We look back at the 2018-19 season and marvel at the community of artists and audience that converged at ACO events. George, Derek and Ed program an ever-adventurous and horizon-expanding repertoire. This season’s Carnegie Hall series brought us a sci-fi opera by Alex Temple, a concerto for Imani Winds by Valerie Coleman, a multimedia oratorio by Du Yun and Khaled Jarrar, a rarely heard work by Morton Feldman, and the recognition of two composers celebrating their 80th Birthdays: Joan Tower and Gloria Coates.

We’re also proud of progress made in the first year of our three-year strategic plan. Thanks to generous funders like the Altman Foundation and the Baisley Powell Elebash Fund, we added new staff. From July through October, we welcomed our new Emerging Composers and Diversity Director Aiden Feltkamp and expanded our development staff to include full-time Development Associate Stephanie Polonio and part-time Grants Writer Jay House.

Not only did we build ACO’s fundraising capacity, we also launched a three-year campaign with a special $250,000 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to strengthen the organization’s financial foundations. This is an important step to position ACO for increasing the scope and reach of its activities. We’re also proud of the work the board and staff have done to move towards a balanced budget. At its core, this was a year of rebuilding and stabilization. But we are proud to have maintained our regular rotation of concerts, readings and education programs, while renewing and deepening our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.

One thing that remains constant: ACO is committed to furthering the cause of American composers. Whether we are teaching students in New York City public schools, partnering with orchestras in Philadelphia, Grand Rapids, Sarasota, and Detroit, or performing with ACO’s incomparable Music Director George Manahan, composers of every age, race, gender, and musical background can find their voices with us. We look forward to continuing the work of this year to create an even more vibrant future for American music and ingenuity.

Sincerely,

Frederick Wertheim
Chair

Sameera Troesch
Vice Chair
Dear ACO Community,

Reviewing our concerts, the New York Times often calls ACO “essential.” But what does that mean?

When ACO was founded, Aaron Copland spoke at our inaugural concert on February 7, 1977. He said, “You can easily imagine that I come tonight with much emotion. Our music programs are still dominated by the great works of the past. We don’t want to stop their playing the great works of the past; all we want to do is get in on it. You know as well as I know that you don’t create a great musical culture in a country simply by repeating great works from other countries. We don’t want to deny them performance, of course, that would be idiotic. But it has been slow progress. Our concert programs still ignore – to an unfair extent – the amount of American musical material which is available for performance and which need not take second place to the new music of any other country’s music. I might not have been able to say that 40 years ago, but I say it with considerable confidence tonight. Anything you can do to help the cause of the American composer will have the gratitude of all of us.”

When the great Copland uttered these words, the landscape was quite different. It is wonderful and cause for joy that now, many of our flagship orchestras are programming more and more music by American composers: places like the Albany Symphony, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Nashville Symphony, the Louisville Orchestra, the St. Louis Symphony, our own city’s New York Philharmonic and many others are playing the great works of John Adams, Joan Tower, Jennifer Higdon and Gabriela Lena Frank. But there are voices still to be discovered and nurtured. There are works that still need to be heard.

We believe that ACO’s mission and purpose is to uncover and discover, to explore and celebrate lesser known works by well-known American composers as well as works by the emerging voices of today, including composers who happen to be women, gender marginalized and/or of color. These goals are what make ACO’s work “essential.”

Perhaps someday, our orchestras’ programming will be overwhelmingly of today and from a dazzlingly diverse group of creative artists. Until then, we are grateful to the musicians, board, staff, and supporters of ACO for enabling the exciting and gratifying work still to come.

With warmest wishes,

Derek Bermel
Artistic Director

Edward Yim
President
inti figgis-vizueta (she/they) used non-traditional notation for their work *Symphony for the Body*, which was selected for the Underwood Readings in May. Thanks to work by ACO’s Emerging Composers and Diversity Director, our mentorship opportunities are increasingly more accessible to individuals with non-traditional practices and backgrounds.

“The rich and enthusiastic engagement from the mentor composers was my highlight of the 2019 Underwood Readings. Combined with in-depth professional development workshops and abundant orchestral feedback, this was an incredible learning opportunity especially as a composer whose composition and artistic education has been largely separate from institutional spaces.” –inti figgis-vizueta

ACO commissioned composer and flutist Valerie Coleman (she/her) to write an original work. The result was *Phenomenal Women*, which received its world premiere with ACO in November 2018. Since then the work has been played by the Atlanta Symphony and the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, and is programmed to open Albany Symphony’s season in October 2019.

