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The genesis of cultivated choral tone in the United States (1906-1928): Peter C. Lutkin, F. Melius Christiansen, and John Finley Williamson

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Dissertation

THE GENESIS OF CULTIVATED CHORAL TONE
IN THE UNITED STATES (1906–1928): PETER C. LUTKIN,
F. MELIUS CHRISTIANSEN AND JOHN FINLEY WILLIAMSON

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to chronicle the genesis of cultivated choral tone in the United States from 1906 to 1928. That transformation was led by three conductors whose disparate careers represented a shared trajectory. Individually and collectively, they pioneered two singing genres with European provenance — *a cappella* and *senza vibrato* singing — as early techniques to isolate and refine choral tone. Their work converged in 1928, when it expanded to become the American *A Cappella Movement* (1928–1938).

The earliest of the three conductors was Peter C. Lutkin (1858–1931). After study in Europe, he became dean of the School of Music at Northwestern University. Through his publications and university *a cappella* choir, founded in 1906, he placed greater responsibility on singers, and employed diction and breath control to improve intonation and tonal purity.

German-educated Norwegian-American F. Melius Christiansen (1871–
1955) was guided by his experience as a violinist and influenced by the choir of St. Thomas Church, Leipzig, Germany. In 1907, he began to gradually transform the choir of St. John’s Lutheran Church choir in Northfield, Minnesota. By 1920, his St. Olaf Lutheran Choir toured nationwide and eventually epitomized a choral prototype through his publications, compositions, ideology, and methods, both original and derivative. Self-reliant and confident, Christiansen championed Russian choral literature, symphonic form for programming, and self-referential choral singing. His “inner choir” technique, “instrumental” tuning for choirs, and “conductorless” onset of tone were widely imitated. Spiritual beliefs undergirded his work.

Originally inspired by Christiansen, Ohioan John Finley Williamson (1887–1964), a trained singer, cultivated choral tone by recontextualizing solo vocal Lamperti technique into choral methods. In 1920, he modeled his ensemble’s results via national tours with his Dayton Westminster Choir. By 1926, he co-founded a choir school in a Dayton church where he implemented his theory of the choral rehearsal as a class voice lesson. His unorthodox tenets included his belief that vowels were controlled by volume and phrase conducting, that vowel color was dictated by overtones, and that a conflict existed between time beating and “rhythmic magic” (or “pace”).
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background, Context, and Rationale

Choral history in the United States is not a well-wrought narrative. Rather, it is a story with significant gaps, as historians have focused on certain chronological periods and neglected others. One historical interlude that has not been carefully chronicled, involves the first quarter of the twentieth century. Before those years, during the entire nineteenth century, as in the eighteenth century, American choral singing existed in an uncultivated state amidst both political and social upheaval. Perhaps unexpectedly, in the twentieth century, during the decade of the 1930s, the choral art was ostensibly in a very different place. Our present choral histories encourage a kind of “fast-forwarding” from the late nineteenth century to 1930 mostly omitting the beginning of such a transformation. This has resulted in an incomplete and confusing account that picks up again at the beginning of the Great Depression.

That era (the decade of the 1930s) encompassed what might be referred to here as the American *A Cappella* Movement (hereafter referred to as the AACM), from 1928 through 1938. During this period, much of American choral music education, including secondary, collegiate, and university levels, became
increasingly interested in and involved with the performance of unaccompanied choral music. As the movement gained momentum, its proponents promoted an “a cappella ideal”: a standard of choral perfection, beauty, and excellence. It was during the 1930s; a cappella singing exemplified that aesthetic prototype and became a model for emulation for choral educators throughout the United States. Despite a shifting focus during World War II, from 1939 to 1945, the decade from 1928 to 1938 generated a foundation after which the choral developments of the rest of the twentieth century followed.

What has not been explained is that such a movement had an extended prologue—a long beginning involving the widespread cultivation of choral tone. The present study asks: How and why did this happen?

This study is not an examination of the AACM, but rather the choral developments preceding it. The AACM did not materialize suddenly, but rather emerged progressively from 1906–1928, encouraged by disparate cultural, ecclesiastical, and aesthetic factors. For that reason, the movement is mentioned in this introduction as it represents a rationale for this research, which examines only one chronological segment of a continuum—the earliest years of choral evolution in twentieth-century America. It might be proposed here, that without this period of evolution, such a movement might never have manifested in the way that it did. Many individuals were involved in that
transformation, but three stand out above all others. These collegiate conductors represented the most significant choral “game changers” of the early 20th century. They were Peter Christian Lutkin of Northwestern University (Evanston, Illinois); F. Melius Christiansen of St. Olaf Lutheran College (Northfield, Minnesota); and John Finley Williamson of Westminster Choir College (Princeton, New Jersey). The choral evolution proposed here subsequently spread from collegiate to high school music education approximately between the years 1906 to 1928, only to expand rapidly across the country during the decade of the 1930s, diminishing slightly with the onset of World War II.

Providing a context and rationale for choral advancement from 1906–1928 does not only involve the period after this era. Pinpoints of transformation were evident even before the turn of the twentieth century and cannot be left out of the equation. Because of their limited influence, those forerunners of choral change might be referred to as second tier players in a world of uncultivated choral tone. Literature from the period indicates that the beginning of American choral cultivation was a gradual process involving critical support from national music education leaders such as George Oscar Bowen, Peter William Dykema, and Nobel Cain, who continually disseminated information and ideas about choral singing and a cappella choral music and
encouraged choral evolution in the early years of the twentieth century.

In his study of nineteenth century music, music historian Alfred Einstein proposed that nineteenth century music was no longer “a period of great vocal composition.”¹ Chester L. Alwes, explains that Einstein, “based that judgment on his belief that the large-scale choral works written in that century presented nothing new, only a continuation of genres (mass, oratorio, requiem, motet, etc.) already well established in the preceding century. He dismissed the nineteenth century’s singular contribution to choral repertory – the part-song – as mere musical trifles designed to engage and entertain a new class of amateur singers.”² Alwes goes on to mention that there is an element of truth in Einstein’s assessment, even though he failed to consider the new political, economic, and social realities to which composers of the time were responding. In other words, Einstein did not consider how the new cosmology of the nineteenth century transformed the nature of choirs and the music they sang.

Across the pond, in one large American urban center, seeds of a different type of change were being planted which would slowly expose the public to a cappella music in a time when oratorios sung by choral societies

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were, as Alwes noted, the order of the day. Great cities were attractive to those European immigrants who were eager to embrace the freedoms that America promised along with an urban receptivity toward European musical values. A few of those settlers wasted no time in attempting to bring their ideals to the New World. One of these was Walter Damrosch (1862–1950), a German immigrant and prominent conductor of the Musical Art Society of New York, who helped set the stage for the AACM with his late 19th century *a cappella* music making in New York City. For beginning in 1894, he introduced unaccompanied choral music to that metropolitan center at a time in which it was not only unknown but probably considered to be avant-garde.

Later, in the early twentieth century, another New York City choral ensemble led by Margarete Dessoff, an immigrant from Frankfurt, Germany, reinforced Damrosch’s work by promoting unaccompanied singing beginning in 1924, first with her Adesdi chorus of women’s voices. By 1929, the group was a mixed ensemble calling itself the A Cappella Singers of New York. The ensemble changed its name to the "The Dessoff Choir" in 1930. Two principles guided Dessoff in her work with her choir: the commitment to present music

3. Ibid.


that would not otherwise be heard in the ordinary course of musical events, and a pledge to provide an opportunity for talented amateurs to sing some of the world’s finest choral masterpieces. In her work, she introduced New York audiences to composers such as Machaut, Lassus, Josquin des Prez, Victoria, Schütz, and Monteverdi.6

From the late nineteenth century and well into the early twentieth century, choral singing in schools, colleges, and universities was largely associated with a popular and deeply entrenched glee club tradition. From 1900–1925, several well-known educators (including the three conductors examined by this study) were actively involved in transitioning that social-musical activity toward an academic approach to the choral art. One of the most significant was Harvard Glee Club conductor Archibald T. Davison. His advocacy took the form of writings, publications, and musical practices.7 Davison’s glee club frequently sang a cappella repertoire during the early years of the century including much early music by composers such as Palestrina, Dufay, Josquin, and Victoria. His 1926 book Music Education in America displays his criticisms of status quo music pedagogy and suggestions for transforming choral education in the United States. Those widely disseminated ideas on


educational and artistic achievement were influential in promoting the changes that took place in the 1930s.

As previously mentioned, certain national music education leaders provided critical support to the work of the three conductors treated by this study. That advocacy continued long after the years of the AACM. One important architect of such change was past Music Educators National Conference president George Oscar Bowen. His Herculean effort to promote *a cappella* singing throughout the land before, during, and after his 1928 MENC presidency was crucial for infusing a burgeoning AACM with meaning for music educators. Fourteen years later, after World War II, his text *Song and Speech* (1952), a co-coordinated course in the fundamental production and use of the voice for good singing and speech, proceeded from the author’s experiences during the first quarter of the 20th century.8

While this study focuses exclusively on the chronological period between 1906 and 1928, the years of the AACM were the fruits of a twenty-two year period of cultivation of the American choral art, which preceded that nationwide trend. The pre-AACM era represents a conduit between the late nineteenth century and the 1930s—a period in which choral tone began to evolve in schools, colleges, and universities. During that time, the way in which

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choral musicians, choristers, and the public thought about choirs and choral music evolved considerably. As a reaction to that choral revolution, during the 1930s, a majority of the nation’s educational institutions performed *a cappella* music. According to a 1933 survey of coeducational institutions, 28% had ensembles with the words "*a cappella choir*" in their title.\(^9\) It is likely that more performed primarily *a cappella* choral music. In addition, the movement provided musical opportunities for increasing numbers of students after 1928. For example, in 1930, Edward Moore of the *Chicago Herald Tribune* noted that the “*A Cappella Chorus*” of the city’s Nicholas Senn High School numbered 450 members, marking unprecedented participation.\(^10\) The AACM introduced *a cappella* choral singing to the U.S., involved millions of individuals during the 1930s, and further evolved from the changes begun from 1906 to 1928. Because of this focus on unaccompanied music during the decade of the 1930s, the present study necessarily examines the roots of this curious American *a cappella* phenomenon.

The remarkable sociocultural environment in which the *a cappella* trend

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9. Forrest Eugene Albert, “Curriculum Practices in Music in Senior High Schools” (MM thesis, Northwestern University, 1938), 101. Albert’s study surveyed 477 secondary schools in cities with a population from 13,000 to 35,000. The returns from 133 secondary schools showed that 28% had “a cappella choirs.”

10. Edward Moore, “Choral Singers of Senn High Set New Mark,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 May 1930, 33. With more than 400 choristers, Chicago’s Nicholas Senn High School A Cappella Choir was so large that it had to rehearse in the rehearsal hall used by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.
of the 1930s took place was the Great Depression (1929–1939). Instead of a reduction or total cessation in the activity, amount, quality, and force of choral singing, the reverse occurred. The choral changes during this time occurred at all levels of vocal music making including high schools, colleges, and universities. This was an era in which there were few boundaries between educational levels and a considerable flux between conductors in secondary schools and collegiate and university music makers. Written accounts from the time demonstrate a positive approach from national MSNC leaders and other music educators. These individuals focused upon pedagogical goals and intentions rather than financial challenges. For example, some secondary school music teachers worked without salaries during this economic crisis and the choral publishing business, largely supported by schools, grew in size.¹¹

The changes that the AACM brought to American music education were many and long lasting. Before its rise, choral music in America consisted of gender-segregated glee clubs and mixed-voice assembly sings, both extracurricular activities. During the AACM, college and secondary school choral educators encouraged students think differently about music for the first time. As a result, Glee clubs and assembly sings were eventually recast as mixed-voice ‘a cappella choirs’ or mixed-voice choirs that sang primarily

unaccompanied music. In these ensembles, instruction in sight singing and music fundamentals was encouraged by some educators using new materials developed by leaders of the AACM. The phenomenon also gave importance to choral music as an academic subject. As a result, after 1928, universities, colleges, and high schools across the nation increasingly offered academic credit for vocal music study.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to chronicle the genesis of cultivated choral tone from 1906 to 1928. That transformation was led by three conductors whose disparate and highly individual careers represented a shared trajectory. Individually and collectively, they pioneered two singing genres with European provenance—*a cappella* and *senza vibrato* singing—as early techniques to isolate and refine choral tone. Their work converged in 1928, when it expanded to become the American *A Cappella* Movement (1928–1938).

Research Questions

This research study was guided by the following questions: What factors led Peter C. Lutkin, F. Melius Christiansen, and John Finley Williamson to cultivate choral tone in America from 1906–1928? Why and how did each conductor embrace and promote *a cappella* choral music? How did their pedagogy, performances, and ideals lead to the cultivation of choral singing in
the United States? Which of their specific choral techniques, if any, were key components of the genesis of cultivated choral tone between 1906 and 1928? What was the provenance of choral ideals that influenced the genesis of cultivated choral tone in the United States? How might knowledge about the influence of these conductors on choral singing be of use to choral educators and choral conductors today and in the future?

Delimitations

This inquiry was limited to the chronological period between 1906 and 1928. The boundaries of this period begin with the beginning of the Northwestern University A Cappella Choir created by Peter C. Lutkin in 1906 and extend to the 1928 convention of the Music Supervisors National Conference (MSNC) held in Chicago. That latter event might be considered here to mark the beginning of a nationwide embrace of a cappella singing in schools, colleges, and universities during the decade of the 1930s (the American A Cappella Movement). Though there were indeed other contributors to the early transformation of vocal tone in America before 1928 (outside the limits of this inquiry), the present study focuses exclusively on the early work of three conductors who perhaps had the greatest impact on the first cultivation of choral tone in the United States during this era: Peter C. Lutkin, F. Melius Christiansen, and John Finley Williamson.
Definition of Relevant Terms

A Cappella. In modern usage, the term indicates unaccompanied singing. Translated from the Italian, the descriptor means “in the style of the chapel.” Historically, this refers exclusively to the Sistine Chapel at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome and its choir the “Capella Sistina,” which has always, until the late 20th century, sung without accompaniment. Another form of a cappella, “alla cappella” (similarly translated from the Italian as ‘in church/chapel style’) has sometimes been used in place of a cappella. Less frequently, the term has been spelled “a capella.” That spelling might be traced to Giovanni Gabrieli who used the term “capella” to indicate chorus sections in his music and J. J. Fux, who wrote at length about “Stilus a Capella” in his Gradus ad Parnassum, 1725. 12

Accompanied Repertoire. Choral music supported by an independently composed instrumental part.

12. Johann Joseph Fux, Gradus Ad Parnassum: Sive Manuuctio Ad Compositionem Musicæ Regularem, Methodo Nova Ac Certa, Nondum Ante Tam Exacto Ordine in Lucem Edita [Steps to Mount Parnassus: Or Guidance for Regular Musical Composition, New Certain Methods, Not Previously Published in This Order] (Vienna: Joannis Petri van Ghelen, 1725), 243–273 “De Stylo A Capella]. Within the Stilus ecclesiasticus Fux distinguishes two subgroups: the stilus a Capella immersive pleni chori (the old prima Prattica) and the Stilus mixtus (formerly seconda pratica). The stilus a capella Fux shares again in the stilus a capella absque Organo, et alius instrumentis, the purely vocal a cappella style, and the freer stilus a capella, organo, alisque instrumentis instructus. Fux devotes thirty pages of his 1725 edition of his Gradus to Stilus A Capella, which in the eighteenth century denoted a sacred compositional style. Garratt notes that Fux’s Stilus A Capella was actually a combination of components of strenge Satz (‘strict style’) described in the Gradus with later musical elements that remained in use in south Germany and Austria well into the nineteenth century; James Garratt, Palestrina and the German Romantic Imagination (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3.
Cecilian Movement. A 19th-century German movement (taking its name from St. Cecilia, patron saint of music) for the reform of Roman Catholic Church music. Its roots are from the late 18th century. This trend sought the integration of music and liturgy, promoted the *a cappella* polyphony of the age of Palestrina (later referred to as *stile antico*) and Gregorian chant, together with new polyphonic compositions inspired by this model, and opposed music for solo voice accompanied by orchestra, which had become commonplace following an edict in 1749 of Pope Benedict XIV. Reacting to the liberalization of the Enlightenment, the Cecilians sought to restore traditional religious feeling and the authority of the church. They regarded ‘true, genuine church music’ as being subservient to the liturgy, and the intelligibility of words and music as more important than artistic individuality. The American Cecilian Movement began as an extension of its European counterpart in 1874 with the establishment of the American Caecilian Society. That movement continued until 1965, ending with the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church.13

**Choir.** A group of singers who perform together, either in unison or in sections. The term is derived from the architectural name of the part of a church building where the singers traditionally perform.

**Choral model.** A choir demonstrating characteristics that serves as an example for imitation or emulation by other choirs. These distinguishing traits or qualities can include the choir’s tone, appearance, singing style, diction, seating arrangement, performance style, repertoire, conductor’s style, size, and vocal configuration, etc.

**Glee Club.** The glee club is a choral ensemble with British provenance, traditionally composed of men, but also including women and mixed voices. These groups historically sang short convivial songs called ‘glees’ in trios and quartets. The first glee club was formed in England in 1787. Glee clubs were popular until the 1850’s when they were gradually replaced by the choral society. These ensembles became rare in the U.K. by the 1950’s. American glee clubs are men’s, women’s, and mixed-voice choral ensembles usually associated with educational institutions. Today they exist as choirs or choruses. The oldest glee club in the United States is the Harvard Glee Club, founded in 1858. They organizations were popular in the United States from the middle 19th century until the mid-1920’s, when their presence was impacted by the AACM. Nevertheless, Glee clubs have remained present, viable, and popular in
American high schools and college and university campuses until the present day.\textsuperscript{14}

**Chamber Choir.** A mixed voice ensemble usually limited in number to less than 50 singers. Its use in American music education reflects the desire by secondary school music educators during the 1950’s and 1960’s to identify with the ascendancy of chamber music at that time.

**Homophony** (Homophonic). Homophonic music has one melodic line, the other parts acting as accompaniment. In homophonic music the parts move ‘in step’ with one another instead of exhibiting individual rhythmic independence and interest.\textsuperscript{15}

**Oratorio.** A sacred work for soloists, chorus, and orchestra on a large scale, neither liturgical nor theatrical, but intended for concert performance.\textsuperscript{16}

**Polyphonic.** Referring to polyphony.


**Polyphony.** This term is derived from the Greek polyphōnos (‘many-voiced’) referring to many sounds. In polyphonic music, all or several of the musical parts move to some extent independently. In historical terms, the polyphonic era is defined as 13th–16th cent., but polyphony survived beyond 1700.17

**Senza Vibrato.** The term ‘senza vibrato’ refers to a musical tone sung or played without vibrato. In choral music, this is often a synonym for ‘straight-tone’ (as in straight-tone singing).

**Sight Singing.** The reading or singing of music at first sight in order to perform it.

**Straight-Tone.** A term referring to the absence of vibrato (either sung or played.

**Western Canon.** The Western canon (or Western musical canon) is a term used to refer to music that has been the most influential in shaping Western culture. It asserts a compendium of the ‘greatest works of artistic merit’, which have been historically held in high regard.18

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Overview of Related Literature

*Dissertations, Theses, and Historical Texts*

No dissertations or theses exist which specifically focus on choral transformation in the United States from 1906–1928. Approaching the subject historically, in some instances, means backtracking from the period of the AACM, though this study does not directly focus on that phenomenon. For example, there is a scant amount of literature dealing directly or indirectly with the AACM, written either during the years of that trend. This includes inquiries focusing on related aspects of the movement; and investigations related to transformative aspects of the AACM, before and after the years of the movement.

During height of the AACM, only one dissertation related to the movement was written; it was a study of the status and function of *a cappella* choirs in colleges and universities in the United States. This 1938 inquiry by Wilfrid Bain was limited to choirs and institutions of higher learning bearing the words 'a cappella" in their ensemble title.19 Bain conducted a survey of 400 institutions in the U.S. and received 265 replies. One hundred and thirty five indicated their institutions sponsored ‘*A Cappella* Choirs’ (51%). Bain analyzed a number of traits of these choirs, including selection of singers, choir

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enrollment numbers, rehearsals, singer seating arrangements, concerts and
Tours, apparel, repertoire, training, academic credit, and radio broadcasts. A
Significant amount of this data bears a direct relationship with the choral
evolution of first quarter of the twentieth century. Ruth Steese Zimmerman’s
Master’s thesis from the same year stands as the only thesis chronicling the
same period. Zimmerman used a similar survey to study 178 coeducational
colleges and found that 43% sponsored ‘A Cappella Choirs’. Her inquiry was
primarily concerned with the distribution and demographics of these choirs.20

After World War II, no historical research treated the subject until the
independently generated 1964 dissertations of Richard Kegerreis (University of
Michigan) and Leonard Van Camp (University of Missouri).21 Kegerreis’s focus
is on the of the "High School A Cappella Choir" rather than upon an "A
Cappella Movement." His study does not conceive of a trajectory carrying
influential dimensions of the AACM into the future but he does investigate its
past, which makes it a significant reference for this study. His observations
were made from a chronological distance of 26 years.

Leonard Van Camp’s 1964 dissertation investigates the development and

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20. Ruth Steese Zimmerman, “Choral Music in the American Colleges” (MM thesis,
Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester, 1938), p. 9.

Van Camp,” The Development and Present Status of A Cappella Singing in United States
Colleges and Universities” (DMA diss., University of Missouri at Kansas City, 1964).
status of *a cappella* singing in U.S. colleges and universities. His survey-based inquiry is similar in design to Wilfrid Bain’s 1938 dissertation. Here information was gathered about many aspects of collegiate choirs as of 1964: academic credit, choir size, choir tours, repertoire, use of accompaniment, categorization of choirs, and choral conductors. Van Camp’s study is of value to this research because of his background study of unaccompanied singing in schools and colleges during the early years of the twentieth century, though this period and its choral activities were not the central focus of his research.  

Both Kegerreis and Van Camp published later journal articles distilled from portions of their 1964 dissertations. One of Kegerreis’s articles (1966) was a short summary about the aspects of the movement. *The Choral Journal* published portions of chapters from the Kegerreis’s dissertation as a series of articles from 1970–1971. Van Camp similarly wrote two journal articles in which he treats aspects of the movement from a broad perspective. Both presented the phenomenon as an historical episode isolated in time, and removed from present choral trends. Noteworthy in this literature review is Robert Reid’s 1983 dissertation focused on the use of Russian Orthodox choral literature by early twentieth-century ‘A Cappella Choirs’. It is important because the three

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23. Robert Addison Reid, “Russian Sacred Choral Music and Its Assimilation into and
conductors upon which this study examines all both performed and promoted this repertoire before the era of the AACM.

Textbooks devoted to the history of music education in the United States are examined here because the devoted little or no attention to choral music in the first quarter of the twentieth century. For example, Edward Bailey Birge’s *History Of Public School Music In The United States* mentions *a cappella* singing three times while never discussing the genesis of cultivated choral tone. Mark and Gary devote one sentence to the AACM in their 1999 edition and eight years later (2007) altered that to mention that choral music was not “equal to that of vocal music and might have overshadowed it if not for the popularity of the *a cappella* choir, following the Flint (Michigan) High School triumph at the first biennial MSNC meeting”. Theodore Tellstrom in *Music in American Education: Past and Present* and James A. Keene in *A History of Music Education in the United States* did not discuss this subject.

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Three Conductors

Historical research on American choral music between 1906 and 1928 reveals three conductors who both collectively and individually transformed the way American choral musicians and audiences think about the topic. One researcher who suggested this was Van Camp, who pointed to the directors of three of the earliest *a cappella* college choirs in American choral history: Northwestern University, St. Olaf Lutheran College and Westminster Choir College.\(^27\) His 1980 journal article on the rise of American choral music and what he calls an “A Cappella Bandwagon” remains the only publication centering on the AACM of the 1930s after 1964.\(^28\)

The earliest member of this group of three conductors was Peter Christian Lutkin (1889–1971) of Northwestern University who, like Archibald Davison, was significant for his support of new musical values for musical educators. Lutkin’s paper “Certain Relative Values in Music” and a later essay “The Values of A Cappella Singing” (Lutkin, 1923) underscore a broad philosophical shift in choral education, which occurred in the first quarter of

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the twentieth century. Written near the end of his life, Lutkin’s 1930 article “Choral Conditions in America” is a snapshot of the changes taking place during the first two years of the AACM. Statements about his choral tenets are contained in his text American Church Music. These beliefs are also mentioned in his “Musical Times” obituary. The Peter Christian Lutkin Papers in the archives of Northwestern University include biographical material, correspondence, lectures, essays on music education, and addresses that span the years 1889–1928. Additional biographical material (1859–1971) includes general material, i.e. memorabilia, and miscellaneous historical sketches of and clippings relating to Lutkin. Finally, Lutkin’s life and contributions to music are the topic of Pauline Kennel’s 1981 dissertation. This work stresses his function as a choral innovator, performer, scholar, educator, and first Dean of the School of Music at Northwestern University.


The St. Olaf Lutheran Choir under the direction of F. Melius Christiansen (1871–1955) was perhaps the most powerful figure inspiring the AACM. One omission from the research literature is concrete evidence about the German choral ideal inspiring Christiansen. Primary sources revealing his thoughts and *modus operandi* during his earliest years at St. Olaf are valuable for understanding the sounds that shaped the movement. These include Paul G. Schmidt’s narrative account of his firsthand experiences in the St. Olaf Choir as a student under Christiansen as detailed in *My years at St. Olaf: With particular emphasis on my lifelong association with my friend F. Melius Christiansen and the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir.*

Similarly, Leola Bergmann’s chronicle of Christiansen and the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir is based upon her experiences as a student in that ensemble. Bergmann’s anecdotes portray Christiansen honestly revealing the struggles he faced in creating a lasting musical heritage. Her biographical account is based on her 1944 dissertation (authored under her maiden name Nelson). That work focused upon Christiansen’s life and work as a Norwegian-American and contributor to American culture. Albert Johnson’s 1973 dissertation on “The

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36. Leola Nelson Bergmann, “Music Master of the Middle West, the Story of F. Melius...
Christiansen Choral Tradition” connects the works Christiansen with his sons Olaf and Paul. Both sons continued the choral work of their father, Olaf at Oberlin Conservatory and St. Olaf College, and Paul at Concordia College. That study adds weight to the notion of a choral trajectory extending past the years of the AACM into the future.37

Christiansen’s text: School of choir singing: A one-year course in singing for older and newer choirs reveals some of his earliest choral methodology.38 That text, written for use in secondary schools, was popular from 1928–38, as an instructional manual for a cappella choirs. Its content supports the idea that Christiansen was a lifelong proponent of music fundamentals for high school and college choristers. His interest in musical composition, theoretical studies in Germany with his mentor Gustav Schreck, and solid musical background from Norway are revealed in this approach to teaching music theory on an elementary level.

Before and during the AACM, ecclesiastical styles influenced secular music making in public high schools, colleges, and universities. For example,

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38. F. Melius Christiansen, School of Choir Singing (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1916).
educational institutions throughout the country embraced the model of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir and its director. Understanding this choir’s Scandinavian-Lutheran connection sheds light upon many of the changes the ensemble inspired in choral education. Paul Benson’s study *A Cappella Choirs in the Scandinavian-American Lutheran Colleges* provides data concerning the earliest influences of Christiansen and his *a cappella* work at St. Olaf College.\(^\text{39}\)

Similarly, Robert Jennings’ dissertation research focuses on the historical development of choral ensembles in selected Lutheran liberal arts colleges in the United States.\(^\text{40}\) Jennings explores the proposition that Christiansen provided a choral model for over 40 sectarian collegiate choirs in America.

Christiansen’s choral inspiration for his work with the St. Olaf choir proceeded from two residencies in Berlin where he studied with the choral director of St. Thomas’ Church, Leipzig. Since Christiansen only mentioned these experiences to a few close individuals, it is necessary to access other accounts of that German choir to understand their impact upon Christiansen. Richard Petzold’s study of the Leipzig Thomaner Chor provides a background for understanding that organization as it bears connection with Christiansen’s


\[^{40}\text{Robert Lee Jennings, “A Study of the Historical Development of Choral Ensembles in Selected Lutheran Liberal Arts Colleges in the United States” (DMA diss., Michigan State University, 1969).}\]
two residencies in Germany.\textsuperscript{41}

Other period accounts of nineteenth century European choirs include “Letter X” (1854) from Lowell Mason’s \textit{Musical Letters from Abroad}. Here Mason gives detailed information about having heard a choir sing a 9 minute ‘Motette, \textit{without accompaniment}’ on Feb. 29\textsuperscript{th}, 1854.\textsuperscript{42} Michael Broyles’ 1985 journal article on Mason sheds additional light on this subject.\textsuperscript{43} Similar selected information is contained in Rich’s dissertation on Lowell Mason as a music educator and Carol Pemberton’s book on the life and work of Lowell Mason.\textsuperscript{44}

The third member of this group of three conductors, John Finley Williamson (1887–1964) lived and worked well past the A ACM until 1964. A few research studies of his life have been generated. For example, Ray Robinson’s 1981 paper on Williamson is a memorial retrospective written shortly after Williamson’s death. This study makes important comments about Williamson’s place in the ACM as a music educator and communicator of the choral values especially Williamson’s philosophies for teaching amateur choral singers and


\textsuperscript{42} Lowell Mason, \textit{Musical Letters from Abroad: Including Detailed Accounts of the Birmingham, Norwich, and Dusseldorf Musical Festivals of 1852} (New York: Mason Brothers, 1854).


using choral music to raise consciousness.\textsuperscript{45} Another Robinson reference: \textit{John Finley Williamson: A Centennial Appreciation} contains much published archival data from the Williamson archives at Westminster Choir College’s Talbott Library in Princeton, New Jersey.\textsuperscript{46}

Joseph Beck’s compilation of \textit{Selected Writings of John Finley Williamson} from 2004 provides specific information about Williamson’s educational ideas and choral concepts as well as and contextual data about the ACM.\textsuperscript{47} This includes a series of articles for \textit{The Etude} music magazine detailing his specific approaches to vocal technique, conducting, vocal acoustics, and rehearsal techniques. These articles also lay out Williamson’s educational program, which was engineered to duplicate his choral values throughout the country.\textsuperscript{48}

Charles Schisler’s 1976 dissertation \textit{A History of Westminster Choir College} includes a discussion of the relationship between John Finley Williamson and F. Melius Christiansen.\textsuperscript{49} These data are important for making connections


\textsuperscript{47} Joseph Beck, ed. \textit{Selected Writings of John Finley Williamson} (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2004).

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 5.

between the three conductors during this era of unaccompanied singing. Beck’s 1976 article on recordings made by the Westminster Choir from 1926 to 1966 affords a critical look at changes in choral repertoire that took place over this time span.  

Procedures

Heller and Wilson insisted that historical research in music education must “treat questions that contemporary practitioners are concerned about.” With that directive in mind, it can be observed that the decade of the 1930s transformed many facets of the American choral art in America from 1928–1938: repertoire and performance practice, choral techniques, rehearsal techniques, standards of choral performance, traditions, musical meaning for choral students, and characteristics of highly effective choral educators. Many of the changes that took place in American choir singing in the first quarter of the twentieth century involved thinking differently about choral music. In order to appraise how such an evolution of thought occurred, it is beneficial to understand the social, historical, ideological, and cultural contexts in which the learning and teaching of choral music took place between 1906 and 1928. In this study, the construction of a useable past means a scholarly analysis of those contexts.


changes. Those facets of choral music listed above—core aspects of the art—should necessarily concern all contemporary practitioners. Because the evolution of choral thought is an ongoing process, it seems both reasonable and logical that choral conductors and educators might look forward toward efficacy and meaning with a critical eye toward the past.

Techniques

This inquiry employed an historical approach to research. The design of this research will follow six steps for conducting historical research detailed by Charles Busha and Stephen Harter:52

1. The recognition of a historical problem or the identification of a need for certain historical knowledge.

2. The gathering of as much relevant information about the problem or topic as possible.

3. If appropriate, the forming of hypothesis that tentatively explain relationships between historical factors.

4. The rigorous collection and organization of evidence, and the verification of the authenticity and veracity of information and its sources.

5. The selection, organization, and analysis of the most pertinent collected evidence, and the drawing of conclusions; and

6. The recording of conclusions in a meaningful narrative.

Historiographic techniques will be used to evaluate evidence and present it in a meaningful context. The design and parameters of this historical study are based upon the research questions which are embedded in the inquiry’s overarching problem statement: “In what ways was the American Choral Art recontextualized from 1906 to 1928?” Procedures used for this historical research study involve the critical examination of written material, which includes primary and secondary sources.

Finding and assessing primary historical data is an exercise in detective work. It involves logic, intuition, persistence, and common sense. Potential primary sources for this study were located in libraries; specific archives related to individuals studied in this inquiry; archives of regional and local newspapers; periodicals and pamphlets; professional publications; dissertations; and other local, regional and national public records including databases. Personal letters, diaries, and documented interviews with witnesses of past events were sources of evidence.

Validation of Data

Because “historical data are, at best only fragmentary remains of what was once a reality” steps were taken to verify the authenticity of sources after

the data is collected.\textsuperscript{54} The process of external criticism was used to establish the truthfulness of all data incorporated in this research. This historical study followed steps suggested by Phelps to determine authenticity:\textsuperscript{55}

1. For the verification of authorship, autographs will be checked for veracity and handwriting will be checked to make sure that it is consistent.

2. The age of documents will be questioned and when dates are missing clues will be looked for to establish the date. Contemporaneous materials will be indicators that an item existed.

3. To establish the provenance of a document the original location and present location of the item will be considered.

4. The structure of the document will also be considered (are part of it missing, illegible, or out-of-order). If the item is out-of-order, the original order must be considered.

5. If there are variant forms of a document, the researcher will question whether it is a variant or a copy, whether an earlier version exists, and/or whether there may have been multiple authors. The possibility of forgery means considering whether a document was written by someone else imitating the author’s style and whether for any reason the item is not genuine.

The analysis of documents and/or sources meant a critical approach to these items. Eleven specific questions recommended by Heller and Wilson were utilized by this study for the examination of leaflets, pamphlets,


brochures, papers, forms, booklets, and the many other documents scrutinized by this investigation: 56

1. Does the document convey hearsay or direct observation of an event. Does the document convey hearsay or direct observation of an event? How much time passed between the observation and creation of the document? Could physical or emotional health issues affect the accuracy of the observation?

2. Could memory loss have diminished reliability?

3. Was the document created merely to record or report, or was there another purpose or intention?

4. Did the writer or speaker have any known biases that might affect the observation?

5. Does the item have any purpose like: apology, propaganda, promotion, malice, vanity, diplomacy, or good will that would affect its credibility?

6. Is there a reason why the writer or speaker might have ignored certain facts?

7. What was the intended audience for this document?

8. Would the observer have been more or less candid in relation to another audience?

9. Is there any style or mode of address in the document that might obscure the writer’s true meaning?

10. Were the writer’s training, experience, and knowledge sufficient to support the reliability of the observation?

11. Do other accounts of equally qualified observers agree with this one?

Sources

Sources of information for this research included three broad categories: (1) Archival sources (2) library sources including dissertations, books, and journal articles (2) internet and electronic media and (3) reference materials. Each research question (which collectively formed the architecture of this study) was approached via ‘complexes’ of sources from at least two and possibly three of these broad categories, specifically targeting the type of data needed to answer these questions.

Archival sources provided the most important historical data for this inquiry. The archives of three libraries associated with the three subjects of this study (Peter Lutkin, F. Melius Christiansen, and John Finley Williamson) were both visited and consulted extensively. These included the archives of the Northwestern University at the Deering Library at Northwestern in Evanston, Illinois; the archives of St. Olaf College Choir at the Rolvaag Library in Northfield, Minnesota; and the archives of Westminster Choir College located at Talbott Library in Princeton, New Jersey. The archives of St. Thomas Church in Leipzig, Germany were also consulted. Additionally, the Music Educators National Conference Historical Center at the Performing Arts Center Library located at the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland was utilized.
Scholarly writings such as dissertations were accessed online via ProQuest UMI Dissertation Publishing. Writings, diaries, programs, letters, and unpublished manuscripts were sought through archives and special collections divisions of libraries. These included personal artifacts, photographs, concert programs, as well as uncatalogued materials. Encyclopedias and dictionaries were obtained online and in library reference rooms. Literary materials were obtained from libraries; archives and repositories and non-literary print sources (questionnaires, transcribed interviews, and miscellaneous writings) were obtained archives, libraries, and repositories. Non-library data sources were also referenced.

Valuable online data sources included card catalogues of college and university libraries; inter-library retrieval systems such as World Catalogue (OCLC); and smaller ‘linkage systems connecting a limited number of libraries (often organized geographically). Online music indexes provided valuable pathways to information and included the Music Index Online (1979–2002), the CDI (Comprehensive Dissertation Index) from 1861 to date, DDM (Doctoral Dissertations in Musicology), as well as RILM Abstracts (Repertoire International de la Litterature Musicale) from 1972 to date. Additional online journal storage sites such as JSTOR, along with sources of full-text e-books, and musicological dictionaries such as Oxford Music Online were important sources of information
for this study. Specific reference sources include Yearbooks for the *Music Educators National Conference (MENC)* and its predecessor the *Music Supervisors National Conference (MSNC)* (published annually from 1910 to 1940) and three ‘sourcebooks’ published by MENC: *Music Education Sourcebook I* (1947); *Music in American Education: Sourcebook Number Two*, 1955; and *Perspectives in Music education: Sourcebook Three*, 1966.⁵⁷ These materials were first developed by MENC commissions in 1942 and compiled in 1947 into its Music Education Sourcebook [I], a compendium of writings about music education. The 1955 Sourcebook was organized differently under then MENC President Robert Choate in 10 sections representing ten commissions.

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CHAPTER 2

CHORAL TONE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

Early American Vocal Tone

Choral singing has been a popular pastime throughout American history; however, before the turn of the twentieth century, it was generally not a subject for study or artistic refinement. The change from popular pastime to cultivated choral tone evolved from disparate singing traditions in North America and Western Europe. An elucidation of both traditions is critical for understanding the beginning of refined choral singing, because noteworthy individuals who were responsible for the transformation of choir singing in the United States were immersed for a time in both cultures, an ocean apart. In addition, immigrants raised the three protagonists in this story and two of them lived and attended educational institutions in Europe for extended periods. A brief look at this choral milieu begins at home in America, where frustration and challenges appear to have been widespread.

Independent primary sources from eighteenth-century America repeatedly indicate that from the country’s beginning, discontent surrounded the matter of choral sound. Since most group singing in those early colonial days occurred in the context of religious services, choral song was depicted as a kind of aesthetic blemish on those activities. Rev. Thomas Walter, in the
introduction to his 1721 book *The Grounds and Rules of Musick Explained*, observed that “in many Places, one Man is upon this Note, while another is a Note before him, which produces something so hideous and disorderly, as is beyond Expression bad.”\(^{58}\) Clearly displeased, the Calvinist clergyman went on to explain:

[At one time our tunes] were sung according to the rules of the scale of musick, but are now miserably tortured and twisted and quavered in some churches, into a horrid medley of confused and disorderly noises. This must necessarily create a most disagreeable jar in the ears of all that can judge better singing than these men, who please themselves with their own ill-founding echoes...Our tunes are...left to the mercy of every unskilled throat to chop and alter, to twist and change, according to their infinitely diverse and no less odd humours and fancies...I have myself paused twice in one note to take a breath. No two men in the congregation quaver alike or together. It sounds in the ears of a good judge like five hundred tunes roared out at the same time, with perpetual interfearings with one another, perplexed Jars, and unmeasured Periods, would make a Man wonder at the false Pleasure, which they conceive in that which good Judges of Music and Sounds, cannot bear to hear.\(^{59}\)

In his judgment, the already fragile repertory of psalm tunes had fallen victim to many evils, including tone-deaf deacons, slow tempos, lower pitches, inaccurate intervals, improvised part singing that did not work, “falling-in” from one tune to another, and vocal ornaments such as quaverings, turnings, and flourishes.\(^{60}\)

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59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.
According to a later American historian, Alice More Earle (1851–1911), as time went on, the situation became more divisive. In a chapter titled “The Church Music” in her 1891 history entitled *The Sabbath in Puritan New England*, Earle provided colorful depictions of just how bad the singing was. Leaving little to the imagination and proclaiming her disapproval, she wrote:

> Of all the dismal accompaniments of public worship in the early days of New England, the music was the most hopelessly forlorn [because of the] horrible manner in which those tunes were sung. So villainous had church singing at last become that the clergymen arose in a body and demanded better performances; while a desperate and disgusted party was also formed which was opposed to all singing. Still another band of old fogies was strong in force who wished to cling to the same way of singing that they were accustomed to; and they gave many objections to the new-fangled idea of singing by note, the chief item on the list being the everlasting objection of all such fossils, that “the old way was good enough for our fathers.”…They also asserted that “the names of the notes were blasphemous;” that it was “popish;” that it was a contrivance to get money; that it would bring musical instruments into the churches; and that “no one could learn the tunes anyway.”

This aesthetic pandemonium contributed to an increasingly tense atmosphere, for along with the unskilled and coarsely rendered singing, the Massachusetts historian noted that Puritan women even interrupted services by standing, breaking bottles, and loudly proclaiming the preacher an “old fool,” or worse, during sermons.62

It would not be an exaggeration to state that, until about 1900, group


62. Ibid., 231.
singing in the United States existed in a homegrown state—a kind of vast domestic choral vacuum executed by vocalists perhaps more interested in the experience of singing than its refinement. That is not to suggest that choral music abroad was polished in all locations, for singing in rural England at the same time was likely not much better. Alice Morse Earle twice quoted Master Mace, an unidentified British source, who pointed out in 1676 that similar cacophony was present in outlying British parishes.63 According to Earle, Mace expressed that he was “…sad to hear what whining, toling, yelling, or shreaking there is in our country congregations.”64

Ostensibly, choir singing in the American colonies had not improved by 117 years later in 1793, when Andrew Law (1749–1821), a graduate of Brown University and a singing school master, wrote that the state of sung music in the United States was at a low ebb:

In a word, our singing in general is extremely harsh; and this harshness produces its natural effects: it renders our psalmody less pleasing and less efficacious; but it does more; it vitiates our taste and gives currency to bad music. American compositions aim at variety and energy by

63. Master Mace, quoted by Earle, was Thomas Mace (1612 or 1613 – c. 1706?), an English composer, singer, lutenist, viol player, and musical theorist of the Baroque era. He was a clerk (collegiate chorister) at Trinity College, Cambridge University. Mace’s book Musick’s Monument (1676) describes 17th century musical practice in England and is the uncited source of Earle’s quotation. Mace’s original passage is: “Tis sad to hear what whining, toling, yelling, or sereeking there is in many country congregations, as if the people were affrighted, or distracted (sic). And all is for want of such a way and remedy as this is.” Here, Earle misquotes Mace as can be seen by comparing her quotation with the original text.

guarding against the reiterated use of the perfect cords. Great numbers of the American composers, on the contrary, as it were, on purpose to accommodate their music for harsh singing, have introduced the smooth and perfect cords, till their tunes are all sweet, languid and lifeless: and yet, these very tunes, because they will better bear the discord of grating voices, are actually preferred, and have taken a general run....But it was the roughness of our singing that ought to have been smoothed and polished, and not the composition of Madlan and Handell.\textsuperscript{65}

Many primary sources from colonial America contain critical comments about choral sound. Rarely, if ever, is any defense given for it, other than perhaps impugning American composers, as in Law’s example above. Having no point of reference, colonial American choir singers were seemingly unbothered that their vocal utterances were not the result of musical training. Even if they had possessed broader perspectives on choral singing, theoretical training in music exceeding an elementary level was not generally available.

For Americans who may have desired a more complex level of musical education, there were few options even as late as 1900. Attempts at vocal education, such as the singing school tradition, did almost nothing to improve choral tone. Music fundamentals were stressed over vocal technique, and singing school masters appear to have had little or no formal schooling or experience in either. Most singing school instructors were themselves trained in

\textsuperscript{65} Andrew Law, “The Musical Primer,” in \textit{The Art of Singing} (Cheshire, CT: William Law [Plate Printing], 1793), 5–6. The “Introduction” of Law’s \textit{The Art of Singing} (Part I. Musical Primer) has brief essays on “Toning and Tuning the Voice,” “Articulating and Pronouncing,” (pp. 2–9), however, Part I is largely instruction in the most basic theoretical rudiments of music, rather than a manual on how to sing.
singing schools, just as their teachers had been. Moreover, singing school
sessions were sometimes more social than musical.\textsuperscript{66} A peripatetic instructor
meeting with students in a tavern in the evening was typically the only option
for choral students in search of music education.

Since college-level choral training did not exist, and the choral art was
not considered an academic subject, aspiring choir directors learned on the job
by trial and error. Except for pockets of European immigrants, who had
brought singing traditions with them, and a handful of choral or oratorio
societies in large urban centers, choral singing was amateurish by European
standards of choral performance. However, it did not remain that way. By the
turn of the twentieth century, key individuals arrived on the scene to introduce
and reinforce new ideals, original techniques, a new choral genre, and vocal
models. In doing so, a widespread transformation of choral tone was begun in
the United States.

Choral Music in the United States from 1800 to 1900:
Two Historiographical Approaches

Many twentieth-century musicologists have pointed to two dominant
streams within the context of a diverse American musical identity. Music
historian Gilbert Chase (1906–1992) has been credited as the first to do so.

\textsuperscript{66} Allen P. Britton, “The How and Why of Teaching Singing Schools in Eighteenth
According to Chase, one vein encompassed music made or continuously used by the people of the United States, while another represented music sometimes associated with the cultivated musical traditions of Western Europe. A certain segment of the U.S. applauded the latter and referred to it as the “polite arts.” Chase called this segment “polite society,” which included prominent, influential, refined families. His delineation of those musical traditions pointed to class associations and at the same time highlighted divergent approaches to the interpretation of American musical history.

Another pioneer musicologist in the field of American music studies, H. Wiley Hitchcock (1923–2007), broke new ground in 1969 by considering all kinds of American music together, both artistic and popular. In his influential book, *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction*, he used the well-worn labels “cultivated” and “vernacular” for depicting those traditions. For Hitchcock, vernacular music was “a more plebian body of music, more naïve, not approached self-consciously but simply grown into as one grows into one’s...

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67. In his discussion of the “polite arts” (which also included dancing and fencing), Chase makes specific reference to professional European musicians who immigrated to the United States. Gilbert Chase, *America’s Music, from the Pilgrims to the Present* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 94–95.

68. Ibid., 94, 127.

vernacular common.” The term referred to “music understood and appreciated simply for its utilitarian or entertainment value.” By contrast, the cultivated idiom was “a body of music that America had to cultivate consciously, music to be approached with some effort, and to be appreciated for its edification—in other words, for its moral, spiritual, and/or aesthetic values.”

A half-century earlier, in America’s Coming-of-Age (1915), American literary critic, biographer, and historian Van Wyck Brooks described a similar categorization, explaining vernacular as a product of “Lowbrow” society and the cultivated tradition as a manifestation of “Highbrow” society. Although Hitchcock’s later use of this language may have been innovative and novel, was he not pointing to different strands in American music that had existed since the earliest years of the English colonies in North America? On one side were the musical images of spontaneity, naturalness, and liberty that the American wilderness offered. On the other side were Europe and the evolving urban centers on the East Coast, where many held that European civilization could and should be transplanted to their shores in toto.

70. Ibid.
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid.
Sixty years later, in 1975, American musicologist Richard Crawford defined “cultivated” music as “music more consciously sought after and studied for the spiritual edification it offers.”\textsuperscript{74} It was the musicological equivalent of upward mobility. Crawford resisted moving out of the neighborhood. That is, he believed it essential for the student of American music not to make this change: not to move “up” to a more genteel, more consistent, more controllable musical world than what one inherits. According to his viewpoint, cultural legacy is more authentic than cultural transformation. Perhaps Crawford’s understanding represents a kind of musical power spectrum where one type of music is unrestricted and egalitarian by nature, and another is both restricted and exclusive.\textsuperscript{75}

American music historiography has reflected those fault lines, with one contingent preferring a Eurocentric interpretation of the nation’s past and another favoring an exclusively American perspective. Crawford characterizes the former perspective as the “chip-off-the-old-block” school of historiography, in the spirit of “he’s looking more like his dad every day.”\textsuperscript{76} Included in that

\textsuperscript{74} Richard Crawford, \textit{American Studies and American Musicology: A Point of View and a Case in Point}, I.S.A.M. Monograph no. 4 (Brooklyn, NY: Institute for Studies in American Music, Department of Music, School of Performing Arts, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, 1975), 7.


\textsuperscript{76} Richard Crawford, “Musical Learning in Nineteenth-Century America,” \textit{American
category are Louis Elson, John Tasker Howard, H. Earle Johnson, Frederick Louis Ritter, and Oscar Sonneck.\(^\text{77}\) Historians of this ilk hold that music in nineteenth-century America arose from a widespread impulse toward musical change. Here, “each noteworthy event can be seen as another link in a chain of musical ‘progress’.”\(^\text{78}\) This type of musical improvement often implied advancing toward European musical ideals.

Representing a different perspective, Gilbert Chase, Charles Hamm, H. Wiley Hitchcock, and Irving Lowens chose to acclaim the variety and vitality of American music.\(^\text{79}\) Often they suggested that gospel hymns, minstrel songs, and brass band music of this era existed for the tastes of the listeners for whom the music was created. For these writers, the measure of success for such music was how well a composition fit its intended purpose. In that light, the theoretical idealism of composer Thomas Hastings, whose 1822 *Dissertation on Music* vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 1.


Musical Taste venerated German compositional models, was perhaps inconsequential.\textsuperscript{80}

European Ideals and American Choral Music

Although the United States was still a young country in 1800, the transatlantic separation of the country from European music making and education did not stop critics of American music who espoused European musical values. Many such nineteenth-century American musicians demonstrated “the summary rejection of uncultivated musics, the commitment to change for ‘improvement’s’ sake, and the particular amalgam of self-interest and morality that justified the process.”\textsuperscript{81} On the other hand, there was also simultaneous rejection of, resistance toward, and ignoring of European ideals in music and music education, which may have had a sociocultural basis. For example, after the Civil War, a widely quoted (and possibly spurious) adage attributed to Mark Twain—“I have never let my schooling interfere with my education,”—exemplified a widespread public skepticism about “knowledge and its purveyors” in colonial America and later in the United States.\textsuperscript{82}


\textsuperscript{81} Crawford, “Musical Learning in Nineteenth-Century America,” 12.

\textsuperscript{82} Twainquotes Website, Directory of Mark Twain’s Maxims, Quotations, and Various
The scorn “serious musicians” leveled at indigenous American musical genres had little effect. One such self-styled authority, Lowell Mason (1792–1872), a much-studied hymnodist, choral conductor, singing school master, and writer, contrasted oral musical traditions in his homeland with what he called “scientific music.” When praising the director of Leipzig’s Hochschule für Musik und Theater, Ignaz Moscheles, Mason indicated, “His influence is on the side of truly scientific music, like that of Beethoven and Mendelssohn, nor will he do anything to patronize a more superficial style or flippant taste, either in composition or in playing.” With this in mind, it was no surprise that Mason was a chief proponent for the “Better [Scientific] Music” movement in the early nineteenth century. That censorial trend discouraged the use of “crude and lewd music,” which was essentially anything with, as Allen P. Britton called it, “indigenous flavor”: fuguing-tunes, folk tunes, and revival songs.

Opinions: Education,” http://www.twainquotes.com/Education.html; Garson O’Toole, “Quote Investigator,” http://quoteinvestigator.com/2010/09/25/schooling-vs-education/. O’Toole believes that credit for this saying should go to the controversial novelist and essayist Grant Allen, who published a variant in 1894. Indeed, Grant Allen was so enamored with the maxim that schooling interfered with education that he presented it in an essay and then restated it in at least three of his novels, published in 1895, 1896, and 1899. Barbara Schmidt, editor of the website “Twainquotes,” wrote: “This quote has been attributed to Mark Twain, but until the attribution can be verified, the quote should not be regarded as authentic.”


Of the nineteenth-century choral traditions native to the United States, the singing school and its associated musical genres were both prevalent and popular. However, at the same time their prevalence may have also created early choral polarities, shifting the attention of musicians from choral tone and technique toward music fundamentals, especially fundamentals related to sight singing. The reason for this was simple: Singing school leaders were unschooled, having no formal training in music. As the nineteenth century continued, the shape-note traditions in the North were replaced by movements toward more “refined” hymnody, with tunes and harmonies situated within common-practice tonality. This was initiated by musicians such as Lowell Mason and James Webb, who wrote in 1848 that indigenous American hymns were often “low and vulgar,” and whose goal it was to eradicate shape notes from the northeast corridor of the country.85

As a result, the shape note tradition progressively relocated south and west, accruing new tunes and contrafacta of folk songs and instrumental tunes along the way. Eventually, that practice moved into rural areas, especially in the South, mostly into what musicologist George Pullen Jackson referred to both as

85. Lowell Mason and James Webb, “Preface,” in The National Psalmist, ed. Charles Danvers Hackett (London, England: Peter Jackson, the late Fischer, Son & Co., The Caxton Press, 1848). “Other works followed, in which the peculiar style of which Billings has sometimes been called the American father, was more fully developed. This consists in an easy and popular (though often low and vulgar) flow of melody for Tenor voices, with harmony parts for a Treble and Alto above, and a Bass below.” This passage is from the book’s preface, which is a lengthy essay on singing in church.
the “Southern Uplands and Southern Highlands.” Later, music educator and shape note historian Allen P. Britton was critical of Mason’s rejection of the shape notes as an instructional device, stating, “Had this pedagogical tool been accepted by ‘the father of singing among the children,’ Lowell Mason, and others who shaped the patterns of American music education, we might have been more successful in developing skilled music readers and enthusiastic amateur choral singers in the public schools.”

Some authors believe that changes in choral music that took place in the early twentieth century may be traced to changes in school music education, which took root in the United States by the 1830s. Britton calls to mind that these early school music programs attempted to improve American school repertoire but actually introduced “insipid music of English and third-rate Continental composers.” Writing in 1961, he explained:

Since folk or popular music has been considered to lack gentility, and since the highly artistic forms of European art music have been little understood by the public, the music educator has found himself in the position of trying to find understandable music that could be taken as

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“classical.” The term “polite” is perhaps as good as any other to characterize much of the music utilized in schools from the time of Lowell Mason to the present day.\textsuperscript{88}

In some areas, the employment of “shaped” or “patent” notes in the nineteenth century changed the singing and teaching of this \textit{a cappella} genre. Between 1798 and 1803, two American publications introduced that system of music learning. First, William Little and William Smith debuted a system, known as “fasola,” in Philadelphia in 1798 in a book called \textit{The Easy Instructor}.\textsuperscript{89} The preface to the manual states that Philadelphian John Conneley, the inventor of the method, signed over the rights of the invention to Little and Smith in 1798.\textsuperscript{90} By contrast, five years later, in 1803, Andrew Law published “The Musical Primer,” in which he claimed to be the creator (or as Crawford explains, the “inventor”) of shape notes.\textsuperscript{91}

In that notational system, note heads of different shapes represented four syllables, which corresponded with four notes of the major scale: mi, fa,
sol, and la. Music historian Robin Hitch explained that, “They are intended to help singers with little musical expertise to sing at sight without having to recognize pitches on the staff or understand the key system.” Urban critics from the Northeast labeled this didactic method “uncouth,” while in the South and West it became the popular standard for sacred music publication. Compilers of hymnbooks such as Andrew Law (1749–1821) and Thomas Hastings (1784–1872) were more colorful in their disdain for shape notes, referring to them as “dunce notes,” a term nineteenth-century historian Alice Morse Earle traced to the years between 1764 and 1789.

Another music educator and author, Robert W. John, pointed out that approximately one hundred singing manuals were published in the United States thirty years before the Civil War, a time when music was sung largely by rote in schools. This was driven to some extent by Lowell Mason’s advocacy of

92. Fa notes always have a triangular head, sol notes a round head, la notes a square head, and mi note heads are diamond-shaped.


95. Fred Kimball Graham, With One Heart and Voice: A Core Repertory of Hymn Tunes Published for Use in the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States, 1808–1878 (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 3.

the Pestalozzian idea of putting “the thing [sung sound] before the sign [written notes or names],” as explained in the *Manual of the Boston Academy of Music*. Mason, an influential Boston music teacher, discussed later, was controversial because of his new ideas, which were sometimes met with considerable objections. During the first year of the Civil War, 1861, the “graded series” concept first entered American music education with Joseph Bird’s *Vocal Music Readers* in two volumes intended for primary and grammar grades. Bird had disagreed with rote singing in schools eleven years prior, in 1850, when he and his younger brother Horace published a pamphlet entitled “To Teachers of Music,” warning “few will read but the greater number give up in despair.” By 1883, with the publication of Holt and Tufts’s series titled *The Normal Music Course*, John noted that rote singing had declined. In the final chapter of the 1886 edition of that text appeared lists of Italian musical terms associated with

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aspects of performance such as movement, force, and manner.\textsuperscript{101}

By 1892, illustrations of how to sing vowels appeared in Friedrich Zuchtmann’s \textit{American Music Reader}, a graded manual. This illustrates a shift from a sole focus on the note versus rote controversy toward vocal technique and quality. His manual instructed:

Vowels should be formed with the upper and lower teeth widely enough separated to introduce two fingers. While the shape of the opening made by the lips will vary, the teeth should be kept well apart for all vowel sounds. This assists materially in the production of a mellow and pleasing quality and tends to prevent objectionable thinness of tone in such vowels as e and ah.\textsuperscript{102}

The repertoire taught by southern singing masters in the nineteenth century included a mixture of New England Psalm tunes and “folk hymns,” as well as popular Anglo-American melodies from oral tradition—such as the tune “New Britain,” commonly known as \textit{Amazing Grace}—that were harmonized in a shape-note idiom and set to sacred words.\textsuperscript{103} These pentatonic songs began to achieve publication due to the development of camp and revival meetings during the Second Great Awakening, 1790 through the 1840s, an era of religious revivals marked by widespread Christian evangelism and

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotereference{101}{John W. Tufts and H. E. Holt, \textit{The Normal Music Course} (Boston: Silver, Rogers, & Co., 1886), 244–45.}
\footnotereference{103}{Jackson, \textit{White Spirituals}, xvii, 53, 215.}
\end{footnotes}
conversion. The leaders of such events were not connoisseurs of fancy church music because they had never heard it. Most preferred a different marketing strategy—the familiar simplicity of the old shape note hymns, which by the late nineteenth century had been around for several generations.

After the Civil War, a new form of shape note notation gained dominance over the earlier four-note form. In the South, choral singers used the seven-shape (“doremi”) system of notation during the 1840s and 1850s, while after the war the previous fasola notation became associated with gospel music and folk hymnody. Though sometimes criticized as primitive, the music education provided by southern and western singing schools was both popular and effective in promoting public a cappella choral singing. In addition, an expanding choral publishing industry was vitalized by the publication of hundreds of shape note hymnals from 1813 to 1891.

In the midst of all of this widespread interest and public involvement with singing schools, a dissenting voice arose from the whirlwind that was not ignored. Boston-area church musician and music educator Lowell Mason had experienced European music making and was on a mission. From the age of sixteen, he had worked as a singing school master. However, following journeys

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abroad, his thinking shifted, and in an effort to elevate “taste,” he came to promote European musical models after 1830. Mason was also widely critical of choral tone in nineteenth-century America. Musicologist Michael Broyles explained that Mason’s problem with American psalmody and fuguing tunes was its open harmonic structure, “roughness of singing,” and “discord.” He believed that those unpleasant characteristics prevented attractive choral tone, which should be “euphonious,” like the choirs he had heard in Europe. Mason’s collection of choral music from 1859, Carmina sacra, contains chapters on the emission and purity of tone, as well as on diction for church choristers. He was attempting to provide a point-of-reference to American choir singers who lacked choral experience, because for the most part nineteenth-century American choristers had not visited Europe and had no idea what this notable musician was talking about.


109. Ibid.

110. When Mason visited Europe in 1837 and 1852, for a brief period he was immersed in an ongoing Palestrina/a cappella revival in Germany and other countries. During that time, there was an increased interest in and involvement with early choral music. Other studies of Mason’s Euro-centric point of view do not mention this. That trend, discussed in detail in Chapter 3, is critical for understanding the present research.
Criticism of American psalmody was nothing new. Earlier, professor of mathematics and natural philosophy John Hubbard had pointed a finger at contrapuntal fuguing tunes in his 1807 *Essay on Music*. In Hubbard’s opinion, these tunes not only obscured sacred texts, but were also models of compositional ignorance. He wrote:

> When the parts of the music move in unison with the words, the ideas are rendered more emphatical. When the different parts are pronouncing different words, the emphasis is diminished…such fugues are a perversion. They cannot affect the heart, nor inform the understanding.¹¹¹

Lowell Mason represented one side of an American musical coin. On one hand, some Americentric musicians deplored what they regarded as his supercilious intolerant preference for imported musical traditions—traditions most of them had never heard of, regardless of their educational level. By contrast, musical leaders such as Mason struggled with widespread musical traditions they saw as inferior and steeped in a lack of European-style commitment, erudition, and refinement. For Mason, a notorious Germanophile, musical ignorance in the United States was a daily challenge. He had simply been bowled over by choirs in Europe. For example, upon hearing the choir of the Thomaskirche (St. Thomas Church) in Leipzig in 1852, he wrote in *Musical Letters from Abroad*:

I wish I had words to point out that consecration to the work, that deep, heartfelt interest which these choir members seem to possess; so that our American singers might seek it for. But we cannot obtain it unless we use the appropriate means; education only will do it; musical training, such as we have but little idea of, must go before; and as we plant, so we shall reap in these things.\textsuperscript{112}

Mason’s experiences in Europe during 1837 and 1852—his points of reference—were critical to his choral advocacy and pedagogy during the second half of the nineteenth century. He was a driven man devoted to fixing what he saw as broken about music study and performance in the United States.

Music educators and performing musicians were not the only critics of American music making. In the second half of the century, historians also expressed frustration with the level of musical development in the country. A good example is the first chapter of historian Frédéric Ritter’s 1883 study \textit{Music in America}, which the author subtitled “Low State of Musical Culture.”\textsuperscript{113} Here, Ritter likens nineteenth-century American choral singing with that of the Gauls and the Alemanni in the seventh century. Not mincing words, he quotes St. Gregory’s biographer John Diaconus (fl. 500), who stated candidly, “…their rough voices, roaring like thunder, are not capable of soft modulation. Indeed their voices give out tones similar to the rumbling of a baggage-wagon rolling down from a height; and instead of touching the ears of the hearers they only

\textsuperscript{112} Lowell Mason, \textit{Musical Letters from Abroad}, 83.

\textsuperscript{113} Frédéric Ritter, \textit{Music in America}, 3.
fill them with aversion.”\textsuperscript{114} Later, twentieth-century American musicologist Howard Smither echoed Mason’s viewpoint, writing, “Conditions of existence precluded the broad-scale acquisition of performance skills in vocal and instrumental music sufficient for the regular performance of oratorios well into the nineteenth century.”\textsuperscript{115}

The condition of American music during the nineteenth century was often attributed to musicians not having acquired more than an elementary theoretical knowledge of music. It was not for lack of trying, though, as this was an overarching focus of singing schools. However, significant advances in music education could not occur because singing school masters, most of whom lacked a thorough understanding of music theory, led these short-term groups. As music historian Robert W. Wason pointed out, the common technical limit of theoretical music education in North America during most of the nineteenth century, and certainly before 1850, was four-part harmony.\textsuperscript{116} It is not

\textsuperscript{114} John Diaconus, in Frédéric Ritter, \textit{Music in America}, 10. Ritter previously quoted the same passage in his text \textit{The Student’s History of Music} (London: Williams Reeves, 1880), 34. The context of the latter is a discussion of the history of Gregorian chant.


\textsuperscript{116} Robert W. Wason, “Musica pratica: music theory as pedagogy,” in \textit{The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory}, ed. Thomas Christensen (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 66. Wason noted that the theory treatises of British author Ebenezer Prout became important in nineteenth-century America, and that Lowell Mason translated Charles Simon Catel’s \textit{Traité d’harmonie} in 1832. By the 1860s, the American conservatory movement resulted in the publication of many German texts such as \textit{A Manual of Harmony} by
surprising that musicians who had acquired some semblance of a musical education were offended by the idea that musical skills could be taught to choir singers in a few weeks.\textsuperscript{117}

A good example of a musician who reached that technical limit was the leading proponent for American music reform during the nineteenth century, Lowell Mason. Probably because he was an outspoken advocate for European standards for music fundamentals, he was considered a well-educated musical authority during the nineteenth century. However, according to musicologist Carol Ann Pemberton’s study of Mason’s life and work, he was largely self-taught.\textsuperscript{118} As a boy, he learned to play six instruments through experimentation: violin, violoncello, flute, clarinet, piano, and organ. Before the age of twenty, he participated in the singing schools of two local Medfield, Massachusetts, singing school masters: a neighbor Amos Albee (1772–1823) and Oliver Shaw (1779–1848).\textsuperscript{119} Mason attended Albee’s school in Medfield for a few weeks at age thirteen. Shaw’s school lasted for a similar time span. By age sixteen, after

\textsuperscript{117} Independent sources mention different configurations for singing schools; a typical one met once per week for two to six weeks. Most met in the evenings after work.

\textsuperscript{118} Carol Ann Pemberton, “Lowell Mason: His Life and Work” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1971), 12

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., Lowell Mason’s family was also related to a third singing school master, Libbeus Smith, with whom he did not study.
completing those two singing schools, Mason began teaching singing schools himself.

When he was twenty years old, in 1812, Mason moved to Savannah, Georgia, where he worked in a bank. Five years later, in 1817, a twenty-three-year-old musician named F. L. Abel (1794–1820), a native of Mecklenburg, Germany and grandnephew of German composer Carl Friedrich Abel (1723–1787), moved to that port city. Most historical records seem to assume that Abel was highly competent in music theory simply because he was from Germany; however, none offers any confirmation of his compositional or theoretical skills. More than a few historical accounts report erroneously that Mason’s time with Abel was spent entirely in the study of harmony and composition. Heller and Pemberton point out that from 1817 to 1820, during spare time from his banking position, Mason translated choruses from European choral masterworks from German into English for Abel. The German musician also taught Mason how to realize figured bass. His reason for learning four-part harmony was to harmonize psalm tunes for his use as a church organist and choirmaster. Before Abel’s premature death of yellow fever in 1820, Mason began to compose psalm harmonizations and eventually wrote over 1,600

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hymns, some of which are notable. He was considerably more advanced than most American musicians of this period, although he was primarily self-educated, lacked formal training in music, and his theoretical proficiencies were limited to writing four-part homophony.

Nathaniel B. Gould (1781–1864), a Boston church musician and conductor, was another who was not pleased by the musical status quo. In his 1853 essay “Ignorance of the Science of Music,” he complained that when books on “ancient music” were published in the early nineteenth century, “no one was competent to correct errors.” The scores,” he stated, “were simply copied and reprinted with perceptible gross errors.” Gould continued:

To show how little was known by the wisest, we will just mention that a committee for publishing one of the books saw fit to introduce one tune from a recent English publication, with the figures of the harmony attached; and when one of their number was asked the use of these figures, he honestly answered he “did not know,” but they meant to make the public believe they knew something.

Similarly, in 1883 Charles Perkins, Boston’s Handel and Haydn Society historian, and John Sullivan Dwight recalled what they considered musical deficiencies displayed by members when the organization was founded in 1815:


123. Ibid.
Consecutive fifths were not only tolerated, but admired, and consecutive octaves between the parts attracted no one’s attention. Tunes were often introduced from recent English publications having a figured bass, but as no one could read it, or had the least idea what it meant, such aid to the right filling up of the parts was of no avail. With incorrect music, ill-trained singers, and incompetent professors, the ordinary church-choir singing must have been intolerable to educated ears.\textsuperscript{124}

For Perkins and Dwight, choir repertoire also contributed to the problem. They referred to a well-known fuguing tune by American composer and hat maker Timothy Swan (1758–1842) entitled “Ocean,” pointing out multiple theoretical violations.\textsuperscript{125} For Perkins, the earliest years of the venerable society meant memories of poorly constructed compositions sung by musical illiterates.

Lack of theoretical competency did not stop nineteenth-century American musicians from introducing musical yardsticks for judging compositions and performances. Music education historian Vicki Eaklor suggested that this reinforced “the post-Revolution repudiation of American hymnody, fuguing tunes in particular, and a native system of notation (shape-notes) that had become popular, in favor of ‘correct’ forms and notation.”\textsuperscript{126}

While American musicians created new compositional forms and some


\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.

attempted to teach basic rudiments of music to rural church choristers in
singing schools, perhaps because of the level of musical understanding, choral
tone remained unchanged. Despite much discourse by historians considering
“indigenous” culture versus other cultures, the historical evidence points to one
predominant concern, the quality of the music. Those who wanted to improve
that quality, such as Lowell Mason, regarded the European continent,
especially Germany, as a model.

Immigration and Choral Music from 1800 to 1900

The experiences of immigrants from European countries with
established choral traditions added to the American musical culture from 1800
to 1900. Many of those immigrants came from countries such as Germany and
England where choral singing was already a popular established pastime for a
burgeoning middle class increasingly enabled by the Industrial Revolution.
Nineteenth-century American census records illustrate those immigration
patterns. The population of the United States grew from 5.3 to 23.1 million
between 1800 and 1850, and by 1900, it had increased to 75.9 million people, a
15-fold increase in one century.127 By 1845, 14.5% of the country’s population

127. Geospatial and Statistical Data Center University of Virginia, “Historical Census
histcensus/index.html.
consisted of immigrants.\textsuperscript{128}

The perpetuation of singing traditions from the old world was part of the phenomenon of immigration in the new world. Perhaps longing to transport cultural history, like a family album filled with daguerreotypes, newcomers from Germany, for example, established men's singing societies (Männerchor) wherever they settled. New York, Cincinnati, Milwaukee, Chicago, and St. Louis all had such groups.\textsuperscript{129} English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish immigrants similarly formed glee clubs in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. Gradually those transplanted European musical traditions became authentic components of a diverse American choral culture.

Singing Societies: Boston

Middle class choral societies of nineteenth-century Europe were recreational in nature and arose because of the Industrial Revolution. By contrast, American choral societies in urban centers first existed to improve the state of church music and appeared in connection with singing schools. In Boston, singing schools and musical societies had existed for several years before the founding of the Handel and Haydn Society in 1815.\textsuperscript{130} Those included Ye Olde Musical Society of Stoughton, Massachusetts, founded in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{128} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Smither, \textit{A History of the Oratorio}, xx, 389, 390, 398, 430, 632.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 383.
\end{itemize}
1762, as well as the Old Stoughton Musical Society and Boston’s Independent Musical Society, both founded in 1786. Boston’s Massachusetts Musical Society, a predecessor of that city’s Handel and Haydn Society, existed from 1807 to 1810. Like all New England singing societies, its purpose was the improvement of metrical psalm tune singing. With musical progress and choral change in mind, on March 24, 1815, Gottlieb Graupner, Matthew S. Parker, Thomas Smith Webb, and Amasa Winchester organized the Handel and Haydn Society to cultivate and improve “a correct taste in the performance of Sacred Music.”

