



Building Bridges *and*  
Transforming Lives  
*through the* Power of  
Music

Athens, Greece | July 4-9, 2025

# Athens Choral Festival



Co-Artistic Director

**Dr. Pearl Shangkuan**  
Director of Choral  
Activities and Professor  
of Choral Music at Calvin  
University



Co-Artistic Director

**Dr. Jerry Blackstone**  
Emeritus Professor of  
Conducting, the University  
of Michigan School of  
Music, Theatre & Dance

# The Setting



## The Artistic Experience

Leading U.S. choral conductors Drs. Blackstone and Shangkuan are joining forces to create an unforgettable and exciting performance opportunity for mixed choirs in Athens, Greece. This event will be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to learn from and study with two of the country's foremost music educators. The Athens Choral Festival will conclude with a gala concert by the massed choir co-conducted by Pearl Shangkuan and Jerry Blackstone in one of the most ancient cities in the world.

## Athens, Greece

Classical Athens was one of the most powerful city-states in ancient Greece. It was a center for democracy, the arts, education, and philosophy, with a strong influence throughout Europe, particularly in Ancient Rome. Thus, it is often regarded as the cradle of Western civilization and the birthplace of democracy independently from the rest of Greece. The heritage of the Classical era is still evident in the city, represented by ancient monuments, and works of art, the most famous of all being the Parthenon, considered a key landmark of early Western culture. The city also retains Roman, Byzantine, and a smaller number of Ottoman monuments. Athens is home to two UNESCO World Heritage Sites, the Acropolis of Athens, and the medieval Daphni Monastery.



## The Organizers: Perform International

*“Building Bridges and Transforming Lives through the Power of Music”*

Boldly informed by the belief that music inherently speaks as an expression of the human spirit beyond borders and in all cultures, Perform International seeks to empower music directors and ensembles to realize meaningful and life-changing immersion experiences and performances around the world.

- We empower music directors, music ensembles and individual musicians to share and grow in their artistic expression and understanding of people and cultures.
- We design and create rewarding performances as well as educational and cultural immersion opportunities by building and maintaining relationships with domestic and international musicians and music education organizations.
- We partner with concert venues, publicity teams, airlines, hotels, and tour guides to plan and implement operational methods that enhance rather than distract from the artistic experience.
- We provide meaningful and life-changing performance tour experiences that are personal, thoughtful, and efficient in the processes of conceptual artistic and educational development.

# Faculty



**Dr. Jerry  
Blackstone**

*Co-Artistic Director*

GRAMMY Award winner **Jerry Blackstone** is a leading conductor and highly respected conducting pedagogue. Now emeritus professor of conducting, he served on the faculty of the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance for thirty years where, led the graduate program in choral conducting, and oversaw the University's eleven choirs. In February 2006, he received two GRAMMY Awards ("Best Choral Performance" and "Best Classical Album") as chorusmaster for the critically acclaimed Naxos recording of William Bolcom's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. The Naxos recording of Milhaud's monumental *L'Orestie d'Eschyle*, on which Blackstone served as chorusmaster, was nominated for a 2015 GRAMMY Award ("Best Opera Recording"). The University of Michigan Chamber Choir, conducted by Blackstone, performed by special invitation at the inaugural conference in San Antonio of the National Collegiate Choral Organization (NCCO) and presented three enthusiastically received performances in New York City at the National Convention of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA). As conductor of the University of Michigan Men's Glee Club from 1988-2002, Professor Blackstone led the ensemble in performances at ACDA national and division conventions and on extensive concert tours throughout Australia, Eastern and Central Europe, Asia, South America, and the United States. In 2017, NCCO presented him with its prestigious Lifetime Achievement Membership Award and, in 2006, for "significant contributions to choral music," he received the ACDA-Michigan chapter's Maynard Klein Lifetime Achievement Award. From 2003-2015, Dr. Blackstone served as conductor and music director of the University Musical Society (UMS) Choral Union, a large community/university chorus that frequently appears with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO) and the Ann Arbor Symphony and presents yearly performances of Handel's *Messiah* and other major works for chorus and orchestra.



