



Honoring soul food's place in the culinary world

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Voices unified through love of music



"We're open to everyone who loves to sing the music we choose," says Cynthia Powell, Stonewall Chorale's artistic director. Photo by Rachel Michelle Jones

When Cynthia Powell assumed the role of Stonewall Chorale's artistic director in 2002, the choir had just 35 singers, most from the LGBTQ community. Membership has grown to 85 performers, ranging in age from the mid-20s to mid-70s, some professional singers, some avocational, but all united by their love of classical choral music.

"Most of them have some choral music in their background in high school or college," Powell says. "The love to sing, first and foremost. They happen to be gay. We don't discriminate on the basis of people's sexual orientation. We're open to everyone who loves to sing the music we choose."

Performances are typically held at Holy Apostles in New York City, which seats about 325 people. Funding comes from tickets sales, cultural grants and membership dues. When the group is asked to sing a selection for a special event, a chamber choir, made up of 12 to 16 voices, will perform.

[The Stonewall Chorale](#) performs three main concerts a year. The next show, "[Iconic Anthems of LGBTQ Pride](#)," is at 7:30 p.m. on June 12, 2025, at Holy Apostles.

Powell's musical journey started in Middletown, New York, where she was raised in a musical family: Her dad played the piano and her mom sang and danced. Powell and her brother studied piano under a graduate of The Juilliard School, a music school in New York. In her teens, Powell was introduced to the pipe organ, an instrument typically seen inside a church.

"I was drawn to that," Powell says. "I loved the power aspect of it. It was pretty loud. I also loved the fact that you could get a lot of total colors (different sounds). You get a lot of different choices: flutes, trumpets, oboes, clarinets."

After graduating with a degree in music from Westminster Choir College in Princeton, New Jersey, Powell has since served as minister of music or director of music at multiple churches (and one synagogue) in New Jersey and New York. She continues to freelance.

In her position with Stonewall Chorale, Powell chooses the music with the help of a repertoire committee and conducts the chorus; someone else plays the accompaniment. "It's gratifying when you lift your arms and take a breath and everyone sings," she says. "There's nothing like that."

The group practices once a week for 2 1/2 hours in a small church in Manhattan's West Village - Powell travels there from her home in Englewood, New Jersey. Some singers have been members since the early 1990s, many have forged lifelong friendships and others have met their lifetime partners.

"I like the idea of people coming together and uniting in a joint effort to create something of beauty," she says. "I like giving people the platform, the opportunity to meet others and form friendships."

Stonewall Chorale's performances serve another purpose: to break down barriers in communities unfamiliar with the LGBTQ community. Powell remembers a woman at a New Jersey synagogue, where they were performing, leaning over and thanking her for bringing the performers.

"For the greater community, it's important to see gay people, men and women, together, cooperating and doing something that is of cultural value and significance," Powell explains. "For people who wouldn't ordinarily be exposed to gay folks, it was good for them to experience this group - that we weren't scary. There's a real image that people get in their mind. Choral singers can bust that up pretty quick."

Laureate crafts stories of joy and reflection

Steven Petrow, author of “The Joy You Make,” draws upon his own life, weaving together personal observations and stories with reported events to write books in the literary-nonfiction genre. The book reflects his journey through a five-year period of darkness.

“This book is about how can we find the joy that lives within us during challenging or dark times,” Petrow says. “It’s my road map to finding bits and pieces of joy along the way.”

In June 2024, Petrow, a resident of Hillsborough, North Carolina, and author of seven books, was named the North Carolina Piedmont Laureate in creative nonfiction, the first queer-identified person to hold this position.

“My family often doesn’t agree with my recollections of events,” Petrow says. “They’ve asked, ‘Did they make up this category for you?’”

