Who We Are

Our Director, Melissa Hale, began her musical journey in grade school, where she discovered her love of music through singing and playing piano for school and church choirs. She continued her studies at University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) and Birmingham-Southern College (BSC). During her college years, she sang with the concert choir and the Village Singers ensemble, while also sharing her talents as an accompanist for soloists and choirs.

After nearly 25 years away from music, Melissa found her way back to the joy that had first inspired her when she attended The Vail Chorale's inaugural rehearsal in the fall of 2011. The founding director, Fritz Reinagel, invited her to serve as assistant director at that very first rehearsal. She served in that role for 10 years, through 2021, before stepping into the position of director with the spring 2022 concert season.

Today, Melissa leads The Vail Chorale with a deep appreciation for the power of music, the joy of singing together, and the special sense of community that grows through shared harmony.

Our Accompanist, Anka Mischel, accompanied the University of Arizona High School Outreach Choir for over 20 years. She has served as music director for Arts Express Community Theatre and currently accompanies choirs for Tucson Girls Chorus, Empire High School, and Rincon Vista Middle School. Anka is a music teacher in the Vail School District (since 2002) where she established steel drums programs, choirs, theatre, and piano programs at Mica Mountain High School. She is thrilled to play for Vail Chorale and loves the talent and sense of humor of the choir!

Our Percussionist, René Cañez, is a Tucson native. He started playing drums and percussion in fifth grade. He continued to play percussion throughout his middle school and high school years. His playing styles range from Black gospel to jazz and blues, and even punk rock! Since 2003, he has played drums for various churches, including at the Talil Air Base Gospel Chapel while deployed to Iraq with the US Air Force. He currently plays drums at University City Church, which he has attended for the past nine years. René has been playing drums and auxiliary percussion (and singing) with The Vail Chorale since 2018.

The Vail Chorale

LIVE FOR SINGING. SING FOR LIFE.

presents

Exsultate! Jubilate!

15 Years of Joyful Song



Saturday, November 14, 2026 3:00p.m.
Rancho del Lago

Sunday, November 15, 2026 3:00p.m.
Arizona Senior Academy

Melissa Hale, Director of Music

Mindi Bennett, *Guest Conductor*
Michael Melton, *Guest Conductor*
Fred Reinagel, *Guest Conductor*
Brianna P. Smith, *Guest Conductor*

Anka Mischel, *Accompanist*

René Cañez, *Percussionist*

No charge to attend

Donations gratefully accepted

Program

Stronger, from *Finding Neverland*.....Elliot Kennedy & Gary Barlow
Brianna Smith, Conductor Arr., Mark Brymer

The Book of Boba Fett, from the *Star Wars Series*..... Görransson
Tenors & Basses + Arr., Roger Emerson

Touch the Sky, from *Brave*.....Alexander L. Mandel/Mark Andrews
Katherine Machamer, Soloist Arr., Mac Huff
Rose Briones, 5-string Violin

A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square.....Maschwitz/Sherwin
Ensemble; Mindi Bennett, Conductor* Arr., Alan Billingsley

Heart, from *Damn Yankees*.....Richard Adler/Jerry Ross
(The Coach: Dale Thoreen, The Players: Mindi Bennett, Butch Bryant, Janet Canez, Julie Dawson, Holly Gonzalez, Kirsten Reed, Mary Jo Snyder)
Narration: Julie Dawson
Mike Melton, Piano

Personent Hodie from *Piae Cantiones* .....Trad. Christmas Carol
Arr., Philip Kern

Sabbath Prayer, from *Fiddler on the Roof*.....Harnick/Bock
Arr., John Leavitt
Nicole Herington, Butch Bryant, Soloists
Jaci Howard, Clarinet; Rose Briones, 5-string Violin

Keep Your Lamps.....Traditional Spiritual
Mike Melton, Director Arr., Victor C. Johnson

