

Melinda O'Neal

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Conductor Melinda O'Neal is artistic director & conductor of the Handel Choir of Baltimore (MD) and professor of music at Dartmouth College (Hanover, NH). From 1979-2004 she was music director and conductor of the Handel Society of Dartmouth College, a student-community oratorio society performing choral and choral-orchestral works with guest vocal artists and the Hanover Chamber Orchestra.

The Handel Society of Dartmouth College under O'Neal's direction performed works including Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* (complete), Vaughan Williams' *Dona Nobis Pacem* and Schubert's Mass in Eb Major, Haydn's *Harmoniemesse*, Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, to name a few. The ensemble performed in Austria and Germany, performed an excerpt from Berlioz's *L'enfance du Christ* in Carnegie Hall and toured to Toronto, Canada. Projects of special and recent interest include presentation of Berlioz's rarely heard individual songs and choruses such as *Vox Populi* in 2003, and in partnership with the Dartmouth Medical School, commission and première of *The Staff of Aesculapius* by Charles Dodge in 2001.

With the Handel Society, O'Neal prepared Mahler's Symphony No. 2, and conducted Poulenc's *Gloria* and Brahms' *Schicksalslied* in collaboration with the New Hampshire Symphony Orchestra in Manchester, NH. As chorus master of the New Hampshire Symphony Chorus' performance of Verdi's Requiem, Richard Dyer of the Boston Globe wrote, "The chorus master Melinda O'Neal had trained them to sing everything musically -- there was none of the fancy murmuring and false theatrics that disfigure so many performances of this genuinely dramatic music. Everything they did was clean and honest." Of Monadnock Music's performance of Gluck's *Orphée et Eurydice*, Richard Binder wrote, "The 12-member chorus, prepared by Melinda O'Neal, was divine.

Singing stylishly and with a superb balance both internally and in relation to the [solo] singers, they were one of the evening's highlights." As guest conductor in residence for the Seattle Symphony Orchestra Chorale in 1995, O'Neal prepared Berlioz's *La damnation de Faust* for Gerard Schwarz.

O'Neal founded two professional chamber ensembles: Boston Vocal Artists' Sonique (MA) and Group Vocale de St. Denis (Hanover, NH). Sonique's concerts included "Bon Anniversaire, Berlioz!" (solo and ensemble music by Poulenc, Duparc, Milhaud, Saint-Saëns and Berlioz), American and British 20th-century solo and ensemble repertoire, and music by North American composers Christian Wolff, Ileana Perez Velasquez, Charles Dodge and John MacDonald.

For seventeen years O'Neal conducted the all-undergraduate Dartmouth College Chamber

Singers. This 32-voice ensemble presented an annual Feast of Song renaissance music-drama banquet and inaugurated a series of collaborations with the period instrument orchestra Arcadia Players (Amherst, MA), performing vocal-instrumental works by Purcell, Bach, Mozart, Haydn and Handel. Chamber Singers performed on tour in England, Spain and Germany/Austria as well as America's east coast and Midwest. Chamber Singers regularly premiered works by Dartmouth faculty and students as part of the music department's New Music Festival.

As a visiting professor in residence (1996-7), O'Neal taught conducting at the doctoral, masters and undergraduate levels at University of Georgia (Athens) where she also conducted the Concert Choir, University Chorus and Camerata. As a visiting professor and conductor at Indiana University (1999), O'Neal conducted the Contemporary Vocal Ensemble and taught and advised graduate conducting students. Dartmouth College students she has taught or advised have continued their studies at Columbia University, Indiana University, University of Illinois, Temple University, Peabody Institute, and Boston University, to name a few.

With O'Neal's appointment in 2004, Handel Choir of Baltimore became a newly reconfigured community oratorio ensemble of 45 voices, performing baroque, classical and early romantic style works with a period instrument orchestra. Collaborations have included engagements with Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Baltimore Chamber Orchestra, Pro Musica Rara, Peabody Early Music, and American Opera Theatre. Recent projects include a recording of Handel's *Alexander's Feast* with the Bach Sinfonia (Dorian label) and commissioning and première of Jonathan Leshnoff's *Requiem for the Fallen*. A review in *The Baltimore Sun* cited that "Melinda O'Neal has steadily and rapidly honed this formerly uneven ensemble into quite a potent chorus... two Bach cantatas received dynamic performances from the choristers, who were backed stylishly by a period instrument orchestra. ... It was a thoughtfully constructed, entertaining program delivered with an informed sense of historic style."

O'Neal holds masters and doctoral degrees in choral-orchestral conducting from Indiana University in Bloomington and a bachelors in music education from Florida State University in Tallahassee. She studied score preparation, choral literature and conducting with Julius Herford, Jan Harrington, Fiora Contino, Helmuth Rilling, Robert Shaw, Marcel Couraud, John Nelson, Thomas Dunn and Joseph Flummerfelt. O'Neal teaches conducting, studies in music and text, and music theory at Dartmouth College, and her continuing research and performance interests include the relationship of text and music, historical performance practices and the music of Hector Berlioz. Her articles on Mozart and Berlioz may be located in the *Choral Journal*, *Journal of the Conductors Guild*, and *Becoming the Complete Conductor* (ECS Publishing), and her performer's guide to the vocal music of Berlioz is in progress. O'Neal is a past board member of the Conductors Guild and serves on the research and publications committee of the American Choral Conductors Association.