Like the Massachusetts Musical Society, this group was concerned from the beginning with the improvement of musical skills. Charles Perkins, historian for the society, reminisced in 1883 that “very few readers at sight were available,” and for this reason “judgment had to be exercised in the selection of music for performance, which could be easily learned by ear.” Despite such challenges, according to Smither, the Handel and Haydn Society was “most important and influential as a model for many other societies.”


Oratorio in Nineteenth-Century America

By 1800, the oratorio tradition in the United States was only twenty-two years old, and performances were “isolated.” Only twelve years prior, in 1788, New York City was the location for the first complete performance of an oratorio in the United States. Even though the American oratorio tradition almost never involved a cappella singing, its presence was part of the choral milieu from which unaccompanied music emerged in the nineteenth century. In both England and the U.S., especially from 1800 to 1850, the term “oratorio” commonly referred not to a musical form, but rather to a concert of separate oratorio excerpts. This is not to imply that oratorio, as a composite genre, did not exist in the United States during the early nineteenth century, but rather that programs containing oratorio extracts were far more common than complete performances of oratorios.

Boy Choirs as an American Historicist Movement in the Nineteenth Century

The establishment of boy choirs in the United States during the

134. Ibid., 383.
135. Ibid.
136. Ibid.
137. Johnson, Musical Interludes in Boston, 94.
138. The use of the word “historicist” here implies the deliberate revival of historical styles.
nineteenth century represented a limited attempt to improve singing tone and was related entirely to contemporaneous choral trends in Europe. The first boy choirs in the nineteenth-century America were begun at wealthy urban churches sponsored by prosperous 19th-century American businessmen, such as John Wanamaker who subsidized the music at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. Repeatedly affluent churches hired celebrity architects like Ralph Adams Cramm of Boston to design their buildings. Often wanted to acquire furnishings similar to those seen in European churches and purchased expensive organs (usually built in America). After the beginning of the Oxford Movement in England, certain prosperous urban Episcopal churches hired English choirmasters such as Edward Hodges (who came from Bristol, England to Trinity Church on Wall Street in New York City). The idea was that an English choirmaster could create the sound of an English cathedral choir in an American church.

In this way, from their beginning in the United States, boy choirs represented a transplanted European cultural tradition, even though cultural

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139. The title used for a choir of boys varies. As of the date of this study, the descriptor “boychoir” is used to refer to what was formerly written as boys’ choir, boy’s choir, or boys choir (e.g., “The American Boychoir School”). That descriptor will be used here because it is the term currently used by specialists. When referring to the subject (noun), “boy choir” or “boy choirs” will be used (e.g., “The Philadelphia Boy Choir”).

differences between Europe and the America were apparently not considered. Sometimes churches supporting boys choirs during this period, viewed them as trappings of grand European style—acquisitions rather than ensembles made up of people. As a result, some religious organizations tried to acquire them in the same acquisitive manner that an 1890s robber baron might ship an oriental carpet from Shanghai to his Newport, Rhode Island estate. Such a choir represented a part of an impressive aesthetic image—one which might be purchased.

By the 1890s, large Episcopal and Roman Catholic churches, predominantly in urban centers but also in smaller locales throughout the country had several churches with choirs of men and boys. Occasionally, these boy choirs combined forces for large choral festivals. For example, S. B. Whitney, organist-choirmaster of the Church of the Advent in Boston, recorded that an 1891 choir festival he attended had “some twelve hundred singers, boys and men, [who] sang in a chorus.” He went on to state: “[This] will give some idea of the prevalence of this kind of choir in and about that city.”

The appearance of boy choirs in American churches followed the


prevailing quartet tradition in religious organizations at the time. Around 1840, some churches installed large organs in rear galleries and sometimes behind a central pulpit so that they might be admired. This resulted in inadequate space for large mixed choirs. A musical compromise resulted in the quartet or “quartet choir.” Mainline Protestant denominations such as Baptist, Methodist, Congregational, and Presbyterian were not generally involved with the boychoir trend. These choirs were oases of music education during a time when choral music education in American schools was largely non-existent. Music education historian Jere Humphreys supports such an idea, writing that before the twentieth century, the very few ensembles that did exist in schools were fringe phenomena.

The sole rationale for the appearance of boy choirs in churches in the United States during this period was vocal quality. However, as historian Leonard Ellinwood suggests, these choirs may have failed in their mission:

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143. Choral historians give a variety of reasons for the appearance of boy choirs in nineteenth-century American religious institutions. Since English-style male choirs were often, though not always, associated with Episcopal churches in the late nineteenth century, explanations are often demographic, having to do with the concentration of affluence in that Protestant denomination during the post-Civil War and post-Reconstruction eras. Sometimes historians refer to this period as the Second Industrial Revolution or “Gilded Age.” Other writers relate the nineteenth-century American boychoir trend to the idealized ritualism of the Oxford Movement. Arising in England in the 1830s, this phenomenon crossed the Atlantic almost immediately.

Apparently, most of the singing by boys in these early days was done with the same coarse type of tone, which is still found so often among the untrained ensembles in our public schools. No one...seems to have developed the higher “head tones” in their boys, no one, certainly, in the first half of the nineteenth-century.145

Some critics of these nineteenth-century American boy choirs focus on the “short-sighted preference among some liturgical churches for boy choirs to the exclusion of all other types.”146

The American Cecilian Movement, Catholic Church Music, and Chorister Gender

It seems perhaps unlikely that a growing number of ecclesiastical church music reformers from European historicist movements would have anything to do with the beginnings of choral music education in America in the late nineteenth century. The context for this involvement of sectarian organizations with music education was both a response to the general unavailability of choral training in the country during this period and a desire to improve church music.

Even though the United States was the first to make public elementary education (grades one through eight) available for all (non-slave) children,


public secondary education was not always a part of the American landscape.\textsuperscript{147}

For example, before the twentieth century, very few students attended high school in the United States. The first public high school opened in Boston in 1821, almost two centuries after the first high school of any kind, the Boston Latin Grammar School, made its debut in 1635. Although private academies existed since the eighteenth century, most did not offer classroom music instruction in favor of algebra, American history, geometry, Latin, and Greek.\textsuperscript{148}

Music was seen as a recreational activity, not an academic subject. For many, church was the only place choral music was heard, and for this reason the beginnings of many facets of public school choral music education proceeded from church music. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that in the last quarter of the nineteenth century church-run schools were the only place music education occurred for many students, at a time when neither public nor private schools offered music ensembles for academic credit. Driving much of this was the Cecilian movement, a phenomenon that had gathered considerable steam in Europe and eventually brought music education ideals and choral models to Catholic schools and churches in the United States.


The American branch of the Cecilian movement arrived in the United
States in 1873. Its sway upon American Catholic church music and ritual was
similar to the effect the concurrent Oxford movement had on Anglicanism. In
that year, the American arm was organized in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, through
the efforts of John Martin Henni (1805–1881), first Archbishop of Milwaukee;
Rev. Joseph Salzmann (1819–1874), first rector of St. Francis Seminary; and
Chevalier John Baptist Singenberger (1848–1924). Singenberger, who was
Swiss, had studied in Regensburg, the movement’s headquarters, with Xavier
Witt, a preeminent German Cecilian leader.

By 1876, the society had grown to 1,680 members in locations across the
country. 149 Singenberger and other Cecilians were intent on reviving interest in
an older orthodox style of Catholic music that they believed would be
accessible to all and suitable for liturgical use. Leaders of this movement
promoted unaccompanied Renaissance music at their general convention held
in Cleveland in 1882. At that event, an ensemble of mixed voices performed
many works by “ancient masters,” including Palestrina and his
contemporaries. 150

One ideal of the Cecilian movement in Europe was that boys’ voices

149. McDaniel, “Church Song and the Cultivated Tradition,” 32.

150. Ibid., 57.
should render choral music in church. In the American branch of the movement, the subject was handled differently. The topic appeared for the first time in the 1883 issue of *Echo*, an American publication of the St. Caecilia Society. In his essay, the *Echo* editor responded to Professor J. Schultheis’ article “Frauenstimmen oder Knabenstimmen” (Women’s voices or boys’ voices) in the European sister journal *Caecilia*. The editor of *Echo* concurred with Schultheis and wrote, “That women should not join in the choral singing (except in convents) is evident.”

However, the *Echo* went on to contend that there were no liturgical laws prohibiting women from singing away from the altar. On the other hand, the American St. Caecilia Society seemed to be more intent on promoting musical style over medium. Therefore, during this period many urban American Catholic churches utilized quartets and double quartets, patterning their music after Italian churches and singing Italian and Latin masses in an operatic style.

In large cities such as New York City and Boston, churches often had two choirs at this time. Such an arrangement existed at the Cathedral of the Holy

Cross in Boston in 1890.\textsuperscript{152} Near the altar was the all-male \textit{a cappella} “sanctuary choir” that sang plainsong mass propers and Renaissance polyphony. A mixed choir with female sopranos and altos was located at the other end of the church in a rear choir loft. Accompanied by orchestra and organ, such choruses rendered elaborate settings of the ordinary of the mass.

Musicologist and music educator Richard R. Bunbury described two Catholic choirs that were significant in the musical life of New York City, and whose activities the \textit{New York Times} considered newsworthy.\textsuperscript{153} The first of these was the boy choir at St. Francis Xavier Seminary, founded in 1877, which was also associated with a church of the same name. The director was Fr. John B. Young, a Jesuit from Alsace, France. His successes with this student choir led to his appointment as the director of a men and boys choir and a mixed choir for St. Francis Xavier Church. Apparently, the latter was so skilled that its choral performance in 1881 “caused the dissolution” of their previous professional mixed choir.\textsuperscript{154}

Fr. Young was an advocate of “voice culture” and furthered his knowledge of singing with Francis Charles Maria de Rialp, an Italian voice

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{152} Mary E. McKay, “Altars of Light,” \textit{Boston Daily Globe}, 7 April 1890, p. 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{153} Richard Ramon Bunbury, “Justine Ward and the Genesis of the Ward Method of Music Education” (PhD diss., University of Massachusetts at Amherst, 2001), 42–43, 46.
  \item \textsuperscript{154} Wiseman, “Church Music and Our Choirs,” 185.
\end{itemize}
teacher and author of *The Legitimate School of Singing* (1894), when the latter visited New York City.\(^{155}\) Young recorded Rialp’s exercises and later offered them to Justine B. Ward (1879–1975), who adapted them as a method for sight singing in the 1920s. Many parochial schools in the United States used Ward’s techniques, collectively labeled “The Ward Method,” for boys and girls. Although she was a significant and prolific creator of sophisticated choral music education materials, she operated in a restricted Roman Catholic venue that limited her influence. Over her career, she published dozens of books and materials for students and teachers and was interested not only in the improvement of musical skills, but also the refinement of choral tone, pitch, and singing technique.

Another Catholic boychoir of note in New York City during the nineteenth century was that of the Church of St. Paul the Apostle under the direction of an English priest named Fr. R. P. Alfredus Young (1831–1900). According to historian John Talbot Smith’s volume *The Catholic Church in New York*, this choir was in operation as early as 1870.\(^{156}\) For the first time, in hundreds of Catholic schools and churches throughout the land, thousands of children were given music instruction to improve music for weekly masses.

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A seed of Germany’s progressive nineteenth-century *a cappella* choral activities arrived in New York City in the last decade of that century with an immigrant from Breslau, Frank Heino Damrosch (1859–1937). His notable family of Silesian Jewish immigrants to Germany encompassed several musical leaders, including his father. Therefore, it was not surprising that Damrosch’s life was dedicated to the building up of music, particularly choral music, in large cities. As Edwin Rice explained in 1939, two years after Damrosch’s death, “It was a career planned by an idealist whose sole desire was to increase the musical resources and opportunities of his adopted city [New York City].”

After transforming the musical life of Denver, Ohio, through a series of synchronicities and hard work, he repeated his successes on a grander scale in Manhattan, where his father Leopold, a composer and conductor, was a distinguished musical figure. In addition to establishing the Musical Art

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157. Leopold Damrosch (1832–1885), a German-American orchestral conductor, was Frank Damrosch’s father. Walter Johannes Damrosch (1862–1950) was a German-born American composer and conductor and brother of Frank Damrosch. Though of distinguished Jewish ancestry, because Frank Damrosch’s mother was not Jewish (Jewish tradition of matrilineal descent), technically he was not Jewish.


159. The German-American conductor Leopold Damrosch garnered enormous respect in New York artistic circles before 1900 as general manager and chief conductor of the Metropolitan Opera. He combined that regard with public support from wealthy New
Society of New York, he worked as chorusmaster of the Metropolitan Opera, conductor of the Mendelssohn Glee Club, organizer of People’s Singing Classes, founder of the People’s Choral Union, music supervisor for the New York City Public Schools, conductor of the Oratorio Society of New York, and director of the New York Institute of Musical Art.  

A predominant theme affecting every aspect of Frank Damrosch’s work was music education. New York Times music critic Richard Aldrich (1863–1937) followed the progress of the Musical Art Society for seventeen years (1902–23). He observed in 1907 that the group had been founded in 1894 for “the cultivation of the works of Palestrina, Bach and the ancient and modern composers of the a cappella style [contemporary composers of unaccompanied choral music].” Cultivation for Damrosch was his nurturance of this repertoire. As a choral educator of masses, his performances of early unaccompanied literature represented not only an aesthetic offering, but also his method of music education.

To accomplish his aims, he assembled a paid fifty-five-voice Yorkers such as the Astors, the Carnegies, J. P. Morgan, and Edith Dresser (Mrs. George W.) Vanderbilt.


unaccompanied mixed chorus from what he considered the best professional singers in New York City. In the preface to the Musical Art Society’s first concert program, he wrote:

The works of Palestrina and his school, of Bach and the more modern masters of *a cappella* music are not only difficult on account of their contrapuntal intricacies, but require such delicacy of execution, purity of intonation and capacity for intelligent interpretation that it was recognized at the start that it would be almost impossible to rely on amateurs for this kind of work. Good voices are plenty, but good readers are scarce, and the majority of our population have not yet heard enough good music to enable them always to enter intelligently into the spirit and meaning of the higher form.\textsuperscript{163}

After the group disbanded in 1920, Aldrich wrote a retrospective examining the group’s musical contributions as well as their conductor’s pedagogical intentions, explaining:

An analysis of the programs shows a very large repertory drawn from the whole history of music; a repertory so large and varied as to constitute an education in itself for any who have followed the society’s concerts.\textsuperscript{164}

The group’s repertoire was presented in “sixty one concerts in twenty-five seasons.” Looking backward almost a century later, evidence indicates that over this span of many seasons, the Musical Art Society accomplished quite a few of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{163} Ibid. As a public school music educator, Damrosch wanted students and teachers to hear *a cappella* choral music at a nominal price, and therefore always offered them tickets at half price. In addition, he provided free balcony tickets for the many participants in his popular “Peoples Singing Classes.”
\item \textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
its German founder’s goals. Specifically, Damrosch’s ensemble exposed New York audiences to a world of music never before performed or heard in a public venue there.\textsuperscript{165} His models for the Musical Art Society were German secular choral societies from 1800 to 1850, such as Carl Friedrich Zelter’s \textit{Singakademie} in Berlin and Anton Thibaut’s \textit{Singverein} in Heidelberg, that sang primarily \textit{a cappella} repertoire.\textsuperscript{166} Unaccompanied compositions by forty-four composers were included among the many works presented by the organization (see Table 2.1).

Three core contributions stand out when summing up influences by the Musical Art Society of New York to American choral music. First, as journalist Richard Aldrich suggested, this organization inspired the creation of scores of similar groups in various cities. Although his estimate may be slightly high, it is clear that many choral societies were indeed modeled after Damrosch’s Manhattan chorus, simply because his name was repeatedly invoked by conductors of similar choruses throughout the country. Aldrich goes on to suggest that the origin of many of these ensembles can be “directly traced not only to the example of the Musical Art Society but by consultation with Dr.

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\textsuperscript{166} Aldrich, “Music: The Closing of a Chapter,” p. 92.
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Moreover, at a time when the publication of early choral music was rare in the United States, Damrosch edited and published motets by old Flemish and Italian masters. Because of the visibility and notoriety associated with his various New York City music positions, those American publications were

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167. Ibid., 92.


Table 2.1
Composers represented in performances by Frank Damrosch’s Musical Art Society of New York City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allegri</th>
<th>Corsi</th>
<th>Herzogenberg</th>
<th>Palestrina</th>
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<tr>
<td>Anerio</td>
<td>Cui</td>
<td>Kopylof</td>
<td>Praetorius</td>
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<td>Arcadelt</td>
<td>des Prez</td>
<td>Lasso</td>
<td>Schumann</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bach</td>
<td>Donato</td>
<td>Leisring</td>
<td>Schutz [sic]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlioz</td>
<td>Dvorak</td>
<td>Leo</td>
<td>Sveelinck</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bortniansky</td>
<td>Eccard</td>
<td>Leslie</td>
<td>Taneiev</td>
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<td>Brahms</td>
<td>Franz</td>
<td>Liszt</td>
<td>Tomkins</td>
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<td>Caldara</td>
<td>Gabrieli</td>
<td>Mendelssohn</td>
<td>von Othegraven</td>
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<td>Calvisius</td>
<td>Gibbons</td>
<td>Morley</td>
<td>Vittoria [sic]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cherubini</td>
<td>Gretchaninoff</td>
<td>Mozart</td>
<td>Wesley</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cornelius</td>
<td>Haydn, M.</td>
<td>Nanino</td>
<td>Wilbye</td>
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widely respected. The distribution of these printed scores helped educate choirs and choral audiences throughout the land at a time when public appreciation of unaccompanied singing was nonexistent.

Over the group’s twenty-five-year life, audiences were simultaneously educated and entertained. During that time, an entire generation of New Yorkers had opportunities to experience a cappella choral music. This “artist-minded musician of relentless energy” attempted to transplant a nineteenth-century German reverence for the a cappella tradition to that city. Damrosch was keenly aware that this could not happen without combining music education with aesthetic education. His version of the latter included hearing a cappella choral repertoire performed in a manner he considered beautiful. Because there are no recordings of these performances, we can surmise that contemporaneous criticism of the group was relative to the choral performance standards of the day. Frank Damrosch hoped that responses to his choir’s beautiful singing would perpetuate his efforts by inspiring the formation of other similar groups.

His nineteenth-century German music education model included instruction in sight singing, music history, choral performance, and listening on a massive scale, all of which he demonstrated. While the ensemble did accomplish many of its aesthetic goals, everything about the Musical Art
Society of New York – its ethos, values, and repertoire – was strongly
Damrosch-dependent, which was probably why the group did not continue
after his retirement.

Vernacular American Choral Traditions:
Choral Music in Antebellum America

In the context of the American Civil War, the function of choral music
was largely utilitarian. That period of political upheaval drew focus away from
the advancement of choral singing, which became a vehicle for the expression
of wartime sentiments. For example, choral music of the antebellum era, 1830
to 1860, included patriotic songs, cantatas, part-songs, and anthems, which
were often employed as a backdrop for patriotic or political events. Composers
of such songs included Bostonians Samuel Parkman Tuckerman (1819–1890)
and George Frederick Root (1820–1895). Root composed thirty-six cantatas,
including “The Flower Queen” (1852) and “The Pilgrim Fathers” (1854).
Practical songs for pleasure were also popular antebellum forms. The most
notable composer of songs of that genre was Stephen Collins Foster (1826–
1864). Known primarily as a songwriter, Foster’s most appreciated works
include “Ah! May the Red Rose Live Alway!” “Come Where My Love Lies
Dreaming,” “Hard Times Come Again No More,” “I Dream of Jeanie,” “My Old
Kentucky Home,” “Old Black Joe,” “Old Folks At Home,” and “Slumber My
Darling.” Sung music in nineteenth-century America was both
characteristically and necessarily simple. Many pieces were written in the style of homophonic Victorian hymns, while others were sectional—unison verses followed by a chorus, refrain, or contrasting portion in four parts. Such songs were less musically demanding, with simple lines and the rare use of polyphony.

The minstrel show was an American musical entertainment form performed by both whites and African Americans, the latter being humiliated in the process. Stephen Foster and Daniel Decatur Emmett (1815–1904) composed choral settings of songs for these shows, which also featured various instruments, solo singing, and other forms of entertainment. The genre originated in England in the eighteenth century as a way of making fun of the New World and its racial problems associated with slavery. In the United States, the minstrel show emerged in the early 1830s in the Lower Broadway, the Bowery, and Chatham Street neighborhoods of New York City as one of the earliest indigenous contexts for American choral singing of a secular nature. It also was one of the most commercially successful. Throughout the Civil War, blackface among white performers lost popularity, while black minstrel troupes emerged with gusto, evolving into musical comedies, variety shows, and

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vaudeville. Although often assumed to have been a southern invention for southern audiences, minstrel shows were much more popular in the northern United States. Minstrelsy did not enter southern culture until the Civil War and was even banned in some southern towns because it broached the subjects of race and slavery. Originally, the shows were associated with less cultured spheres of Northern society, as music historian Hans Nathan wrote, “To the delight of the populace, he transferred to his art the loud gaiety of a low social stratum.”

One high point of the tripartite minstrel show structure was the final section of the first half, known as the “walk-around.” It featured members of the troupe in various combinations of song, instrumental and choral music, and competitive dancing. A popular dance, which was made synonymous with the


walk-around, was the cakewalk, which later featured male performers “in
drag.”

Minstrel shows were usually performed by traveling troupes under
professional management. Their tours included large segments of the United
States and locations in Europe, such as France. Some performed for U.S.
presidents and European crowned heads.

An increasing number of arts activities in urban areas before the Civil
War involved choral music. In Cleveland, Ohio, for instance, concert records
exist for the Cleveland Harmonic Society (established in 1835), the Cleveland
Mozart Society (1837), the Cleveland Mendelssohn Society (1850), and the
(Cleveland) St. Cecilia Society (1852). The Cleveland Mendelssohn Society
and Cleveland Harmonic Society were organizations devoted solely to the
singing of oratorio and sacred music. Also included in this mix was the
Cleveland Gesangverein (singing society), an association dedicated to the
production of opera in that city.

As previously mentioned, around 1840 antebellum ecclesiastical music

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as 1870, a possible etymological root of “drag” is 19th-century theatre slang referring to
clothing associated with one gender role when worn by a person of another gender.


176. James Harrison Kennedy, A History of the City of Cleveland: Its Settlement, Rise and
Progress, 1796–1896 (Cleveland, OH: Imperial, 1896), 294; William Osborne, Music in Ohio (Kent,
OH: Kent State University Press, 2004), 21, 44, 47; and F. Karl Grossman, A History of Music in
Cleveland (Cleveland, OH: Case Western Reserve University, 1972), 9, 10, 19, 20, 23, 39, 44, 76.

177. Osborne, Music in Ohio, 228, 346.
underwent a noticeable change by focusing not on choirs, but soloists. That gradually influenced the choral repertoire of the period. Music historian John Ogasapian explained that:

> Before the Civil War, most quartets sang only hymns and service music. By the 1860’s there was a growing repertoire of church music especially for soloists and quartets. In general, this music was in the fashionable, quasi-operatic style that signified culture and taste on the part of singer and listener alike.¹⁷⁸

Choral music during the antebellum period was an incongruous mixture of songs for pleasure and worship. It was also part of the *mise–en–scène* for political and patriotic occasions. Even though composers of this repertoire included musicians with a characteristic style, such as Stephen Foster, no school of American choral composition existed, and most simplistic theoretical models, such as the English Victorian hymntune, used by American composers of this era, originated outside the United States.

**Choral Music during the Civil War**

During the four years of the American Civil War (1861–1865), sung music was primarily for religious, social, military, and patriotic purposes. Representing the first category were large concerts organized by religious organizations in which choral music was an important part. After 1840, there was increasing organization of singers into choral societies in cities. Similar to

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choral societies in England and Germany, their repertoire was mostly devoted to oratorio and their function was both social and musical. That trend continued both during and after the Civil War.

American sacred choral music rooted in the traditions of Western Europe was not prevalent during the Civil War. One exception was a composer and organist named Dudley Buck (1839–1909). In the middle of the national struggle, in 1862, Buck returned to his hometown of Hartford, Connecticut, after four years of study in Europe that included eighteen months at the Leipzig Conservatory and organ study in Dresden and Paris. Buck was among the estimated five thousand American students matriculating at German conservatories between 1850 and 1900. Two years later, in 1864, he published *Buck’s Motette Collection*. Unlike popular unison songs of the day, and reflecting strong English influence, these motets were the first of their kind in an American romantic style.

The plethora of patriotic songs and ballads written during this period mirrored the painful war in the United States, as well as the hope for peaceful resolution. One popular example of questionable origin was titled “When


Johnny Comes Marching Home” (1863), a song expressing the longing of citizens for the return of their friends and relatives who were fighting in the conflict.\textsuperscript{182} Such pieces were often unison choral works that juxtaposed soloists with chorus and incorporated instrumental interludes. The music usually did not specify the voicing or type of soloist(s) required. This allowed for great choral versatility during wartime and made such music both useful and popular for singers with minimal musical backgrounds. The thematic focus of these songs shifted during the course of the war period, from nationalism at the outset of the conflict, to death and loss during battle, and finally to the anticipation of soldiers returning home after the war.\textsuperscript{183}

While these unison choral songs were most prevalent during the American Civil War era, choir music with four-part voicing was also generated and sung during this period. For example, choral music preceded President Abraham Lincoln’s address at the Gettysburg battlefield. The two choral works composed for that occasion were Wilson G. Horner’s “National Consecration Chant” and Alfred Delaney’s “Dirge,” both written in 1863 and sung by the

\textsuperscript{182} Wayne Erbsen, \textit{Rousing Songs and True Tales of the Civil War} (Pacific, MO: Mel Bay Publications, 2000), 68. One possibility is that Irish-American bandleader Patrick Gilmore, under the pseudonym Louis Lambert, composed the song “When Johnny Comes Marching Home.” It was deposited in the Library of Congress in 1863. The genesis of the tune may have been a popular drinking song of the day, “Johnny Fill Up the Bowl.” The text may have evolved from a well-known folk song “Johnny, I Hardly Knew Ye,” widely regarded as a traditional Irish anti-war song and rewritten as the pro-war “When Johnny Comes Marching Home.”

National Union Musical Association of Baltimore. Their form consisted of the familiar model of a refrain following a unison verse. This time, however, the refrains had four voice parts (SATB). In addition, the four-part accompaniments under the unison verses melded with the choral voicing of the refrain, imparting a harmonic cohesion to these works. Popular songs during the Civil War by composers such as Stephen Foster, George Root, and Henry Clay Work were also “choral,” as either a single soloist or any combination of singers could sing them. Twentieth-century American music historian John Warthen Struble explained that such compositions arose from a fusion of “the first American folk music with discernible features that can be considered unique to America.”

In the midst of the Civil War, choral societies based in cities continued performances of oratorios by European composers. According to Smither,


185. Edward Everett and Abraham Lincoln, Address of Hon. Edward Everett, at the Consecration of the National Cemetery at Gettysburg, 19th November, 1863: With the Dedicatory Speech of President Lincoln, and the Other Exercises of the Occasion (Boston: Little, Brown Publishers, 1864), 25. According to this record (p. 25), music for the occasion was provided by Birgfield’s Band (of Pennsylvania), the U.S. Marine Band, and a “Choir selected for the occasion.” Since the score of Delaney’s “Dirge” is printed here and it specifies accompaniment, it is possible that one or both of these bands accompanied the choral music. The name of the choir and the presence of an accompaniment, if any, are unspecified in historical records.

Moses in Egypt by Fry (1865) and Deluge by Beltzzhoover (1860s) were the only two American oratorios composed during the war years. Both have biblical subjects, the latter being a musical treatment of the biblical account of Noah and the great flood.

Nineteenth-Century American Choral Music after the Civil War

In the years following the American Civil War, instrumental and choral music continued to evolve in both city and country locales. As musicologist Stephan Baur pointed out, “While American instrumental ensembles grew in prevalence during the latter half of the nineteenth century, choral music remained the most pervasive type of formal music-making throughout the era.” In more densely populated areas, urban choral societies that survived the war continued to thrive. American composers emerged to contribute works to the repertory alongside large choral works by European composers such as Mendelssohn and Brahms. An increasing number of American composers had received training in Germany. Included in that assortment was a subgroup who resided on the Northeastern seaboard and were collectively known as “The

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188. Beltzzhoover’s Deluge was composed in the style of Haydn’s Creation.

Second New England School.”

Also, during the last decade of the period, a fusion of modernist ideas affecting choral music appeared on the American musical scene. These aesthetic philosophies represented a variety of beliefs that encompassed anti-romanticism, intellectualism, surrealism, the primacy of science, positivism, and a break with common practice. Carl Dahlhaus was explicit in not labeling this “breakaway mood” as “late romanticism.” Instead, he suggested viewing this aesthetic shift in post-Civil War American music as the direct result of an “extended period of intense industrial expansion, unprecedented in magnitude and scope.”

Finally, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century some choral educators expressed a desire to elevate the “moral composition” of American society. From the mid-1880s, music education evolved as a sort of “neglected child” in the still relatively few secondary schools in the United States. Although some of those schools adopted an academic approach to music education by singing oratorios and offering credited music courses, the norm


193. Ibid., 64–130.
across the nation was casual auditorium singing. As music education historian Bailey Birge confirmed, “Practically all have occasional assembly singing.”

Between 1890 and 1915, the number of public high schools doubled because of social conditions surrounding the Industrial Revolution. In response to increased numbers of young people, extracurricular music clubs and groups offered students informal choral experiences. Referring to that era of school growth, music education historian Jere Humphreys observed, “They were on the fringes of what historian Harold Rugg called the ‘faintest outline’ of a curriculum of culture that formed during the last 30 years of the century.”

Music Festivals and Late Nineteenth-Century American Oratorio

The proliferation of music societies during the late nineteenth century magnified and benefited choral music in America, but it did nothing to refine choral singing. These groups offered musical experiences to choir members who sang large symphonic choral works in concerts and music festivals. The latter were an outgrowth of “singing conventions,” which, like singing schools, often incorporated periods of musical instruction. Postbellum American music

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societies usually followed English or German models and fell into a number of categories, such as the *Sängerbund*. Also seen was the “singing union,” a conglomerate of several German-style singing societies. One reason for the success of such organizations was their widespread popularity.

As in Europe, choral festivals were usually large events with choruses of hundreds of singers, orchestras of one hundred or more players, and professional vocal and instrumental soloists. They often lasted a week, encompassing the performance of five to seven different oratorios or large choral-orchestral works. Cincinnati’s 1873 May Festival, for example, “featured a chorus of 850 singers, mainly from choral societies in the Cincinnati area, and a 105-piece orchestra of musicians from Cincinnati, and from the New York Philharmonic Society.” Participation in these groups did not seem to be a problem. Even small towns in the South had many choirs functioning simultaneously. For instance, in Charlotte, North Carolina, between 1865 and 1918, twenty-two choirs of thirty to forty singers each were operational. In 1870, the population of Charlotte was only 4,473, so to generate ample singers

196. A Sängerbund is a choral society made up of members chiefly of German descent.


for a choral festival, choral organizations pooled their numbers.

Like their European counterparts, most choral societies in large American urban centers were social organizations rather than ones dedicated to the serious cultivation of choral tone.¹⁹⁹ Due to the absence of choral music education in schools at the time, most of the singers in such groups lacked basic sight-singing skills.²⁰⁰ These activities provided opportunities for casual music making as another manifestation of an on-going Industrial Revolution and burgeoning middle class. Increasingly grander concert spaces, expanding symphony orchestras, and notable oratorio soloists—usually more of a draw than the choruses—often overshadowed the choral singing.

Shape-Note Singing Schools after the Civil War

After the Civil War, a complex transformation of the singing school tradition followed. First, the popularity of this shape-note singing declined in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and at the same time, it took on more of a southern identity. Second, the original four-shape notational system eventually gave way to a seven-shape system. Third, surviving singing schools, already identified with music education, reinvented themselves as “normal


²⁰⁰. Ibid.
schools” for the training of teachers.\textsuperscript{201} Even though singing school masters were untrained, singing schools functioned as a kind of \textit{de facto} “proving ground” for the academic study of music in schools.\textsuperscript{202} This evolution from a semi-social night school movement to normal schools for teacher education placed increased focus on music teacher education. The effort was an organized one by former singing school masters who came to believe that the quality of music education depended on teachers with technical knowledge of their subject. Allen Britton suggested that by the turn of the twentieth century singing school masters, now instructors in normal schools, became better educated, even though vocal technique was still not taught.\textsuperscript{203}

Further support for shape-note singing came from such publications as \textit{The Musical Million and Fireside Friend}, a periodical promoting music reading by means of shape-notes in North America from 1870 to 1914. That journal helped link music teachers throughout the United States.\textsuperscript{204} Finally, southern shape-note hymnody expanded to include gospel and folk hymns. The former, such as

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
the camp-meeting revival hymns of Ira Sankey (1840–1908) and Fanny Crosby (1820–1915), usually derived from Victorian European and English models. Such a change represented a reconnection with a genre that had previously rejected the shape-note tradition.

In the last fifteen years of the century, a musical technique imported from England arrived in the United States. Developed in that country around 1840 by Methodist minister John Curwen (1816–1880), it was brought to the United States by B. C. Unseld, Theodore F. Seward, and Biglow and Main publishers. American critic and musicologist Henry Edward Krehbiel (1854–1923) explained the benefits of the pedagogical solmization technique called “Tonic Sol-Fa” in 1888, writing: 205

There are features in tonic sol-fa, which seem to mark it as the agent called to free our musical cultivation from certain dangers, which lurk in the dominant instrumental tendency. In the hands of the pupil who plays it, or imitates it in the study of tones and intervals, a pianoforte which is out of tune is an evil of frightful magnitude which holds the pupil in its grasp and either stunts or deforms his faculties. Over the instrument of the tonic sol-fa ist [sic] there stands a monitor who can both detect faults and remedy them. 206

Perhaps because of the widespread long-standing popularity of shape-note hymnody in certain areas of the United States, this method for reading musical

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205. “Tonic Sol-Fa” is an English pedagogical solmization technique for the teaching of sight singing in which each note of the score is sung to a specific solfege syllable.

notation was never widely accepted.

Choral Music Education and Moralistic Dimensions of American Secular Culture

In the second half of the nineteenth century, high-minded bastions of secular culture in the United States encouraged the elevation of the “moral composition” of American society. This affected the way various types of music were perceived and explained why oratorio was the most prominent choral genre from 1875 to 1900. It was a choral category sung by lay singing societies, which were by nature secular organizations devoted to performing large-scale choir works such as oratorios. Because such choruses often sang works based on religious themes, they functioned as a kind of bridge between sacred and secular forms of expressive culture. Similarly, in some circles nineteenth-century American music education, like the German concept of Bildung (discussed later), operated as part of a social program for moral instruction.

CHAPTER 3

UNACCOMPANIED CHORAL TRENDS
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPE

Nineteenth-Century European Sacred *A Cappella* Choral Music:
*A Cappella* and Its Historical Relationship with the *Cappella Sistina*

At the beginning of the twentieth century, choral performance in the
United States began to be refined by a variety of means, which included
unaccompanied, or *a cappella*, singing. Musicologists do not know precisely
when the ubiquitous term *a cappella* first came into use; however, the apparent
earliest manifestations of the expression appeared in Italian baroque treatises
around 1660, sixty-six years after the death of Giovanni Perluigi da Palestrina
(1525–1594). During that Renaissance composer’s lifetime, there was only one
compositional practice—his. For that reason, Palestrina never used the labels
that were applied to his music later in the seventeenth century. However,
perhaps before his death, and certainly less than a decade after it, musical
relativity entered the equation with the birth of other compositional styles.
When this occurred distinctions were drawn between the old and new
practices.
Referred to initially around 1600 as the “first practice” or “prima pratica,”\textsuperscript{208} that descriptor denoted techniques of strict contrapuntal composition used by Palestrina as well as by composers of the Roman School who emulated his practices. During this time, Palestrina was the director of the Sistine Chapel Choir, or \textit{Capella Sistina},\textsuperscript{209} an ensemble that has always sung without accompaniment. Because Palestrina composed exclusively for that choir, his compositions would have been performed “in the manner of the [Sistine] Chapel,” meaning without instrumental accompaniment. The Italian translation of \textit{a cappella} is “of the chapel.” However, not just any chapel is meant, but rather the Sistine Chapel. Therefore, implicit in the character of \textit{Prima prattica}—Palestrina’s sixteenth-century compositional practice—was its original “\textit{a cappella}” context.

\textsuperscript{208} The Italian terms \textit{prima prattica} (“first practice”) and \textit{seconda prattica} appeared in the first decade of the seventeenth century in a controversy between Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643) and Italian theorist and reactionary music critic G. M. Artusi (1540–1613). In 1600, Monteverdi both defended and rationalized the freer use of dissonance he employed in his first book of nine madrigals published in 1587. Here, Monteverdi distinguished between the older sacred style of the sixteenth century (as exemplified by Palestrina), \textit{prima prattica}, and his new compositional techniques, labeled \textit{seconda prattica}. Monteverdi’s use of \textit{prima prattica} was not necessarily complimentary, for he saw the earlier ecclesiastical style as subordinating text to music. He advanced his \textit{seconda prattica} as advantageous because it gave preeminence to the text. It should be noted here that the Italian word for practice was spelled two ways during the Renaissance period. Monteverdi, who coined the term, spelled it \textit{prattica}, while his famous compositional opponent Giovanni Maria Artusi spelled it \textit{pratica} [identical with the modern spelling].

\textsuperscript{209} After Pope Sixtus IV (1471–1484) reconfigured the Pope’s chapel from the former \textit{Capella Magna} between 1477 and 1480, he named the new structure the \textit{Cappella Sistina}, or “Sistine Chapel,” a title that that historically also referred to its choir.
Palestrina had more than a few disciples who desired proximity with their musical master. Perhaps as many as twenty-seven polyphonists living in or near Rome both referenced and/or copied his compositional style during his career and immediately after his death. During that period, Rome became a kind of “polyphonic destination” for many composers from the low-lying delta of the Rhine, Scheldt, and Meuse rivers. These areas encompassed the modern countries of Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and parts of northern France and western Germany. Well-known contrapuntists such as Jacques Arcadelt, Josquin des Prez, and Jacob Obrecht represented a Franco-Netherlandish sub-category of what historically has been called the Roman School. To help make ends meet, a position in the highly stratified *Capella Sistina* was the great desideratum of musicians from many European locales. At least for a time, some of the most notable names in sixteenth-century counterpoint resided in that Italian center of high Renaissance culture.

The Council of Trent

The context for the polyphony of the Roman School during the sixteenth century was the Catholic Church and its ecclesiopolitical dramas. During this period, the Catholic Counter-Reformation culminated in The Council of Trent, which met for two decades, from 1543 to 1563, in an effort to correct abuses within the Catholic Church. Throughout that period, the Council’s actions
generated both intra- and extramural gossip from individuals with church music agendas. However, that official assembly did not examine music until its third and final session, which took place in 1562–63. On 10 September 1562, a draft proposal from a multinational committee on music was presented to the general congregation:

Canon 8. All things should indeed be so ordered that the Masses, whether they be celebrated with or without singing, may reach tranquilly into the ears and hearts of those who hear them, when everything is executed clearly and at the right speed. In the case of those Masses which are celebrated with singing and with organ, let nothing profane be intermingled, but only hymns and divine praises. The whole plan of singing in musical modes should be constituted not to give empty pleasure to the ear, but in such a way that the words may be clearly understood by all, and thus the hearts of listeners be drawn to the desire of heavenly harmonies, in the contemplation of the joys of the blessed. They shall also banish from church all music that contains, whether in the singing or in the organ playing, things that are lascivious or impure.²¹⁰

Proposal 8 was not accepted by the Council even though, up to the present, many music history textbooks quote excerpts from that proposed canon as a “decree” of the council.²¹¹ What was later accepted by the Council was the shorter statement: “They shall banish from church all music that contains, whether in the singing or in the organ playing, things that are


lascivious or impure.” The “proposed” Canon 8 was translated from the Latin by the late musicologist Gustave Reese (1899–1977), a founding member of the American Musicological Society who taught at Harvard University, Oxford University (UK), and the Juilliard School of Music. Reese’s music history text, *Music in the Renaissance*, which continues to quoted by many other prominent authors, is at least partially responsible for the incorrect belief that Canon 8 was a decree of the Council. Musicologist Craig Monson, who has studied the Council of Trent extensively, stated, “Reese created a misleading impression of the Council’s legislation on music by stringing together the preliminary eighth canon, which had not been approved, and this final published version—a procedure followed by many other musicologists since.”

Despite two decades of protracted deliberations and the special interests of some, clergy delegates to the Council strove to say as little as possible about music. They advocated the elimination of secular, or impure, “elements” from the mass in favor of a spirit of veneration and reverence, leaving specific musical issues to the local jurisdiction of individual bishops and provincial

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synods. In the immediate aftermath of this assembly, those with blatant church music agendas, such as Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti and Cardinal Carolo Borromeo, focused unofficially on the issue of the intelligibility of texts, affording that topic a quasi-official status that seems to have quickly become widely accepted as “*iuxta formam concilii*” (“according to the form of the Council”), which it was not. Certain characteristics of Palestrina’s music—such as homophony, consonance, employment of homorhythms, and slow harmonic rhythms—became associated with ideals supposedly put forth by the Council of Trent, though that official body made no musical decrees, only the short statement given above about musical purity. Near the conclusion of the Council, Pope Pius IV (1499–1565) both honored and elevated Giovanni Perluigi da Palestrina by issuing a Papal Brief naming Palestrina “Composer of the Papal Chapel.” This was a separate papal honor for Palestrina based on his work and had nothing to do with the Council of Trent.

Monteverdi and Stylistic Delineation

Palestrina, who is so often associated with the term *a cappella*, did not employ it. It is logical to surmise that if this descriptor refers to the manner of

215. Ibid., 22.


the Sistine Chapel Choir, only people outside of this musical body would have used it. Whether this was the case during Palestrina’s lifetime is unknown, and it is doubtful because only one style of music existed. Historically, the first choral composer after Palestrina associated with a “precursor” of the term *a cappella* was the composer Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643), a contemporary of Palestrina who first delineated sacred and modern choral practices as a reaction to criticism of his contrasting madrigals. As previously mentioned, in 1600 Monteverdi, an experimentalist, became involved in a famous argument with another composer, Giovanni Artusi, who deemed modernisms in Monteverdi’s madrigals to be unrefined. Monteverdi did not employ the term *a cappella* in “Studiosi lettori” of his *Il quinto libro de madrigali a cinque voci*, his only public response to Artusi’s criticisms.218

What he did do in the introduction to this fifth book was not only reply to Artusi; he also proposed a division of music into two streams: a first practice and a second practice. *Prima pratica* [Artusi’s Italian spelling] represented the sixteenth-century ideal of Palestrina: flowing strict counterpoint, prepared dissonance, and the equality of voices. *Seconda pratica* was not limited in this way and utilized freer counterpoint and an increasing hierarchy of voices

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emphasizing soprano and bass. In *prima pratica*, the words were controlled by
the harmonies; the reverse was true for *seconda pratica*. There was also the
introduction of accompaniment in *seconda pratica* with the basso continuo.\(^{219}\)

Only three surviving choral compositions by Monteverdi refer to the
Sistine Choir with a descriptor similar to *a cappella*: These three compositions,
all of them masses, have the words *da cappella* in their titles. Two of these
settings called for a choir of four parts with organ continuo. One of these was
his *Messa a quattro voci da cappella*, published posthumously in 1651 by his
pupil and admirer Alessandro Vincenti. Even though in both masses
Monteverdi utilized the strict polyphonic style of Palestrina, his addition of an
organ continuo brought into question whether this work represented *prima* or
*seconda prattica*. The composer used the term “*da cappella*” rather than *a
cappella* in the titles of all three masses. His use of the Italian preposition “da,”
in this instance, indicates source or origin. Therefore, the fact that Monteverdi
titled a work “Mass for Four Voices,” followed that with the prepositional
phrase *da cappella* (“originating from the chapel”), and then included an organ
accompaniment, might indicate that the title meant “Mass for Four Voices with
Reference to the Unaccompanied Compositional Style of Palestrina.” This was

\(^{219}\) Claudio Monteverdi, “Il Quinto Libro De Madrigali a Cinque Voci, Studiosi
Claude V. Palisca (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), 151–52.
seconda pratica referencing prima pratica. Monteverdi wrote much unaccompanied choral music; however, most of the music—for example, his madrigals—employs a freer counterpoint associated with seconda pratica. In the light of Monteverdi’s use of da cappella, it seems highly unlikely that he would have ever employed the term a cappella because historically the words referred to different but related actions. Da cappella was perhaps the earliest precursor of the term a cappella; the former referred to a compositional style associated with the counterpoint of Palestrina and the latter a genre of singing modeled by the Capella Sistina. Palestrina’s single practice now existed in relationship to another. At this crossroads in music history, one practice became two styles: old and new, a transformation that called for new language to describe it.

Monteverdi never proposed obviating the previous practice of Palestrina, but rather recommended keeping it as a stylistic possibility for future composers, and he demonstrated how this might be done. Whereas musicians before Monteverdi had to speak only one language, now composers were required to be bilingual, though idiomatic expression was still a creative choice. This simple introduction of another musical style, the departure from a well-understood “box,” initiated a progressive taxonomic nightmare of increasing complexity in the annals of music history, for as musical style evolved, future composers increasingly sought labels in an effort to help illuminate change. For
even if the influence of the *Cappella Sistina* was waning, the power of its reputation and its increasingly mythical stature remained a fixture in European culture. Like an enormous stone mausoleum in a “grave yard,” its very presence functioned to entomb the *stilo antico* in perpetuity.

**Marco Scacchi: Further Stylistic Delineation**

Synchronistically, the first continuation of Monteverdi’s stylistic taxonomy occurred in 1643, the year of his death. Then, Marco Scacchi (1600–ca.1662), a Roman *maestro di cappella* to the King of Poland, published his polemic *Cribrum musicum ad triticum Syferticum* (*Musical Sieve for the Syfert Wheat*), arguing for a new and improved clarification of musical styles. The genesis of that treatise was a response to Scacchi’s criticism of German composer Paul Siefert’s (1586–1666) settings of Calvinist psalms from the Goudimel-Lobwasser psalter of the Reformed Church.²²⁰

It was not long before creative fusion of the newly delineated choral styles caused angst for some musicians of the day. Even before the second half of the seventeenth century, basso continuo lines appeared in sacred *stile antico* choral works, specifically in settings of the psalms. This was unacceptable for

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Scacchi, who opposed the blending of *stylus antiquus* (*prima practica*) and *stylus modernus* (*seconda practica*). Music historian Lorenzo Bianconi explained that, according to Scacchi:

The two styles, ancient and modern, have equal dignity but differing functions. Each is governed by its own laws and constitution; mixing them together would compromise not only their effectiveness but also, above all, their grammatical correctness.\(^{221}\)

In defense of Scacchi, in the first half of the seventeenth century choral singing had evolved considerably, complicating the landscape. Scacchi’s response, published in his treatises *Cribrum* (1643) and *Breve discorso sopra la musica moderna* (1649), was a comprehensive classification of musical styles.

Scacchi proposed three main classes: church (*ecclesiasticus*), chamber (*cubicularis*), and scenic or theatrical (*scenicus seu theatralis*:\(^{222}\)

### Church style (*Ecclesiasticus*)

1. Masses, motets, and other vocal pieces without organ for four to eight voices
2. The same with organ or with several choruses
3. Similar vocal music in concerto, that is, with instruments
4. Motets or concerti in modern style

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\(^{222}\) Ibid., 48.
Chamber style (Cubicularis) had three components:

1. Madrigals without instruments (da tavolino)
2. Vocal pieces with continuo
3. Vocal pieces with solo instruments such as violins, violas majores, theorbs, lutes, and recorders 223

The theatrical style was a single style of “speech perfected by song,” or “song by speech.” Here, for the first time, there is a category associated with prima prattica that specifically mentioned unaccompanied singing as a style, not with the descriptor a cappella, but with the words “without organ.” Marco Scacchi’s own rationale, as well as targeted references to prima and seconda prattica, purposely and explicitly posited his taxonomy as a continuation of Monteverdi’s classification. Musicologist Paul Collins confirmed, “Scacchi’s system is clearly adapted from the Monteverdian model outline in the foreward to the Madrigali guerrieri, et amorosi of 1638.” 224 He went on to point out that we can deduce from comments in the treatise Breve discorso that this three-part classification incorporates “two practices and three styles, the former corresponding to the prima prattica and the seconda prattica, respectively.” 225

Scacchi wrote in Breve discorso sopra la musica moderna (1649):

223. Marco Sacchi, Breve Discorso Sopra La Musica Moderna (Warsaw: Peter Elert, 1649).


225. Ibid.
Ancient music consists in one practice only and almost in one and the same style of employing consonances and dissonances. But the modern consists of two practices and three styles, that is, the church, chamber, and theatre styles. The practices are: the first which is ut Harmonia sit Domina Orationis [that harmony be the mistress of the text] and the second, which is ut Oratio sit Domina Harmoniae [that the text be the mistress of the harmony]. Each of these three styles contains very great variations, novelties, and inventions of extraordinary dimension.226

However, Scacchi rejected Monteverdi’s choice of organ continuo in stile antico composition.

It is clear from Scacchi’s musical classification, which separates a cappella from accompanied polyphony, that under the earlier taxonomy he would have considered those experiments to be seconda rather than prima prattica (see Table 3.1 for Scacchi’s classifications). It is also probable that Monteverdi might have agreed with Scacchi on that point. Monteverdi’s prima prattica was directly associated with the singing practice of an ensemble performing exclusively a cappella music, the Sistine Chapel Choir. One might then extrapolate a direct correlation between Palestrina’s unaccompanied prima prattica and Scacchi’s subcategory of Stylus Ecclesiasticus with “no organ.”

Christoph Bernhard’s Expansion of Scacchi’s Taxonomy

Other later theorists, such as Christoph Bernhard (1628–1692) in his treatise Tractatus compositionis augmentatis (1657) and Angelo Beradi (ca. 1636–
Table 3.1. Summary of Scacchi’s threefold classification of musical styles with subdivisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stylus Ecclesiasticus (Church Style)</th>
<th>Stylus Cubicularis (Chamber Style)</th>
<th>Stylus Scenicus seu Theatralis (Stage or Theatre)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Masses, motets, etc., for four to eight voices, without organ</td>
<td>1. a cappella madrigals da tavolino (i.e., sung around a table)</td>
<td>1. Stile semplice recitativo (without gestures)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Polychoral with organ</td>
<td>2. Madrigals with basso continuo</td>
<td>2. Stile recitativo (with gestures)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. In concerto (with various instruments)</td>
<td>3. Compositions for voices and instruments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Motets and concerti in modern style in stile misto or recitativo imbastardito (recitative with passaggi and arias)</td>
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1694) in his treatise *Documenti armonici* (1687), quoted Scacchi at length.

Bernhard, for example, classified choral music into three categorical styles based upon performance location, the kinds of dissonance employed, and the relationship between words and music. His categorization was the first to use the words *a cappella* stylistically. Like Monteverdi, Bernhard’s classification

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included two main groups: a *stylus gravis* and *stylus luxurians* (*stylus modernus*), but he added a further subdivision of *stylus luxurians* into *communis* and *theatralis*. Although his stylistic taxonomy was similar to Scacchi’s tripartite classification, it was not identical. In some ways, it was a continuation of Monteverdi’s concept because its three-part structure emerges from a two-part morphology, identical to that of Monteverdi. Bernhard explained that the *stylus gravis*, or “grave style,” was synonymous with what had also been called the *stylus antiquus* (*antique style*), *stylus a cappella* (*chapel style*, referring to the “*Cappella Sistina*,” or Sistine Chapel), and *stylus ecclesiasticus* (*church style*). Bernhard here implied that although the term *stylus a cappella* had not been recorded taxonomically, it was in common use during that time. Therefore, Bernhard’s division of music into two categories, *stylus gravis* (*stylus antiquus*) and *stylus luxurians* (*stylus modernus*), refers to Monteverdi’s *prima* and *seconda prattica* (see Table 3.2). However, here Bernhard goes one step further, subdividing secular styles, or *stylus luxurians*, into two subcategories. His use of *stylus gravis* is synonymous with the strict sixteenth-century polyphonic practice of Palestrina and the Roman School. Both Bernhard and Monteverdi wanted to codify various references to this music into one descriptor.

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228. Ibid.
Table 3.2. Christoph Bernard’s stylistic taxonomy of 1657: two-part classification representing two styles of counterpoint predicated on quantity of dissonance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grave Style</th>
<th>Synonymous with:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Palestrina-style Counterpoint</td>
<td>Only a few dissonant “figures”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>stylus gravis</em></td>
<td><em>solemn style</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>prima prattica</em></td>
<td>Monteverdi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>stylus antiquus</em></td>
<td>antique or ancient style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>stylus a cappella</em></td>
<td>Sistine Chapel style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>stylus ecclesiasticus</em></td>
<td>church style</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Luxuriant Style</th>
<th>Synonymous with:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary Counterpoint</td>
<td>Many more dissonant “figures”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>stylus luxurians</em></td>
<td><em>stylus modernus</em> (modern style)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>seconda prattica</em></td>
<td>Monteverdi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>stylus communis</em></td>
<td>common practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>stylus theatralis</em></td>
<td>comic style (theatrical, recitative, oratorical)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As its translation of “chapel style” indicates, the term *a cappella* has always referred to unaccompanied vocal singing. Although any relationships between the word “Capella” and the Sistine Chapel Choir in later usage (e.g., beginning in the twentieth century) are purely vestigial, its indication of unaccompanied singing nevertheless remains. The title *Cappella Sistina* and the unaccompanied music style of singing performed there are inextricably linked.

The primary reason for this linkage is that choirs in the Sistine Chapel have always sung unaccompanied. Yale musicologist Richard Boursy confirmed that:

> Their repertory consisted almost exclusively of works by Palestrina, his contemporaries, and his imitators. They always sang without instrumental accompaniment; this is probably the source of our expression “a cappella.”

Catholic choral scholar Joseph Otten also confirmed that the Papal choir’s ideal had always been a purely vocal style, excluding all instruments, even the organ. In a forty-two-page booklet published in London in 1771, English historian and traveler Charles Burney cited testimony from 1695. In his description of the Sistine choir, he reaffirmed that the voices “were not

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231. In 2002, a small mobile organ built by Hermann Mathis of Näfels, Switzerland was placed in the Sistine Chapel.

disturbed by instruments, whose tones are unalterably fixed." 233 Numerous accounts from European grand tours confirm that after the Napoleonic Wars, when many choirs abandoned previous practices, the _Cappella Sistina_ retained its tradition of singing without accompaniment. 234 Therefore, one might reason that Bernhard’s original mid-seventeenth-century use of _a cappella_ referred to choral music sung in the unaccompanied fashion of the Sistine Chapel Choir, not merely an “ecclesiastical style.”

We do not know what meaning the term _a cappella_ may have had at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Europe, or even how prevalent its use may have been. For some particularly affluent individuals who may have had the experience of a Grand Tour, the label _a cappella_ could have conjured up idealistic images of the _Cappella Sistina_ singing unaccompanied music in St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. For others, perhaps the vast majority of those familiar with the term, it simply meant an absence of accompaniment. For liturgical reformers “longing for the past,” the term may have suggested a reconnection with unaccompanied sixteenth-century choral singing.

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Eighteenth-Century Reforms in Roman Catholic Church Music: A Reaction to Perceived Ecclesiastical Extravagance

During the nineteenth century, critics in and outside the Roman Catholic Church criticized the liturgy of the mass, which they thought had become excessive. This was nothing new; similar criticisms had been offered before 1800. For example, German Emperor Joseph II’s 1781 Edict of Toleration restricted the length of the mass to forty-five minutes. For composers trying to create settings of the liturgy in the concerted styles of the day, this was an unacceptable limitation and interference. In 1776, W. A. Mozart, in Vienna, wrote to his Italian colleague, G. B. Martini, in Bologna, “Our church music is very different from that of Italy, since a mass must not last longer than three quarters of an hour.” In Catholic circles, the critical appraisal of ritualistic worship and liturgy ensued into the nineteenth century and no doubt bore a relationship to earlier historical reforms.


Roots of the Palestrina Revival

Following the Napoleonic Wars, a growing middle class showed an interest in older music, while it simultaneously enjoyed an evolving Western European musical canon that included much secular music. Choral music expressed increased emotional expression by way of expanding musical forms and the transformation of harmonic language. Not everyone at the time, however, was pleased with those changes, and herein lay the roots of the unaccompanied choral movements of the nineteenth century. Below the surface of this widespread musical evolution in Europe flowed a small but influential countercurrent of scholars who saw early nineteenth-century musical innovation as the antithesis of progress. Using the argument that masterworks of Beethoven, Haydn, and Mozart had roots in the music of earlier composers, a dozen or so unique figures interested in sacred music reform likewise increasingly espoused historical choral models. The ideas of these learned clerical and non-clerical individuals manifested first as disparate tenets. However, over time their ideas coalesced into what they believed to be a general standard of sacred choral perfection. These were not simply minimally significant, opinionated people on the fringes of musical progress in Europe, but specialists who privately had the attention, respect, and interest of many of the foremost European composers of their day.
Their “ideal” had one common ethos: an almost cultic reverence for the Renaissance as a golden age of choral excellence. Specifically, their model was Giovanni da Palestrina—the individual, his oeuvre, and his followers. The latter encompassed a “Roman School” of polyphonists who employed the techniques of their master. These reformers, who championed his music and idealized his style, inspired a renewed interest in Palestrina and sixteenth-century choral music in Europe during the nineteenth century. Despite an intermittent past and before its nineteenth-century rebirth, unaccompanied Renaissance choral music never entirely left the musical landscape of the European continent. Between the death of Palestrina in the sixteenth century and 1800, the Sistine Chapel Choir clung tenaciously to his a cappella works, performing them regularly.  

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Key Figures in the Nineteenth-Century Revival of Unaccompanied Early Music

Giuseppe Baini

Italian musicologist and composer Giuseppe Baini (1775–1844) exhibited a lifelong fascination with and devotion to the music of Palestrina. He came to the stile antico and unaccompanied choral singing in his youth and later became a basso singer in the Papal Choir. In 1814, at thirty-nine years of age and after twelve years in Rome, Baini ascended to the directorship of that choir. There

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he combined his enthusiasm for Palestrina and the Roman school with his multi-faceted career as a performer, composer, music educator, biographer, priest, and editor.

Baini, an unassuming priest, held this high-profile post for the rest of his life, garnering interest in Palestrina’s “severe ecclesiastical style.” His important seven-volume collection of the works of Palestrina, *Raccolta di Musica Sacra* (Collection of Sacred Music), published in Rome from 1841 to 1846, was one of the factors influencing this revival. As a biographer, Baini’s monumental *Memorie storico-critiche della vita e delle opere di Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina* (*Memories and historical criticism of the life and works of Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina*) is significant, not so much for its information on Palestrina, but because of the historical data this monograph provided about other composers.

An examination of Baini’s regard for Palestrina as “the saviour of church music” leads one to a strange admix of historical facts, fiction, and promotion. In his 1994 dissertation on Baini, musicologist Richard Boursy observed that it was by “a combination of scholarship and hero-worship” that he (Baini) contributed to the creation of a nineteenth-century Renaissance choral ideal.²⁴⁰


²⁴⁰ Richard Boursy, “Historicism and Composition: Giuseppe Baini, the Sistine Chapel Choir, and Stile Antico Music in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1994), 16.
James Garratt’s 2002 study of Palestrina takes that concept one step further. He proposed that this hero-worship caused Baini to promote an existing legend\textsuperscript{241} that Palestrina “saved” church music from the Council of Trent’s “draconian ban on counterpoint.”\textsuperscript{242} While Boursy confirms Garratt’s proposition, the latter linked it directly to Baini’s \textit{Memorie storico-critiche}. According to a fictional narrative set forth in the work, Palestrina composed his \textit{Missa Papae Marcelli} to convince the Council that polyphonic treatments of texts were preferable to homophonic ones.\textsuperscript{243} However, University of Texas Palestrina scholar John Bokina proposed that the mass existed possibly as long as a decade prior to the convening of the cardinals in 1545 for the Concilium Tridentinum.\textsuperscript{244}

Baini composed most of his many unaccompanied choral works in a homophonic rather than an “observant” polyphonic style \textit{alla Palestrina}. One explanation for this is that he equated the simplicity of Palestrina’s homophonic writing with the composer’s spiritual devotion. Baini’s younger colleague Pietro Alfieri (1801–1863), who did attempt to emulate Palestrina compositionally, offered a different reason. He described Baini’s style as a \textit{stile}.

\textsuperscript{241} The original savior myth (e.g., Palestrina as a savior of church music) was spread by Italian composers Agostino Agazzari (1578–1640) and Adriano Banchieri (1568–1634), who wrote that Pope Marcellus attempted to replace all polyphony with plainsong.


\textsuperscript{244} Ibid., 129.
sanz’organo (a style without organ), a characteristic that he attributed to a period later than the sixteenth century.  

Musicologist Joseph Otten pointed out that Baini rejected contemporary musical advances: “Baini lived so completely in the great musical past that he had but scant sympathy with, or understanding for, modern developments of the art.” Conversely, Baini’s ability to advance the stile antico in the nineteenth century resulted from the fact that he inhabited a world that for a few decades idealized a model of “true church music.” Although critics later in the century characterized Baini’s scholarship as questionable or even fictional, his impact on choral music of that era endures. Baini’s embrace of Palestrina’s life and works helped promote unaccompanied singing and the stile antico anew in Europe during his lifetime and beyond.

Alexandre-Étienne Choron

At about the same time in France, Alexandre-Étienne Choron (1771–1834) was an advocate of early music, including that of Palestrina and the Roman School. Possessing many of the same skills as Baini, Choron contributed to a revival of sixteenth-century polyphony in France parallel to the


one in Germany. He accomplished this through his work as a prolific writer on early music, pedagogue, administrator, choral conductor, publisher, and composer.

When he was sixteen, two teachers associated with old music introduced Choron to the work of Renaissance composers. First, his friend, the opera composer André-Ernest-Modeste Grétry (1741–1813), recommended that Choron study counterpoint with Abbé L. Nicolas Roze (1745–1819), a well-known French composer who possessed academic knowledge of music of the French Renaissance.\textsuperscript{249} Musicologist Bryan Randolph Simms suggested in his 1971 dissertation on Choron the possibility that Roze introduced Choron to Josquin and other Renaissance composers.\textsuperscript{249}

Second, Choron studied counterpoint with the eminent Italian theorist and composer Barnaba Bonesi (1745–1824). While living in Paris, Choron learned strict counterpoint in the manner of Bonesi’s teacher, Nicola Sala (1713–1801). Bonesi also introduced Choron to Italian composers and their music. It is likely that during these student days he acquired his understanding

\textsuperscript{248} Bryan Randolph Simms, “Alexandre Choron (1771–1834) as a Historian and Theorist of Music” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1971), 5. Evidence for the idea that Choron’s teacher, Abbé L. Nicolas Roze, introduced Choron to early French choral music is provided by a manuscript score of the \textit{Stabat Mater} by Belgium composer Josquin des Prez that was copied by Roze and given to Choron. Choron later placed in the library of the National Conservatory of Music in Paris.

\textsuperscript{249} Ibid.
of Palestrina and the stile antico.  

Many other musical involvements added weight to Choron’s later efforts to promote early choral music. One was his partnership, ca. 1905 to 1906, in the publishing firm of August Le Duc. Choron also held notable positions that served as a public stage for his interests, which included Renaissance vocal music. For example, between 1811 and 1812, he was appointed Directeur de la Musique des Fêtes Publiques (Music of the Public Festival). Next, in 1816, he assumed the position of “régisseur-général,” or director, of the Paris Opéra.

That post was short-lived due to Choron’s critical and demanding approach to singers, which resulted in his dismissal in 1817. Undeterred, he went on to found and direct the Institution royale de musique classique et religieuse, or Royal Institute of Classical and Religious Music, an establishment dedicated to the revival of early choral music in nineteenth-century France. As the Institute’s director, Choron placed emphasis on old music and arranged for the performance of choral masterworks of all periods, including the Renaissance. Musicologist Bryan Randolph Simms wrote, “Works by Josquin des Prez, Palestrina, Clement Janequin, and Händel were mingled with new music by

\[250.\text{Ibid., 6.}\]

Ignaz von Seyfried, Sigismund Neukomm, Cherubini, and Choron himself."

During his time at the institute, Choron published inexpensive editions of works by Josquin, Goudimel, Palestrina, and Carissimi, as well as Italian and German music up to the time of Bach. As important aids for teaching early music, they helped spread this repertoire to venues throughout Europe.

Choron’s work as a choral composer yielded works such as his *Messe brève*, a *Magnificat*, a *Stabat Mater*, and numerous motets. These represented both *a cappella* and accompanied styles, and some employed the *stile antico*.253

His publications from 1820 to 1822 include the *Collection des pièces de musique religieuse qui s’executent tous les ans a Rome durant la Semaine-Saint, dans la chapelle du Souverain-Pontife*, a reediting of British music historian Charles Burney’s collection of Holy Week pieces sung by the Sistine Chapel Choir.254 Unique to this edition was Choron’s addition of singing instructions for this sixteenth-century choral music:

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…all of this music must be sung with sustained and flowing pitches, at quarter voice, with great exactness [of intonation], in an equal and moderate tempo, with the greatest simplicity but with much fervor and sweetness.  

Following his school’s decline after 1830, its new director, Abraham Louis Niedermeyer (1802–1861), revived it after 1936 and renamed it the École de Musique Religieuse Classique. Choron’s efforts to promote early music were not in vain, as Niedermeyer continued to promote the choral music of Josquin, Palestrina, Victoria, and J. S. Bach. In 1853, he reinvented that institution as the École Niedermeyer, where many well-known organists and choir directors studied.

To suggest that Choron romanticized Palestrina is perhaps putting it mildly. His physician, J. B. F. Descuret, related a deathbed reminiscence by Choron:

Imagine an immense ocean, where the waves roll with calmness and majesty – this is old music. On the other hand, consider an ocean where the furious waves rise to the heavens, then plunge to the depths...This is modern music. Indeed! Palestrina is the point of contact, the confluence of these two oceans. Palestrina is the Racine, the Raphael, the Jesus Christ of music!


257. Original French quotation: “Figurez-vous un immense ocean don’t les flots roulent avec calme et majeste: c’est la musique antique. D’un autre cote, voyez cet ocean, don’t les vagues furieuses s’élevent jusqu’au ciel, puis tout d’un coup, s’enfoncent dans l’abime…C’est la musique moderne. He
Here, Choron’s deification of Palestrina appears similar to Baini’s concept of Palestrina as the “Savior of Church Music.” However, the two scholars did not always agree. Their conception of Palestrina’s *Missa Papae Marcelli* is one example. While Baini romanticized this mass, Choron framed it as a triumph of musical taste rather than a technical accomplishment.\(^\text{258}\)

Before his passing, Choron summarized his own life in the form of a Latin epitaph. He eulogized himself in one of the verses, stating, “But chiefly he cultivated sacred and didactic music.”\(^\text{259}\) One way Choron accomplished this was by means of his “Historical Concerts,” which were presented from 1820 to 1840 as part of the program of his choir school. According to Ellis, those events “inspired the creation of several musical societies specializing in *a cappella* Sistine Chapel repertory.”\(^\text{260}\) Perhaps referring in 1832 to similar concerts by François-Joseph Fétis, musicologist Bryan Simms added, “They began an era of awareness of early music which would leave its mark on music of that time and

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\(^{258}\) Simms, “Alexandre Choron (1771–1834) as a Historian and Theorist,” 86.

\(^{259}\) Leon Gautier, *Eloge D’Alexandre Chron* (Paris: Derache, 1845), 91–92. From obsequies read in Latin on 1 July 1834: “SED MUSICAM SACRAM ET DIDACTICAM PRAESERTIMV EXCOLUIT.”

\(^{260}\) Ellis, “Interpreting the Musical Past,” 27.
which would be an important influence on musical taste for the remainder of the century."  

William Crotch

The colorful English musician and composer William Crotch (1775–1847) was an extraordinarily precocious child prodigy who began his fast-moving musical career at age two. By age thirteen he had matriculated at Cambridge University, and in 1799, at the age of twenty, he acquired an academic post at Oxford University. By twenty-two Crotch had attained the degree of Doctor of Music at Oxford. As professor of music and organist at St. John’s College, Oxford, and the University Church of St. Mary the Virgin, he initiated a popular series of lectures on the history, theory, and aesthetics of music.  

Between 1806 and 1807, Crotch left Oxford while retaining his professorship to pursue a career in London as a composer, conductor, teacher, organist, and scholar. Fifteen years later, the Royal Academy of Music appointed him its principal. There he taught composition, counterpoint, and harmony and also lectured on his concepts of beauty in music, which influenced a wider audience. Those aesthetic ideas, formed while at Oxford,


orbited around his broad understanding of the ultimate musical experience. According to his thought, some experiences or musics were greater than others. Crotch therefore adopted the theory of a “descending order of greatness” proposed by eighteenth-century English painter Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792). That scale proceeded downward from sublime to beautiful to ornamental.\(^{263}\)

Crotch believed that his order also applied to musical compositions. In his *Substance of Several Courses of Lectures* from 1831, he proposed that this aesthetic scale was proportional to the “mental labour employed in their formation and the mental capacities required for the comprehension and enjoyment of them [compositions].”\(^{264}\) For Crotch, ancient music embodied his highest level, the sublime. His historically based opinion that music history after Palestrina was generally a record of musical decay colored his view of musical progress. Musicologist Jonathan Rennert explained that for Crotch:

> The “pure sublime” had reached absolute perfection even earlier, with the “true church style” of Palestrina, Byrd, and Gibbons. Ever since this peak, he believed, music had been declining in sublimity...And it was 16th-century choral polyphony, which he recommended his pupils to imitate in their compositions.\(^{265}\)

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263. Ibid., 289.


So, like Baini and Choron, for this English musician the *a cappella* works of Palestrina represented an apogee of choral achievement, a model for composers, and an ideal for performers of sacred choral music. That advocacy is remarkable in light of England’s geographic distance from continental Renaissance music and the country’s own notable high Renaissance musical traditions, with composers such as Gibbons and William Byrd. Nevertheless, Crotch’s diverse advocacy of sixteenth-century music served to educate and broaden the musical scope of middle class England in the nineteenth century. As a result, some historians, such as Temperley and Heighes, prefer not to focus on his obvious bias toward sixteenth-century polyphony, but rather to frame his career in a larger context as “an important force in the revival of early English church music.”

François-Joseph Fétis

Belgian musicologist, critic, teacher, and composer François-Joseph Fétis (1784–1871), like all key figures in the nineteenth-century early music revival, shared a life-long fascination with *a cappella* choral music. As a result, he proactively advanced this music in many ways, in his homeland as well as in France. Fétis’s musical activities, which paralleled those of both Baini and

Choron, encompassed extensive musicological scholarship, educational administration, and public lectures. He made his interests known via published writings, high-profile teaching posts, and involvement in concerts, which included early music. Fétis’s mission was the communication of early music. He expressed that ethos by editing and publishing ancient music and by his lifelong commitment to music education.

