



Most of us will probably never win a Grammy Award, or a Pulitzer, a Tony or an Academy Award, or may never even be nominated. But that does not mean that the music we make is unworthy of national recognition and reward. I am proud to be chief judge of the The American Prize—because it is the national competition for the rest of us.

We all know that excellence in the arts is not restricted to the famous names, or limited to a single city on either coast, or reserved only for the top graduates of the most prestigious schools. It is not necessary to be well-connected to achieve greatness. In America, it is not location nor pedigree, but talent, love of the art, hard work and commitment that makes the difference.

During my career, I have had the privilege of guest conducting orchestras, choruses, bands and opera companies all over the country—not just professionals, but school, church and community ensembles, and not only in big cities. Whether in the deep south, the far west, the heartland, or on the coasts, I have encountered inspiring artists entertaining audiences, educating young people, enriching communities and contributing to the quality of life.

*Maybe you are one of them.*

If only The American Prize had existed a little earlier in my career! When I was conducting a community orchestra and a church choir in Hartford, Connecticut, I would have applied. I would have wanted to know how my groups stacked up to similar ensembles elsewhere in the country. Were we really as good as I thought we were?

When I was leading a youth orchestra in Elgin, Illinois, and a community chorus in Libertyville, I would have applied. I thought some of my programming choices were inspired. Would conductors from across the country think so, too?

When I was music director of a professional orchestra in a tiny town in Southern Michigan, I would have applied. In Adrian, my symphony roared through some of the greatest pieces ever written and the audiences roared back their approval. I wanted people all across the country to know what amazing things we were doing—how well—and where.

And for twenty-eight years now, I've also conducted an orchestra of lawyers in Chicago. Of course, I would have applied. Because, what if we had won?

What if your audience, donors or membership woke up to the news that you had just won The American Prize, judged to be the finest in the country in your category, chosen by an impartial panel of experienced professionals from all across the United States? There would be prize money, of course, but more important would be the bragging rights, to be emblazoned next year on your brochure, or printed in your church newsletter, or announced at the next faculty meeting. There would be the award certificate hanging proudly in your rehearsal room, office or auditorium lobby; there would be articles in newspapers and magazines pointing to your winning performances, all linked on The American Prize website.

If winning The American Prize might help you sell more tickets, or build your base of donors, or aid recruitment, or enhance your resume, or solidify your position, or add to your press coverage; if you have wished there were a way for your work to be recognized by someone in addition to your audience, board, parents or pastor; if winning might be the shot in the arm you and your group

needs, reminding everyone in your community that what you do every day matters profoundly—then you should apply.

The American Prize is here to stay. It is an annual competition that is going to continue to grow in visibility and prestige. This spring, somebody (a whole group of somebodies) is going to win The American Prize and be recognized for artistic achievement.

*Why not you?*

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*David Katz is chief judge of the non-profit The American Prize. Professional conductor, playwright and actor, award-winning composer and arts advocate, he believes deeply in the mission of The American Prize to recognize and reward excellence in the arts wherever in America it is found.*

WEBSITE: [www.theamericanprize.org](http://www.theamericanprize.org)

BLOG: [theamericanprize.blogspot.com](http://theamericanprize.blogspot.com)

EMAIL: [TheAmericanPrz@aol.com](mailto:TheAmericanPrz@aol.com)

