What We Do

We transform lives through the power of diversity in the arts

Through our programs, Sphinx creates positive change in the performing arts field and helps transform the lives of thousands of individuals in communities across the nation and around the world.

Key accomplishments amongst Sphinx's diverse alumni base include:

- Twenty-six members of professional orchestras and at least ten hold leadership positions within those orchestras
- Eight currently perform/tour as professional soloists
- Two professional ensembles: Harlem Quartet and Catalyst Quartet
- Two large ensembles: Sphinx Symphony and Sphinx Virtuosi
- Six serve as faculty at top music schools and conservatories
- Three serve as arts administrators for orchestras/symphonies
- 20-30 annual solo performances by Black and Latino classical musicians
- Partnerships with more than 100 organizations around the world

Organizational History

The Sphinx Organization is the Detroit-based national organization dedicated to transforming lives through the power of diversity in the arts.

The organization’s founding and mission were informed by the life experiences of Aaron Dworkin, who, as a young Black violinist, was acutely aware of the lack of diversity both on stage and in the audience in concert halls. He founded Sphinx while an undergraduate student at the University of Michigan, to address the stark under-representation of people of color in classical music. President Obama’s first appointment to the National Council on the Arts, Aaron P. Dworkin currently serves as dean of the University of Michigan’s School of Music, Theatre & Dance.
Now led by Afa S. Dworkin, its President and Artistic Director, Sphinx programs reach over 100,000 students, as well as live and broadcast audiences of over two million annually.

Afa Dworkin’s work as the organization’s long time Artistic Director and now President, has also been recognized nationally. She was named one of the 30 Most Influential People by Musical America, Detroit’s “40 Under 40” by Crain’s Detroit Business, in addition to being a frequent speaker on the importance of inclusion and music education at conferences nationwide, including the League of American Orchestra, Chamber Music America, Americans for the Arts and beyond. Ms. Dworkin also serves as faculty for Roosevelt University’s Master’s Program in Performing Arts Administration.

Sphinx works to create positive change in the arts field and in communities across the country through a variety of programs organized into four main principles:

EDUCATION and ACCESS
- Overture (grassroots beginning violin program)
- Sphinx Performance Academy (intensive summer program)
- Classical Connections (in-school integrative curriculum)

ARTIST DEVELOPMENT
- National Sphinx Competition for young Black and Latino String players
- Music Assistance Fund (scholarships and fine instruments)

PERFORMING ARTISTS
- Sphinx Virtuosi
- Sphinx Symphony Orchestra
- Soloist Program
- Global Scholars
- Catalyst Quartet
- Harlem Quartet

ARTS LEADERSHIP
- SphinxConnect (a comprehensive effort to connect artists of color and industry leadership)
- Sphinx Medals of Excellence (identifying extraordinary artists who demonstrate artistic excellence, outstanding work ethic, a spirit of determination, and leadership potential)

As the organization has grown, so has its acclaim. Sphinx has been featured in The New York Times, Newsweek, People magazine, The Detroit Free Press, and on National Public Radio and NBC’s Today show. In addition, the annual Sphinx Competition is broadcast by Detroit Public Television, and syndicated to PBS stations nationwide.