At the age of sixteen, in 1800, he matriculated at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique, where he was encouraged by its inspector, composer Luigi Cherubini. Cherubini, who also taught sixteenth-century counterpoint at the conservatory, authored that institution’s counterpoint text entitled *Cours de contrepoint et de fugue*, published in 1835. His works included some twenty *a cappella* antiphones and litanies for four, five, and six parts in the style of Palestrina. Encouraged by Cherubini, in 1803 Fétis left Paris to travel and focus on the choral music of Palestrina. During that time, he composed a few sacred works in the *style antico* using Palestrina as a model. Fétis also read “…attentively all of the works of the Italian pedagogues, particularly those of Zarlino, Zacconi, Cerato and….of P[adre] Martini and

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Paolucci.” He embarked on an academic career in 1821, the date of his appointment as professor of counterpoint and fugue and librarian at the Paris Conservatoire. Subsequently, in 1832, he instituted a series of historical concerts that included the unaccompanied singing of early music. Fétis’s meticulously organized “Concerts Historiques” were thematic. They also included a cappella choral music of the sixteenth century and introductions in the form of mini-lectures.

His aesthetic justification for a renewed interest in early music was an application of the philosophical thought of French philosopher Victor Cousin (1792–1867). Known as the Juste Milieu, Cousin’s visual arts movement referred to a “middle way” or “happy medium,” and held that truth existed simultaneously at a surface or “apparent” level and at a deeper universal or “real” level. From Cousin’s philosophy emerged Fétis’s statement: “Art does not progress, it merely changes.” That concept provided both musicians and amateurs with a rationale for judging early music by other (real) performance standards rather than by (apparent) nineteenth-century ones. The idea also

269. Ibid.

“underpinned the revival of early music in nineteenth-century France and Belgium.”

E. T. A. Hoffmann

Esteemed as a German author of fantasy and horror, Ernst Theodor Wilhelm Hoffmann (1776–1822) was a multi-faceted, one might even say dramatic, presence. Known by his pen name Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann, or “E. T. A. Hoffmann,” his other life roles included that of artist, composer, jurist, musicologist, and music critic. In all these positions, he achieved a certain amount of recognition. As an early music authority, he contributed to the scholarly discourse on early sacred choral music taking place in southern Germany and Austria. However, his relevancy to this study is limited to one influential essay.

Hoffmann spent his relatively brief life in several locales, including Königsberg, East Prussia; Warsaw, Poland; and Berlin, Germany. While his earliest musical training in Königsberg encompassed piano, thoroughbass, and counterpoint, he made no attempts at composition until he was almost thirty years of age. At that time, he composed several choral pieces in a sixteenth-century polyphonic style, including a Messa d-moll (from 1805), 6 Canzoni per 4

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271. Ibid.

272. Hoffmann’s full pen name was “E. T. A. Hoffmann.”
voci alla capella (1808), and a Miserere b-moll (1809).  

The combination of his early pietistic environment, his musical training, and compositional experiences all contributed to his esteem of early choral music. That vortex of thought found expression in his most important analytical writing on ecclesiastical music, Alte und neue Kirchenmusik (Old and New Church Music), which musicologist James Garratt called “the culmination of a German literary tradition of panegyrics to Palestrina.” Hoffmann’s essay elevates Palestrina as a universal model, depicting a golden age of Renaissance Italian church music by contrasting music of the period with earlier writings from the history of visual art. It was first published in 1814 in the Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung (“General music journal”), which historian Alessandra Comini pronounced “the foremost German-language musical periodical of its time.”

According to Hoffmann’s view, the Renaissance represented the zenith of church music history as “both a paradigm for the purposes of comparison


with the present and as a springboard for the future.  

Not surprisingly, in his opinion, church music was on a downward trajectory. His lists of ideal composers for the church in *Alte und neue Kirchenmusik* are similar to the variety of Renaissance composers put forth by previous proponents of early sacred music in Germany some two decades earlier.

The rationale for his point of view appears to be consonance. Hoffmann held the “conviction that the chief character of Palestrina’s style consists of ‘emphatic and often bold progressions of predominantly consonant chords, whose resolute impression is neither modified nor weakened by melodic ornaments or rhythmic diversity’.” In his opinion, dissonance, as represented by the dominant and diminished seventh, was employed metaphorically to represent anguish. Therefore, any dissonance was unacceptable and needed to be resolved. Palestrina represented a “supreme model for consonance.”

In *Alte und neue Kirchenmusik*, Hoffmann provided no historical

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278. Ibid., 42.


justification for his idealization of Palestrina, lunging straightaway to the
“golden age” of church music with the circa 1552 Missa Papae Marcelli (Pope
Marcellus Mass). He pointed to Renaissance polyphony as having a “pious and
grate character appropriate to the church,” and riding right past stylistic
categories, he traced Palestrina’s “lofty, simple style” to the elegance of the late
seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century stile antico, replete with continuo.281

Hoffmann’s romantic conception of Palestrina resembles German
philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche’s 1873 theory of “monumental
history.” Here “illustrious models from the past” are “elevated as exemplars for
imitation.”282 However, for Nietzsche such veneration was an “abuse of history”
that resulted in historical distortion.283 As an experienced writer of Romantic
fantasies, one might expect his idealization of Palestrina to imply some sort of
Romantic longing for the past. However, Hoffmann’s exaltation of the
composer represented the past not as how it actually was, but rather how he
believed it should have been.284 He claimed that because the past is justified, it

281. Ibid., 73; and Elinor R. Dill, “Alte Und Neue Kirchenmusik [Old and New Church
Music] by E. T. A. Hoffmann” (MM thesis, University of Nebraska, 1979). Dill’s translation of
Hoffmann’s essay comes from this thesis.

282. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, The Use and Abuse of History (New York: Cosimo
Classics, 2005; first published in 1873), 16. Unlike Hoffmann, for Nietzsche imitation was
problematic. The latter believed that in seeking conformity, the past is forced into a universal
form, resulting in historical distortion.

283. Ibid.

represents a guide for future creation. Hoffman’s approach reminds us that an appreciation of the contradictory tension between subjective and objective historicism is crucial for appreciating the focus on Renaissance music in nineteenth-century Germany. As Garratt suggests, “A discernment of the role of E. T. A. Hoffman in this dialectic around nineteenth-century church music involves a synthesis of both historical scenarios.”

Raphael Georg Kiesewetter

The musical house of Austrian musicologist Raphael Georg Kiesewetter (1773–1850) had many chambers. As an army officer, war office councilor, and nobleman, his involvement in music manifested in four primary areas, all of which affected his pervasive interest in early choral music. First, he expressed himself as a singer and conductor. Second, his work as an ethnomusicologist, comparative musicologist, and music theorist involved him in the technical aspects of music. Third, he communicated his love of music to many individuals through his work as an administrator and music educator. Finally, Kiesewetter revealed his association with music of the past as a musicologist, published music historian, and antiquarian. This final category included his large library of old musical scores and collection of early instruments.


286. Ibid., 164–204.
Kiesewetter’s early work in harmony and counterpoint with the revered Austrian music theorist and composer Johann Georg Albrechtsberger (1736–1809) introduced him to unaccompanied sixteenth-century choral music and taught him a polyphonic compositional style derived from Johann Joseph Fux. Albrechtsberger venerated the *stile antico* and taught his love of that genre to Kiesewetter. Later, Kiesewetter’s interest in Renaissance choral music lead him to make copies of scores of old music. This may have contributed to his interest in historically authentic pitch and *chivette*, the combination of soprano, alto, tenor, and bass clefs in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century polyphonic choral music.

Kiesewetter’s published articles and books include his one-volume tome from 1834, *Geschichte der europäisch-abendländischen Musik* (History of the Modern Music of Western Europe), a scholarly treatment of music history written by a musical amateur for musical amateurs. In 1847, in an appendix to the book (Appendix VI), he added a 38-page supplement “Containing the Most Ancient Moments of Figured Counterpoint.” In that 253-page volume,

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287. Raphael Georg Kiesewetter, “Über Den Umfang der Singstimmen in Den Werken der Alten Meister...” [Higher Vocal Parts in the Works of the Old Masters...], *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 29, no. 8 (February 1827): 125. This, Kiesewetter’s first published article and elsewhere incorrectly dated as 1820, addressed the subject of chivette for the first time (“About the Size of Singing Voices in the Works of the Old Masters...”).

Kiesewetter devoted 182 pages, or seventy-two percent of the text, to music before 1600. Here, individual chapters are devoted to Dufay, “Ockenheim,” Josquin, Willaert, Palestrina, and “Montiverde [sic].” His text was notable during this period because of numerous musical illustrations of Medieval and Renaissance choral music.

Similar to and preceding Francois-Joseph Fétis’s Parisian “Concerts Historiques,” held from 1832 to 1839, Raphael Kiesewetter instituted performances in his Vienna home from 1816 to 1842. His Historischen Hauskonzerte were devoted to vocal music of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries and included a choir of amateur singers with Kiesewetter singing bass. The list of old works that Kiesewetter performed at those private concerts included a cappella works by Palestrina, Pergolesi, the Scarlattis, Schutz, and Victoria. His restriction of participants served to magnify the value of these events among music lovers. Even though space limited the number of players and singers, word of those secluded events soon spread through Vienna and beyond. A certain cachet was also associated with these concerts because notable composers like Beethoven and Schubert, who were early music

by Thomas Cautley Newby (1797/1798–1882), an English publisher and printer. A copy may be found in the New York Public Library bearing the stamp of the Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundation. It is possible that the book did not appear in this library until after 1900 because the library was formed by the consolidation in 1895 of the Astor Library, Lenox Library, and Tilden Trust, and by a merger with the New York Free Circulating Library in 1901.

289. Ibid.
aficionados, attended on occasion.

Almost every facet of Raphael Georg Kiesewetter’s musical life had some connection with music learning, either directly, or indirectly. For this amateur teacher of music, musicology was a means to an end and a basis for his pedagogy.\textsuperscript{290} In the opinion of music historian Othmar Wessely, a technical background underpinned the efficacy of Kiesewetter’s musicological research and teaching. Wesseley stated, “Like François-Joseph Fétis, Kiesewetter’s pioneering accomplishments were in the field of musicology, which he came to by way of music history and theory.”\textsuperscript{291} Other than his early work with Albrechtsberger, Raphael Georg Kiesewetter acquired almost all of that essential musical information through self-instruction, experience, and practice. Though an uncredentialed amateur musician and collector, Kiesewetter exhibited a scholarly understanding of and approach to early music education and musicology.

Anton Friedrich Justus Thibaut

Another amateur German-speaking musician represented an influential stimulus upon cultivated \textit{a cappella} singing in the early 1800s. Anton Friedrich

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290. Kiesewetter’s work editing F. S. Kandler’s German translation of Baini’s biography of Palestrina may have influenced his choral performances of motets by that composer at his \textit{Historische Hauskonzerte} (Historical House Concerts).

Justus Thibaut (1772–1840), a German legal scholar and amateur musicologist, promoted early nineteenth-century interest in Renaissance choral music by proactively eulogizing old music, especially that of Palestrina. Thibaut, whose career as a law professor occurred in Kiel, Jenna, and Heidelberg, found time to pursue sacred choral music as a secular pastime. He also was an avid collector of antique musical scores and often sent assistants to Italy, at his own expense, to scout out interesting musical manuscripts.  

It was one curious nocturnal activity, though, that captured the attention of other German musicians and cognoscenti: the rehearsals of his own personal secular *de facto* “cathedral choir,” the Heidelberg *Singverein*. Begun in 1811, that small ensemble of carefully selected singers met every Thursday evening, not in a Medieval gothic edifice, but in the dark attic of his home, by candlelight. In contrast to the frivolity of contemporaneous English madrigal and catch societies, their rehearsals were serious business indeed. Music historian John Butt stated, “Of all the various choral societies of the time, this was perhaps the most private, elite, and quasi-religious, singing in Thibaut’s own house, often in darkness, and allowing select visitors to hear the society

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only four times a year. “Penetrating acuteness” set the tone for those serious rehearsals. Individuals who were not devotees of early music or concerned with social trivialities were explicitly unwelcome.

Despite the privacy of the weekly meetings, like Kiesewetter’s Historical Concerts, they developed a certain amount of celebrity because famous figures such as Goethe, Tieck, Mendelssohn, and Schumann sometimes attended. The group’s rehearsals were in preparation for four annual concerts of choral works from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. The Heidelberg Singverein presented these concerts to stimulate an appreciation of early music. They continued under Thibaut’s leadership until 1833, reaching a peak of interest around 1830.

Heidelberg artist Franz J. Julius (Jakob) Gotzenberger (1800–1866) made a visual record of one rehearsal of the Heidelberg Singverein with a pencil drawing from 1840 entitled “Choir practice at Anton Friedrich Thibaut’s” (see Figure 3.1). Musicologist Thomas Day provided an analysis of that historic rendering:


Every Thursday evening a group of carefully selected singers met in the attic of Anton Friedrich Thibaut (1774–1840). This drawing by an anonymous artist\footnote{Author Thomas Day did not mention that this pencil drawing was by Franz J. Julius (Jakob) Götzenberger, a Heidelberg artist whose pencil drawings of well-known musicians, such as Frederick Chopin, were popular at the time. Reproductions of the drawing are in the public domain.} shows a bare room, dimly lit with a few candles. Thibaut would tolerate no idleness or frivolity at these meetings. Singers were chosen for their earnestness and devotion to the principles set forth in Thibaut’s book Über Reinheit der Tonkunst. Those who sought admission to the circle merely for reasons of light entertainment or companionship were not welcome. The austerity of the dim attic where the company met and Tibaut’s somber theories on the proper behavior of a choral society must have produced an eerie, almost religious atmosphere. We can see why, on one occasion, Thibaut referred to this room as “my temple, there Marcello furnishes the scriptural lesson for my edification, Händel delivers the sermon to me, with Palestrina I worship my God, and our religious language is music.” The key word in Thibaut’s remarks is “religious.” His book on music and his singing society, both very influential in the nineteenth century, helped to spread the idea that old music (whether by Palestrina or Händel) provided something close to a religious experience.\footnote{Thomas Day, “Old Music in England, 1790–1820,” 30.}
In the opinion of several scholars, Thibaut’s most influential musical achievement was his publication Über Reinheit der Tonkunst [About the Purity of Musical Art] (1825). It is important to mention that “Pure Musical Art” for Thibaut was represented by a cappella choral music. Essentially an essay, in Über Reinheit der Tonkunst Thibaut cited, like E. T. A. Hoffmann, the “ancient dignity and simplicity” of “a golden age of old Italian church music, encompassing a rise from primitive beginnings, blossoming, development and gradual decline into decadence.”298 His need for a humble, dignified, moderate sacred music reflects his somber view of church as “…the place where man

298. Garratt, Palestrina and the German Romantic Imagination, 40.
appears, as it were in the sight of God.”299 Driving Thibaut’s refinement of tone was his secular spiritual philosophy surrounding the early church music he loved.

Akin to Baini, Kiesewetter, and Hoffmann, Thibaut characterized contemporary music as being in a state of serious decline caused by a downward spiral of musical taste. Like Hoffmann, he portrayed Italian Renaissance choral music as analogous to earlier narratives in art history. Thibaut attributed a later descent of music to “miserable Parisian taste,” which he believed dragged down all European art during the Enlightenment. Thibaut was not alone in blaming France for what he considered a low state of nineteenth-century art.300 Historian Georg Iggers explained that at the time of Napoleonic rule, from 1799 to 1815, Germany was a veritable epicenter of anti-Napoleonic nationalism in Europe.301

Thibaut’s solution to this dilemma of taste was a refinement of choral repertoire created by focusing on older sacred choral music of which he approved. For the Renaissance, this was Palestrina, and for the Baroque,


300. Garratt, Palestrina and the German Romantic Imagination, 37.

Handel. In Über Reinheit der Tonkunst (About the Purity of Music), Palestrina, Thibaut’s musical hero, was next in a line of chronological succession of master composers preceded by Goudimel, Morales, and Lassus. From a theoretical angle, he was impressed with Palestrina’s employment of consonance and homophony and fond of his “bold progressions,” slow-moving successions of consonant triads, and root position chords. That praise also included the composer’s fragmentary imitation and blocks of double choir dialogue.\textsuperscript{302} Like Hoffmann, Thibaut associated those aspects of consonance with the grave asceticism of Palestrina’s most austere choral works.\textsuperscript{303}

Thibaut’s choral scope was the result of an extensive knowledge of early choral literature. Chronological lists of works performed by the Heidelberg Singverein from autumn 1825 to spring 1833 reveal his aesthetic preferences.\textsuperscript{304} His tastes were also associated with his large personal archive of musical scores.

\textsuperscript{302} Garratt, Palestrina and the German Romantic Imagination, 80.


\textsuperscript{304} E. Baumstark and Ant. Friedr. Justus Thibaut, Blatter Der Erinnerung Für Seine Verehrer Und Für Die Freunde Der Reinen Tonkunst [Leaves of Remembrance for His Devotees and for the Friends of Pure Musical Art] (Leipzig: W. Engelmann, 1841), 161–81. A catalogued list of choral repertoire from Thibaut’s library comprises a 20-page appendix. The phrase “Der Reinen Tonkunst” [Pure Musical Art/or Purity of Music] was coined by Gustav Schilling (1805–80), a German musicologist and lexicographer in his book Zugleich ein Supplement zu allen grösseren musikalischen Theorien, und ein Hand- und Lesebuch für die Gebildeten aus allen Ständen zur Förderung eines guten Geschmacks in musikalischen Dingen [Attempt at a philosophy of beauty in music, or aesthetics of music. At the same time, a supplement to all major musical theories, and a hand and reading book for the educated of all ranks to promote good taste in musical matters] (Mainz, GR: B. Schott’s Sohne, 1838), 21, 357, 552, 556, 570, 623.
Similar to that of Kiesewetter, his library contained numerous *a cappella* works by Renaissance masters like Allegri, Fux, Josquin, and Palestrina.\(^{305}\)

Thibaut operated before 1825 in Europe, when old music was not part of the musical landscape. Although he was a musical explorer, he was also essentially a period figure whose knowledge and ideas were limited by the scholarship of his era. He proposed that sixteenth-century polyphony, exemplified by the music of Palestrina, be used as a universal choral model, and he promoted performances of that repertoire at a time when they were rare. From Thibaut’s lifetime of intensive inquiry, he generated published writings on early music that communicated his “gospel of Palestrina” to an expanding audience. His musical life helped elevate a growing early music phenomenon within the larger German Romantic imagination, highlighting parallel trends in art, architecture, literature, and aesthetics.

Carl Georg von Winterfeld

Not all nineteenth-century secular devotees of Renaissance music focused exclusively on Palestrina as a choral ideal. A notable exception was Baron Carl Winterfeld (1784–1852). Like Thibaut, Winterfeld was a jurist who operated as a sort of freelance amateur musicologist, pursuing the study of

historical manuscripts in Italy with great intensity. Winterfeld also authored scholarly studies on the lives of composers, such as his three-volume *Johannes Gabrieli und sein Zeitalter* (1834). Similar to Giuseppe Baini, Winterfeld wrote an important volume on the life and works of Palestrina.\(^{306}\) In that 1832 study, he criticized what he considered Baini’s biased hero worship of Palestrina and his Palestrina-centered approach to Renaissance music.

Essential to Winterfeld’s revisionist approach was a plea for impartiality and objectivity. To this end, he proposed four co-equal schools of Renaissance music: German, Roman, Venetian, and Flemish. His choices for the greatest sacred composers of all time were Giovanni Gabrieli, Lassus, and Palestrina.\(^{307}\) However, instead of using Palestrina as a Protestant model for sacred music, Winterfeld championed the post-Reformation German composer and *Kapellmeister* Johannes Eccard (1553–1611). Although his choice of Eccard was due to that composer’s adherence to the chorale, Winterfeld did not intend to diminish the music of Palestrina or the Roman School. Like other supporters of what might be referred to here as the “cult of Palestrina,” he traced a

\(^{306}\) Smith and Young, “Chorus [I].”

\(^{307}\) Garratt, *Palestrina and the German Romantic Imagination*, 95.
chronological decline and weakening of Protestant sacred music from 1600 to 1800. \(^{308}\)

**England: The Oxford Movement**

While not dubbed the Oxford Movement until 1841, the phenomenon arose in 1833 with a sermon by Oxford clergyman John Keble in which he attacked theological liberalism. \(^{309}\) Tractarianism, referring to the group’s publications or “tracts,” suggested that the Church of England, formed in 1534 during the reign of King Henry VIII, reunite with Catholicism as one of its three branches. This proposed realignment with Roman Catholicism meant that, for Tractarian Anglicans, who were actually full-fledged Protestants by definition, everything “Catholick” became the aim. That included a return to a pre-Reformation ceremonial of worship. While this was initially an anti-liberal, pro-orthodox theological trend, it ended up being more of a stylistic phenomenon within Anglicanism that influenced almost all aspects of liturgy and ritual, including choral music. As an expression of this “Anglo-Catholic” ritualism, Renaissance polyphony sung by an all-male choir was, from the beginning, one explicit aesthetic goal.

\(^{308}\) Even though he was one of the founders of the Bach-Gesellschaft, Winterfeld considered the music of both Johann S. Bach and Heinrich Schütz (1585–1672) part of this downward spiral.

\(^{309}\) John Keble’s well-known “Assize Sermon” was his response to the British government’s reduction in the number of bishops in the Church of Ireland, which he famously called a “national apostasy.”
Because the Oxford Movement arose to correct perceived problems in Anglicanism, and because those alleged problems had largely emerged during the preceding two centuries, some historical background is necessary to understand the conditions from which that trend arose. From the English Reformation of the sixteenth century to 1800, English sacred music experienced two periods, both of which adversely affected this form of choral art. The first of these, the Reformation, was the consequence of Henry VIII’s breakaway from Rome. This period saw the closure of all monasteries, some of which were centers of Roman liturgical and musical traditions. Composers were invited to conform to the new and more refined style requirements, the use of the organ was banned, and the number of choristers was reduced. During the English Civil Wars (1642–1651), Puritans disapproved of the emphasis the church was placing on elaborate music performed by professional musicians. During that Civil War and Interregnum, religious dissidents saw to it that choirs were disbanded, choral music incinerated, and organs smashed.

After the Restoration in 1660, cathedral choirs were reconstituted as rapidly as possible but with great difficulty. During the restoration period from 1660 to 1688, the state of parish church music, including choral music, changed due to the Civil Wars. Long indicated that from 1685 to about 1830, the

The constitution of most parish choirs varied. Frequently, in country churches, barrel organs provided accompaniment and singing took place in west galleries. At the same time, cathedral music functioned at an entirely different level.

Composers such as John Blow and Henry Purcell created great masterpieces of the choral art intended for professional ensembles such as the Chapel Royal in London, as well as cathedral choirs. Often, such works had concerted accompaniments.

During the eighteenth century, contending with such issues led English church music to a sorry state by 1800. In the case of musical composition, “not only was development almost at a standstill but in some ways there was even regression and decline.” Long believes this was caused by an almost total rejection of the modal system, reliance on limited harmonic resources of the classical key system, emphasis on choral tunes rather than texts, and composers being interested in writing superficially attractive music.

In the nineteenth century, the Oxford Movement remedied many of the problems plaguing English choral music. That trend is important to the history of nineteenth-century a cappella choral music in England because of the
musical models the movement promoted. In support of that notion, Rainbow described his discovery of a church record book that contained a log of choir repertoire used at daily services in Plymouth, England in 1848. Of its contents, he observed, “At those daily services, it appeared works by Tallis, Byrd, Gibbons, Palestrina, Victoria, Marenzio, and the like, were sung unaccompanied as a matter of routine—works seldom or never heard even in our cathedrals during the musical doldrums then still prevailing in England.”

It should be mentioned that during the Oxford Movement, adherents not only venerated a cappella choral repertoire of the Renaissance, but also the florid accompanied eighteenth-century verse anthems of William Boyce (1711–1779) and other composers of the period.

Attacked by its many critics as “Romanizing,” the Oxford Movement intended to bring greater richness and powerful emotional symbolism to the church. Singing a cappella Renaissance choral music was therefore an expression of those objectives. So was the arrival, for the first time in the 1830s, of all-male choirs in ordinary parish churches in England. Previously, after


Henry VIII’s dissolution of the monasteries, choirs of men and boys sang only in cathedrals and royal chapels. Due to the nineteenth-century Oxford Movement, a male English choral model was set in motion that over time became a facet of Britain’s musical tradition. However, it must be remembered that by 1900 the English men and boys choir “tradition” (outside the cathedrals) was only seventy years old.

Europe: Cecilianism and Nineteenth-Century Roman Catholic Church Music

The Catholic Church music reforms in Europe during this period resembled those occurring in England in that they emerged from responses to the ecclesiastical status quo. However, the wheels of church music reform began turning earlier on the Continent. One controversial change was Pope Benedict XIV’s 1749 encyclical, *Annus Qui*, which permitted Gregorian chant to be performed with orchestra, while expressing a preference for unaccompanied chant. A musical countercurrent within the church saw these new “operatic” forms of sacred music as a threat to older forms. As a result, reactionary groups called *Caecilien-Bündnisse* (Cecilian Leagues) advocated a return to the sacred choral music of the Renaissance. They “attempted to promote *a cappella* choral singing through the study and revival of Giovanni da Palestrina’s music and
chant and through new compositions based on those traditions.”  

A century later, those liturgical crusaders were still active.

In the midst of the dramatic musical advances in contemporary choral music of the nineteenth century, proponents of change gave much attention to the dynamic relationship between liturgy, texts, and artistic individuality in sacred music. To legitimize their conservative musical ideals and values, these individuals stated that sacred music should be “subservient to the liturgy.”

The ability to understand sung words was now more important than artistic individuality. “Authentic” sacred music was now dubbed the “the handmaiden of the liturgy.”

In 1868, the ongoing Palestrina revival with its attendant values came together in Germany as one organization, the Allgemeiner Cäcilienverein, or General Cecilian Association, which aimed to improve church music along the lines previously described. That body traced its provenance back to fifteenth-century religious communities devoted to the cult of the saint who:

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320. Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 185. The origin of this phrase is Piux X’s 1903 Papal encyclical “Tra le Sollecitudini,” in which he wrote that music is “simply a part of the liturgy, its humble handmaiden” (p. 23). As Dahlhaus (ibid.) observed: “In an age when ecclesiastical propriety as disintegrating and coming under pressure from an aesthetic that defined musical authenticity in terms of originality, sacred music required a subjective legitimation lest it raise suspicions of being ‘inauthentic’.”
...had in turn inspired the 18th-century Cecilian Leagues \textit{(Caecilien-Bündnisse)} in such cities as Munich, Passau and Vienna, which were organizations of church musicians dedicated to the upholding of an ideal of sacred music, epitomized by monophonic plainchant and the polyphony of Palestrina. These regarded few accompanying instruments other than the organ as liturgically acceptable, and held that church music was to be at the service of the liturgy, rather than important in an artistically independent sense.\footnote{321}

One core objective of the \textit{Caecilien-Bündnisse} (Cecilian Associations) was to preserve the tradition of unaccompanied singing in the Roman Catholic Church. That choral genre was not popular in Italy, but it had retained some influence in Germanic countries, which kept \textit{a cappella} singing alive.\footnote{322}

Importantly, nineteenth-century Cecilianism occurred within a context of Romanticism, a multidimensional complex of ideas, one of which was a “longing for the past.” Not to be omitted from that picture, and perhaps potentiated by it, was a climate of historicization,\footnote{323} in which key scholarly figures of the Palestrina revival, such as Baini, felt free to distort or fictionalize...

\footnote{321. Nicholas Clapton, \textit{Moreschi: The Last Castrato} (London: Haus, 2005), 93.}


\footnote{323. \textit{Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary} defines the transitive verb “historicize” as “to make historical.” Here the term “historicization” means giving the appearance of historical truth. In this sense, historicization involves distortion and the creation of pseudohistory or a fictional narrative. Pseudohistory is a pejorative term applied to a type of historical revisionism involving methods that depart from standard historiographic conventions. First used in 1846, later German modernist theatre practitioner Bertoldt Brecht also employed the term “historicize” as a part of his theatre aesthetic to portray historical incidents. In that context, “historicization” is a fundamental interpretative attitude or “grund-gestus” (ground gesture). Bertolt Brecht, \textit{Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic}, trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 96.}
histories they worked so hard to construct. In addition, both Romanticism
and Cecilianism rejected the doctrines of the Enlightenment. Replacing those
principles were the ideals of simplicity, spirituality, and a focus on basics, all in
the midst of an increasingly complex, industrialized, and anxious Europe.

The familiar Romantic notion of “purity” echoed repeatedly within
Cecilianism. For many, the simplicity of Palestrina’s slow-moving homophony,
harmonic language, avoidance of chromatics, and subtle use of dissonance
equated with purity. For example, W. H. Gladstone translated Justus Thibaut’s
1825 Über Reinheit der Tonkunst for its 1877 English edition as On Purity in
Musical Art. Later, the celebrated composer Franz Liszt extolled Palestrina’s
music as sung by the Cappella Sistina for some of the same reasons, even using
the works as a model for his Missa Choralis from 1865. From the point of view of
reception history, Hungarian musicologist Zsuzsanna Domokos believes that
Palestrina’s choral music attracted Liszt’s attention because it “emanated that
kind of purity and elevation of the soul and mind, which converted his music
into prayer.”


325. Zsuzsanna Domokos, “The Performance Practice of the Cappella Sistina as
Reflected in Liszt’s Church Music,” Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae 41,
no. 4 (December 2000): 393; and Zsuzsanna Domokos, “Liszt’s Church Music and the Musical
Traditions of the Sistine Chapel,” in Franz Liszt and the Birth of Modern Europe: Music as a Mirror
of Religious, Political, Cultural, and Aesthetic Transformations, ed. Michael Saffle and Rossana
By contrast, for many ecclesiastical disputants the expansive nature of chromatic transformation in nineteenth-century choral music was theatrical and hence undesirable. In fact, anything remotely theatrical was verboten by Cecilians, just as it was for composers following the Council of Trent. In a century when high-profile contemporary composers were creating large-scale symphonic choral works with religious texts, a different model was preferred for sacred choral music. For these reformers, exaggerated word painting associated with eighteenth-century choral music was not acceptable.

The number of significant figures involved in the German Cecilian Movement was large, precluding any comprehensive list here. However, three figures who contributed prominently to its genesis and development in Europe were Karl Proske, Franz Haberl, and Xavier Witt. Karl Proske (1794–1861), a German Catholic priest, began his career as a medical doctor but was ordained a priest in Regensburg, Germany in 1826. One year later, he assumed the position of “Vicar Choral” at the city’s cathedral, where he spent the rest of his life. For Proske, only two genres of church music qualified as “vere musica ecclesiae,” or “the true music of the church”: Gregorian chant and Renaissance polyphony. Like other leaders of the Cecilian Movement, he combed Europe and Rome for manuscripts of old music, spending almost all his money to acquire them. At his death, his fellow priest and musicologist in Regensburg,
Karl Weinmann (1873–1929), indicated that Proske had collected more than thirty thousand manuscripts during three research trips to Italy between 1834 and 1848.\textsuperscript{326} However, August Schamagl and Raymond Dittrich reported a smaller number, approximately five thousand.\textsuperscript{327}

Karl Proske became kapellmeister of Regensburg Cathedral in 1830. From that time on, he transcribed his ancient manuscripts for modern performance. Twenty-three years later, during 1853 to 1862, he published them in his four-volume, 2,000-page collection titled \textit{Musica Divina}.\textsuperscript{328} A year after his death in 1862, his student Franz Haberl completed the last volume. That collection is important to Cecilianism and the Renaissance revival in nineteenth-century Europe for two reasons. First, the collection contains extensive information on each composer presented, many of whom were unfamiliar to choral musicians. Second, for the first time this oft-criticized movement offered the world many explicit examples of Renaissance choral music from Italy, France, Germany, and Spain.

The second of these reformers of import was Proske’s student Franz


\textsuperscript{327} At his death, Proske’s music library was bequeathed to the Bishopric of Regensburg. The collection was subsequently transformed into the Proske Library of Music there (Proske-Musikbibliothek, Bischöfliche Zentralbibliothek, Regensburg, GR).

\textsuperscript{328} Karl Proske, \textit{Fr. Xavier Haberl, and Joseph Schrems, Musica Divina} (Ratisbon, GR: Fredrich Pustet, 1853).
Xavier Haberl (1840–1910), a German cleric, musicologist, and church musician whose life’s work resembled that of Giuseppe Baini. Like his Italian counterpart, who published his edition of Palestrina’s works in 1828, Haberl went a step further by editing the first critical edition of that composer’s complete oeuvre.\(^{329}\) Begun in 1862, Breitkopf & Härtel published Volume 1 under an earlier editor in 1870. Haberl’s editorial contribution began with Volume 10, published in 1880, and ended with Volume 33, published in 1907.\(^{330}\) Haberl’s impact on the Cecilian Movement, or Cäcilianismus, came from his work as a journal editor, author, administrator, and practicing choir conductor. From 1899 until his death in 1910, he was president of the Cecilian Society, called Allgemeiner Deutscher Cäcilienverein (The General German Cecilian Organization). He edited the organization’s journal Fliegende Blätter für Kirchenmusik (The Flying Journal of Church Music) as well as its periodical Musica Sacra.\(^{331}\)

Haberl spread the musical tenants of Cecilianism in many ways, but

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none was more significant to his work than church music education. He was proactive about the movement and realized that its success depended upon sound learning and scholarship. With this in mind, on November 22, 1874, Haberl founded *Die Kirchenmusikschule Regensburg* (The Church Music School Regensburg), which soon achieved international prominence in the worlds of liturgical ritualism, choral music, and composition.\(^{332}\) It also put focus on that German city as a center of *a cappella* singing, Cecilianism, and the study of Renaissance choral music.

Haberl’s legacy points to the student-centered nature of his educational goals. Haberl built a church adjacent to his *kirchenmusikschule* so his students would have an opportunity to practice the theoretical knowledge they acquired. A kind of liturgical learning laboratory, he named that edifice after St. Cecilia, patron saint of music, whose name the movement bears. As a widely published pedagogue, Haberl also used his own writings as teaching tools. His 1864 *Magister Choralis*, a theoretical and practical manual on Gregorian chant, is but one example.\(^{333}\)

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The image of the Cecilian Movement in Europe was based entirely on ideals and models. Germany, and much of both Protestant as well as Catholic Europe for that matter, was smitten with their ideal of the finest choir in the world—the Sistine Chapel Choir. Even for those who had never heard it, as was the case for most people, so much hype surrounded that choir that Regensburg became something of a “center of idealism.” For all these Cecilian leaders, the Papal Choir in Rome represented the ultimate model for ecclesiastical choirs. As a response to that Cecilian standard of choral perfection during the nineteenth-century Cecilian Movement, choirs imitating the Papal model arose in Regensburg, Munich, and Cologne. Perhaps most notable was the first of these, the Regensburg Cathedral, or “Dom.”

From 1871 to 1882, Franz Xavier Haberl was domkappellmeister (cathedral choirmaster) at that church. There he trained and directed the cathedral boy choir, traditionally dubbed Domspatzen, or “Cathedral Sparrows.”  

Subsequently, his male choir became widely recognized as highly proficient in Gregorian chant and Renaissance polyphony, apparently successfully mimicking the Cappella Sistina from this high-profile ecclesiastical position.

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Also associated with Regensburg was another important leader of this Restoration Movement in Europe from 1800 to 1850, Franz Xavier Witt. Witt (1834–1888), a cleric, church musician, and composer who also sang in the *Domchor* and taught Gregorian chant at Regensburg’s seminary. He founded the Caecilia Society in 1868 to revive the use of Gregorian chant and polyphony.

In Regensburg, Witt was in the midst of a swirl of Cecilian activities. Along with his model choir, Regensburg boasted a seminary, church music school, and student church. It was also the location for the headquarters of the Cecilian organization and its journal *Musica Sacra*. As a nucleus for the Cecilian Movement, Regensburg, together with Munich and Cologne, were centers of a cappella singing in the second half of the nineteenth century. In other European locales, the movement encountered challenges. For example, in France scholars such as music historian Jean-Michel Nectoux emphasized, “Despite serious efforts toward restoring plainchant, the typical repertoire in the churches remained gravely contaminated by theater music throughout the nineteenth-century.”

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In France, church musicians such as composer and organist Charles-Camille Saint-Saëns, were troubled not only by the increasing secularization of sacred music, but also by requests for operatic music in church. Saint-Saëns famously recalled that when his curate at the Church of the Madeleine in Paris “begged him to play music of greater appeal to the tastes of the faithful [he] replied that he would play such an offertory the day the priest read Labiche from the pulpit.”

Similarly, the extent to which taste concerns dominated Cecilian thought in the late nineteenth century was captured in a letter to the editor of the Catholic newspaper *The Table* in 1875. Here an adherent from Belfast, Leo Kehbusch, defended German Cecilianism:

It is not long ago I heard in a London Catholic church a Mass, the music of which was only fit (I regret to say it) for a singing saloon or a circus, and the organist wound up with an overture to “La Dame Blanche.” On another occasion, not many months ago, a London organist played quite coolly at Mass a selection from Balfe’s opera “Il Talismano,” and ended the Mass with the overture to “Zampa.” Does “Precentor “not rejoice to see a nation, even if it should be the German, moving to stop such desecration in the house of God? For that purpose the Society of St. Caecilia goes back to the original source of Catholic Church music, the Gregorian, and its offspring “à la Palestrina,” and cultivates any other Church music composed in the same spirit. And that is the aim and end of this GERMAN reform.

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337. Ibid. Eugène Marin Labiche (1815–1888) was a nineteenth-century French dramatist.

Throughout Europe, the Cecilian Movement was not without criticism and resistance from a host of contemporary composers. At the same time, many new compositions written according to the movement’s archetypes evoked the wrath of critics who believed they were lackluster, uninspired, and mediocre. This did not deter these reformers, who created compositional dictates for Cecilian composers to follow. Those Palestrinian traits included:

1. Restrained representation of the words
2. All voices equally balanced
3. Diatonic melody in small range
4. Use of modal counterpoint
5. Intervallic harmony and intervallic treatment of dissonance
6. Evenly flowing rhythm regulated by the tactus

The Dutchman J. A. S. van Schaik, an ardent Regensburg apostle in his younger years, was one of the first Dutch church composers trained at Haberl’s school. He became disillusioned when he realized that the mediocre copycat compositions produced by many Cecilians could not advance church music. This was because, as Van Schaik believed, the Cecilians had only the most

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superficial acquaintance with chant and polyphony.\textsuperscript{341} This would explain
reactive comments about the Cecilian Movement by historians, such as Paul
Henry Lang, who likewise characterized their compositions as “archaic,
fundamentally lifeless, and remote from the true sources of religious art.”\textsuperscript{342}

Next, the toxicity of musical intolerance and judgment reared its head in
Regensburg. In 1870, the \textit{Cäcilienkalender} published the first catalogue of music
approved for use in church services. Here there was delineation between
strictly liturgical music for the main divine service, and sacred music for shorter
devotional services and religious concert music. Gregorian chant was first on
the list of acceptable music, followed by \textit{a cappella} polyphony, organ music, and
community hymns. A decade later, the Regensburgers used their periodicals\textsuperscript{343}
\textit{Musica Sacra} and the publication \textit{The General Catalogue of the Society of St.
Cecilia} to either approve or disapprove of choral music. Italian musicologist
Laura Basini pointed out that this blacklist appeared in the February and
March 1880 issues of \textit{Musica Sacra}. She went on to state:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{341} Michael E. Lawrence, “Sacred Music and the Hermeneutic of Continuity,” \textit{Saint
\item \textsuperscript{342} Paul Henry Lang, \textit{Music in Western Civilization} (New York: W.W. Norton, 1941),
855.
\item \textsuperscript{343} Journals associated with the movement include \textit{Fliegende Blätter für katholische
Kirchenmusik}, \textit{Musica sacra}, \textit{Cäcilienkalender}, and \textit{Kirchenmusikalisches Jahrbuch}, all founded in
the late 1860s, as well as \textit{Chorwächter} (St Gallen), \textit{Gregoriusblatt} (Aachen), \textit{Kirchenmusikalisches
Vierteljahresschrift} (Salzburg), \textit{Wiener Blätter für katholische Kirchenmusik} (Vienna), and \textit{Caecilia}
(New York).
\end{itemize}
The Church had issued edicts about this throughout the century [1924, 1835, 1842, 1855, 1856, and 1859 targeted at “the poison of theatrical sensualism”] – as late as 1880 the Journal *Musica Sacra* testified to the prevalence of theatrical music with its “Indice della musica proibita in chiesa” (Index of music banned in church), a long blacklist that included *I puritani, Lucia di Lammermor, Guiglielmo Tell,* and *Paisiello’s Nina.*

Other nineteenth-century composers offered varied responses to the authoritative rules for creating Cecilian compositions. Franz Liszt, who took minor holy orders in his later years and was a Palestrina devotee, wanted the movement’s support, but he did not always cater to their requirements. Munich critic and composer Josef Rheinberger believed that the group was “backward looking” and had “restricted themselves unnecessarily.” While he tried initially to comply with their dictates, eventually the individualistic Rheinberger stood apart from the movement, which he regarded as both “uncompromising and epigonic.” However, his opponents were not forgiving, and consequently the Cecilian journal *Musica Sacra* proscribed his masses. In his 2006 doctoral dissertation on Josef Rheinberger and the Regensburg Cecilian Movement, Joel Scraper explained:


Rheinberger was affected by the reform ideals of a new Palestrina style, but utilized these ideals in his own manner. This practice is certainly not unique, as Liszt and Bruckner also composed sacred music with reform in mind and simultaneously utilized distinctive personal styles. Rheinberger’s refusal to adhere to the Cecilians was ultimately a rejection of the ultramontane faction of church reform and instead showed an adherence to the historical practice of sacred music that was established in Munich.  

Other major nineteenth-century composers assessed the movement in a negative light. Austrian composer Anton Bruckner took a hypocritical stance toward the organization. Privately, he was critical of the movement. However, he realized their widespread influence and possible impact on his pocketbook, so he was concerned that the Cecilian opinion of his works be favorable. Interestingly, the Cecilians reciprocated by straddling the fence as well. While his smaller choral works were similar to the Cecilian ideas about “practical church music,” or Gebreuchskirchenmusik, they did not contain evident Gregorian or Palestrinian structures. Therefore, the Cecilians considered Bruckner’s smaller a cappella works like the phrygian motet Pange Lingua (1868), Locus Iste (1869), and the modal Os Justi “unliturgical.” At the same time, the Cecilian leadership listed his Mass No. 2 in E minor [WAB 27] as

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348. Ibid.

recommended for liturgical performance.\textsuperscript{350}

He attempted to placate the group until their audacious leader, Xavier Witt, decided to “improve” Bruckner’s Eucharistic motet \textit{Tantum Ergo} by removing an unprepared ninth. Witt did not inform Bruckner of the change and boldly published his altered version in \textit{Musica Sacra}. The drama reached a high point when the composer learned of this, as Dutch music critic and essayist Wouter Papp (1908–1981) described:

> When Bruckner received the proof issue, Friedrich Eckstein was present. He told later that Bruckner uttered a cry of rage and indignation, immediately erasing the corrected note and putting in the interval he wanted. By this willful measure, Witt had incurred Bruckner’s displeasure for good.\textsuperscript{351}

In late nineteenth-century post-unification Italy, the Cecilian Movement had a strong foothold as well. Prominent adherents such as Giuseppe Gallignani, the \textit{Maestro di Cappella} at the Milan Cathedral from 1883 to 1923, advocated a return to Renaissance choral music. He composed hundreds of unaccompanied \textit{alla Palestrina} choral pieces for his cathedral choir and was the editor of \textit{Musica Sacra}. Italian Cecilians like outspoken cleric Father Guerrino Amelli were adamantine in their rejection of what they considered “the poison of theatrical sensualism” in choral music.


Gender-Specific Choral Trends

*France*

After the Napoleonic Wars, post-revolutionary nationalistic fervor was manifested in the form of male singing ensembles during France’s First Republic. France’s male choir movement grew out of the success of a large public choir at an annual national festival begun on 8 June 1794 (*Fête de l’Etre Supreme*/Festival of the Supreme Being). That event was notable not only for its enormous size, but also because of the popularity of its 2,400-voice chorus. Accordingly, a similar choral experience at the national festival held in 1815 was successful, and from it a choral movement emerged that affected most geographic locations in that country. Those highly regarded men’s choirs had the public support of the Emperor Napoleon, who encouraged singing to reduce the travail of ordinary workers.352

As musicologist Jane Fulcher explained, the “Orphéon” phenomenon (named after the classical Greek mythical singer Orpheus) comprised mostly working-class amateur male singers.353 Her research indicated that the


movement “grew to dimensions of unfathomable size, becoming ubiquitous throughout the country, and eventually employed some of the finest composers, conductors, and teachers in France.” 169 Eighteen years later, in 1833, the Orphéon movement had evolved into the Orphéon Choral Society, with headquarters in Paris. By the turn of the twentieth century, there were more than two thousand Orphéon societies in France. 170 Music historian François Lesure explained that:

Many Orphéon competitions were organized after the first was held at Troyes in 1849; an inventory of 1867 enumerates 3243 Orphéon societies, representing nearly 150,000 members, the largest being in the north and the next largest in the Bouches-du-Rhône, Seine and Rhône areas. 171 In addition to promoting choral music, the organization functioned as a branch of French music education. Among its many publications were two periodicals, La France Orphéonique and L’Echo des Orphéons, dedicated to reporting its many activities.

Concurrent with the Orphéon phenomenon, a method of teaching sight singing devised by Pierre Galin (1786–1821), Aimé Paris (1798–1866), and Émile Chevé (1804–1864) came to the fore in France. Chevé “disseminated the method

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169. Ibid., 47.


widely in France through ‘vigorous propaganda’ and the publication of his 1844 text *Méthode élémentaire de musique vocale.*” Lesure explained that this numerical method of teaching sight singing drew criticism and was associated with a deterioration of teaching methods in France during the period. At the same time, the Orphéon trend became mediocre due to the unsupervised music instruction in schools, the poor repertory utilized for sight singing, and the lack of training in musical interpretation. As a result, the movement progressively departed from its initial idealism.

*Germany*

Eleven years earlier, near the very end of the eighteenth century, Karl Friedrich Christian Fasch established a venerable institution for the promotion and teaching of the *a cappella* choral art. Previously, he had been a composer and *hofcemballist* for Frederick the Great as well as a former colleague of C. P. E. Bach. Several times in 1789, Fasch gathered his music pupils in the garden house of his student, Charlotte Dietrich, to present choral programs. One gathered in the evening, “drank tea, spoke, talked, in short entertained oneself;
and the matter itself was only secondary.”362 Their initial meetings resembled informal German social gatherings called Singthees, rather than rehearsals focused on high-quality musical results. Because the students enjoyed singing together, they continued their informal monthly meetings, and in four years the result was a thirty-voice choir. Fasch established the venerable Sing-Akademie zu Berlin in the same year, 1793, as a center for music learning in nineteenth-century Berlin for “protecting standards in German choral music.”363

After the establishment of the Sing-Akademie, other similar choral societies arose throughout Europe and in the United States, where the German societies were used as a prototype.364 At this point, both the concept and the word Sing-Akademie became synonymous with the English term “choral society.”365 The beginnings of a nineteenth-century male choir movement in Germany point to one of Fasch’s students, Carl Friedrich Zelter (1750–1832), as a key influence. Zelter was a lieder composer, conductor, and teacher who was associated with the city of Berlin throughout his life. At Fasch’s death in 1800 at the age of fifty, Zelter assumed the mantle of conductor. His biographers

362. Willi Reich and Karl Friedrich Zelter, Selbstdarstellung (Self representation) (Zurich, SW: Manesse Verlag, 1955), 64.

363. Smith and Young, “Chorus (i),”


note that at first his choirs sang predominantly *a cappella* works from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Consequently, the *Sing-Akademie* became a model for the performance of sacred music from the past. 366 In discussing the organization’s history, Georg Graf zu Castell-Castell, 2010 board chair for the *Sing-Akademie*, proposed that nineteenth-century Berliners were enthralled by unaccompanied choirs:

> A new sound had entered the world, produced by this mixed *a cappella* choral singing, which fascinated people and suited the musical sensibilities of early Romanticism: Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, a student of Fasch’s, described this sound as the “language of angels.”

Singing academies were not limited to Berlin, as they existed in other German-speaking countries as well. For example, a similar though entirely separate foundation arose in Switzerland, inspired by Zurich composer and music publisher Hans Georg Nägeli (1773–1836). There he founded two singing organizations: the *Singinstitut* and a *Sängerverein*, or “singer association.” Additionally, in 1817 Nägeli encouraged what had become a flourishing German male choir trend by publishing his *GesangBildungslehre für den Männerchor*, or *Instruction in Group Singing for Male Chorus*. 368

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368. Michael Traugott Pfeiffer and Hans Georg Nägeli, *Gesangbildungslehre für den*
The Männerchor Movement

A gender-specific choral phenomenon, parallel with the Orphéon movement in France, emerged in Germany during the early nineteenth century. Similarly, the German tradition arose from both patriotism and nationalism and continued well into the first decade of the new century. Zelter’s establishment of a men’s choir in 1909 at the Sing-Akademie, known as the Liedertafel, or “Song Table,” helped initiate a tradition of men’s a cappella choral singing in German-speaking countries. Because Berlin was initially a nucleus for Liedertafel activity, the city also became a center for a larger Männerchor, or men’s choir, movement. After becoming increasingly organized, these men’s choirs played a role in the broad socialization of music in Germany during the nineteenth century.

Akin to Orphéon, which organized French men’s choirs into an association, in Germany Vereinigte Liedertafeln (Combined Men’s Choruses) planned and executed large competitive regional festivals. Newly composed

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369. Hermann Kuhlo, Geschichte Der Zelterschen Liedertafel Von 1809 Bis 1909 (History of Zelter-inspired Liedertafel from 1809 until 1909) (Berlin, GR: Sing-Akademie, 1909), 1–170. The title “Liedertafel” was inspired by literary figure King Arthur and his “round table.”

choral works were often a feature of those gatherings. For example, Richard Wagner’s *Das Liebesmahl der Apostel* (The Lovefeast of the Apostles) was composed for an 1843 gathering of men’s choirs from Saxony.\(^{371}\) In this way, published choral music often represented an historic record of these large choral gatherings. For instance, in its eighteen-month existence during 1805 and 1806, Berlin’s first scholarly music journal, the *Berlinische Musikalische Zeitung*, published German patriotic songs for men’s voices in parts.

Historically, the German *Liedertafel* trend is sometimes portrayed as a “symbol of a united Germany through the bond of German song” and “an agent of social and political change.”\(^{372}\) However, other authors suggest that instead, these men’s choirs exemplified the realities of social stratification in nineteenth-century German society. For example, Hanoverian musicologist and author Carl Dahlhaus (1928–1989) pointed out that these choruses were “divided clearly, if not rigorously, along social lines.”\(^{373}\) Additionally, such

\(^{371}\) A profusion of männerchor compositions were created for the Liedertafel movement. Schumann, Schubert, Brahms (“Tafellied,” 1884), Spohr (“Das befreite Deutschland”/Liberating Germany), and Weber (“Kampf und Sieg”/Fight and Victory) all wrote through-composed works as well as partsongs for this genre. Many of these pieces were patriotic and nationalistic, as were collections put together by publishers such as *Auswahl Deutscher Lieder: Vaterlands- und Bundeslieder, Kriegs- und Heldenlieder nebst Festgesänge für Siegestage* (Selection of German songs: Native country and federal songs, war and hero songs together with festival songs for victory days) (Leipzig, GR: Serig’sche Buchhandlung, 1830).


\(^{373}\) Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 61.
organizations expedited communal interaction, as music historians Josef Eisinger and Styra Avins explained:

Choruses were potent vehicles for social intercourse, which had been severely restricted in many places after the uprisings of 1848. The Liedertafel, or choral society, was a conscious and clever way around a general ban on gatherings... 374

This popular choir development also spread throughout the nineteenth century by means of German emigration to other countries, including the United States, where these choruses were widespread, especially in cities. They proudly displayed their Teutonic roots by employing the term Liedertafel in their titles. The Männerchor movement reached its climax in 1840, with the threat of a new French attack on the Rhine, and survived into the first half of the twentieth century. 375

The Frauenchor/Damenchor Trend

A German female version of the Männerchor movement, referred to here as the Frauenchor or Damenchor trend, affected the development of choral traditions in that country as well as abroad. While these choirs were run differently than male choruses the interpersonal connections which held them together were likely quite similar. By comparison, they were primarily independent, existing in loose association with no centralized national


375. Ibid., 18.
leadership; so collectively, they did not appear to have the size or strength of the men’s movement. Nevertheless, their existence continued past the beginning of the twentieth century. Like the men’s movement, notable composers such as Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, and Johannes Brahms composed a repertoire of *a cappella* works for women’s ensembles during this period. Brahms, for example, conducted a women’s chorus in Hamburg from 1859 to 1861.\(^{376}\) For that Frauenchor he wrote his unaccompanied *Marienlieder*, various canons, and contrapuntal motets. He also composed *Psalm VIII*, 4 *Songs*, Op. 17; *Ellens zweiter Gesang*, Op. 52, No. 2; and *Ave Maria*, for SSAA voices and organ for that group.\(^{377}\)

German women’s choirs varied with regard to organizational structure, reflecting that country’s sociocultural milieu. Those without a coordinated operation often had performance venues of a social nature, such as soirées and informal concerts. However, even more formally constituted women’s ensembles, such as Brahms’s chorus, also had a strong social element.\(^{378}\) While it might seem that the absence of a national organization for women would have prevented the coordination of large events such as choir festivals, such activities


\(^{377}\) Ibid., 16, 34, 38.

\(^{378}\) Ibid., 81.
Like the men’s *Liedertafel* movement, emigration from German-speaking lands took the *Frauenchor* trend to the United States during this era. For example, when large numbers of Moravians settled in the northern and southern areas of the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, women’s choirs served several purposes. Historians Clinton and Lunardini explained, “The solidarity of these female choirs within the Moravian Church provided women with strong bonds of sisterhood within their small farming communities.”

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Europe: Unaccompanied Protestant Church Music during the Nineteenth Century

Some historians have intimated that, in general, European church music was in a state of continual decline from 1800 to 1900. For example, in their 1855 musical commentary entitled *The Music of the Nineteenth-century and its Culture*, music theorist and critic Adolph Bernhard Marx and his colleagues wrote, “It must therefore be acknowledged that church music—as a matter of course—is both less in extent and intrinsic power than it was in the preceding period.”

Historical data points to many disparate activities collectively directed at a

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redefining church music by means of a reexamination of its past. A widespread
desire on the part of non-Catholic church musicians to remedy the state of
Protestant sacred music in Germany led to the founding of state-sponsored
schools of sacred music in Breslau in 1810, Königsberg in 1812, and Berlin in
1822. For some, these institutions represented a nationalistic expression of the
musical heritage of Protestant Germany.

The prevalent distribution of important books, monographs, and musical
collections assisted the efforts of those intending to elevate the standard of
Protestant choral music. Those published between 1817 and 1854 include Über
den Gesang in den Kirchen der Protestanten (1817), Thibaut’s Über Reinheit der
Tonkunst (1825), the Berliner Gesangbuch (1829), C.F. Becker’s Kirchengesänge von
J.S. Bach (1843), and the Eisenacher Gesangbuch (1854). Nineteenth-century
Protestant churches in Germany broke with the long-standing tradition of
choral music rendered exclusively by male singers. In the 1850s, for the first
time, more than a few mixed choirs came into existence. Twenty years later,
mixed-gender “church choral societies,” which had formerly been secular
organizations, also appeared on the scene.381 Other groups, such as Berlin’s
Royal Domchor (cathedral choir), which aligned itself with the tenets of

The “Palestrina Renaissance” was not exclusive to Catholic churches in Europe. Several non-Catholic, non-clerical musical scholars and conservationists such as Carl Friedrich Zelter, Baron Karl Georg August Vivigens von Winterfeld (1784–1852), Anton Friedrich Justus Thibaut, and August Eduard Grell (1800–1886) were part of a parallel nineteenth-century Protestant Palestrina revival, which had non-ecclesiastical facets. That phenomenon was both associated with and affected by the Catholic Cecilian Movement. The individuals just mentioned found inspiration in secular philosophies that affected entire societies rather than just religious congregations. Both Zelter and Thibaut, for instance, founded choral societies with the expressed intention of restoring musical “taste” within society in general. They envisioned their roles as part of a greater cultural process of artistic renewal rather than as merely a remedy, solution, or stimulus for Protestant church music. Nevertheless, Zelter’s secular Singakademie, a non-sectarian institution, did have the effect of stimulating choral reform in most of Berlin’s churches.

The Protestant Palestrina revival had secular dimensions that influenced the religious branches of the movement and vice versa. Here inspiration came from a culturally conscious ethos rather than religious belief. This secular
branch of the revival was exemplified by Singvereine (singing organizations), such as those of Zelter and Thibaut. “Quasi-liturgical works,” like those of composers Louis Spohr and Otto Nicolai, epitomize that philosophy. Both Zelter and Thibaut were careful to distinguish between these quasi-liturgical pieces and those intended for liturgical use in church services.

At the core of Zelter and Thibaut’s artistic renewal was music education, embodied within the German concept of Bildung, which has been described as “the self-cultivation of the individual.” These men held that the elevation of ethical concerns encouraged and promoted the replication of earlier choral styles. Thus, the Palestrina revival had primarily a moral rather than a musical significance. For Zelter, “elevated music” as modeled in the choral music of Palestrina was an instrument for molding national character. It had the potential to connect upper and lower social classes, thus benefitting society (das Volk/the masses) in general. Both reasoned that since music is a language of

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383. Ibid., 69.

384. Ibid., 63

385. Ibid., 69.

feelings, and feelings can be elevated, man could be ennobled and perfected by it. There was a philosophical rationale for unaccompanied singing as well. Both scholars championed the *a cappella* idiom to promote the Kantian view that music can only attain “purposiveness” and contribute positively in combination with language.\(^\text{387}\) These ideas provided Zelter and Thibaut with a philosophical rationale for enthusiastically supporting unaccompanied Renaissance church music.\(^\text{388}\)

**Mendelssohn and Brahms and the Protestant Palestrina Revival**

Throughout his life, Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847) encountered many leading figures of both the Catholic and Protestant Palestrina movements.\(^\text{389}\) His earliest composition studies, at age eight, happened to be with Carl Friedrich Zelter in Berlin, a key figure in the German Palestrina revival. This

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\(^{388}\) Zelter arranged eighteenth-century music for *a cappella* choirs.

\(^{389}\) Mendelssohn’s involvement with Christian church music is complex and seems to have been technical or theoretical rather than religious—exterior to any inner/spiritual/eclesiastical identification or lack thereof. Mendelssohn was born into a prominent Jewish family. His grandfather, Moses Mendelssohn, was a famous Jewish philosopher and founder of Reform Judaism. Mendelssohn’s wealthy parents had he and his sister baptized as Lutheran in 1816 because of the anti-Semitic environment in Germany at the time. His father believed that Christianity was the religion of “civilized people,” and fully and vehemently rejected the religion of his ancestors. In addition, he wanted to do away with the family name Mendelssohn in favor of Bartholdy. Letters to his sister Fanny suggest that Felix privately never rejected his Jewish roots, and that, despite his Christian baptism, both he and his sister may have furtively self-identified as Jewish rather than Christian.
put him in close association with Zelter’s Singakademie, and his philosophies, motivations, and musical activities. Later, at age twenty-one, Mendelssohn embarked on a grand tour, or “Great Trip,” as he called it, of Europe from 1830 to 1832.\footnote{Russell Stinson, \textit{The Reception of Bach’s Organ Works from Mendelssohn to Brahms} (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006), 17.} That journey took him to Rome, where he met with Giuseppe Baini and visited the extensive library of Fortunato Santini, which was rich in Italian sacred polyphony. He also consulted Raphael Georg Kiesewetter and attended Holy Week services in the \textit{Cappella Sistina}. In 1862, he recorded and subsequently published in the form of a ten-page letter a record of his weeklong stay in Rome, in particular, services sung by that choir. He wrote, replete with written-out musical examples, that he heard the Papal Choir sing Palestrina’s \textit{Improperia}, or Reproaches, and Gregorio Allegri’s \textit{Miserere}.\footnote{Ernest H. Sanders, et al. “Motet.” \textit{Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online.} Oxford University Press, accessed August 18, 2014, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.bu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/40086.}

During this time he also composed several short accompanied sacred choral works, some based on Reformation chorales.\footnote{\textit{Psalm CXV} (after the Vulgate text, \textit{Non nobis, Domine}, op. 31); four more chorale cantatas, \textit{Mitten wir im Leben sind} (op. 23, no.3), \textit{Verleih’ uns Frieden}, \textit{Vom Himmel hoch}, and \textit{Wir glauben all’ an einen Gott}; and two motets (op. 39, nos. 1 and 3).}

Occasionally, Mendelssohn’s choral compositions allude to his historical research in early music. For example, his 1827 motet \textit{Tu es Petrus} references Palestrina’s work by the same title. Mendelssohn’s version is a homophonic
polychoral work that juxtaposes lower voices in opposition to and together with higher voices. In *Hora est*, a motet from 1828 in sixteen parts, he again employed a homophonic polychoral style.\textsuperscript{393} His unaccompanied *Three Motets*, op. 69, from 1827, consist of *a Magnificat*, *Nunc Dimittis*, and a Psalm.

It was in 1842 that Mendelssohn made perhaps his greatest impact upon the Berlin Palestrina revival. In that year, King Friedrich Wilhelm IV lured him away from Leipzig to appoint him conductor of a choir of men and boys at the new Protestant Lutheran Berlin Cathedral (*Berliner Dom/Oberpfarr-und Domkirche*). Around the time of his arrival there, Mendelssohn’s friend, theologian and Prussian Ambassador to London Christian von Bunsen, suggested to the King that a revival of *a cappella* writing in the style of Palestrina be implemented. In response to royal requests, during that “winter of discontent” (1843–1844), as music historian David Brodbeck portrayed it, Mendelssohn set about to compose a number of *a cappella* works for the *Domkirche*’s male choir.\textsuperscript{394} Here he trained his ensemble to sing *altklassiche Kirchenmusik*, or unaccompanied early church music, as it was called in Germany at the time. Mendelssohn’s new compositions included four *a cappella*

\textsuperscript{393} Mendelssohn’s five early Latin motets include *Magnificat*, *Tu es Petrus*, *Kyrie* with soloists and orchestra, *Hora est* for four choirs, and *Ave Maria* for sixteen voices and wind ensemble.

settings for Passion Sunday and Good Friday (1844) and *Psalms xliii and xxii*, op. 78 nos. 2 and 3.

While Mendelssohn knew and understood the Palestrina style, he never fully embraced it, finding it too limiting. His work as a disinclined leader in sacred choral music in Berlin from 1843 to 1844 placed him at the center of a Protestant revival of old music in that city. Music critic and theorist Adolph Bernhard Marx explained:

> The only new institution of any importance in this sphere of art [Evangelical Lutheran church music] is the Berlin cathedral choir, [which] has been instrumental in the production of a series of compositions written specially for it, as well as in the revival of works of a more ancient date, particularly those of the middle ages, by Palestrina and others.395

Another prominent nineteenth-century composer associated with Protestant church music, *a cappella* music, and the Protestant revival of early music was Johannes Brahms (1833–1897). Like Mendelssohn, his larger

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396. Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 184. The duality of Brahms’s agnosticism and his simultaneous creative urge to create sacred choral music directly reflects music historian Carl Dahlhaus’s observation of the interesting coexistence of the secular and profane that impacted nineteenth-century Protestant church music: “...a composer of Protestant background, such as Robert Schumann, could write a Requiem for the concert hall as though the liturgical text were merely an elegiac poem, we might be tempted to speak of a confusion of concepts and emotions, of a secularization of the religious and a sanctification of the profane. Yet, by nineteenth-century criteria, it was virtually impossible to tell whether a composer of a concert mass had turned the concert hall into a church or the mass into a concert piece” (p. 184).
choral works, such as *Ein deutsches Requiem, nach Worten der heiligen Schrift*, op. 45 (1868), *Shickalslied*, and *Nänie*, have tended to overshadow his smaller unaccompanied compositions. Several authors have proposed that Brahms’s impact upon unaccompanied choral music and alignment with a Palestrina revival in Protestant Europe was associated with his lifelong interest in old music, including unaccompanied music. Similar to Mendelssohn, his private musicological studies involved visits to libraries and private archives, the collection of books and manuscripts, and the study of early music, particularly of the Renaissance and Baroque periods.

Brahms’s interest in and exploration of old music may have found expression in his compositional process. For example, musicologist Robert Pascall explained that his 1856 *Missa canonica*, written while copying Palestrina’s *Missa Papae Marcelli*, influenced the composition of his *a cappella* motet *Warum ist das Licht gegeben*, Op. 74, No. 1. Likewise, his three *Geistliche Chöre* (Sacred Choruses), Op. 37, reflect his interest in canonic writing between

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398. After the death of the composer in 1897, the extent of his interests in early music became known when his personal library was bequeathed to the archive of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde (Society of Music Friends) in Vienna.
Here Brahms employs long note values and simple harmonies, lending the work an atmosphere reminiscent of *stile antico*. In the first chorus, “O bone Jesu” (1859), he creates a canon *per arsin et thesin* (arsis and thesis) in which the second voice reverses the pattern of metrically strong and weak beats in the first voice. Brahms’s *a cappella* motet from the same year, *Adoramus te, Christe*, employs a four-part canon that ends homorhythmically. The third motet, *Regina coeli laetare* (1863), employs a canon in contrary motion. Finally, in the second of Brahms’ *Zwei Motetten* (Two Motets), Op. 29, *Schaffe in mir Gott* (1856–60), the composer creates a *stile antico* augmentation canon in parts one and three.

Brahms’s choral programming may also shed light on his interests in early *a cappella* music. In his last three choral conducting positions, he programmed motets by sixteenth-century German Renaissance composer

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Johannes Eccard, whose chorale-based works bear association with the history of the Protestant Reformation. Brahms also incorporated *a cappella* works of sixteenth-century Franco-Flemish Catholic composers such as Heinrich Isaac (ca. 1450–1517) and Orlando di Lasso (ca. 1532–1594) on concert programs. However, his repertoire choices were primarily Protestant ones, similar to those suggested by Karl Winterfeld (discussed previously).

A Model for Emulation: *A Cappella* Singing as *Bildung*

In addition to various parallel trends such as the Oxford Movement, the Cecilian Movement, and the Palestrina revival in nineteenth-century Europe, secular philosophies and singing organizations unaffiliated with any religion appeared and supported *a cappella* choral singing. One belief structure was the German concept of *Bildung*, a multidimensional holistic set of ideas that promoted knowledge, skills, values, ethos, personality, authenticity, and humanity. That construct resurfaced in discussions of *a cappella* music because its adherents held that *a cappella* music was *Bildung*.

Seen as an appropriate expression for the totality of all teaching and learning activities in Germany, *Bildung* used in its reflexive form implies teaching and learning. Because it was believed to develop human aptitudes, *a*

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404. Ibid.
cappella singing was regarded both as part of individual spiritual formation and as an opportunity to express Bildung on a wide scale. In elevating a cappella music, advocates supported a further German neohumanistic concept: the idea that only unaccompanied music can contribute to the improvement of the individual and society. Because of the universality of singing, it was thought to be the perfect medium for Bildung. These scholars believed that only music of the “strict style” (Gebundene Styl) makes possible the equal participation of every singer.

Among the most proactive exponents of a cappella as singing as Bildung during the nineteenth-century Palestrina revival in Germany was August Eduard Grell (1800–1886) and his pupil and apologist Heinrich Bellermann (1832–1903). Grell was the choral director of the Berlin Domchor (Berlin Cathedral Choir) and director of the Singakademie from 1853 to 1867. Both advocated their belief in the primacy of vocal music, more specifically a cappella singing (called “naked singing” by Grell), and both demonstrated their beliefs by composing unaccompanied choral music. Inspired by this social philosophy, Grell and Bellermann campaigned vigorously for placing a cappella choral

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405. German poet, philosopher, historian, and playwright Johann von Schiller (1759–1805) and government functionary, diplomat, philosopher, linguist, and educational theorist Friedrich von Humboldt (1767–1835) both championed this concept of the self-cultivation of the individual. They held that such a multi-faceted personal process would in turn result in a cultural regeneration of the populace, or “Volks-Bildung.”
singing at the heart of music education. A second philosophical stance affecting *a cappella* choral singing was the Kantian notion that music can attain purposiveness and contributes positively in combination with language. Both Zelter and Thibaut incorporated this position into their own choral doctrines. They also used Kant’s idea to explain their view that a predominance of instrumental music in modern musical culture is one aspect of its degeneration.  

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407. Ibid., 65.
CHAPTER 4

PETER CHRISTIAN LUTKIN

1858–1931

Conductor of America’s First Collegiate A Cappella Choir

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Situated “on the borders of prairie and timber,” the rural landscape of Thompsonville, Wisconsin was the backdrop for the beginning of Peter Christian Lutkin’s life on 27 March 1858.409 His parents were Danish settlers, having immigrated to the United States in 1834, twenty-four years before his birth.

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408. Photograph courtesy of Northwestern University Archives, Deering Library, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL. Photograph is in the public domain.

birth. At age ten, his father, Peter Christian, and mother, Hanna, relocated
their family to Chicago to manage a grocery. Fate unexpectedly turned his life
upside down when both parents died five years later in one of the city’s many
dysentery epidemics. The orphaned teenager was taken in by his older sister
and her husband, Elizabeth and Philip Cavana, a hatter.

After moving to Chicago, Lutkin became involved in the music program
at the Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul. His earliest musical experiences were
as a boy alto in that choir, and at the age of fourteen, he became cathedral
organist (1871–81). The magazine *Music* noted in 1898, “Having a fine voice he
was advanced as rapidly as possible and was probably the first boy in the west
to sing oratorio solos in public.” 410 In 1871, Lutkin began his first formal
training in music, studying organ with Clarence Eddy, one of America’s
foremost organists, piano with Regina Watson, and music theory with *Chicago
Tribune* critic Fredrick Grant Gleason. At age twenty-one, he joined the piano
faculty at the Northwestern University Conservatory of Music. 411

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410. Mathews, W.S.B. “Noteworthy Personalities: Mr. Peter C. Lutkin.” *Music: A
Magazine Devoted to the Art, Science, Technic and Literature of Music* 13, no. 3 (January 1898): 342–
43.

“Peter C. Lutkin (1858–1931),” accessed 24 February 2014,
Education in Europe

After Lutkin worked for two years at Northwestern Conservatory, an anonymous donor provided funds for him to further his education in Europe. Lutkin was admitted to Berlin’s Königliche Hochschule für Musik, where he studied piano with Oscar Ralf and organ with August Haupt, Clarence Eddy’s teacher. He also took composition lessons with Waldemar Bargiel, Clara Schumann’s half-brother. After one year at the Hochschule, Lutkin gained a scholarship to the Königliche Meisterschule für Komposition in Berlin, the only foreigner admitted to a class of sixteen. He then travelled to Vienna and enrolled in Theodore Leschetitzky’s piano school. Here, he took lessons with Leschetitzky’s Russian protégé and housekeeper, Vrette Stepanoff and likely attended Leschetitzky’s group piano classes. Lutkin’s last stop on his European educational journey was Paris, where he worked briefly with the celebrated German pianist and composer Moritz Moszkowski. Those years provided him with the requisite musical skills, experiences, and theoretical foundations that were critical to his future in music.

