

# A Carol Competition in Minneapolis

*Philip Brunelle*

*IFCM Vice President, VocalEssence Founder & Artistic Director*

Christmas carols have been part of holiday celebrations for centuries. The question is – how to keep carols fresh and interesting? Exactly 15 years ago VocalEssence, the choral organization in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA launched a Carol Competition opened to composers of all ages whose permanent residence is North America. The carol (maximum 3 minutes) could have a sacred or secular, medieval to present-day text appropriate for a concert setting. Proof of public domain or author's written permission for use of text is required.

Each year the competition features choirs with a different instrument and the results have been fascinating. With the American Composers Forum promoting the competition and collecting the entries we have had between 75 and 150 entries each year. The list of instruments during these 15 years includes harp, string orchestra, percussion, recorder, cello, acoustic guitar, celesta, French horn, viola, hand-bells, English horn, flute and piano. In addition one year's competition featured carols with audience participation and another was *a cappella*.

Applications and scores are screened for completeness by the American Composers Forum staff with final selection and programming decisions made by VocalEssence Associate Conductor

Sigrid Johnson and me. Of course, we reserve the right not to make an award. However, that has never been the case and each year we have had two winners, each of which receives a cash gift of US \$1000. In most cases the composers have come to Minnesota for the premiere, have been interviewed by the local media AND have had their carol broadcast nationally on American Public Media the following Christmas.

Each year the 'Welcome Christmas' concert is performed five times and the new carols appear on all programs. Most of the carols have subsequently been published by various publishers and have received numerous performances nationwide. For more information on this exciting program please consult the VocalEssence website: [www.vocalescence.org](http://www.vocalescence.org)

**Philip Brunelle**, artistic director and founder of VocalEssence, is an internationally renowned conductor, choral scholar and visionary. He has made his lifelong mission the promotion of the choral art in all its forms, especially rarely heard works of the past and worthwhile new music. Under his leadership, VocalEssence has commissioned more than 150 works to date. Philip has conducted many major symphonies as well as choral festivals and operas on six continents. Over the past decade Philip has been deeply involved with the International Federation for Choral Music (IFCM). He served as president of the Sixth World Choral Symposium, held in Minneapolis in 2002. He is a Vice President of the IFCM Board and is currently serving as Executive Director for the 2014 World Choral Symposium to be held in Seoul, South Korea. Philip holds five honorary doctorates and has been recognized for his commitment



to choral music by the countries of Norway, the United Kingdom, Hungary, Sweden and Mexico. Email: [pbrunelle@vocalessence.org](mailto:pbrunelle@vocalessence.org)