Wade in the Water.....Traditional Spiritual
Janet Canez, Soloist; Mike Melton, Conductor Arr., Moses Hogan

O Love.....Elaine Hagenberg
Text, George Matheson
Rose Briones, 5-string Violin

Lacrimosa from *Requiem*.....Wolfgang A. Mozart
Fritz Reinagel, Conductor

Exsultate! Jubilate!.....Kyle Pederson
Traditional Latin

The Vail Chorale Singers

Sopranos
Linda Buus
Janet Canez
Sara Cothern
Julie Dawson
Chelsea Grote
Jennifer Hook
Melissa Larsen
Katherine Machamer
Jessica Mannella
Leslie Nitzberg
Ashley Payne*
Kristen Reed*
Lindsey Shaw
Michele Smelker

Tenors
Lee Cuevas
Zach Hammond*
Joey Mantua
Dale Thoreen*
Adriana Walker

Basses
Butch Bryant
René Cañez*
Mike DePaso*
Ronald Klaiss*
Jinyi Liu
Miles Orchinik

Altos
Nancy Babson Gulotta
Mindi Bennett+
Julie Flint
Laura Gehrig*
Holly Gonzalez
Nicole Herington*+
Melody Loya
Kimberly McCarthy
Heather Redmon+
Mary Jo Snyder
Tamsin Whitesell
Jane Williamson-Davenport
Susan Zamora

**Ensemble*
+Boba Fett addtl. singers

A very special thank you to Erika Brand for serving as our choir librarian for many years.



Sound Assist
Juan Gonzalez

Videography
Scott Rigg

Special Guests

Our Guest Conductor, Mindi Bennett, has a life immersed in music. She began singing in church choirs at age 5, studied harp for a decade, and performed with high school and college orchestras and choirs. After living in Italy for 15 years and directing a church choir in California, she joined the Vail Chorale in 2012 and has since led part rehearsals and directed ensemble works.

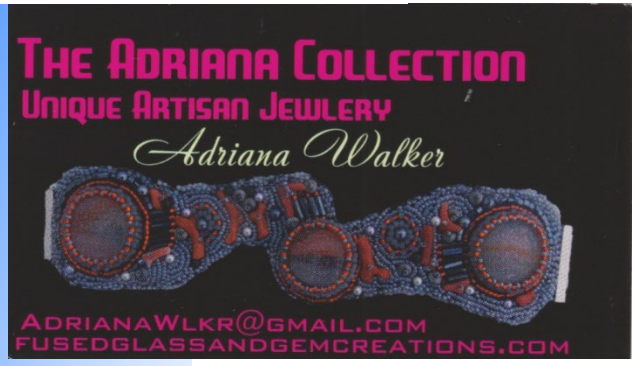
Our Guest Conductor, Michael Melton, has been active throughout his career as conductor, singer, pianist, coach, and teacher. He is recently retired from Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago where he served as Director of Choral Activities and Opera Conductor, and taught voice, conducting, diction, and secondary methods. He continues his summer work in Chicago as score reader for video productions of Chicago Symphony Orchestra concerts at the Ravinia Festival. He is the author of *Inspiring Harmony: A Memoir about Leading with Grace.*

Our Guest Conductor, Fred Reinagel, moved to Tucson in February 2007, and since, has sung with the *Arizona Repertory Singers, Musica Sonora*, the *Tucson Symphony Orchestra Chorus*, and the *U of A Collegium Musicum*. In his former life in Western New York, he sang in numerous choral groups, as well as directing several church choirs and the *Fort Erie Community Chorus*. While living aboard his 44' yacht, Troubadour, he was a member of the Don Thompson Chorale in Jacksonville, Florida from 2000-2006. Also during this time, he sang with the *Lassus Chor München*, and served as Director's assistant for the *Munich International Choral Society* in Bavaria.

