washington, DC and services over 1,500 choruses nationwide.

From 1978 until 1991, Michael was also the Chorus Master/Associate Conductor of the Opera Company of Philadelphia. During his tenure, he prepared the opera chorus of 60-80 voices for numerous productions, conducting several operas from the pit, including Bizet's *Carmen*.

Before his untimely death, Michael prepared concert details for two future seasons which included guest appearances by Margaret Hillis, Richard Westenberg, conductor of Musica Sacra in New York City, and Robert Page, one of the country's greatest choral conductors. Michael willed his vast music library, as well as his grand piano, to the Curtis Institute of Music. His concert recordings went to Temple University.

He died on August 29, 1991 in Pennsylvania Hospital from complications related to HIV/AIDS, at the age of 44.

Michael's accomplishments continue to resonate within the choral industry. His lasting legacy remains in the memory of those who loved him, worked with him and attended his many magnificent performances.

Janice Bryson