



SANTA MONICA-MALIBU UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

SANTA MONICA-MALIBU UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 11, 2019

70th Annual “Stairway of the Stars” Concerts Shine a Brilliant Light on the SMMUSD Music Program

For the 70th year, the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District will present Stairway of the Stars, a musical extravaganza highlighting the outstanding music education programs, and showcasing the talents of students from every school in the district. Nearly 1,000 elementary, middle, and high school students will “star” in three separate concerts at Santa Monica High School's historic Barnum Hall.

Choir Concert – Monday, March 18, 2019
Orchestra Concert – Friday, March 22, 2019
Band Concert – Wednesday, March 27, 2019

All three concerts will begin at 7 p.m.

Each of the three Stairway concerts will have a prestigious guest conductor:

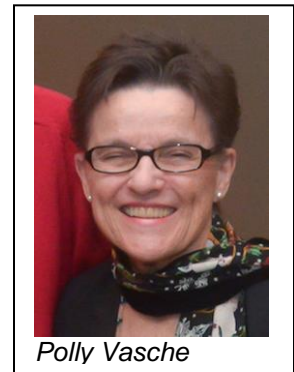
Choir Concert Guest Conductor – Polly Vasche taught high school choral music from 1975 to 2004. She has served on the Western Division Board of the American Choral Directors Association, which honored her in 2018. She studied choral conducting with Joseph Flummerfelt at Westminster Choir College and with Paul Salamunovich, music director of the Los Angeles Master Chorale, at Loyal Marymount University.

Orchestra Concert Guest Conductor -- Born in Monterrey, Mexico, pianist, composer, orchestrator, and conductor **Arturo Rodriguez** is becoming one of the most sought after musicians of his generation. He has been commissioned to write music for orchestras around the world, as well as orchestrating and conducting for film, TV, and multi-media projects.

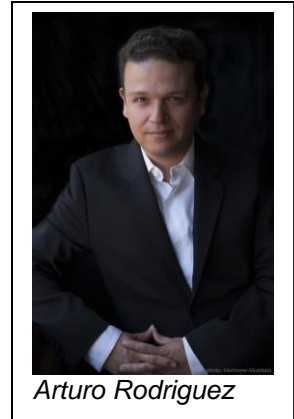
Band Concert Guest Conductor -- Dr. John Burdett is the Director of Winds and Percussion and Director of Music Education at Azusa Pacific University. In addition to earning his doctorate at the University of Illinois, he has also studied conducting with Dr. Abel Ramirez and with Michael Tilson Thomas, music director the San Francisco Symphony.

The **2019 Stairway Honor Award** will be presented to Class of '94 Samohi graduate **Ben Wendel**. A world renowned jazz artist and a graduate of the

-more-



Polly Vasche



Arturo Rodriguez



Dr. John Burdett

Eastman School of Music, Ben has enjoyed a career as a performer, composer, and producer. He has toured with Cuban drumming legend Ignacio Berroa, Tigran Hamasyan, Antonio Sanchez, Gerald Clayton, Eric Harland, Taylor Eigsti, Snoop Dogg, and the artist formerly known as Prince. He is a member of the Grammy nominated group Kneebody. Ben received an ASCAP Jazz Composer Award, the 2008 and 2011 Chamber Music America “New Works Grant,” and a 2013 award presented by the Canada Council for the Arts. Beginning in 2008, he also produced *Under the Radar*, a multi-genre performance series at The Broad Stage in Santa Monica.



Tickets are on sale to the community and available online until **noon** on the day of each concert at www.StairwayoftheStars.org -- All seats are reserved. Any remaining tickets for each concert will be on sale at the Barnum Hall box office from 6 to 7 p.m. Parking will be available in the Civic Center parking structure on 4th Street at Civic Center Drive.

Proceeds from the ticket sales go right back into the district’s award-winning music programs.

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