



Allentown Arts Commission  
City of Allentown  
435 Hamilton Street, Third Floor  
Allentown PA 18101

## **31<sup>st</sup> Annual Allentown Arts Ovation Award Recipients Announced**

### **Arts Commission to Award Nine for Outstanding Contributions to the Arts Celebration and Ceremony at Miller Symphony Hall**

**For Immediate Release – September 5, 2019 – Allentown, PA**

**The arts give life to the city. Join us in celebrating those who give life to the arts.** Strong partnerships between businesses, community members and the arts stimulate economic growth, promote the city's revitalization, encourage tourism and enhance Allentown's cultural image. The Allentown Arts Commission Arts Ovation Awards, now in its 31st year, recognize the community's crucial contributions to the arts.

We are excited to invite the community to celebrate Allentown's vibrant Arts Community and honor nine incredible individuals & organizations who helped to define and move the Arts in Allentown forward.

This anniversary event will be hosted at Miller Symphony Hall on **Thursday, September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019**, and will honor **Jodi Duckett, former Arts & Entertainment Editor of the Morning Call, with a Lifetime Achievement Award** and the following recipients for their steadfast belief and dedication to the Arts in Allentown:

**Jodi Duckett**

Lifetime Achievement in the Arts

**Ron De Long**

Outstanding Achievement in Visual Arts

**Mike Krisukas**

Outstanding Achievement in Performing Arts

**Diane Wittry**

Outstanding Achievement in Literary Arts

**Allentown Symphony's El Sistema Lehigh Valley**

Outstanding Achievement in Arts Education

**WDIY 88.1**

Outstanding Service to the Arts

**City Center Allentown**

Outstanding Philanthropy

**Aaron Stone**

Outstanding Emerging Artist

**Michael McDonald**

Crescendo Award

“The Crescendo Award” is a new introduction to Ovation recognizing Allentonians who have grown their talents to international levels and continue to give back to our community.

The commission will also award scholarships for outstanding achievement in art, music and theatre to students from Allentown’s high schools: William Allen, Louis E. Dieruff, Central Catholic & Building 21 High Schools.

We encourage the community to join us in celebrating our honorees at the Arts Ovation Awards Reception, Thursday, September 26th, 2019, from 5:30 to 8:00 pm at Miller Symphony Hall, 23 N. 6<sup>th</sup> Street, Allentown.

Tickets to the event are \$60 per person (\$30 for students under 21) and are available online at [www.Ovation.AllentownArts.com](http://www.Ovation.AllentownArts.com). You can download more information at: [www.AllentownPA.gov/Arts](http://www.AllentownPA.gov/Arts).

The Commission also is seeking sponsorships for the event ranging from \$250-\$1000. Inquiries on the event or how to support can be directed to the Arts Commission Ovation Chair, Jane Heft, at [Arts@AllentownPA.gov](mailto:Arts@AllentownPA.gov). 610-762-8099

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Details on the recipients are as follows:

### **Lifetime Achievement Award – Jodi Duckett**

Jodi Duckett was arts and entertainment editor at The Morning Call for 20 years before retiring in February 2019. She started her career at the paper in 1979 and worked for two decades as a news and features reporter, winning many writing awards. She was named arts editor in 1999 and then founding editor of the Go Guide, dramatically expanding the opportunity for local arts organizations, artists, musicians, actors, dancers, authors and other artistic creators to get the word out to the public about their projects and events. Working with a small staff and small team of freelance writers, Jodi curated the news of the Lehigh Valley’s arts and entertainment scene, passionately striving to foster an awareness of and appreciation for their important and interesting work.

Jodi worked tirelessly to support the arts and entertainment community as a friend and advocate by sharing the news of their interesting and creative projects with the public. She tried to make sure there was something for everyone in the paper’s coverage of arts and entertainment and that everyone was represented in some way, with smaller organizations and lone voices also having an opportunity to get their information out.

### **Outstanding Philanthropy – City Center Allentown**

City Center Allentown continues to give back to the community through their Building Community Initiative. Building Community is the community-engagement initiative of City Center Investment Corp. and its employees and principals. The initiative aims to revitalize downtown Allentown and its surrounding neighborhoods into a sustainable, vibrant urban community by providing financial support, in-kind donations and volunteer service. Building Community focuses on three key results-oriented areas: **the arts, education and community development**. In 2018, City Center donated more than \$4.3 million total to 123 organizations through the program. In addition, the company’s 25 employees volunteered at 45 organizations, donating 2,000 total hours.

City Center understands the importance of improving our city’s public spaces and creating new opportunities for artists inside and outside of our properties. Recent major Building Community initiatives include City Center’s partnership with Community Services for Children to launch the Learning

Hub at City Center Allentown, which provides educational programming for local children in need; City Center pledging \$1 million to match new and increased gifts to United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley in 2018 and again in 2019; and City Center serving as the corporate partner of Central Elementary, a United Way Community School, for the past two years.

