

Honorary Degree Committee End of Year Report 2024-2025

The committee was composed of Rebecca Boni (SON), Elizabeth Delorme-Axford (CAS), Jessica Payette (CAS), Jeffrey Youngquist (CAS), Robert Del Greco (CAS), Yin Y-Thompson (SBA), David Kidger (CAS-sabbatical replacement), Rasika Vanagutte (graduate student) and Am Banes-Berceli (EVPAA designee, Chair). The committee met in the Fall and the Spring to review candidates that were submitted in response to the university -wide call.

The Honorary Degree Committee is charged to consider and recommend candidates for honorary degrees, according to the criteria and procedures specified by the Oakland University Board of Trustees.

Based on feedback from the President we amended the review criteria this cycle. The new criteria placed more emphasis on the level of achievement in their field. More weight was given to the overall impact of the individual's work with preference being given to those with more national reputation.

We had 13 nominations this year and decided after consultation with the President's Office to move forward with three nominations. The other qualified candidates were kept in the pool for future consideration. The three chosen candidates were of a national and international caliber while the other candidates were much more local in their scope of work and impact. To ensure the gravitas of the awards no more than one per ceremony will be considered. We anticipate one award in the December ceremonies and two in the April/May ceremonies.

The candidates are:

1. Laurie Marker

Dr. Marker is internationally recognized as a pioneering leader in wildlife conservation, a distinguished researcher, and an influential advocate for sustainable coexistence between humans and wildlife. It is not understating her importance to suggest that she is the "Jane Goodall" for conservation of the cheetah. Dr. Marker founded and serves as the Executive Director of the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF), an organization globally respected for its groundbreaking efforts to prevent the extinction of the cheetah. Under her leadership, the CCF has implemented innovative conservation strategies, including influential community-based programs that effectively mitigate human-wildlife conflicts. Her work has had profound impacts on the local economies, culture and the cheetah. Her tireless dedication has directly contributed to the stabilization and growth of cheetah populations in Namibia and has inspired similar initiatives worldwide, notably in Somaliland and India, where she actively leads efforts to combat illegal wildlife trade and promote cheetah conservation.

Dr. Marker's prolific academic and public contributions further underline her extraordinary impact. She has authored numerous peer-reviewed scientific articles, advancing knowledge in conservation biology, animal behavior, and sustainable ecosystem management. Her visionary approaches to conservation have earned global recognition, as evidenced by her extensive feature in reputable media platforms, documentaries, and educational films such as "Born to Explore: Namibia – Land of the Cheetah" and "League of Exploradores." Her acclaimed book, "A Future for Cheetahs," further reflects her commitment to education and global outreach.

Recognizing Dr. Marker with an honorary degree from Oakland University would not only acknowledge her exceptional accomplishments but also serve to inspire current and future generations of students, conservationists, and global citizens. Her life's work embodies the principles of innovation, leadership, and humanitarian service that Oakland University celebrates. The committee suggested, and I support, that she be considered to give the Varner Vitality Lecture as part of her visit.

It is our suggestion, with your approval, that Dr. Marker should be awarded a Doctor of Science, *honoris causa* from the College of Arts and Sciences at the 2 PM ceremony on May 2, 2026. Should you determine that a more appropriate (different) degree be awarded or at a different ceremony, the Honorary Degree Committee supports your recommendation (without further review).

2. Anika Noni Rose

Ms. Rose demonstrates the high level of achievement and leadership this award is meant to recognize, as evidenced by a remarkable career in the performing arts. Her professional accomplishments and expertise have been recognized through winning a Tony Award for her performance as Emmie Thibodeaux in *Caroline, or Change*, and for being nominated for a Tony Award for her performance as Beneatha Younger in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Rose has earned an AFI Ensemble Award, a SAG Award nomination and a Grammy Award nomination for her performance as Lorell Robinson in "Dreamgirls". In addition, Rose is a nine-time NAACP Image Award nominee. Rose has voiced many audiobooks, performed sold out concerts, and has sung at Carnegie Hall and the Vatican. For her many outstanding achievements, we seek to honor Anika Noni Rose through the conferral of an honorary degree from Oakland University.

Anika Noni Rose has more than 70 film and tv credits and is best known for voicing 'Princess Tiana' in Disney's *The Princess and The Frog*, which featured the first African American Disney 'Princess'. Rose has authored a children's book based on this character, "Tiana's Perfect Plan", to help children deal with disappointment. In 2019, Rose was named as the Colonial Williamsburg Revolutionary in Residence for her portrayals of strong, female characters which have empowered and inspired audiences. Rose received her MFA from American Conservatory Theater and holds an honorary Doctorate from Florida A&M University.