“The one thing that composers can do, which makes us a very dangerous sort, is we record the times and create new histories by basically interpreting what has happened onto music, onto the page. Creators, that’s what we do.” –Valerie Coleman
Dominican-American Emmanuel Berrido (he/him) participated in an EarShot Reading with Grand Rapids Symphony in September and then traveled to New York City to observe and network at our annual Underwood Readings. “ACO saw the work for what it was and believed in it, and in me. Many composers speak at length about the long-term benefits that participating in an ACO event has for their careers. Work with ACO solidified my belief in myself and fueled the creation of a number of other pieces, making 2018-19 one of my most productive years to date.” –Emmanuel Berrido

Composer Saad Haddad (he/him) participated in the Underwood Readings in 2013. After discovering his music in ACO’s EarShot Archive online, the Chicago Composers Orchestra performed his work titled Hawa on June 8, 2019 at Ganz Hall in Roosevelt University. “It’s very cool to know that the archive led to this performance, and hoping that it has done so for many others!” –Saad Haddad
Che Buford (he/him), a rising sophomore at Boston Conservatory studying composition and violin, shared his chamber piece *We Lived Happily During The War* at our Gala in March 2019. The work was one he first wrote as a student with ACO’s Compose Yourself program for high school composers.

“The Compose Yourself program opened my mind to new ways to interpret and listen to music.” —Che Buford

ACO performed the New York City premiere of a new multimedia work by Pulitzer Prize Winner Du Yun (she/her) and Palestinian visual artist Khaled Jarrar (he/him) at Carnegie Hall in April 2019.

“It is a rare luxury to not only receive a commission but to also have four performances built into the commission structure. I wanted to create something with Khaled that would be a shared experience through live performance. We sought to convey the human resilience of these refugees. American Composers Orchestra believed in my vision and paved the way both for the piece and for a conversation around and about its ideas, at a time when it’s crucial to make work about what’s happening in the world.” —Du Yun
In early 2017, under the direction of President and CEO Edward Yim, ACO initiated a strategic planning process with the full backing of the board of directors, and with consultants from Dunch Arts. The three-year plan (FY19-FY21) springs from this newly articulated vision:

ACO will be a global leader in orchestral music, including operas that require large instrumental forces. With commitment to diversity, disruption and discovery, ACO will create unmissable concert events and impactful education and emerging composer programs to foster a community of creators, audience, performers, collaborators, and funders.

Through the planning process, ACO applied this vision through four key focus areas in the coming period: Concerts, Emerging Composers, Education, and Diversity. Taken together—rather than separately or prioritized—these focus areas are ACO’s blueprint for making a meaningful contribution to the music field.

Photo credits: Jennifer Taylor, Ed Yim, Pete Checchia, Aiden Feltkamp
ACO’s 2018-19 concerts, led by Music Director George Manahan, featured New York, U.S., and world premieres, and embraced eclectic instruments, diverse influences, multimedia and interdisciplinary collaborations, with an emphasis on emerging to mid-career composers.

**November 2, 2018**  
*Zankel Hall in Carnegie Hall*  
Attendance: 540

ACO’s season opened with two world premieres of ACO commissions: Valerie Coleman’s concerto *Phenomenal Women* with Imani Winds, and Alex Temple’s sci-fi opera *Three Principles of Noir* featuring singer Meaghan Burke, with direction by Amber Treadway, and costumes by Storm Garner. The performance also included a celebration of Joan Tower’s 80th Birthday with her 2006 work *Chamber Dance*.

**April 11, 2019**  
*Zankel Hall in Carnegie Hall*  
Attendance: 442

The Spring concert centered on the NYC premiere of the multidisciplinary work *Where We Lost Our Shadows* (co-commissioned by ACO, Carnegie Hall, The Kennedy Center, Southbank Centre, and Cal Performances), co-created by composer Du Yun and visual artist Khaled Jarrar, and featuring singer Helga Davis, Pakistani Qawwali singer Ali Sethi, and percussionist Shayna Dunkelman. The evening also included Gloria Coates’ Symphony No. 1, “Music on Open Strings,” from 1973, and Morton Feldman’s 1980 work *Turfan Fragments*.