412. Ibid.


414. Ibid.
Early Years in Chicago

After he returned from Europe, for eleven years, Lutkin worked as an organist and choirmaster in two Chicago churches: first at St. Clement’s Protestant Episcopal Church (1884–1891) and then at St. James Episcopal Church (1891–1895). Anglican music historian J. Albert Strohm indicates that he conducted a “vested choir of 11 boys and 10 men” at St. Clements Church.415 During this period, Lutkin was also director of the music theory department at the American Conservatory of Music (1888–1895). In 1891, he returned to Northwestern Conservatory at a time when that institution was facing financial ruin and closure.416

Throughout his career, Lutkin was savvy at navigating the upper strata of Chicago society, where people venerated high culture and were probably impressed by his European training. One influential member of that echelon, Cornelia Gray Lunt, daughter of Northwestern University founder Orrington Lunt, recommended Lutkin as an individual capable of salvaging the study of music at the University.417 On her suggestion, the trustees asked him to


reconfigure music instruction and appointed him professor of music and
director of a new music department. In 1892, the Department of Music became
a department of the College of Liberal Arts. Lutkin immediately worked to
restore the conservatory to its former status and modeled its curriculum after
German conservatories. In 1895, the trustees created a separate School of Music
with Lutkin as its dean. In addition to his administrative position, he
simultaneously continued to teach theory, piano, organ, church music, and
composition as a professor in the newly established Northwestern School of
Music (1895–1931). He later added two more responsibilities to his post as dean
during a two year period (1926–28), when he served concurrently as director of
the Department of Church and Choral Music at the Northwestern School of
Music and lecturer in church music at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary,
an independent Episcopal institution in Evanston.418 Soon after he took over
leadership of the School of Music, a building housing its offices, Music Hall,
was erected on the Willard Hall block.419

Lutkin’s great respect of European musical artisanship drove his desire
to bring his own training in Berlin into the picture in his role as a professor.
Because most American music schools in the first two decades of the twentieth

418. “The Lutkin Society,” (Evanston, IL: Bienen School of Music, Northwestern
University, 2009).

419. Sheppard and Hurd, History of Northwestern University, 138.
century did not have teachers qualified to teach species counterpoint, Lutkin taught it himself at Northwestern, using his own instructional materials from Germany.220 His theoretical background bore fruit with his composition students, for in June 1908, compositions created by the Class of 1908 were sung in the Forty-First Students’ Recital. The works performed included an unaccompanied Kyrie Eleison written in stile antico, by Lutkin’s composition class, and a Gloria Patri in fugue form.221 The Quarterly Bulletin of School of Music (sic) from 1908 indicated that in the fourth year of study on the undergraduate level, “The study of counterpoint is pursued as far as eight-part writing, together with the collateral writing of canons and fugues.”222

Upon returning to Northwestern in 1891, he founded the women’s Cecilian Choir, the Men’s Glee Club, and in 1906, the Northwestern University A Cappella Choir.223 While the latter group received most of the focus of Lutkin’s career, the specificity of the title given by him to his women’s choir is possible evidence supporting the proposition that Lutkin was influenced by the

420. Peter Christian Lutkin, Dean Lutkin’s Counterpoint, 3 vols. (n.p.), Rare Books Dept., Deering Library, Evanston, IL. Manuscript notebooks from Lutkin’s student days at a Berlin conservatory.


German Cecilian movement in full sway during his various residencies in Europe. It is conceivable that this title suggests that Lutkin, upon his return to the United States, wished to bring Cecilian ideals to America and to spread them to his students.

The Northwestern University A Cappella Choir

Lutkin’s founding of his unaccompanied choir was not intentional. In December of 1906 Mrs. Alfred Emerson asked Lutkin to supply a choral group to illustrate a music history lecture she was to present to the Women’s Club of Evanston. Later, that presentation with choral examples was repeated at the University. The fourteen-voice ensemble that he reluctantly assembled was a success, so he decided to continue the ensemble indefinitely to promote the School of Music (see fig. 4.2). After one year it was enlarged and added to the voice department for “the study of Palestrina, Bach, and the early English madrigal writers, (and) also the better examples of modern unaccompanied

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424. When referring to Lutkin’s unaccompanied ensemble, no italics are used because italics were not used in the original title, which was printed both as the “Northwestern University A Cappella Choir” and “The A Cappella Choir” (or simply “A Cappella Choir”) during the chronologic limits of this study. In quotations when the original title is not italicized, it is not italicized here. Elsewhere, when referring to the unaccompanied genre “a cappella” is italicized.

choral works.” Former chorister John Rosborough recalled, “During the first few rehearsals, he was much bored, but after several weeks of practicing he could not give it up.”

Figure 4.2. 1907 photograph of the first Northwestern University A Cappella Choir.


428. Photograph courtesy of Northwestern University Archives, Deering Library, Evanston, IL.
The original singers listed in that publication (see fig. 4.2) were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soprano</th>
<th>Alto</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hedwig Brenneman</td>
<td>Virtine Frost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minarose Oakes</td>
<td>Mary Porter Pratt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnes Hammer</td>
<td>Mabel Thompson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ida Mercer</td>
<td>Mayme Thygeson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mae Smith</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenor</th>
<th>Bass</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carl Beecher</td>
<td>Irving Hamlin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luverne Sigmond</td>
<td>Walter Allen Stults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl Songer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lutkin first mentioned the choir in the February 1906 issue of the *Quarterly Bulletin of School of Music (sic)* explaining,

…the school has recently organized a small choir of voices selected from the more advanced and talented students, for the study of a cappella or unaccompanied singing. This choir began its career by giving the musical illustrations to a lecture on Polyphony by Mrs. Alfred Emerson before the Women’s Club of Evanston on December 18th, and repeating it at the School of Music.\(^{429}\)

That initial mention of the group began a tradition of devoting a section of each *Quarterly Bulletin of School of Music (sic)* to the ensemble. The February issue

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429. “The A Cappella Choir,” in Northwestern University, *Quarterly Bulletin of School of Music 3, 1906–1907, Feb–July 1907* (Evanston, IL: The University, 1909), p. 6–7. Mrs. Alfred Emerson was a concert pianist and Lecturer in Music at the University of Chicago. She was the wife of Prof. Alfred Emerson, Professor of Classical Archaeology at Cornell University. The family moved to Chicago in 1905, when he became Curator of Classical Antiquities at the Art Institute of Chicago and Professor of Greek at Lake Forest University. While at Cornell Mrs. Emerson was a Special Lecturer in Music History. Her lecture: “Polyphony. 1100–1750. Comparison of the Suite and Sonata” was likely the lecture presented to the Women’s Club of Evanston and again at Northwestern.
anonymously announced, “It is proposed to enlarge this choir in the School of Music, and to have it as a permanent feature of the vocal department.”\textsuperscript{430} That publication indicated that the following choral pieces were sung at the first performance:

\begin{verbatim}
Sumer is icumen in....................... Anon.
Ave, verum corpus ........................ Josquin des Prez
Gloria Patri................................ Palestrina
Popule meus .............................. Palestrina
Jesu dulcis ............................... Vittoria
Kommt mein Gespons ................... Orlando di Lasso
Lo, how a Rose e’er blooming ........ Praetorius\textsuperscript{431}
\end{verbatim}

The next mention of the group seems to be in the June 1906 issue of the Northwestern University \textit{Quarterly Bulletin of School of Music 1906–1907}. Here the descriptive account of the ensemble is longer and includes Lutkin’s musical rationale for the group’s presence. He wrote,

\begin{quote}
Since the publication of the February number of this Bulletin, the A Cappella Choir has developed into an organization of which the School of Music is justly proud. It was a repertoire of some thirty numbers, giving varied examples of sacred and secular unaccompanied choral music extending down from the twelfth century. The skilled training in independent part-singing is of the utmost value to the students, for it gives them a practical routine far above that required in church quartette positions. The piano is not used at rehearsals. The slavery to the keyboard (sic) which is so lamentably prevalent even among the most experienced singers, is thus done away with a, and a feeling for actual pitch and positive intervals is cultivated.\textsuperscript{432}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{430} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{431} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{432} Ibid., p. 12.
The unnamed author points out that the choir received many invitations to sing at “private musicales, churches, clubs, etc.,” and each appearance aroused “enthusiastic commendation.” In 1907, the Northwestern University A Cappella Choir was also mentioned in the minutes of the Board of Trustees on June 18: “Among the interesting developments of the year is the A Cappella Choir, a small body of picked voices, whose public work has received the highest commendation and is destined to be an important element in the public culture of the city.”

Evidence of the original number of singers in the Northwestern University A Cappella Choir is available in critical reviews of the choir (1907); records in the Quarterly Bulletin of School of Music (sic) (1907) as quoted above, photographs of the original ensemble (1907), and published descriptions of the choir by Lutkin. A letter from Lutkin to Northwestern University business manager William A. Dyche, dated March 25, 1907, refers to the number of singers, and to the A Cappella Choir as a “permanent feature” of the School of Music. Nearly a quarter of a century later, he stated in an address to the Music

433. Ibid.
434. A. W. Harris, “The School of Music” in “Annual Report of the President,” in Northwestern University, Minutes of the Board of Trustees (Evanston, IL: The University, June 18, 1907), call number: 01/00/57, Northwestern University Archives, Deering Library, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL.

Supervisors National Conference:

Some 25 years ago, I formed the A Cappella Choir of Northwestern University. Like the inception of many important enterprises, the start was accidental. A lady was to give a lecture on old choral music and wished me to supply examples of Josquin des Prez, Orlando di Lasso and Palestrina, and I did so rather reluctantly. The small group of 14 singers was not allowed to disband and a permanent organization was effected—I think it is the first of its kind to continue uninterruptedly for a quarter of a century.\textsuperscript{436}

Another Northwestern publication, the 1907 “Syllabus” read, “A no less important function of the choir is the bringing before the public a class of music of extreme beauty which is rarely performed, but which demands unusual finish and sympathetic interpretation to make its full effect.”\textsuperscript{437} That same year, Lutkin included a description of his ensemble in his annual report to university president, Abram W. Harris. He stressed the importance of the group as a means to promote the institution, and he encouraged Northwestern’s new president to support the group’s permanent status:

The most important development of the year has been the \textit{A Cappella Choir}, a small body of picked voices from the advanced students, whose singing has been developed to such a point of finish as to attract very general attention and some rather extravagant press notices. The undersigned [Lutkin] feels that the continuation of this choir is of great importance, as it will no doubt be the very best possible means of advertising the efficiency of the school...The place that this choir may


\textsuperscript{437} “The A Cappella Choir,” in Northwestern University, \textit{Syllabus: Northwestern University School of Music} (Evanston, IL: The University, 1907), 3.
occupy in the development of the school is so vital that steps should be taken at once to insure its permanence.438

Lutkin knew the importance of advertising his ensemble’s success and presence to university alumni. After the A Cappella Choir had existed for two semesters, an article in the Northwestern University “Alumni Newsletter” of December 1907 stated that the choir’s formation was one of the most interesting developments in the School of Music during the past year. He commented, “The excellence of this group has already earned it a very enviable reputation in 1907.”439

By 1909, the Quarterly Bulletin of School of Music (sic) portrayed Lutkin’s choir as an organization of advanced vocal students with the specific objective of performing unaccompanied choral music. The group concentrated on its tone quality, balance of parts, purity of intonation, and attention to artistic interpretation. In this way, the ensemble hoped to attain the highest possible performance standards.440 Mention of Lutkin’s A Cappella Choir in the official minutes of the University Board of Trustees appeared in 1910 and 1911, and in


the presidential reports of A. W. Harris. Harris wrote in the November 22, 1910 minutes: “The faculty and pupils have reflected credit upon the School by several notable performances, by the increased efficiency of the A Cappella Choir, and by participation in the Music Festival.”441 Two years later, the minutes from October 3, 1912 announced that Lutkin had begun presenting his choir to the community by way of local venues. Here President Harris commented, “The A Cappella Choir gave concerts in several of the nearby towns, and a number of concerts in Evanston, and it had the distinction of appearing at one of the regular concerts of the [Theodore] Thomas Orchestra.”442 Students received academic credit for participation in the choral group, which was uncommon nationally at that time.443

The 1917 involvement of the United States in World War I resulted in the loss of many male students from the choir, which led to a temporary reconfiguration of the group to a women’s ensemble.444 Lutkin’s report to the

441. A. W. Harris, “Annual Report of President,” in Northwestern University, Minutes of the Board of Trustees (Evanston, IL: The University, 22 November 1910), pp. 53–54. Northwestern University Archives, Deering Library, Evanston, IL.

442. Ibid., October 3, 1912.

443. Northwestern University, The School of Music Annual Announcement 1927–1928 (Evanston, IL: The University), p. 44. Northwestern University Archives, Deering Library, Evanston, IL.

444. Peter C. Lutkin, “Report of the Dean of the School of Music,” in “President’s Report,” quoted in Northwestern University, Northwestern University Bulletin (Evanston, IL: The University, 1917–1919), p. 86. During the years of WWI, only one Northwestern University Bulletin was printed.
president of Northwestern for 1917–1919 recorded, “For the first time, there were no men in the graduating classes. The A Cappella Choir, through lack of tenors and basses, was perforce changed to a choir of women’s voices.” After World War I ended in 1918, the recruitment of male singers was still problematic for Lutkin, who offered $100 scholarships to attract male choristers. Apparently, his tactic worked because during the 1920s, the reputation of the Northwestern University A Cappella Choir spread nationally and many choirs throughout the land emulated them. In addition, recent music graduates and other former choristers took their Northwestern choir experiences to locales throughout the country.

Lutkin directed the choir from 1906 to 1929, during which time he expanded its size three times. This allowed the group to sing in more than four parts, increasing the scope of their repertoire (see Table 4.1.).

445. Ibid.
Table 4.1. Northwestern University A Cappella Choir enrollment, 1906–31

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year(s)</th>
<th># Singers</th>
<th># Parts (Repertoire Sung)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4-Parts (SATB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907–1925</td>
<td>22–29</td>
<td>6-Parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8-Parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929–1931</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>8-Parts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data acquired from unpublished photographs of the Northwestern University A Cappella Choir and Concert Programs 1906–31, Lutkin papers, Northwestern University Archives, Deering Library, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL.

The 1907 “Syllabus” of the Northwestern University School of Music explained Lutkin’s plan for enlarging his choir:

Twelve of the fourteen singers are in the school this year, and to them have been added ten more voices, making a choir of eight sopranos, five altos, five tenors and four basses. This augmentation of the chorus makes it possible to perform some of the larger works which subdivide into more than four parts.446

Evidence for that expansion can be found in concert programs from the 1907–08 season, when the choir sang Palestrina’s six-part motet *Tu Es Petrus*. Lutkin always preferred a predominance of soprano voices, a practice of English choirs; therefore, in his expanded ensemble, more female singers were required to balance tenors and basses. Lutkin’s preference in women’s voices gravitated toward *soubrettes* who could sing without vibrato like choirboys. It is possible and perhaps likely that his preference for more female than male choristers

arose from his life-long immersion in and love for Anglican choral music and his musical experiences abroad.

Choir Repertoire

By June 1907, the repertoire of Lutkin’s unaccompanied ensemble was evolving and included both sacred and secular unaccompanied choral music extending down from the twelfth century.” The “1913 Syllabus of Northwestern University” hints at the type of repertoire sung by the choir from its beginning:

Only the very best music is sung. Such things as “Alta Trinita Beata,” “Gloria Patri,” and “Adoramus Te,” by Palestrina, are sung on every program given by the Choir. Another favorite, Scarlatti’s “Exultate Deo,” is a very beautiful piece, but likewise very difficult.

He published a detailed list of that literature in *The School of Music Annual Catalogue 1912–13*, which lists the repertoire sung in the first five years of his choir’s existence (see Table 4.2.).

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Table 4.2. Northwestern A Cappella Choir: Repertoire First Five Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>Composer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Popule meus</td>
<td>Palestrina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria Patri</td>
<td>Palestrina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoramus te Christe</td>
<td>Palestrina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu es Petrus</td>
<td>Palestrina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenebrae factae sung</td>
<td>Palestrina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O Bone Jesu</td>
<td>Palestrina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kommt mein Gespons</td>
<td>Orlando di Lasso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matona, lovely Maiden</td>
<td>Orlando di Lasso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesu dulcis memoria</td>
<td>Vittoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exultate Deo</td>
<td>Scarlatti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection from Motette,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Jesu, Priceless Treasure”</td>
<td>J.S. Bach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O Villanella</td>
<td>Claude le Jeune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down in a Flowery Vale</td>
<td>Festa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lo, Now a Rose e’er Blooming</td>
<td>Praetorius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrie eleison</td>
<td>12th Century Plain Song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O Filii et Filiae</td>
<td>Ancient Hymn-tune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumer is icumen in</td>
<td>Ancient English Round</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since First I Saw Your Face</td>
<td>Thomas Ford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now Is the Month of Maying</td>
<td>Thomas Morely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God be in my head</td>
<td>Davies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alla trinita beata</td>
<td>Traditional Hymn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come, Dorothy, Come</td>
<td>Swabian Folksong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Keel Row</td>
<td>Border Folksong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlie Is My Darling</td>
<td>Old Scotch Folksong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caller Herrin’</td>
<td>Scotch Folksong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalekarlien Dance</td>
<td>Swedish Folksong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Harken, Gentle Maiden)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ar hyd y nos</td>
<td>Welsh Folksong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brunette</td>
<td>17th Century French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen Lordings Unto Me</td>
<td>English Traditional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>Composer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cradle Song</td>
<td>German Folksong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Edited by Franz Wuellner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent, O Moyle, Be the Sound of Thy Waters</td>
<td>Old Irish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of Christ in the Temple</td>
<td>Johann Eccard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amor im Nachen</td>
<td>Gastoldi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creations’s Hymn</td>
<td>Beethoven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quando corpus (Stabat Mater)</td>
<td>Rossini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ave Verum</td>
<td>Gounod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Among the Barley</td>
<td>Elizabeth Stirling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On High the Stars</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now Shining</td>
<td>Rheinberger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting Song (Rise, Sleep No More)</td>
<td>Benedict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God So Loved the World (Crucifixion)</td>
<td>Stainer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Waits</td>
<td>Saville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O Gladsome Light</td>
<td>Sullivan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So Happy in Thine House</td>
<td>O. Thomas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You Stole My Love</td>
<td>Macfarren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord, for Thy Tender Mercy’s Sake</td>
<td>Farrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep, Holy Babe</td>
<td>J. B. Dykes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O Savior of the World</td>
<td>John Goss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mellow Eve is Gliding</td>
<td>A.J. Holden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God Is A Spirit</td>
<td>Bennett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Fathom Five</td>
<td>Wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corydon Arise (Six Elizabethan Pastorals)</td>
<td>C. Villiers Stanford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet Love for Me (Six Elizabethan Pastorals)</td>
<td>C. Villiers Stanford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lover’s Counsel</td>
<td>Cowen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>Cowen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening (Intermezzo)</td>
<td>Lasseu</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table 4.2 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>Composer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two Lovers</td>
<td>Hecht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Legend</td>
<td>Tchaikovsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hymn to the Trinity</td>
<td>Tchaikovsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherubim Song</td>
<td>Tchaikovsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pater Noster</td>
<td>Tchaikovsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farewell to Summer</td>
<td>Brahms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where’er I Go</td>
<td>Brahms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music, When Soft Voices Die</td>
<td>Dickinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunrise</td>
<td>Taneyef</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Round the Good Father’s Door</td>
<td>Arkhangelsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Around Us Hear the Sounds of Even</td>
<td>Dvorak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Joyful Christmas Song</td>
<td>Gevaert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Magi Kings</td>
<td>Gevaert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep of the Child Jesus</td>
<td>Gevaert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Lyons as I Journeyed</td>
<td>Gevaert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas Song (Three Kings Have Journeyed)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Old Bohemian Christmas Carols</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night Whispers</td>
<td>W. von Moellendorf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ave maris stella</td>
<td>Grieg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Brook</td>
<td>MacDowell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Slumber Song</td>
<td>MacDowell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come, Sleep</td>
<td>Alfred G. Wathall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serenade (with ‘Cello obligato)</td>
<td>Arenski</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awake, Awake</td>
<td>G. Bantock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Himalay</td>
<td>G. Bantock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As Torrents in Summer (King Olaf)</td>
<td>Edward Elgar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwestern University Hymn (Quaecumque sunt vera)</td>
<td>Haydn-Lutkin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choral Blessing (The Lord Bless You)</td>
<td>Lutkin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Day is Past and Over</td>
<td>Lutkin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Will Sing of Thy Power</td>
<td>Lutkin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>Composer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child Jesus Comes from Heavenly Height</td>
<td>Lutkin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like as a Father Pitieth His Children</td>
<td>Lutkin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night Song</td>
<td>Lutkin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There’s a Song in the Air</td>
<td>Lutkin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes</td>
<td>Lutkin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Song of St. Francis</td>
<td>Grant-Schaefer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noel</td>
<td>Grant-Schaefer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Christmas-tyde</td>
<td>Grant-Schaefer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Early Choir Tours

During Lutkin’s entire choral career, he was never interested in national touring, and although his choir sang for national music education conventions, Lutkin limited their performances to Illinois and surrounding states. In his annual report to the president in 1907, he listed concert venues for the A Cappella Choir’s first semester:

Concerts by this choir have been given in private homes in Evanston, at the University Club, at the First Methodist and First Presbyterian churches of Evanston, at Glencoe, Ravenswood, and Elgin and at the College of Education of the University of Chicago.450

The choir also sang for university functions such as the installation of

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Northwestern University President Abraham W. Harris.\footnote{Northwestern University, “Alumni Newsletter” (Evanston, IL: The University, December 1907), p. 13} During the next (1907–08) school year, the A Cappella Choir gave approximately fifteen concerts in cities in Illinois (e.g., Evanston, Chicago, Waukegan) and Wisconsin (e.g., Fon du Lac) in addition to singing for local university gatherings (see Table 4.3).\footnote{Peter C. Lutkin, “The School of Music: Report of the Dean” in Northwestern University, 	extit{Bulletin of Northwestern University: Report of the President 1907–08} (Evanston, IL: The University, 1907–08), p. 38.}

In his 1911–1912 report to Northwestern’s president, Lutkin described concerts being restricted to Illinois: “The Choir has also given concerts at Danville, Urbana and Lake Forest, in addition to local performances.”\footnote{Peter C. Lutkin, “The School of Music: Report of the Dean” in Northwestern University, 	extit{Bulletin of Northwestern University: Report of the President 1911–1912} (Evanston, IL: The University, 1911–12), p. 54.} He also mentioned that the choir appeared at the regular Thomas Concerts and “won unstinted praise.”\footnote{Ibid.} In the spring of 1913, the group made a trip to Danville, Illinois and to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

The 1913–1914 academic year involved the usual local round of public and private appearances. This included concerts before the Women’s Club of Evanston; the Daughters of the [American] Revolution, both at the Fine Arts Building in Chicago; the University of Chicago; Lake Forest College, the Moody
Table 4.3. Concerts of the Northwestern University A Cappella Choir, 1907-08

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Concert Venue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 25</td>
<td>Private Wedding in Evanston, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 19</td>
<td>Association of Collegiate Alumnae, Fine Arts Building, Chicago, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 3</td>
<td>All Saints’ Observance, First Methodist Church, Evanston, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 23</td>
<td>Concert at Grafton Hall School for Girls, Fond du Lac, WN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 18</td>
<td>Concert at Music Hall, Evanston, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 30</td>
<td>Concert for the Amateur Musical Club of Chicago, Music Hall, Fine Arts Building, Chicago, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 4</td>
<td>Concert at the North Shore Congregational Church, Chicago, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 15</td>
<td>Concert at Music Hall, Evanston, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 3</td>
<td>Concert at the Episcopal Parish House, Waukegan, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 5</td>
<td>Day of Prayer for Colleges, First Methodist Church, Evanston, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 17</td>
<td>Concert at the Congregational Church, Glencoe, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 31</td>
<td>Concert at the Congregational Church, Winnetka, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 31</td>
<td>Concert, for the Woman’s Club of Evanston, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 15</td>
<td>Reception to President Charles W. Elliot of Harvard University, Evanston, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 26</td>
<td>University Eastertide Service, First Methodist Church, Evanston, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 8</td>
<td>Concert at the Third Congregational Church, Oak Park, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 22</td>
<td>Concert at the First Congregational Church, Evanston, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 30</td>
<td>Assisting at the Alumni-Senior Concert, First Methodist Church, Evanston, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 8</td>
<td>Concert at Grand Prairie Seminary, Onarga, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 10</td>
<td>Assisting at Recital of Classes in Composition, Music Hall, Evanston, IL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Institute; Chicago’s Eckart Park, established in 1907; and at Elgin, Illinois, forty miles west of Evanston, before an audience of 1,500 people. The choir also sang at the Chicago Art Institute and McCormick Theological Seminary, and The
Baton Club of Chicago. The latter, an association of forty choirs, engaged the ensemble to present a concert intended to encourage unaccompanied singing. In May, the group travelled to South Bend, Indiana for that city’s May Musical Festival.\textsuperscript{455}

In 1914, a short exposé about the A Cappella Choir appeared in the Northwestern University “Syllabus”:

Choirs—and excellent ones—are to be found that sing with organ or piano accompaniment but choirs that specialize in unaccompanied choral music are rare in this country...to revive this neglected art is the object of the A Cappella Choir. After all the human voice is the most expressive and beautiful of all instruments and singers should learn to use their voices without any extraneous assistance. The choir is primarily for the development of its members and for the cultivation of good choral music.\textsuperscript{456}

That syllabus served to promote the Northwestern University A Cappella Choir to prospective students throughout the country. One year later, Lutkin’s presidential report portrayed “notably successful” concerts in Mandell Hall and at the University of Chicago and Lake Forest College. The choir also ventured out of state, again to South Bend, Indiana. Lutkin stated that the choir’s function was not just musical, but also served to advertise the Northwestern University.

\textsuperscript{455} Peter C. Lutkin, Northwestern University, “Report of the Dean of the School of Music” in \textit{Quarterly Bulletin of School of Music 1913–1914} (Evanston, IL: The University, June 1914), pp. 56.

\textsuperscript{456} “School of Music” in Northwestern University, \textit{Syllabus} (Evanston, IL: The University, 1914), p. 11. There are two Northwestern publications bearing the title Syllabus. This citation represents an annual yearbook published for the Northwestern community. The other “Syllabus” was a pamphlet issued by the School of Music for students.
School of Music. 457

Although other schools of music in the United States placed advertisements in print media of the day, Lutkin’s advertising was different because it portrayed Northwestern’s School of Music as different and cutting-edge in the context of European-style training. Ensembles, such as his A Cappella Choir appeared different, novel, and were attention getting in print advertisements. Even if students did not matriculate at Northwestern, musicians across the country who read his advertisements knew that interesting things were happening at the Evanston school. Therefore, when the Northwestern “Syllabus” labeled the A Cappella Choir as an attraction and advantage for students that “no other school can approach,” it was not far off the mark, simply because unaccompanied choirs were not the order of the day during this period. 458

His group also spread the a cappella message by performing annually at many local “festive musical occasions” such as Chicago’s North Shore Music Festival. 459 The A Cappella Choir’s annual involvement with that event began in


458. Ibid., 117.

1908; the year Lutkin founded it. Lutkin ensured that his small ensemble was an integral part of the festival. By contrast, the festival choir was a large mixed chorus accompanied by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Lutkin placed his unaccompanied choir on an elevated platform high above the 600-voice Festival Chorus—an “angelic choir” singing in contrast with the larger group.

According to Walter Allen Stults,⁴⁶⁰ a bass singer in the original A Cappella Choir, “…the [A Cappella] choir was seated on top, just under the rafters [of the newly constructed Patten Gymnasium], and we did not only considerable antiphonal singing with the massed choir, but sang individual numbers as well. In fact, many people attended just to hear our singing unaccompanied.”⁴⁶¹

Lutkin’s successor as director of the North Shore Festival Choir, Seth Oliver Beltz, provided a similar account of the Northwestern University A Cappella Choir’s participation in this music festival in a letter dated November 11, 1971, to music historian Mark Wayne Zalkin:

The A Cappella Choir was always an integral part of the Festival program…they were usually seated high above the large chorus of 400 to 500 voices in a special stage that gave their singing an ethereal effect that was often thrilling by the contrast with the large chorus, in such numbers as the Sea Symphony, the Frank [César Franck] Beatitudes and

⁴⁶⁰ Possibly, due to his advanced age, Stults provided erroneous data about the genesis of the Northwestern University A Cappella Choir to Van Camp, who published the information. Stults’ description of the Festival Choir here is synchronous with other accounts, such as that of Dr. Oliver Seth Beltz (provided above), regarding the A Cappella Choir’s first involvement with the North Shore Music Festival.

the Pierne *Children’s Crusade*, works that are being neglected these days in favor of modern cacophony.\(^{462}\)

Choral Programming

Lutkin arranged his concert programs by the Northwestern University *A Cappella* Choir both chronologically and stylistically in sections devoted to historical genres. Organ solos punctuated those unaccompanied groups. He hoped such a contrast would help listeners appreciate the historical impact of developments in choral history. Through choral programming, he intended to raise both the aesthetic consciousness and musical learning of his audiences. He was convinced that American audiences and choral conductors possessed insufficient knowledge of the Western choral canon. Only what he considered the very best choral literature passed muster.\(^{463}\)

As a rare American published in England by Novello, he was afforded access to musical literature unavailable to other U.S. choral conductors at the time. For example, he wrote in 1901 of his visit to London publishers, where he studied stacks of new editions of music and later met with composer Charles


\(^{463}\) More than a few posthumous retrospectives point to Lutkin’s uncompromising stance regarding choral repertoire. He saw his standards as high and refused to lower them by performing what he considered low-quality music. He encouraged other musicians to do the same.
Villiers Stanford at London’s Royal College of Music. Probably because of that meeting, he performed Stanford’s part-song “The Blue Bird” with his Northwestern A Cappella Choir. Such contacts were unusual, because most American choral musicians at the time had no knowledge of or interest in European music, and no access to much of it simply because of a geographic separation. That Lutkin took a three-month period and devoted it to the acquisition of choral knowledge from Europe was atypical and extraordinary. Similar excursions (such as his three month visit to Europe during the Summer of 1905), not only provided Lutkin with opportunities to access a different musical culture and context, but also informed his musical leadership after returning to the United States.

His writing on choral topics influenced his programming and provided evidence that his knowledge of choral music was broad at a time when American choral performance standards were low. He used his understanding of that topic, together with his background, training, and experiences, to enhance his role as a writer on choral music and as a music educator. For this Northwestern dean, the only cure for the choral status quo in the American secondary school was sound musical learning. Therefore, even though he


operated via limited performance venues, his uncompromising performance standards and communicative methods served as both an aesthetic model and educational example for the nation.

Not all Northwestern University A Cappella Choir concerts under Lutkin contained an equal balance of sacred and secular repertoire. For instance, in 1919 the thirty-voice ensemble sang on an Annual Benefit Concert for the Conservatory of Music of the Northwestern University Settlement. That event, the 1,000th performance by students, was conducted by Lutkin and contained only one sacred selection, his three-part canon “Sing Ye to the Lord.” The rest of the program consisted entirely of secular part songs punctuated by vocal, organ, and piano solos performed by choir members and advanced students from the Conservatory.

Due to his experiences as a church musician, Lutkin was particularly adept at the fusion of secular music education with church music in a time when sacred music was regularly performed in public schools, colleges, and universities. He expressed some of his ideas about choral programming as trends, which he adhered to and recontextualized throughout his long career. For instance, by 1920, his annual spring Northwestern University Conservatory

choir concerts included two equal parts—one designated sacred and one secular (see Fig. 4.3).

Lutkin continued his practice of punctuating groups of choral works with instrumental solos, in this case organ compositions. His favorite part-songs, such as C. V. Stanford’s “The Bluebird” continued to appear, as did his beloved motets of Palestrina, including the six-part polyphonic *Tu Es Petrus*. In this 1920 concert, Lutkin also included music from other cultures, such as a Mallorcan Ballad and a Catalanian song in a “Folk Songs” group.

Along those lines, another groundbreaking feature of Lutkin’s programming was the African-American spiritual. Spirituals gained in popularity in American choral music during the second and third decades of the twentieth century. The performance of this genre by Lutkin and his unaccompanied ensemble was one of the first examples during this period of a college choir, other than historically African-American colleges, performing spirituals. These were collectively labelled “Negro Spirituals” in his “Sacred” section and programmed alongside “motettes” (sic) by Tchaikovsky, Victoria, and Palestrina (see Fig. 4.3.).

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467 The *a cappella* choral arrangements of spirituals by noted African-American bass singer Harry Thacker Burleigh began to be widely disseminated in the United States after 1920, when the singer began working at Ricordi, an Italian music publisher with offices in New York City.
Northwestern University Concert by the A Cappella Choir
Under the direction of Peter Christian Lutkin
Assisted by Mr. Stanley Martin, Organist
Fisk Hall, April 11, 1917

University Hymn
Quaecumque sunt Vera
Haydn

Part I. Sacred

Motettes
Born today (Five-voiced) Sweelinck (1562–1621)
Adoramus Te Palestrina [1524–94]
From Missa Papae Marcelli (six-voiced) Paleostrina
Gloria in Excelsis
Sanctus

Organ
Fugue in E flat major, “St. Anne’s” Bach (1685–1750)
Mr. Stanley Martin

Motettes
Cherubim Song Tchaikovsky
Quando Corpus, from the Stabat Mater Rossini

Part II. Secular

Part Song
Volga Boat Song Russian Folk-song
Arr. by C.T. Rubetz
In the Fields Russian Folk-song
Arr. by C.T. Rubetz
The Blue Bird Stanford
The De’il’s Awa’ Delamarter

Organ
Concert Variations Mr. Stanley Martin
Bonnet

Negro Spirituals
Listen to the Lambs Arr. by R. Nathaniel Dett
Every time I feel the Spirit Arr. by Carl R. Diton

Figure 4.3. 1917 Program of Northwestern University A Cappella Choir

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Particularly after 1920, an “American Motets” section also featured unaccompanied compositions by U.S. composers, including those of Lutkin and Yale University’s Horatio Parker. Parker was represented on the choir’s February 1923 concert by his *a cappella* motet *Urbs Syon Unica*, written in imitation of sixteenth-century style.\(^{469}\) Another American composer of unaccompanied music heard in this American choral category was F. Melius Christiansen, conductor of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir of Northfield, Minnesota. In 1922, Lutkin’s choir sang Christiansen’s *a cappella* “Hosanna to the Living Lord.” Perhaps to distinguish between Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran choral repertoires, seven years later, in 1927, Lutkin created a new more specific category titled “Lutheran Motets.”

Long a feature of Lutkin’s concerts, and a favorite choral category, were the unaccompanied works of the Russian Orthodox School (discussed in detail later). Representing that category were compositions such as Alexander Kastalsky’s (1856–1926) “O Gladsome Light,” translated from the Russian into English. Kastalsky, a contemporary of Lutkin, was the founder of a new Russian choral school of church composition around the turn of the twentieth

\(^{469}\) Translated as “City of High Renown” from Parker’s oratorio *Hora Novissima*. It was unusual at the time to have *a cappella* sections in an oratorio, perhaps due to its historical genesis as an accompanied genre stemming from accompanied sacred dialogues of the early seventeenth century, such as Anerio’s *Teatro harmonico spirituale* (c. 1619).
Lutkin, a strict proponent of using original Latin texts, did not perform Russian *a cappella* works in their original language, but rather in English translation. This was likely due to his unfamiliarity with the Russian language, singing texts written with a Cyrillic alphabet, and not knowing the principles of Russian diction. In addition, during this period, Russian Orthodox Church compositions were not readily available in their original form, because there was not a market in America for choral scores published in Russian.

Accounts and/or Reviews of the Choir

From the choir's beginning, both local and national newspaper music critics praised the Northwestern University A Cappella Choir for its purity of tone and expressiveness. Lutkin's biographer, Kennel, noted that all reviews were positive but did not question this phenomenon. The present study could find no negative reviews of Lutkin's choir in press reports, in the Northwestern University Archives, local Chicago newspaper archives, or larger venues. There may be reasons for this consistent adulation; however, those reasons remain as conjecture since Lutkin's wife and son, the latter a Northwestern University law

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professor, suppressed most of his personal records at his death.  

One reason for this control of his historical record may have been that Lutkin and his entire family were well-connected highly respected members of Evanston society who associated with the cultured elite of Chicago. Not allowing access to his papers prevented any examination of his life’s work in favor of sanitized retrospectives, which his family may have preferred. Consequently, immediately after his death all of his personal belongings were removed from Northwestern. Since, no organized paper record of his presence at Northwestern existed, at some point thereafter, a letter went out to offices at the university asking for copies of items bearing his name. A few boxes of materials were gathered into an uncatalogued Lutkin archive, which was organized by an archivist in the early 1970s. It is unknown whether his personal papers still exist somewhere or whether his remaining family descendants discarded them. Someone, likely Lutkin himself, donated a few items from his library to the Northwestern Music Library, including Dean Lutkin’s Counterpoint, a collection of three volumes of his exercises from his

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472. Lutkin’s wife was Lelah [Nancy] Carman Lutkin (1861 [b. Iroquois, Ontario, Canada]–1949) and his only living offspring was Harris Carman Lutkin (1886–1961). Lutkin’s second child Caryl Cecil Lutkin (1888–1892) died at age four of diphtheria, four days before Lutkin was to conduct his first performance of the Northwestern University A Cappella Choir. Illinois, Cook County, Birth Registers, 1871–1915, lists Caryl Lutkin’s gender as female.

473. Information provided to the author by the Archivist of Northwestern University, Deering Library, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL.
student days at German conservatories.

Lutkin’s social connections may have also served him well during his career. For example, it is possible that local Chicago and Evanston critics feared repercussions from negative reviews. Some of those were also among the most prominent music journalists in the country, such as Fredrick Griswold of the Chicago Herald, who was notorious for his painfully honest and sometimes acerbic pen. On one occasion, for example, Griswold reviewed the great Polish pianist De Pachman, calling his performance “monkey-shines” and writing that the performer failed to play the correct notes and leaned to ladies in the front row whispering, “Ach, what a fluke I made.” Therefore, it is possible that Lutkin’s position at Northwestern shielded him from criticism. Alternatively, his long association with the church and its music may have portrayed him as a pious figure. However, there seems to be no actual evidence for either proposition.

Portions of early reviews of the ensemble were recorded in the Quarterly Review of School of Music (sic) in June 1907; six months after the group was founded. One was from an unidentified critic from an unidentified Chicago newspaper, who wrote:

The A Cappellas consist only of fourteen singers, but each one must be musical to the extreme, and finished in a most absolute sense, for the quality of the singing is so utterly refined as to be wholly outside amateur ranks.... Of the four pieces Palestrina was the most exquisitely beautiful, though all of them were done with a beauty of tone and wealth of shading which left almost nothing to be asked.475

Another anonymous critic wrote, “In precision of attack, delicacy of shading and promptness of response to the leaders’ eye or baton, the choir was remarkable.”476

A 1908 issue of the Quarterly Bulletin of School of Music (sic) quoted from a review by Frederick Griswold from January 31st of that year:

Only a few times during our musical season is there chance of hearing such music as that given by the A Capella [sic] Choir last night before the Amateur Musical Club in Music Hall. Smooth and suave in delivery, sympathetic in interpretation, good in the technic of ensemble, the choir justified itself and the program immediately. The striking thing about this A Capella Choir is its small size and its great effectiveness. Fourteen names make up the choir’s roster, and yet those things we assign naturally to our large choral bodies alone—tonal beauty and balance, crisp attack, shading and phrasing—these very qualities characterized this small club’s work.477

That same source also quoted an undated review of the ensemble from W. L. Hubbard, music critic of the Chicago Tribune: “The young singers have been carefully and thoroughly trained, and sing with enjoyable accuracy, precision, 


476. Ibid.

and beautiful tonal quality.\textsuperscript{478}

Six months later the June 1908 issue of the \textit{Quarterly Bulletin of School of Music (sic)} chronicled newspaper reviews of concerts during that period. A critical review from the \textit{Evanston Index} implied that Lutkin’s ensemble was breaking new ground with its level of performance:

The writer in these columns has more than once enthused over the singing of other choruses, but it must here be admitted, without reserve, that in forty years of concert-going we have never heard chorus singing to equal that of Dean Lutkin’s choir, as at present constituted.\textsuperscript{479}

An undated review from \textit{The Musical Leader and Concert Goer of Chicago} was similarly complimentary, referring to the special status this ensemble held with Dean Lutkin:

The bulk of the concert, however, was given by Mr. Lutkin’s pet organization, the A Cappella Club, which he directs so superbly, and which responds to his slightest wish in a way to make other conductors envious indeed.\textsuperscript{480}

The \textit{Saturday Evening Herald of Chicago}, while complimentary, paints a picture of a small ensemble:

The A Cappella is one of the neatest and most effective choral bodies ever maintained here, and though the membership is limited and the kinds of songs given includes only small works, the quality of both voices and interpretation is beyond any question artistic in the extreme.\textsuperscript{481}

\textsuperscript{478} Ibid., p. 7.

\textsuperscript{479} Ibid., p. 15.

\textsuperscript{480} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{481} Ibid., p. 18.
In summary, these and other published critiques praised Lutkin’s choir for its purity of tone and expressiveness, but the reviewers refrained almost entirely from negative remarks. They are synchronous with the comments of Eric Delamarter (1880–1953), a Chicago newspaper critic and assistant conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, who is quoted in the 1912 *Northwestern University Summer Bulletin*: “Its ensemble is admirable. Its tone quality beautiful. There is plasticity in its shading, signifying thorough understanding of the aims and means of interpretation.”

It was not a secret that the Northwestern University A Cappella Choir was Dean Lutkin’s favorite ensemble. Four years after the start of the group in 1906, an anonymous reviewer in *The New Music Review and Church Music Review* mentioned that their conductor favored the chorale and compared it to foreign choirs:

> The A Cappella Choir is Dean Lutkin’s pet hobby. Composed of twenty-two picked voices from the school, it is rehearsed two and three times each week of the school year, the aim of the organization being highly finished performances of unaccompanied choral works. Although they do not confine themselves to the music of any particular school or period, they are unquestionably heard to special advantage in compositions of the great mediaeval masters, such as Palestrina and Orlando di Lasso, attaining a perfection of tone quality, balance of parts

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and interpretation that is only found in such organization as the Kneisel Quartette or the Mendelssohn Choir of Toronto.⁴⁸³

Similarly, Lutkin’s successor at Northwestern, Dean Carl Beecher, reminisced about Lutkin’s A Cappella Choir one year after the former’s death, writing, “This organization probably was the nearest to his heart of all of his musical activities, and for it he wrote a great many of his finest compositions for unaccompanied voices.”⁴⁸⁴

*A Cappella* Choral Singing

There were many dimensions to Lutkin’s choral aesthetic and promotion of unaccompanied music, an examination of which, does not equate with simplistically restating repeatedly what would seem to need to be stated only once: that Lutkin loved *a cappella* singing and practiced it and advocated it. Such an omission misses the point by overriding the history of cultivated choral tone in the United States during this period. Exactly why Lutkin practiced the *a cappella* art and how this affected the American choral community during the first quarter of the twentieth century must be scrutinized to understand how he was involved in the refinement of choir singing. There were many reasons why his little-understood aesthetic drove him and dictated his choices.


From the time that Lutkin began his well-known Northwestern University A Cappella Choir in 1906 until his death in 1931, he wrote numerous statements in support of unaccompanied choral music. His 1901 journal article, “Notes of a Vacation Tour,” written five years before his unaccompanied ensemble was formed, suggests he had a preformed choral aesthetic based on previous choral experiences in Europe.\textsuperscript{485} Before the genesis of the ensemble, Lutkin was involved with choral music but not cultivated choral singing and he was not involved with the advocacy of \textit{a cappella} choirs, for none existed in the United States. For eleven years, prior to becoming a Northwestern dean, one of his several part-time activities involved directing volunteer Anglican church choirs, including at least one choir of boys and men. In that capacity, he played the organ and conducted undistinguished standard American and English fare of the day.\textsuperscript{486} His first published essay on the topic of refined choral singing was his 1909 “Certain Relative Values in Music,” which he wrote three years after starting his Northwestern ensemble.\textsuperscript{487} That writing represents one of the

\textsuperscript{485} Lutkin, “Notes of a Vacation Tour.”

\textsuperscript{486} “Manuscript Diary Kept by Samuel Carr,” uncatalogued manuscript, Music Department, Boston Public Library, Boston, MA. This uncatalogued manuscript diary of Samuel Carr (1848–1922), organist at Boston’s Old South Church (Congregational) from 1884–1904, contains listings of Sunday service music for the years 1886–1890. Of the 270 anthems listed, in descending order of popularity were the composers Buck (Dudley), Sullivan (Arthur), Shelley (Harry Rowe), Gounod, Stainer, Tours, Southard, and Smart.

earliest scholarly advocacies of unaccompanied music in U.S. choral history. Before that, only his 1901 journal article (just mentioned) provides a hint about his early ideas about choral music and singing.

Lutkin biographer Pauline Kennel wrote a telling statement in this regard in her 1981 dissertation: “Because Lutkin had experienced music in intensely moving and enriching ways, he desired such musical experiences for everyone.”488 Upon starting the Northwestern University A Cappella Choir, he knew immediately the sound he wanted, the repertoire he wished to perform, and the choral style he preferred. It is perhaps likely that, as a church musician who had only directed and experienced average coarse-sounding American church choirs, European choirs were a revelation. In several later essays, he repeatedly mentioned choirs such as the Church of the Madeleine in Paris and St. Paul’s Cathedral in London as choral models for a cappella choral music and/or boys choirs. Lutkin’s summer vacation tour in 1901 was not his first visit to Europe, as he had lived there from 1881–1884 and he and his wife spent the entire summer of 1905 in Europe as well.489 It is important to reiterate, with regard to this topic, that with the beginning of the Northwestern University


489. “Faculty Notes,” in Northwestern University, Quarterly Bulletin of School of Music 1904–1905 (Evanston and Chicago, IL: The University, June 1905), p. 9. “Dean and Mrs. Lutkin will spend the summer in Europe, visiting Italy, Switzerland, and South Germany. They expect to sail from New York on June 6th, returning about September 10th.”
School of Music (as stated earlier) he began a women’s choir, which he titled the Women’s Cecilian Choir in the spring of 1891, directly reflecting his alignment with the German Cecilian movement during his residencies there. He directed that choir for fifteen years before the genesis of his famous unaccompanied ensemble.

From the beginning of his work with cultivated choral tone, one cardinal aspect of Lutkin’s choral aesthetic was the primacy of unaccompanied singing. From all accounts, he deeply loved cultivated unaccompanied singing, so much so, that the genre took on an almost metaphysical meaning:

> No instrument has the charm or appeal of the human voice when it is heard in its purity and perfection. The simplest melodies become transformed and the most ordinary harmonies receive an almost supernatural quality when performed by beautiful voices.

The question of when exactly Lutkin started promoting *a cappella* singing during his career is central to this discussion. The answer is almost immediately after beginning his Northwestern University A Cappella Choir in the 1906–1907 school year. After his initial choral efforts at Northwestern, he became increasingly intrigued with unaccompanied music, which became his

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focus. Lutkin’s former student and fellow choral musician John Rosborough wrote that his teacher held this genre closest to his heart:

> Those of us who attended some of the Chicago North Shore festivals, witnessed Mr. Lutkin’s deep affection for the oratorio accompanied by the Chicago Orchestra. But those of us who knew him more intimately know that his *a cappella* choir was his beau ideal. 493

In his first essay on the subject, “Certain Relative Values of Music” (1909), he referred to the origin of that sound ideal:

> In the old country, the most famous choirs disdain the assistance of organ or other instruments. The *a cappella* singing one hears by the Dom-Choir of Berlin, at Cologne Cathedral or at the Madeleine in Paris, to mention but a few instances, is a pure joy and is of indescribable charm. In these, as in all the noted choirs of Europe, young lads are entrusted with the upper parts, and the manner in which they accomplish their work is beyond all praise. 494

Later, in an address to the Music Teachers National Association entitled “The Values of A Cappella Singing,” Lutkin explained the essence of unaccompanied choral sound: “It deals essentially with fineness of feeling and delicacy of nuance.” 495 A cappella choral music was “the pure juice of the grape,” unadulterated by instrumental contamination. 496 While he had great respect

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496. Lutkin, “Choral Conditions in America,” 68.
for independent accompaniments, he had little tolerance for the thoughtless duplication of vocal parts:

Under such conditions, pianos and organs are like charity—they cover a multitude of musical sins—sins of pitch, of intonation, of attack, of balance, of rhythm, and the whole galaxy of choral vices.\(^{497}\)

The instrumental imitation of vocal lines “blurred the issues,” distracted the attention, and was an unnecessary convention.\(^{498}\)

Lutkin saw six primary values in *a cappella* singing. First, it cultivated vocal independence. Second, it fostered a sense of autonomous pitch and a more refined sense of vocal rhythm. Third, he thought that, as a democratic process *a cappella* singing required singers to submerge themselves in a greater whole. Fourth, he believed that both tone quality and nuance of tone are continually to the fore in unaccompanied singing. Fifth, he held that one’s performance standards become more exacting as a result. Finally, Lutkin taught that when singing *a cappella* choral repertoire one lives in a “rarefied musical atmosphere,” communing closely with “great souls.”\(^{499}\)

One justification for *a cappella* music was that instrumental duplication was never what he considered a “contaminant”—”an intrusive and unnecessary interference.” He clarified his position in a speech to American music educators

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\(^{497}\) Lutkin, “The Values of a Cappella Singing,” 54.

\(^{498}\) Ibid., 55.

\(^{499}\) Ibid.
in 1923:

What I am objecting to is the type of composition, where the accompaniment plays practically nothing but the vocal score. Such an anthem sung in good solid style by a well-trained choir is decidedly more impressive and effective without accompaniment than with one. The organ adds nothing but a tendency to blur the issues and distract the attention from the principal business in hand.  

For Lutkin, sung sound required isolated exposure in order to improve and cultivate it. In that context choirs could no longer hide behind instrumental sound and had to be responsible for previously ignored choral challenges. He defended his position, stating, “Under such conditions pianos and organs are like charity—they cover a multitude of musical sins—sins of pitch, of intonation, of attack, of balance, of rhythm and the whole galaxy of choral vices.”

In his estimation, *a cappella* singing represented a huge stride forward for American music education. Even though public schools were reluctant to take choral singing seriously, he practiced the *a cappella* art and promoted what he believed were its benefits, demonstrating his principle that singing unaccompanied music dramatically improves a choir’s level of performance and “taste.” Another advantage of singing without accompaniment was the

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500. Ibid.


502. Ibid.
“intimate and searching relation of word with tone,” which Lutkin thought attained its “highest and most perfect state in unaccompanied music.”

Having similar views to European choral reformers from the time of the Council of Trent to the nineteenth century, he taught that without accompaniment, the words stand out more clearly and the music must justify its own existence.

He believed that a relationship exists between great literature, represented by choral texts, and choral music. In the context of music learning, singers come face-to-face with “the great thoughts of the world,” which affect the life and thoughts of the choristers singing them. Musical settings enlarged and enhanced those great thoughts, thus potentiating their effects. He said in an address to the Music Teachers National Association in New Orleans in 1917:

The music will illumine and expand the meaning of the poet, words will have newer and more far-reaching import, faith and aspiration will be strengthened, the finer emotions and instincts will be warmed into new life and one will sense values far removed from the commonplace experiences of everyday life.

It was the choral educator’s business to help student singers understand musical works as a entirety and to call attention to the fact that, however

503. Lutkin, “The Values of A Cappella Singing,” 57

504. For example, August Eduard Grell (1800–1886), director of Berlin’s Sing-Akademie, referred to a cappella choral music as “nackten Vokalmusik” or “naked music.”


506. Ibid., 174–75.
interesting and absorbing his or her part may be, it was but a fraction of a musical whole.

In an age of “Physical Culture” classes in American secondary schools, colleges, and universities, he promoted choral singing as a health-giving exercise as well as an enhancer of intellectual activity. Those physical benefits resulted in an improved “moral sense,” a belief similar to aspects of the German concept of self-cultivation, or Bildung (discussed in Chapter 3). In his 1914 essay, “When Music Fulfills Its Highest Function,” he wrote:

If really capable and efficient instruction in singing were given in our public schools the gain would be not only an aesthetic one. Singing is a most health-giving exercise, expanding the lungs and increasing the general vitality...in Liverpool, England, children of the dock laborers...were so stimulated by music that the improvement in health, moral sense, and scholarship was most remarkable.

Lutkin’s overarching rationale for his pursuit of a cappella singing was the highest-level aesthetic experience for all involved. It was a worthwhile challenge for music educators who must not only explain the singing style and its history, but also give the United States a taste of fine unaccompanied choral performances, two activities he modeled for the nation. Lutkin believed that

507. Benjamin Franklin Johnson, Physical Culture (Richmond, Va.: B. F. Johnson Publishing Co., 1900). B. F. Johnson’s famous text, Physical Culture, was used in many American public schools at the turn of the century. Lutkin’s curriculum at Northwestern University School of Music included classes in Physical Culture.

unaccompanied music had the potential to open an entirely new realm of aesthetic experience to those who would partake of it as directors, students, or listeners and he saw unaccompanied singing as a necessity for choral education. He explained, “We are under the tyranny of the organ in this land of the free, and many of us have to learn that there is no beauty like the beauty of unaccompanied voices.”

Palestrina as a Compositional Model

In all the experience of a long musical life filled with many rare treats, I have never had the innermost springs of my musical consciousness so deeply touched as by certain short motettes {sic} of Palestrina sung by this choir of young voices when in its best form. It is no exaggeration to say that these motettes have been rehearsed hundreds of times by the A Cappella Choir, but such is the innate power and beauty of the music, so indisputable is its spirituality, that the singers never tire of it and they love it above all else, although their repertory includes the best of all styles and schools.

Lutkin penned these words six years after founding the Northwestern University A Cappella Choir. According to choral conductor John Rosborough, his teacher Lutkin, “one of the foremost interpreters of Palestrina in America,” believed that the Renaissance master was “the first composer for the church.”


It is difficult to determine the exact origins of Lutkin’s veneration of Palestrina. He explicitly said or wrote on more than one occasion that he believed Palestrina represented the pinnacle of the choral art. For example, in his essay “The Evolution of Modern Music,” he stated, “Under Palestrina and Bach choral music reached such a high state of development that no substantial progress has since been made.” For Lutkin, Palestrina’s art was not simply an ideal but rather an experience having the power to transform ideals. He wrote for the Music Teachers National Association in 1916, “Still to be permeated with the spirit of Palestrina is the greatest experience a church musician can undergo and his ideals will become transformed through this experience.”

For Lutkin, these choral and compositional modes represented a means by which he manifested his ideals:

I have been privileged to approximately realize certain ideals in choral music that have been in my mind for years. These ideals concern the performance of unaccompanied choral music with the same precision, attention to details, purity of intonation and artistic interpretation that one hears from a first-class orchestra or a string quartette played by expert professionals.

Lutkin believed that when he programmed choral music for the Northwestern


University A Cappella Choir, the works of Palestrina had the greatest impact. He wrote that while his concerts always included both sacred and secular works, those of Palestrina “invariably make the deepest impression on both musician and non-musician.”

Lutkin’s conception of music as a craft permeated his educational paradigm, every aspect of his life’s work, and his absolute dedication to musical betterment in the United States. He wrote, “With these early composers there is a mastery of part-writing, a sense of proportion, and a capacity for producing fine effects with simple means that is beyond all praise.” He believed that the context of early music, the Church, was a strong factor that weighed upon the dignity, sincerity, and workmanship of old choral music. The secular commercialism of contemporary musical composition, with its exploitation of sentiment, had largely stripped composition of meaning.

It is likely that Lutkin may have acquired his compositional ideals during his residency in Berlin. At that time in Germany, the nineteenth-century Palestrina revival was in full sway. Corroborating this idea are essays in which Lutkin mentioned the Berlin Domchor (cathedral choir) as one of the finest choirs in Europe. That notable ensemble of men and boys was, for a time in the same century, directed by Felix Mendelssohn. Even though it was a Protestant

515. Ibid., 60.
cathedral, it followed the tenets of Cecilianism, frequently singing a *cappella* renaissance motets from its imposing neoclassical organ loft.  

Lutkin placed two stipulations on the performance of Palestrina’s choral music. First, the singing of such music was acceptable only if it was of the highest caliber. That was not a requirement stemming entirely from perfectionism. He frequently made comments about the necessity for good performances, explaining that all *a cappella* repertoire, not just Palestrina, required the best rendering possible. When a choir could not do this, it magnified flaws in exposed individual lines, compromising an entire work. Lutkin preferred adding an accompaniment when a choir could not sing an unaccompanied piece excellently. Lutkin wrote that without good performances, unaccompanied choral music suffers. Addressing American music supervisors in 1923, he stated:

> Let me hasten to add that unaccompanied singing must be well done or it is quite intolerable. Far better, bolster up with the organ than take any chance if parts are ill-balanced voice quality below par or if serious lapses from pitch are likely to develop.

Lutkin’s desire for choral perfection also permeated his writing on and

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516. That tradition continues today with the Domchor. During the nineteenth century, the Berlin Dom was often used as an example of the widespread influence of Cecilianism and the Palestrina revival.


performing of choral music. Choral conductor John Rosborough explained his professor’s thinking in 1933: “Mr. Lutkin so often told me that whenever he wrote for the choir he wrote for a perfect choir, and whenever he conducted a choir he heard a perfect choir toward which he attempted to lead the choir which he was conducting.”

Second, particularly in the music of Palestrina, Lutkin insisted that the original Latin must remain intact. The common early twentieth-century American practice of translating almost all early music texts into English was, for him, an aesthetic abomination. In 1916 he wrote to the Music Teachers National Association, that “Palestrina’s art belongs to the Latin…there is a certain loss when the words are translated into another language.” After meeting those requirements, Lutkin taught that the music of Palestrina could ascend to the highest level of aesthetic experience. He proclaimed to American music educators, “Palestrina beautifully sung is undoubtedly the most exalted and refined choral music in the whole realm of the art.” Lutkin believed that such beauty required aesthetic perfection. He thus inferred, “We cannot conceive of his music being otherwise than beautifully done and if this was the

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521. Ibid.
case the art of chorus singing must have been highly developed in his day.”

One topic related to Lutkin’s veneration of Palestrina was “purity,” a term so often used by nineteenth-century Regensburg reformers of Catholic church music in Germany. He believed that purity was associated with the high artistic value of choral music written “before the organ or clavichord began to intrude upon the celestial realms of pure vocal concord.” Lutkin used the adjective “pure” to describe the *a cappella* genre. For him, the composers of early *a cappella* choral music represented the “great creators of the past” and exhibited a “whole-souled and complete devotion to an ideal.” He believed that in the “earlier music” one finds “a spirituality, a refinement of feeling and a reverence of touch that is conspicuous by its absence in more recent times.”

Lutkin was also aware of, and interested in, the music of other Renaissance choral composers. While he held Palestrina in high esteem, he elevated the Spanish composers Tomas Victoria and Morale [sic/Christobal Morales] almost as high. He was also knowledgeable about the choral composers of the high English renaissance and baroque periods, such as Tallis, Purcell, Gibbons, and others. However, he believed they lacked the popularity

522. Ibid.

523. Ibid.

524. Ibid., 59.

of motets of the Russian and Lutheran schools. He had a special appreciation
for a cappella Russian Orthodox liturgical music, such as that of Rachmaninoff,
because he supposed that genre arose in a context devoid of what he believed
to be “instrumental corruption.”

Choral Techniques and the Necessity of New Choral Methods

_I sing of Herr Lutkin, our Dean_
_Who\’s hearing is wondrously keen_
_When his chorus does flat He scolds them for that_
_Until they believe they are green._

In the 1917 _Syllabus_ of the Northwestern University School of Music,
Lutkin provided a short description of his rehearsal procedures with the A
Cappella Choir:

The singers meet twice a week for rehearsal, on Tuesdays at five o’clock,
and on Saturday mornings at eight; and the strictest possible discipline
is maintained in regard to attendance at rehearsals. The rehearsing is
done without accompaniment, thus cultivating in the singers the habit of
self-reliance and independence in regard to reading and intonation. The
most minute attention is paid to tone quality, dynamics and
interpretation.

526. Ibid.

527. Peter C. Lutkin, “A Cappella Choir,” in Northwestern University, _The Syllabus_ 26
(Evanston, IL: The University, 1911), p. 265. Special Collections, Deering Library, Evanston,
IL. This is an annual university yearbook of Northwestern University. The title of this annual
yearbook is not consistent and bears several titles, including: Syllabus, The Syllabus, Syllabus
Yearbook, etc. This is a different publication from “Syllabus—Northwestern University School
of Music,” a specialized publication from the School of Music.

528. Northwestern University, _Syllabus—Northwestern University School of Music_
(Evanston, IL: The University School of Music, June 1917), p. 5.
In his essay entitled “The Routine of Choral Preparation,” presented at the 1919 convention of the Music Supervisors National Conference in St. Louis, Missouri, Lutkin explained many of his rehearsal methods. By this time he was a nationally known MSNC leader and authority in the area of choral music. In that paper, he enumerated the two self-evident propositions that he believed governed effective choral rehearsals. First “to know what you want,” and then “to know how to get it.”

His first proposition meant a careful study of the composer’s musical interpretation of the text and elucidation of vital meaning. Only a full digestion of the poetic content and expressive qualities of the words would yield a convincing rendition. Aiding this process is exposure to as much good music as possible, and indeed to all kinds and types of music. The acquisition of a breadth of musical experience and patient study enhanced the musicality of the choral musician and enabled the “appreciation of details making up the technique of expression.” Lutkin’s second proposition, “how to get it,” dealt entirely with the mechanism of rehearsing, which encompassed three directives. First, do not waste time. Second, lay out plans for the rehearsal in


530. Ibid.

531. Ibid.
advance. Third, have mental clarity about goals for the rehearsal.\footnote{Ibid., p. 102.}

One choral technique used by some conductors that Lutkin opposed was “hammering,” or needless repetition of choral passages. This was counterproductive and resulted in “metallic, angular performance(s) devoid of charm and well-considered contrasts.”\footnote{Ibid.} Another was constant loud singing. Doing this caused two primary vocal problems, it “strains the muscles of the throat, and tires the ear and gets onto the nerves.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 103.} Such singing also lessened the singers’ interest in the music they sang. His general instruction was to avoid fatiguing the voice or attention. He encouraged his students to sing softly, as an effect in itself and as a background for effective crescendos and climaxes.\footnote{Ibid.} Loud singing was not aesthetically pleasing and lacked refinement, which made exquisite performance effects impossible. His friend, George Craig Stewart, the Episcopal Bishop of Chicago, recalled that Lutkin while was on his deathbed: “his mind wandered” and, as if wielding a baton, he whispered “Gently, not so loud! Loud music is vulgar!”\footnote{George Craig Stewart, “Dean Peter Christian Lutkin in Memoriam,” in “Retrospective Memorial Tribute” (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University School of Music, 1932), 10. Pamphlet in Peter Christian Lutkin Papers, ID 19/1/1, box 1 (of 1), Northwestern}
Lutkin encouraged choral educators to practice the most difficult parts first while a choir’s attention was fresh. He also used other techniques to engage the interest of choristers. One involved the merging of two effective ideas. First, conductors should begin with the most attractive point of a piece. Second, a score might be rehearsed backwards. Lutkin then combined these ideas, proposing that conductors achieve success with the climax first, followed by backing up and leading into it.\textsuperscript{537}

Lutkin reversed the usual practice of a choir moving from the known to the unknown. It was discouraging for an ensemble to head for the unknown and to see pages of uncharted music looming in the distance. That technique was invaluable because it allowed singers to get their feet upon solid ground. The feeling of accomplishment that resulted from the mastery of a passage produced joy and satisfaction within any choir.\textsuperscript{538}

One of Lutkin’s favorite rehearsal techniques was humming, which improved the intonation and vocal production of choristers. Writing to music educators in 1919, he explained:

Much fatigue and unnecessary tension may be spared by humming while notes and expression marks are in process of assimilation. Humming not only saves the voice but improves its quality by cultivating relaxation.

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University Archives, Deering Library, Evanston, IL.
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\textsuperscript{537}. Lutkin, “The Routine of Choral Preparation,” p. 103.

\textsuperscript{538}. Ibid.
which is so necessary to good intonation and correct voice production. If the words are eliminated the entire attention can be focused upon the music. Without being conscious of it most singers obtain their pitch more from chordal suggestion than from staff relationship. The soft singing permits the singers to hear the harmonies of the accompaniment distinctly and this helps them mainly in getting their parts. They can also hear the guiding and warning remarks of the conductor. Lastly, singers rarely hum out of tune. Of all the time saving and nerve shielding devices in chorus rehearsing humming easily comes first. 

Humming inspired a relaxed vocal mechanism, which allowed choirs to focus on expression marks and other musical instructions in the score by removing text. It allowed singers to hear harmonies, thus aiding part-singing. The improvement of intonation was also a benefit for Lutkin, who taught that humming saved the voice, was “time-saving,” and “nerve-shielding.”

When Lutkin rehearsed his *A Cappella* Choir entirely without accompaniment before 1910, this was a bizarre practice. In 1909, he explained, “The dependence of singers upon the keyboard is truly lamentable, and they lean upon it with equal confidence, whether it is in tune or not—and mostly it is not.” Unaccompanied rehearsals encouraged independent singing among choir singers. He wrote in the 1908 *Quarterly Bulletin of School of Music (sic)*, “The rehearsing is done without accompaniment, thus cultivating in the singers the habit of self-reliance and independence in regard to reading and

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539. Ibid., 103–04.
540. Ibid., p. 104.
541. Lutkin, “Certain Relative Values in Music,” 78
intonation. The most minute attention is paid to tone quality, dynamics and interpretation.”

Although the use of musical instruments was *verbotten* during Lutkin’s choir rehearsals, he used a tuning fork to give starting notes and then hummed the pitch. After that, the choir sang entirely unaccompanied. When he had to resort to assistance from the piano during rehearsals, he was “extremely irked.”

Lutkin looked for two characteristics when he auditioned singers for the Northwestern University A Cappella Choir: a pure straight tone and excellent pitch sense. Press reviews frequently mentioned that this resulted in a choir with a clear tone. In contrast with John Finley Williamson, director of the Westminster Choir, who cultivated a choral tapestry of many colors, Lutkin wanted complete vocal unification within his ensemble:

Many pursue the antiquated plan of beginning on page one and hammering the work into the singers page by page until we reach the end with a sigh of relief. This hammering process usually results in a metallic, angular performance devoid of charm and well-considered contrasts. It is a strategic blunder for we injure voices by singing loudly all the time and our singers grow restive under such a mechanical and ill-considered plan of procedure.

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544. O.F. Richards et al., “Big Ideas from St. Louis,” *Music Supervisors Journal* 6, no. 1
The exquisite control of his choir that Lutkin was noted for may have had a psychological component. He believed that training in psychology might be helpful for choral directors for “the knack of attracting, holding, and controlling choristers.” Observers described Lutkin’s conducting gesture as almost motionless. Porter Heaps, a well-known organist, composer, and former Lutkin student, wrote that his teacher did not move his arms and that he hardly ever moved.

His paradigm for music educators was idealistic perfectionism. He showed his Northwestern University A Cappella Choir how to strive after excellence, demonstrating the value of good tone production, accurate rhythm, good phrasing, and clear enunciation by focusing upon the achievement of these goals. Lutkin saw a direct correlation between a transformative aesthetic experience, high-quality musicianship, and good repertoire. He wrote in 1910, “Where the aesthetic sensibilities have once been thoroughly aroused,

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547. Peter C. Lutkin, “Concerning Choral Societies,” typewritten ms., n.d., p. 1, Box 1, Lutkin Papers, Northwestern University Archives, Deering Library, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL.
nothing short of good work will satisfy the singers.”548

Lutkin and Boys Choirs

Lutkin’s love of the sound of boys choirs pointed to two different animals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century: the European boychoir and the vernacular American version. Lutkin had been a choirboy himself, but his early musical experiences represented a coarse uncultivated choral tone, typical of American choirs of the period. In Lutkin’s case, St. James Cathedral in Chicago in the late 1800s was eight hundred miles removed the musical culture of the major urban centers of the Eastern Seaboard of the United States, and even there, as has been pointed out, the choral tone of boys choirs was not cultivated during this period. In this light, it would perhaps be safe to state that Lutkin’s early church choir experiences were not part of his later choral ideals. His studies in Germany exposed him, for the first time, to the sounds of ecclesiastical choirs singing in a refined manner and they etched an indelible mark on his aesthetic consciousness. Throughout his career, he made periodic trips to England and the Continent, where boys choirs were the norm. It is not surprising that he commented: “...the trained boy voice is indisputably the most beautiful of all.”549 Lutkin’s later essays about choral


549. Ibid., 210–13.
sound refer to the “purity” of boys’ voices. He wrote:

…the greatest Cathedrals in Europe entrusted the soprano part in their choirs not to the nature and emotional charm of women’s voices, but to the pure tones and musical ability of lads ranging in age from ten to fifteen years.\footnote{550}

Lutkin’s reaction to European boys choirs was almost identical with that of Lowell Mason [discussed previously], earlier in the nineteenth century: upon hearing them, he was smitten, and nothing else would do.

Lutkin rationalized his advocacy of that choral sound by noting that boys choirs were historically associated with celebrated composers and performances of their works. He had directed the Northwestern University A Cappella Choir for only four years when he wrote about the genre idealistically in 1910:

It is a fact that the most famous choirs in existence, choirs that scorn the assistance of organ or orchestra, choirs noted for their beauty of tone and for the perfect manner in which they perform the most difficult scores of the great masters, invariably make use of the boy voice for the soprano and sometimes the alto part.\footnote{551}

Lutkin believed that the mixed choir, with women singing the soprano line, was largely an “American invention.”\footnote{552} On more than one occasion, he listed in print specific European choirs that exemplified what he considered

\footnote{550. Ibid., 184.}
\footnote{551. Ibid., 184–85.}
\footnote{552. Lutkin, “The Values of A Cappella Singing,” 55.}
acceptable choral tone. Those included ensembles at the Imperial Chapel in St.
Petersburg, the Kremlin in Moscow, and the Dom [cathedral] in Berlin. St.
Paul’s Cathedral and Westminster Abbey in London were also mentioned, as
was the Cathedral in Cologne, St. Thomas Church in Leipzig, and the
Madeleine in Paris.\footnote{553} Lastly, he included the Sistine Chapel Choir in Rome.
When Lutkin heard the Sistine choir on his vacation tour to Rome, boys sang
the higher parts. Previously in the century, the choir employed castrati. Two
years later, in 1903, a papal document from newly elected Pope Pius X stated: “
Whenever...it is desirable to employ the high voices of sopranos and contraltos,
these parts must be taken by boys, according to the most ancient usage of the
Church.”\footnote{554} About such choirs Lutkin wrote, “…we will hear lads sustaining
their difficult parts with unerring accuracy, delighting the ear with the purity of
their voices and satisfying the most exacting taste in their artistic
interpretations.”\footnote{555}

In the fall of 1901, immediately after his journey, he shared his musical
observations abroad with American music educators in an extended account
accompanied by photographs. In that article, entitled “Notes of a Vacation

\footnote{553}{Lutkin, “Certain Relative Values in Music,” 77.}

\footnote{554}{Pope Pius X, “Tra Le Sollecitudini [Among the Concerns],” Instruction on Sacred

\footnote{555}{Lutkin, \textit{Music in the Church}, 185.}
Tour,” Lutkin recorded his impressions of many choirs, a number of which sang unaccompanied. For example, upon hearing the choir of St. Margaret’s Westminster, a church adjacent to Westminster Abbey, he wrote, “The anthem was in penitential effect and started with a phrase for tenor solo in the old style and it was answered a capella [sic] by the choir.”