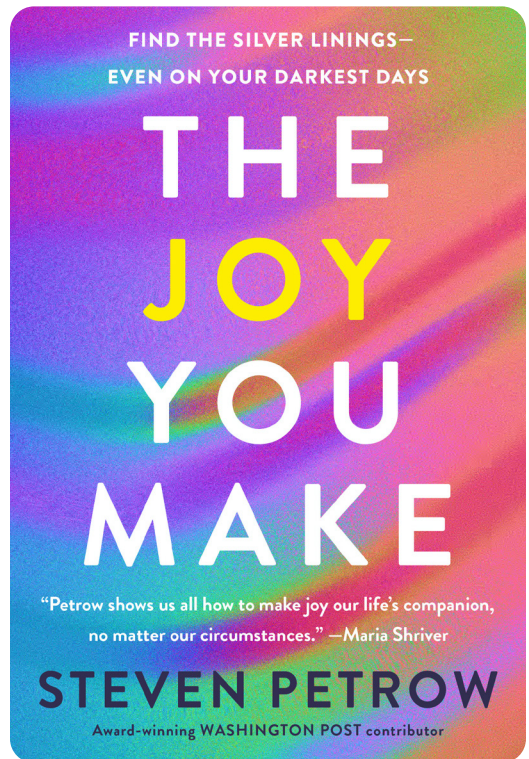
In this role, Petrow is tasked with “building a literary bridge for residents to come together and celebrate the art of writing, enriching the lives of all our citizens.” Given the freedom to choose how he wanted to address these issues, Petrow selected topics important to him.

“I did a number of panel discussions in June of 2024 about young adult queer fiction and adult issues,” Petrow explains. “I did a panel on book banning in North Carolina and nationally. I did a writing group on finding joy in difficult times. It’s been a worthwhile experience.”

Petrow grew up in New York City seeing his dad, a journalist, living an exciting life traveling, talking to people and writing about it in print, television and in books. Although Petrow said he didn’t want to be like his dad, he followed a similar career path.

“I think it’s in my blood,” Petrow says. “My brother was a magazine art director. Two of my nieces are journalists. Do you think there’s a hereditary link there?”

After graduating from Duke University in 1978 and receiving a master’s in U.S. history at the University of California, Berkeley in 1982, Petrow was the editor for the Wall Street Journal, and was a columnist for The New York Times and The Washington Post. For many years, he was a journalist by day and book author by night.



Once a journalist by day and book author by night, Steven Petrow is now a full-time writer of literary nonfiction. Credit: Red Feather West

“I finally decided to believe in myself and become a full-time writer,” Petrow says. “It’s been great to follow my passion and to find my professional voice.”

Petrow describes his writing process as visual. As he begins a new book, Petrow imagines the topic as a completed jigsaw puzzle that tells a story. He gives each blank puzzle piece definition, figuring out how they fit together in the narrative.

Petrow served as the president of the NLGJA: The Association of LGBTQ+ Journalists, in the early 2000s. The organization’s mission is “to advance fair and accurate coverage of LGBTQ+ communities and issues.” The membership base of bisexual and transgender journalists expanded under Petrow’s leadership.

Aspiring writers make writing a practice, says Petrow. Planning 30 minutes at the end or beginning of a day can be beneficial for holding writers accountable and allowing the time to think about the process. Writing may be a diary entry, working on subject matter for a book or no structure at all – it’s the act of writing that’s important.

“Publication is not the only recognition that is important to a book,” Petrow says. “Many books are not published. They serve an important purpose to the people who are writing them: the act of self-discovery.”

Profound expressions of pride

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The visual arts have long played a crucial role in the pride movement, providing a platform for self-expression, activism and community empowerment. Artists like Nathanail Evangelos Lindardis, Emmy Marshall and Naomi Christenson challenge notions of visibility while affirming the importance of representation and the spirit of pride.

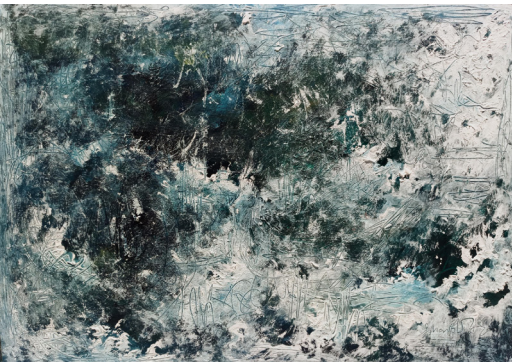


"Be Grounded" by Nathanail Evangelos Lindardis

NATHANAIL EVANGELOS LINDARDIS

Nathanail Evangelos Lindardis began painting at the age of 4. The Greek-born artist struggled to relate to the world around him and retreated into his own artistic world. "That was my way of engaging with people, expressing love and even starting new friendships," explains Lindardis. As early as kindergarten, he gravitated toward realism as a style because he had a particular interest in learning how to perfectly replicate the physical world on canvas by using different painting materials or techniques.