**Dr. Pearl  
Shangkuan**

*Co-Artistic Director*

**Dr. Pearl Shangkuan** is a highly sought-after conductor, lecturer and clinician who has led performances and workshops across six continents. Director of Choral Activities and Professor of Music at Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Michigan, she is also the chorus director of the Grand Rapids Symphony, a Grammy-nominated professional orchestra. Recently appointed as the Editor of Hinshaw Music, Shangkuan also has a signature choral series with earthsongs, and is the music editor of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship choral series published by GIA. In 2014, she made her Carnegie Hall conducting debut and was an invited guest lecturer at the World Symposium for Choral Music held in Seoul, South Korea. Dr. Shangkuan has served on the jury of several international choral competitions in Europe and Asia and has led conducting masterclasses for the ACDA national conference, Chorus America conferences, the University of Michigan and the University of Illinois Choral Conducting Symposium among many institutions and organizations in the US. She has conducted numerous All State choirs, ACDA division honor choirs, and choral festivals nationally and internationally, and has headlined several ACDA state and other professional conferences. She serves on the Board of Directors of Chorus America and is the incoming President of ACDA. She has commissioned and premiered numerous choral works and her choirs have performed at ACDA national, division and state conferences. In 2020, she received a Calvin University Award for Excellence in Teaching and previously received the Grand Rapids YWCA Arts Tribute Award. Michigan ACDA in 2013 honored her with the Maynard Klein Choral Award for "artistic excellence and lifetime leadership in choral music."



**July 4-9, 2025**

# Athens Choral Festival

## Tour Itinerary

### **Day 1 - Friday, July 4, 2025 - Departure USA**

The journey to Greece begins by boarding an overnight flight to Athens.

### **Day 2 - Saturday, July 5, 2025 - Arrival Athens**

Arrive in Athens. Time permitting take a tour of the city's ancient center with your tour manager. Welcome dinner and overnight in Athens.

### **Day 3 - Sunday, July 6, 2025 - Acropolis Visit & Rehearsals**

Start the morning with a guided tour of the Acropolis. After lunch, begin the artistic portion of the festival with a first rehearsal. After dinner Drs. Shangkuan and Blackstone will lead a second rehearsal with all singers. Overnight in Athens.

### **Day 4 - Monday, July 7, 2025 - Rehearsal & City Sightseeing**

Today starts with another joint rehearsal followed by a guided tour of Athens. The remainder of the day is at your leisure to explore the city on your own. Overnight in Athens.

### **Day 5 - Tuesday, July 8, 2025 - Dress Rehearsal & Gala Concert**

Relax this morning in preparation for tonight's gala concert. This afternoon, dress rehearsal in the festival concert venue followed by dinner. Tonight, Pearl Shangkuan and Jerry Blackstone will lead the massed chorus in an unforgettable gala concert performance to conclude the Athens Choral Festival. Overnight in Athens.

### **Day 6 - Wednesday, July 9, 2025 - Depart Athens / Start Post Festival Tour Programs**

Transfer to the airport in Athens to begin your journey back to the U.S. or start your customized post festival tour.

## Pre/Post Festival Tour Programs

Optional pre- and post-tours for groups of 20 and more passengers are available including additional individual performance opportunities for balanced ensembles. All of PI's pre/post tours are fully customized to each choir's specific needs. Following are some examples:

### **Tour B**

Enjoy an extension to Meteora to visit the famous hanging monasteries. Continue to Thessaloniki, where you'll enjoy sightseeing, and a standalone concert (for ensembles that are balanced and wish for another concert).

### **Tour C**

Greece is famous for its many islands and beaches. Spend two nights in Corfu on Greece's northwest coast. The island is located in the Ionian sea and defined by rugged mountains and a stunning shoreline. On your way to Athens, spend a night in Delphi to visit the city's ancient excavations which were a symbol of unity of the ancient Greek world.

### **Tour D**

Arrive in Greece a few days before the start of the Athens Choral Festival and spend two nights in ancient Corinth which has a history dating back to the 8th century B.C. Sightseeing in Corinth and a visit to the panhellenic sanctuary of Delphi, where the oracle of Apollo spoke are included before arriving in Athens to start the music festival program.