

VOICE FACULTY

Elisa Fraser Wilson, DMA, Director of Choral Activities

Dr. Elisa Fraser Wilson joined the faculty in 1998. She conducts the Concert Chorale, Chamber Singers, and Children's Choir and also directs the UTEP Choral Union, which performs masterworks with the El Paso Symphony Orchestra. She is the head of the Conducting Area and holds degrees in Choral Music Education, Voice Performance, and Choral Conducting and Literature from the University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign (BS, DMA), and Wichita State University (MM).



Brian Downen, MM, Voice, Choir, Voice Area Coordinator

Brian Downen joined the music faculty of the University of Texas at El Paso in 2014. He holds an MM and AD in vocal performance from Yale University. As an operatic tenor, Prof. Downen has performed more than 80 leading roles in productions for opera houses in the U.S., Europe and Canada, including The Metropolitan Opera.



Cherry Duke, AD, Voice, Director of Opera

Mezzo-soprano Cherry Duke joined the music faculty in 2015. She has performed more than 60 operatic roles around the US. She received degrees in Voice and Opera Performance from Texas Woman's University and The Hartt School at the University of Hartford. Duke also serves as the Artistic Director for El Paso Opera.



Diana Esparza, MM, Voice, Diction, Border Music

Soprano Diana Esparza joined the music faculty in 2016. Previously, she was on the voice faculty of the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez. She was choir director and Fine Arts Concerts coordinator for seven years at Henderson Middle School in El Paso. She earned her B.M. in Music Education and M.M. in Vocal Performance from UTEP.



Phillip Hill, DMA, Voice, Pedagogy, Song Literature

Dr. Phillip D. Hill, baritone, joined the voice faculty in 2018. He holds DMA and MM degrees in Voice Performance from the University of Texas at Austin and a BA degree in voice performance from Mississippi College. His career includes international performances of operatic and oratorio roles and extensive teaching experience at the university level.



Alexander Kariotis, MM, Voice, Commercial Music

Tenor Alexander Kariotis joined the faculty in 2017. He has taught voice and coached/music directed extensively at The Paper Mill Playhouse. He has had a thriving private voice studio and vocal/recording studio for almost two decades. His students have performed in film, opera, and musical theater in the US and Europe, including on Broadway.



Elvin Porflit, MM, Choir, Conducting

Elvin Porflit joined the faculty in 2019 and previously served as the Choral Director of Jefferson High School. He also serves as the Minister of Music for First Baptist Church. Mr. Porflit earned his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Music Education from UTEP.



Annie Pennies, MM, Voice

Mezzo-soprano Annie Pennies joined the faculty in 2025. She holds degrees from New Mexico State University and Arizona State University and has professional experience performing opera and musical theatre. She was previously on the voice and opera faculty of NMSU.



April 2024: Opera UTEP performed excerpts from the opera, CARMEN, with the UTEP Symphony Orchestra.

The University of Texas at El Paso Department of Music

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music.utep.edu

utep.edu/voice

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  [utepvoice](https://www.instagram.com/utepvoice)



SINGING at UTEP



Admission & Scholarship Auditions

Saturday, February 21, 2026

Monday, March 23, 2026

For more information about auditions, visit

utep.edu/musicauditions

or

text **Audition2026** to **855-751-9964**

Text the word UTEP to (915) 207-2481 for more information.

DEGREES OFFERED

UNDERGRADUATE

- Bachelor of Music in Performance
- Bachelor of Music in Music Education
- Bachelor of Music in Commercial Music
- Bachelor of Music in Theory & Composition
- Bachelor of Arts in Music Technology

GRADUATE

- Master of Music in Performance
- Master of Music in Education
- Master of Music in Choral Conducting
(also available online)

RECENT & UPCOMING EVENTS

2025

- **April:** UTEP Concert Chorale in Concert featuring the music of Jocelyn Hagen and Timothy Takach.
- **September:** Opera UTEP's annual ¡Celebración! concert with Metropolitan Opera baritone, Levi Hernandez
- **October:** UTEP Concert Chorale performs music of Eric Whitacre with the El Paso Symphony Orchestra
- **October:** The UTEP Symphony Orchestra and Concert Chorale perform side-by-side with the Orquesta and Coro Esperanza Azteca and internationally known tenor Fernando de la Mora.
- **December:** UTEP Choral Union performs holiday favorites with the El Paso Symphony Orchestra

2026

- **January:** Opera UTEP and El Paso Opera present master classes with guest artists from EPO's production of *La Boheme*
- **April:** UTEP Choral Union performs *Carmina Burana* with the El Paso Symphony Orchestra

Visit music.utep.edu for the complete UTEP Music Events Calendar.