Lindardis studied at the Florina School of Visual and Applied Arts where he focused on abstract painting, ambient music and digital media while researching



"Frozen Waves" by Nathanail Evangelos Lindardis

neurology, trauma and cognitive psychotherapy. Today, the artist creates abstract and representational works of art. In "Be Grounded," blue, white, yellow and green swirl around the canvas with built up sections of thick paint to create texture. Similarly, "Frozen Waves" creates a cold abstract scene akin to an overhead view of a snowy forest.

Integrating into the LGBTQ+ arts landscape has proven difficult for Lindardis despite his efforts. He describes his works as "not easy to read" and tends to avoid labels



"Our Universe" by Nathanail Evangelos Lindardis

about his identity in connection with his artwork.

This seems highlighted in "Our Universe." Lindardis creates a cyclone of color, where dramatic contrast and an interplay of cool and warm colors, evokes strong emotions. The turbulence Lindardis has experienced seems reflected in "Our Universe."

NAOMI CHRISTENSON

Naomi Christenson spent her childhood enveloped in her own creativity via coloring, performing in community theater and dancing, and sewing while watching her parents run creative businesses from home. Her childhood was a vibrant mix of artistic expression, from talent competitions and school musicals to



"Cupcake" by Naomi Christenson

student art exhibitions. Christenson furthered her

training by attending the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point as an art-and-design major with a dance minor. During her matriculation, she exhibited her artwork in group exhibitions and participated in performances.

She graduated in 2006 and immediately began a career as an independent artist, supporting herself through her many talents.

Whether through illustration, design, choreography or painting, her work is defined by playfulness, rich color and intricate detail. For example, a unicorn and bright, saturated hues dominate, especially blues, pinks and greens, in "Cupcake." The use of contrasting colors creates vibrancy.

"Delphia" exalts a dark-skinned figure dressed in beautiful contrasting patterns as rainbow-hued butterflies with eyes fly around her.

"Prickly Hand Thrower" incorporates similar bright colors and visually mimics a tactile, encrusted surface with patterns resembling beadwork.

Inspired by nature's patterns, feminine energy

and a love for dramatic composition, Christenson's art invites viewers in for a closer look. She has exhibited in the Pacific Northwest and Upper Midwest, completing numerous original works and commissions.

EMMY MARSHALL

While visiting Toys "R" Us with his father at age 6, Emmy Marshall declared his intention to become an artist. His childhood self would be proud today to see how Marshall has so masterfully managed to make his dreams come true. The self-taught artist has learned through constant experimentation and abstract



"Delphia" by
Naomi Christianson



"Prickly Hand Thrower"
by Naomi Christianson

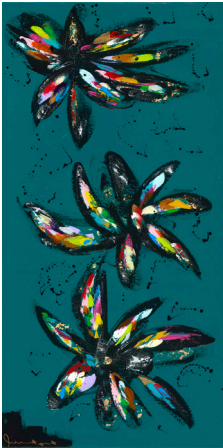
expression. He begins with "a loose idea, but the process is very intuitive – letting the paint, materials and my emotions guide the piece," according to Marshall.

His recent abstract paintings, "Eternal Moments II," "Leap of Faith" and "Radiant Joy of Being," reference flower-like ephemeral shapes. Within each form, splatches of rainbow colors outlined in thick black paint emerge before the audience. The vibrant colors and optimistic titles lend to a sense of hope and cheer.