Anika Noni Rose has five Broadway rolls to her credit with four off-Broadway rolls to her credit. Rose will have a lead role in the upcoming Encores! Production of *Wonderful Town* which will run in New York City Center from April 30 through May 11, 2025. Rose's professional success and trailblazing performances are an example for Oakland University students and alumni. Her keynote address at the Keeper of the Dream awards celebration this past January inspired our students, faculty, staff and guests in attendance. Rose has distinguished herself as a leader in her field.

It is our suggestion, with your approval, that Anika be awarded a Doctor of Arts, honoris causa from the College of Arts and Sciences at the School of Music, Theater and Dance ceremony at the 9 AM on May 2, 2026. Should you determine that a more appropriate degree be awarded or at a different ceremony, the Honorary Degree Committee supports your recommendation (without further review).

3. Leonard Slatkin

As a former Music Director of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and its current Music Director Laureate, Maestro Slatkin has demonstrated the highest level of achievement in raising the cultural scene of the Detroit Metropolitan area to a qualitatively new level and making a lasting impact on musicians and music lovers in Southeast Michigan, in the United States, and globally. For his numerous outstanding achievements in performance, orchestral training, recording, music education, and scholarship, and in celebration of his 80th anniversary, it is appropriate to honor Leonard Slatkin through the conferral of an honorary degree from Oakland University.

Leonard Slatkin was born to a family of prominent musicians, including his father, Felix, an American violinist and conductor. Slatkin studied at Indiana University, City College of Los Angeles, and finally at the prestigious Juilliard School in New York. His conducting career began in 1966 with the New York Youth Symphony, followed by appointments as the assistant conductor of the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra and music director of the New Orleans Symphony.

In 1979, Maestro Slatkin started his 17-year tenure at the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra. His dedication resulted in the orchestra attaining national acclaim and securing numerous prestigious recording contracts with Telarc, RCA, and EMI. His impact on the hitherto regional orchestra is self-evident. Under Slatkin's baton, the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra won seven Grammy awards, including those for the best classical orchestral recording of Prokofiev's 5th Symphony (1984) and Barber's 1st Symphony and Piano Concerto (1991). Slatkin's Saint Louis years highlighted the virtues that make him stand out among conductors of several generations. Slatkin established himself as a conductor of a universal scope from standard orchestral repertoire (Beethoven, Brahms, Tchaikovsky) to contemporary classical music, including

living composers. His recording legacy of American classical music (Copland, Bernstein, Piston, Anderson, Barber, Hanson, Williams, Bolcom, Gershwin) is virtually unparalleled in the output of any single conductor. It indicates his rare ability to explore the repertoire without prejudice and bring to light undeservedly neglected works through the highest level of musicianship reflected in his universally excellent discography. Altogether, Slatkin premiered 220 compositions of contemporary classical composers. Slatkin's work with several major orchestras in the United Kingdom, first and foremost the BBC Concert Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, and Philharmonia Orchestra, is a remarkable display of transcending the boundaries of national pride and superstition. It is unparalleled that an American conductor would set a standard in the recorded history of the music by Elgar and Vaughan Williams and offer an exemplary rendition of Haydn's London symphonies.

Leonard Slatkin's 10-year tenure with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (2008-2018) was an exemplary combination of superb musicianship, community building and engagement, and global outreach. His recording legacy with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra shows the same strengths as those in Saint Louis. However, several aspects of his Detroit tenure are unique. In Detroit, he perfected the ability to intelligently plan not only individual concerts but entire seasons by thoughtfully combining the hallmarks of the orchestral repertoire with the works of living American composers, including several world premieres. Following the six-month strike in the 2010-2011 season, he rebuilt the orchestra and made it "a point of civic pride" by launching a free world wide web streaming of its concerts.

In addition to being a conductor of national and international acclaim, Leonard Slatkin is a prolific author. He has written five books on conducting and numerous articles and reviews. His remarkable achievements translate into pedagogy through his teaching at the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University. Maestro Slatkin maintained a valuable connection with Oakland University through the Meadow Brook Music Festival, including his appearance with DSO and the music of Beethoven, Gershwin, and Bolcom over several seasons of this event on the Oakland University grounds.

Maestro Slatkin's impact on the culture scene of the Detroit Metropolitan area and Oakland University is lasting and profound. His achievements as a world-class conductor, scholar, pedagogue, and community builder make him worthy of being conferred an honorary degree from our school.

Submitted by Amy Banes-Berceli on behalf of the Honorary Degree Committee