*Photo credits: Pete Checchia and Jennifer Taylor*
Initiatives led by new Emerging Composers & Diversity Director Aiden Kim Feltkamp. He has worked to remove barriers to entry, improve inclusive language and demographics questions on our applications, and proactively recruit composers from underrepresented backgrounds.

Removing Barriers
ACO has eliminated the following stipulations for scores being submitted:
• must be written within the last three years;
• must use standard Western notation;
• cannot resubmit a piece

Inclusive Language and Application
Added more options for self-identification on the submission application including
• Gender identity
• Gender pronouns
• Race/ethnicity
• Chronic illness
• Physical disabilities
• Multi-lingual

New Recruitment Strategy
Focuses on finding diverse composers where they congregate rather than expecting them to find ACO. Feltkamp sent personal email invitations to many composers, and built partnerships with and recruited alumni from the following groups:
• Institute for Composer Diversity
• Sphinx’s Living Black Composers Directory
• Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music
• Fresh Ink
• JFund
• Hildegard Competition
• Music programs at community, state, and historically black colleges and universities

Composer Applicants By the Numbers

- from 3% to 12.66% black American (up 9.66%)*
- from 6% to 10.24% Hispanic and Latinx (up 4.24%)
- from 21% to 24% (up 3%) women and nonbinary
May 23-24, 2019
Frederick Loewe Theater
at New York University

Underwood Readings bring together composers in the early stages of their professional careers to meet with ACO artistic staff, orchestra members, music director, and mentor composers.

Selected from 200+ submissions, composers represented a broad spectrum of musical backgrounds and sound worlds. During the Readings, they worked with guest conductor Ludovic Morlot and mentor composers Tania León, Anthony Cheung, and ACO Artistic Director, Derek Bermel.

Participants:

Rodrigo Castro  
Chen Yihan  
inti figgis-vizueta  
Jack Hughes  
Jihyun Kim  
Aaron Israel Levin
In FY19, ACO launched a multi-year Emerging Composers Commission Consortium to enhance support for promising young composers beyond their engagement with EarShot or Underwood. This new model provides training through a reading, commissions the composer to write a new work, and premieres the work three times for different audiences across the country, with time for revision between performances.

This year, ACO completed our annual Underwood New Music Readings in NYC, after which composer Jihyun Kim was selected for a commission by ACO President Ed Yim, ACO Artistic Director Derek Bermel, and Carlos Izcaray, the Music Director of the Alabama Symphony Orchestra and the American Youth Symphony.

Kim’s work receives its world premiere with the American Youth Symphony in Los Angeles on May 3, 2020, followed by an East coast premiere with Alabama Symphony Orchestra in Birmingham, and a New York premiere with ACO, both in the 2020-2021 season.

Photo credit: Jiayi Liang
**EarShot Readings** bring the model of Underwood to a national network of host orchestras, for whom ACO provides overall planning, coordination, production, financial resources, mentor composers, marketing and administrative support and program design. First launched in 2008, the program has served 87 composers to date.

**Partners in the 2018-19 Season**
Grand Rapids Symphony – September 28-29, 2018  
Detroit Symphony Orchestra – March 2-9, 2019  
Sarasota Orchestra – March 12-16, 2019

12 composer participants  
9 mentor composers

Readings identify emerging talent and provide emerging composers with the tools and experiences to excel in writing music for orchestra. A digital recording of each composer’s work is presented to the composer, an invaluable tool for individual growth.

*Photo credits: Jiayi Liang and Aiden Feltkamp*
Grand Rapids Symphony:
- Emmanuel Berrido
- Tyler Eschendal
- Jiyoung Ko
- Daniel Leo

Detroit Symphony Orchestra:
- Brian Raphael Nabors
- Marian L. Harrison Stephens
- Anthony Tidd
- Kerwin Young

Sarasota Orchestra:
- Kristis Auznieks
- Nicky Sohn
- Sam Wu
- Kitty Xiao
September 6, 2018 (Philadelphia, PA)

Presented by The Philadelphia Orchestra and American Composers Orchestra

Six women composers – Melody Eötvös, Robin Holcomb, Chen-Hui Jen, Hilary Purrington, Xi Wang, and Nina C. Young – all of whom have previously participated in ACO’s programs, had their works read and recorded by The Philadelphia Orchestra in a rehearsal led by Assistant Conductor Kensho Watanabe at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts. Composers engaged with the Orchestra’s leadership and Artistic Committee, and received feedback from the co-facilitators, ACO Artistic Director Derek Bermel and Pulitzer Prize-winning composer and native Philadelphian Melinda Wagner.

