

Epic Award
Fontana Chamber Arts



Fontana Chamber Arts was formed in 2000 by merging the Chamber Music Society of Kalamazoo (CMS) and the Fontana Concert Society (FCS). Founded in 1955, CMS provided world class traditional chamber music to Kalamazoo audiences, bringing in the best of the world's touring ensembles each year for a series of four or five winter season concerts. FCS, formed in 1980, provided much more varied programming during its summer and winter seasons, featuring traditional chamber music, jazz and world music. Fontana has carried forward the best traditions of its predecessors each year, bringing in the very best of the world's touring chamber music and jazz ensembles, with an occasional foray into "world music".

The musical fabric of Kalamazoo is created by many organizations .. the Symphony .. the Gilmore .. Bachfest ... Early Music ... Sacred Music ... WMU Jazz and Classical studies .. Crescendo Academy ... Fontana and others, with each organization contributing in its own way to the overall cultural richness. Uniquely among these many organizations, Fontana, brings in the very best touring ensembles from the world of classical chamber music, jazz and world music.

According to board chair Chris Shook, "David Baldwin's impeccable credentials and track record are second to none when it comes to programming the best of the best". Just looking ahead to next season, we see, on the jazz scene, that Branford Marsalis, Cyrus Chestnut and Jazz at Lincoln Center will grace Fontana's stage while, on the classical side, we will be blessed with artists from the Curtis Institute of Music, the Netherland's Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Julliard String Quartet and the New York Philharmonic String Quartet. In recent years, Fontana has brought in banjo master Bela Fleck, the Shanghai Quartet, Chris Thile (master of the mandolin and now radio host of Live from Here), the Vienna Boys Choir and leading jazz vocalist Cecile McLorin Salvant with piano great Aaron Diehl.

Fontana has twice earned national recognition with Chamber Music America's ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming and has been designated as an Anchor Organization by the Michigan Council for Cultural Affairs, a highly competitive program that supports organizations widely recognized in their region as hubs of significant arts and cultural activity.

In addition to providing a consistent, exceptionally-high level of varied musical experience each year to our community, Fontana contributes to the community through education and outreach. Fontana provides master classes at WMU; elementary school field trips; visits to the Juvenile Home, Friendship Village, Amber Way, and Boys & Girls Club; sponsoring - with other organizations - the annual Bravo! Competition (designed to give local high school students an opportunity to perform), and collaborates with The Arts Council of Greater Kalamazoo to stage their Thursdays in the Park series. This community outreach is possible because the artists are asked to participate in these varied programs, in addition to their main-stage performances. Audiences are identified to match the area of expertise of the artists.

Fontana encourages families and young listeners to explore music through its Crybaby Concert series, where infants and toddlers can listen to music in a setting where crying and the occasional tantrum are completely understood by fellow concertgoers. The concerts last just under an hour and are held throughout the Greater Kalamazoo region with specific focus on neighborhoods that are underserved. Additionally, Fontana offers reduced price tickets to students and those 25 and under.