



WASHINGTON PERFORMING ARTS

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WASHINGTON PERFORMING ARTS WELCOMES NEW BOARD MEMBERS FROM A VARIETY OF BACKGROUNDS WITH A SHARED INTEREST IN THE ARTS

(Washington, D.C.)—Washington Performing Arts announced the appointment of two new members of the Board of Directors: **Faria Abedin** and **Peter Buscemi**; and 10 new junior board members: **Kennedi Alsop, Kiarah Cooper, Lean Deskins, Megan Gailes, Will Hudson, Shannon Kellman, Elizabeth O’Neil, Olu Oriowo, Prachi Shah, and Lee Templin**.

Washington Performing Arts is guided by a dynamic and deeply engaged community of leaders, including its Board of Directors, Junior Board, and Women’s Committee. Together, these groups reflect a wide range of backgrounds, generations, professional expertise, and lived experiences.

Committed to balanced representation across gender, age, race, ethnicity, and life experience, Washington Performing Arts has upheld these values since its founding by Patrick Hayes and Todd Duncan. This commitment is intentional, ongoing, and central to the organization’s mission.

The Junior Board is composed of passionate young professionals who share a dedication to the arts and to advancing philanthropy and advocacy throughout the Washington, D.C. region. Junior Board members gain valuable professional development in nonprofit governance, benefit from mentorship by members of the Board of Directors, and participate in a natural leadership pipeline that fosters future involvement at the highest levels of the organization.

“As we mark 10 years of the Junior Board, we celebrate not only its remarkable growth but its vital role within Washington Performing Arts’s broader leadership community. Alongside our Board of Directors, the Junior Board brings fresh perspective, passion, and purpose to our work. Drawing from sectors as varied as healthcare, finance, defense, and media, these leaders expand our reach and strengthen our impact. I’m inspired by how this cohort continues to deepen our connections across the region and help shape the future of Washington Performing Arts,” said President & CEO Jenny Bilfield.

A full listing can be found at WashingtonPerformingArts.org/our-people#board. Washington Performing Arts Board members serve three-year terms with no term limits.

BOARD MEMBER BIOGRAPHIES

Faria Abedin has been involved in numerous philanthropic and community outreach efforts. She also currently serves on the board of Women for Women International, and is a member of Shoulder to Shoulder Consultative Circle.

In the years prior, she has served as a board member of the Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN), Ta'leef Collective, Trenton Area Soup Kitchen, Interfaith Center of New York, Habitat for Humanity, Meals on Wheels, Medina Clinic, Duke Islamic Studies Center, and the Kenan Institute for Ethics at Duke University. She has also served as Board President of the Princeton Girlchoir and the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom. Faria co-founded the Mizaan Retreat, hosted annually by Princeton University's Muslim Life program.

Faria holds a B.S. in Electrical Engineering from the University of Maryland and an M.S. in Computer Science from The Johns Hopkins University. Faria currently works for Bayan Tours, an organization that coordinates travel experiences centered on Islamic history and heritage. She lives in the DC area with her husband and three children.

Peter Buscemi is a retired lawyer who practiced for nearly 40 years in Washington, D.C. He spent most of his career as a litigation partner in the Washington office of Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP.

Peter received his law degree from Columbia in 1976. During his final year in law school, he served as Writing and Research Editor of the Columbia Law Review. Before law school, Mr. Buscemi received his undergraduate degree from Columbia in 1969, with majors in Government and Mathematics, and a master's degree in Soviet Politics from Princeton in 1971.

Immediately after law school, Peter served for a year as a law clerk to Judge Carl McGowan of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit. Thereafter, from 1977 to 1981, he was an Assistant to the Solicitor General in the U.S. Department of Justice. During his tenure at the Justice Department, Mr. Buscemi served for five months, from May to October 1980, as a Special Assistant U.S. Attorney in the Eastern District of Virginia.

After leaving the government in 1981, Peter practiced for five years in the Washington office of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison. He joined Morgan Lewis in 1986, and became a partner in the firm the following year. His practice focused primarily on civil litigation, including the briefing and argument of cases in many federal and state appellate courts. He retired at the end of 2015.

JUNIOR BOARD MEMBER BIOGRAPHIES

Kennedi Alsop is a self-described “amateur anthropologist,” as the Creative Director and Founder of Collective Joy Studios, she is deeply fascinated by how cultures express themselves through art, music, and dance. Having explored 19 countries and counting, she aims to see the world through a lens of

collective joy—discovering the beauty of life through community, creativity, and connection. A dancer of over 20 years, Kennedi is an emerging creative director who blends Pilates, rhythm, and dance to craft movement experiences centered on community and self-expression. When she's not on the go, Kennedi enjoys KBBQ dates with her fiancé, a good cup of chai, and a great book.

Kiarah Cooper is a marketing professional with experience across corporate communications, digital marketing, and advertising strategy. A Maine native, her passion for the performing arts began in childhood and has remained a central part of her life. She is passionate about expanding access to the arts and supporting initiatives that create meaningful community ties. Kiarah earned a B.A. in Communications from Drexel University and a M.S. in Integrated Marketing Communications from West Virginia University. She currently resides in Baltimore, Maryland with her husband.

Leah Deskins is an associate at Wiley Rein LLP, where she represents clients in a variety of complex commercial litigation matters in federal and state courts. Outside of work, Leah is an active musician and passionate supporter of the arts. She has played trumpet in a variety of ensembles spanning classical and contemporary music, from university and community orchestras to, most recently, a D.C.-based cover band. A lifelong Virginian, Leah is a proud graduate of the College of William & Mary and the University of Virginia School of Law.