The Philadelphia Orchestra is commissioning all six composers for performance in future seasons.

Photo credit: Jessica Griffin
Now in its fifth year, the Women Composers Commissions program – an initiative of the League of American Orchestras, in partnership with American Composers Orchestra and supported by the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation – awarded three $15,000 commissions.

Courtney Bryan’s work will be premiered by the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra and music director Carlos Miguel Prieto in the 2019-20 season. Cindy Cox’s work will be premiered by the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra and Fang Man’s work by the San Francisco Symphony (performance details for both to be announced).
ACO’s education programs address the lack of progressive, sequential, skills-based music education in New York City and around the country.

By the Numbers
- 8 schools in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens and Manhattan
- 3 schools in which ACO serves special needs students
- 16 teaching artists
- 25 guest performers
- 684 students received direct instruction
- 3,171 students, teachers, parents and other family attended our events
- 19,555 student contacts

Music Factory places composers and musicians in classrooms. Students develop their creativity and make connections between the arts and life-long learning.
- IS 229 - Roland Patterson Middle School, Bronx
- Achievement First Bushwick Middle School, Brooklyn
- Fort Hamilton High School, Brooklyn
- MS 245 - The Computer School (Middle School), Manhattan
- William Cullen Bryant High School, Queens

Compose Yourself consists of small groups of students, in-school and out-of-school, who work on writing an original composition to be performed in a workshop setting.
- Frank Sinatra School of the Arts (High School), Queens
- Talent Unlimited High School, Manhattan
- Brooklyn High School of the Arts, Brooklyn
- Fall, Spring and Summer Private Group Classes, Manhattan
In March 2019, four EarShot Participant Composers and four Student Composer Assistants learned how to present composition basics to K-12 public school students. Instructors and collaborators for the workshop included Detroit Symphony Orchestra’s Teaching Artists, workshop leader Jessie Montgomery, and ACO staff.

After two days of training, four teams (comprised of Participant Composers, Student Composer Assistants and DSO Teaching Artists) presented chamber adaptations of orchestral works to the following schools:

- Munger Middle School 5525 Martin Detroit, MI 48210
- FLICS Elementary School 6501 Outer Dr W Detroit, MI 48235
- Charles L. Spain Middle School 3700 Beaubien St Detroit, MI 48201
- Detroit School of Arts 123 Selden St Detroit, MI 48201

EarShot Participant Composers spoke about their inspiration for the pieces, their work as composers and played interactive games with the students. Each school averaged 30 students per session with a total of 210 students served by the program. Teachers, students, and their families were invited to attend the reading session of the composers’ full orchestra works with the DSO on March 9, 2019.
Violin
Eva Gruesser
   The Rogers Sessions Chair
Robert Chausow
Michael Roth
Deborah Wong
Sander Strenger
Martin Agee
Mitsuru Tsubota
Diane Bruce
Elizabeth Kleinman
Laura Oatts
Carlos Villa
Dorothy Strahl
Carolyn Wenk-Goodman
Ming Yeh
D. Paul Woodiel
Robin Bushman
Katherine Hannauer

Viola
Veronica Salas
Sandra Robbins
Liuh-wen Ting
Juliet Haffner

Cello
Eugene Moye
   The Virgil Thomson Chair
Jeanne Leblanc
Lanny Paykin
Maxine Neuman
Roberta Cooper
Sarah Carter
Eliana Mendoza
Marueen Hynes

Bass
Gail Kruvand
Jordan Frazier
Jacqui Danilow
Richard Sosinsky

Flute
Susan Palma Nidel
   The Otto Luening Chair
Laura Conwesser
Diva Goodfriend Koven

Oboe
Stephen Taylor
   The Pinkerton Chair
Melanie Feld

Clarinet
Liam Burke
   The Louise and Charles Underwood Chair
Sarah Carter
Stuart Selden

Bassoon
Frank Morelli
Harry Searing

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Stewart Rose
   The William Schuman Chair

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   The John Swallow Chair
Mike Seltzer
   The John Swallow Chair

Tuba
Raymond Stewart

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Benjamin Herman
James Saporito
Jonathan Haas

Keyboard
Christopher Oldfather
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Photo credit: Noah Stern Weber
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