Likewise, of his visit to Paris he recalled:

Then we attended St. Gervais, where they affect the strict ecclesiastical style, the quasi-Palestrina school...they have a choir of male adults only, and they sing in three part harmony and adhere strictly to the old ecclesiastical style of music. The music was strictly contrapuntal. The singing was quite good. I liked it very much, as I am extremely fond of the old school...I like those good, musty old things; they have a strong individual character and stand on their own legs.

That tour and choral experiences took place five years before he founded the Northwestern University A Cappella Choir in 1906.

While for Lutkin the trained boy voice was indisputably the most beautiful of all, the untrained boy voice represented the antithesis and came with unacceptable added baggage. In that regard Lutkin made it clear, why he never chose to refine a choir of boys’ voices, explaining,

We have much better raw material in the voices of girls and young women. They naturally produce a more agreeable quality of tone, they are innately more refined and musical, and far better results can be obtained from them with less ability and effort on the part of the

556. Lutkin, “Notes of a Vacation Tour,” 300.

557. Ibid., 303-04.
choirmaster, than is the case with boys. Moreover, they are better behaved, more docile, and their voices have not the annoying trick of breaking when the point of maximum usefulness has been gained. On the one hand, we have the male choir with its traditional authority and fitness, plus coarse singing, poor interpretation, and boisterous behavior; on the other, we have the mixed choir with its violation of churchly custom, plus better voices, more artistic finish, and better conduct.\footnote{Lutkin, \textit{Music in the Church}, 210.}

Lutkin devoted an entire chapter to “The Vested Male Choir” in his 1910 book, \textit{Music in the Church}. Here the choral ideal he promoted was the same he described in his articles published in professional music education journals. In contrast to the secular nature of music education periodicals today, journals in the United States before 1940 regarded church music as a subcategory of music education and regular columns on the subject were part of each issue.\footnote{In addition, annual proceedings of the Music Teachers National Association and the Music Supervisors National Conference regularly contained papers devoted to the subject of church music.}

Adding historical evidence depicting turn-of-the century American choral sound, and sounding a bit like Lowell Mason, Lutkin offered his opinion that even the best American boys choirs were not up to European performance standards. Like Mason, he advocated transplanting a European model to the United States:

It is true that in New York City one hears services of decided merit and in our larger cities there are choirs whose attainments are most commendable. Still the best of these do not compare with the famous choirs of Europe, and the question arises, Why cannot we, with our
energy, ambition and natural resources, have choirs equal to the greatest?\textsuperscript{560}

With his perfectionistic values and practical considerations so explicitly laid out, one might wonder if Lutkin’s Northwestern University A Cappella Choir represented an aesthetic compromise: a kind of interface between the age and gender demographics of choral students in American universities during this period and his Eurocentric male ecclesiastical choral ideal.

\textit{Voix Mixée} Singing

Although Lutkin idealized the sound of boys choirs singing \textit{senza vibrato}, he did not endorse register singing.\textsuperscript{561} Perhaps due to his German musical experiences, he favored \textit{voix mixée}, or “mixed voice” production from singers. Rather than the pure head tones cultivated in the English school and sometimes described as “hoody,” Lutkin favored a \textit{Bel Canto} vocal sound with core, which was only obtainable by evenly mixing head voice with chest voice throughout the vocal registers. This more resonant approach was and is sometimes characteristic of German, Austrian, and other continental choirs. In 1901, after hearing a boys’ choir in London use the former approach, Lutkin commented:

\begin{quote}
This choir was trained exceptionally well and had a very beautiful tone
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{560} Lutkin, \textit{Music in the Church}, 210.

\textsuperscript{561} Singing exclusively in one particular vocal register.
quality. They have a tendency perhaps to confine the boys to the head voice too much. It is very fine in the high tones; in fact the higher they are the better the tone, but in the middle and low ones there is no virility to it. 562

Chorister Auditions

When he auditioned voices, he looked for “a pure tone with an absence of tremolo.” 563 Such a sound was characteristic of ecclesiastical choirs in Europe and England but not in the United States, where the technique was almost completely unknown and hence regarded as a novelty. This was a period before the writings of Carl Seashore on vibrato and tuning in the 1930s. It is interesting that both Lutkin and his younger colleague F. Melius Christiansen referred to vibrato as “tremolo.” Both were instrumentalists and held that one could not tune notes with vibrato due to the undulation of the tone above and below the pitch. Choral unification was an absolute requirement for Lutkin. He wanted his choir to sound as one voice and vibrato represented an impediment. 564

Advocacy of Russian Orthodox Church Music

Lutkin frequently referred to the unaccompanied sacred choral literature of the Russian Orthodox Church when illustrating the use of *a cappella* singing.


564. Kennel, “Peter Christian Lutkin—Northwestern University’s First Dean of Music,” 104.
He was an advocate of Russian church music early in his choral career at Northwestern, and he successfully encouraged the nation’s choir conductors to try the genre. For example, in an address to the Music Teachers National Association in 1916, this past president viewed the increasing interest taken in Russian church music as an “encouraging sign.”

Regardless of the fact that he knew little about the genre, his national advocacy of it was significant. When making boldly incorrect statements regarding this choral school, he probably stayed out of trouble with musicologists because few existed in America at the time. For example, Russian liturgical choral repertoire bore no historical connection to any works of the Palestrina or the Roman School. The two categories being based on a bifurcation of Christianity into eastern and western traditions. The roots of the Russian Orthodox choral tradition extended back to 988 C.E., when East Slavic tribes, the Kievan Rus, converted to Orthodoxy and imported Byzantine music into Russia. Nevertheless, Lutkin attempted to both compare and connect Eastern and Western choral music solely by means of singing style. He wrote that Russian liturgical music “developed directly out of the capacity of the

human voice, uninfluenced by the aid or support of instruments.”

He also believed that this music operated in the realm of choral effect rather than being dependent on tonal or modal systems with “stilted cadential formulae,” presumably in reference to Western European music. Though he knew little about the Russian genre, he was particularly impressed with its qualitative musical characteristics. He maintained, “It is dignified, picturesque, at times dramatic and passionate, but rarely ordinary or lacking in reverence.”

Lutkin saw the benefits of Russian choral music from two perspectives. First, this choral category represented a novel, aesthetically pleasing, underappreciated type of choir music, which deserved performance, despite the language barrier. Second, he hoped that the performance of Russian church music would advance the a cappella art in America. His efforts in this regard bore fruit, because amid the a cappella trend of the 1930s Russian church music began to be widely included in the repertoire of unaccompanied choirs.

Lutkin’s early promotion of this literature through his leadership positions in music education organizations, his writings, performances, and students who disseminated his ideas helped spread knowledge of the Russian choral


568. Ibid.

569. Ibid.

570. Ibid., 84.
repertory throughout the United States. Writing to the Music Teachers National Association in 1916, and curiously referring to the Russian Orthodox Church as “Greek,” he stated:

They use no organ at all in the Greek Church, and this means everything to its music. Like the art of Palestrina, Russian Church music is developed directly out of the capacity of the human voice, uninfluenced by the aid or support of instruments. It is not tied hard and fast to major and minor modes with stilted cadences but reaches back to other realms of choral effect. It is dignified, picturesque, at times dramatic and passionate, but rarely ordinary or lacking in reverence. It should be sung without accompaniment, and if it brings to this country the habit of a cappella singing it will be a boon indeed.571

Robert Addison Reid, whose 1983 dissertation on Russian sacred choral music and its assimilation and influence on the American A Cappella Choir Movement, suggests that Lutkin was the first to place Russian choral works into stylistic categories. For example, to introduce this genre to American choral educators at the 1928 convention of the Music Supervisors National Conference in Chicago, Lutkin created the classifications illustrated in Fig. 4.4.

His promotion of Russian choral literature in the United States was critical to the genre’s advancement before World War II. In support of that notion Reid wrote, “Certainly the national exposure given to the Russian genre had a positive impact on its assimilation into the a cappella choir repertoire as it took shape in the years to come…. This helped increase the scope of choral

educators, thus paving the way for the widespread performance of this unaccompanied repertoire.  

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### Lutheran Motets

- Presentation of Christ in the Temple
- The Angels’ Greeting
- Wake, Awake for the Night is Flying

### Latin Motets

- Alta Trinita Beata
- Gloria Patri
- Adoramus Te

### Russian Motets

- Glory to the Father
- The Beatitudes
- Christ is Risen

### American Motets

- Fairest Lord Jesus
- The Shepherd
- The Waits are Singing in the Lane

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Figure 4.4. 1928 program for national MSNC convention in Chicago

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In assessing Lutkin’s overall influence on *a cappella* singing in the United States and the assimilation of Russian choral repertoire into American choral education, Reid wrote:

> It is undeniable that such an address delivered by as prominent a figure in choral music as Dean Peter Christian Lutkin before as widespread a gathering of musicians as the Music Teachers National Association Convention would have tremendous impact both upon the rapid development of a cappella singing and inclusion of Russian sacred choral works in the repertoire of American a cappella choirs.\(^{574}\)

**Lutkin’s Knowledge of Choral Music**

Although he had no formal training in choral music, Lutkin possessed a remarkable knowledge of Western sacred choral repertoire, the history of choral music, and musical happenings in other locales. One way he acquired knowledge of choral music was through travel. He toured more frequently than other choral musicians of his day, and sometimes he recorded his music experiences while away from home. As an orphaned child of immigrants, Lutkin did not grow up in a wealthy environment. However, over time, he appeared to have arrived at a comfortable financial position due to his position as Northwestern Dean, his several adjunct academic positions (mentioned previously), as well as his directorship of Chicago’s Northshore Music Festival. This allowed him to live comfortably and to continue to travel extensively in

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\(^{574}\) Ibid.
Europe throughout his career. In 1925, for example, he attended the Triennial Festival at Leeds in England, as well as the Festival of the Three Choirs, now known as the Three Choirs Festival.

Lutkin often referred to the superiority of British and European music making and the challenges faced by American choral directors during the first quarter of the twentieth century. For example, he wrote, “In England they do better. England is notoriously the land of choruses and choral music.” A lifelong Anglophile, he was fascinated and impressed by the choral scope of British audiences, stating, “The attitude of these English audiences greatly interested me. They evidently knew and loved the old classics, but they were also keenly interested in new choral works.”

Publications: Books, Original Musical Compositions, and Arrangements

Lutkin added to the repertory of unaccompanied choral music in the United States by creating a cappella compositions at a time when few American composers were interested in or familiar with the style. Included in Lutkin’s ninety-seven published compositions are sixty-five anthems, most of which


576. Ibid., 82.

are unaccompanied. Regarding those choral works, his successor, Northwestern University Dean Carl Beecher, stated, “His specialty... was compositions for unaccompanied singing, most often written for the _A Cappella_ Choir of the University, which he founded and directed for twenty-eight years.”

Musicologist Terry Fansler, whose research on the American anthem as a musical category, commented that, “This was unusual at a time when choral sections of anthems frequently had “bombastic organ accompaniments that generally double the vocal score.” While he had a special interest in sacred music, Lutkin’s _oeuvre_ embodied both sacred and secular compositions.

Several factors limited the popularity of most of his sixty-five anthems. First, many were too difficult for the average choir. He wrote most of these for his own group or other notable _a cappella_ ensembles, such as the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir or the Westminster Choir, which could negotiate difficult passages. Lutkin did not always know when to stop when composing and some of his works were excessive in length (twelve to eighteen pages long). Lastly, Lutkin’s creations were often technically weak. For example, when modulating

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from one key to another, he often employed harmonic progressions typical of inferior Victorian choral music. However, he recognized his personal compositional shortcomings, referring to them in a paper written in 1916 for the Music Teachers National Association:

The writer of this article occasionally writes church music, and some of it has been published. Like most composers, he has two standards—one for other people’s music and one for his own. They do not agree, the one being far more exacting than the other. Somehow or other we cannot judge rightly of the merits or demerits of our own children. He wishes hereby to make public confession of his sin, and to add that he does not set himself up as an example of what a composer of church music should be, but as a warning.\(^580\)

However, one work did not fall into that category and has kept Lutkin’s name alive for over a century. At his funeral on December 29, 1931, his *A Cappella* Choir sang that short motet—the unaccompanied choral benediction “The Lord Bless You and Keep You,” published by Clayton F. Summy in 1900.\(^581\) Originally in the key of C Major, its construction contains a homophonic “A” section with a biblical text from Numbers 6:21 and a polyphonic B section consisting of repetitive imitative “amens” in a style reminiscent of Horatio Parker. Here, Lutkin’s best-known and most popular

\(^{580}\) Lutkin, “American Church Music,” 86.

\(^{581}\) The text of Lutkin’s choral benediction is often called “The Benediction of Aaron.” Numbers 6:22–23 reads, “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites.’” Numbers 6:24–26 contains this “Aaronic Benediction” given to Moses: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.”
work highlights his European contrapuntal training in a restrained manner. A
cursory look demonstrates only the piece’s deceptive simplicity and what might
be judged as triteness; however, a closer examination reveals a miniature that
reveals structural perfection and craftsmanship. The three-page motet
introduced hundreds of thousands of American choristers to a cappella choral
singing. After one hundred years, it would be accurate to state that this
unaccompanied composition remains in thousands of choral libraries
throughout the United States and has retained its popularity, or as some might
put it, iconic status. For example, at Westminster Choir College in Princeton,
New Jersey, the work has become part of school tradition. The college website
calls it “one of choral music’s most beloved works”:

Peter Christian Lutkin’s choral benediction The Lord Bless You and Keep
You has long been associated with Westminster Choir College. This
beloved work is sung at most important College events and concludes
many choral concerts. It has been sung at times of great joy and has
brought comfort in the midst of sorrow. In the College’s early days the
campus community gathered on the Williamson Hall balcony and sang
the Lutkin Benediction as the Westminster Choir left on tour. Today,
admitted students are welcomed to Westminster with a copy of the
music and a letter from the Dean inviting them to join the Westminster
community in singing the Lutkin Benediction at their first Westminster
Convocation in the fall.\textsuperscript{582}

\textsuperscript{582} Ann Sears, “Westminster Creates Lutkin Benediction Video,” Tuesday, October
19, 2010, Westminster Choir College, accessed 14 March 2014,
http://www.rider.edu/news/2010/10/19/westminster-create-lutkin-benediction-video,
Lutkin and American Music Education

As a pioneer in the choral field, historical evidence suggests that Lutkin’s *modus operandi* was music education. He progressively introduced *a cappella* singing to the nation as a choral technique for the cultivation of sung tone in the first quarter of the twentieth century. He not only believed, but demonstrated with his own ensemble, that unaccompanied singing could elevate the performance status of a secondary school and college choir to that of a string quartet or string orchestra:

* A cappella singing is to choral singing what the string quartet is to instrumental music—they are the most refined and the most spiritual expressions of the art of music. To be able to sing choral numbers acceptably without accompaniment means a decided improvement in the capacity of the average choir; hence the *a cappella* habit, which is increasingly so rapidly, indicates a higher standard of performance wherever it is practiced. It also means an improvement in choral taste, for the *a cappella* repertory averages far above accompanied choral music in its artistic value.  

During this period the novelty of the *a cappella* genre was an attention-getter that aided Lutkin in his mission, allowing not only a focus upon it but also new thoughts about the “undreamed of possibilities” for choral music in schools.  

Lutkin also influenced American music education through his essays, publications, writings, articles, performances with his unaccompanied


584. Ibid.
ensemble, and convention addresses. He was an active leader in the Music Teachers National Association (MTNA), serving as national president in 1911 and again in 1920. As early in that organization’s history as 1910, his Northwestern University A Cappella Choir sang a program of unaccompanied choral music at the group’s national meeting in Boston.\textsuperscript{585} Called upon frequently as a speaker before 1920, according to music education historians Cooper and Bayless, Lutkin authored ten papers for the MTNA between 1906 and 1930. He also addressed national conventions of MTNA in 1909, 1916, and 1917.\textsuperscript{586}

He approached the improvement of choral and vocal music education in the United States from his own backyard, promoting a serious approach to music first at Northwestern and subsequently beyond its walls. For Lutkin, choral music was a technical subject that demanded full academic respect. His Northwestern curriculum was a direct extension of the deep value he placed in his own education, a privilege he realized most American students would never have the opportunity to experience. Lutkin took an egalitarian view of singing


instruction, holding that it should not be limited only to so-called gifted students. In his opinion, musical talent and hard work had nothing to do social position, wealth, or status. He wrote, “practically anybody can learn to sing well enough to take his part effectively, not only in simple hymn music, but in the great choral masterpieces of music as well.”\textsuperscript{587} For Lutkin, excellent music education was the “heritage of every human being.”\textsuperscript{588} His biographer wrote, “He also asserted that it was the responsibility of the public schools to provide such training, for he found many values in choral music.” As his Northwestern students evolved musically, he taught them that music was a craft requiring time, effort, discipline, and scholarship. Reflecting his rigorous approach, he wrote, “To look at the full score of a modern choral work gives to the eye some adequate idea of the machinery of great music…. And this appreciation came about only after weeks of painstaking, analytical study.”\textsuperscript{589}

In 1913, Lutkin hired Osbourne McConathy (1875–1947), a noted self-taught music educator to head the Northwestern Music Education Department. McConathy supervised student teachers and taught teaching methods, sight -

\textsuperscript{587} Kennel, “Peter Christian Lutkin—Northwestern University’s First Dean of Music,” 76.

\textsuperscript{588} Ibid.

singing, ear training, and dictation.\textsuperscript{300} Under his direction, the school’s music curriculum grew from 1913 to 1920 to culminate in a four-year degree program in 1924. Lutkin’s rationale was not just artistic, but physical, intellectual, and moral as well. He proposed that:

If really capable and efficient instruction in singing were given in our public schools the gain would be not only an aesthetic one. Singing is a most health-giving exercise, the intellectual capacity is both stimulated and enlarged and that the moral sense is developed thru emotional singing.\textsuperscript{301}

For Lutkin the educational benefit of a school choir was two fold. First, value came from the experience as a group activity. Second, he believed it also affected students on a deeply personal level. Addressing American music teachers in 1914, he elaborated: “Singing in chorus is the one means by which we can collectively give effective expression to one and the same emotion at the same time. It is the self-participation that gives the larger thrill.”\textsuperscript{302}

Lutkin’s work as a leader and administrator was not the result of academic complacency. When he intended improve a situation, he urged proactive steps to improve a given challenging educational situation. He challenged music educators in 1914 to raise the bar for the benefit of all


\textsuperscript{592} Ibid.
students, writing, “It should be our aim and endeavor to constantly raise the standard of musical appreciation so that the cultured few will eventually be lost among the cultured many.”

His opinion that anyone can sing was not a distinctive one; however, the proposition that every student could benefit from vocal pedagogy was foreign to the collective consciousness of American music educators before 1920. Lutkin wished to transition vocal pedagogy from an educational specialty to an integral part of mainstream choral music education:

It should also be the business of the public school to teach voice production as it concerns singing, for the ability to sing well should be the heritage of every human being. At the present time, the teaching of the art of singing is a highly specialized profession.... The fact remains that proper breathing, good tone production, and correct enunciation can be successfully taught in classes.\footnote{594}{Ibid., 645.}

Lutkin held that developing the human voice properly should be the privilege and heritage of every human being. He realized that this would require capable and efficient instruction. When this was the case, he predicted aesthetic, health, intellectual, and moral paybacks for students through what he referred to as “emotional singing.”\footnote{595}{Singing in which there is variation in emotional force and intensity.} He suggested that it was the “business of
the public school to teach voice production as it concerns singing.”

Discussing the psychological benefits of the school choral experience, he commented, “Singing in chorus is the one means by which we can collectively give effective expression to one and the same emotion at the same time. It is the self-participation that gives the larger thrill.”

Long before the contemporary philosophy of praxial music education, Lutkin was a proponent of active musical practice in music learning rather than passive involvement. He believed that the joys of creation and production were incomparably greater than the joys of listening. For him, technical deficiencies were less important than individual musical capacity and the potential for excellence. It is no surprise, then, that he was a supporter of the idea of the a cappella choir as a portal to consciousness-raising, with a moral component involving personal improvement. Lutkin observed, unaccompanied singing “...calls for a surrender of self and complete absorption in the music for the music’s own sake. The petty vanities of solo performance disappear and the participant is engaged in higher and nobler work.”


597. Ibid., 645.

Frederick Melius Christiansen’s life occurred against a diverse geographical backdrop. The influence of his early years in Scandinavia and Europe was apparent in his Norwegian ethnicity, personality, family background, and German education. In contrast, his immigration to and subsequent career in the United States represented a blank slate on which he created a remarkable life narrative. Because of an unlikely admix of cultures, experiences, and values; he was able to make a significant impact on choral singing in this land.

Figuratively speaking, Christiansen was wedded to music, and in that

599. F. Melius Christiansen Photo, ca. 1925, Faculty Photograph Collection, F. Melius Christiansen file, St. Olaf College Archives, Rolvaag Library, Northfield, MN.
respect, he was a monogamist. St. Olaf College in rural Northfield, Minnesota, was both his home and his anchor. His life concluded in a rear first-floor addition to his wooden Arts and Crafts-style bungalow on St. Olaf Ave., a wide shady street that proceeded from the circular network of convoluted roads on the small-town college campus. Surrounded by Victorian and neo-Gothic halls on Manitou Heights, a steep elevated plateau, he created and molded the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir, which from 1913 until 1939 came to represent an *a cappella* choral ideal for countless musicians in this country. Through a complex web of factors, including sharing his choir’s singing with American audiences, Christiansen and his ensemble helped promote widespread refinement in choral performance and music education throughout the country. Even today, writers on the subject refer to him as the “Father of A Cappella Singing.”

**Early Life and Musical Experiences**

Christiansen’s life began on April Fool’s Day in 1871, near Eidsvold, Norway, in Akershus County. His family lived in a tiny settlement at the southernmost tip of Hurdalsjøen (The Lake at Hurdal), a large inland lake.

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approximately forty-three miles north of Oslo. During the first decade of his life, economic conditions in that country weighed heavily on the Christiansen household. The Industrial Revolution, then in full swing in Norway, forced Scandinavia and the rest of Europe to transition from an agricultural economy to an industrial one. During a national economic downturn in the 1870s, Christiansen’s father, Anders, repeatedly facing the closure of glass factories where he labored, relocated his family three times. The last of these moves took the family 124 miles south to Larvick, an industrial seaport town on the Oslofjord in the Torstrand District of Vestfold County. In that larger port community, Anders worked as a skilled glassblower at the Larvig Glassvaerk (Larvick Glassworks).

Christiansen’s musical encounters began in 1874 at age three with the gift of a miniature three-key clarinet. In the same year, St. Olaf’s School, a Lutheran academy 4,062 miles away in Northfield, Minnesota, came into being. Christiansen later played in his father’s glass factory band and studied violin, piano, and organ with a member of the Larvick orchestra, a Professor Olson. Concurrently, he took music lessons with the local organist and orchestral conductor, Oscar Meier-Hansen. Meier-Hansen represented a monopoly on

601. “Press and Musical World Pay Tribute to Christiansen,”[ca. 1951], newspaper clipping, F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN.
musical leadership and education in the town. Educated in Oslo (called Christiana until 1925) and Leipzig, Germany, Meier-Hansen directed two factory bands, a summer band, a community orchestra, and three singing societies, all in Larvick. He was also the organist and choirmaster at the Larvik Kirke (Larvik Church), a Lutheran church overlooking the bay.

For most of Christiansen’s time in Norway, that portly German-trained polymath was his inspiration, model, and mentor. Norwegian journalist Otto Nordheim reported that Meier-Hansen recognized Christiansen’s high level of musical ability and wanted to help the child. He quoted the professor as saying, “Just come to me and I will teach you to play the organ and piano. And should you have a desire to play the violin, you just come and see me.” Meier-Hansen also introduced the boy to the fundamentals of music theory. At least part of the money for Christiansen’s lessons came from Jørgen Christiansen, an unrelated family friend. To earn additional money for his tuition, Christiansen copied instrumental parts for his teacher’s orchestra.


604. Johnson, “The Christiansen Choral Tradition,” 5; and Eugene E. Simpson, A History of St. Olaf Choir (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1921), 121. Simpson mentioned that Norway never entered into international copyright conventions. At the time,
Christiansen did not pursue singing as a boy. On one occasion, inspired by Meier-Hansen’s church choir, he implored his teacher to allow him to join. However, it was on the violin that he initially developed expertise as a performer, playing first violin in the city’s music society orchestra. He also became so proficient on the organ after three years that, when he was thirteen, Meier-Hansen asked him to substitute as organist at the Larvick Kirk during his teacher’s half-year sabbatical at the Leipzig Conservatory. At about the same time Meir-Hansen also suggested the boy might someday study music at that noted German center of musical learning. 605

The year 1885 was a traumatic one for the fourteen-year-old Christiansen. His mother, Oleana, had battled a progressively debilitating infectious disease for a few years and by 1884 was bedridden. In those days before antibiotics, her young children watched helplessly as her painful condition deteriorated. A year later, in 1885, three sisters succumbed to tuberculosis. His mother’s illness and death caused a lingering emotional trauma that over time served to isolate the teenager within his own surviving immediate family. Moreover, during the next five years the bonds of his previously tightly knit household unraveled in the wake of Anders’ impending

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only orchestral scores were available. Individual parts were copied by hand from the master score.

remarriage. His father’s determination to establish a new life and family resulted in his grieving and emotionally vulnerable children feeling excluded. Ander’s apparent coldness and shifting focus disconnected the young man from the warmth he had enjoyed while his mother was alive. Now, the only surviving members of his family were Christiansen, his father, his brothers Christian and Karl (who previously emigrated, also to the United States), and his sister Anna.\footnote{606. Leola Nelson Bergmann, \textit{Music Master of the Middle West} (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1944), 14–16.}

To make matters worse, Christiansen saw no musical future in Larvick, as it seemed likely that Meier-Hansen’s sons would continue their father’s monopoly on conducting and teaching there. Yet, he was not entirely without hope. “America fever” consumed his imagination because of letters from his older brother Karl and his uncle, both of whom had emigrated several years earlier and painted a picture of greener pastures. This matrix of hard realities—fortune, lack of opportunity, and the excitement of future possibilities—placed young Christiansen at a crossroads, with all signs pointing toward the United States.

After graduating from high school in Larvick in 1888 at age seventeen, Frederick made the three-week transatlantic journey by steamer.\footnote{607. Christiansen attended public school in Norway for eight years.} Anders
provided the money for passage and did not try to stop his son from leaving his homeland.\textsuperscript{608} The teenager arrived in New York Harbor with a fiddle tucked under his arm and little else except hope and determination. He stayed in New York only long enough to pass through U.S. customs and then traveled by train to Oakland, California, where his uncle Hans Christiansen had settled. Due to a lack of musical job opportunities there and no doubt because of language barriers, after six months he joined his brother Karl in the immigrant community of Washburn, Wisconsin.\textsuperscript{609} In that cultural microcosm, immersed in a familiar language and culture, and with Karl's support and encouragement, circumstances began to improve. First, he entered the local high school to study English.\textsuperscript{610} Partly because of credit for previous schooling in Norway and partly because of a female teacher he fancied, it took Christiansen only six months to gain an American high school diploma.\textsuperscript{611}

A year later, in 1890 at age nineteen, he secured employment 240 miles southeast of Washburn on Lake Michigan's Green Bay as the director of The

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{608} Leola Nelson Bergmann, “Music Master of the Middle West, the Story of F. Melius Christiansen and the St. Olaf Choir” (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1944), 9.
  \item \textsuperscript{610} Albert Rykken Johnson, “Choir Master Supreme,” 49–52.
  \item \textsuperscript{611} “Dr. Christiansen Started His 42 Year Career at St. Olaf in 1903,” [Ashland, MN] \textit{The Daily Press} [n.d., 1975]. F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN.
\end{itemize}
Scandinavian Band in Marinette, Wisconsin, a small town of about 11,000 persons [as of 1890]. He remained there for two years working as a music teacher as well as organist and choir director at Our Savior’s Lutheran Church. In Marinette, he also met his future wife, fourteen-year-old Edith Signora Lindem, the daughter of Norwegian immigrants. Near the end of his time there, the male quartet of Augsburg Seminary, a Norwegian Lutheran school in Minneapolis, paid a visit. His reaction to the group was favorable, and in short order its members successfully encouraged him to attend their institution. Here almost all students and professors were Norwegian, textbooks were imported from Norway and written in Norwegian, and the Norwegian language was spoken exclusively.

Christiansen began a one-year stint, perhaps more social than academic, as a student at Augsburg College in 1892, where he expanded his views on politics and music but earned no academic credit. To help with his finances, he conducted the all-male student chorus as well as the Nordlyset Chorus and taught singing and harmony. At Augsburg, the required four years of

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615. “Mr. And Mrs. F. Melius Christiansen Observe Golden Wedding Anniversary at
compulsory Latin and Greek proved to be too much for Christiansen, who sometimes clashed with members of the faculty. He came to the realization that he would rather spend more time on music, especially violin performance, and less on academic subjects. When he went to the Augsburg College president for advice, he was flatly told, “The Lord has made you a musician. We can’t change it.”

The following year he enrolled at the Northwestern Conservatory of Music in Minneapolis, a private school of several hundred students established in 1885. For social reasons, he did not give up his association and involvement with performing groups at Augsburg or with various Scandinavian choral groups in that city. He also worked as a freelance musician. Joint compositional efforts with his Augsburg friend Hans Andreas Urseth involved scoring the older Urseth’s poetic texts. Several co-creations included a monthly bulletin, 12 Korsange from 1894, the “Song Series” Sangserie, and a popular publication for Norwegian-American church choirs called Korsangen, or “The

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616. M. Burnette Thompson, “The Significance of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir in American Choral Music” (MM thesis, Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester, 1939), 44; and [n.t.], unidentified newspaper clipping, 1 June 1955. F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, Northfield, MN.

617. Northwestern Conservatory of Music in Minneapolis operated from 1885–1915, after which it was absorbed by the McPhail School of Music. The institution should not be confused with Northwestern University Conservatory of Music in Evanston, Illinois, which at the time had the same name.
Choir Singer.” Although he dabbled in composition, at this time Christiansen saw himself as a violinist rather than a composer.

Education in Europe

After Christiansen’s marriage to Edith Lindem on July 14, 1897, the couple and his older brother Karl, also a musician, traveled to Larvick, Norway, for a summer vacation. The trio visited Christiansen’s father, who had offered to fund his son’s education in Germany. Then, by steamer and rail, they journeyed to Leipzig, where he completed a three-year diploma course at the Königliches Konservatorium der Musik zu Leipzig (Royal Conservatory of Music of Leipzig).

Christiansen spent a large part of each day focusing on piano and violin performance during his first residency in Leipzig. His violin teacher at the conservatory was the distinguished Bohemian-German composer and violinist Jan Hanuš Sitt (1850–1922). In addition to being a violin virtuoso and teacher of important musicians such as Frederick Delius, Sitt was an active choral conductor and composer. Though Christiansen advanced his piano skills while at the conservatory, those studies took a backseat to his primary concentration on the violin. Likewise, already a skilled organist, he did not study that keyboard instrument in this historic center of organ playing.\(^{618}\) He also did not

\(^{618}\) Bergmann, “Music Master of the Middle West,” 75. Johann Sebastian Bach was the
study choral music there. One reason for Christiansen’s lack of formal vocal or choral training in Germany may have been the prevalent anti-choral attitude among instrumentalists at the Leipzig Conservatory during that time. He claimed that he never attended any of the “chorus drill” classes listed on his schedule of classes at the conservatory that were made available to all students.  

Many of the noted string players who taught at the conservatory were also members of the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig (Gewandhaus Orchestra), the oldest symphony orchestra in existence. Christiansen and his brother Karl attended many of that orchestra’s concerts during their time in Germany. The musicians of the Gewandhaus Orchestra had contracts with the city of Leipzig specifying that in addition to their work at the opera, twenty-two symphony concerts, and public rehearsals, they also were required to provide orchestral support for Sunday morning cantata performances, alternating between the Thomaskirche (St. Thomas Church) and the Nicholaikirche (St. Nicholas Church).  

Kantor and organist of St. Thomas Church, Leipzig.

619. “Famed Choir Founder Dies at 84.”; and “Course Registration Form” (Leipzig Konservatorium), (n.d., ca. 1897–99). F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, Rolvaag Library, Northfield, MN. This form constituted Christiansen’s registration for chorus class.

620. Bergmann, “Music Master of the Middle West,” 75.
The boys’ choir, or Thomanerchor, of the St. Thomas Church was trained at an adjacent institution, the ancient Thomasschule (St. Thomas School), which arose out of an Augustinian cloister founded in 1222. That cloister provided choirboys for the church connected to it. As choral historian Eugene E. Simpson explained, “Soon the task of training those choirboys was wholly assigned to an individual especially qualified therefor [sic] so that in the very early years, as may be seen from the statutes of the cloister, there was always a ‘cantor’ at the Thomasschule.”

Since the founding of the Leipzig Conservatory in 1943 by Felix Mendelssohn under royal Saxon protection, cantors (directors) of the St. Thomas Church boys’ choir had also been members of the conservatory faculty. During the late nineteenth century, one such cantor, Gustav Schreck, a conservatory alumnus (from 1868–70) joined the institution’s theory faculty in 1886 (see fig. 5.2). Seventeen years later, in 1893, he assumed the mantle of cantor of the Thomaskirche, joining a line of succession that included Johann Sebastian Bach. As a professor at the Royal Leipzig Conservatory, Schreck was notorious for the rigor of his species counterpoint classes. As a result, a majority of his students, unable to keep up with Shreck’s expectations of technical fluency, were compelled to leave his classes before the end of the

621. Ibid.; and “Course Registration Form” (Leipzig Konservatorium).
term. As an alumnus of the conservatory, Christiansen prided himself on not being among the more than sixty percent of students who had dropped out of Schreck’s class (see fig. 5.3).

Christiansen thought highly of the instruction he received in Germany. He later commented, “German teachers prepare the way for learning. They take your conceit out of you. A person, to receive education, must be empty so as to leave room to fill in something. Some people are so full of self-esteem that there is no room in them for anything else.”

Unlike most German-speaking professors at the conservatory, Schreck taught exclusively in English and used

622. Ibid., 27. Photograph in the public domain.

Figure 5.3. Page from Christiansen’s “Counterpoint Notebook.”

624. F. Melius Christiansen, “Counterpoint Notebook” (ca. 1897–99), from counterpoint class with Gustav Schreck at Leipzig Konservatorium, St. Olaf College Archives, Rolvaag Library, Northfield, MN. “Counterpoint Notebook” was how the book was labeled by Christiansen.
English language textbooks. That practice attracted many students from English-speaking lands such as England, Scotland, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States.

During his academic residency in Germany, Christiansen partook of weekly opportunities to hear the choir of St. Thomas Church, where his composition and counterpoint teacher Gustav Schreck was cantor.\textsuperscript{625} As a knabenchor (boys’ choir) in the German tradition, the Thomanerchor sang both soprano and alto parts, while adult males covered the tenor and bass parts.

Each Saturday, Christiansen and his brother Karl observed Schreck’s ensemble in rehearsal and as members of the audience for the packed Saturday afternoon performances. He also regularly attended rehearsals of the St. Thomas Choir and never missed one of the public performances. The Saturday noon or just after noon “Motette in der Thomaskirche” concerts have been practically continuous since 1358, when, in deprecation of another wave of pestilence, a Mass to the Virgin was ordained: “singulis Sabbathis perpetue.”\textsuperscript{626} The singing of large motets only began in 1810 when Cantor J. G. Schicht moved the service to the afternoon, at which time the choir typically performed

\textsuperscript{625} Joseph M. Shaw, \textit{History of the St. Olaf Choir: A Narrative} (Northfield, MN: St. Olaf College, 1997), 53–54.

\textsuperscript{626} Ibid., Service leaflets from 1898 Motette in der Thomaskirche (the proper name for the concerts/services) list their time as Nachmittag ½ 2 Uhr, or 2:30 p.m., on Sonnabend (Saturday). Archives of St. Thomas Church, Leipzig, Germany.
three short choral works at 2:30 p.m. The length of the program varied, but usually ran 30–45 minutes.\textsuperscript{627}

According to Bergmann, part of this ensemble’s performance repertoire was a cappella renaissance polyphony:

With ease, precision, and marvelous accuracy of intonation the boys sang the most difficult motets of the great masters, the early Netherlands and Italian composers, their own Bach, and the modern polyphonic writers…without a doubt the hours he spent listening to the impressive singing of this choir unconsciously enriched him for the work he was later to do.\textsuperscript{628}

Previous research has not investigated precisely what Christiansen heard in Leipzig. The answer to that question lies in the archives of the church in question. Program leaflets for each concert during the period 1897–1899 are contained in one volume entitled Motetten in the Archives of St. Thomas Church, Leipzig (see fig. 5.4).

\textsuperscript{627} Stefan Altner. \textit{Thomaskirche und Thomaner: Historisches und Gegenwartiges in Bildern} (Tauchaer Verlag: Diving, GR), 90–95.

\textsuperscript{628} Bergmann, “Music Master of the Middle West,” 74.
Figure 5.4. Thomaskirche, Leipzig. Motette concert program from 11 September 1897.\(^{(29)}\)

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629. Thomaskirche, "Motette in Der Thomaskirche" (Concert Leaflet), Leipzig, 11 September 1897. Courtesy of St. Thomas Church, Leipzig. F. Melius Christiansen likely attended this concert.
Examination of all Saturday afternoon concerts during the time of Christensen’s residency revealed that Cantor Gustav Schreck scheduled seven categories of choral music (see fig. 5.5). Much early music was part of this choral assortment (see fig. 5.6). Typically, the choir sang only three compositions, but on some occasions, an entire service was devoted to one larger composition. While that famous church choir formerly sang most Sunday cantata concerts within the Thomaskirche, Christiansen must have observed that Schreck increasingly involved his group in concert hall performances with the Gewandhaus Orchestra outside the church.
1. Choral music in alignment with the Protestant Caecilian Movement in nineteenth century Germany, including chorale-based music by German renaissance composers, such as Johannes Eccard (1553–1611) composer and Kapellmeister at the Berlin court chapel. Also included were nineteenth century composers such as Albert Becker choirmaster of the Berliner Dom, a successor of Mendelssohn, and Caecilian Movement proponent.

2. Works from the Roman and Franco-Flemish schools

3. Works of Leipzig Conservatory faculty members: Including E. F. Richter, Hermann Kretzschmar, W. Rust, Carl Piutti, S. Jadassohn, and C. Riedel, all colleagues of Gustav Schreck. The theory and musicology faculties were represented.

4. Works of former Thomaskirche Cantors such as Moritz Hauptmann, Johann Friedrich Doles, Seth Calvisius, J.G. Schicht, and Johann Sebastian Bach

5. Nineteenth century compositions from German-speaking lands by composers such as Felix Mendelssohn, Franz Schubert, Joseph Rheinberger, J.G. Vierling, J.A. Hiller, Franz von Holstein, Eduard Rohde, and Woldemar Bargiel

6. Post-Renaissance stile antico motets, such as the Francesco Durante’s Misericordias Domine

7. Works of Gustav Schreck, and on occasion, his wife, a composer

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630. Thomaskirche, “Motetten,” service leaflets from September through May, [n.d.] (Leipzig, GR: 1897). Program leaflets for each concert during the period 1897–98 are contained in one volume entitled Motetten. It appears that the church archives probably use a dated classification system arranged by year. Motette in der Thomaskirche is the proper title of the choral “services” that were unique to St. Thomas Church, Leipzig, and conducted by Schreck.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Palestrina</td>
<td>Christus factus est</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O Domine Jesu Christe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sanctus from Missa Papae Marcelli, 6-pt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Popule meus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Tallis</td>
<td>Verba mea auribus percipe, Domine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnoldus de Bruck</td>
<td>O du armer Judas, 6-part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orlandus Lassus</td>
<td>Kyrie and gloria {mass not indicated}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Praetorius</td>
<td>Eis is ein Ros entsprungen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Jesu, Dulcis Memoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francesco Durante</td>
<td>Misericordias Domini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johannes Eccard</td>
<td>O Freude uber Freud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth Calvisius</td>
<td>Aus Lieb lasst Got der Christenheit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Joseph, lieber Joseph mein</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allein zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Selig sind, die da Leid tragen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.P. Sweelinck</td>
<td>Hodie Christus natus est</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Scarlatti</td>
<td>Exultate Deo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.6. Examples of early choral music performed at Motette concerts at Thomaskirche, Leipzig, 1896–98

Christiansen received his diploma from the Royal Conservatory at Leipzig in the spring of 1899, completing a three-year program of study in two years. According to the 1895 Catalogue of the Royal Conservatory, to accomplish this a student had to be admitted to advanced standing in music theory. Such a student would also have had to reach a degree of instrumental proficiency. It

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632. Das Königliche Conservatorium der Musik zu Leipzig, Catalogue (Leipzig, GR: Leipzig Konservatorium, 1895). F. Melius Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, Rolvaag Library, Northfield, MN.
appears that Christiansen’s training in Norway and Minneapolis prepared him for his academic success in Germany.

**Return to Minneapolis**

Although initially Christensen and his wife had intended to move to Norway after his graduation, a family addition altered their plans. Upon returning to Minneapolis from Germany in the summer of 1899, Edith and the Christiansens’ new German-born son, Elmer, traveled to her parents’ home in Marinette, Wisconsin, while F. Melius established himself in Minneapolis. Similar to Peter Lutkin’s return to Chicago from Berlin, F. Melius almost immediately became a professor of violin at his former school, Northwestern Conservatory. He also resumed an increasingly busy concert schedule as a violin soloist.

In Minneapolis at the turn of the century, male choruses populated by German and Norwegian immigrants were popular social activities in the upper Midwest. Christiansen’s various musical involvements in Minneapolis included directing five of these choirs: the Kjerulf Club, the Swedish United Singers, the Norwegian Male Chorus, the Orpheus Society, and the Augsburg Student Chorus. Unbeknownst to Christiansen, by 1902 among the singers in the Kjerulf Club was an individual who would become a pivotal part of his future.

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633. Ibid.
That person was St. Olaf mathematics professor Paul G. Schmidt, who had accepted a position at St. Olaf that year. Schmidt had been continually impressed with Christiansen’s spirit, conducting ability, musicality, and musical values and had recommended him to St. Olaf’s president as a possible choice for musical leadership at St. Olaf.

**Manitou Heights**

In the summer of 1903, four years after his return to Minneapolis, Christiansen unexpectedly received a postcard from a Reverend John Nathan Kildahl, president of St. Olaf Lutheran College in Northfield, Minnesota. Established in 1874 by Bernt Julius Muus, a native of Snåsa, along with a group of Norwegian Lutheran immigrants, the school was affiliated with the Norwegian Lutheran Church. In scribbled writing was the abrupt message: “Have you a desire to lead our school’s music instruction?” Contained therein was an invitation to interview with Kildahl in Minneapolis for the position of head of the music department.634

Christiansen’s biographer, Leola Bergmann, maintained that Christiansen had never heard of the school, but that was not the case. Christiansen had visited the college, but under bizarre circumstances as a member of the Augsburg Quartet from Augsburg Seminary in Minneapolis.

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634. Bergmann, “Music Master of the Middle West,” p. 85
According to a manuscript at St. Olaf College, Northfield was one of the concert destinations for that group on its tour of southern Minnesota. While there, the Northfield police asked the ensemble to leave St. Olaf College after less than a day due to reports of “strife.” The police in this small town suspected the four young seminarians of having “evil intent” and “wanting to destroy St. Olaf College.”635 It is unknown whether that alleged incident colored Christiansen’s opinion of the school and town.

After journeying forty miles by rail from Minneapolis to Northfield to see the campus and talk with President Kildahl, Christiansen agreed to try the part-time job for one year as an experiment. His central responsibility was to organize and build a music department for the young, struggling, and poorly equipped Lutheran college. Things changed straightaway. The Norwegian musician took assertive measures to improve the St. Olaf Band, which before 1904 had not been successful. “Immediately,” as St. Paul, Minnesota journalist John Harvey put it, “the fur began to fly.”636 A witness to Christiansen’s first encounter with the band wrote:

When Melius walked in they were in noisy horseplay. “Get in your places!” he roared. “Sit up! Take off your hats! Keep your feet on the

635. “Glimpses of the Past” typewritten manuscript [n.d.], F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, Northfield, MN. This anonymous manuscript may have been for a local St. Olaf community publication or possibly an address by Christiansen.

floor! Silence!” After silently glaring at the petrified boys for a long moment, he strode from the room without another word. That beginning was never forgotten and strict discipline was the rule in Christiansen bands and choruses.\footnote{637}{“Dr. Christiansen Started His 42 Year Career.”}

Enough progress ensued after their first season that the band took its first tour in 1904. The musical development continued, and two years later, in 1906, the band toured Norway. The initial purpose for those tours was to advertise the school as well as to bring music to areas with few opportunities to hear live music. Following his self-imposed trial period, Christiansen vowed that St. Olaf was a “tonic for creativeness,” and he stayed on. Apparently, he charmed the St. Olaf president and students as well.\footnote{638}{“News: F. Melius Christiansen,” in “Press Release 13 May 1958” (Northfield, MN: St. Olaf College News Bureau, 1958), 2.}

Christiansen and the Improvement of Lutheran Church Music

From the fall of 1904, after having been at St. Olaf for the 1903–04 school year, Christiansen also served as organist and choirmaster at St. John’s Lutheran Church, a small house of worship close to the college. St. John’s counted among its congregation St. Olaf students and faculty as well as local residents. Stemming from his past choir directing experiences in Norwegian Lutheran churches in Minneapolis and Marinette, as well as his work at the church in Northfield, Christiansen became interested in the revitalization of congregational singing in his denomination. He blamed the bad singing on the
Norwegian church’s book of chorales, or Koralbog, associated with the composer and organist Ludvig Mathias Lindeman (1812–87). There were two problems with Lindeman’s Koralbog. First, Lindeman’s chorales were in unison instead of four parts, limiting congregational singing to a unison line. Second, in his opinion the tunes were unsingable. As one who had studied under one of the most learned teachers of counterpoint of his time, Christiansen later wrote, “His [Lindeman’s] harmony is superb, but his counterpoint on the other hand is not so good.”639 While his interest in chorales was escalating, he also developed a heightened fascination with folk tunes, particularly those of his native Norway. He knew he again needed the help of his German mentor, Gustav Schreck.

Postgraduate Study in Leipzig

After three years at St. Olaf, Christiansen decided to return to Leipzig for a period of postgraduate musical training. Again, with the financial backing of his father Anders in Larvick and the approval of the St. Olaf president, he planned his return to Leipzig, although this time alone. Thus, after the St. Olaf Band’s 1906 tour of Norway, Christiansen returned to Leipzig via steamer for ten months of study in composition with Gustav Schreck. His academic focus during his second residency involved sacred music: the influence of folk music.

upon church music and the musical treatment of Lutheran chorales.\textsuperscript{640}

Unable to arrange for private composition lessons with Schreck, Christiansen settled for conservatory classes in church composition with his former counterpoint teacher. He also continued his piano studies, but did not pursue violin instruction, his principal area of concentration during his first residency in Germany. It is likely that this represented a shift in Christiansen’s career from instrumental to sung music via the portal of choral composition. During his second stay in Leipzig, he dedicated himself to reconstructing the harmony and texture of many Lutheran chorales for practical use in Norwegian Lutheran churches. Meeting four times per week with Schreck, he arranged all the Lutheran chorales used in Lindeman’s Koralbog in a contrapuntal style.\textsuperscript{641} He also studied orchestration at the conservatory with Prof. Richard Hofmann. The usual orchestration course was a two-year program that Christiansen completed during his ten months there. Schreck, exploiting Christiansen’s new training in orchestral notation, suggested that he think in terms of symphonic structure while employing classical forms. During this time, Christiansen composed the first movement of a symphony, an experience that gave him

\textsuperscript{640} F. Melius Christiansen to Edith Christiansen, August 21, 1906. F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, Northfield, MN. Christiansen wrote: “Well, father has offered to pay my expenses here in Norway and Germany.” John N. Kildahl served as president of St. Olaf from 1899–1914.

\textsuperscript{641} Some sources cite 70 chorales.
When recounting Christiansen’s second period of study in Leipzig, his continued surreptitious interest in Gustav Schreck’s choir of men and boys at St. Thomas Church was a critical part of his study in Germany which cannot be omitted from the equation. His desire to study the Thomanerchor may represent a primary, though furtive, motivation for his return to Germany. We know that Christiansen attended all rehearsals and performances of this choir when he was in Leipzig. The aesthetic impact of his contact with that director and his choir was very likely life changing, although though we have very little historical evidence from Christiansen, other than his work with the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir, to confirm this supposition.

The Genesis and Characteristic Sound of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir

At the outset of Christiansen’s career at St. Olaf, the fledgling institution did not have a mixed-voice college choir. The chain of events that led to the creation of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir began with the coalescence of several musical groups over time. The first choral organization at St. Olaf College was “St. Olaf’s Sangkor” (St. Olaf Choir), a choral group organized only one year after the school’s founding in 1874.643 That ensemble was short-lived, lasting


643. Ibid., 24.
only one year. Four years later, in 1879, the Student Choral Union, a local manifestation of the United Norwegian Lutheran Church’s Choral Union, was born. Its primary purpose was the organization of sacred choral festivals in the Midwest.644

When F. Melius Christiansen joined the St. Olaf faculty in 1903, he took on the directorship of the Choral Union, comprised of approximately 90 male and female singers. This organization was an accompanied chorus that presented unrefined interpretations of cantatas and oratorios such as Haydn’s Creation (1904) and Handel’s Messiah (1905).645 For the performance of these larger works, Christiansen’s St. Olaf Band often provided instrumental support. Although he initially continued the Choral Union tradition, he was not enthusiastic about it because he did not care for large accompanied choral works. As mentioned previously, Christiansen directed the choir at St. John’s Lutheran Church from his arrival in Northfield in 1903. While he was a trained organist, he did not begin playing the organ at St. John’s until 1916, with the installation of a new instrument.646

It should be mentioned that while St. John’s Church was not a part of


St. Olaf Lutheran College, it might be said that with respect to its choir, the two organizations were definitely enmeshed because its membership represented faculty and students of the school. Before 1903, St. John’s choir was composed of congregation members and a few students. Nineteenth-century photos indicate that sometimes students were in the majority. As time went on, according to Paul Schmidt, the choir became “a small group of fifteen elderly people.” The first major change came in the fall of 1905, when Christiansen expanded the church choir membership from fifteen to fifty by enlisting St. Olaf students. When Christiansen returned to St. Olaf after his postgraduate study in Germany in the fall of 1907, he reassumed the music directorship of St. John’s Church. Two years after that, in the fall of 1909, he made additional changes in the St. John’s choir that would have a lasting impact on St. Olaf College. Driving that transformation was his desire to make “some rather drastic changes for the choir’s improvement.” Over a five-year period, from 1907 to 1912, the choir evolved into a larger all-student organization. That process occurred because of Christiansen’s higher musical performance standards and the subsequent falling-away of older choir members from the group. In retrospect, Christiansen was not afraid of

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647. Schmidt, My Years at St. Olaf, 56.

648. Ibid.
upsetting the status quo. He held fast to his unlikely dream of transforming an average small town church choir into a sophisticated choral ensemble, singing in a style unknown in most American churches.⁶⁴⁹

To accomplish his goals, Christiansen altered the makeup of the St. Olaf Choral Union, which was part of the St. John’s Choir only by association, insomuch as the St. John’s student choristers were also Choral Union members. In the 1909–10 academic year, he divided the mixed Choral Union into a Ladies Chorus and a Male Chorus. One year later (by the 1910–11 school year), the St. John’s Church Choir consisted solely of these two St. Olaf choruses, singing as one choral entity. In other words, the “transformed” St. John’s Choir was actually the combined male and female choruses of the former mixed-voice Choral Union.

Part of Christiansen’s rationale for splitting the St. Olaf Choral Union along gender lines, and the reason the choir of St. John’s Lutheran Church became an all-student ensemble, was for the betterment of singing in both groups. He also wanted to have the church choir, composed of college students, perform unaccompanied repertoire and become adept at singing Lutheran chorales. Improved singing by the reconfigured choir also meant increasing musical demands upon the singers. His choristers likely soon realized that

those increased demands were not just about discipline; the demands were also
a reflection of their director’s style.\textsuperscript{650}

Repertoire Change for the St. John’s Choir

The repertoire sung by the newly reconfigured St. John’s Church Choir
began to center around folk songs, polyphonic settings of chorales, and
“developed chorales” by Christiansen.\textsuperscript{651} Because not much published
a cappella choral repertoire was available in the United States at that time,
Christiansen had to create his own. Additionally, a new kind of creative
musical-worship experience came into being for the St. John’s Church Choir,
now comprised entirely of college students.

Norwegian historian Paul Glasoe indicated that these new services
originated at St. Olaf in the spring of 1907, immediately after Christiansen
returned to Northfield from his ten-month sabbatical in Leipzig:

The annual conference of the United Norwegian Lutheran Church of
America met at St. Olaf College that year. The Hoyme Chapel, seating
one thousand, had been erected and it made possible such an event.
Professor Christiansen had picked a chorus of forty voices composed of
students and faculty members, and a program of church hymns,
contrapuntally arranged especially for singing, was prepared. After each
hymn, Dr. J. N. Kildahl spoke briefly, touching upon the text just sung
and introducing the theme of the next. The program for that occasion

\textsuperscript{650} Shaw, \textit{The St. Olaf Choir: A Narrative}, 6, 97, 107.

\textsuperscript{651} Two of F. Melius Christiansen’s most beloved choral works, “Beautiful Saviour”
and “O Bread of Life,” are examples of his “developed chorales.” That concept is a free form of
“chorale composition” that tends to develop the cantus firmus harmonically in an
extemporaneous Romantic style rather than following Baroque chorale prelude form.
was printed in pamphlet form under the title En sanggudstjeneste (A Song Service). The very next year, 1908, he undertook another experiment. He trained a mixed octette which toured Minnesota and neighboring states during summer vacation and sang a program of hymns, many of them taken from Song Services 1, 2, and 3.  

From 1907 to 1916, Christiansen’s chorus presented Sang-gudstjenester, or “Song Services,” in collaboration with President Kildahl, who sometimes also served as a clergyman for St. John’s Church. These consisted of short religious talks by Kildahl, several paragraphs in length, plus Lutheran chorales harmonized by Christiansen in alternation with the speeches. The Song Services were offered at St. John’s Lutheran Church and at other Protestant churches in Northfield. Seven different Song Services were created during that period.  

Christiansen’s “developed chorals” did not appear until the second service in 1908. In the seven song services put on by Christiansen and Kildahl, 


654. Paul Maurice Glasoe, “A Singing Church.” The services were presented in 1907, 1908, 1910, 1913 (2), 1914, and 1916.

forty-six choral works were represented, eighteen of which were developed chorales. All were published as part of Augsburg’s St. Olaf Choir Series. The song services represented a fusion of church service and concert and a step in the evolution of a church choir to a concert choir. In 1911, the St. Olaf’s student newspaper, the Manitou Messenger, recorded an account of the first such “sacred concert” of St. John’s Church Choir in a local church:

The St. John’s Church choir gave a sacred concert in the Congregational Church on Tuesday evening, Feb. 21. The choir was directed by F. Melius Christiansen, assisted by Eulalie Chenevert, organist; Adolph Olson, violin, and Oscar A Gronseth, baritone. The church was full to the doors, and every person in that large audience was given a treat of the highest order. The choir is well trained and sang the various numbers with much expression.

The program is included in this account and here Christiansen labeled all the choral works, including chorales, as Norwegian and German “folksongs.” Concert programs for the first tours of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir were often held in churches and took the form of sanggudstjeneste (song services).

656. Pamela Schwandt et al., Called to Serve : St. Olaf and the Vocation of a Church College (Northfield, MN: St. Olaf College, 1999), 85.

657. F. Melius Christiansen, St. Olaf Choir Series (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1919).

The College Octet

In addition to the newly gender-divided Choral Union functioning as the St. John’s Lutheran Church Choir, another St. Olaf Lutheran Choir precursor was a select group of singers called the St. Olaf College Octet (see fig. 5.7). Formed in 1908 after Christiansen’s postgraduate work in Germany (1906–07 term), the group was in existence three years before the changes to the St. John’s Church choir (which occurred in the 1910–1911 academic year). In the summer of 1908, the group toured Minnesota, South Dakota, and Iowa under his direction. Its director’s mission was to inform Norwegian Lutheran churches about their musical heritage and thereby revitalize congregational singing.

659. “Concert Marks 80th Birthday of Founder of the St. Olaf Choir,” *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune*, 8 April 1951. F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, St. Olaf College, MN.

In 1908, Christiansen took that eight-member ensemble on its first tour. Former St. Olaf student and historian Edel Ytterboe Ayers recorded that a “Song Service” format was employed for the concerts. O. I. Hertsgaard, a student who sang on tour, chronicled in the The Manitou Messenger in October 1908:

“We had sung to the people at sixty-two different places, which means that about 20,000 people had heard our stately old chorals [sic] rendered in the light of Prof. Christiansen’s interpretation, and we have reason to

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661. Photo courtesy of St. Olaf College Archives, Rolvaag Library, Northfield, MN. The first choral group Christensen took on tour. On the back of this photo Christiansen penciled “the first St. Olaf Choir.”

believe that they were edified and uplifted from having heard this music. At every place we told people what a legacy we have in our choral music.\footnote{663. O. I. Hertsgaard, “The Tour of the St. Olaf College Octet,” Manitou Messenger 22, no. 4 (October 1908): 141.}

This small singing group induced change at St. Olaf by demonstrating how successful a choir tour could be. As a result, Christiansen and the St. Olaf administration began to consider the economic possibilities of a similar tour for the newly transformed St. John’s Church Choir. Their motivation for such a tour was not entirely a musical one, because during this period the finances of the school were precarious indeed. Such a venture offered the hope of sorely needed revenue for St. Olaf.\footnote{664. It is clear from Hertsgaard’s article above that even St. Olaf students were attempting to assist their financially strapped institution. After expenses, the Octet tour contributed $400 to the school’s fund to purchase a pipe organ.}

Plans for such an event coalesced over the next three years. About the significance of the Octet, Ayers stated: “Dr. Christiansen said to my sister and my brother-in-law in my presence that he considered the St. Olaf Octet the forerunner of the St. Olaf choir.”\footnote{665. Ayers, The Old Main, Ch. 20.}

In 1911, the St. John’s Church Choir, which (from the 1910–1911 academic year) consisted of the combined male and female choruses of the St. Olaf Choral Union, gave a series of successful concerts in Northfield and the surrounding areas. St. Olaf Choir historian Eugene Simpson wrote that as late
as the concert on February 21, 1911, the group was still using the name St. John’s Church Choir. One year later, in the spring of 1912, future choir manager Paul Schmidt was encouraged by President Kildahl to make plans for a second, more extensive tour. This time the forty-five-member group journeyed from Minnesota to Eau Claire, Madison, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and to Chicago (see fig. 5.8).

Figure 5.8. The St. Olaf Lutheran Choir, 1911–12

In later years, F. Melius Christiansen was asked about the early growth of the St. Olaf Choir. In the archived papers of Paul Schmidt, an unidentified newspaper clipping contains a statement by Christiansen on that topic:

The choir just grew. Most of the children were too poor to buy band or

666. Simpson, A History of St. Olaf Choir, 76.

667. Photo courtesy of St. Olaf College Archives, St. Olaf College, MN.
orchestra instruments. The voices were there and singing didn’t cost anything. I felt that in an educational institution, its music should be educational. I felt that the literature available for choir singing was of a much higher standard than the more popular music usually employed for glee clubs.\footnote{668. Newspaper clipping, [n.t., n.d.]. P. G. Smith Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN.}

It is essential to point out that the creation of a “much higher standard” to which Christiansen referred earlier was connected with a two-year stage of “formation” between the fall of 1910, when he combined ladies and men’s choruses from the Choral Union (during the 1910–11 term), and 1912, with the presentation of that group’s first concert program (see fig. 5.7).\footnote{669. Thompson, “Significance of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir,” 31.} During this “period of formation,” the group was referred to as the St. John’s Church Choir. The changes or transformation that occurred in that two-year span established Christiansen’s much higher standard.

A Change of Title and Context

In preparation for the St. John’s Church Choir’s first tour, scheduled for the 1912 Easter recess, advertisements were sent out. The creation of these posters and signs prompted a change in the choir’s name because the group going on tour did not represent church choir members, but rather St. Olaf students. Entirely for publicity purposes, the “St. John’s Church Choir” was
renamed the “St. Olaf Lutheran Choir,” which Paul Schmidt thought more accurately represented the choir’s makeup. A college choir was born.

A Change of Program Format

The song service (sanggudstjenester) format helped propel both the Octet and the St. John’s Church Choir from their home base, taking that Norwegian service style to venues outside of Northfield. The transition from St. John’s Choir to the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir is documented in concert programs as illustrated in Figures 5.9 and 5.10.

The talks were omitted for the tour of 1912 (see fig. 5.10). From that point on, the group was no longer a church choir offering song services, primarily in churches, but rather a college choir presenting concerts in both sacred and secular settings.

670. Schmidt, My Years at St. Olaf, 56.
St. John’s College Choir Concert
February 21, 1911

1. Organ Sonata
   Allegro Maestoso
   Adagio
   Fuga

2. Chorus
   (a) Velt alle dine veie
   (b) O hoved hoit forhaanet
       German Folk Song
   (c) Cen store hvide flok
       Norwegian Folk Song
   (d) Deilig er jorden
       Melody from 12th century

3. Violin
   Romance
   Adagio

4. Chorus
   (a) Alone With Thee
       Conradi
   (b) I Know that My Redeemer Liveth
       From “Messiah” by Handel

5. Organ
   (a) Theme and Variations
       Faulkes
   (b) Invocation
       Meilly
   (c) Fanfare
       Lemmens

6. Chorus
   (a) Jeg saa ham som barn
       Norwegian Folk Song
   (b) Taenk, naar engang
       Folk Song
   (c) Det ringer
       Kjerulf
   (d) Lover den Herre
       Frankfurt, A. M. 1668

Figure 5.9. Concert by St. John’s Choir, 21 February 1911.\textsuperscript{671}

\textsuperscript{671} Concert Program St. John’s Lutheran Church Choir 21 February 1911. F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN. This concert was the last before the choir’s name change.
I.

a. Der ringes paa jord  
   [Today There is Ringing]  
   F. Melius Christiansen

b. Deilig er jorden  
   [Beautiful Saviour]  
   Melody from 12th Century

c. Lamb of God  
   A. Sodermann

d. He is Blessed  
   A. Sodermann

e. Hosanna  
   A. Sodermann

II.

a. I Know That My Redeemer Liveth  
   From Handel’s “Messiah”

b. Jeg saa ham som barn  
   [The Vision of Christ]  
   Norwegian folksong

c. O Jesus, se  
   Known from 1628

III.

a. O hoved hoit forhasnet  
   [O Sacred Head]  
   German folksong

b. Som sol gaer ned I havnet  
   [As Sinks the Sun]  
   F. Melius Christiansen

c. Det ringer fra alle taarne  
   Kjerulf

d. Loverden Herre  
   Frankfurt-a-Main 1668  
   [Praise to the Lord

Figure 5.10. St. Olaf Lutheran Choir tour program, 1912

Even though there was now a concert format, the common element was  
still the Lutheran chorale as musical subject matter. The impetus, then, for the  
tour during the 1912 Easter vacation was the same as during the Octet tour, as

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672. F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, St. Olaf College,  
Northfield, MN; and Thompson, “Significance of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir,” 31. This  
program was for the ensemble’s first tour.
reported in St. Olaf’s Viking Yearbook of 1915:

During the last few years, there has been a feeling prevalent throughout our Lutheran choir circles that our beautiful old church chorals [sic] have been sadly neglected, and something must be done to reinstate these grand old hymns into favor. It was decided, therefore, that the St. Olaf Choir should make a concert trip during the Easter vacation of 1912 to add its mite [sic] to a good cause.673

Norway: The 1913 Tour

Each year the choir’s reputation spread. At first, there were short trips in the “buggy loop” – the environs of Northfield. Gradually those trips became forays into surrounding states, with trains replacing buggies. In 1913, ten years after arriving at St. Olaf, Christiansen and his choir embarked on a transatlantic tour of Norway, their ancestral homeland, visiting Stavanger, Trondheim, Lillehammer, and Kristiana (now Oslo). About that tour, Christiansen remarked, “I would like to go there and tell them what America taught me. Norway gave me much, but America has taught me how to use it.”674 The climax of that tour was the choir’s participation in the huge anniversary festival held in the Domkirke (Cathedral) at Trondheim, with the newly crowned King Haakon, Queen, and Crown Prince of Norway present.

673. Ida Hagen, “First Tour of the St. Olaf College Choir,” in The Viking ’13 ’14 ’15 (Northfield, MN: St. Olaf College, December 1912), 150.

674. Bergmann, “Music Master of the Middle West,” 121.
The Quiet Years

In 1917, when the United States entered World War I, the Selective Service Act resulted in the conscription of 2.8 million men. Edel Ytterboe Ayers recalled, “Then came the years of the first World War, and many of the boys in the choir left school. However, we did take some trips to small towns not far away.”

From 1914 to 1919, that international conflict affected the makeup of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir. Because of the war and reduced touring during 1914, St. Olaf granted Christiansen a one-year leave of absence to write and compose. In 1915, he moved with his family to Minneapolis. For three academic years, 1916–18, choir tours were again restricted. In 1919, the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir took no tour but prepared for an extended trip to the eastern seaboard the following year.

Those quiet years gave Christiansen time to test the validity of his vocal ideas and to experiment with different voice combinations in pursuit of the tonal effects he sought. He spent many hours experimenting with a variety of voices, vocal placement, and individual personalities. Christiansen—a violinist and organist, who lacked formal training in vocal music—studied the

675. Ayers, The Old Main, Ch. 20.


677. Schmidt, My Years at St. Olaf, 122.
physics of sound, intonation, the voice, and diction. As one who learned best through experience, he explored the mechanics of producing an even-toned, well-balanced choral sound during this downtime. His writings from the late 1920s seem to reflect that period of learning.

A New York Impresario for St. Olaf

The Treaty of Versailles was signed on 28 June 1919, ending the state of war between Germany and the Allied Powers. The following month St. Olaf’s new president, Lars Boe, sent choir manager Paul Schmidt to New York to investigate possible concert venues. During that journey, Schmidt secured professional artistic management for the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir with the German-born concert manager Martin H. Hanson (1865–1931).

Throughout his career, many saw Paul Schmidt as one who approached tour planning with great shrewdness, knowledge, and information. His procurement of Hanson’s assistance and connections enabled the choir to book concerts in significant venues. St. Olaf’s new impresario, whose office was in the same Manhattan building as the National Lutheran Council, eventually managed several renowned choirs, including the Westminster Choir and Sistine Chapel Choir. St. Olaf historian Edel Ayers recalled in 1919 the

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678. Ibid.

Then came a man from New York City. His name was Mr. Hanson. We later learned that he was a professional agent and that he had powerful connections in musical circles in the East and throughout the country. The St. Olaf authorities showed great wisdom in selecting him as agent as he had entree with some of the most distinguished critics in our land. Mr. Hanson looked like a rather nervous fat man to us. He seemed jolly enough and told us to call him Papa Hanson. 

During April and May of that year, the St. Olaf Choir and its director entered a new phase of concertizing, because for the entire duration of the choir’s 1920 east coast tour, the ensemble sang exclusively under his professional management. Likely for financial reasons, two years later, in 1922, Schmidt assumed management responsibilities of the choir from Hanson.

The 1920 East Coast Tour

In 1920, the St. Olaf Choir toured the East Coast of the United States, bringing Christiansen and his ensemble before an important segment of the U.S. choral world. His manner of conducting, the group’s a cappella style of singing, and the repertoire collectively “became the prototype upon which hundreds of choral programs in schools, colleges and churches were established.”

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680. Christiansen referred to Hanson as an “impresario” in a letter to his wife Edith dated 29 March 1921.

681. Ayers, *The Old Main*, Ch. 20.

682. John K. Sherman, “Choirs Became ‘Celestial’ under Christiansen’s Hand,”
from April 1920, Christiansen listed the itinerary of his East Coast tour (see fig. 5.11).  

Chicago, Illinois  
Fort Wayne, Indiana  
Columbus, Ohio  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
Washington, D.C.  
Baltimore, Maryland  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
Brooklyn, New York  
Baltimore, Maryland  
Paterson, New Jersey  
New York, New York  
Lancaster and York, Pennsylvania  
Albany and Rochester, New York  
Youngstown, Cleveland, Akron, Canton, Springfield, Dayton, Cincinnati, and Toledo; Ohio  
Fort Wayne, Indiana  
Detroit, Michigan  
Minneapolis, Minnesota  

Figure 5.11. St. Olaf Lutheran Choir 1920 East Coast Tour, destinations in chronological order  

Minneapolis Tribune, 5 June 1955, 2.  

683. F. Melius Christiansen to Edith Christiansen, 8 and 20 April 1920, F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, Northfield, MN.  

684. F. Melius Christiansen to Edith Christiansen, April 8, 1920, F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, Northfield, MN; and F. Melius Christiansen, letter to Edith Christiansen, 16 April 1920, F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, Northfield, MN.
After that venture, the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir made annual concert trips through all geographical regions of the country. On later East Coast tours, concert locations included major venues such as Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis, Carnegie Hall in New York City, and Symphony Hall in Boston. On one occasion, the choir sang for President Herbert Hoover. In addition, occasional tours to Europe extended the reputation of the group beyond its homeland. Under his direction, the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir of sixty voices made three European tours, the first in 1913. On these excursions, the group sang for numerous dignitaries, including Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany.

St. Olaf Choir Tours–Critical Reception

Most, but not all, critical reviews of the choir by newspaper journalists from Europe and the United States during the tenure of F. Melius Christiansen were complimentary (e.g., see fig. 5.12). One not entirely favorable review was penned by Harvard-educated New York Times critic Richard Aldrich, who made a clear distinction between what he thought of the choir as opposed to his judgement of its conductor. Aldrich’s assessment of the choir was positive, praising the group’s disciplined approach and technical achievements:

It is a body of excellent material, well balanced and trained to a high degree of finish in enunciation, attack and release, phrasing and dynamic shading. It sings with remarkable flexibility under the conductor’s beat;

there is a plasticity of phrase, a subtlety of accent and rhythmic quality that are unusual, and in these respects it may be numbered among the few “virtuoso” choirs that have been heard here in recent years. Its tone is good…  

Examples of Press Reviews of Christiansen and the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir before 1921

Only from the Bach Choir of Bethlehem and the Mendelssohn Choir of Toronto have New Yorkers in the past fifteen years heard choral singing as surprisingly fine as that provided by the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir. There were moments when it equaled in point of sheer facility the best that either of the older organizations have ever done here and seemed virtually to establish a new local record for flawless finish of unaccompanied song.  

