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## The Oberlin Conservatory of Music Awarded 2009 National Medal of Arts

Honor Conferred by President Barack Obama in White House Ceremony on February 25

*Editors Please Note: Effective April 22, 2010, the Litoff Building was renamed.*

*Oberlin's new home for jazz studies, music history, and music theory is now the Bertram and Judith Kohl Building.*



Photo: Richard Frasier

Dean of the Conservatory David H. Stull and President Barack Obama

OBERLIN, OHIO (February 25, 2010)—The Oberlin Conservatory of Music is a recipient of the 2009 National Medal of Arts, the highest award given by the United States government to artists and arts patrons in recognition of the wealth and depth of their creative expressions. President Barack Obama presented the award to Dean of the Conservatory David H. Stull at a White House ceremony held today in the East Room. In attendance were Oberlin College President Marvin Krislov, Robert Lemle, chair of Oberlin College's Board of Trustees, and trustee Stewart Kohl. A gala dinner celebrating the honorees took place at the National Museum of American History yesterday evening, sponsored by the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.

The Oberlin Conservatory of Music is the only professional music school to be so honored by

President Obama. The other honorees for 2009 are: singer and songwriter Bob Dylan; director and actor Clint Eastwood; graphic designer Milton Glaser; architect and sculptor Maya Lin; singer, dancer, and actress Rita Moreno; soprano Jessye Norman; arts patron and design advocate Joseph P. Riley Jr.; painter and sculptor Frank Stella; conductor Michael Tilson Thomas; composer and conductor John Williams; and the School of American Ballet.

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) administers the National Medal of Arts.

"These individuals and organizations show us how many ways art works every day. They represent the breadth and depth of American architecture, design, film, music, performance, theatre, and visual art," says NEA Chairman Rocco Landesman. "This lifetime honor recognizes their exceptional contributions, and I join the President and the country in saluting them."

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Oberlin College President Marvin Krislov, who was appointed by President Obama to the National Council on the Humanities in 2009, says: "Being awarded the National Medal of Arts is a tremendous honor for the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. It is a great tribute to the conservatory's faculty, staff, and students, past and present, whose relentless dedication to achieving excellence is the hallmark of music at Oberlin."

Renowned internationally as a professional music school of the highest caliber, the Oberlin Conservatory of Music has been called a "national treasure" by the *Washington Post*. Established in 1865 as one of the two divisions of Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio, the conservatory is America's oldest continuously operating conservatory of music and is the only major music school in the U.S. devoted primarily to the education of undergraduate musicians.

"This is an extraordinary moment in the history of the Oberlin Conservatory of Music," says Dean Stull. "It is directly attributable to the brilliant work undertaken by generations of faculty, students, and alumni since our founding more than 140 years ago. We should all take great pride in receiving the highest honor in the land for artistic excellence and achievement. I offer my deepest gratitude to President Obama for his recognition of Oberlin, and for including us in his first group of honorees to receive the National Medal of Arts."

The conservatory's mission is to prepare artistically talented and intellectually gifted students for professional careers in music and a lifetime of effective advocacy for the arts. The degree programs of the conservatory are designed to develop understanding and insight into the arts, as well as the knowledge, skills, and technical competence essential to professional musicians. The members of the conservatory's internationally distinguished faculty are dedicated to both teaching and professional performance. Central to its mission are the more than 500 performances and events Oberlin produces each year by ensembles, students, and faculty of the conservatory and by guest artists, including residencies by Distinguished Professor of Voice Marilyn Horne, Professor of Conducting Robert Spano, and guest conductor Sir Simon Rattle.

The effectiveness of an Oberlin Conservatory education can be measured in the success of its students and graduates. Among recent awards won by conservatory students and recent graduates are the Metropolitan Opera National Council Audition Grand Prize (2008, 2007, 2003, 2002); Fischoff National Chamber Music Competition Grand Prize (2007, 1996); Fulbright Scholarships (nine in the last five years); and Javits Fellowships (three in the last four years). In 2008, eighth blackbird, a contemporary music ensemble fully formed at Oberlin, won the Grammy Award for Best Chamber Music Performance.

