DISTINCTIVE ALUMNI

Four distinguished alumni were presented with Anchor Awards at a special dinner held on Friday, Oct. 17, as part of Hawktober Weekend.

The Anchor Awards, the most prestigious awards presented by the University of Hartford’s Alumni Association, recognize alumni who have distinguished themselves by achieving the highest level of professional and community accomplishments, and who possess absolute standards of integrity and character, to positively reflect and enhance the prestige of the University of Hartford.

HONOREE PROFILES

Alisa B. Coleman ‘83
ABKCO Music & Records, Inc., of which Alisa B. Coleman ‘83 is senior executive vice president, is home to a diverse catalog of iconic assets that include compositions and master recordings by The Rolling Stones, Sam Cooke, Bobby Womack, and Eric Burdon, as well as original artists’ recordings by The Animals, Herman’s Hermits, and Chubby Checker. An innovative-thought leader and acknowledged expert in the field of music publishing, intellectual property management, legacy content development, new-media innovation, and transformative digital strategy, Coleman has a degree in music business management from the University’s Hartt School. She is an accomplished art director and in 2006 was named one of the 20 people to watch by Graphic Design USA magazine. Her work has been recognized by the Clio Awards, New York Art Directors Club, and AIGA, the professional association for design. She has won the Graphic Design USA Award of Excellence for many packages, including Martin Scorcese’s Boardwalk Empire, Volume 2, soundtrack and remixes by various artists (including The Rolling Stones) of the Stones song “Sympathy for the Devil,” with a 3-D cover.

Judith McElhone ’88, M’94
Five Points Gallery, of which Judith McElhone ’88, M’94, is executive director, actively collaborates with the area’s commercial, political, and cultural entities to promote downtown Torrington, Conn. as an arts destination. Under McElhone’s leadership, FPG has grown from a small storefront gallery to a 3,800-square-foot facility with three exhibition spaces that have exhibited 80 outstanding professional artists and a database of scores of other qualified artists. Passionate about education and community outreach, McElhone established a consortium agreement with the University of Hartford’s Hartford Art School, the University of Connecticut Torrington Regional Campus, and Northwestern Connecticut Community College to connect the colleges with the communities they serve, provide the gallery with invaluable educational resources, and serve as a gateway for college students pursuing professional art careers. College interns learn gallery management and function as docents, interacting with visitors and fostering an appreciation of contemporary visual art. McElhone received an AS degree from Northwestern Connecticut Community College and a BFA and MFA from the University’s Hartford Art School. Recognized with a Connecticut Visual Arts Fellowship, she has exhibited her work in many venues.

Edward F. Peltier ’68
Edward F. Peltier ’68 served as executive director until July 2014, was the first permanent school for the deaf in the United States. Founded in 1817, it is nationally renowned for comprehensive educational programs and services for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Peltier has more than 40 years of experience in deaf education and has held positions as teacher, coach, athletic director, and administrator. He has been a board member of the Council of Educators and Administrators Serving the Deaf (CEASD) for two terms and chair of its Residential Life Committee for eight years. In June 2014, Peltier received the Robert Davilla Award, the highest honor conferred by the CEASD. With his involvement with the Connecticut Coalition for the Deaf, he has been an active proponent of the Child First initiative and the Deaf Child Bill of Rights. He has served as cochair of the Private Schools for the Deaf Coalition for 10 years. Peltier, who attended the University of Hartford on a sports scholarship for basketball and baseball, graduated with a degree in business administration. He is active in the West Hartford Rotary and is an honorary Paul Harris Fellow. He coaches a deaf special-needs group of young adults in basketball and was inducted into the New England Basketball Hall of Fame in the Scholar-Athlete category in 2013.

Erik G. Wexler A’83, ’85, M’87
Dallas-based Tenet, for which Erik G. Wexler A’83, ’85, M’87, is CEO of the northeast region, is the second-largest publicly traded healthcare organization in the United States, operating 80 hospitals and more than 180 outpatient centers in 10 states.

Wexler started his career at the University of Hartford in fundraising and community outreach, ultimately being promoted to director of development. He moved to the healthcare profession as vice president for development and community relations at Waterbury Hospital in Waterbury, Conn. Wexler subsequently held many healthcare management positions at MidState Medical Center in Meriden, Conn., and LifeBridge Health in Baltimore, Md., and was president and chief executive officer of investor-owned Vanguard Health’s Saint Vincent Hospital.

Wexler has a BA with a major in sociology and an MBA from the University of Hartford. In 2013 he received an Honorary Doctor of Sciences from the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences. He is a trustee for Anna Maria College and the Massachusetts Hospital Association.
Green was recruited from the Governor’s School for the Arts in Norfolk, Va., by Joanna Levy, an associate professor in Hartt’s Vocal Performance Department and chair of the department at that time. She remembers an early conversation with him about his unusual name.

“We noticed that while we were calling him ‘Ryan,’ the other students were calling him ‘Speedo,’” recalls Levy. “When he told me he planned to perform under the name Ryan Speedo Green, I wasn’t sure that the opera world was ready for that. I suggested to him that Ryan Green was a wonderful name.

“He said, ‘No. My name is Ryan Speedo Green.’ Here he was, talking to his college professor, and he already knew he was going to make it on his own terms.

“And of course, he was totally correct,” she adds with a smile.

Green received a full, four-year scholarship to Hartt in 2004. Here, he was nurtured by the entire vocal faculty in everything from developing his voice to developing good study habits. He then went on to earn a Master of Music in performance from Florida State University in Tallahassee, Fla.

Now approaching 30, Green has an impressive stage presence, standing six feet five and weighing around 300 pounds. He is in his final year of the three-year Lindemann Young Artist Development Program at the Metropolitan Opera, for which he was competitively chosen in 2011.

Green was also one of five winners at the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in 2011. The competition, which began early in January that year with some 1,200 entrants performing at venues around the country, has been likened to the American Idol of opera. Writer Daniel Bergner documented the competition with a focus on Green for The New York Times Magazine’s May 22, 2011, issue in an article called “Sing for Your Life.”

This past April, Green received a 2014 Leonore Annenberg Fellowship Fund for the Performing and Visual Arts grant that will provide $50,000 a year for two years to support the development of his voice. Opera singers spend years training their voices, learning to sing in foreign languages, developing a stage presence, acting, and more. Levy likens the training in terms of length, expense, and rigor to that of a neurosurgeon.

Green made his Met debut in the 2012–13 season singing the Mandarin in Turandot and the Second Knight in a new production of Parsifal. He returned in the 2013–14 season to sing the Bonze in Madama Butterfly and the Jailer in Tosca. For the 2014–15 season, Green will become a full company member of the revered Wiener Staatsoper (Vienna State Opera).

Green’s rise from a childhood spent in a trailer park and low-income housing in southeastern Virginia to the Metropolitan Opera stage is unusual, to say the least. He very nearly slipped through Fortune’s fingers, but a class trip while attending the Governor’s School for the Arts helped him find his destiny.

On that trip to New York City, Green attended his first opera, Carmen. When he heard the toreador’s aria, sung by black opera singer Denyce Graves, and the audience’s response, he was hooked. Afterwards he told the choral director at Governor’s, the late Robert Brown, that he was going to sing on that stage someday.

And so he did.

To hear Green singing in the George London Competition earlier this year, go to hartford.edu/ryan-speedo-green.