

H. Royce Saltzman (1928-2023)

By Fred Crafts

Vocalist and conductor Royce Saltzman was the cofounder and longtime executive director of the Oregon Bach Festival in Eugene. A professor of choral music and an associate dean for the School of Music at the University of Oregon, Saltzman was president of both the American Choral Directors Association (1979–1981) and the International Federation for Choral Music (1985–1993).

Royce Saltzman was born in Abilene, Kansas, on November 18, 1928. He graduated from Goshen College, a Mennonite school in Goshen, Indiana, in 1950, and then did graduate work at Northwestern University. He received a Doctor of Musical Arts from the University of Southern California in 1964. That year, he joined the faculty of the School of Music (now the School of Music and Dance) at the University of Oregon in Eugene.

While teaching in Germany one summer, Saltzman met conductor Helmuth Rilling, an expert on the choral works of Johann Sebastian Bach. The two musicians co-founded the Oregon Bach Festival in 1970, with Saltzman as executive director and Rilling as artistic director. Saltzman would lead the Festival until 2007, when he was named executive director emeritus; Rilling retired as artistic director in 2013.

The first Oregon Bach Festival, originally called the Summer Festival of Baroque Music, featured two concerts and two choral workshops. Over the years, Saltzman expanded the Festival to include more than forty-five concerts, recitals, and lectures. He increased the Festival's budget from \$2,500 in 1970 to \$1.9 million in 2007, and more than twelve hundred conductors have participated in the Festival's Master Class in Conducting. Under Saltzman's leadership, the Oregon Bach Festival contracted with Haenssler Verlag, a German music publisher, to make several recordings, including *Credo*, by Krzysztof Penderecki, which received the 2001 Grammy Award for best choral performance.

Saltzman was acting dean of the University of Oregon Music School and a board member of Chorus America (USA). He served as an adviser to the Toronto Bach Festival (Canada), the International Bachakademie (Germany), the China International Choir Festival, the Zimriya World Assembly of Choirs (Israel), and Academia Bach de Venezuela. As a member of the Civic Center Commission and the Performing Arts Center Commission, he helped plan the Hult Center for the Performing Arts, which opened in Eugene in 1982.

In 1994, the German government presented Saltzman with the Officer's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, the country's highest honor. He received Chorus America's Distinguished Service Award in 2010 and the American Choral Director Association's Robert Shaw Award in 2015. Saltzman was also named a Eugene Symphony Advocate for the Arts, and the 2013 Oregon legislature honored him for helping make the Oregon Bach Festival one of the "preeminent music festivals in the United States."

Royce Saltzman died on April 3, 2023. "His main legacy," said Maria Guinand of the Fundación Schola Cantorum de Venezuela, "will be his unwavering faith in the transformative power of choral singing and its possibilities to achieve peace and understanding among people."

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