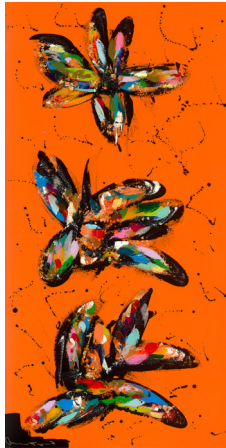


"Eternal Moments II" by Emmy Marshall

For Marshall, visibility as an LGBTQ+ artist matters deeply, especially as a frequent mentor to younger generations in his Atlanta home. His abstract artistry often does not directly reference his identity. However, he expresses wanting to be "part of a legacy that encourages authenticity, self-expression and the freedom to take up space in the art world without limitations."



"Leap of Faith"
by Emmy Marshall



"Radiant Joy of Being"
by Emmy Marshall

From dorm room cook to executive chef



"Trial and error are the best ways to learn in the kitchen," says Executive Chef Alex Pasco. Credit: The Scott Resort & Spa

Alex Pasco's first attempt at cooking was in the small kitchen in an Arizona State University residence hall. While growing up in Scottsdale, his family usually ordered takeout, but his college budget didn't allow for restaurant food.

"I started cooking through various cookbooks," says Pasco. "I'd make food for people on the same floor. I really enjoyed it. I dabbled in cooking and catering some events in college for friends."

When Pasco graduated in 2008, the job market was bleak for a government and political science major. He enrolled at the Scottsdale Culinary Institute and finished in 2010. For the next 10 years, he held chef positions in Arizona, California and Virginia. In 2020, Pasco became the executive chef at The Scott Resort & Spa, a boutique hotel featuring The Canal Club restaurant in Scottsdale.

Since 2023, Pasco has also served as the corporate chef de cuisine at Marc & Rose, a collection of resorts on the West Coast. Pasco incorporates dishes on the menu that reflect the personality of each of the eight properties in Arizona and California. He lends support where needed, writing recipes and training

teams. When Pasco writes a recipe, he considers the style of food, vision for the property and takes a deep dive into the concept. It involves a lot of eating, Pasco says.

"Once you've been exposed to that type of food, the recipes come pretty naturally," the Phoenix resident explains. "I do a massive tasting with a bunch of different options, and we'll all sit down and try everything. We see what we like the most and what we think the guests will like and we build the menus from there."

Pasco recommends people new to cooking should start by using a cookbook, one with beautiful photos. Look for recipes with simple ingredients. Two cookbook authors Pasco suggests are Alice Waters, known for her farm-to-table recipes, and Yotam Assaf Ottolenghi, for his recipes rooted in Middle Eastern and Mediterranean traditions.

"Some recipes might be challenging, but there will always be some that are more basic and simpler," Pasco says. "Mistakes will be made. Try again and again until you get it right. Trial and error are the best ways to learn in the kitchen."

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Honoring soul food's place in the culinary world

Deborah VanTrece, a James Beard Awards nominee and author of "The Twisted Soul," incorporates her culinary style, which she calls "global soul food," into her two restaurants in Atlanta, Georgia.

VanTrece honors the traditional soul foods that have nourished Black families for centuries with the appreciation and knowledge she's gained from growing up in Kansas City, Missouri, and traveling around the world as an American Airlines flight attendant.

"The exposure to the cuisine and cultures I got from flying around was immeasurable when I realized I could put all this together and come up with my own style of cooking," she says.

Twisted Soul Cookhouse & Pours features lunch and dinner menus with dishes such as country fried artichokes, shrimp encocado and smoked tandoori chicken. Oreatha's At The Point, named after VanTrece's mother, includes oxtail lasagna, Thai seasoned catfish and grits, and vegetable cauliflower curry on the menu.

"Mothers are our first chefs," VanTrece says. "The focus is on dishes moms would create all over the world and adding a Southern twist."

After earning a culinary degree with valedictorian distinction from the Art Institute in Atlanta in 1995, VanTrece continued as a flight attendant until 2016, while operating a catering business.

Her newest endeavor, "Global Soul Kitchen," a cooking show on FYI and Hulu, is produced by Free Food Studios, a Rachael Ray production company. VanTrece is known for dancing around the kitchen to rap and hip-hop while she cooks.