It is a group of young people, all of them letter-perfect, pitch-perfect, tone-perfect, text-perfect in the most difficult classic choral music, singing absolutely from memory and without accompaniment, even without the opening assurance of the diapason or tuning fork. Their director, Mr. Christiansen, gets effects unlike those produced by any other like organization heard in these parts. The pianissimo is of wonderful tenuity, fine-spun as silk, yet never lacking in musical quality. Their dynamics are their own and the ensemble effects quite flawless. Their concert was one of the rarest expositions of the superlative in choral singing.

Today Dr. Christiansen’s chorus is comparable to Stokowski’s orchestra. It discovers new tonal worlds, new acoustic experiences. It creates illusions, comparable to those wrought by Stokowski’s hidden strings; echoes, faint reverberations that seem as remote as interstellar space.

The choir numbers fifty-two voices, exquisitely balanced, fresh and euphonious in quality. In Mendelssohn’s Savior of Sinners and Gretchaninoff’s O God, hear my prayer, we were made to marvel at the ability of the choir; and there was ravishing beauty in an anthem by a modern composer, Lindeman, with its suggestion of bell chimes.


687. H.F.P, “St. Olaf Sets New Choral Record,” Musical America, 8 May 1920; and F. Melius Christiansen to Edith Christiansen, April 28, 1920, F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, Northfield, MN.

688. Herman Devries, Chicago Herald Examiner, [n.d.], St. Olaf College Archives, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN.


Fig. 5.12 (continued).

Like the life-restoring breeze from the Northwest that sweeps over New York at the close of a suffocating August day, the St. Olaf Choir descended upon us at a concert in Carnegie Hall and bestowed upon us in the overwrought, dying music season a benison of song. The half a hundred voices gave an impressive exhibition of choral singing.  

Figure 5.12. Examples of press reviews of Christiansen and the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir before 1921

However, Aldrich criticized Christiansen for “occasional defective taste and knowledge” and for using rapid tempi in the “wrong places.” Furthermore, the esteemed Manhattan critic was not impressed with the St. Olaf conductor’s compositional efforts, criticizing scalar passages in his motet “Praise to the Lord” as senseless. That composition, based on the 1680 chorale Lobe den Herren, seems to have been patterned upon one of the Six Motets of J. S. Bach (BWV 225–230), as evidenced by similar florid sixteenth note passages. While Christiansen attempted to highlight the coloratura skills of his sopranos, Aldrich thought the effort lacked the inspiration of its Baroque model. In a letter to Edith, Christensen acknowledged circumspectly that Aldrich’s opinion might indeed be correct: “Critics in New York are divided as to the singing of the choir. Some say it is the best ever heard in New York and some say that

Archives, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN.

691. Sylvester Rawlings, New York Evening World, ca. 1920, St. Olaf College Archives, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN.
director Christiansen had misconceptions which of course may be true.  

The Genesis of Christiansen’s Choral Aesthetic

Discerning Christiansen’s choral aesthetic is critically important because of two questions. First, was his career in American choral music original or in large part derivative? In other words, was he truly a pioneer or one who simply copied another aesthetic? Second, considering the influence of Christiansen, was the genesis of cultivated choral tone in America also in large part derivative or the work of original thinkers? An exploration of Christiansen’s choral aesthetic reveals three aspects of the topic: much conjecture, testimony of a best friend, and a lifelong reticence on the part of the conductor. What is hypothesized here is that Christiansen had choral models and deep inspirations, but chose not to discuss, apparently under any circumstances, what they were. Two possibilities arise with regard to the last statement: first, that he believed it was to his advantage to frame his choral music making as entirely original; and/or second, that no one ever asked Christiansen about this aspect of his work. Coherence refers to a consistent and overarching explanation for all facts. The problem with discerning Christiansen’s choral aesthetics is that empirical facts are scarce. A simultaneous examination of the three facets of the topic (listed above) may help readers move from assumptions

692. F. Melius Christiansen to Edith Christiansen, 28 April 1920.
toward coherence, in part by an examination of the consistency of all elements of this equation.

Soon after he returned from Leipzig, Christiansen made sweeping changes in his Northfield church choir and the result was senza vibrato singing by young female voices and some more challenging repertoire he had heard abroad, according to his friend Paul Schmidt.\(^6^9^3\) The context of those events has led to the hypothesis that the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir was born out of a choral aesthetic Christiansen internalized while observing Gustav Schreck’s choir at St. the Thomaskirche in Leipzig. In 1962, music educator Leonard Van Camp interviewed Christiansen’s two sons, Olaf and Paul, both of whom had enjoyed careers as renowned college choral conductors. Referring to those sessions, that author recalled:

> Both of the sons of F. Melius felt that the most important reason which caused him to form the choir and to insist that the singing be unaccompanied was that he had been impressed by the St. Thomas Choir in Leipzig. Each son stated the belief that his father consciously or unconsciously was striving for a similar sound—the sound of men and young boys singing without accompaniment.\(^6^9^4\)

It is important to note that both sons provided their opinions on the subject rather than concrete information from their father. Schmidt also offered his

\(^6^9^3\). Schmidt, *My Years at St. Olaf*, 55–56.

opinion, some twelve years after Christiansen’s death, about the impact of Schreck’s choir on Christiansen: “There is no doubt that the association with Schreck and his choir was a real inspiration to him and had much to do with his success as choir director and composer in America.”

Further, while discussing the choir’s 1930 trip to Europe, Schmidt made a comment of related interest:

Dr. Christiansen often told me, as he no doubt has told others, what a profound influence Schreck and the singers of his choir had had on him, and how he had decided to try to bring to America some of the choir essentials and ideals he had absorbed there during those rehearsals.

When Schmidt wrote, “as he no doubt has told others,” he again implied that the specific “choir essentials and ideals” Christiansen gleaned from Schreck’s work with his choir in Leipzig were the subject of later discussions with others. Historical evidence suggests the opposite: that other than Paul Schmidt, apparently he did not tell anyone, including his own family, anything about what he gleaned from Schreck or the St. Thomas Choir, other than that he heard them on a regular basis. Even Leola Bergmann, who interviewed Christiansen for many hours for her biography, did not pose questions about choral aesthetics. Her biography of Christiansen does not discuss the topic of choral models, takes an entirely positive stance, and posits his choral work as

695. Schmidt, My Years at St. Olaf, 119.

696. Ibid., 94.
completely original.

Even individuals who inhabited the same house with Christiansen could only suggest by way of their personal opinions, but could not confirm their father’s choral ideals. For example, Paul Christiansen, his youngest son and well-known conductor of the Concordia College Choir, wrote:

My father studied at Leipzig, Germany, in the early 1900’s. He studied chiefly violin at the conservatory. Every week, in addition, he stopped at the St. Thomas Church to hear the famous boys’ choir. Often they sang Bach motets. When F. Melius returned to Minnesota to direct the choir at St. Olaf he must have carried back with him the choral sounds of St. Thomas Church. His St. Olaf choirs used the same thin soprano tone, typical of a boys choir in Germany. Although in later years his soprano voices became more full and mature, my father’s conception of choral singing was essentially that which he heard at Leipzig. I remember this sound—the thin, straight tone—from early years at home. I remember hearing it at concerts, at Christmas concerts, when singers came to our house to try out for the choir.

Paul was interviewed again on July 12, 1982, in Moorhead, Minnesota. He stated, “In 1938, I heard the [St. Olaf Lutheran] Choir which I had not heard for a few years. “I was surprised by the lush, rich alto section. Earlier my father was interested in the boys’ choir sound, particularly in the sopranos, from his Leipzig years. By ’38 he had forgotten about the boys’ choir sound.”

697. Paul J. Christiansen, “Story C: The Concordia Choir – Informational,” [n.d.]. F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN. Paul Christiansen’s comments about “thin” tone is his own description of how he heard the sound of boys vs. the sound of adult women singing.

Christiansen’s comments project distance between the father’s work and his son’s perception of it. He confirmed that his statements were also speculative because of the phrase “must have carried back with him,” indicating that he could not definitely confirm these ideas. Paul knew that his father had been in Leipzig and heard Gustav Schreck’s choir repeatedly. He did not know how that experience affected his father internally. He could not verify, but rather assumed, that this German ensemble was his father’s choral model.

What drew F. Melius Christiansen to St. Thomas Church on a weekly basis to hear the choir of boys and men? When in 1996 Gregory J. Aune interviewed eleven notable choral directors associated with the Christiansen School, he reported, “Without exception each agreed that the development of the St. Olaf sound was primarily influenced by Christiansen’s experiences in Leipzig studying with Gustav Schreck. Several conductors mentioned the Männerchor tradition of Leipzig.”\(^\text{699}\) However, importantly, none of these conductors demonstrated any empirical evidence for their comments. Later, in a cogent review of the choir’s tour to Leipzig in 1930, an assessment outside the chronological limits of this study, Professor Wilhelm Jung in a German newspaper review attributed the choral sound to Christiansen’s study with

Gustav Schreck. Data confirming this study’s position that Christiansen was completely silent on this topic comes from his former student and close friend Carl O. Thompson, who recalled, “We sang as we were told; F.M. did not communicate his techniques with us.”

Twenty years after Schmidt published his book entitled My Years at St. Olaf, Anton Armstrong, conductor of the St. Olaf Choir since 1990, wrote in his 1987 doctoral dissertation about the evolution of the St. Olaf Choir:

It is strongly believed that F. Melius Christiansen not only brought back the stringent rehearsal techniques and musical standards of Schreck’s ensemble, but their concept of sound. It is this sound of men and boys that many have alleged Christiansen was trying to recreate with the young women and men of the St. Olaf Choir. This would further explain his striving for use of a minimum of vibrato [called tremolo by Christiansen] in the female voices, for this sound would more closely match the quality of the boys’ timbre. The reedy tone which he desired is characteristic of the German and continental approach to the training of the boy’s voice.

While Armstrong’s statement makes sense, because of Christiansen’s reticence about the subject, it too lies within the realm of informed conjecture, which appears to have been status quo with regard to this subject. It is critical to note


that his best friend Paul Schmidt’s testimony cited above is the only source that confirms this idea by restating what Christiansen discussed with him. Because of that direct linkage to Christiansen, it is considered here, along with an attendant body of highly consistent speculation, to be sufficient evidence to support the idea that this hypothesis is correct.703

Recording the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir

Archival and discographic evidence indicates that the earliest recordings of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir occurred in 1920. In his 1992 dissertation on choral recordings as history, Alan Wayne Miller suggests otherwise, writing, “St. Olaf’s first commercial recording was made in 1921.704 However, a private letter from Christiansen, writing from Philadelphia on 21 April 1920, to his wife Edith in Northfield, stated, “…. the choir will sing for the Victor [sic] at 10:30 across the Delaware River at a place called Camden, New Jersey. This may take

703. In his book My Years at St. Olaf, Paul Schmidt confirms the close friendship that Christiansen and Schmidt shared with his account of his assistance with a personal health issue. At Christiansen’s request (at an age of more than seventy-five years), and after the death of his wife Edith, Schmidt accompanied Christiansen to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota for examinations for a health concern. Schmidt wrote, “Early the next morning he called me by phone and asked me to take him to the clinic in Rochester, Minnesota as he had had a bad night. This I did and at his request remained with him during his examinations by the physicians. He later underwent an operation from which, I am glad to say, he made a splendid recovery.” Schmidt, My Years at St. Olaf, 121.

That letter confirms that during the choir’s 1920 East Coast tour, Christiansen and his choir began recording commercially with Victor Recordings. The *Encyclopedic Discography of Victor Recordings* also lists the date of this first recording as 21 April 1920.

St. Olaf’s initial choir recordings may have been made to generate extra funds for the small college. According to Miller, their first 78-rpm recording was with Victor Red Seal Records. These recordings might also have been arranged by Martin Hansen (the choir’s East Coast manager) to capitalize on interest generated in the group in locales that the choir visited on its 1920 tour. On that early disc, the choir recorded the German Lutheran chorale “A Mighty Fortress” (see fig. 5.13).

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705. F. Melius Christiansen to Edith Christiansen, 21 August 1920. F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN.

706. Samuel Brylawski, ed., *Encyclopedic Discography of Victor Recordings*, Regents of the University of California, accessed 16 April 2013, http://victor.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/talent/detail/21192/St_Olaf_Choir_St_Olaf_College_Vocal_group. Christiansen’s first recordings were destroyed because he was not pleased with them. Therefore, they are not contained in the printed version of this discography, but are displayed in gray type in the online archives of the discography, indicating that they were recorded but subsequently destroyed.

707. The choir made enough money on its long, multi-stop choir tours to construct a concert hall in 1926 (known as Old Music Hall), and St. Olaf’s Music Hall in 1947, a four-story gothic structure devoted to music. The building was completed in 1950, three years after F. Melius Christiansen’s retirement as director of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Matrix No.</th>
<th>First Recording Date</th>
<th>Primary Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B-23949</td>
<td>21/4/1920</td>
<td>A Mighty Fortress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-23950</td>
<td>21/4/1920</td>
<td>Beautiful Savior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-23951</td>
<td>21/4/1920</td>
<td>Hosanna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-23952</td>
<td>21/4/1920</td>
<td>Ave Maris Stella</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23955</td>
<td>21/4/1920</td>
<td>Day-Spring of Eternity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.13. Earliest Victor recordings of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir from the *Encyclopedic Discography of Victor Recordings* (EDVR).^{709}

The record was produced on a Victor mechanical phonograph using an acoustically recorded disc. The recording was done in a vacant church building in Camden, New Jersey, that was used by Victor as a kind of early “recording studio.” Since electric microphones did not enter the recording world until 1925, large megaphones, called recording horns, were employed to enhance the singers’ voices.^{710} They focused choir voices toward a vibrating diaphragm that etched a wax-coated disc or matrix. The ensemble of fifty-two singers had to be reduced to twenty-eight for the recording to fit around the recording horns.^{711} The first four “takes” made in Camden were destroyed. The archive lists twelve recordings made by the choir from 1920 through 1927 (five initial recordings

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710. Miller, “Choral Recordings as History,” 141–43.

711. Ibid.
are listed in fig. 5.13.\textsuperscript{712} Those Victor recordings of the choir were made for hand-crank “Victrola” phonographs.

The fidelity of the 1920 acoustic recordings was so unlike the sound actually produced in the studio that Christiansen was unhappy with the results. Miller wrote that after the first recordings, Christiansen “simply refused to record anymore” and made no more recordings for twenty years.\textsuperscript{713} The St. Olaf Lutheran Choir was among the many classical artists and ensembles recorded by the Victor Company from 1919 to 1922, including performances by Arturo Toscanini and the Sistine Chapel Choir.

\textbf{Approach to Choral Programming}

Christiansen did not believe that stringent rules were helpful for choosing choral repertoire. He thought that various factors such as the size, ability, and general standard of the ensemble as well as the level of appreciation of the audience should be considered. In his opinion, strict regulations prevented choral choices from being tailored to the ensemble singing it. He believed that only choirs with more than fifty voices should sing large oratorios, while smaller choirs should confine themselves to smaller lyrical forms.\textsuperscript{714}

Christiansen used subjective artistic criticism when choosing choral

\textsuperscript{712} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{713} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{714} Christiansen, \textit{School of Choir Singing}, 63.
repertoire, and recommended that others judge choral music by their own personal aesthetic and musical standards. He deplored music lacking artisanship and/or music created for a quick sale; and he believed that choirs should elevate the taste of the public by singing music he deemed to be of “high quality.” “Low grade compositions” were never part of his choral efforts.

Christiansen supported the use of inspired choral music composed by classically trained musicians.

In his essay entitled “The Importance of Singing Good Music,” Christiansen explored what makes choral music worthy or unworthy of the time and attention of choral directors, choirs, and audiences. His language and thought was reminiscent of Lowell Mason campaigning decades earlier for “scientific” or “better” music, as he categorized choral compositions according to non-exact idiosyncratic polarities: good and bad, acceptable and unacceptable, worthy and unworthy. He even used social class as a metaphor in his short Choir Director’s Guide from 1940, writing of a “better class of music” as opposed to “floods of trash.”

Foremost in his selection of repertory was the consideration of the quality of the music and text. Next, he expected that a conductor would acquire

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715. Ibid.

a thorough knowledge of the score and analyze its inner meaning prior to rehearsals. He stated, “Music must be chosen for its potential inspiration and beauty; choral singing is something to be cherished, to provide singers and audiences with lasting memories of their participation in artistic enterprise and to give them a lasting love for the choral art.”

Christiansen’s concept of musical taste involved the idea that music could influence those who associated with it. For him, musical compositions almost metaphorically represented individuals in association with other individuals. He believed that a second-rate composition was to be avoided because it could “rub off” on those who had contact with it. In other words, musicians were influenced by the “musical company” (repertoire) they keep. Taste was not simply the result of scope, or a wide exposure to diverse musics. Good taste in music was acquired by exposure to “worthy repertoire.” Thus, “growth in taste and better singing” meant alignment with “better music.” “Cheap music” represented the attributes listed in fig. 5.14. By contrast, good repertoire included the opposite of all these characteristics plus some additional features specific to choral music (see fig. 5.14). With the exception of lack of symmetry, all the characteristics of both “cheap music” and “good

music” were both individual and non-specific. By the end of the decade of the 1920s, the use of such descriptors seems to have increased in frequency in music journals. For example, the 1929 Proceedings of the Music Supervisor’s National Conference contained twenty-two references to “cheap music.”

718. F. Melius Christiansen, “Attitude of the Director Toward the Composer: Personal Opinion,” in Harold Decker Papers, Box 1: Series 1: Early Education, American Choral Directors Association Archives (Oklahoma City, OK: [ca. 1937]), p. 11. Handwritten and typewritten manuscripts. Christiansen wrote this at St. Olaf College on St. Olaf College Stationary, as he commonly did with other lectures now housed in the F. Melius Christiansen Papers in the Archives of St. Olaf College, Rolvaag Library, Northfield, MN. The signature is not F. Melius Christiansen’s. The essay contains a section entitled “Good Music” (p. 11); Christiansen, School of Choir Singing, 63. Here Christiansen instructs choir directors to avoid “cheap anthems” that are “made for quick sale.” He insists that “cheap music has the tendency to tear down and pollute taste,” and argues that “music counters all over are heaped with stuff that is simply ‘manufactured’ for commercial purposes.” He writes that the compilers of his Choir Directors Guide “went through two thousand anthems at one time and found only about fifty that had any special character, and less than half a dozen that were real gems.”

Cheap Music

it tears down and pollutes taste
only meager results are possible
money, not artistry, is the sole motive
it does not have “grip”
it is crudely composed
lacks a “growing purpose”
illogical form with no unity
lacking in symmetry
can be sentimental and thus ignoble and superficial
does not stand up to repetition
does not grow with use
demoralizes the sense of appreciation
diminishes sense of values
it is characterless
rambles without theme and coherence

Good Music

rarity, uncommonness
it impresses us in repetition
unity of text and music
encompasses impelling ideas
increases taste by association

Figure 5.14. Attributes of “Good Music” and “Cheap Music” according to Christiansen

Included in his category of good music was the folk song, which he believed was the simplest and most beautiful choral form. One characteristic of choir literature that impressed Christiansen was brevity. His maxim, “There is beauty in brevity,” possibly originating with Gustav Schreck, was often passed

720. Ibid., 5–8.
along to his students. He was obsessive about the length of individual compositions and of groups of compositions when programming concert repertoire. He designed programs so audiences would leave the concert hall wishing for more.\textsuperscript{721}

Potential choral literature had to meet six requirements to qualify as performance-worthy for Christiansen’s ensemble. First, a composition must be “good music” according the characteristics listed in Figure 14. Second, “correct choral construction” was required. While he was not specific about the definition of this term, it may have meant obeying theoretical norms (rules of counterpoint, harmony, rhythm, and duration) of the Common Practice Period (1600–1800). Third, the composition needed to be an honest expression of human feeling, expressing the composer’s soul, not his taste. His fifth and sixth requirements were framed as questions: Must the music and/or text be revised or arranged, and were the tonal contours of the piece separated from the text?\textsuperscript{722}

Three overarching considerations molded the design of Christiansen’s choral programs.\textsuperscript{723} As features of good music, the sequence of ideas in a work was required to exhibit a certain level of refinement. Next, the progression of

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{721} Willis H. Miller, “Memories of a Choir Member” (newspaper clipping from River Falls, WI), \textit{The Hudson Star Observer}, n.d. June 1955, F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN.
\textsuperscript{722} Johnson, “The Christiansen Choral Tradition,” 179-82.
\textsuperscript{723} Ibid.
\end{footnote}
musical form had to be effective. Finally, the consequent psychological effect on both singers and listeners was sensed. While most of his ideas about programming were written down after 1920, programs before that date that demonstrated those concepts suggest that his methodology was formed earlier, and, in the case of program design, according to a tripartite scheme (see fig. 5.15).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group I</th>
<th>Group II</th>
<th>Group III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Short majestic open</td>
<td>1. Strong objective</td>
<td>1. Lyric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The heaviest and longest</td>
<td>2. Lyric</td>
<td>2. Light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A smaller lyric</td>
<td>3. Lyric</td>
<td>3. Lighter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.15. Christiansen’s tripartite design for program-making.\textsuperscript{724}

Christiansen’s knowledge of music repertoire was magnified during his first period of study in Germany, when he enrolled in a class taught by the well-known musicologist Hermann Kretschmar (1848–1924).\textsuperscript{725} That experience may have promoted Christiansen’s inclusion of historical works when programming for the St. Olaf Lutheran College Choir. However, throughout his career, his

\textsuperscript{724} Ibid., 220–22.

\textsuperscript{725} Ibid., 83.
personal tastes and biases also meant the exclusion of some schools of choral
literature (English as well as Renaissance choral works for example). Those
preferences were expressed as choices during summer choir tours and
vacations when Christiansen researched and acquired choral music for his
ensemble.

Christiansen and Russian Orthodox Choral Music

Like his colleague Peter Lutkin at Northwestern University, Christiansen
programmed Russian Orthodox liturgical music for concert tours on a regular
basis. In 1916, while on leave from St. Olaf College during World War I, he
traveled to New York City to search for choral repertoire and visit music
publishers. In a letter to his wife from Manhattan, he described hearing
Russian choral music at St. Thomas Episcopal Church on Fifth Avenue. That
newly constructed edifice, only three years old at the time, had a men and boys’
choir in the English tradition directed by T. Tertius Noble, a renowned former
organist of both York Minster and Ely Cathedral in Britain. Noble had been in
the U.S. for only three years when Christiansen heard his choir. By no means
an anglophile, the St. Olaf conductor acknowledged the choir’s fine
performance, writing his wife Edith in Northfield, “...found in the paper about
a service to be given at four o’clock in another Episcopal Church on the famous
5th Ave. where all the rich people live. I wanted to go to that church because
they advertised Russian Choir music. The choir was good…”

Robert Addison Reid wrote about F. Melius Christiansen’s use of Russian choral music on St. Olaf Lutheran Choir concert programs in his 1983 doctoral dissertation on that choral genre’s place in what Reid called an “American A Cappella Movement.” The author concluded:

> It is evident, though, that F. Melius Christiansen rightly deserves the title, “pioneer of the a cappella choir,” and that his inclusion of Russian sacred choral music in the repertoire of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir greatly influenced its assimilation into the mainstream of American musical life.

Before 1915, the repertoire of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir consisted primarily of works by German and Scandinavian composers, together with Christiansen’s own compositions. It was not until his WWI sabbatical in Minneapolis, 1915–16, that Professor J. Jorgen Thompson, Christiansen’s substitute, introduced Russian literature into the repertoire of that ensemble. During that season, four Russian choral pieces were listed: O Praise Ye the Lord (Arensky), Cherubim Song (Glinka), Christmas Song (Rimsky-Korsakov), and The Nightingale (Tchaikovsky). Thereafter, from 1917 until his retirement

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726. F. Melius to Edith Christiansen, 9 April 1916, New York City, F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN.


728. No concert tour occurred in the 1915–16 school year; however, repertoire can be ascertained from the choir’s annual Christmas program that took place on 19 December 1915 in
In 1943, Christiansen programmed Russian choral works (see fig. 5.16).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Composer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>How Blest Are They</td>
<td>Tchaikovsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Cherubim Song</td>
<td>Glinka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Christmas Song</td>
<td>Rimsky-Korsakov</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>O Praise Ye</td>
<td>Arensky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>O God Hear My Prayer</td>
<td>Grechaninov</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.16. Russian Choral Music sung by the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir, 1917–20

Reid proposed that he deserves recognition because he not only introduced Russian choral repertoire in the United States, but also performed it repeatedly in English over many years. As one who spent much time weekly in J. S. Bach’s workplace, the Thomaskirche in Leipzig, Christiansen had a special interest in performing Bach’s choral music, especially his motets. Like his performance of Russian works, Christiansen chose to have his choir perform J. S. Bach’s motets in English translation. For example, his 1920 East Coast tour program included a double choir motet entitled “Blessing, Glory, and Wisdom.”

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Hoyne Memorial Chapel at St. Olaf College. Program in St. Olaf College Archives, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN, v. 29, #7, p. 315, 1915–16, pp. 1–16.

attributed at the time to J. S. Bach.\textsuperscript{730} He also performed other music by German composers such as Nicolai, Mendelssohn, and his teacher Gustav Schreck.\textsuperscript{731}

Sacred Choral Music: A Change of Venue

Christiansen’s third successor, Anton Armstrong, suggested that his predecessor’s chief contribution was the transitioning of religious choral music from the church to the concert hall. In the nineteenth century, new performance spaces were being built throughout Europe as well as in the United States to accommodate the larger musical forces of that period.

Christiansen watched his mentor Gustav Schreck periodically relocate the choir of St. Thomas Church in Leipzig onto concert stages to perform works with orchestra.\textsuperscript{732} In addition to a shift from sacred to secular venues, Christiansen introduced new music from the Western and Eastern musical canons to choral singers, directors, and audiences. Because he was widely copied, that expansion

\textsuperscript{730} This work was incorrectly ascribed to J. S. Bach in 1819 (BWV Anh. III 162). The work, \textit{Lob und Ehre und Weisheit und Dank}, is believed to have been composed by Georg Gottfried Wagner (1698–1756), a singer in the Thomascor from age 25–28 under Bach. Originally conceived for double chorus, the choral first section alternates the larger group with a quartet before resolving into an intricate fugue on “Allelujah, Amen.” The text is from “Revelation” and the “Psalms.”

\textsuperscript{731} Gustav Schreck’s “Advent Motet” remains on St. Olaf Choir concert programs.

\textsuperscript{732} In this he followed the example of his counterpoint professor Gustav Schreck, Cantor of the Thomaskirche and music faculty member at the Leipzig Konservatorium. None of this is to suggest that Christiansen and the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir never performed in churches.
encouraged a broadening of choral scope in both American music education and American sacred music, as Armstrong explained:

One of Christiansen’s greatest contributions to the choral art was his programming of sacred choral music for the concert hall. Previously, much of the repertoire of collegiate choral ensembles consisted of second-rate, glee-club songs. Christiansen’s programming of nineteenth-century unaccompanied choral works of the German and Russian schools as well as the motets of J. S. Bach was an important addition to the choral concert repertoire of the day. This rebirth of sacred choral literature not only served as a catalyst for the development of accompanied school and college ensembles but also fostered the growth of volunteer church choirs in the middle decades of this century.  

F. Melius Christiansen and *A Cappella* Choral Music

Like the *Cappella Sistina* more than two centuries prior, historical evidence suggests that the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir was an unaccompanied ensemble from the outset. Oscar A. Overby, a St. Olaf chorister under Christiansen and later a St. Olaf professor, believed that the Nordic director’s choice of *a cappella* singing as a means of choral expression was a result of experimentation. It was Overby’s opinion that Gustav Schreck’s influence “helped materially in formulating his philosophy and musical style.” However, Overby stated in a 1951 tribute, “...the a cappella choir idiom for which Dr. Christiansen is so well known was hardly a direct result of contacts with


Schreck, as often is contended, but was rather the product of his own progressive experimentation.”

Overby, a member of the St. Olaf music faculty member for twenty-one years after his graduation in 1921, did not offer any evidence for his claim. He and his wife, the well-known St. Olaf Choir soprano soloist Gertrude Boe, were dear friends of the conductor. Overby’s name does not appear on any St. Olaf Lutheran Choir roster from the choir’s genesis through the 1920–21 academic year. His wife’s name appeared for the first time in that year and his tribute was written 30 years after his graduation from St. Olaf Lutheran College.

Professor Overby did not explain when or how “progressive experimentation” occurred. All historical data examined for this study indicated that, from its very beginning in 1912 (approximately six years before the arrival of Oscar Overby) the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir (in the form of the combined Ladies and Men’s choruses from the St. Olaf Choral Union) always sang without accompaniment. Data from the period indicates that Christiansen’s reconfiguration of the St. John’s Choir was for singing more challenging repertoire without accompaniment. Furthermore, Overby’s comments contradict those of F. Melius’s two sons and those of Christiansen’s closest friend, Professor P. G. Schmidt, who was an expert on the choir’s history, a

735. Ibid.
chorister in the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir, and the choir’s manager during Christensen’s entire tenure with the choir and beyond. The writings of Christiansen’s biographer, Leola Bergmann, and St. Olaf Choir historian Eugene Simpson also does not support Overby’s claim. Also, Overby was not with Christiansen in Germany and did not witness any of his European experiences.

Moreover, Christiansen explained that he used *a cappella* singing for explicit reasons. In his *Choir Director's Guide* from 1940, he cited choral independence, tone production, and enunciation as part of his rationale.\(^{736}\) For Christiansen, unaccompanied singing promoted better habits of singing. He also mentioned the awareness of intonation and balance as important factors. Christiansen did not refer to any kind of progressive experimentation when he wrote:

> This word “a capella” means choir singing without instrumental accompaniment. When a choir sings continually with instrumental accompaniment, it is certain to get into bad habits. The members become dependent instead of independent singers. They will not feel the necessity of learning their parts well enough to be independent of the accompaniment. They will not be careful about tone production or enunciation. They will not pay much attention to intonation and balance of chords. They will hang their voices on the organ and follow the leadership of that instrument as best they can. This is putting things upside down. The choir should be the leader, as in solo singing, and the accompaniment—when such is used—should be following the singing of the choir.

\(^{736}\) Christiansen, *Choir Director's Guide*, 17.
An accompaniment is never to take the leadership when the choir is singing. In singing a capella [sic] the choir must of necessity develop better habits of singing. There is nothing to hide its faults, hence the faults must be eradicated and thus improve the singing of the choir. Practice a capella [sic] singing.\textsuperscript{737}

Christiansen believed that pitch and shading were both impaired by singing with accompaniment. He reiterated that the independence of choirs could be weakened by constantly singing with accompaniment, both warning and encouraging American choral directors:

Don’t use accompaniment when the choir can sing alone. Every choir can learn to sing A Capella [sic]. The best results like intonation and fine shading are greatly impaired by the instrument. This is one big reason why choirs show so little progress. There is not much you can do with a choir that cannot stand on its own feet. Moreover, the effects that characterize the singing of the better choir are so fine and subtle that no director can produce them from the organ box, or under the barrages of an accompanist. It is far better to sing a simple song A Capella [sic] than to attempt a grandioso [sic] with the organ and get results more akin to noise than to art.\textsuperscript{738}

Anton Armstrong suggested that motivations other than aesthetic ones prompted Christiansen to program \textit{a cappella} music.\textsuperscript{739} Music historian J. David Holdhusen paraphrased Armstrong’s rationale in his 2007 dissertation on the history of the Gustavus College Choir:

\textsuperscript{737} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{738} Ibid., 13.

\textsuperscript{739} Armstrong, “The Musical Legacy of F. Melius Christiansen,” 11–12.
1. The small rural city of Northfield lacked skilled instrumentalists, as did St. Olaf College. On the other hand, when the choir began in 1912, St. Olaf had a preexisting resident band, which increased their skills enough for the perfectionistic Christiansen take them on tour six years prior in 1906. Before the beginning of the St. Olaf choir, Christiansen conducted instrumentally accompanied oratorios sung by the mixed voice Choral Union. Also, during the 1930’s and 40’s, as the music department evolved, instrumental music at St. Olaf became more advanced.

2. Christiansen believed it was difficult to travel with instruments on tour. While, quality keyboard instruments were not available at every performance site, at other sites fine pianos and organs might have been accessible.

3. Christiansen felt that the “developing” voices he worked with were not capable of projecting over large instrumental forces. Although, the choir did perform from time to time with the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra and many of his a cappella motets, such as Praise to the Lord require a big sound.

4. F. Melius was a proponent of a cappella singing for strengthening the skill of singers and for cultivating refinement in singing.

5. He believed that instruments could obscure nuance, whereas unaccompanied sung texts could emerge more naturally.\textsuperscript{740}

Gustav Schreck’s choir often sang \textit{a cappella} motets. The results that Schreck attained with his ensemble singing without accompaniment and the resulting aesthetic response experienced by Christiansen to that singing in Germany may have represented his most powerful inspiration—a deep motivating energy that preceded and obviated any rationale. At the same time,\footnote{740. J. David Holdhusen, “The Gustavus Choir: A 75 Year Commitment to Musical Excellence” (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 2007), 109–10.}
it is perhaps also likely that those choral experiences in Germany—a turning point—provoked critical thought about *a cappella* singing that engendered all of his resulting philosophies about it.

**Core Beliefs of F. Melius Christiansen**

Christiansen was committed to hard work, concentrated effort, and discipline. However, the elements of what has been portrayed as a demanding perfectionism were tempered by his impish and endearing sense of humor. In that respect, his faculty colleague and friend Oscar R. Overby wrote of Christiansen’s initial work with the St. Olaf Band, before his founding of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir:

> From the very first students regarded him as a beloved taskmaster, one who drove his pupils mercilessly, but who could relieve the tension at the drop of a phrase. The rigid discipline of “that violin player” was a sharp change to some of the members of his band, but to their surprise they discovered that their group was beginning to sound like a good band. Though he was a terror in the minds of his pupils, they could not help but admire and love him and his unfailing sense of humor.

> Even though Christiansen possessed no background in vocal music, and perhaps at the risk of being seen as a hypocrite, he acknowledged the necessity of understanding the science behind singing. He believed that there could be

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741. F. Melius Christiansen to Edith Christiansen, 1939, F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN.

742. Dr. Oscar R. Overby, “A Tribute to Dr. Christiansen” (Northfield, MN: St. Olaf Lutheran College, n.d.), 3. Undated memorial pamphlet, F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN.
no art without the background of scientific facts, declaring, “A person who has theoretical knowledge and technical training combined with a fine artistic taste and feeling is an artist. The two must go hand in hand. To be artistic and beautiful the singing must be disciplined.”

Despite his shortcomings concerning singing, he knew what he wanted in ensemble voice production, and through patient drill and discipline, his choirs achieved results that many judged as consummate beauty. Some who observed his choral conducting methods thought there must have been special tricks involved, but they discovered they were nothing more than “inspired drudgery.” In days before the existence of an array of group vocal techniques, problems, which might have been fixed quickly by means of training and experience, were remedied by the laborious process of repeating sections of a work until an acceptable result was achieved.

Breathing

Christiansen focused on breathing in the context of choral singing, but we have no idea about the origin of his ideas about it. We do not know whether they were learned from observing Gustav Schreck or others in Leipzig, or whether unidentified contemporaneous voice teachers at St. Olaf coached him.

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744. Ibid
on the subject. It is also possible that he studied and/or researched the subject privately, as he did during his WWI sabbatical.

Four years after he founded the St. Olaf Choir, Christiansen wrote, “To develop large lung capacity and control of breath is the principal work of the singer.” To enhance breathing he recommended relaxation. He also suggested stooping over, placing the elbows on the knees, and putting the face in the hands while singing, all aimed toward greater awareness of the breathing muscles. In addition, he recommended yelling as if at a basketball game as an exercise to improve breathing.

In 1916, Christiansen advocated costal breathing, a free expansion of the lower chest. He did not mention abdominal breathing, or a release of these muscles. He also wrote of the “diaphragm being strongly contracted.” Quoting unidentified old Italian singing masters, he wrote, “The virtuoso in breathing is nearest to the virtuoso in singing.” Christiansen taught singers to use as little air as possible. He saw the loss of air while singing as an unpleasant forfeiture of fullness and body of tone. He believed that the choral rehearsal


746. F. Melius Christiansen, n.d., p. 60. Handwritten Lecture Notes for Christiansen Summer Choral School, F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, Rolvaag Library, Northfield, MN.

747. Christiansen, *School of Choir Singing*, 60.

could incorporate opportunities for practicing breath control; one excellent application of that idea was the marking of breaths between phrases in the score.

Ensemble Singing

According to Christiansen, ensemble singing meant working toward the creation of a musical whole with functionally interdependent dimensional layers. That process was contingent upon awareness and listening, which entailed hearing not only the pitch of neighboring singers, but of other sections as well. He wanted his singers to listen to the color, size, and intensity of the sound they sang. Feeling was involved, in addition to the sensing of the pulse and tempo. When these interactive components of the choral totality functioned correctly, the singer gave him- or herself to the unity of the entire group. Christiansen explained, “A good ensemble singer assumes the responsibility of the whole without showing it. The best ensemble singer is the one who can sing the loudest without being heard.”

Music Reading

Christiansen’s sense of “absolute” or “perfect” pitch colored his ideas about music reading. He recorded his own descriptive categorization of sounds according to perceived pitches in his School of Choir Singing. For scale degrees

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749. Christiansen, School of Choir Singing, 60.
within the octave, Christiansen described experiencing the characteristics shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1. Christiansen: scale degrees and associated feelings (1916)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale Degree</th>
<th>Note in C Major Scale</th>
<th>Feeling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tonic</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>feeling of a satisfactory ending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supertonic</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>calm and peaceful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediant</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>complaining and weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subdominant</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>solemn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>feels heroic and strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submediant</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>coming from far off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading tone</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>hard and piercing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Christiansen, *School of Choir Singing*, 61.

He believed that “tone-hitting, as he called it, presented the greatest difficulty.” It is possible, and perhaps likely, that many of his ideas regarding pitch characteristics were gleaned from his studies in late nineteenth-century Germany. He suggested that these personal auditory-sensory pitch qualities, or chromae, represented an achievable technique to help choristers everywhere.751

750. Ibid.

751. The term “chroma” refers to pitch color or quality and is a psychological term with roots in renaissance choral music of the thirteenth through the sixteenth centuries. It is equivalent or analogous to “hue” in color theory. A “pitch class” refers to all pitches sharing the
The Production of Tone

Many of Christiansen’s early ideas about the production of vocal tone were published after 1920. Prior to that time, he wrote that from a physical perspective vocal tone was dependent on an open, relaxed, “loose” throat. He especially favored the “ah” vowel to achieve good tone because it required the tongue to be flat in the mouth and gave the tone free passage. He taught his singers to “feel after tone” so their mouths would feel “full of tone.”

Balance, Blend, and the Homogeneity of Sound

In 1916, Christiansen argued that no individual voice in a choir should protrude from the ensemble. The best choir singer, he noted, should be able to produce the strongest tone without drawing attention to him- or herself. Here, he linked the concepts of timbre and vowel placement with blend, writing metaphorically about the location of light and dark sound. Vowels, for example, should be in the same place, because whether dark or light tone colors were involved, most often vowels convey sung sound. He explained:

The timbre or tone color of the voice and purity of intonation are two important elements of blending quality. The form of the cavity of the mouth gives each note its special tone color. When a tone is placed too much forward, the tone is light and more difficult to blend than the same “chromae” (C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, etc.). Because chromae represent a set mathematically, the topic became part of musical set theory in the twentieth century.

752. Ibid., 59.

753. Ibid., 62.
darker tones further back. There are on the whole only the dark and the light voice, which every singer should be able to use. If the whole choir uses a dark tone color and a single individual the light, this light-colored tone will not blend. It is therefore important that all use the same color of voice.\footnote{Ibid.}

Christiansen wanted his singers to be self-referential, continually comparing their own power of tone with that of other singers and then modulating their voices in proportion to the volume of the whole. He saw his choir as a composite architectural unit with sound boundaries for each singer. A given chorister played a specific role in that overall architecture. To exceed or not meet the overall volume level would distort or diminish the ensemble blend. The sole reason for this constant monitoring was purity of choral tone. His successor, Anton Armstrong, wrote of the Christiansen era at St. Olaf: “…the battle for purity of tone was constantly being waged.”\footnote{Armstrong, “The Musical Legacy of F. Melius Christiansen,” 10.}

Christiansen had three main requisites for “pure music.” First, the tone had to be of good quality and produced by a true inner feeling. Second, it had to be in tune and accurate in pitch. Finally, it had to pulsate with a natural rhythmic feeling.\footnote{F. Melius Christiansen, “The Art of Music,” Lutheran Herald 13, no. 36 (1929): 1,271, F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN.} In addition, Christiansen required solo singers to conform to this ensemble ideal and not show off at the choir’s expense, as individual
choristers were ultimately responsible for blend.

Other problems affecting Christiansen’s concept of blend included the *meccadi voce* [sic], tremelo [sic], and sliding. Addressing the first of these, he warned that the pitch must not vary during crescendo and decrescendo. Next, it was Christiansen’s belief that what he called a “tremelo voice” would never blend. (This topic, as well as Christiansen’s recommended treatment, is discussed later.) “Sliding” was also a common fault that negatively affected blend. He encouraged his singers to feel for a harmonious bell-like quality, occurring when tones are produced with “pure intonation.”

Christiansen used a procedure to achieve optimal blend that has since been called “voice matching.” This involved the acoustical placement of voices so that a natural merger of sound occurred with no manipulation of vocal production. Choral educator and conductor Howard Swan, who studied with Christiansen, illuminated his teacher’s concept, writing:

> Blend is born when each singer succeeds in subordinating his own unique vocal quality to the emerging sound of the group. A chorus

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757. Pitch sliding here refers to portamento, a musical term describing pitch sliding from one note to another. In singing, the term has seventeenth-century provenance (*portamento della voce*) and arose initially as a way of imitating string and wind instruments with the voice. During the 1920s and 1930s it was avoided in opera because it was considered a sign of cheap sentimentalism, showiness, poor technique, and/or bad taste.

758. Ibid.

learns to sing with a beautifully blended tone quality only to the extent that each individual in the chorus consents to give up, to take out, or to submerge a measure of his own sound. So, it is that imitating, or “matching” “voice to voice” and “section to section” becomes a most important and necessary procedure.\textsuperscript{760}

Christiansen believed that he created the best possible ensemble sound by means of singer placement. At the beginning of a choir season, he listened to each new group of singers for a few rehearsals before deciding on the best physical placement for each singer.\textsuperscript{761}

He placed thin, light, even voices in the center of each section. Those singers would aid the execution of delicate passages. On either side of these lighter voices he positioned heavier ones, and then lighter ones toward the edges. This placement resulted in what might be described as a non-protruding core within the sound of a section. He called this “The Inner Choir” (see fig. 5.17). The lighter voices acted as a buffer, with the result that larger voices did not draw attention away from the musical whole. Former Christiansen chorister Carl O. Thompson recalled that there were approximately “16 to 24 singers in

\textsuperscript{760} Howard Swan, “The Development of a Choral Instrument,” in Choral Conducting a Symposium, eds. Harold A. Decker and Julius Herford (New York: Appleton Century Crofts, 1973), 20. Swan studied with Christiansen at one of his popular summer Christiansen Choral Schools. These occurred during the 1930s and 1940s and are therefore outside the chronological limits of this study.

this inner choir. Choral scholar Rachel Waniata explained the details of Christiansen’s method:

One of the methods he used to achieve blend was meticulous voice placing. He would place singers with thin, light, even voices at the center of each section. Then he would mix in singers with heavier more brilliant voices and blend them within the sound by placing a few more singers with heavier more brilliant voices and blend them within the

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762. Bergmann, “Music Master of the Middle West,” 155. The “Inner Choir” here is indicated by dotted lines. Here, a choir of sixty singers, the number in Christiansen’s St. Olaf Choir, has the light, thin voices, the Inner Choir, centrally positioned (uncircled numerals). Heavier, darker voices are circled.

sound by placing a few more singers with light voices on the outside edges. The middle group of singers was called the inner choir. This inner choir was asked to continue singing when the rest of the group was cut off in order to accomplish delicate passages with purity or to achieve a pianissimo. The sudden use of only a few singers provides beautiful contrast to the fuller sound of the entire choir.  

Christiansen believed that the conductor’s awareness of the evenness of each vocal part was critical. Christiansen considered that the outer voices in his plan were more important; hence, he could place more singers on those parts. Because tenor voices tended to protrude in choral ensembles, he used fewer tenors. For a choir of twenty-three, he recommended a choral formation of eight sopranos, five altos, four tenors, and six basses.

For Christiansen the three critical aspects of blend were timbre, or tone color, purity of intonation, and vocal placement. He taught that a forward-placed voice was more difficult to blend than a voice placed further back. He further maintained that a vocal placement yielding both light and dark tones was ideal. This mix of dark and light was the color palette of each singer. Because he believed that “no individual voice should stick out from the rest of the voices in the choir,” the challenge for Christiansen was to get all choir singers to produce the same color, light, or dark.

765. Christiansen, School of Choir Singing, 63
766. Ibid., 62.
In pursuit of absolute tonal purity, similarity of tone color in each section was Christiansen’s goal. He never put bright tones adjacent to dark tones, thin voices adjacent to heavy voices, or wide vibrato adjacent to straight tones. Because he knew exactly the type of tone color he was looking for, he was often able to preempt troublesome vocal issues in auditions. In fact, students were often surprised when Christiansen rejected voices that they considered excellent for the St. Olaf Choir. In such cases, individual tone colors, however beautiful, did not match the other voices in the different sections of the choir. Carl O. Thompson remembered:

> Since balance was of extreme importance to F. M. Christiansen, he worked on this constantly in rehearsal and in concert. We learned from him that there could not be perfect intonation if the balance of voice was imperfect. This is where F. M.’s eyes came into play. If he wanted to hear more tone from the altos, for instance, his eyes would move to that section and with a little movement of the baton, the alto tone was strengthened. He received the balance he sought. The chord came alive in all its beauty.  

In addition to constructing his “inner choir,” the placement of singers in a singing formation was a concern for Christiansen at both rehearsals and performances. Figure 5.17 illustrates his preferred arrangement for vocal divisions of an SATB choir.

The mental framework of choristers was important for Christiansen when creating vocal blend and homogeneity of sound. Singers at all ages had to

exhibit initiative, self-confidence, and the ability to work at a high level. They had to be able to forsake their personal identity in favor of collective goals. Because he believed that no voice should predominate, he valued the singers who were capable of producing the strongest tone without being heard above the rest of the choir. He had no qualms about expelling anyone who could not meet those requirements. Waniata concluded that Christiansen’s pioneering thoughts on blend could be attributed “not to specific techniques but to a frame of mind.” She continued, “This ideology is conceivably one of the reasons the choir blended so well.”

Past studies of Christiansen, including at least two doctoral dissertations written since 1990, have alluded to a similarity between his concept of the “inner choir” and the later choral technique commonly called “voice matching.” It is important to state that the inner choir and voice matching are different ideas and sometimes involve disparate aesthetic goals. Christiansen’s technique of the inner choir was entirely for the creation of a homogeneous choral sound. It was for the tempering of vocal resonance, which he felt might interfere with a very blended choral sound. For Christiansen, an entirely blended sound was a refined one. Voice matching involves the pairing of similar voice types and the placing of weak voices beside more resonant ones for the purpose of blend.

There are many later variants of the practice of voice matching. Christiansen’s pioneering contribution in this regard was to first introduce the practice of seating choristers in positions that affected choral sound. That practice of “choral seating” evolved into other voice matching techniques (outside the scope of this study), such as that of Weston Noble.

We do not know the origin of Christiansen’s concept of the “inner choir.” It is possible that the method was derivative. The author of this study, a student of the late Frauke Haussemann, a noted German vocal authority at Westminster Choir College in Princeton, New Jersey, recalls Haussemann’s use of different but related choral seating techniques. Before moving to the United States, she was associated with the noted choral conductor Dr. Wilhelm Ehmann (1904–1989), who had studied at Leipzig University and knew the choir of St. Thomas Church and its cantor well. Considering the possibility of choral seating being used in Germany at the turn of the twentieth century suggests that Christiansen’s inner choir model may have had German provenance. Did Christiansen become familiar with that practice during his student days in Germany? He may have employed it, not mentioning his source, as one of many seemingly original choral methods he developed in this country. Like a cappella singing, the notion of “choral seating” as expressed by Christiansen’s inner choir technique was new in the United States. Regardless of its origin, the
concept was not only a significant ingredient in Christiansen’s transformative choral cocktail, but also in the genesis of cultivated choral tone in America.

**Intonation and Vocal Pitch**

Throughout his career in choral music, F. Melius Christiansen was committed to improving choral intonation. Without training in singing, choral music, or choral conducting, he approached the subject as a violinist. When auditioning singers, he listened carefully to detect students who had superior abilities to sing in tune. The vocal pitch he listened for was a more precise pitch than might be heard by a singer. He tuned his choir like a string—a physical object that could be physically manipulated to a very precise vibration.

Christiansen’s perfect pitch combined with an acute sense of timbre from years of violin playing allowed him to be accurate when tuning his choir. This was significant in American choral history because up until that point, choirs in the United States had not sung in perfect tune. In a posthumous retrospective, Carl O. Thompson, chairperson of the Department of Music at Bemidji State University, explained:

> It soon became obvious to me that the singers who sang the thirds and sevenths (major scale) high were the ones he wanted for his select inner choir. Applying this principle to choral singing, the family tradition was to approach as much as possible the natural musical scale, since the tempered scale, like the one used in piano tuning, was not musically
satisfying for a finely tuned a cappella choir (A good string teacher will teach his students the same principle of high thirds and sevenths.).

Christiansen was not concerned that he approached choir intonation as a violinist and suggested that the study of a stringed instrument might be valuable to choral conductors, a cogent recommendation that has not yet been explored by American music educators and choral conductors.

According to Christiansen, basses often sing leading tones (e and b in C major) too low. In addition, the seventh of a chord is sometimes sung too low. He held that singers easily get into the habit of “leaning on” the tone of the choir instead of singing the exact pitch. He also thought the “spirit of inertia” is often the reason for the sinking of pitch and singers’ failure to adjust their voices to the proper harmonic intonation.

Perhaps alluding to the muscular control of breathing, he believed choral pitch sank during soft singing. As a result, he never allowed his choir to sing too softly. He taught that the singer must hear a tone plainly, so that it may be controlled and held in tune. By contrast, loud singing also created problems. Thus, Christiansen was a proponent of moderation and observed that a choir may sometimes rise in pitch by singing too loudly. He also associated overly

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loud singing with harshness.\textsuperscript{771}

In addition, he held that purity of intonation occurs when the sound waves of the beginning, middle, and end of the tone coincide. When chords are involved, each note of the chord consists of sound waves, which must coincide. Christiansen wanted his singers to have a vocal self-awareness of their sound, filling in their own voices in proportion to the volume of the whole. He encouraged choristers to notice the bell-like quality that occurs with pure intonation. If a \textit{messa di voce} was involved, the pitch could not change. A true enemy of pure intonation was the “tremelo voice”\textsuperscript{(sic)}, which he insisted could never blend.\textsuperscript{772} His cure was to have singers practice keeping the tone steady in the soft or medium voice. As a result, the St. Olaf Lutheran choir under F. Melius Christiansen became known for its straight-tone singing.

Another factor affecting intonation was key. He thought that changing the key to comfortably fit the tessituras of the choir sections would steer the choir away from potential problems. That tenet provided yet another rationale for choosing unaccompanied choir repertoire: the convenience of being able to transpose a work instantly:

\textsuperscript{771} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{772} Christiansen referred to vocal vibrato, which he abhorred aesthetically, as “tremelo”\textsuperscript{(spelled in this fashion). He referred to a voice with vibrato as a “tremelo voice.” The terms vibrato and tremolo are sometimes used interchangeably, although they can also be defined as separate effects with vibrato defined as a periodic variation in the pitch (frequency) of a musical note, and tremolo as a periodic variation in volume (amplitude) of a single note.
A capella [sic] singing permits a piece of music to be sung in almost any key near or around the given one. When the sopranos can not sing the high notes with comfort, the piece may be sung in a lower key, or when the basses are too light and can not reach the low notes with sonority, the pitch should be lifted a half tone or even a whole tone higher than the given key.\textsuperscript{773}

Vocal Vibrato

A chord must be in pitch; it must be in tune; it must be straight; it must be pure—and you walk in a garden. If it isn’t, you walk in mud.\textsuperscript{774}

No choral topic addressed by Christiansen drew more attention than vocal vibrato, which as the above quotation illustrates, he equated with tonal purity. He was convinced, despite complaints from the nation’s vocal pedagogues, in the correctness of his belief that phonation with vocal vibrato was not a pure sound and therefore was unacceptable in choral singing. Probably due to his early experiences hearing the straight-tone singing of German boys’ choirs, Christiansen found vocal vibrato not just theoretically, but also aesthetically displeasing and therefore intolerable. Such a tone could not be tuned properly, and it would not blend suitably in an ensemble. It was therefore undesirable and for the purposes of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir, verboten.

To understand Christiansen’s approach, several things should be noted.

\textsuperscript{773} F. Melius Christiansen, “Pitch Variations.”

\textsuperscript{774} F. Melius Christiansen quoted in Thompson, “The Significance of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir,” 65.
First, he used what may have been labeled, even by contemporaneous vocal pedagogues, as questionable terminology, referring to a vibrato that moves too fast as tremelo [sic]. This may be attributed to the fact that Christiansen, a violinist, approached the voice instrumentally. His ideas sometimes put him at odds with those trained in singing or choral music, but he was undaunted. The straight tone controversies that polarized American voice teachers in the 1930s were exacerbated by a 1932 publication by Carl Seashore. Seashore was a psychologist interested in the “nature of beauty in the vibrato” and opposed to “the thinness, rigidity, and coldness of straight tone.” Christiansen was familiar with the writings of Seashore on vibrato, but they are beyond the chronological limits of this study.

From his perspective as a violinist, tuning was problematic for singers because generally they had not learned to listen carefully to intonation. By contrast, Christiansen thought that his string playing had advanced his listening skills, and he encouraged his choirs and singers to fine-tune their listening as well. He was adamant in his belief that wide vibrato interferes with intonation because it oscillates around a pitch center. As a result, he believed that such wavering of pitch made critical judgments about tuning impossible for choir directors. Most of Christiansen’s comments about vibrato seem to

relate to female voices, though he did not exclude male voices from his preference for straight tone singing. Waniata explained:

Most notable about Christiansen’s career was that his choirs adhered to principles of pure intonation. He believed that impeccable intonation was the key to good choral singing. In fact, he thought intonation so important that he disliked the use of vibrato because it obscured the pitch. Thus his preference for straight tone singing can be explained through his view that vibrato obscures the pitch because the principal tone oscillates slightly around the chosen pitch. Christiansen called a particularly troublesome vibrato a “tremelo”[sic]. A tremelo is a vibrato that moves too fast and obscures the intended pitch. Christiansen avoided such voices and preferred his voices to be pure and unwavering.776

From Christiansen’s pool of college undergraduates, he was able to find female voices that were smaller and achieved purer intonation by way of vibrato control. Voices of this nature could more easily produce sounds similar to Gustav Schreck’s boys choir in Leipzig. Like most of the children in his teacher’s choir, these St. Olaf undergraduate women were not solo singers and most, though perhaps not all, had “underdeveloped” voices. At the end of his life, Christiansen made a critical comment that sheds light on the provenance of his earliest straight-tone work with the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir: “We revived and practiced a certain principle of ensemble singing that the world had forgotten.” He continued, “This consisted of dispensing with the tremelo [sic]

voice and singing straight tones for the purpose of good intonation. The only time Christiansen believed that vibrato was appropriate in a choral setting was in a large choir with hundreds of voices.

Diction

When you open your mouth, look out! Something is coming.

Any examination of Christiansen’s ideas about choral diction must consider his predominant goal of blended tone. In Christiansen’s St. Olaf Lutheran Choir, diction always served blend, as choral conductor Alan Zabriskie explained:

Christiansen often sacrificed clarity of text for what he considered a beautiful, blended tone by placing primary emphasis on vowels; he saw consonants as a hindrance to the pure tone. As a result, he asked the singers to sustain an open vowel sound throughout the musical line and minimize the consonants at the beginning and ending of words. This approach to diction created a characteristic covered sound that led to an unintelligibility of the text. However, this was a sacrifice that Christiansen was willing to make in order to create a blended sound.

777. Walter Monfried, [n.t.], Milwaukee Journal, n.d. 1951, F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, Rolvaag Library, Northfield, Minnesota; and “Lost Boy on Icy Bay Found World Fame Death of Christiansen, Noted Choir Director, Recalls His Arrival in State in 1888,” n.d. 1955, Unidentified newspaper clipping, F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN.

778. Bergmann, “Music Master of the Middle West,” 146.

779. F. Melius Christiansen, "Quotes from Christy” [List of Expressions by F. Melius Christiansen], n.d.,” F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, Rolvaag Library, Northfield, MN.


781. F. Melius Christiansen, "The Language in Singing," Lutheran Church Herald 13, no.
In his *School of Choir Singing*, Christiansen more specifically addressed the issue of pronunciation. He taught that the beginning student should vocalize on “ah,” “a,” “o,” and “e,” because those vowels force a singer to open the mouth. The “u” vowel should be used last. The concept of the open mouth was important to Christiansen. He recommended that when singing “e” and “a,” the “teeth should be held as far apart as possible.” Additionally, he instructed that “R’s must be trilled” and consecutive consonants should be sounded.

**Rhythm**

Like diction, rhythm was not Christiansen’s foremost concern. He wanted absolute choral unity, including rhythmic precision, and worked hard to make certain that attacks and releases were perfectly executed during a time when such precision was not common or expected in American choral performance. He once told his choir that he wanted a particular release to be “like the end of a sawed-off log! Clean!”

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782. Christiansen, *School of Choir Singing*, 60.

783. Ibid.

784. Bergmann, “Music Master of the Middle West,” 146.

785. Ibid, 136.
Once a choral piece was begun in performance, the rhythm was to function like clockwork. For example, University of Illinois choral conductor Harold Decker wrote that Christiansen “compared rhythm in an ensemble to a pocket watch; all singing parts must be sung in sync, like an hour, minute, and second hand of a timepiece.” However, he also commented that Christiansen came from a nineteenth-century Romantic context, which was reflected in the rhythm in his choral performances:

F. Melius believed that a conductor should place his own personal imprint on the music he directs, a result of his feeling for the music after preparing and becoming intimately familiar with it. Treating a phrase with rubato was not uncommon in his interpretations, whether it be an early Renaissance motet or his own composition. No doubt, this concept of the conductor’s role grew out of his roots in the Romantic period and his studies at the Leipzig Conservatory.

Instrumental Analogies for Choral Sound

Because Christiansen was a violinist and organist, he classified soprano voices in three metaphorical categories: reedy, fluty, and mixed (see fig. 5.18). Most of his soprano section was composed of small, reedy voices.

787. Ibid., 12.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choir Section</th>
<th>Instrumental Characteristics of Voices: Vocal Requirements for Choir Sections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soprano</td>
<td>Reedy: small, adaptable, pure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fluty: heavier, more brilliant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed: a combination of the above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alto</td>
<td>Cello-like: dark, rich, colorful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenor</td>
<td>Reedy: smooth, high tessitura (high A or B-flat with no falsetto)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baritone</td>
<td>Lyrical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass</td>
<td>Low Tessitura: functional low D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.18. Christiansen’s metaphorical/instrumental requirements for sections of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir

Such voices were valued for their adaptability and purity. He placed heavier, more brilliant, fluty voices between reedy ones. He preferred dark, rich, colorful voices with a cello-like sound for the alto section. Tenors, like sopranos, were usually smooth, reedy-toned voices that could sing a high A or B-flat in mixed voice without falsetto. Baritones needed to have a lyrical quality, which Christiansen tested by having prospective male participants sing a major sixth. Basses needed to have a low D “without scraping the bottom of the kettle.

Rehearsal Techniques

We work.\textsuperscript{789}

Christiansen knew exactly what he wanted and expected his ensemble to produce it. He maintained a professional distance from his students. This can be observed in archived film reels from the choir’s 1913 tour to Norway as he exhibited a strict formal demeanor, keeping to himself in the midst of students playing shuffleboard on the deck of their steamer.\textsuperscript{790} In rehearsals, although accounts suggested that he could be humorous, amusing, even impish, he sustained a relatively impersonal relationship with his choir. Carl Thompson recalled, “Choir rehearsals were all business. There was never a harsh or sarcastic word from F.M. We all had so much respect for him that we gave 100 percent during rehearsal. He knew that.”\textsuperscript{791} Historical evidence does not always support Thompson’s picture of Christiansen as perpetually gentle and kind, for there were also many reports that he was capable of high spectacle, including stinging insults and sarcasm, with both individuals and groups. Students often framed such incidents as humorous.

Christiansen wrote two books on choir directing between 1916 and 1940.

\textsuperscript{789} Thompson, “The Significance of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir,” 69.

\textsuperscript{790} “St. Olaf Lutheran Choir, 1913 Tour to Norway,” uncatalogued film reels transferred to VHS tape, St. Olaf Archives, Rolvaag Library, Northfield, MN.

\textsuperscript{791} Thompson, “Memories of F. Melius Christiansen,” 10–11, 39.
By 1940, he had developed a hierarchy of choral values that he addressed sequentially in the context of his rehearsal plans. We do not know whether such a rehearsal order was used in his earliest years with the choir, from 1913 to 1920. It is likely that during the years of World War I, Christiansen had the opportunity to contemplate and write down many ideas that later were either published or written in letters to his son Olaf. Some later ideas can be mentioned here because they reflect historical evidence from before 1920. For example, in his *Choir Director's Guide* from 1940, Christiansen declared that the central focus for directors should be “business and discipline.”\(^792\) This bears direct relation to his beginning work at St. Olaf Lutheran College. He believed that if a choir was going to learn to sing beautifully, a great deal of practice together was the first essential. In 1939, he wrote to Olaf, “My policy is to shut up and saw wood.”\(^793\) A year later, he continued that dialectic: “We must acknowledge the importance of hard work in this connection. There is no royal road to choir achievements. Everybody must attend every rehearsal and sing and sing, and then sing some more.”\(^794\) Discipline was the key word for the

\(^{792}\) Christiansen, *Choir Director's Guide*, 10.

\(^{793}\) F. Melius Christiansen to Olaf Christiansen (n.d. 1939), F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN.

\(^{794}\) Christiansen, *Choir Director's Guide*, 10.
organization, and many accounts of his choral techniques mention his disciplined approach to music. A student from 1939–40, Willis H. Miller, observed, “He was an uncompromising perfectionist and would often say, ‘Nothing is correct that can be bettered.’” Christiansen’s rehearsal style was two-fold. First, he focused on short musical phrases. He then gave attention to each section for accuracy. Miller recalled:

> During the choir rehearsal, it was more than just singing music. It was a time when we absorbed a philosophy of living and an appreciation for what was beautiful. Christiansen’s disciplined approach was played out in his role as a taskmaster. He would spend an entire rehearsal polishing a certain musical phrase. When it finally met his standard after an hour’s grilling work, he would say to the choir, “I knew you could do it.”

Miller also described an intensity of focus that Christiansen demanded at all times during performances. An unwritten law of the choir was “never to take your eyes off the director during the singing of a number.” He recalled several occasions when singers fainted during performances and quietly slipped to the floor. Not once did the other singers take their eyes from Christiansen, but instead kept singing as if nothing had happened. “It was like being

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796. Ibid.

797. Ibid.

798. Ibid.
hypnotized.”²⁹⁹

Christiansen recognized two difficulties of choir singers: first, that the typical choir member could not find time to attend more than one rehearsal per week, and second, that no choir member would have enough patience or interest to sit through so many repetitions and so much grind. In response to these challenges, he stated, “If we take care of the second difficulty the first one is apt to take care of itself. The personality, musicianship, and leadership of the director can cause the choir to work hard and willingly.”³⁰⁰

Progressive methods and marked accomplishments characterized Christiansen’s rehearsals. He demanded maximum effort from every singer. Every minute was a working minute for him in rehearsals. He believed that one-hour rehearsals were long enough and that anything longer required a break. The St. Olaf Lutheran Choir of sixty singers under Christiansen had five one-hour rehearsals per week. Of course, from the beginning the St. Olaf Choir sang without accompaniment in both rehearsals and concerts. He recommended a cappella singing at all rehearsals to other directors, especially for songs originally written without accompaniment. Like his colleague Peter Lutkin at Northwestern University, he deplored the instrumental doubling of

²⁹⁹. Ibid.

³⁰⁰. F. Melius Christiansen quoted in Miller, “Memories of a Choir Member.”
voice parts except in emergencies:

Songs written a capella [sic] (without accompaniment) should never be rendered with an instrumental doubling of the voice parts, except in the case of absolute necessity. This necessity may be felt when, on account of circumstances, it has been impossible for the choir to learn the parts, or when some new voices have not had sufficient time for blending.  

The Baton, Conducting, and Der moderne Dirigent

Christiansen’s use of a baton for choral conducting began with his earliest work at St. Olaf Lutheran College and continued throughout his career. Historical researchers have suggested that the practice proceeded from his background as an instrumentalist, his training in Germany, and one particular book to which he was devoted. Many choral conductors of his day used only their hands, but Christiansen wrote, “He should then procure a baton and use it.” He thought that directing without the baton was ineffective, unnatural, and ill appearing. Christiansen held that its use imparted dignity, precision, and command as compared with the director who “merely gesticulates aimlessly and effeminately with empty hands and fingers.”

801. Christiansen, School of Choir Singing, 64. Manfred Bukofzer, a German musicologist, discussed previously in Chapter 2, during the 1940s challenged the notion that stylo antico choral music was never doubled by instruments during the Renaissance period. His ideas helped spawn an early music movement later in the twentieth century, but his ideas have since been heavily criticized for bias and incomplete scholarship, and some have been rejected.


803. Ibid. Christiansen’s use of the word “effeminate” here is identical to comments by the other two conductors examined in this study, Peter Lutkin and John Finley Williamson. All three praised that which was “masculine” and “virile,” while expressing disgust toward anything
A second rationale for his use of a baton was his insistence that the director should give definite beats. His comments from 1940 are directly traceable to an earlier conducting text, discussed below, so it is likely that he acted on these ideas from 1913 to 1920. He held that this is why a conductor stands in front of a choir in the first place. Hand conducting, which he referred to as the “new substitute,” was not an improvement over the use of the baton. He wrote, “The new substitute is commendable only when it is an improvement over the old practice.”

Christiansen encountered a small book that deeply affected his conception of conducting during his postgraduate sabbatical in Leipzig. How he came upon *Der moderne Dirigent* (*The modern Conductor*) by Arthur Lazer is unknown (see fig. 5.19), but it may have been recommended to him by Gustav Schreck or even by his violin teacher Hans Sitt, who also was a notable choral conductor. His interest in and devotion to that text during his second period of study in Germany suggests that this was a time of career change from instrumentalist to choral conductor.

represented as feminine. For example, choral tone was depicted negatively as “effeminate” and positively as “virile.”

804. Ibid.
Many of the lessons and ideas in that German language text concern Hans Guido Freiherr von Bülow (1830–1894), a noted conductor, virtuoso pianist, and composer of the Romantic era. A student of Franz Liszt who married Liszt’s daughter Cosima, von Bülow famously quipped, “Always conduct with the score in your head, not your head in the score.” In an interview with Olaf Christiansen, musicologist Albert R. Johnson learned that during summers at the family’s vacation cottage in Sister Bay, Wisconsin, his

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father spent time going over portions of the book with him. Christiansen’s ideas about artistic individuality are reflected in Laser’s statement, “The director is first of all an artist who must infuse into the work of the original artist (the composer) his own individuality, for artistry and individuality are inseparable.”

Another idea from Laser, also tied to personal expression, was that each motion of the conductor must have purpose and follow directly from a thought. An unpublished manuscript by Christiansen from 1937 entitled “Attitude of the Director toward the Composer: Personal Opinion” sheds light on the primacy of individuality in Christiansen’s conducting philosophy. Marvin E. Latimer Jr. and James F. Daugherty studied the 1937 essay and concluded that it was “likely the result of spending many years with Laser’s ideas.” In keeping with Christiansen’s lifelong silence about his choral models, it is interesting that he did not use Der moderne Dirigent as a text at St. Olaf. It was not available in English, but he could have easily translated the small book or had it translated for his students by the German faculty at St. Olaf. A textbook that he did recommend to students was Essentials of Conducting (1919) by Karl Wilson

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808. Laser, Der Moderne Dirigent, 10.

Gehrkens (1882–1975), an American music education leader on the faculty of the Oberlin College Conservatory of Music.810

Motivation: The Bond between Choir and Conductor

In Christiansen’s copy of Arthur Laser’s *Der Moderne Dirigent*, the Norwegian conductor underlined the following passage in German: “Dieses von Liszt gewünschte geistige Band existierte wirklich zwischen Bülow und seinem Orchester,” translated as “This spiritual bond Liszt desired really existed between Bülow and his orchestra!”811 In other words, von Bülow’s teacher, Liszt, longed for a geistige Band, or spiritual connection, between conductor and orchestra, while his student actually manifested it.

The line before that statement amplifies the descriptive account of von Bülow: “And every musician felt in constant contact with the master, as if he were bound by invisible chains on him.”812 It is possible that Laser’s romantic depiction of von Bülow captured Christiansen’s imagination enough to inspire a fascination with that conductor, because a further exploration of the German text reveals similarities between the two. If one reads further, the lines following Christiansen’s penciled underscoring explain that such a “spiritual wavelength” (one possible translation of that text) only existed in “still waters.”

812. Ibid.
Laser wrote in his text:

But—and this point I ask to be considered seriously and impressed upon the memory for all time—von Bülow did such things only if the flow of the composition took the orchestra forward through calm waters. As soon as any danger presented itself, or the smallest storm was reported, it was von Bülow, a captain on the bridge, who steered the ship with a sure hand through the dangerous cliffs.... Each blow was so clear, so tight that the slightest mistake, the smallest variation was an impossibility.813

Similar to Christiansen’s reportedly unpredictable nature, historical accounts of von Bülow describe him as a notoriously tactless individual who alienated many of his musical colleagues. As a result, for example, the German conductor was dismissed from his conducting position in Zürich.814 Likely an inspiration to Christiansen in this regard, he was known for memorable aphorisms such as, “A tenor is not a man but a disease,”815 aimed at a recalcitrant singer; and “Your tone sounds like roast-beef gravy running through a sewer,” which he hurled at a trombonist.816

Starting Pitches and Delayed Onset

The aura surrounding certain choral effects used by Christiansen’s St. Olaf Lutheran Choir was in part due to a unusual mix of secrecy, drama, and

813. Ibid.
816. Ibid.
illusion. For example, the onset of choral tone in Christiansen’s ensemble was an unusual event during performances, as he wanted the singers to begin the sound themselves with no help from a conductor. This was both a great novelty as well as a mystery for audiences who never understood how it was done. Apparently, this was even confidential information at St. Olaf, for St. Olaf Choir historian Joseph Shaw concluded that the decision to begin was made not by Christiansen, but simultaneously by the choir as a group.