### **Crescendo Award – Michael McDonald**

Michael McDonald is a **Tony nominated New York Costumer Designer** who has worked and continues to work on Broadway productions, productions at The Public Theatre, one of New York's most prestigious arts centers, and many of the most respected regional and Off Broadway theatres. He also teaches at NYU Tisch School of the Arts and Rutgers Mason Gross School of the Arts.

As far as Michael's career has taken him to the big stages, he continues to come back to Allentown to share his talents. Michael often returns to design costumes for Muhlenberg's Summer Theatre. He most recently received smashing reviews for his design of the costumes for *Anything Goes*, his 34th production for Muhlenberg.

Michael began his design career in his early teens volunteering in the costume shop at Civic Theatre of Allentown. He went on to design over 25 productions including Civic's annual production of *A Christmas Carol*. The CLT production of *Our Town* is, and will always be, his favorite costume design. He has also designed costumes for Pennsylvania Playhouse, The Theater Outlet, and The PA Shakespeare Festival.

Michael's Career Highlights Include the following:

BROADWAY and WEST END: *Hair* (Tony Award, Drama Desk and Hewes Award nominations).

OFF BROADWAY: *The Public : Hair* (Delacorte Theater), *Jericho* (59E59), *The Irish Curse* (Soho Rep), *Almost Home* (The Directors Company), *Craving for Travel* (Peter Jay Sharp Theater) *Application Pending* (West Side Theater) *Tartuffe* (Tribeca Playhouse), *STRAIGHT* (Theater Row) *Amahl and the Night Visitors* (Lincoln Center).

REGIONAL: *La Cage Aux Folles* (Goodspeed Musicals) *God of Carnage*, [Title of Show], *Sex With Strangers* (George Street Playhouse); *Take Me Out* (Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, Kevin Kline nomination); *The Foreigner* (Maltz Jupiter Theater) *Oklahoma!*, *West Side Story* (Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival) *Johnny Baseball*, (American Repertory Theater, IRNE nomination), *Dirty Blond*, *Omnium Gatherum*, *Crowns*, *Spring Awakening*, *Next to Normal*, *Peter and the Starcatcher*, *Mothers and Sons*, *All The Way* (Zach Scott Theatre).

### **Outstanding Achievement in Visual Arts – Ron De Long**

"Ron DeLong's works of art are audacious in nature – bold, brilliant and absolutely beautiful. DeLong is a masterful storyteller who uses the full visual palette to shape eye-popping experiences that feature delicately skewed faces, gorgeous gestural twists, and mannered pulsating patterns. His works are at once profound, joyous, referential and startling in how they invite delicious reflective time. Although deeply personal, they are universal in appeal so take your sweet time when looking because the more you look the more you see!" This description is from Lynn Berkowitz, Director of Education at Crystal Bridges Museum of Modern Art.

Ron De Long is well known for his impact on the arts in Allentown as a visual artist. He is also an instructor, an advocate and benefactor of the Ron De Long Art Gallery at Penn State Lehigh Valley. He also operates Studio and Gallery 2908. Ron has published a number of articles, received countless fine arts awards, exhibited his work, and participated with communities in residencies over the past 50 years. He continues to be a full time Art Lecturer and Fine Arts Instructor at Penn State University Lehigh Valley. In addition to serving as an instructor at Penn State, he has instructed at Kutztown University,

Moravian College, Cedar Crest College and several Pennsylvania public schools. He was also formerly the Manager of Art Education for Crayola.

### **Outstanding Achievement in Performing Arts – Mike Krisukas**

Mike Krisukas, musician and composer, is founding member, arranger and principal songwriter for the avant garde, Cabaret band, **Zen For Primates** grew up equidistant between New York and Philly where he developed his very personal compositional and playing styles.

He studied arrangement and orchestration with Evan Solat at the Philadelphia Music Academy and advanced harmonic theory with the legendary, [Dennis Sandole](#). Mike continued performing with an eclectic mix of musical aggregations ranging from Appalachian Bluegrass to James Brown influenced Funk bands, and New Wave/Punk bands. He toured Japan as the guitarist for R&B band “The Three Degrees” and throughout France and Greece with his duo “**Interlaken**” with violinist Mark Golin.

Concurrent with performing, Mike pursued compositional projects beginning with jingles, film/video soundtracks, later moving into theatrical collaborations and larger commissioned pieces for orchestra, including the Black Sea Concerto and [Lazy Dogma for Trombone & Orchestra](#).

Mike composed music for a new production of the Mac Wellman play “Terminal Hip” for the Galway Fringe Festival in Ireland and an original score for *Arcane: A Tale of All Hallows’ Eve*, a Halloween themed work by Company C Ballet which premiered in San Francisco. He continues to perform with **The Music of Zen For Primates**.

### **Outstanding Achievement in Literary Arts – Diane Wittry**

Diane Wittry – Conductor, Composer and Writer, is the author of the book, "*Beyond the Baton - What Every Conductor Needs to Know*", Oxford University Press, 2007, which was **nominated for a Pulitzer Prize** and has become a standard, both nationally and internationally, in the conducting field. This book is currently a required text at many Colleges and Universities, including Universities in Australia, and Great Britain. The book is a leadership book for conductors that centers on the Music Director's role off the podium as a community leader.