Our Guest Conductor, Brianna P. Smith, is an educator, musician, and lifelong lover of the arts. In 2021, she remarried and, in the years that followed, welcomed two children into her family. Since 2023, Brianna has taught English Language Arts at Mica Mountain High School, where she also serves as the founder and lead advisor of the school's chapter of the National English Honor Society. Through the many changes and chapters of her life, music has remained a constant passion and an important means of self-expression. She loves sharing that passion with others and values the connection that comes from creating meaningful art together.

(listed in alphabetical order)









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Many thanks to the Vail School District for providing us rehearsal space.

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The Vail Chorale Governing Board

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Martie Maierhauser
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Susan Zamora



Melissa Hale, *Director of Music*
Anka Mischel, *Accompanist*
René Cañez, *Percussionist*
Fritz Reinagel, *Founder*

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We are a 501(c)(3) organization

Many Voices. One Heart.

History of The Vail Chorale

In 2011, a vision became a reality when teacher, musician, and community leader **Fred (Fritz) Reinagel** founded The Vail Chorale as a non-auditioned, intergenerational community chorus. What began as a community outreach project of the **Arizona Senior Academy (ASA)** would grow into a beloved musical tradition in the Greater Vail community.

Fred became the Chorale's first director, with **Marilee Leishman** serving as its original accompanist. With Fred's determination and the support of the late **Calvin Baker**, Superintendent of the Vail School District, the Chorale secured rehearsal space at **Cienega High School**—a partnership that has continued for many years. The Chorale also began a tradition of performing concerts at the Arizona Senior Academy, which has supported the ensemble from its very first season.

Growing in Harmony

As the Chorale grew, so did its musical leadership. Fred recruited **Melissa Hale** as Assistant Director, giving her the opportunity to develop the skills and experience that would eventually make her the Chorale's director.

In 2017, Fred moved to North Carolina, and **Brianna Smith (Petty)** became the Chorale's second director. During her five years of leadership, Brianna brought her extensive choral experience, education, and love of musical theater to the group. **Shantell Petty-Funckes** became the Chorale's accompanist at that time.

Melissa continued as Assistant Director, providing continuity and helping the Chorale flourish.

Around 2020, The Vail Chorale joined the **Arizona Choral Arts Association (ACAA)**, gaining nonprofit support as it continued to establish its place in the Arizona choral community.

Then came COVID-19. For a choir, the inability to sing together was especially difficult. Yet music continued to provide a connection. Brianna offered a Musical Theater Workshop, giving Chorale members a much-needed creative and musical outlet during an extraordinarily challenging time.



Continued…

History of The Vail Chorale

Finding Our Voice Again

In 2022, after a decade as Assistant Director, **Melissa Hale became the Chorale's third director**, with **Michael Melton** joining as accompanist. Mike has also served as Co-Director during special seasons, including holiday performances.

Melissa helped bring the Chorale back together after the pandemic and has continued to build not only our numbers, but our musicianship, friendships, and sense of community. With Mike's support, she has encouraged our singers to keep learning, growing, and discovering the joy of making music together.

The Chorale has also embraced the opportunity to give back. Through the generosity of our patrons, we have been able to make donations to local high school choir programs—helping nurture the next generation of singers.

Becoming Our Own

In 2022, under the leadership of **Julie Dawson**, The Vail Chorale took an important step toward independence. The organization established its own 501(c)(3) nonprofit, originally known as the **Vail Performing Arts Society**, with The Vail Chorale as its flagship performing ensemble.

In 2025, the organization officially adopted the name **The Vail Chorale**, bringing our nonprofit identity and our musical identity together under the name our community has known and loved.

Fifteen Years—and Still Singing

What began with one musician's vision has become a community of many voices, generations, friendships, and musical memories.

For 15 years, The Vail Chorale has brought people together through the simple but powerful act of singing—sharing music with our audiences, supporting young musicians, learning from one another, and giving back to the community we call home.

From our first rehearsal to today, the heart of The Vail Chorale has remained the same: Many Voices. One Heart.

And the music continues.