Christiansen never gave pitches during choral concerts because he considered the practice obtrusive and inefficient. Instead, singers in each section had pitch pipes, which they used during applause without the audience being aware of it. The section that had the root or beginning phrase would give the initial pitch, and from there, it spread unobtrusively throughout the ensemble. This led to speculation that his choir members all had perfect pitch, like their director. The onset of choral tone was also a great novelty as well as a mystery. Christiansen would give a sudden gesture for the downbeat, pull his hands quickly to his body, and wait for the choir to start, all of which created a dramatic pause. This obviated the clue of timing given by the

818. “Dr. F. Melius Christiansen to Be Honored on Eightieth Birthday,” in News Letter of Augsburg Publishing House (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, n.d. 1951 ); n.p. [single page removed from this larger publication], F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, Rolvaag Library, Northfield, MN.
preparatory beat. Then he waited, allowing the choir to enter on its own. It appeared that he allowed the group to access the right moment for the onset of sound, after which he immediately regained control of the beat. Various authors have concluded that individual choir members had to sense each other and be aware of a larger choir consciousness rather than just individual intention. They believed that this type of onset of sound required absolute commitment and concentration from the ensemble, and yielded a feeling of unity and mutual interdependence. For example, St. Olaf Choir historian Joseph M. Shaw explained:

> The conductor may feel lost for a while, but as soon as the sound begins, he takes hold of it and gives the second beat in the right tempo. This waiting on the part of singers and players is a moment of real concentration and a get-together, the purpose being to make an even entrance of the tone.  

Even past members of the choir did not reveal their ensemble’s secret. Esther Tufte Rian, a former St. Olaf chorister, also described the phenomenon as practiced by Christiansen:

> Christy would give the downbeat and nothing would happen for a second or two, until we suddenly came on. Once it was quite dramatic: he gave the downbeat. Silence. He gave the downbeat again, more vigorously. Silence, then suddenly—an explosion of glorious sound.

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820. Ibid.
However, in a December 2003 interview with former Christiansen chorister and subsequent successor, Kenneth Jennings provided another explanation for Christiansen’s delayed attack. Disclosing the trick, he explained that the technique was not entirely up to choir, but like hidden pitches, dependent on illusion for dramatic effect: “The choir members would enter when his baton was “at the third button of his dress coat,” Jennings explained.”

Chorister Auditions

Gaining entrance into the St. Olaf Choir under F. Melius Christiansen was a rigorous process due to the specific criteria he required for prospective choristers. First, he insisted that the singer have sure pitch, so sure that there could be no drop in pitch when singing without accompaniment. Moreover, the voice must be tonally even and smooth, without vibrato—“Straight as an Indian woman’s hair or a telegraph wire.” Christiansen sought voices with a colorful timbre, uniform throughout the range, and flexible. He preferred smooth voices, even if not large, to an exceptionally full voice with vibrato.

821. Interview with Kenneth Jennings, December, 2003. Quoted in Christina Marie Armendarez, "The Influence of Fredrik Melius Christiansen on Six Minnesota Conductor-Composers" (MM thesis, University of North Texas, 2006), 17. Kenneth Jennings (b. 1925) was appointed to the faculty of St. Olaf College in 1953, and became the third director of the St. Olaf Choir, succeeding founder F. Melius Christiansen and his son-successor, Olaf C. Christiansen. Jennings retired from St. Olaf College in 1990.

822. Elizabeth McCleod Jones, “Chance Observations,” (n.d. [ca. 1955]), F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, Rolvaag Library, Northfield, MN.

Acceptance into his elite choir was the highest honor for a singer at St. Olaf College. From approximately 500 students seeking admittance into the St. Olaf Choir in 1929, Christiansen chose only sixty.\textsuperscript{824}

Longtime choir manager J. P. Schmidt wrote, “Choir interests come first!”\textsuperscript{825} Having observed the audition process many times, he listed ten qualifications he considered necessary for gaining membership, for example, a good voice and a good ear.\textsuperscript{826} Personal qualities that Christiansen looked for in auditions included “an attitude of service and servanthood.”\textsuperscript{827} He sought students who wanted to work “for the honor of something infinitely greater than any human being or organization.”\textsuperscript{828} In an interview with the St. Paul Pioneer Press in 1926, he explained the process:

\begin{quote}
We pick our singers by their character, as revealed in the color of their voices. Nothing is so personal as the human voice. It reveals one’s true nature. It is the personality that sings; so we test the personality first. Next we test the ear, and thirdly, the tone coloring and volume.\textsuperscript{829}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{824} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{825} Schmidt, \textit{My Years at St. Olaf}, 110.
\textsuperscript{826} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{827} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{828} F. Melius Christiansen, “To Choir Directors,” \textit{Lutheran Church Herald} 23 (3 September 1939): 31.
\textsuperscript{829} “Interview with F. Melius Christiansen,” \textit{St. Paul Pioneer Press}, 24 October 1926, n.p. Newspaper clipping, F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, Rolvaag
Art and sacrifice were his only acceptable motivations for St. Olaf choristers. He stated, “There must be only one motive for membership: the desire to preserve fine art and the willingness to sacrifice and work toward that end.”

Most of the tales surrounding St. Olaf Choir auditions have to do with Christiansen’s idiosyncratic and unconventional behavior. Based on what we know about his interaction with the St. Olaf Band when he first arrived at the school, it is likely that drama during choir auditions occurred from the start. As one who admired the ego-deflating skills of his German music professors, he could be gleefully insensitive to students with exalted opinions of their vocal abilities. One particularly confident female who tried out for the choir and was found to be deficient exclaimed, “Don’t you think I can do anything with my voice?” The impish Christiansen replied soothingly, “Maybe it will come in handy in case of fire.” In that case, the full diplomatic prowess of the St. Olaf administration was required to assuage one furious family.

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830. Christiansen, quoted in Bergmann, “Music Master of the Middle West,” 136.


832. Ibid.
Christiansen’s Ideology: Program Building

One way Christiansen challenged his choir continually was by planning regular performances. He believed that concerts motivated choirs. When scheduling those events, he had definite ideas about the design and structure of his choral programs: “There must be a certain unity in a program. The necessary contrast must be had within this unity.” He preferred concert programs arranged into three or four groups. He followed sonata or symphonic structure for his program building. In a four-section program, the first was full of life, the second was lyrical and slow, the third was very light, and the fourth was strong and lively. According to him, there should also be a variety of movement and character, all of which made for a good program.

When planning concerts, quality was always more important than quantity for Christiansen. He believed it was better to learn fewer and better songs, and to repeat them frequently until memorized. He explained:

If the song is good, it is never completely learned. A good song grows and grows both with the director and the singers, and also with the audience. For this reason, it is better to repeat numbers and render them more artistically from time to time, than to strive for new half-mastered songs.

834. Ibid.
835. F. Melius Christiansen, "The Listener," *Lutheran Church Herald* 14, no. 26 (1 July
Expression of the Spiritual Component

The connection between spirituality and choral artistry was evident throughout Christiansen’s high-profile career. He was concerned with an interior connection to a higher power accessible only to the individual and believed that music was the perfect path to that experience. As a young student in Norway, he had been attracted to church music via organ music. Later, his unaccompanied choir existed in the context of a small sectarian college.

Christiansen’s writings also point to his spiritually driven desire to create perfection. This was as much a music education technique for the Norwegian choir conductor as it was a means for the creation of his art. In most respects, Christiansen did not separate spiritual connection from pedagogy, but instead promoted it openly at a time when fusion of sacred and secular was not considered politically incorrect. As early as the 1920’s, the he nation took notice. One example was choir attire. By the 1930s, many choirs in public schools, colleges, and universities throughout the land sought to copy characteristics associated with the St. Olaf Lutheran choir. That ensemble, originally a church choir, always wore religious vestments, even in secular venues. As a result of their influence, thousands of public high school, college,

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836. F. Melhus Christiansen, “The Art of Music.”
and university choirs with no religious affiliation or connection whatsoever began the practice of wearing religious vestments when performing, and more than a few continue that practice to the present day. In his 1964 study of the history of the American high school *a cappella* choir, Richard Kegerreis writes about the ubiquity of ecclesiastical robes in secular secondary school ensembles from 1925 to 1940:

Robes, however, were just another manifestation of the romantic philosophy which governed the *a cappella* choir movement. The St. Olaf choir wore robes because they were fitting in a church service. The high school *a cappella* choir director could not accept the fact that his choir had a different purpose. He justified the *a cappella* choir because of its alleged spiritual effect on the teen-ager. The vestments added a spiritual appearance to the spiritual sound of their music.

Not everyone liked or appreciated these vestments and some considered them to be an unfavorable contribution of the *a cappella* movement, referring to them as “shrouds.”

A further manifestation of Christiansen’s spirituality was the repertoire he programmed, which was always of a sacred nature. The importance of a spiritual motivation behind Christiansen’s music making and pedagogy is revealed in an undated letter to his son Olaf: “Sometimes we are forgetting our

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838. Ibid., 340.
main reason for singing religious songs—this is a grave danger.”

Although it might be said that his spirituality was exteriorized fully and visibly through his choral art, his religious beliefs were totally off limits.

Though he pointed to spirituality as the raison d’être for his choir’s work, he was both adamant and vocal about his tenet that religion was a private affair. He never discussed religious dogma publically. What was critical was connecting with the essence of where he believed the music was coming from.

For Christiansen, music making was a sacred endeavor and that meant approaching the process with a deep private spiritual commitment to the music.

Essence was non-discursive and communicated with individuals on an energetic rather than dogmatic level. One factor that may have contributed to his spirituality was the death of two of his children before 1920 (a third died in 1921). Espousing egalitarian tenets, Christiansen, a Lutheran, respected other faith traditions, including, on a closer level, that of his wife and brother-in-law, who were practicing Jehovah’s Witnesses [Russellites].

Performance Characteristics

Choral conductor Howard Swan enumerated nine attributes of performances of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir under F. Melius Christiansen.

Swan believed the characteristics melded to create the sound of the choir

839. F. Melius Christiansen to Olaf Christiansen, n.d. 1939, F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, Rolvaag Library, Northfield, MN.
under Christiansen (see fig. 5.20). His list gives a precise idea of what aspects of Christiansen’s choir work were noticed, emulated, and eventually became choral ideals by those who were impressed by the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir.
Nine Attributes of St. Olaf Lutheran Choir Performances

1. Purity and beauty of tone

2. An emphasis on choral blend and balance with attention to the selection and placement of singers in each vocal section. Singers with excessive and wide vibratos were not desirable ensemble members.

3. An emphasis on uniformity of vocal timbre, with a preference for the selection of lyric voices. Also, there is great importance placed upon the uniformity of vowels throughout the range.

4. Excellent intonation and accuracy of pitch, with an emphasis on good unisons. Great importance placed on the musical ear of each singer. The tuning of chords occurs throughout the composition, not simply at cadences. Block formation preferred with basses seated behind sopranos and tenors behind altos.

5. Disciplined singing, which leads to the precision of ensemble attack and release. Clear textual enunciation achieved by continuous unification of vowels and precise execution of consonants.

6. Attention to textual nuance and text painting

7. Flexibility and nuance of phrasing as well as the expressive use of rubato

8. Emphasis on legato singing

9. Impressive use of softer singing which permitted a wide range of dynamics by the ensemble

Figure 5.20. Nine attributes of performances of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir under F. Melius Christiansen as described by Howard Swan

Publications by Christiansen: 
Musical Compositions, Arrangements, 
Books, and Writings 

According to journalist David Scheie, Christiansen’s compositions left “a permanent imprint upon the American repertoire of choral music.” Though most do not remain in the standard choral repertory, they were significant historically because they filled a gap that would later be replaced as choral music in America evolved. Nearly all were for unaccompanied choir and were written during a time when it was difficult, if not impossible, to acquire high-quality editions of *a cappella* choral works in the United States. In that light, the majority of his compositions might be considered utilitarian.

His most popular anthem, “Beautiful Saviour,” an arrangement of a Silesian folk tune for eight-part *a cappella* choir, was first published by Augsburg Publishing House in 1919 (see fig. 5.21). However, Christiansen’s use of the tune dates to the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir’s Norway tour of 1913. He probably became familiar with it while in Leipzig, because he wrote that the genesis of this arrangement was the Norwegian text “Deilig er jorden” (Lovely is the Earth), which had its origin in *Schlesische Volkslieder mit Melodien* (Silesian Folksongs with Melodies), created in Leipzig in 1842 by controversial German

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841. David Scheie, “F. Melius Christiansen,” press release, St. Olaf College News Bureau, 1951, 1 page, F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, Rolvaag Library, Northfield, MN.
Figure 5.21. Portion of original manuscript of Christiansen’s anthem “Beautiful Saviour.”

educator August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben (1798–1874) and his colleague Ernst Friedrich Richter (1808–1879). That composition stands outside the main body of Christiansen’s oeuvre, not simply because it was the signature piece of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir and other groups, but because, as a musical work, it was perhaps of a different

842. F. Melius Christiansen, “Beautiful Saviour,” n.d., F. Melius Christiansen Papers, Box: Compositions/Small Size, St. Olaf College Archives, Rolvaag Library, Northfield, MN.

843. St. Olaf College Song Book (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1934), 8; and August H. H. von Fallersleben and Ernst F. Richter, Schlesische Volkslieder mit Melodien (Leipzig, GR: Breitkopf and Hartel, 1842), 339. Only unison melodies and texts are printed in this book of folksongs; however, this tune (marked Jesus über Alles) includes a soprano and alto harmony in consecutive thirds.
caliber. In his 2009 dissertation on selected choral works of F. Melius Christiansen, Albert Pinsonnealut explained why:

Christiansen’s hymn arrangements represent his simplest and most direct form of composition. In some instances, these works possess a more enduring quality than Christiansen’s more ornate and sentimental works written in a post-Romantic style. Beautiful Saviour and Lamb of God are two examples that represent the best of this genre and are among the most frequently performed of Christiansen’s works.\(^{844}\)

By 1941, the motet was his most popular composition, and by 1961 some 1,116, 597 copies of the work had been sold.\(^{845}\) Scores of choirs across the nation attempted to emulate the sounds, techniques, and performance standards of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir by singing Christiansen’s arrangements and following his precepts. In this way, early on he directly and indirectly encouraged refinement in choral singing in the United States.

Christiansen published choral music before 1920, including his seven Song Services, or *Sang-Gudstjenester*, printed in English translation.\(^{846}\) Some of his early compositions were strict contrapuntal treatments of Lutheran chorales, which he labeled “developed chorales,” and may have been completed under Gustav Schreck. The seven Song Services served as a forerunner to the

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846. Seven *En Sang-Gudstjeneste* (“Song Services”) by Christiansen and John Nathan Kildahl were published by Augsburg Publishing House in Minneapolis between 1907 and 1916. Nos. 1–3 were published in Norwegian and nos. 4–7 were distributed in English.
publication of the St. Olaf Choir Series, which began to appear in 1919, the same year Beautiful Saviour was published. The first two volumes of that series were largely Christiansen’s choice of “old masters,” but subsequent volumes were composed almost exclusively of his own writings. The number of individual selections therein ran into the hundreds.

According to René Clausen, director of choral activities at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, Christiansen’s original choral compositions fall into three categories: (1) simple arrangements of hymns (primarily homophonic in texture), folk songs, original melodies, and repetitive forms (the hymn Beautiful Saviour is in this category); (2) extended chorale fantasias (episodic free forms) such as Wake, Awake; Praise to the Lord; and O Day Full of Grace; and (3) choral tone poems (episodic free forms with functional late nineteenth-century harmonic language). His love of lush lyricism may reflect the romanticism that prevailed during his impressionable student years in Germany. According to Clausen, two additional influences contributed to the development of Christiansen’s compositional style: the musical milieu in which he worked and his ideas regarding choral tone. Christiansen published two books in 1916, both written in Minneapolis.


848. Ibid., 19.
during his productive sabbatical in 1915–16. The first was *Practical Modulation*, a technical guide to the theory and practice of modulation.\(^{849}\) Former Christiansen student Willis H. Miller recalled, “We used it for a textbook in school. One day I mustered up enough courage to ask the great maestro to autograph the volume, which he kindly did. In his Spencerian penmanship, he wrote, “What is theory without application? Nothing!”\(^{850}\)

The second book, entitled *School of Choir Singing* and also published by Augsburg, is a tripartite ninety-page guide for choral singers intended as a one-year course in singing for “higher schools.”\(^{851}\) Its first section is devoted to providing secondary school singers with a foundation in music theory. Topics covered were scales, triads, inversions, intervals, cadences, and transposition. The second section, entitled “The Voice,” is five pages in length. Here, Christiansen, who had no formal training in the subject, wrote on tone production, pronunciation, and breath control. He also gave a brief treatment of music reading, the blending of voices, and choosing music. Here the choir rehearsal as well as the interpretation of choral music is covered. Finally, there are written “Exercises” that correlate with the content of the first section. Nine

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850. Miller, “Memories of a Choir Member.”

851. Christiansen, *School of Choir Singing.*
of eleven topics in this area of the book were aspects of music theory. Although only the last two, on agility and intonation, deal specifically with singing, it is perhaps significant to emphasize that this was one of the first published examples of choral methods before 1920 in the United States.

As Christiansen’s reputation spread nationally, especially after World War I, many of his earlier ideas were disseminated via journal articles, music magazines, and other publications. Those writings included topics such as musical artistry, technical aspects of choral music making, and his advocacy of a cappella singing. One significant series of articles published during the 1930s in The Lutheran Church Herald included titles like “The Necessity of Concentration in Choir Singing.”

John Finley Williamson and the Westminster Choir

One important choral director who was inspired by Christiansen was John Finley Williamson. The latter had an abiding friendship with F. Melius Christiansen and admiration for the St. Olaf Choir because Christiansen was Williamson’s mentor and initially his greatest choral inspiration. In 1920, when Williamson was a church choir director in Dayton, Ohio, Christiansen and Paul Schmidt took the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir to Dayton on its annual tour. When Williamson heard the ensemble he was astounded, and followed the group.

from town to town for several nights to make sure what he heard was not a fluke. St. Olaf student journalist, Tom Twaiten, wrote about this incident in 1954:

What particularly struck Williamson about the St. Olaf Choir was its a capella [sic] singing. In those days it was a new thing, and the St. Olaf Choir was one of the first a capella [sic] choirs in the nation. His own choir, he had to admit, couldn’t do it. So, he asked Dr. Christiansen and Dr. Schmidt about the possibility of concertizing his choir. Today’s Westminster Choir is the result of the encouragement he received.853

In the beginning, because he was a devotee of Christiansen, in some respects, Williamson modeled the sound of the Westminster Choir after that of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir. A choral experimentalist, he later embraced a soloistic approach to ensemble singing that differed from Christiansen’s subordination of the individual to the group.

F. Melius Christiansen and American Music Education

During his entire career, and even during most of his retirement, F. Melius Christiansen was deeply committed to music learning. His former student Harold Decker emphasized his teacher’s almost fanatical dedication to education: “I can still hear his booming voice and see his radiant face when F. Melius would say to our group of fledgling conductors, “Knowledge is power!” He knew the importance of a solid musical education should be a lifelong

During his first year at St. Olaf Lutheran College, he defended the notion that music was on equal footing with science, math, athletics, and literature. In support of the educational value of music, Christiansen argued that it could teach analytical skills as well as science and math, offering as examples the musical subjects of counterpoint and harmony. It would have been difficult to claim that Christiansen did not possess the technical musical background to make such a claim, because he had trained under some of the most skilled theoreticians of his time.

Another lasting effect of Christiansen upon music education was the example of extended tours, a trend that spread throughout the United States, especially after 1920. The administrators of St. Olaf Lutheran College ensured the success of early tours by engaging the assistance of a well-connected professional tour manager from New York City. They were probably unaware that sending Christiansen and his choir on the road to raise funds for the school would have a lasting national impact on choral music. The choir’s audiences were observing, listening, and remembering. For more than a few, this was not merely an aesthetic experience, but a transformative one as well, because they heard choral singing performed in a new way. They were shown


what was possible by a very small, poor, rural college surrounded by cornfields and scarecrows. As a result, by 1930, Christiansen’s demonstration of his version of refined choir singing encouraged an academic approach to choral music education and a different standard of singing in schools and colleges throughout the nation.

Christiansen was a significant driving energy for that vortex of change. He did not simply make music, but effected widespread choral transformation through a curious mix of derivative German ecclesiastical choral ideals and original methods often enhanced by secrecy, creativity, personal observation, and Nordic chutzpah. Even before 1920, by means of dedication, discipline, and extraordinary self-confidence that superseded personal shortcomings, he became one of the earliest exemplars for vocal cultivation in American choral history.
Of the three career narratives examined in this research inquiry, the chronicle of John Finley Williamson’s work is possibly the most unlikely. Largely through dreaming, focus, and unwavering self-confidence, Williamson, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, established a volunteer church choir in Ohio and in a span of six years transformed it into a professional-level choir performing in national venues with the country’s most notable orchestras.

856. Photograph ca. 1912 of John Finley Williamson in the public domain. Courtesy of Westminster Choir College Archives, Talbott Library, Princeton, NJ.
Through the greater part of his thirty-eight-year career, Williamson came to represent different and changing perspectives on choral singing in the United States and beyond. He was portrayed by *The New York Times* as the “dean of American choral directors” because his work affected the early evolution of choral sound in America.\(^{857}\)

From humble beginnings in Ohio, Williamson embarked on a quest for what he believed was the best in choral singing, though not everyone agreed with his conclusions. His numerous, multifaceted activities involved national and international tours, performances with eminent conductors, and recordings. Williamson also reached hundreds of thousands of individuals through his teaching, national radio broadcasts, music publications, and writings. The choir college he and his wife founded in Princeton, New Jersey continues to influence the lives of numerous individuals more than a half-century after his death. Though he never considered himself an academic, he spent his entire career as a music educator. More than a few of his students still say that his gifts of charisma and inspiration—his *modus operandi*—were on par with or perhaps greater than his musical offerings or choral inventions.\(^{858}\) As a

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lifelong transformer of choral tone, his perpetual experimentation with the sound of the Westminster Choir was a manifestation of his philosophy that striving after choral beauty was a spiritual quest.

Early Life and Family Background

Though his parents were both British immigrants, Williamson was a child of nineteenth-century rural America. He did not begin his life around high musical culture, and lacking education, his parents had no connection to it. Williamson was born on June 23, 1887, in Canton, Stark County, Ohio, a small city of about 12,258 in northeastern Ohio, located approximately twenty-four miles south of Akron and sixty miles south of Cleveland. Both his father and mother, William Walter Williamson (1858–1934) and Mary Ann Finley Williamson (1860–1890), grew up together in an country setting, some three-and-a-half miles apart. The tiny town of Tow Law in northeast England was William Walter’s birthplace. Located in Durham County, Tow Law is a few miles south of the town of Consett and about ten miles west of the shore of the North Sea. Mary Ann Finley was born in the nearby village of Fir Tree in


860. n.a., “History of the Town: From 1841,” Tow Law & District History Society, accessed July 18, 2014, http://towlawhistory.webs.com/history. According to the Tow Law & District History Society, in 1851, the population of Tow Law (pronounced “tahaw law” with stress on Law) was 2,000. Many of the town residents worked at the Tow Law Iron Works, which was founded in 1845. One purpose of the industrial venture at Tow Law was to manufacture rails and chairs for railways, which were being constructed at that time.
Durham County, west of Crook and near the River Wear.\textsuperscript{861} In their youth, Mary’s brother, Tom, and William Walter were best friends.

After the death of his parents, at the age of nine, John Finley Williamson’s father, William Walter, moved to the United States to be raised by his aunt and uncle, John and Florence Featherstone.\textsuperscript{862} Twelve years later, in 1879, at the age of twenty-one, he moved back to England for a period of several years before returning once again to the United States. Wehr states that Mary Ann Finley and William Walter Williamson journeyed together to the United States in the early 1880s.\textsuperscript{863} State records indicate that on August 30, 1885, the couple married in Beach City, Stark County, Ohio.\textsuperscript{864}

William Walter was an evangelical clergyman in the Church of the

\textsuperscript{861} T. H. K., “Dr. W. W. Williamson,” \textit{New York Times}, n.d. 1934, 17; Mary Ann Williamson’s death certificate, located in public Records of Deaths, Stark County, Ohio. Past studies have referred to Williamson’s mother as Mary Finley. Her given name was actually Mary Ann Finley.

\textsuperscript{862} David A. Wehr, “John Finley Williamson (1887–1964): His Life and Contribution to Choral Music” (PhD diss., University of Miami, 1971), 4. “Jack and his sister, Ruth [a year and a half old], were taken into the home of friends of his parents, Jay and Gretta Cogan, until the great-aunt and great-uncle (sibling of grandparent) who had raised their father and were considered grand-parents, John and Florence Featherstone, could take the babies on their farm near Burton City, Ohio.”

\textsuperscript{863} Ibid., 3.

United Brethren in Christ. His denomination first appeared in the U. S. in Pennsylvania in the late eighteenth century. Initially, it was an unorganized revivalist movement, but it eventually spread west into Ohio and Indiana by means of circuit-riding preachers, many of whom were farmers traveling on horseback. Clergy for this denomination were inadequately paid. Almost all ministers of this denomination, including Williamson’s father, were uneducated, and virtually any male who expressed interest in becoming a preacher was given a church. Generally, education was not encouraged in the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. Persons with a college education were viewed with suspicion due to a fear that they might rely more on their learning than upon God. During his ministry, most of the churches Williamson served in Ohio and Pennsylvania were poor and literally built from the ground up by the financially strapped Rev. Williamson.

During the first three years of his infancy, John Finley Williamson was

865. According to Wehr, “John Finley Williamson,” 3, and Charles Harvey Schisler, “A History of Westminster Choir College, 1926–1973” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1976), 12. Williamson’s father was a clergyman in the Evangelical United Brethren Church, a denomination that originated in 1946, twelve years after his father’s death, by the merger of the Evangelical Brethren Church with the Church of the United Brethren in Christ (his father’s church).


867. Ibid.
cared for in a home where music was important, and where the hymns and songs of the church were heard often. Both of his parents had good singing voices and sang at home and in Rev. Williamson’s church. Mary Ann and William Walter were frequently in demand for singing at “weddings, funerals, and other occasions.”

That childhood stasis continued until Williamson’s young life was disrupted at age three-and-one-half with the death of his mother, on December 27, 1890, after an illness that lasted only two weeks.

The cause of her death was likely peritonitis resulting from a perforated appendix, the consequence of acute appendicitis, and a fatal condition in the late nineteenth century. Despite his young age when his mother died, Williamson later maintained that he remembered her “vividly” throughout his life.

After their mother’s death, he and his baby sister Ruth were relocated to


870. Robert Hooper, Lexicon-Medicum (New York: E. Bliss & E. White, How, Spaulding & Dwight, 1822); and Rudy Schmidt, “Rudy’s List of Archaic Medical Terms: A Glossary of Archaic Medical Terms, Diseases and Causes of Death: The Genealogist’s Resource for Interpreting Causes of Death,” accessed 10 July 2014, http://www.archaicmedicalterms.com/. Mary Ann Finley Williamson’s death record indicates “Inflammation of the bowels” as the cause of death. Medical historians consider this commonly used nineteenth-century term to be archaic. According to Hooper and Schmidt, Appendicitis, as a distinct disease, was generally unrecognized in the nineteenth century. Such cases were diagnosed as “inflammation of the bowels,” and nearly all died. Therefore, it is possible that Mary Williamson died of peritonitis from a perforated appendix, the result of acute appendicitis (surgery was not involved).

871. A handwritten inscription on the back of a photo of Mary Finley Williamson reads: “Mary Finley, Daddy’s mother, who left the security of her home in England to come to a strange country and marry a struggling young minister assigned to various parishes in
two other residences from 1890 to 1893: first to friends of his father, Jay and
Gretta Cogan, and then to a great aunt and great uncle, John and Florence
Featherstone, at their farm near Burton City, Ohio.\footnote{872}

Williamson’s early maternal loss and relocation appears to have
interrupted his childhood equilibrium and emotional stability. For, from a young
age, Williamson exhibited behavioral problems in addition to a precocious
talent for singing. Much of what was later depicted as Williamson’s
idiosyncratic behavior might be traced to this early trauma. His sister Ruth later
described him during their years with surrogate parents as a “mischievous,
willful boy, determined to have his own way, and very difficult to handle.”\footnote{873}
Perhaps for that reason, the Featherstones were more than happy to have him
return to his father and new stepmother Alice Sonnedecker, whom William
Walter had married in 1893.\footnote{874} Born in 1862, and six years older than William
Walter, she was the daughter of Andrew Sonnedecker, a farmer from Wayne,
Ohio, whose family had immigrated to the United States from Germany.

William Walter and Alice had two children. Over time, Williamson’s

\footnote{872. Ibid.}

\footnote{873. Ibid.}

\footnote{874. Wehr, “John Finley Williamson,” 4.}
relationship with his father became progressively more contentious, and the constant battle spilled over into his schooling. Williamson’s need for attention prompted him to rage, which was not acceptable for a clergyman’s son in the nineteenth century. For the boy, decorum at home, school, or his father’s church was impossible, and he resisted all efforts by his father to control him.  

Meanwhile, in Rev. Williamson’s household there was no money for music lessons, or even sheet music. His son explained in 1950:

My father was a minister. We lived in a small town, and Father’s salary was meager. Being a builder of churches, and a generous man, he was always giving to others. There was never any money left over for buying music or taking music lessons. For this reason, the hymn-book in the First United Brethren Church of Altoona, Pennsylvania, was my only textbook for piano practice…

Young Williamson’s desire for independence and his strict home environment reached a crisis point when, according to Ruth, at age sixteen he ran away from home three times. First, he jumped a freight train en route to Chicago, and later fled his home but remained near it. After another similar flight, John Finley secretly joined the Navy, a move she suggested that their father could have reversed but chose not to.

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875. Ibid., 7–8.


It is likely that Williamson did run away three times, but his third escape did not involve the United States Navy. Correspondence requesting confirmation of enlistment or discharge of Williamson from the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, Missouri casts doubt on any military service. The archivist at this government center wrote, “We have conducted extensive searches of every records source and alternate records sources. We have been unable to locate any information verifying the military service of John Finley Williamson.” An exposé published in the *Musical Courier* in July of 1924, based on an interview with Williamson, provides a different account of his whereabouts. That article states:

His father did not want him to become a musician—it was, indeed, from his mother that he inherited his love of and aptitude for music. So, as his father remained firm in opposition, he did what many another minister’s son has done—ran away from home when he was thirteen years old. Around and about he went, from one city to another. He was in New York for a while and sold papers here on the street. And everywhere, as he moved along, he got a temporary job as a choir singer in one church or another. When he was eighteen years old he turned up in Cleveland and there got his first position as choir director. They paid him $3 a Sunday. After that he began to go to college to make up for the loss of education those five years of wanderlust had cost him.

878. Carolyn Clark (3C Archives Technician) to Allan Robinson, Request No. 1-11058653355, National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, MO, 29 June 2012.

879. “The Dayton Westminster Choir and Its Leader,” *Musical Courier*, 24 July 1924, 8. Most articles in the trade magazine Musical Courier were unsigned. No further information about Williamson’s military service is mentioned in his *New York Times* obituary or in music encyclopedias or dictionaries. Williamson (who was prone to exaggeration) states that he ran away from home at age thirteen. This may have been the first attempt of three. His sister states that he ran away at age sixteen and reappeared at age twenty. Interview with Ruth Drury, cited
It is the first revelation of several issues, which included his father’s opposition to his becoming a musician and his living on the streets of large cities during his teen years. It also reveals that he attributed his musical talent entirely to his mother, while he felt that his father opposed that facet of his identity, hence his ire towards that parent. Although the validity of this quotation is in question because its author/interviewer is unidentified, it is nevertheless convincing because it reveals Williamson’s tendency to create fiction without hesitation if it served his purpose, a distinctive pattern that accompanied him throughout his life.

Davis Conservatory of Music

After a year of working in the office of a coal company in Cleveland, Williamson set a goal for his life. He wanted to become an opera singer, and the first stop on his musical journey was Cleveland’s Hiram College, where he spent only one year before transferring in 1908 to the Davis Conservatory of Otterbein College in Westerville, Ohio. At a time when music was not considered an academic subject in the U.S., it is not surprising that the conservatory focused on music performance and awarded certificates rather than academic degrees. At Davis Conservatory, he received instruction in voice from Frank Jordan Ressler, who had resigned his position as director of music.

at Iowa State University and moved to Otterbein in 1908. Ressler reported that Williamson was undisciplined with respect to musical practice but had an exceptionally beautiful baritone voice. He was seemingly not interested in educational endeavors. Later, his wife Rhea commented lightheartedly that he was “allergic to academic work.”

Williamson’s extracurricular activities were musical and included singing in Otterbein’s male quartet and glee club, both recreational ensembles. He had been financially independent from his father since the age of sixteen, and supported himself in college by gifts from friends, singing engagements, and by doing cabinetwork. He also met his future wife, Rhea Beatrice Parlette from Dayton, Ohio, a undergraduate in the liberal arts degree program at Otterbein College.

**Summer Vocal Study in New York**

During his college years and in the years immediately thereafter, Williamson saved every spare penny for summer study with three celebrated vocal pedagogues in New York City. He had become familiar with that urban center, having run away there during his adolescence. According to a *Musical

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880. Rhea Beatrice Parlette diary, 30 September 1908 to 19 March 1909, Westminster Choir College Archives, Talbott Library, Princeton, NJ. These entries were written while the author was at Otterbein University in Westerville, Ohio.

Music was still the ruling passion of his life in college days. He had to earn most of the money to pay his way through and to leave him enough so that he could come East summers to study singing with some of the best New York teachers. His teacher at home was W. C. Howell. In New York, he studied with Witherspoon, Herbert Wilbur Greene, and the late David Bispham, with whom he worked especially on Elijah.\(^{882}\)

According to Williamson, his vocal studies lasted for about five or six summers, though he never indicated which years.

**The In-between Years: Change and Destiny**

In June of 1911, Williamson graduated from the Davis Conservatory of Music at Otterbein, earning a diploma in voice rather than an academic degree. One year later, in June of 1912, he married Rhea Beatrice Parlette.

Williamson’s bride graduated from Otterbein College in 1911 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. The couple then moved to Rhea’s hometown of Dayton, where Williamson taught voice privately in their house and took miscellaneous musical jobs, including paid work as a baritone singer in a quartet at the First Lutheran Church. Rhea later remembered:

> After college was finished his work began in Dayton. At first it was at the community centers. He had no less than seven community choruses under him, which paid him the magnificent sum of $2 per chorus,

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though of course there was his work as church and concert soloist and teacher to depend on.\textsuperscript{883}

Meanwhile, the new Mrs. Williamson worked as a secretary for Platte Iron Works and as a society editor for the \textit{Dayton Herald}.\textsuperscript{884}

The year 1912 was a fateful year for Williamson, who was anticipating a career in opera. Rhea recorded in her diary in 1936 that her husband considered his own voice so beautiful that he loved displaying it with the Lutheran church quartet.\textsuperscript{885} However, one year after graduating from the conservatory, he developed tonsillitis and his physician recommended removing his tonsils. Unfortunately, Williamson’s Dayton surgeon accidentally severed his Palatopharyngeus muscle (also known as the Posterior Pillar), a muscle that connects directly with and supports the soft palate and is crucial for singing. Williamson’s soft palate immediately dropped to one side, his oropharyngeal space was altered, and what was once a beautiful singing voice became a shrill, raspy, unnatural sound. Rhea repeatedly described the tragic

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\textsuperscript{884} Rhea B. Williamson biographical information, n.d., John Finley Williamson Collection, 1, drawer A, folder 1, Westminster Choir College Archives, Talbott Library, Princeton, NJ.
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\textsuperscript{885} Rhea B. Williamson, “Diary 1936.”
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outcome of her husband’s botched surgical procedure as “bunglesome” and “bungled.”

Learning by Doing: 1912 to 1919

The seven-year segment of Williamson’s life from 1912 to 1919 was one in which he was required to reconfigure his musical dreams. Due to his vocal setback and his wish to remain connected to music through song, he turned to a subject in which he had no training or experience: choral music. In the years that followed, he gained skill by means of trial-and-error, patience, and, as his wife Rhea explained, “sheer perseverance.”

Herbert Wilbur Greene’s Vocal Instruction

Williamson’s focus upon solo singing receded during 1915–19 because of his surgical injury, his increased responsibilities conducting choirs, and his teaching of voice lessons. However, he gained hope from an article in The Etude music magazine by noted vocal pedagogue Herbert Wilbur Greene, the magazine’s vocal editor. Greene was also executive director of the National Association of Teachers of Singing (N.A.T.S.) and a past president of the Music Teachers National Association (M.T.N.A.). In a question-and-answer column,

886. “Bunglesome,” a word first used in 1889, implies a botched job because of a lack of dexterity. From about 1909 on, tonsillectomy was considered a safe surgical procedure in the United States. Williamson underwent his procedure in 1912 in Dayton, Ohio. In 1912, Dayton had a population of 120,344 according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

when asked what to do about a rasp in a male voice, Greene suggested that the rasp was not problematic, but rather a component of “male vitality.” Even though Williamson’s vocal issue was surgically induced, because Greene was a famous and well-respected voice pedagogue, his comments motivated the young man and gave him hope.

In the years following, Williamson became a proponent of Greene’s vocal methods and claimed to have spent several summers studying with him. The location for that study may have been the Brookfield Summer School of Music and Art in Connecticut, which Greene established in 1900 and where he resided during the summer months. The curriculum there focused on a different aspect of vocal technique each week. Greene’s influence upon Williamson was likely significant because he often spoke and wrote about him during his career. It is also possible that Williamson studied with Green at his studio in New York City.

Years later, Williamson mentioned two other voice teachers who espoused the same methods as Greene: David Bispham (1857–1921) and Herbert Witherspoon (1873–1935), both of whom were associated with grand opera in New York City (Witherspoon was general director of the Metropolitan Opera House).

888. John Finley Williamson, “The Art of Choral Conducting,” The Etude 68, no. 4, April 1950, 15. The Etude was a music magazine published from 1883 to 1957.

889. As mentioned previously, the dates of that instruction were never revealed.
The common ideology that bound Greene, Bispham, and Witherspoon together was the Bel Canto technique of father and son vocal teachers Francesco Lamperti (1811–1892) and Giovanni Lamperti (1839–1910). An examination of those principles is important because Williamson reiterated their pedagogy and promoted it as part of his vocal approach to choral music.

Lamperti Technique

Past studies of Williamson have not connected Williamson’s study of Lamperti technique as a solo vocal method with his use of Lamperti procedures as a choral technique. This constitutes a serious omission because in the earliest years of his pedagogy he taught his choirs what he had learned from his voice teachers. From the beginning of the Dayton Westminster Choir school in 1926, and probably a decade before that, he developed his theory of the choir rehearsal as a group voice lesson. Here, Williamson recontextualized techniques he had acquired as a solo vocalist for his choirs. Those teachings were entirely new when he both initiated and adapted them in a choral context. They represent some of the first vocally based choral techniques in the history of American choral music because they had never been used in a choral context.

All of Williamson’s New York voice teachers were teachers of “Lamperti

Technique.” The methods of Francesco and Giovanni Lamperti have been referred to as the “old Italian method.” The basics of this instruction were those of the elder Lamperti and were taught by the younger Lamperti as well. Giovanni was resentful of his father because he believed that his father undervalued the worth of his own teaching and charged inappropriately low fees, thus keeping his large family in poverty. Eventually the two parted ways, but the schism was the result of a difficult father–son relationship, not technical differences in their Bel Canto philosophy.

Everything about the Lamperti vocal technique was deliberate. The concept around which all singing orbited was purity of tone, an ideal valued by all three conductors treated in this study. For Lamperti, an aesthetically beautiful singing voice, which was of paramount importance, originated from correct tone production. A maxim Giovanni often uttered with reference to the primacy of tone was “Quality, quality, quality.” Such quality represented the soul and life of a singing voice. All other vocal considerations such as breathing, placement, and diction were simply aspects of tonal quality.

That did not mean that other aspects of singing were unimportant. One concept was that the singing voice must be “on the breath.” Giovanni Lamperti clarified that rather nebulous idea by explaining that the voice must rest on an

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elastic cushion, responding to the slightest tone pressure, with an instant resilience buoying up the tone. Being on the breath thus prevents rasping of the surrounding parts, squeezing of the throat, and vocal thinness.\textsuperscript{892} The former idea was of special interest to Williamson, whose iatrogenic vocal problems resulted in that type of singing.

Another teaching of Giovanni Lamperti was legato singing. He believed the vocal onset (emission of tone) must be accomplished with the greatest possible limpidity and with perfect intonation. He championed natural breathing, which in late twentieth-century vocal parlance came to be known as diaphragmatic breathing.\textsuperscript{893} He advised students that this type of breathing required many months of application and practice to learn.

Singing a wide variety of repertoire was not a consideration for Lamperti, whose focus lay elsewhere. In fact, his voice students might spend all of their training time singing only one or two compositions. His famous adage, “If you can sing one, you can sing them all, if your voice is placed in purity of tone,” indicated that his emphasis was on perfect technique and aesthetic results rather than a wide knowledge of vocal literature.\textsuperscript{894} Lamperti was opinionated about the middle registers of female voices,

\textsuperscript{892} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{893} Ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{894} Ibid.
which he often found problematic. He believed that there was too much stress on high registers, which he thought resulted in imbalance and weakened the vocal compass. In turn, he thought this caused a disagreeable inequality of tone and worked against the purity he required from all his students. Lamperti placed much emphasis on perfectly controlled small tones. His aphorism, “As the small tone is, so will the large one be,” succinctly explained his rationale. Exquisite and beautiful tone was the goal. Even bombast, if necessary, had to be beautifully sung, so one first approached it from a place of beauty. To help his students achieve his singing goals, he composed many exercises, vocalizes, and solfeggi.

Herbert Witherspoon’s Pedagogy

Williamson’s link to Lamperti technique was through three voice teachers who had studied with these Italian pedagogues. Of primary significance was Herbert Witherspoon, a native of Buffalo, New York. Witherspoon was educated at Yale University where he performed with the Glee Club and studied with Horatio Parker. He also received instruction from Edward MacDowell, Gustav Stoeckel and took singing lessons with Walter...

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896. The earliest recordings of Williamson’s choirs (1920s) exhibit full-voice singing even in Renaissance works. It seems that Williamson did not agree with Lamperti on this issue.

Henry Hall and Max Treumann in New York. Witherspoon then travelled to Europe and studied with Jean-Baptiste Faure in Paris and Francesco Lamperti in Milan. Three years after graduating from Yale in 1895, he began a New York concert career singing in operas and oratorios. In 1908, he made his Metropolitan Opera debut in Wagner’s *Parsifal*, remaining at that company until his retirement from singing in 1914, when he chose to concentrate on teaching. It was during that period that Williamson studied with Witherspoon.

Between 1907 and 1917, Witherspoon made many recordings for the Victor Talking Machine Company. His 1909 recording of Arthur Sullivan’s song “The Lost Chord” (Victor 74137), listened to over a century later reveals a refined free vocal instrument, perfectly in-tune, with a skillfully honed forward resonance.898 This evidence clearly places Witherspoon’s vocal technique in a different category than most other opera singers recording during this early period whose singing skills and technique were not of the same caliber.

Verification of this suggestion is possible via contemporaneous Victor recordings of singers [before 1920], freely accessible on the internet. In this study, it is critical to correlate Witherspoon’s historic recordings with his student Williamson’s abundant confidence in his own vocal training and

education to both analyze and understand what might incorrectly appear to be Williamson’s closed-minded and/or defensive point-of-view. For in Williamson’s hands, those solo Lamperti techniques were what he recontextualized as choral methods and whether or not they were truly efficacious, worthwhile, and valid constitutes a critically important issue. Historical evidence in the form of period recordings seems to indicate that Williamson had indeed tapped into the most advanced singing methods of his time by way of Herbert Witherspoon, and he was well aware of the import and power of his training. It appears that even by twenty-first century vocal standards, Williamson’s vocal education from Witherspoon was up-to-date. As a trained singer, Williamson’s evolving understanding of the voice provided a lone contrasting perspective in the expanding American choral conversation of the 1920s and 1930s. His perspective was based on solo vocal Lamperti technique and he offered American choral directors and music educators another way of thinking about the many rapid changes occurring in choral singing during that period, as well as possibilities that might arise from those ideas.

Williamson’s Formative Dayton Period: 1913 to 1920

In 1913, two years after graduating from Otterbein’s Davis Conservatory of Music, Williamson took a position as choir director at the First United
Brethren Church in Dayton—the church in which his wife Rhea had grown up. That organization did not have a choir, but rather a quartet of paid soloists, which was the common practice in some American Protestant churches of the time. Even though Williamson had sung as a paid singer in a church quartet, increasingly he did not care for the genre as a substitute for choirs in churches. He used many of his private voice students as a nucleus around which he formed his first church choir. Shortly after losing his singing voice, Rhea recalled the circumstances of her husband’s first church choir position:

...through the very sympathetic encouragement of my minister of many years, he organized a choir. To this, he applied himself so arduously that he made people read who did not know how to read music and people sing who did not know how to sing. It was not ability on his part to conduct or teach, it was perseverance. He evidently was born with an inner appreciation for beautiful sound. 899

In the seven years between 1913 and 1920, Williamson combined a number of freelance activities to make ends meet. Those undertakings included teaching public speech and hymnology at Central Reformed Theological Seminary in Dayton. He also began directing choirs in seven churches in this city. 900

Before Williamson’s arrival at First United Brethren Church, the organization’s paid professional quartet was called the “quartet-choir.” That name was likely used because solo quartets in American churches at the time


were replacements for actual choirs. The rationale was that because soloists were trained singers, a professional quartet would sound better than a mixed volunteer choir. Later, when Williamson reestablished an adult choir of men and women for the church, it bore the title “chorus-choir,” perhaps to distinguish it from the former solo quartet-choir.

In 1916, in addition to his church position, Williamson organized the Dayton Chorus, a sixty-voice secular choral society that included most of the singers from his church choir. It was with the Dayton Chorus that Williamson began a lifetime of touring with choirs. The group’s 1917 tour involved traveling twenty-one miles to Xenia, Ohio, and then to Richmond, Ohio, located approximately 214 miles from Dayton. In the summer of that same year, the group also traveled to Winona Lake, Indiana, a venue Williamson would return to four times during the 1920s.

It should be mentioned here that prior to 1920, with the exception of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir, most American choirs did not tour. Williamson’s desire to take his choir on the road could be seen as a wish to both perform and connect with audiences. He not only communicated musically, but “chorally” because up until this point in American choral history there had been very little interest in choirs that strove after a refined aesthetic. Touring was about communication, and in Williamson’s case, the communication of what his
group had to offer: a new choral aesthetic. When an aesthetic was accomplished in a way different from the status quo, it drew attention, focus, and interest. Displaying cultivated sounds was not about the image of an ensemble, but rather its musical impact. Those early choir outings represent evidence that the beginnings of cultivated sound in the United States were connected with the projection of refined singing traditions via choir tours. As time went on and the phenomenon of the American *a cappella* movement of the 1930s developed toward its zenith around 1939, choir tours became much more common and even *de rigueur* for many school and college choirs. That tradition was initiated by only a few but increasing number of leaders between 1906 and 1930, Williamson among them.

Williamson learned to conduct on-the-job from 1913 to 1920. At the Davis Conservatory, he studied voice but never learned conducting. A journal from 1936 by his wife Rhea indicates that at this stage he was often frustrated with the sound of his choirs and was prone to temperamental displays in an attempt to fix vocal problems.\(^{901}\) Williamson preferred to learn by doing rather than submit to formal instruction, even if that meant doing what he did not know how to do. Rhea Williamson wrote:

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He broke dozens of batons (...we purchased them in dozen lots from Eddy in Canada, whoever Eddy was). He scolded his singers, he lost his temper, he soaked his feet in hot water every night after rehearsal so he could sleep...There always seemed to be that conflict between what he heard with his inner ear and what he actually heard outwardly.902

In an era before a widespread understanding of attention deficit issues, it did not occur to the young conductor that training would have been a more efficient path or that rehearsal histrionics were unnecessary. On the other hand, Williamson’s frustration was not the only emotion he presented to his choirs. Throughout his entire career and even afterward, many observed that he possessed a charismatic ability to inspire singers. His early choirs were apparently not frustrated by his lack of skill or experience, but instead were fascinated and inspired by his persistence, piety, and magnetism.

In his early role as a church musician, Williamson devoted thought to the state of Protestant church music in the United States. Increasingly opposed to the practice of paid quartets providing operatic-style entertainment on Sunday mornings, much like F. Melius Christiansen and Peter Lutkin, he concluded that ecclesiastical music needed drastic improvement. For Williamson, church music was an integral part of worship because theoretically it represented a direct approach to God. However, in his lifetime of church attendance as the son of a clergyman, he had never experienced music in this

902. Ibid.
way. Therefore, Williamson became increasingly committed to what he saw as a noble mission to improve music in American churches.

Westminster Presbyterian Church

Until the fall of 1920, Westminster Presbyterian Church did not exist. It was a new religious organization formed from the merger of two Dayton churches, First Presbyterian Church and Third Street Presbyterian Church. However, the genesis of Westminster Church can be traced to a single institution, First Presbyterian Church, established in 1799. Third Street Presbyterian Church broke away from First Presbyterian Church in 1839, the result of a contentious dispute regarding slavery and original sin. The two organizations, only a city block apart, maintained separate congregations for some eighty-one years. In 1919, their differences long forgotten, the two churches reunited under the name of Westminster Presbyterian Church as a congregation of 1,146 members.903

The creation of a new sacred space for Westminster Presbyterian Church did not happen overnight, as the planners of this Dayton church were on a quest for the best. For three years, from 1920 to 1923, consulting architect Ralph Adams Cram (1863–1942) of the Boston firm of Cram, Wentworth, and

Goodhue conceived its Gothic Revival (also known as Victorian Gothic or Neo-Gothic) design. Cram was not only a celebrity architect, but also an arch Anglo-Catholic who specialized in disciplined Gothic Revival and Collegiate Gothic architecture. His well-known projects included the grandest ecclesiastical spaces of the East Coast: the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, St. Thomas Church on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, and, coincidentally, Princeton University Chapel, where Williamson would spend many future hours. After the planning stage, three years (1923–26) elapsed before completion of the striking Neo-Gothic edifice. The final cost of Westminster Presbyterian Church’s new Calvinist “cathedral” was $860,705.90, equivalent to $11,568,470.83 in 2014 dollars.

Westminster’s design was aligned with a style that British architectural historian Bridget Cherry called “dissenting gothic revival.” Cram’s plan meant taking a Protestant design and clothing it in what most would consider a non-Protestant stylistic vocabulary (yet a vocabulary with a uniquely Protestant

904. Anglo-Catholic here refers to an Anglican/Episcopal subgroup that emphasizes the Catholic tradition, especially in sacraments and rituals and obedience to church authority.


syntax). This included a “stacked chancel,” an arrangement that allowed for the altar (referred to as the Lord’s Table in Presbyterian churches), pulpit (or lectern in some cases), elders’ seats, and choir to occupy central positions in the front of the church.\textsuperscript{907} To achieve this, Cram took the medieval quire and compressed the elements back into one another, causing a “stacking” of pieces. It was in this lofty “front and center” position, high above the congregation, that Williamson and his \textit{a cappella} choir made music.

That vision of gothic grandeur beloved by Williamson was in synchrony with the aesthetics of the Westminster Presbyterian Church congregation. Never mind that such an image was at odds with the stark asceticism historically associated with followers of Calvinism, who tended to reject ritual and symbolism. Williamson adored grandness, even grandiosity. Though brought up in a simple, rural, non-liturgical religious tradition, he repeatedly gravitated toward and seemed most inspired by splendor, majestic spaces, and pomp throughout his life.\textsuperscript{908} For this choral conductor, any expression of his multisensory aesthetic may have involved drama, ceremony, ritual, music, theatre, space, architecture, visual art, pageantry, and acoustics.\textsuperscript{909}

\begin{flushright}
907. Ibid.
908. The United Brethren Church was pietistic and Anabaptist rather than Calvinistic.
909. As of the date of this study, the annual commencement exercises of Westminster Choir College are held in Princeton University Chapel, a dissenting Gothic Revival style
\end{flushright}
The Dayton Westminster Choir’s Dayton Period: 1920 to 1929

Williamson remained in his position at First United Brethren Church until the spring of 1920, when he resigned to become choir director at Dayton’s newly formed Westminster Presbyterian Church. Almost immediately, he configured a volunteer choir of sixty committed singers, who sang together for the first time on September 5 of that year. An unidentified essayist explained circumstances surrounding the beginning of that choir:

When John Finley Williamson was called to have charge of the music at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Dayton, Ohio, the professional quartet had almost superseded the volunteer choir in [American] Church music. Most of those going into Church music were doing so as a means of supporting themselves while they studied for the concert or opera stage or else turned to Church music as a means of making a living because they failed to find openings in concert or opera.

The members of the choir, which Dr. Williamson led, were men and women who clerked, typed, kept houses, worked in factories and the like during the day and who came together to rehearse at night and to sing twice each Sunday in the Westminster Presbyterian Church.

Earlier, in 1936, Rhea Williamson painted a similar picture of the choir’s foundation in 1920 at a luncheon address in Manhattan:

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...in a day when choirs were few, he announced in the newspapers try-outs on a certain Sunday afternoon. Partly because of curiosity and partly because of a desire to sing, many came. Sixty were accepted with a mailing list of twice as many more. They were clerks, teachers, painters, housewives, mail carriers, bankers, and merchants. What they were didn’t matter. What did matter was that they believed in the church and accepted the rule that if absent once or tardy three times without an excuse they were dropped from the organization.\textsuperscript{912}

Williamson’s wife went on to point out that due to the success of the Dayton Westminster Choir, the congregation had tripled in size, filling Dayton’s 3,000-seat Memorial Hall, their temporary home during design and construction of their new building. She explained: “The choir and their director made for themselves such a reputation for worshipful music that the congregation [1,100 members] soon caught up with the capacity of the hall!”\textsuperscript{913}

In the Dayton Westminster Choir’s first year, the group was referred to as the “Chorus-Choir,” a title Williamson had used previously with his First United Brethren Church Choir.\textsuperscript{914} It was not until the following year, 1921, that the name was changed to “Westminster Choir.” When touring, it was known as “The Dayton Westminster Choir.”\textsuperscript{915}

\begin{itemize}
\item[912.] Rhea B. Williamson, “The Westminster Story.”
\item[913.] Ibid.
\item[915.] Wehr, “John Finley Williamson,” 33.
\end{itemize}
The Westminster Plan

During the seven years from 1913 to 1920, Williamson continued his consideration of the state of Protestant church music in the United States. Upon taking up his new post at Westminster Presbyterian Church in the fall of 1920, his ideas eventually coalesced into a plan of action for “churches of all denominations.” By 1925, Williamson and Hugh Ivan Evans, the new minister at Westminster Presbyterian Church, codified an educational pathway for individuals that encompassed service to the community and a program of worship for the church. His ideas encouraged the creation of music departments in churches under the control of a “Minister of Music,” a term first coined by Williamson. That individual was to be rigorously trained and on equal status with clergy.

Volunteer adult choirs were part of the “Westminster Plan,” since Williamson disapproved of paid quartets in churches, the prevailing practice of the day. Choirs of young people were also encouraged, the number depending on the size of the congregation. Entirely new was Williamson’s belief that every church should have a church orchestra. Williamson’s “Ministers of Music” were busy people, for he proposed that every member of a Westminster Plan adult


917. Ibid.
choir was to receive free individual vocal training. Ministers of Music were required to possess three subjective characteristics: the highest type of Christian character, sound musicianship, and a magnetic personality.

Williamson’s Westminster Plan affected the choral singing styles in participating churches because, according to his scheme, a minimum of fifty percent of all sung music was necessarily unaccompanied. At Dayton’s Westminster Presbyterian Church, choral music, other than hymns sung with pipe organ, was *a cappella*, as the first Dayton Westminster Choir, from its inception under Williamson, was unaccompanied. Church orchestras were for providing instrumental music, not accompaniment. By putting focus on *a cappella* music in communities, the Westminster Plan also indirectly supported the mission of his own touring choir. As that ensemble became increasingly well known, both sacred and secular audiences in local areas in which the Westminster Plan was implemented gradually became aware of the *a cappella* genre. Its benefits, however small, also extended to music education in schools, colleges, and universities. Specifically, the plan was aimed at but not limited to Protestant churches, which comprised a large percentage of the total church demographic of that era. By advocating that choral tone be separated from accompaniment on a large scale, Williamson was proposing that conductors

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learn to listen critically to, and cultivate, unadulterated four-part choral tone. He was not recommending that choral musicians do something that he had not first modeled for them. In that light, he and his choir represented both theory and prototype.

Williamson was invested as the Plan’s first “Minister of Music” at Dayton’s Westminster Presbyterian Church in 1925. That same year, he introduced his plan to the nation’s music educators in a speech to the Music Teacher’s National Association. This was an era when the subject of sacred music was routinely treated in music education journals and at conventions of secular national music education organizations. One year later, Williamson repeated that address to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, the ruling body of that organization in the United States. The clergy comprising this gathering were interested and formally recognized his plan. However, perhaps resistant to the financial consequences of its “equal status with clergy” ideology, this body of ministers failed to adopt the Westminster Plan for the Presbyterian Church.


Williamson and *A Cappella Singing*

Williamson started his first notable ensemble in 1920, the Dayton Westminster Choir, a professional-level *a cappella* church choir that toured. From that year until his retirement in 1958, his touring ensemble was unaccompanied. In the 1940s, a few accompanied works were introduced on choir tours. However, even during that period, tour and concert programs indicate that the vast majority of repertoire programmed on concerts was *a cappella*. *The Continent*, a religious periodical, confirmed in 1922 that, “Except when leading the congregation in the singing of hymns, it always sings without musical accompaniment.”

Many years after its genesis in Dayton, Williamson’s Westminster Choir began its long-time association with the major orchestras of the eastern seaboard, particularly those of New York City and Philadelphia. That collaboration brought national attention, name recognition, and continuing opportunities to the choir. For that new role, Williamson expanded his select *a cappella* touring choir by adding upper division persons from the college to form a much larger accompanied chorus—a symphonic choir. Under his guidance, that expanded chorus adopted a controversial operatic choral tone that he believed was capable of functioning with a symphony orchestra. Over

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time, the reputation of the Westminster Choir became identified with that “symphonic sound,” a darker, covered, pharyngeal tone with a wide vibrato.

For the purpose of this study, it should be noted that from that point on, there were two Westminster Choirs: a symphonic chorus and a separate *a cappella* touring choir. Both bore the title “Westminster Choir.” Westminster Choir College historian Charles Schisler explained:

> Beginning with the major orchestral performances the title “Westminster Choir,” formerly used only with the forty-voice a cappella touring ensemble, was also used to designate the large symphonic choir in which all the upper classmen of the College participated. This dual usage of the title continues to the present time.\(^9\)

After John Finley Williamson’s retirement and unexpected death in 1964, the names were eventually changed for the sake of clarity. What was formerly a symphonic chorus is now called the Westminster Symphonic Choir. The select touring choir, which as of this writing still sings mostly *a cappella* repertoire, retains the name “Westminster Choir.” The present study is limited to Williamson’s work with his original unaccompanied touring choir.

**The Dayton Westminster Choir School**

The Dayton Westminster Choir School was not just the result of considerable musical success in the establishment of a new choral tradition from 1920 to 1926 at Westminster Presbyterian Church (see fig. 6.2).

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Williamson had been planning the school since at least 1922, when he commented to the *Detroit Free Press* that any earnings from the 1922 tour of the Dayton Westminster Choir “will be used as a nucleus for a choir school to train leaders for the extension of choral singing in the churches.” There was also an increasing need for the school. As Rhea Williamson wrote, “It seemed that every minister who heard the choir sing wanted someone to train his young people similarly, and out of demand in 1926 we founded Westminster Choir School in Dayton, Ohio.”

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923. Ibid.


925. Photograph courtesy of Westminster Choir College Archives, Talbott Library,
In 1926, Westminster Presbyterian Church’s new neo-Gothic edifice was completed. That same year, studies at the Westminster Choir School commenced, housed entirely in the new facilities. The school had access to fifty-five Sunday school rooms where classes convened. For organists, a four-manual Skinner pipe organ in the sanctuary and a two-manual Wicks pipe organ in the chapel were both available for lessons with Westminster’s organist David Hugh Jones and for practice. The chapel was the site of choral rehearsals. The first year the Dayton school had sixty students and a faculty of ten, none of whom received remuneration between 1926 and 1929. A 1934 Time Magazine article, entitled “Westminster’s Way,” depicted the type of student Williamson preferred for the Westminster Choir School:

John Williamson was not content with one group’s singing, no matter how expert. He wanted protégés who, like himself, would be willing to devote a lifetime to church and choral music. In 1926, encouraged by

Princeton, NJ. Here, the choir wears religious vestments; their conductor chooses formal secular attire. Although his first choir initially proceeded from an ecclesiastical context, their trajectory was one that constantly gravitated toward performance in high-profile secular venues.

926. David Hugh Jones, a notable organist, composer, and music educator, studied with the English organist T. Tertius Noble in New York City. He was recruited from New York for Westminster Presbyterian Church in Dayton, Ohio in the 1920s. He remained with Williamson throughout his career, first as a church organist and later as a professor of organ at Westminster Choir College in Princeton, NJ. The 4-manual Skinner organ at Westminster Presbyterian Church was built in 1924 and designed by Ernest M. Skinner (when the name of the Boston Company was simply “Skinner Organ Company”). Its opus number was 499.


928. David Hugh Jones to Bedford and Bedford (Mr. and Mrs.), 11 November 1972, John Finley Williamson Papers, Westminster Choir College Archives, Talbott Library, Princeton, NJ.
Mrs. Harry Elstner Talbott, he started the Westminster Choir School.\textsuperscript{929}

When the Dayton Westminster Choir was launched in 1920, it was a volunteer church choir. With the founding of the Westminster Choir School in 1926, there was a change in the demographic of the church choir. Beginning in that year, only students enrolled in the school were allowed to be members of the sixty-voice Dayton Westminster Choir. In her 1942 master’s thesis on the contributions of the Westminster Choir to American choral music, Helen Schmoyer listed the requirements for membership in the choir during that period: (1) unusual personality and character, (2) high standing in theoretical studies, (3) a resonant voice which is easily tuned, and (4) the ability to cooperate and adapt to unusual conditions.\textsuperscript{930}

These new choir school membership requirements contained one notable change from the original 1920 admission requirements: “highest type of Christian character, sound musicianship, and a magnetic personality.” Even though the school was based upon a church choir and housed in a church, with the beginning of the Westminster Choir School, “Christian character” became “unusual character.”\textsuperscript{931}

\textsuperscript{929} n.a., “Music: Westminster’s Way.”

\textsuperscript{930} Helen Cecilia Schmoyer, “Contribution of the Westminster Choir Movement to American Choral Music” (MMus thesis, North Texas State Teachers College, 1942), 44.

\textsuperscript{931} John Finley Williamson, “1926 Dayton Westminster Choir School Catalogue,”
A remarkable phenomenon that occurred in the ecclesiastical/academic context of the Westminster Choir School in Dayton was the evolution of an amateur church choir into a choir with professional performance standards. Part of that development involved long tours in the United States and Europe, which resulted in making the “concert church choir” famous. It is possible that the “concert” part of that image was a very definite, though downplayed, aspect of Williamson’s intention, dreams, and long-term goals. Historical data provokes two questions involving two parts of that equation—an evolving dichotomy involving the Williamson’s apparent fusion of sacred and secular. First, were the choir school and its attendant choir being presented solely as a church ministry exemplifying the very best in sacred choral music? Alternatively, even in these very early stages, was the possibility of future uber-performance an unspoken goal that excited and motivated the Williamsons, his entire ensemble, and his financial supporters?

As time went on, fast-developing opportunities propelled what had begun as a volunteer church choir into a new organization far from the Neo-Gothic arches of Westminster Presbyterian Church. At the same time, Williamson, his students, and alumni of the school, at least in theory, remained fully committed to their image as servants of the church via church music. It is

Dayton, OH, Westminster Choir College Archives, Talbott Library, Princeton, NJ.
interesting that no cognitive dissonance existed in this scenario. On one hand, there was the choristers’ dedication to sacred music, the Williamsons, and the Dayton Westminster Choir School, and on the other was the group’s unspoken quest for the best in concert choral music in the best secular venues with the finest orchestras in the world. There were seemingly no boundaries or limits in this unusual coexistence of “concert choral music” with “sacred choral music.”

The Dayton Westminster Choir School curriculum was specific for choral musicians, with an emphasis on music theory.932 Listed from the “1926 Dayton Westminster Choir School Catalogue,” required courses were: (1) Vocal Class, (2) Psychology, (3) Conducting Class, (4) Hymnology, (5) English, (6) Religious Education, (7) Theory – Fundamentals of Music, (8) Theory – Tone Thinking and Ear Training, (9) Theory – Keyboard Harmony, (10) Theory – Applied Harmony, (11) Organ, (12) Piano, and (13) Voice.933 Voice lessons at the choir school were taught only by Williamson using a “class-lesson” approach, which complemented the Westminster Plan. From the beginning, no outside voice teachers were allowed. Because every choir rehearsal represented a class voice lesson, students could immediately transfer what they had learned to their own choirs. Such an approach was one of the earliest theoretical

932. Ibid., 1–6.

departures from the techniques of Williamson’s mentor, F. Melius Christiansen, who was not a trained singer and therefore could not approach choral music vocally.

The “Westminster Sound”

My memory flashed back to my first day as a student on this campus...74 years ago. It was dinnertime, and all the students gathered in the foyer of the dining room, which was below this chapel. We waited until the appointed time, then all entered, standing around carefully set tables of four. We stood until the evening hymn was sung. I was in heavenly awe when “Day is Dying in the West” was sung in beautiful four-part harmony...a cappella. I experienced for the first time the famous “Westminster sound”!\[934

With the formation of the Dayton Westminster Chorus-Choir in 1920, Williamson also gave individual voice lessons to all his choristers with the intention of developing the full vocal potential of each. One singer who was with Williamson in the earliest days of his career was Lorean Hodapp, a young lyric soprano. She served on the Westminster Choir College faculty for almost half a century, from 1926 to 1974, and sang with Williamson’s choir from the founding of his Dayton Westminster Choir School. In an interview, Hodapp acknowledged that at first Williamson copied his mentor, F. Melius Christiansen, who preferred what she described as “puerile” vocal tone.\[935

\[934\] Helen Kemp, “Life Songs.”

\[935\] Interview with Lorean Hodapp, quoted in Wehr, “John Finley Williamson,” 54.
Music critic C. Pannil Mead confirmed Williamson’s initial preference for a boy soprano sound in an unidentified clipping from a Milwaukee newspaper:

Dr. Williamson has contrived to find soprano voices of such lovely purity that they are as sexless as those of English choirboys who have been trained from babyhood. The angelic effect of these soaring tones brought tears to the eyes, so enchanting was it.936

However, according to Hodapp, Williamson eventually tired of his ideal:

“St. Olaf’s was beautiful singing but it was so lifeless. Williamson wanted to create a choir that had a lot of life, tonal beauty, and spontaneity, and he could do this.”937 It should be mentioned that Hodapp’s statement, “it was so lifeless,” is her own and not quoted from Williamson. However, recordings from the 1920s demonstrate that Williamson did try to create a vital sound, one different than that of his mentor, which he referred to in gender-specific language.938

Akin to his colleagues Peter Lutkin and F. Melius Christiansen, he portrayed vitality as “virile” or “manly.” In fact, he used similar language throughout his career. For example, after his retirement he complained to the


937. Interview with Lorean Hodapp, quoted in Wehr, “John Finley Williamson,” 54.

938. Beck, Selected Writings of John Finley Williamson, 108. Beck is referring to Victor recording 20410 (16000–27000 10 in. double-faced, Matrix numbers BVE-36782 and BVE-36784). That recording was released in January of 1927 and deleted from the Victor catalogue in 1944. It contained on one side a recording of Antonio Lotti’s Crucifixus (the version is not indicated), and on the other, Palestrina’s motet Hodie Christus Natus Est.
Westminster Board of Trustees about the tone of his successor’s Westminster Choir in a 1961 letter: “…their voices had been so lightened that the virility was gone from their tone. It took me two hours and a half of hard work before I could get virile tone from the group.”

For Williamson, cultivating a “virile” sound from his choir meant developing a sound that was bigger, louder, darker, and more covered than before. More than a half-century after the death of John Finley Williamson, one might suppose that such a sound was employed only when the group sang with orchestras. However, as Victor recordings from the 1920s illustrate, Williamson often employed and promoted full resonance for both a cappella and symphonic singing throughout his career regardless of the style of the music.

Later, when his choir began singing with orchestras, such a sound was rationalized as one capable of being heard over a symphony orchestra. To twenty-first-century ears, the sound of the 1926 Dayton Westminster Choir singing Palestrina’s double-choir motet *Hodie Christus Natus Est* might be described as dark, flat, covered, pharyngeal, fully resonant, forte chorus singing without accompaniment. These recordings also demonstrate that what has been previously portrayed as straight-tone singing was not *senza vibrato*, but instead singing with a definite vibrato. Those same recordings confirm that musical

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style was perhaps not Williamson’s forte. For the Westminster conductor, 
choral tone did not change even when the musical genre did. In a video-
recorded interview from the 1990s with former Westminster Choir chorister 
and Williamson student Joseph Beck, Beck stated candidly that during his 
student days at Westminster Choir College students joked, “He [Williamson] 
made Monteverdi sound like Giuseppe Verdi.”

Williamson’s Choice of the A Cappella Genre

There were perhaps several reasons for Williamson’s choice of a cappella 
singing, but not all of them were of equal weight. In 1925, he was quoted in 
print stating, “I personally prefer a cappella singing to all other kinds of 
religious music; even the young organization can obtain magnificent effects 
with such music.” Probably foremost, and overriding all others, was his first 
impression of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir in the spring of 1920. At that time, 
he was highly impressed and wished to emulate the Minnesota ensemble. 
Records at St. Olaf College indicate that around 1920 Williamson sought advice 
from F. Melius Christiansen. At that time, Williamson remarked to

940. David Wallis, A Character Study in Ensemble Performance: John Finley Williamson. 
VHS tape, ed. by David Beck (St. Charles, MO: Lindenwood University, 2006). Host David 
Wallis, Program Coordinator for Vocal Activities, Lindenwood University, interviews guest Dr. 
Joseph G. Beck, author of the book Selected Writings of John Finley Williamson. A former 
student of Williamson’s, Beck explained how Williamson influenced him and how he came to 
publish a book on his writings.

941. Paul Hutchinson, “What Is the Matter with Church Music,” The Christian Advocate, 
23 July 1925, 920–21.
Christiansen that his own choir “could not sing a cappella music.”

In a 1962 interview, the Westminster choir conductor offered a different and perhaps less convincing story concerning his use of that singing style. Forty years after his Dayton days, he explained that the tracker organ at Westminster Presbyterian Church was problematic. The mechanical action of that instrument, he said, was hard, and caused the fingers of the organist to swell. This made it difficult for her to make it through church services. Williamson stated that a cappella anthems were employed as a way of adapting to this circumstance. He told Leonard Van Camp, a music educator who interviewed him, that this was the “primary reason” for his specialization in unaccompanied music. He added that this reason drove his search for a cappella repertoire, even inspiring him to visit the personal libraries of Peter Lutkin in Evanston, Illinois; Eric DeLamarter in Chicago; F. Melius Christiansen in Northfield, Minnesota; and Clarence Dickinson in New York City.