Oberlin has performed at Carnegie Hall to rave reviews (Oberlin's performance of the Bartók *Concerto for Orchestra* was described as "stellar" by the *New York Times*); launched a national record label (Oberlin Music) distributed on iTunes and other digital media channels; performs annually at the Kennedy Center as part of the Conservatory Project Series; and undertook a nine-day tour of China with its 66-member student orchestra, performing to critical acclaim and capacity audiences in five cities, including Beijing and Shanghai. The conservatory supports innovative student-developed performance projects and arts initiatives through the Creativity & Leadership project, Oberlin's new entrepreneurship program, funded by a \$1.1 million grant from the Ewing Marion Kauffman and Burton D. Morgan Foundations.

A leader in music education, Oberlin offered the country's first four-year degree program in public school music (1921); introduced the Suzuki method of string pedagogy to the U.S. (1958); was the first U.S. undergraduate institution to establish a program in electronic music (1969); and is building the world's first gold-level LEED-certified (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) music teaching facility, the Phyllis Litoff Building. Oberlin was the first professional music school to admit African Americans, including Pulitzer Prize winning alumnus George Walker. An Oberlin graduate founded the Cleveland Orchestra, and its extraordinary concert facility—Severance Hall—carries his family name.

Conservatory alumni and faculty have won countless Grammy Awards and international competitions, gained national and international stature as performers, conductors, composers, scholars, educators, and arts administrators. Graduates hold leadership positions and perform with all major orchestras including Boston, Cleveland, Philadelphia, the National Symphony, and the New York Philharmonic, and with distinguished opera companies such as Lyric Opera Chicago, the Metropolitan, and San Francisco. Other alumni have pursued successful careers in jazz, chamber music, or the film industry. Many others teach in schools, colleges, universities, and conservatories around the country, and Oberlin leads all undergraduate institutions in the number of graduates who go on to earn doctorates in music.

#### **ABOUT THE NATIONAL MEDAL OF ARTS**

The National Medal of Arts is designed to honor exemplary individuals and organizations that have encouraged the arts in America and offered inspiration to others through their distinguished achievement, support, or patronage. Unlike other awards, it is not limited to a single field or area of artistic endeavor. Congress established the award in 1984 to honor "individuals or groups who, in the President's judgment, are deserving of special recognition by reason of their outstanding contributions to the excellence, growth, support, and availability of the arts in the United States." The National Council on the Arts is responsible for making recommendations to the President of worthy individuals and organizations to receive the medal, which was designed by internationally renowned sculptor Robert Graham (1938-2008), who created the Olympic Gateway for the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. The Robert Graham Studio, located in Venice, California, produces the medals.

Past recipients of the National Medal of Arts include actors, architects, artists, art historians, arts patrons, choreographers and dancers, composers, musicians, poets and writers, ensembles, arts organizations, and schools. The pantheon of individuals and groups honored with the award include, among others, the actors Jessica Tandy, Julie Harris, and James Earl Jones; artists Georgia O'Keefe, Romare Bearden, and Willem de Kooning; composers Elliott Carter Jr. and Aaron Copland; composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim; dancers and choreographers Martha Graham, Jerome Robbins, and Merce Cunningham; musicians Dave Brubeck, Dizzy Gillespie, Wynton Marsalis, Rudolf Serkin, and Isaac Stern; singers Ella Fitzgerald, Marilyn Horne (Distinguished Visiting Professor of Voice at Oberlin), and Barbra Streisand; writers Saul Bellow, Eudora Welty, and John Updike; National Public Radio, and, this year, the Oberlin Conservatory of Music.

#### **ABOUT OBERLIN COLLEGE AND THE OBERLIN CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC**

Ranked consistently among the nation's top liberal arts schools, Oberlin College is committed to rigorous academics, artistic and musical excellence, and social justice. Founded in 1833, Oberlin was the first institution of higher education in America to adopt a policy to admit students of color (1835) and the first college to award bachelor's degrees to women (1841) in a coeducational program. Oberlin's distinct history of challenging intellectual and social conventions shapes the student experience today, which fosters strong bonds among a diverse community of bright and talented students from around the world. Oberlin's combination of a leading liberal arts college and a world-class music conservatory creates an unparalleled learning environment.

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