Wittry's second book "*Baton Basics - Communicating Music Through Gestures*," Oxford University Press, 2014, is a conducting technique book and is being utilized by conducting classes across the country and in Europe. Because of these two books, Wittry is sought out as a conducting teacher and mentor. This past summer she was invited to teach at three international conducting seminars.

From 2003-2011, Diane Wittry was a feature writer and columnist for the Norwalk Hour Newspaper in Connecticut, and since 2009, she has been writing feature articles focusing on the concerts of the Allentown Symphony for the Lehigh Valley Press.

She began her writing career while still in college when she had an article published in the national magazine "*The Instrumentalist*." Later on, her article called "*Roll over Beethoven, Call me Maestra*" was published in *Newsweek* magazine, and it was also translated and published in *Newsweek* in Japan.

Wittry is currently working on a repertoire book for conductors that will focus on how to navigate the conducting of difficult passages in the some of the standard orchestral repertoire.

We are lucky to have Diane Wittry here, now in her 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, as Musical Director and Conductor of our own Allentown Symphony Orchestra.

## **Outstanding Achievement in Arts Education – El Sistema Lehigh Valley, a program of the Allentown Symphony Association**

El Sistema Lehigh Valley, a program of the Allentown Symphony Association, brings underserved and special needs youth a free opportunity to develop life skills learned by participating in high-quality daily music instruction, large ensemble experience and performances, and academic tutoring within a safe and nurturing environment. Participants will develop discipline, the ability to set and achieve long-term goals, and a sense of social responsibility inside a community that cherishes creativity, imagination, and music. This will empower the Lehigh Valley community when their young artists, respective families, and community members come together to celebrate the achievement of their youths.

El Sistema Lehigh Valley (ESLV) at Roosevelt Elementary School is a free music education program made possible through the Allentown Symphony Association's collaboration with the Allentown School District. ESLV provides all participating students with intensive afterschool orchestral instrumental instruction, choir instruction, academic tutoring, and an after-school snack. The rich music curriculum creates a cooperative, fun, a nurturing environment for the children to explore their creativity as individuals and as a large ensemble.

In combination with the impressive number after-school opportunities available to the students and community members through Roosevelt Elementary & United Way, ESLV will help make Roosevelt a community center for joyful music making and will eventually grow to serve hundreds of students in the community.

Participation and use of instruments is free to all students as long as they uphold their contract to care for the instrument, practice and participate in ESLV programming, and academic tutoring.

With its internationally-respected program leadership and an impressive record of growth, El Sistema Lehigh Valley was the only program in the United States invited to participate in the recording of "Love People"; a powerful video featuring over 1,000 children from 13 countries around the world – including Afghanistan, New Zealand, Spain, Venezuela, Canada, Palestine, and Japan – all singing a beautiful anthem of tolerance, harmony and understanding. Watch the video: <https://youtu.be/IWcHNBnuErl>

El Sistema Lehigh Valley is under the leadership of Norma Núñez-Ruch, ASA's Director of Education, and Kaylee Santanello, Program Manager, El Sistema Lehigh Valley.

## **Outstanding Service to the Arts – WDIY 88.1**

WDIY is a listener-supported public radio station based in the Lehigh Valley. In January 2020, WDIY will be celebrating our 25th anniversary on the air. Throughout that time, they have been guided by their continued mission: *to engage the Lehigh Valley community through a wide-ranging exchange of music, arts, news and culturally diverse information.*

WDIY broadcasts award-winning NPR programs like *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered* along with locally-produced music and public affairs programs. The arts have always been central to WDIY's service to the community, with weekly programs like *Lehigh Valley Arts Salon* and *Musings* placing the spotlight on the artists, venues and programs unique to our region. We are home to over 120 dedicated volunteers, including over 90 volunteer on-air hosts.

With a recent triple power boost of its 100-watt signal to a federally approved 300-watt signal, WDIY is now more than equipped to become the voice to engage the Lehigh Valley and have them heard far beyond. Volunteer-driven and community-supported, WDIY is entering its next quarter century embodying the words you hear on our airwaves on a daily basis: *Many Choices, Real Voices.*

## **Outstanding Emerging Artist – Aaron Stone**

Aaron Stone is an up-and-coming artist building quite a reputation for himself in the Lehigh Valley and beyond, notably his “fantasy” masks. Aaron, an 18 years old and a senior in high school, began to show promising artistic talent as a young child.

Aaron has participated in various exhibitions through school and has been a favorite at Allentown’s West End *Art In The Park*. Aaron’s work was featured in The Morning Call for the 44th Annual Art In The Park. Aaron’s talent has garnered quite a list of awards, including the Dr. Christine Isabella Oaklander Award for excellence in the visual arts in the East Central Pennsylvania Scholastic Art Awards of 2018.

An avid collector of Aaron’s masks noted that his level of genius for art and design and mind boggling detail is truly extraordinary at his young age.

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