CLASSICAL VOICE

UTEP boasts a world-class voice faculty and offers students a variety of courses that promote a strong technical and pedagogical foundation. Students have access to a number of performing opportunities including several choirs, Opera Workshop, Commercial Music Ensemble, Mariachi los Mineros, Early Music Ensemble, weekly area recitals, studio classes, and guest artist master classes.

COMMERCIAL VOICE

The commercial singer at UTEP is taught a strong foundation in classical voice in addition to learning to sing a variety of commercial styles. As their study progresses, their repertoire is further geared toward the individual's commercial strengths. Additionally, all commercial music majors take courses in music technology, music business, arranging, improvisation, and recording. UTEP's state-of-the-art recording studio gives students hands-on engineering and recording experience.

CHOIR

UTEP's choirs include Cantare (SSA chorus), Singing Miners (TB chorus), the Concert Chorale, and Chamber Singers. Since 2015, the UTEP Chamber Singers have traveled every other year to Leeds, England, for a week-long residency in the Leeds Cathedral. In 2020 and 2023, the Concert Chorale was invited to perform at the Texas Music Educators Association annual conference in San Antonio. The UTEP Choirs also enjoy regular collaboration with the El Paso Symphony Orchestra and other regional orchestras. All students are welcome to participate in Cantare and the Singing Miners, while the Chorale and Chamber Singers are selected by audition.

OPERA

Students in the Opera Workshop class ("Opera UTEP") perform in the fall and spring. Scenes from lyric theater (including opera, operetta, zarzuela and musical theater) as well as one-act and full-length operas are produced, according to the needs and abilities of the students enrolled in the class. Opera UTEP enjoys a close partnership with El Paso Opera, offering students opportunities to perform in mainstage shows and/or as Junior Artists or Artist Ambassadors.

SOLO OPPORTUNITIES

The importance of successful solo performance is a high priority for the Voice Area at the UTEP Department of Music. In addition to repertoire and technique growth, students work with faculty in the topics of musical expression, stage presence, and performance anxiety to provide a challenging yet positive arena for performance. Weekly studio master classes are held to provide supportive commentary and tips for achievement in music performance. The Voice Area also provides weekly recital opportunities, as well as outreach performances in the community. Many students also choose to compete as soloists at National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) conferences.

GUEST ARTISTS & MASTER CLASSES

UTEP's Voice Area presents residencies, master classes, and talks with nationally and internationally recognized guest artists, including

- **Singers from Broadway, international opera stages, and popular music:** Frederica von Stade, Kevin Burdette, Levi Hernandez, Danielle Talamantes, Cecilia Duarte, Dr. Randall Bills, Luis Orozco, Carlos Conde, Ryan Silverman, Kim Onah, Linedy Genao, Jonathan Hays
- **Conductors and Vocal Coaches:** Pablo Zinger (Zarzuela expert), Brian DeMaris (Anchorage Opera), Steven Crawford (Metropolitan Opera), Dr. James Welsch (El Paso Youth Symphony), Dr. Chester Alwes (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), Jessica Corbin (Bella Voce Singers, NYC)
- **Composers:** Maria Thompson Corley (*The Fox and the Cookie*), Jorge Martin (*El Paso Requiem, Before Night Falls*), 9 Horses, Michael Engelhardt (Walton Music), John Berners (University of Indianapolis)
- **Acting Coaches:** Justin Lucero (Carnegie Mellon University), Jay Stratton (UTEP Theater), Adam Zarowski (Teatro Neplanta), Rebecca Rivas (Theater Squared), Alan Hicks (Shreveport Opera)
- **Performance Anxiety Counselor:** Ingela Onstad, MM, MA, LMHC, CPC



For questions, contact Brian Downen, Voice Area Coordinator: bgdownen@utep.edu (915) 747-6352