Megan Gailes is the Education Program Manager at The Economic Club of Washington, D.C. Working in the Rubenstein Scholarship Program, she creates and leads professional development workshops for scholarship recipients, provides mentorship, and runs the internship program, connecting scholars to meaningful opportunities in the DMV. Megan earned her BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art, majoring in fine arts and minoring in art education with a focus in photography, and earned her MA from the University of Maryland, majoring in Education Policy. As a first-generation college graduate who attended college on scholarships and grants, Megan is passionate about education equity and access. She's from Baltimore and lives there with her husband and two dogs.

Will Hudson works at the intersection of health care communications and business development for Manatt, Phelps & Phillips where he focuses on publishing impactful health policy content and audience engagement. Prior to this role, he worked on physician marketing and communication for Johns Hopkins Medicine and for the history imprint of a small book publisher. He obtained his undergraduate degree from Hampden-Sydney College and Masters in Global Health from Georgetown University. In his free time, he enjoys cooking, hiking, sailing and being with his dachshund, Charlie.

Shannon Kellman is the senior adviser in the U.S. Liaison Office of UNAIDS (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS). She manages UNAIDS' engagement with the U.S. Government and key partners. Before joining UNAIDS, Shannon was the Senior Policy Director at Friends of the Global Fight Against AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the lead advocacy organization in the U.S. working on behalf of the Global Fund. Previously, Shannon was the assistant director of Washington External Affairs at CFR. She also worked for Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky and Senator Carl Levin. Shannon also worked as a lobbyist at J Street and at Pacific Environment in San Francisco. Originally from Evanston, Illinois, Shannon holds a BA in Russian and Eastern European studies from the University of Michigan, and a Master of Science in International Relations from the London School of Economics. She is a classically trained pianist, opera singer, flautist, and bassoon player.

Elizabeth O’Neil is a seasoned arts and media leader with more than 10 years of experience shaping creative programming and supporting mission-driven organizations. She currently serves as Director of Programming Operations & Strategy at PBS, where she helps guide national programming initiatives and brings together teams, partners, and stakeholders from across the country. Her work focuses on turning big-picture ideas into meaningful experiences for audiences and communities. Previously, Elizabeth held roles at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, where she worked closely with artists, producers, and cultural leaders to deliver innovative and engaging programs. Trained as a professional oboist, she combines a lifelong commitment to the arts with strong leadership and organizational skills. She holds a Harvard Business School Online CORe credential and degrees from the New England Conservatory of Music.

Olubukola Oriowo is a special education teacher with Alexandria City Public Schools and has spent more than a decade working with children across a wide range of learning profiles and languages, and is committed to creating classrooms where every student feels understood, supported, and capable of excellence. Olubukola believes deeply in the power of the arts to open doors—giving young people new ways to express themselves, build confidence, and experience the world. Her work in schools has shown her how music, performance, and cultural programming can transform a child’s sense of belonging and possibility.

Prachi Shah has spent the last eight years working across strategy and operations, leading organizational initiatives and supporting C-suite executives in the public and private sector in NYC, D.C., and Germany. She is currently a Project Manager at CapitalOne within Card Tech supporting integration efforts for the Discover acquisition. Prachi holds a B.S. in Finance from Rutgers University. A longtime supporter of philanthropic initiatives, she has served on multiple boards and volunteered with organizations focused on arts, education, and women’s advocacy. She currently serves as the U.N. Youth Representative for FAWCO and as the Programming Chair for the Delta Gamma alumnae group in D.C. Shaped by her third-culture background, Prachi enjoys traveling, visiting museums, learning new languages, and spending time with friends & family.

Lee Templin is an attorney at Goulston & Storrs where her practice focuses on commercial real estate. She advises clients on both land use and zoning as well as transactional matters. Prior to pursuing her legal career, Lee was a professional violinist, playing in various orchestras throughout the United States, including the Knoxville Symphony, the Tucson Symphony, the Atlanta Opera, the Atlanta Symphony, and as a fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center. She earned her Bachelor of Music from Northwestern University, a Master of Music from Indiana University’s Jacobs School of Music, and a Juris Doctor from Georgetown University Law Center. Lee lives in D.C., with her husband, three-year-old daughter, and one-year-old twin sons.

ABOUT WASHINGTON PERFORMING ARTS

One of the most established and honored performing arts institutions in America, Washington Performing Arts has engaged for 60 years with artists, audiences, students, and civic life. The city is truly our stage: for decades, in venues ranging from concert halls and clubs to public parks, we have presented a tremendous range of artists and art forms, from the most distinguished symphony orchestras to both renowned and emerging artists in classical music, jazz, international genres, and more. We also have an ever-expanding artistic and educational presence online, envisioning ongoing opportunities for online connection and community.

Washington Performing Arts deeply values its partnerships with local organizations and other arts institutions. Through events online and in myriad performance venues and neighborhoods, we engage international visiting artists in community programs and introduce local artists to wider audiences. We place a premium on establishing artists as a continuing presence in the lives of both young people and adults through residencies and education programs.

Our achievements have been recognized with a National Medal of Arts and with four Mayor's Arts Awards from the DC Government. We have now embarked upon our second half-century, ever inspired by the motto of our founder, Patrick Hayes: "Everybody in, nobody out."

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