"I focus on educating my audience on why I do what I do, why I put things together," she explains. "There's a heavy emphasis on me combining cultures, but it comes with information on why it makes sense (to do so)."

VanTrece is active with ZAMI NOBLA (National Organization of Black Lesbians on Aging) in Atlanta,



Deborah VanTrece is the host of her own cooking show, "Global Soul Kitchen." Photo by Celeste Sloman

Balsamic Grilled Potato And Arugula Salad

6-8 servings

Ingredients

- 2 pounds small red potatoes, halved
- 2 red peppers, sliced 1/2-inch wide
- 1 red onion, sliced 1/4-inch thick
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 2 teaspoons cracked black pepper
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup arugula (packed)
- 2 teaspoons fresh garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
- 1 tablespoon herbs de Provence, a dried herb blend from the south of France
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- Black pepper to taste
- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil

Directions

Set your grill for direct cooking at 350 F.

Place potatoes in a large pot of water and bring it to a boil. Reduce heat to medium high and cook potatoes for about 10 minutes or until softened but still firm. Remove from heat and drain.

Place potatoes on a sheet pan and place in the refrigerator to cool for about 30 minutes. Remove potatoes and place in a large bowl. Add peppers and red onions to bowl. Sprinkle with salt and pepper and gently toss in olive oil.

Gently place, potatoes, peppers and onion on direct 350 F heat. Grill potatoes until browned and cooked through or about 7 minutes, turning as needed. Grill onions and peppers, until softened or about 5 minutes on each side. Remove potatoes, onions and peppers and place in a large bowl. Add arugula.

In a small bowl, combine garlic, sugar, vinegar, herbs de Provence, salt and black pepper. Slowly whisk in extra-virgin olive oil until all ingredients are blended well. Pour dressing over potato mixture, toss and serve. Can be served warm, room temperature or cold.

an organization dedicated to advocacy and building community among Black lesbians over the age of 40. VanTrece has been involved with the housing initiative.

"We have built one house, and we have another house we've been working on," she says. "I try to raise money and support in any way I can because it's one of those things that makes sense. ZAMI NOBLA is the organization dearest to my heart."

From dorm room cook to executive chef

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Pork Salsa Verde

By Chef Alex Pasco

Servings: 4 to 6

Ingredients

- 4-5 large tomatillos, peeled
- 1 jalapeno, stem removed
- 1 poblano pepper, stem removed
- 4 cloves garlic
- 1/2 yellow onion, peeled and large diced
- Olive oil as needed
- 4 pounds pork butt, cut into large pieces roughly 4 inches by 4 inches
- Salt and pepper
- 1 bottle Mexican lager
- 2 green onions
- 1 bunch of cilantro, stems trimmed
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Water as needed

Directions

Turn the oven to 400 F. Toss the tomatillos, jalapeno, poblano, garlic cloves and yellow onion with a splash of olive oil and roast in the oven until nicely caramelized.

Season the pork generously with salt and pepper. In a large sauté or cast-iron pan, sear the pork on all sides and deglaze with the beer. Place the pork into a deep roasting pan and add the liquid from the deglazed pan.

Puree the roasted items (tomatillos, jalapenos, poblanos, garlic and yellow onion) with the green onions and cilantro in a blender. Season the mixture to taste with salt and pour it over the pork.

Add enough water to the pan to completely cover the pork. Cover the pan with parchment paper and aluminum foil. Roast the pork in a 350F oven for 4 hours or until tender. Shred into chunks and season to taste. Serve over rice and beans.

On the cover: Author and restaurateur Deborah VanTrece. Photo by Celeste Sloman. Articles on pages 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8 by Vanessa Infanzon. Article on pages 4 and 5 by Picture That Editorial Team. Published six times per year, *Unity* is exclusively distributed to clients of Thompson Hospitality and Compass Group, both world leaders in foodservice. To contact us, send an email to marketing@thompsonhospitalityjv.com. ©2025 Thompson Hospitality and Compass Group. Produced by [Content Spectrum](#).



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