The problem with Williamson’s remembrance is that Dayton’s Westminster Presbyterian Church never had a tracker organ, and their organist


was not a “her.” According to the archives of the Skinner Organ Company of Boston, in 1924 the new church awarded this firm a contract for a 48-rank, 4-manual pipe organ with 3,122 pipes, opus 499. This was a state-of-the-art electro-pneumatic action instrument, not a tracker-action organ. It is possible that Williamson was referring to the organ at First United Brethren Church of Dayton, his position before Westminster Presbyterian Church. During his entire choral career, for thirty-eight years, from 1920 until 1958, the Westminster choir under his direction sang unaccompanied choral music almost exclusively. During this period, no tracker action organ was associated with his choir.

Lastly, Williamson explained that intonation was a good reason for singing a cappella choral music. His views on this topic were in alignment with his older colleagues, F. Melius Christiansen and Peter C. Lutkin, who believed that unaccompanied choral music facilitated the tuning of choirs. In 1925, Williamson presented an address at the Music Teachers National Association convention in which he confirmed that idea:

The best way to secure trueness of intonation is through a cappella singing. Let a choir once experience that sheer joy that comes from being a part of a chord in tune with just or natural intervals and the

battle is over. They will resent singing out of tune. It is a matter more of feeling than of hearing.\textsuperscript{945}

It is probable that Williamson was initially so impressed with the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir that he copied everything about the group and its director when beginning his choral work at Dayton’s Westminster Presbyterian Church. Before taking that position, his choral model was not fixed. After being overwhelmed by Christiansen and his ensemble, that group became his choral model. Williamson’s journeys to choral libraries listed were likely at the recommendation of his Norwegian mentor, who had visited them as well.\textsuperscript{946}

Vibrato versus Straight Tone

From the early 1920s Williamson was a devotee of F. Melius Christiansen, whose choir sang without vibrato. As a trained singer, Williamson felt that vibrato was a natural expression of the singing voice. In his 2014 book on Williamson as a “choral ambassador,” his former student Joseph Beck explained: “During the early 1920’s, he had felt that their [St. Olaf Lutheran College Choir’s] straight tone technique was the desired sound for a choir. The Dayton Westminster Choir’s 1926 recording [Palestrina’s double-choir motet


\textsuperscript{946} See Chapter 5 for a discussion of Christiansen’s visit to choral libraries.
Hodie Christus Natus Est/Victor Records] clearly shows the St. Olaf influence.”

This study agrees with Beck, as the choral tone was colorless, however vibrato was clearly present.

Beck argues that before 1929, Williamson had his choir sing in a *senza vibrato* style in imitation of his mentor Christiansen and then after his European tours of 1929 and 1934; vibrato was introduced into the ensemble’s sound. In a much later Williamson recording of the Mozart Requiem from 1956 (outside the limits of this research) conducted by Bruno Walter with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, the choral tone does indeed border on straight-tone. Here, either Williamson or Walter reduced the width of the vibrato to a point that it becomes almost unnoticeable, however, it is always discernable and never disappears. This study finds that Williamson’s extant recordings from the 1920s are not examples of straight-tone singing.

Beck notes that, sometimes vibrato became offensive when Williamson directed choral festivals. Williamson would solve the problem by working on the singers’ posture, breathing, and attack without mentioning the subject of vibrato. He too loved the sound of boys choirs in Europe and felt that straight tone was correct for unchanged voices. Williamson also defended F. Melius

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948. Ibid., 38.
Christiansen’s use of straight tone, writing:

One of my student colleagues stated his strong distaste for the St. Olaf choir because of its straight tone singing. Dr. Williamson was visibly angry. He proceeded to tell the student how misinformed he was about the “great St. Olaf Choir.” He explained the effect that St. Olaf Choir founder, F. Melius Christiansen had upon him. He said that Dr. Christiansen was a dear friend and had a great influence upon Dr. Williamson’s work with the newly founded Dayton Westminster Choir. He considered Dr. Christiansen’s performances of the St. Olaf Choir outstanding. When the St. Olaf Choir would come to Dayton, Dr. Williamson would attend the concerts and also require all his choir members to attend.\footnote{Ibid., 37.}

As previously noted, Williamson’s Bel Canto training with Herbert Wilbur Green, David Bispham and Herbert Witherspoon occurred between 1910 and 1920, before he was hired at Dayton’s Westminster Presbyterian Church. This would support the idea that Williamson’s thought was independent on the subject of vocal vibrato and that he agreed to disagree with Christiansen on this aspect of singing probably from the beginning of his devotion to the older conductor, rather than a decade later. Christiansen demanded choral blend at all costs while Williamson preferred individual vocal development based on classical Italian vocal technique over blend, which meant that vibrato was an implicit component of Williamson’s choral sound.
The Dayton Westminster Choir: Tours

Less than two years after Williamson became the music director at Dayton Westminster Presbyterian Church in September of 1920, the choir began to perform outside of Dayton. There were no tours his first year, 1920–21, but the Westminster “Chorus-Choir” departed on its first tour in July of its second season (1921). The ensemble was financed by a group of city businesspersons rather than by the church. The group’s destination was Winona Lake, Indiana, 185 miles northwest of Dayton (see fig. 6.3). In 1921, Homer Rodeheaver (1880–1955), a famous gospel musician, invited the chorus to serve as the choir for the Practical Training School for Gospel Singers and Workers, which took place yearly in July and August.\footnote{Williamson, “Choir Organization and Training,” 226.} Rodeheaver was the music director for the well-known American evangelist, prohibitionist, and former professional baseball player Billy Sunday (1862–1935). He [Rodeheaver] asked Williamson to teach at the school during the choir’s residency, which took place for one week in July of 1921.\footnote{“Full Schedule for Winona,” 19 May 1921, 607.} During that week, Sunday held revivalist camp meetings every afternoon and evening from July 21 through 24, with music conducted by the trombone-playing Rodeheaver.\footnote{Ibid.}

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952. Ibid.
The site for these events was Billy Sunday’s 5,000-seat “Tabernacle” in Winona Lake. Here, Rodeheaver juxtaposed favorite old-time evangelical Christian hymns with huge choir pieces such as Handel’s chorus “Hallelujah” from *Messiah*. During the weeklong period, the Dayton choir sang concerts twice daily to capacity crowds and performed Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*. One news report stated that the ensemble “delighted many thousands” on this, its first, musical venture. Williamson’s choir was in residence at Winona Lake for a week each summer from 1921 through 1924.

Next, from September through May, nearby urban centers furnished venues for choir tours. After its appearance at Winona Lake in 1921, the choir

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953. Photograph of Westminster Chorus-Choir from 1921, Westminster Choir College Archives, Talbott Library, Westminster Choir College, Princeton, NJ. Note that John Finley Williamson is photographed in secular clothing, while his choir wears religious vestments.


955. Swazey, “Dayton Choir on Tour,” 149.
embarked on its first tour to the Middle West, in November of 1922, traveling to Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Ashtabula, Canton, Detroit, Flint, Lansing, and Grand Rapids.\footnote{Ibid.} This was the group’s first tour under the management of New York impresario Martin H. Hanson, who had become the group’s tour manager only six months prior, in April of that year.\footnote{Hanson had been the tour manager for the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir’s 1920 tour of the East Coast under F. Melius Christiansen. After that tour, St. Olaf no longer used Hanson’s services and Christiansen recommended him to Williamson.} That tour proved more costly than originally anticipated by the Westminster Church Choir Association.\footnote{Wehr, “John Finley Williamson,” 38.} In fact, the Dayton Westminster Choir found itself in dire financial straits during the 1922 tour, as reported in *The Continent* magazine:

The stories of the struggles of finance during that trip, with almost daily appeals to Dayton to send money to get them from one city to another, would make great reading if it were possible to tell it; but the men of the church loyally supported the choir tour. During all this period, Dr. Williamson held fast to his ideal against the discouragement that everywhere seemed to face him. Day after day often with heavy hearts the committee with Dr. Williamson and the Pastor faced the prospect of a sinking ship.\footnote{“Dayton Choir on Tour,” *The Continent*, 23 November 1922, 149.} Three wealthy Dayton businesspersons, leaders of the choir organization, and members of the Westminster Presbyterian Church congregation, carried the debts of that trip, saving the day for Williamson.\footnote{Ibid.}
Financial Considerations

Even though its 1922 tour had been financially disastrous, the choir’s public image was stable. In November of 1922, for example, an article appeared in *The Continent* portraying that all was well with the group:

The chorus choir of the Westminster church of Dayton, Ohio, which delighted many thousands during the week it spent at Winona Lake the past summer, has gone on a tour to the cities of Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Ashtabula, Canton, Detroit, Flint, Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids. This choir consists of fifty young men and women, organized and trained by John Finley Williamson, a music teacher of the city. The organization has been in existence for about three years and has become so popular that the church where it sings is crowded beyond capacity at every service. Although none of its members receive pay for singing, they have the privilege of one or two private voice lessons every week. The choir members are members of the church, the director refusing to admit an irreligious person. Their repertoire is entirely religious music, and none but religious selections are given on the concert tour. Except when leading the congregation in the singing of hymns, it always sings without musical accompaniment. An organization of business men has guaranteed any deficit which may result from this tour. It has moreover persuaded the employers of the young people composing the organization to grant each member two weeks winter vacation at full pay. Mr. Williamson, the leader, is the son of Rev. W. W. Williamson, pastor of the United Brethren church in Akron.961

The creation of the Westminster Church Choir Association in 1922 represented the beginning of a quest for secure financial support for the Westminster Choir. In February of 1923, Charles M. Kelso, the young chairman of the association, a successful businessman, and leader in the Westminster congregation, made an auspicious recommendation to Williamson. He

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961. Ibid.
suggested that he and Williamson try to interest Mrs. Katherine Talbott (1864–1935), a wealthy Daytonian, patron of the arts, and trained singer in the choir. In Talbott’s private memorial biography, written by her children and organized by her daughter Eliza T. Thayer, there are two chapters dedicated to the relationship between her mother and the Dayton Westminster Choir.\textsuperscript{962}

According to that account, when Talbott heard Williamson’s ensemble she was astonished and impressed with the group’s singing (see fig. 6.4 for the choir’s program). She approached Williamson after the concert, saying, “Young man, your choir is a revelation. What is your history? What are your plans? What can I do to help?”\textsuperscript{963} An interview between music historian David Wehr and Lorean Hodapp, a member of Williamson’s choir from its beginning, independently confirms the account in Talbott’s memorial biography. Hodapp remembers Williamson stating to his choir before singing for Mrs. Talbott in February of 1923: “We must sing as we’ve never sung before.”\textsuperscript{964} After meeting Williamson, the two talked at length after the concert, and the Dayton patron discerned the

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\textsuperscript{962} N.a., \textit{Katharine Houk Talbott, 1864–1935} (Mount Vernon, NY: P Beilenson, 1949). This is a memorial biography organized and privately written by Talbott’s children for her grandchildren.


\textsuperscript{964} Interview with Lorean Hodapp, quoted in Wehr, “John Finley Williamson,” 43. That interview was conducted in Princeton, NJ, 20 June 1970.


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<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM</th>
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<tr>
<td>I Wrestle and Pray</td>
<td>Johann Sebastian Bach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus, Friend of Sinners</td>
<td>Edward Grieg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judge Me, O God</td>
<td>Felix Mendelssohn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fierce Was the Wild Billow</td>
<td>T. Tertius Noble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Christ Said</td>
<td>Peter Lutkin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Shepherd’s Story</td>
<td>Clarence Dickinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awake, Awake</td>
<td>Philipp Nicolai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful Savior</td>
<td>Twelfth Century</td>
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<tr>
<td>Praise to the Lord</td>
<td>Peter Soehren</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psalm Fifty</td>
<td>F. Melius Christiansen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listen to the Lambs</td>
<td>R. Nathaniel Dett</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ballad of the Trees and</td>
<td>Philip James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Master</td>
<td>Alexander Gretchaninoff</td>
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<tr>
<td>O God, Hear My Prayer</td>
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Figure 6.4. Dayton Westminster Choir Tour Program, 1923–24

choir’s serious financial need. However, throwing her considerable fortune at a cause was not Katherine Talbott’s style. She believed that her financial assistance would be magnified if the city’s music lovers and business executives helped her support Williamson’s mission. Therefore, rather than initially

donating money to the choir, she first used her reputation and influence in the greater Dayton arts community to let it be known that she had discovered a new ensemble that she both endorsed and supported, and that Dayton should do likewise.966

Her plan worked, for Talbott’s manner and authenticity were respected in that city. Consequently, citizens of Dayton who were not members of Westminster Presbyterian Church became convinced of the choir’s worth as ambassadors and advertisers for their city. The citizens’ group then met with the Westminster Church Choir Association and convinced the association to relinquish control of the ensemble to the former. At this point, what had been a church choir became a civic enterprise under the support of a new organization, the Dayton Westminster Choir Association. That organization even sold “shares of stock” in their organization to Daytonians to fund the group.967 Because support for the choir originated outside the church and thus became secular, the word “Church” was removed from the ensemble’s title. In addition, the choir’s touring name changed from Westminster Choir to Dayton Westminster Choir. What had been a church choir touring under the auspices

966. Wehr, “John Finley Williamson,” 43.

of Dayton’s Westminster Presbyterian Church was now a secular choral organization touring with community support.

It should be mentioned here that this shift from “sacred” to “secular” was a trend that might be observed from the very beginning of Williamson’s association with the Dayton Church. That phenomenon can be observed in photographs of the group’s first tours and in the earliest catalogues of the Dayton Westminster Choir School, when mention of religion was reworded.\textsuperscript{968} It continued during the entire career of Williamson, from Dayton, when the choir attained secular sponsorship and moved out of a church onto the nation’s most notable secular concert halls. Such a shift is perhaps most easily illustrated in the evolution of choral attire for the group. For example, during the 1930’s the women of the choir transitioned from religious attire to evening gowns, elbow-length gloves, and pearls. When the author mentioned the possibility of such a trend to some alumni familiar with the choir’s earlier history, it was denied and Williamson’s strong dedication to the choir’s religious ethos was reaffirmed. This study suggests that such an evolution did occur in the context of an unusual positive admix of sacred and secular which existed at Williamson’s institution from its beginning.

\textsuperscript{968} For example during the group’s 1921 tour to Winona Lake, Indiana, when the ensemble was clad in religious vestments [cottas and surplices] while their director wore secular garb [a fashionable blazer, white slacks, and white shoes]. This is illustrated in Figure 6.3.
The Dayton Westminster Choir Association and Katherine Talbott supported the 1924 tour jointly. That tour was short and included stops in Flint and Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Chicago. Because Talbott was encouraged by the outcome of that tour, in the spring of 1925 she assumed complete financial responsibility for all the Dayton Westminster Choir’s future choir tours.\textsuperscript{969} The Spring 1925 Tour, from April 13–24, was the first under her patronage. The cities visited were Richmond, Indiana; Chicago; Grand Rapids, Lansing, and Detroit, Michigan; Cleveland, Ohio; and South Bend, Kokomo, and West Lafayette, Indiana.\textsuperscript{970}

From 1925 on, Dayton Westminster Choir tours became increasingly grand as the group and its conductor benefited from their benefactress’s choices and largess. Talbott preferred to travel first class, so she saw to it that the ensemble was booked at what she considered the most luxurious hotels and most exclusive restaurants.\textsuperscript{971} The S.S. Leviathan, the ship that transported the choir to Europe for its first tour there, for instance, was a high-end luxury liner

\textsuperscript{969} Ibid., 46.

\textsuperscript{970} Westminster Presbyterian Church, “Dayton Westminster Choir - Spring Tour,” (Dayton, OH: The Church, April 1925), booklet, John Finley Williamson Papers, Westminster Choir College Archives, Talbott Library, Princeton, NJ.

\textsuperscript{971} Mrs. Talbott’s preference for the best of everything also led her to suggest to John Finley Williamson that he should “look the part” of a great conductor. Her directive extended to automobile make as well. Therefore, she purchased a Cadillac for him, a brand he drove for the remainder of his life. Over several summers, she also sent Williamson to Europe to learn more about European musical traditions.
with expensive appointments. Talbott also wanted the choir to sing in the best venues, even if that meant booking the concert locations herself.

The November 1925 tour took the group from Dayton to cities in the Northeast (see fig. 6.5). The ensemble sang in Carnegie Hall in New York City, Symphony Hall in Boston, the Academy of Music in Philadelphia, and Orchestra Hall in Chicago. On that eastern tour, the choir visited Youngstown and Bluffton, Ohio; Pittsburgh; Toronto, Ontario in Canada; Buffalo and New York, New York; Boston; Philadelphia; Washington, D.C.; and Baltimore, Maryland. After the choir’s performance in New York City, a music critic for the New York Times wrote:

The voices were not exceptional, but in the group, they achieved noteworthy results. The singers, especially the men, had learned to articulate, never failed of a clean attack, knew how to phrase and faithfully obeyed the baton in the matter of expression. Above all, their hearts were in their work. They were not individualists, but cooperated for the good of the whole, so that the audience received at times the impression of a responsive orchestral instruments, rather than a choir.

During his visit to New York and other locations, Williamson asked to see the music libraries of well-known choral directors. Mrs. Williamson later wrote, “Such great musicians as Dr. Clarence Dickinson, Dr. T. Tertius Noble, Dr. [Augustus Stephen] Vogt, Dr. Lynnwood Farnam, Dr. Peter Lutkin, and

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Dr. Eric Delamarter opened their church [choral] libraries to Dr. Williamson. 975

In 1926–27, the ensemble took three U.S. tours in the 1926–27 season (see Table 6.1). The word “amateur” likewise could no longer be used as a descriptor for the choir from 1926 onward, as it was made up exclusively of future ministers of music who collectively performed on a professional level. Therefore, the touring choir excluded church

974. Photograph of Dayton Westminster Choir: 1925 Easter Seaboard Tour, Westminster Choir College Archives, Talbott Library, Princeton, NJ. Here Williamson is in secular concert attire while his choir is outfitted in church choir vestments.

members, but sang for church Table 6.1.

Dayton Westminster Choir: Fall 1926 tour destinations\textsuperscript{976}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City/Town</th>
<th>State</th>
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<tr>
<td>Westerville</td>
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<td>Cleveland</td>
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<td>Buffalo</td>
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<td>Syracuse</td>
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<td>Albany</td>
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<td>New York</td>
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<td>Brooklyn</td>
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<td>Orange</td>
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<td>Wilmington</td>
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<td>Camden</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
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<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>Maryland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raleigh</td>
<td>North Carolina</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>North Carolina</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roanoke</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
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<td>Huntington</td>
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<td>Oberlin</td>
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<td>Pittsburgh</td>
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<td>Rochester</td>
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<td>Norfolk</td>
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<td>Durham</td>
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<td>Bluefield</td>
<td>West Virginia</td>
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<td>Portsmouth</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
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services when not on tour. Thus, though the choir was still associated with a church, and its director was paid a salary by that church, the choir was

\textsuperscript{976} Westminster Presbyterian Church, “Dayton Westminster Choir – Fall Tour,” (Dayton, OH: The Church, n.d. 1926), booklet, John Finley Williamson Papers, Westminster Choir College Archives, Talbott Library, Princeton, NJ.
supported when touring by a non-sectarian civic organization and performed mostly in secular venues. The church’s reaction to its choir being away for months at a time on tours was mixed but generally supportive, as they continued to fund Williamson and his endeavors.

F. Melius Christiansen and John Finley Williamson:
Dear Friends

Throughout Williamson’s long career, he considered F. Melius Christiansen to be a mentor, an inspiration, and a dear friend. He was deeply moved by the music making of F. Melius Christiansen and his choir and initially modeled the sound of the Westminster choir after the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir. Knowing when and how the two conductors first met and heard each other’s choirs is significant in understanding Christiansen’s early influence on Williamson and past histories have made this narrative unclear. One of the difficulties in understanding that puzzle is that there is a two-year discrepancy between Rhea Williamson’s account of F. Melius Christiansen’s first meeting with her husband, and independent evidence contained in the Archives of St. Olaf College. In 1936, Rhea Williamson at forty-eight years of age, recorded in her own handwriting that her husband John Finley Williamson had first heard the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir under F. Melius Christiansen in 1922 and in her presence. Both David Wehr and Charles Schisler quoted Rhea’s account in their respective dissertations:
In 1922, a most wonderful thing happened. St. Olaf Choir, when Dr. F. Melius Christiansen, its distinguished founder and conductor, came to Dayton for a concert. Dr. Williamson and I waited at the railroad station just to see how they looked and how they acted—so great was our idealization. We sat at their concert oblivious to the whole world and listened to their superb singing.977

What suggests possible inconsistency here is the phrase “so great was our idealization,” which implies either that Williamson idealized Christiansen due to the latter’s reputation, or that he had formerly heard Christiansen’s ensemble. Were they waiting to observe the behavior of a choir they had never heard? Rhea continued:

After the concert, we were introduced to Dr. Christiansen and Mr. Martin H. Hanson, New York impresario who asked to hear the Westminster Choir. We never found out what they had heard or from whom. However, the choir sang its best and we couldn’t believe we were hearing correctly when Mr. Hanson and Dr. Christiansen agreed that Westminster should tour and that Mr. Hanson should accept the choir as one of his concert attractions.978

In interpreting Rhea’s account, it should be noted that in the same handwritten notebook from 1936, there are additional inconsistencies. For example, when recording the amount of money later gifted to Westminster Choir College by an important benefactor, Rhea, perhaps inadvertently, told the story twice. However, she increased the amount of that bequest from


978. Ibid.
When Rhea’s account is compared with information in the archives of St. Olaf College, a different timeframe for the first meeting of the two conductors appears. According to evidence at St. Olaf, Williamson may have first heard the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir two years prior when that group visited Dayton on April 10, 1920. At that time, Williamson was still employed at Dayton’s First United Brethren Church, before starting his new job at Westminster Presbyterian Church on September 5, 1920.\textsuperscript{980} The first evidence suggesting the April 10 date is contained in two letters from April of 1920, written by St. Olaf Lutheran Choir conductor F. Melius Christiansen to his wife, Edith.\textsuperscript{981}

Nineteen-twenty was also the year of the St. Olaf Choir’s first and much-anticipated East Coast Tour. At the beginning of the tour, from April 8 to April 12, Christiansen and his choir traveled by train to concert venues in Ohio before heading east. Their first stop was at Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio and their second was in Dayton on April 10. The dates April

\textsuperscript{979} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{980} Williamson’s resignation date at Dayton’s First United Brethren Church is unknown. It was probably in the spring of 1920.

\textsuperscript{981} F. Melius Christiansen to Edith Christiansen, n.d. April 1920. F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, Rolvaag Library, Northfield, MN. Two letters, both dated April 1920, are being cited here.
8 through April 12, 1920, for unspecified reasons, were omitted from St. Olaf College’s formal printed itinerary. Only in these two handwritten letters did Christiansen record this first segment of his choir’s tour.\textsuperscript{982}

The second bit of evidence at St. Olaf can be found in a 1954 issue of the *Manitou Messenger*, St. Olaf’s student newspaper. According to that account by journalist Tom Twaiten, on April 10, 1920 F. Melius Christiansen and Paul Schmidt, the choir’s manager, arrived in Dayton via rail:

In 1920, Williamson was a church choir director in Dayton, Ohio, Christiansen and Schmidt brought the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir to Dayton on its annual tour. When Williamson heard the ensemble, he was astounded and followed the group for several nights from town to town to make sure what he heard was not a fluke. What particularly struck Williamson about the St. Olaf Choir was its a capella \textit{sic} singing. In those days it was a new thing, and the St. Olaf Choir was one of the first a capella \textit{sic} choirs in the nation. His own choir, he had to admit, couldn’t do it. So, he asked Dr. Christiansen and Dr. Schmidt about the possibility of concertizing his choir. Today’s Westminster Choir is the result of the encouragement he received.\textsuperscript{983}

Here Twaiten points to 1920 as the year of the Christiansen–Williamson meeting. Providing support for Williamson’s following of the St. Olaf Choir is a statement by Morten J. Luvaas, a choral musician associated with Allegheny College in Pennsylvania, who was on the faculty of St. Olaf College in 1921. In

\textsuperscript{982} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{983} Tom Twaiten, “Christiansen, Schmidt Inspire Westminster Choirmaster.” Williamson may have been accompanied by the Westminster Presbyterian Church organist David Hugh Jones. According to Schisler, “A History of Westminster Choir College,” 40, “Williamson, often accompanied by David Hugh Jones, tried to learn everything he could from Christiansen and the St. Olaf Choir.” However, it is unclear when David Hugh Jones did this.
a letter written in 1963, Luvaas indicated that Williamson “followed the St. Olaf Choir for many days on one of its tours and set out to do as they did.”

It appears unlikely that F. Melius Christiansen would have had any reason to exaggerate anything about his first meeting with Williamson. The elder Christiansen went out of his way to be supportive of the younger conductor (see fig. 6.6). For example, in November of 1925, before the Dayton Westminster Choir’s first trip to the East Coast, Christiansen wrote to encourage Williamson:

…I am sure your tours will open the eyes of many for the beauties of fine choir singing. Do not be afraid of the easterners. They are behind the people in the Middle West in this line of work. You have nothing to fear in New York or anywhere on your whole tour. Forget the critics and the people and sing everywhere as you sing at home.

Further evidence for the first meeting of the two conductors is found in a section on the history of the Dayton Westminster Choir in a Dayton Westminster Choir tour booklet from the late 1920s. Christiansen’s account provides yet another version of the meeting:

Mr. Williamson started the Westminster Choir in September 1920. Their first public appearance at any distance from the city of Dayton was at Winona Lake, Indiana, in the summer of 1921. In November of the same year the famous New York manager and impresario, Mr. Martin H. Hanson, was persuaded to come to Dayton to hear the choir and was much impressed. To justify his conviction of the choir’s unusual

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985. F. Melius Christiansen to John Finley Williamson, 2 November 1925, John Finley Williamson Papers, Westminster Choir College Archives, Talbott Library, Princeton, NJ.
possibility, Mr. Hanson on his second visit to Dayton in January 1922, brought with him Dr. F. Melius Christiansen, the distinguished conductor of the St. Olaf Choir, and the composer of several of the anthems sung by the choir tonight. Mr. Christiansen’s enthusiasm convinced Mr. Hanson of the soundness of his own judgment, and in April 1922, Mr. Hanson accepted the general management of the Westminster Choir...which he has had under observation for more than two years and has promised himself to take our choir on extensive tours. 986

Figure 6.6. Letter from Christiansen to Williamson, November 2, 1925.887

887. F. Melius Christiansen to John Finley Williamson, 2 November 1925, John Finley Williamson Papers, Westminster Choir College Archives, Talbott Library, Princeton, NJ.
Finally, in this admix of data is Leonard Van Camp’s 1965 journal article on the formation of *a cappella* choirs at Northwestern University, St. Olaf College, and Westminster Choir College. Van Camp wrote, “On one occasion (it must have been the eastern tour of 1920, when the St. Olaf Choir sang in nearby Springfield and Columbus) John Finley asked the well-known conductor F. Melius Christiansen to listen to his choir and give him some suggestions.” Van Camp provided no evidence to support this assertion.

On the same page, Van Camp recorded four errors concerning Williamson and his career. First, he stated that John Finley Williamson was the son of a church choir director, although Williamson’s father was a clergyman. Second, he wrote that Williamson received a degree from Otterbein College, whereas Williamson neither earned an academic degree nor did he attend Otterbein College. Instead, he received a diploma after three years from the Davis Conservatory of Music attached to the College, a small music school that did not grant degrees. Third, Van Camp wrote incorrectly that Williamson was hired at Dayton’s Westminster Presbyterian Church in 1919. The first minister of Westminster Presbyterian Church hired Williamson in the spring of 1920. Finally, Van Camp stated that a “wealthy Dayton benefactress” was the

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financial supporter of the 1921 tour of Williamson’s church choir. However, Katherine Talbott did not underwrite Williamson’s choir until after 1923, as discussed previously.

A Possible Sequence of Events for Williamson’s First Meeting with F. Melius Christiansen

It is possible to construct a hypothetical chronology for Williamson’s first experience with the St. Olaf Choir by piecing together bits of historical data and by omitting those that pose validity issues. Williamson probably first heard the Minnesota group in Dayton, Ohio on April 10, 1920, and was astonished. Five months later, on September 5, he began his new position at Westminster Presbyterian Church.989

Sometime between April 1920 and November 1921 (perhaps in the summer of 1920), Williamson contacted F. Melius Christiansen, seeking advice and encouragement. He likely traveled to Northfield, Minnesota, where he stayed for possibly a week (or perhaps longer), for an extended conversation with Christiansen in person. After communicating with Williamson, Christiansen recommended to his New York City tour manager, Martin H. Hanson, that the latter listen to the Dayton choir. Accordingly, in November of 1921 Hanson traveled to Dayton alone to hear the Dayton Westminster Choir.

989. “Music.” Westminster Presbyterian Church (Dayton, OH) MS-276, Subgroup III, Subseries 10, Box 118, file 1, choir 1920–1924, Wright State University Library, Special Collections/Archives, Dayton, OH.
He returned to Dayton for a second hearing of the choir in January of 1922, bringing with him F. Melius Christiansen (at this time Christiansen’s St. Olaf Lutheran Choir was no longer represented by Hanson).\(^{990}\) In April of 1922, Christiansen and his St. Olaf Lutheran Choir again passed through Dayton on tour, and the Williamsons experienced Christiansen conducting his choir for a second time. According to published comments by former Westminster Choir College president Ray Robinson, it is probable that both Williamsons attended that concert together with the entire Dayton Westminster Presbyterian Church Choir.\(^{991}\) If this hypothetical chronology of events is correct, when Williamson began working with the “Chorus Choir” of Dayton’s Westminster Presbyterian Church in September of 1920, he had a choral model and ideal in mind. After observing and hearing F. Melius Christiansen and the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir perform for the first time, and speaking at length with his mentor, Williamson was smitten and deliberately copied many of that choir’s characteristics:

Williamson… [followed] their tours from city to city and in the beginning he copied their methods…he programmed only religious music, which

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990. Hanson was the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir representative for its 1920 East Coast tour. Afterwards, the college decided, probably for financial reasons, to cut business ties with Hanson. Because of the proximity of dates here, it is possible that Christiansen was suggesting the Westminster choir as a “replacement” for the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir on Hanson’s artist management roster.

991. Leonard Van Camp, “The Formation of A Cappella Choirs at Northwestern University, St. Olaf College, and Westminster Choir College,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 13, no. 4 (Winter 1965): 236. “Whenever the St. Olaf Choir would come to Dayton, Williamson would not only attend the concerts with his entire choir, but would hold up the tonal characteristics of this choir to his followers as the ideal choral tone.”
was always sung a cappella and from memory, and he adhered to the “straight-tone” concept of perfect intonation used by Christiansen. In addition, he copied Christiansen’s method of giving hidden pitches in concerts and employed the same number of singers, sixty, with two of his Dayton choirs, the Dayton Chorus and the Dayton Westminster Choir.

In a 1994 lecture on Williamson, his former student Dr. Joseph Beck stated that at some point (he was not specific about chronology), “early on” (perhaps in the 1920s), Williamson took his Dayton Westminster Choir to Northfield, where they sang for Christiansen and the St. Olaf Choir. Later the St. Olaf Choir sang for Williamson and his ensemble. Afterward, Williamson told his choir (after experiencing the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir’s performance): “This is the sound we want.” Beck studied with Williamson in the 1950s (thirty years removed from the Dayton Westminster period), did not provide information regarding the source of this information or dates, and no other studies on Williamson document this second-hand information. He noted that these comments were based on statements that came directly from Williamson while Beck was a student at Westminster Choir College. Aspects of Beck’s narrative are in synchrony with the possible chronology for Williamson’s meeting with Christiansen in Minnesota suggested by this research.


Evidence surrounding Williamson’s first meeting with Christiansen indicates that the first Westminster choir began life in 1920 as a highly deliberate, though unacknowledged, copy of many aspects of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir, all by a young man under the spell of that Nordic conductor and his _a cappella_ chorus. In the words of Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, Christiansen, through example and support, may have introduced Williamson to his “Opus,” or “work of imagination.”

Years later, Williamson told Christiansen’s son-in-law Neil Kjos that never in his whole career was he as nervous as the time he conducted the Westminster choir for F. Melius Christiansen. Characteristically reticent, Christiansen wrote nothing of his impressions of the Westminster choir. However, in a 1962 interview the Norwegian conductor’s youngest son, Paul, himself a celebrated American choral conductor, stated to music historian Leonard Van Camp that his father, upon first hearing the Dayton choir, told Williamson, “We need all of the artistic development we can get.”

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Williamson’s Experience of European Musical Culture

Throughout his 1920 choir tour, Williamson experienced urban culture in cities on the East Coast. It was then that he visited choral libraries of famous American choral directors. However, that exposure was not sufficient to satisfy his benefactress, Katherine Talbott, an urbane patron who had traveled extensively worldwide. She wanted the Dayton Westminster Choir and its conductor to project an image of international success. Mrs. Talbott wanted that picture to be one of high sophistication, which initially was not the case. She believed Williamson needed to have knowledge of European music making, including repertoire, musicians, and European society. Therefore, she covered the expenses of Williamson’s travel to Europe in the summers of 1926, 1928, and 1930.\(^7\)

On those summer “grand tours” to Europe, he met with European music publishers and collected many choral works. Some of the obscure choral repertoire discovered on those trips, much of it unaccompanied, were later included in several published choral series. These collections included the “Westminster Choir Series” published by G. Schirmer, the “John Finley Williamson Series” published by Carl Fischer, Inc., “The Westminster Choir College Library” published by Theodore Presser, and “From the Library of

\(^{997}\) Wehr, “John Finley Williamson,” 55.
Possibly at the suggestion of Christiansen, Williamson also spent time discussing Bach performance practice with the cantor of St. Thomas Church in Leipzig, Karl Straube (1873–1950). A well-known Baroque music specialist, Straube was the director successor of Christiansen’s composition teacher, Thomaskantor Gustav Schreck, who held that position until his death in 1918. Williamson did not undertake any formal academic or musical training while in Germany, as has sometimes been erroneously implied or stated.

Williamson's Approach to Choral Programming and Choice of Repertoire

Choral conductor Alan Zabriskie wrote, “In the early years of the choir, Williamson followed Christiansen’s approach by programming only sacred music of the Romantic tradition.”999 Although concert programs from Westminster choir’s Dayton period indicate that Romantic literature was programmed exclusively during the group’s 1923–24 season, that was not always the case after this period. What Williamson did adhere to was Christiansen’s symphonic plan for designing programs, with different choral sections representing contrasting moods and energies akin to the four movements of a

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998. Ibid., Appendix F, 260–66. This appendix contains a list of published choral works edited or inspired by Williamson.

classical symphony. Tour programs as early as 1923–24 utilized such a format.

The parallels with Christiansen end there with regard to programming. Williamson’s repertoire choices during his entire career were broader and more eclectic than those of Christiansen, representing a wide variety of choral music from many disparate choral schools. Christiansen, for example, rarely performed early music, while Williamson performed it often. Christiansen preferred to repeat repertoire, while Williamson opted for variety.

Westminster Choir Recordings

A tour book from 1925 reveals that Williamson took his choir to Camden, New Jersey on November 11 and 17 to “make records of four of our best songs.”1000 Two years later, the group’s manager announced a recording deal. An undated Dayton Herald article ca. 1927 read, “Martin H. Hanson, New York impresario and manager of the choir, stated that a contract has been effected with the Victor Talking Machine Company which will place records made by the choir on sale throughout the country, an achievement of great advertising worth to Dayton.”1001 Such a statement was no doubt encouraging to the Dayton Westminster Choir Association. According to historical data listed in the Encyclopedic Discography of Victor Recordings (EDVR), the early recordings


1001. Ibid.
of Williamson’s touring choir were of unaccompanied sacred music (see Table 6.2).\textsuperscript{1002}

Table 6.2.
Early recordings by the Dayton Westminster Choir\textsuperscript{1003}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Matrix No.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Performer</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CVE-33793</td>
<td>11/17/1925</td>
<td>\textit{The shepherd’s story}</td>
<td>DWC (Dayton Westminster Choir)</td>
<td>Chorus a cappella (CAC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVE-33794</td>
<td>11/17/1925</td>
<td>\textit{Going home}</td>
<td>DWC</td>
<td>CAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BVE-33865</td>
<td>11/11/1925</td>
<td>\textit{Jesus, friend of sinners}</td>
<td>DWC</td>
<td>CAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BVE-33866</td>
<td>11/11/1925</td>
<td>\textit{Praise to the Lord}</td>
<td>DWC</td>
<td>CAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BVE-36780</td>
<td>11/30/1926</td>
<td>\textit{Bless the Lord, O my soul}</td>
<td>DWC</td>
<td>CAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BVE-36781</td>
<td>11/30/1926</td>
<td>\textit{Beautiful savior}</td>
<td>DWC</td>
<td>CAC, soloist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BVE-36782</td>
<td>11/30/1926</td>
<td>\textit{Crucifixus}</td>
<td>DWC</td>
<td>CAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BVE-36783</td>
<td>11/30/1926</td>
<td>\textit{The three kings}</td>
<td>DWC</td>
<td>CAC, soloist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BVE-36784</td>
<td>11/30/1926</td>
<td>\textit{Hodie Christus natus est}</td>
<td>DWC</td>
<td>CAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BVE-36785</td>
<td>11/30/1926</td>
<td>\textit{Celestial voices}</td>
<td>DWC</td>
<td>CAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BVE-36786</td>
<td>11/30/1926</td>
<td>\textit{Jesus, lover of my soul}</td>
<td>DWC</td>
<td>CAC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Williamson and his choir performed more often than did the few other touring choirs of his time, including the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir. Due to a larger number of concerts, the number of concert reviews for the choir was sizeable, even during the group’s Dayton period. The frequency of the choir’s performances, large audiences, and generally positive reviews enhanced the name recognition and reputation of the choir in the United States and abroad, causing Williamson to become a national choral figure early in his career.\textsuperscript{1004}

One curious aspect of reviews from the first ten years of the choir’s history was that disparate journalists often compared the sound of the ensemble to that of a pipe organ. This may have been because of the cultural novelty of the \textit{a cappella} genre, the straight-tone sound employed by Williamson in his first years, his vibrant legato style, or a combination of these. In February of that year, for example, an unidentified reviewer in Macon, Georgia wrote, “The voices were heard without accompaniment. As they grew in volume, it was as if someone were playing on a great organ.”\textsuperscript{1005}

The notoriously acerbic \textit{Pittsburgh Post} music critic, Harvey Gaul,

\textsuperscript{1004} Like the number of spectators at F. Melius Christiansen concerts, and perhaps contrasting with contemporary crowd sizes at choral concerts, Westminster Choir audiences often numbered in the thousands.

reviewed the choir twice in its earliest years. In 1922, he asked readers, “Why should a little church choir from Dayton, Ohio, come to Pittsburgh to show Pittsburgh how to sing?” Two years later, Gaul seemed to have changed his tune:

The wonderful Westminster Choir of Dayton returned to us last night at Carnegie Music Hall, and we use the adjective wisely, meaning full of wonders. Here is a virtuoso choir of the first rank, an artistic ensemble that is hard to surpass and we don’t mean to drivel hyperbole or to roll the ecstatic eye either. It is a magnificent choir they have out there in the city of cash registers...It was a seasoned organization, competent, compelling and beautifully balanced...They taught us new choral ideas and increased our knowledge of choral techniques...Words are shaped quite as faithfully as phrases and the result is that a text book is a superfluity. Fact. In this respect, we think the Westminster Choir excels all others.

Even in 1926, when the Dayton Westminster Choir was emulating several aspects of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir, the former ensemble did not avoid critical comparison with its model. Frederick Ramig wrote in his critical review of the Dayton choir during the fall 1926 tour:

The only noticeable reason for improvement in the organization lies in the individuals rather than the body. The unity of quality and consistency in tone production with the voice groups, things which make a choir such as that of St. Olaf’s college stand above comparison, are lacking in this instance.


1008. Frederick Ramig, “Dayton Choir Charms City,” unidentified Milwaukee, WI
Referring to Williamson-trained soprano Lorean Hodapp, Milwaukee critic Richard S. Davis also compared the two choirs:

…it lacks the sweet, musical tone noticeable in the St. Olaf Choir, the soprano quality in particular being hard, though clear, and in the matter of nuance and color it must yield the palm to several kindred companies. This peculiarity was perhaps best epitomized in the voice of the solo soprano, which was clear, sweet and certain, but lacking in tenderness and color.

He [Williamson] has duplicated the miracle performed by F. Melius Christiansen of the St. Olaf Choir and has been able, because of his superior material, to produce a chorus that will, until we hear better, stand as the most remarkable organization of the sort now singing.1009

This newspaper review is of special interest because it indicates that in the first six years of the Dayton Westminster Choir, vocal production was different than in Christiansen’s ensemble. The former choir may have had sopranos who studied voice; however, the vocal production that undergirded Williamson’s choral technique was sometimes criticized as heavy and operatic from that choir’s beginning. The adjectives “hard” versus “sweet” represent a key to understanding how both choirs produced choral tone at that time. On the other hand, the criticism that Lorean Hodapp’s voice lacked color would support the notion that initially Williamson espoused a puerile soprano tone—the sound of boys—which are often described as “stripped of all color.”

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Williamson’s Experimentation with Choral Sound

Throughout his career, Williamson’s aesthetic response to what he considered beautiful choral tone affected everything he did as a choir director. It is commonly believed that in his choir’s early years, 1920–30, his focus was primarily on recreating the sound of his choral model and mentor F. Melius Christiansen and the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir. Christiansen emphasized blend and a senza vibrato tone of great purity. The Norwegian conductor would never have allowed any one singer to display the individual colors of his or her own voice in the context of ensemble performances. For Christiansen, the tone of the group was more important than individual tone. In fact, so great was his disdain for such an idea that Christiansen asked singers who could not suppress their vocal individuality to leave his choir. Individual vocal expression in a choir would have been analogous to a renegade viola player in a string orchestra—the very idea was unacceptable.

Initially, some of Williamson’s choral values were derived from Christiansen. However, later, his views about choral tone evolved to an appreciation of individualities in combination—merged in a way that heightened distinctive vocal colors in the context of ensemble tone. Williamson’s ideas represented a new ideology, requiring new thought about

1010. Wehr, “John Finley Williamson,” 207.
the way choral sound was heard and experienced. The core of that philosophy was a beautiful sound tapestry that was “alive.” It was dependent upon a choir and conductor functioning together as artists, weaving individualities into a complementary sound creation. For Williamson, it was the dazzling liveliness of beauty:

Choir singing demands the same sort of weaving. You have the intertwining of threads of vibration that convey to the listener all colors, but this intertwining the choir singer rarely hears. His problem is the perfecting of his own thread of tone. For this reason we need a conductor who can hear as well as weave these threads in tone. If the weaving is done so that all these threads, each one beautiful in itself, intertwine and make patterns that unite the performer and the listener in aesthetic realization, great art has been achieved.1011

As a solo singer with operatic aesthetics, it is likely that Williamson’s “choral tapestry” ideology began to be practiced much earlier than previously thought as his 1926 Camden, New Jersey recordings indicate. Later Williamson departed from his earliest tone, darkening it, and he was criticized widely for doing so. This paper’s focus is limited to Williamson’s Dayton Period.

Williamson’s Choral Ideology Before 1930

In the years from 1920 to 1926, Williamson began his association with Westminster Presbyterian Church and founded his Dayton Westminster Choir School. To the latter position, he brought his preparation as a conservatory-trained singer and voice teacher as well as advanced studies in New York.

1011. Ibid.
addition, he had acquired almost a decade of trial-and-error experience conducting choirs and teaching voice as well as the original ideas that proceeded from that self-education.

By the time he founded his choir school in 1926, his vocal ideals and techniques were firmly fixed, for he would not allow vocalists who had not studied voice with him to teach his choir school students. Previously, Williamson had trained under distinguished vocal pedagogues of the time, such as Herbert Witherspoon (discussed later), a celebrated Wagnerian soloist associated with the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. As previously mentioned, as he began to cultivate choral sound with his first choirs, his training enabled him to bring what was arguably some of the most highly regarded vocal training of that period to his choral work. Because of his respect for that instruction, he developed an “inbred” approach to vocal pedagogy and was criticized by his students and others for it. To more than a few, this suggested a close-mindedness and/or lack of curiosity. However, it did not represent academic defensiveness, for Williamson was certain that his training and beliefs about singing were correct. That assuredness formed the basis for his vocal experimentation in the years after 1930. Historical evidence, including candid writings by his wife Rhea already mentioned here, as well as critical comments by faculty members who spent their careers working alongside
Williamson, support the proposition that he was not interested in conducting academic research to find new approaches to the vocal or choral art. Unlike Christiansen, who boldly dabbled in subjects he had not previously learned, Williamson’s experimentation rested on what might be described as a rock-solid foundation—approaches he already knew and in which he had unshakeable confidence.

Perhaps due to a matrix of issues including self-regulation and personal motivation, Williamson was always more interested in praxis than theory and scholarship. Mental organization of his ideas took the place of the written word. One exception to this was his series of articles on various choral and vocal techniques from 1950 to 1951 (see Table 6.3). Here is support and confirmation for data from Williamson’s earlier years, including information his own teachers taught him, which in some instances was recorded and has been mentioned earlier. A significant portion of Williamson’s original pedagogy existed solely in oral form until American music publisher Theodore Presser’s music magazine *The Etude* asked him to write down his thoughts and precepts. The origin of those ideas (originating before 1930) seems to have been Williamson’s vocal training at Otterbein, as well as summer studies in New York with Lamperti students. That body of knowledge formed the core vocal techniques Williamson taught to his Dayton Westminster Presbyterian Chorus-
Table 6.3.

John Finley Williamson: *The Etude* articles\(^\text{1012}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article Title</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Saga of the Westminster Choir</td>
<td>August</td>
<td>1943</td>
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<tr>
<td>Introduction to Dr. Williamson’s Articles</td>
<td>March</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Art of Choral Conducting</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance the Voices</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Classify Voices</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make Friends with Acoustics</td>
<td>November</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep Your Choir Up to Pitch</td>
<td>December</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm Makes the Music Go</td>
<td>January</td>
<td>1951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correct Breathing for Singers: Part One</td>
<td>February</td>
<td>1951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correct Breathing for Singers: Two</td>
<td>March</td>
<td>1951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Conductor’s Magic</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>1951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning a Choral Rehearsal</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>1951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Singing Requires Good Diction</td>
<td>September</td>
<td>1951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Importance of Vowel Coloring</td>
<td>October</td>
<td>1951</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{1012}\) Beck, ed., *Selected Writings of John Finley Williamson*, 11–76. Williamson student Joseph G. Beck reprinted all of Williamson’s articles listed in Figure 11 from *The Etude* in this 2004 publication.
Choir and his students at the Dayton Westminster Choir School.

Williamson’s The Etude articles represent important corroborating references in the present study, supporting early historical data from his first students, choristers, and colleagues. It was through these teachings that he helped fill an American choral void with a unique amalgam of experientially generated choral conducting methods and codified derivative Lamperti vocal techniques, during a period in the United States when few choral procedures existed. As they were later published nationwide, those teachings progressively influenced the continued cultivation and refinement of choral sound in the United States during those years. For the purposes of this study, they represent a valuable window into his earliest pedagogy at the Dayton Westminster Choir School.

Choral Conducting Technique

Williamson’s choral conducting ideology was experientially generated because he had no formal training in choral conducting. As his wife explained, he “learned to conduct by conducting.”1013 His training phase was the seven-year period between 1913 and 1920, when he learned on the job with two Dayton

choirs, the choir of Dayton’s First United Brethren Church and the sixty-voice secular Dayton Chorus. Those experiences occurred before his fascination with the choral artistry of F. Melius Christiansen. They led him to believe that success in choral conducting was not determined by the accuracy with which a conductor beats time. However, not everyone agreed with Williamson. Even during his retirement, some perceived his techniques as incompetencies rather than original ideas.\textsuperscript{1014} For example, except for the first beat of each measure, he found no value in conducting patterns. For Williamson, tempo was seen as speed. “Pace,” which modern conductors often refer to as “harmonic rhythm,” was understood as something completely different. According to music theorist Walter Piston (1944), harmonic rhythm represented “the rhythmic life contributed to music by means of the underlying changes of harmony.” The pattern of harmonic rhythm of a given piece of music, “derived by noting the root changes as they occur, reveals important and distinctive features affecting the style and texture.”\textsuperscript{1015} Williamson believed that “pace” was the tempo at

\textsuperscript{1014}“Westminster Choir College, Voice Building, and Choral Sound,” in Donald Nally, \textit{Conversations with Joseph Flummerfelt: Thoughts on Conducting, Music, and Musicians} (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 114–15. Joseph Flummerfelt: “Williamson was, I am told, an enormously charismatic man, though not a strong musician.” Flummerfelt observed Williamson conduct firsthand in the summer of 1962, and recalled, “Williamson made this sort of gestural shudder, and the sound started – I wasn’t sure how it happened. After a while I began to suspect that Williamson didn’t really know the piece, and that McCurdy was leading from the organ!” Flummerfelt’s comment “I wasn’t sure how it happened” is perhaps critical here.

\textsuperscript{1015}Davis, “Dayton Choir Ranks at Top.”
which music reveals its magic. He wrote, “You can only find the pace of a number from studying the music and the text; and when you find it that way you have discovered the mood that the composer tried to portray.” Time beating, he insisted, obviates pace as well as excitement because all the singer has is a “monotonous, dead, dull, steady beat.”\textsuperscript{1016} Thus, for Williamson, the vital heartbeat was quite different from the artificial beat of a pacemaker. Pace was not just connected with vital energy, but implied connection.

Williamson alleged that the pace and rhythm of a composition was entirely controlled by the conductor through empathy. By means of empathy, the anticipated mood was rendered.\textsuperscript{1017} He explained his philosophy of choral conducting and empathy, writing:

> It is a mistake to believe that in our conducting we must have points to our beats so that the choir can keep time. Singers do not keep time because of what they see. They keep time because of the forward-moving rhythmic pace the conductor creates through empathy. When one sings under a great master, he cannot make a mistake because he is too busy to stop and think. The conductor presses him forward with such electrifying power that he hasn’t time to think how many beats he gives to a note or even what pitch he is singing. Everything in sound moves forward with such urgency that it is impossible to do anything other than the right thing.\textsuperscript{1018}


\textsuperscript{1017} Beck, Selected Writings of John Finley Williamson, 57.

\textsuperscript{1018} John Finley Williamson, “The Conductor’s Magic,” The Etude 69, no. 4, April 1951, 23.
For Williamson, empathy was not just an intuitive recognition of feelings but also an understanding that consciousness could be connected to singing sound. He believed early on that uniting with the human capacity to recognize the bodily feelings of another was associated with the human ability to connect vocal tone with inner feeling. Therefore, arms and hands were not always necessary for a conductor. My professor at Westminster Choir College, Robert Carwithen, a Williamson student, who directed Westminster Choir for a period after Williamson’s retirement, mentioned that Williamson required his conducting students to direct a choir entirely with their eyes. He wanted students to learn to use body language before adding their arms and hands to the conducting process. One of Williamson’s favorite maxims in this regard was for the director to set this order: mood, breath, pace, and attack. Along these lines, he decreed, “If the choir goes flat, it is the director’s fault.”1019

Williamson did not teach specific breathing techniques because he believed that singers already knew how to breathe. Like the elder Lamperti, whose techniques he studied early on, he espoused “natural breathing” and was of the opinion that various “types” or “ways” of breathing, such as high chest

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1019. Beck, Selected Writings of John Finley Williamson, 37–41. With regard to tuning, Williamson observed that a string quartet might spend fifty minutes of a four-hour rehearsal on tuning, while some American choirs spend less than ten minutes of a two-hour rehearsal on the same.
breathing, abdominal breathing, and intercostal breathing, among others, interfered with the process. He taught his singers to stand erect and tall with good posture and without tension. After that, he believed that proper breathing would follow naturally.

According to his plan for choral conducting, after breathing occurred effortlessly, and pace was communicated, what he referred to as “attack” ensued. The Westminster choir conductor trained his students to understand attack as the onset of phonation or vocal sound resulting from an approximation of the vocal folds (cords). When this happened, a column of air was set in motion and its shape must not change. He maintained that for the beginning of sound the jaw should not move except on labial consonants. A proper attack conserved air. Williamson was perhaps describing in non-scientific terms the Bernoulli principle in physics, a term he did not use. That is, when subglottal air pressure increases the vocal chords are pulled together as air pressure around the vocal folds lowers. This helps the singer retain air and sing longer without a breath.

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1020. Sometimes referred to as “high costal breathing.”

1021. Labial consonants are those made with the lips: m, p, b, f, and v.

1022. The Bernoulli Effect is a hydrodynamic principle commonly used to explain the onset of a vocal sound when phonating. It states that for an inviscid flow [a fluid with no viscosity], an increase in the speed of the fluid occurs simultaneously with a decrease in pressure or a decrease in the fluid’s potential energy.
Williamson explained that choral conducting was not about gesture, but primarily about how people experience music as listeners. In his view, that phenomenon was not solely dependent on any one person, namely the conductor, listener, singer, or composer. It was an interdependent meta-process with shared responsibility between all four individuals. However, each one had separate functions if music was to be experienced gloriously.

According to Williamson, it was the responsibility of the listener to be engaged. In teaching students how to listen, he insisted that the tri-partite whole of body, heart, and spirit be engaged before an optimum musical experience could occur. The listener or music educator knew when “engagement” or connection had taken place because students would react with enthusiasm to the music they heard.

Williamson’s demands upon the listener did not stop there because he wanted the bodies of listeners to be “in tune” rhythmically. Soft singing was a result of control, never a consequence of tonal devitalization, which he deplored. Williamson saw his choristers as singer-performers with great

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1023. John Finley Williamson, “The Conductor’s Magic,” 23. The contemporary concept of “body, mind, and spirit,” or “Bodymind,” represents a trend that began in the 1960s. Williamson’s early ideas about this, on the other hand, bear some resemblance to nineteenth-century Romantic ideas on the original unity of man and nature; the subsequent separation of man from nature and the fragmentation of human faculties; the interpretability of the history of the universe in human, spiritual terms; and the possibility of salvation through the contemplation of nature. Stefano Poggi and Maurizio Bossi, *Romanticism in Science: Science in Europe, 1790–1840, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science* (Dordrecht, Netherlands; Boston: Kluwer Academic, 1994), 4.
responsibility in his multi-layered conception of musical experience. Singers were responsible for mood, because according to Williamson, mood created textual drama, and drama in turn generated emotion. When emotion was present, it immediately stirred the emotions of listeners. Williamson taught singers to “use the lower jaw of an idiot and the upper jaw of an artist.” He explained that for each mood, both the upper jaw and the breathing would change. Singers and conductors were, in the end, the recreators of the mood desired by the composer. Williamson believed that singers also create mood by means of the vowels and consonants that comprise words. Vowels and consonants were: (1) affected by amplitude or volume, (2) controlled by the conductor, and (3) realized in a “phrase pattern” (referring to a gesture made by the conductor painting a picture of the particular phrase being sung).

One of his most controversial ideas was that once a conductor set a tempo for a choir, it was the ensemble’s responsibility to keep the pace. In many ways, this represented a relinquishing of control and responsibility on the part of the conductor—a “getting out of the way.” At the same time, it symbolized a trusting of the choir as co-creators. Keeping the pace meant


1026. Williamson’s complex idea that the choir maintains tempo independent of the conductor after being set by the conductor has never been widely accepted or studied.
keeping the music rhythmic, or generated internally. Singers or performers
were required to follow the conductor’s control of the amplitude, or volume. It
was the choir’s duty to realize the music exactly as the composer put it on the
page. His theory created a new paradigm of trust—an intimate relationship
between the choir (as performers) and the composer. In Williamson’s
conception, a bond now existed between conductor and choir, because each
had specific tasks in the process of creating a musical experience. 1027

His notions about choir timbre were a direct result of his own vocal
education as a solo singer. He thought that choral conductors did not
understand harmonics (overtones) and recommended that they listen and
cultivate timbre in their singers because timbre resulting from bad technique
could destroy a choir. On the other hand, good technique, including breathing
and diction, generated beautiful harmonics and excellent tuning. 1028

According to Williamson, the vocal part with the most overtones was the
bass. He held that soprano overtones were so high that they were rarely heard,
and if a choir tuned to the correct overtones of basses, their tuning would be
successful. For Williamson, a rich choral or vocal sound was one brimming


that tuning was not only heard, but also felt. The terms harmonics and overtones are used
interchangeably here.
with overtones. One criticism of his *a cappella* choir over the years was that the sound was so full of overtones that the fundamental of the pitch was obscured, and as a result, the tuning was perceived to be flat.\(^{1029}\) This may have also been due to the type of vocal placement he imparted. Recordings made during Williamson’s early years illustrate that the placement of vowels was backward and “pharyngeal” to a degree that the color of all vowels was darkened, and the subsequent pitch may have been experienced by listeners as flat. If critics were correct in stating that overtones were all that was being heard by Williamson’s singers, and those harmonics were generated from a flat fundamental (the result of a backward placement), it is quite possible that his choir may have been heard as flat, because an obscured, covered, backwardly placed flat fundamental would have produced flat overtones.

Williamson called the timbre of vowels resulting from overtones “vowel color.” He proposed that every vowel had a different set of overtones or color. When vocal vibrations are partially or entirely stopped, consonants result. Consonants, having a different function, were employed in the creation of musical drama—the portrayal of mood.\(^{1030}\) Once a conductor set the tempo of a work, it was the job of the singer to create beautiful phrases using vowels and

\(^{1029}\) Nally, *Conversations with Joseph Flummerfelt*, 114.

\(^{1030}\) Beck, *Selected Writings of John Finley Williamson*, 86–88.
consonants. Singers were required to communicate the message of a composer by outlining the form of the work. When choristers did this, the minds of listeners were stimulated as well as inspired. According to Williamson, “The only privilege a conductor has is that of setting the pace, controlling the amplitude, or softness and loudness, or the dynamics and the melody to the fore.”

In line with his precepts, Williamson created a pattern, or order of events, for conductors (see Table 6.4). “Greatness in music,” he stated, “rests first with the composer, second, with the singer or performer, and last, with the conductor.”

Like his mentor F. Melius Christiansen, Williamson was of the opinion that singers also need to have “good taste.” For both conductors this was not something subjective, but rather objective, subject to evaluation, and involving the discriminatory faculties of choristers.

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1031. Williamson’s maxim here is a combination of two maxims, one by Hector Berlioz and one by Richard Wagner, both of whom said essentially the same thing.


1033. The concept of “good taste” was one often mentioned by Williamson’s mentor F. Melius Christiansen as well. For both men this was not a nebulous subjective construct, but a highly objective critical faculty culminating in an elevated aesthetic standard. Its use in both cases refers to a complex multidimensional judgment concerning the perceived beauty and refinement of an artistic creation.
Table 6.4. Williamson’s order of responsibility for choral conductors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>First establish mood of a work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Set the breathing for choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The breathing then communicates pace to singers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Attack is given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Conductor controls vowels/consonants by controlling amplitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Releases are part of the rhythmic pattern</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A “Westminster Choir College Newsletter” article from 1974 mentions an historical film showing Williamson conducting in Dayton during the 1920s. The film, ca. 1923–26, chronicled the groundbreaking for Westminster Presbyterian Church’s new sanctuary and the dedication service in 1926. The film also shows the Dayton Westminster Choir singing with Williamson conducting. Earl L. Cunningham, a Westminster Choir College alumnus and author of the newsletter article, observed, “Dr. Williamson’s conducting technique was different in those days than has traditionally


1035. Cunningham, “One Could Only Sit in Wonder at the Exuberance of Those Memories.”

been associated with Westminster. It was high and away from the body, and long notes were sustained with a rigidly held, motionless hand.\textsuperscript{1037}

During the early Dayton period, a critic from the \textit{Boston Globe} described Williamson’s conducting, which even then reflected some of his later views on creating a musical experience. The unidentified reviewer wrote, “He leads without baton, in a manner quite customary with conductors of \textit{a cappella} choirs, and indicates his interpretive desires less by beating time in the usual way than by shading phrases and setting vocal parts in motion by a sinuous flexation of his wrists.”\textsuperscript{1038} Though Williamson’s use of the hands was unorthodox, he maintained that if a conductor did not “time-beat” but followed a “pattern of hand movement that never ceases,” he could focus on the crescendo and diminuendo of amplitude. “The hand,” he wrote, “will then keep the same pace as the pace of the music.”\textsuperscript{1039}

Choosing Choristers for the Westminster Choir

Like F. Melius Christiansen at St. Olaf Lutheran College, Williamson utilized a competitive procedure for choosing choristers and “character” was at the top of the list. It is perhaps likely that when he traveled to Northfield,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1037] Cunningham, “One Could Only Sit in Wonder at the Exuberance of Those Memories.”
\item[1038] Ibid.
\item[1039] Beck, \textit{Selected Writings of John Finley Williamson}, 78–86.
\end{footnotes}
Minnesota, around 1920 to meet with his mentor, Christiansen told him exactly the same thing he repeated to an interviewer in 1926: “We pick our singers by their character, as revealed in the color of their voices.”

Williamson’s formula for choosing Westminster choir singers, influenced by Christiansen, might be summarized as, in order of importance: character, personality, mentality, musicianship, and voice. An undated videotape recording of an interview with Williamson by an unidentified and unseen (audio only) questioner, revealed the following dialogue:

Interviewer: How do you select the students in the first place? Is it competitive?

Williamson: Yes, we have many, many applications. It is first a matter fundamentally of the character of the individual. We feel that our type of work demands a high character standard. It is second a matter of his personality. Third, a matter of his mentality. We demand that he be in the upper 85% in high school credits. Then his musicianship and last of all his voice.

Interviewer: Last of all?

Williamson: Oh yes. Well, you can make voices. We do not aspire to turn out the great artists. We have young people coming who may develop as artists. That takes time and the development of the individual. But, all these other things are more important to the artist than just the voice. And, if one of our people should become a great singer, as some have, we would be very proud of that. But, we have a field that is needed

1040. “Interview with F. Melius Christiansen,” St. Paul Pioneer Press (St. Paul, MN), 24 October 1926. F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, Bolvaag Library, Northfield, MN. The interviewer was unnamed.
that the all around background of the individual is very necessary. So, we hold to that rather rigidly.\textsuperscript{1041}

The Classification of Voices

Williamson’s ideas about the classification of voices originated with his New York City voice teacher Herbert Witherspoon, who used three criteria for classifying voices: quality, range, and lift. Williamson correctly assumed that many choral conductors (including some of his own students) did not understand the last of these. That concept, known originally as “the lift of the breath,” did not originate with Williamson, but rather was developed by his teacher, Witherspoon from Francesco Lamperti’s \textit{Bel Canto} technique, discussed previously.\textsuperscript{1042}

An overarching value for Williamson was vocal authenticity. He always sought a singer’s natural voice and thought that vocal affectations of any kind were undesirable. He was aware that when singers idealized other singers and altered their voices to copy them, problems arose. Williamson told his students that acquiring “naturalness” takes work, and he understood that singers often try to be something vocally that they are not.

Because of his experiences in directing choral groups, Williamson saw

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1041} David Wallis, \textit{A Character Study in Ensemble Performance: John Finley Williamson}. VHS t, ed. by David Beck (St. Charles, MO: Lindenwood University, 2006).
\item \textsuperscript{1042} Herbert Witherspoon, \textit{Singing, a Treatise for Teachers and Students} (New York: G. Schirmer, 1925), 90, 113.
\end{itemize}
the concept of vocal “range” as problematic. He remembered that often choristers considered one voice part superior to another and then demanded to be in a particular section of the choir. He taught his choir school students to instruct their choirs that no section is “best.” He also told them to resist all manipulation by singers who saw personal prestige as more important than ensemble balance or the matching of choristers with their proper choir section. Williamson believed that the range of individual choir voices is not an accurate indicator because in most people it is rather wide and does not provide much information about voice classification.

Witherspoon, his teacher, used the concept of “lift” (“The Lift of the Breath”) in place of the more commonly employed terms “register” or “break.” For Williamson, “lift,” meant a register transition—the point in the voice where the change of register begins (see fig. 6.7). Witherspoon’s concept was similar to the Bel Canto idea of passagio, the commonly used term “break,” “register shift,” or the passage from chest voice to head voice. He taught students that “lift” should happen at the precise point of transition or break:


1044. Ibid.

1045. Ibid.
The lift is a place in the range of the voice where it is necessary to use less breath. The lift is the place where the voice becomes easier to produce, and where the singer senses a spontaneous buoyancy in ascending scales...The realization that the lift exists helps the singer to know that tones that are mistakenly called high tones are more easily produced than the so-called low tones.

Thus, when the singer “lifts,” the following phenomena occur: first, the vocal production is lightened; second, less air is needed; third, the voice is easier to produce; fourth, a spontaneous buoyancy is produced in ascending scales (he believed this might be used in exercises to locate the lift); and finally,

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1046. Paul B. Oncley, “Dual Concept of Singing Registers,” *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 47, no. 1A (January 1970): 120 (Included as part of the contents of this journal is the Program of the Seventy-Eighth Meeting of the Acoustical Society of America. Oncley’s article is one of many contributed papers); and Wehr, “John Finley Williamson,” 178–179.

1047. Ibid.
higher tones are more easily produced than lower tones.  

Williamson justified his concept of “lift” by noting that fast vibrations of high pitches are more easily produced than slow vibrations of lower pitches. He believed that on the first note of the lift, words were subject to a modified pronunciation. For example, if the word “alleluia” was being sung in an ascending scale by a lyric second soprano, when the singer came to a C-sharp (the first note of the “lift” for that voice type), she would sing “uh-leh-loo-yah” (employing a schwa) instead of “ah-leh-loo-yah” (using the pure Italian vowel ah). He believed that vowel modification (or aggiustamento in Bel Canto technique) removed tension from the singing process:

If the singer and conductor can accept the fact that music is horizontal flow, not vertical flow, they will quickly find tensions leaving the singer’s throat, developing a new coordination between his body and the voice that he gives forth. To achieve this coordination it is absolutely essential that the singer and conductor understand lifts.

Four things needed to occur during the lift in a coordinated fashion: (1) less breath, (2) more space, (3) darker vowel, and (4) higher focus. His procedure for vowel modification was as follows: “ah” was modified to “uh” [as just illustrated], “aw” to “uh,” “eh” to “ay,” “oo” (soon) to “oo” (soot), and “ee” to

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1048. Ibid.

1049. Ibid.

Williamson taught that as pitch ascends, open vowels (ah, aw, uh) close and closed vowels (ee, oo) open. Above G3 for low voices and C5 for high voices, he suggested rolling the shoulders slightly forward (not up) and tucking the pelvis under, as both help open the lower back. Alternatively, he proposed that singers try hugging a tree, holding a beach ball under water, or allowing the spine to lengthen. He believed that voices have two lifts separated by a perfect fourth. In women’s voices, there is a third lift, which is a major third above the second lift. Chest voice in female voices is found a major sixth below the first lift.

One of Williamson’s first students, Herbert Vincent Pate, who spent forty-five years as a professor of voice and vocal pedagogy at Westminster Choir College, corroborated what Williamson taught about “lift.” Echoing Williamson, Pate stated that singing above the lift is about power, not pressure. As a result, he taught singers to use less breath above the lift. Pate used a principle from physics to back up his instruction: “As frequency doubles, intensity squares”—one of Williamson’s cardinal teaching principles. He also

1051. Ibid.

1052. Ibid.

said frequently, “There are no ‘high’ notes or ‘low’ notes—only faster and slower frequencies. All the notes on the piano are the same distance from the floor.”¹⁰⁵⁴ With regard to brightening vocal sound, Pate explained, “Focus ‘brightens’ (comes forward, approaches speech) as pitch descends. Snarl a little bit as you approach the bottom of your range.”¹⁰⁵⁵

Williamson’s concept of lift was intended to reduce bodily tension. He advised his singers not to equate vocal or bodily tension with power. “Power,” quite to the contrary, he stated, “is applied through the mind.”¹⁰⁵⁶ The reduction of tension would, according to Williamson, result in a beautiful tone, which singers could use in their music making. Art in singing, he declared, “is based on the singing of a beautiful line.” Balance and proportion “come from weaving these lines together.”¹⁰⁵⁷

Vocal Balance in Choirs

A good choir should be as solidly constructed as the New England Church. The first sopranos, with a simple and pure tone, may be compared to the glistening spire. The second sopranos should be the base of the tower that supports the tapering top. The first and second altos, the first and second tenors, and the baritones make up the body of

¹⁰⁵⁴. Ibid.
¹⁰⁵⁵. Ibid.
¹⁰⁵⁶. Ibid.
¹⁰⁵⁷. Ibid.
the church. These singers should sing with tones as rich in color as old Cathedral glass. The structure must then be supported by the second bass.  

Williamson’s concept of choral balance was architectural and dominated by a foundation of lower voices, which he thought anchored the sound. When designing a choir, he believed that as the pitch of vocal sections increased, the number of singers should decrease. He wanted the base of his choir wide and the top narrow. Early in his career, he used the image of a New England church, with a narrow spire, to depict that choral plan. He also used figures of speech to describe the aesthetic quality he sought in voices. First sopranos were required to have a simple and pure tone, while second sopranos down to the baritones comprised the body of a choir (see fig. 6.8).

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Number of highest pitched voices (Women)

Number of lowest pitched voices (Men)

Figure 6.8. Williamson’s triangular concept of choral balance

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1059. Ibid.
Williamson’s image of “old Cathedral glass” with a variety of dark rich colors depicted the type of sound internal vocal sections must have. The basses of a choir, which formed the foundation of that solid choral architecture, he called “the basic element of the choir.” In his 1950 essay for *The Etude* music magazine, entitled “Balance the Voices,” Williamson wrote, “The first soprano brings the whole structure to a focus through the shimmering clarity of a pure, crystal-clear thread of tone.” His choir’s earliest “star soprano,” Lorean Hodapp, was known for exactly this vocal timbre. Some critics likened her voice to that of a boy soprano. At the same time, Williamson wanted his high voices to be able to modulate their vocal tone so as not to cover bass voices. That ability, he believed, was the mark of a great choral ensemble. Williamson asked his soprano voices to blend their harmonics/overtones with bass voices. He required his lower alto voices to do the same. He believed that if a vocal part had a white, colorless sound devoid of overtones, the sound would be made richer by blending with bass harmonics. In this way, the Westminster Choir was designed literally “from the ground up.”

The sequence for choral rehearsals followed the triangular architectural

1060. Ibid.

1061. Ibid.

design of his chorus. For example, Williamson first worked with the basses, making sure that the harmonics of this section were consonant with the fundamental pitch. Then, focusing on the bass part, his attention turned to vowels, by half steps, making sure that all vowels stayed within the spectrum of those consonant harmonics.¹⁰⁶³

Later, Williamson’s choral aesthetic evolved into his conception of a “choral tapestry.” Therefore, blend, which by definition tended to suppress individual vocal characteristics could not be the goal. Within his triangular notion of choral balance, he believed it was the responsibility of each singer to create choral equilibrium in the ensemble by intense listening. When singing a polyphonic fugal section, for instance, Williamson explained that his choir must function like a football team. Running with the ball, metaphorically represented the subject of the fugue, during which time all other vocal parts would “run interference.”¹⁰⁶⁴

A critical part of Williamson’s achievement of vocal balance was his transmutation of Lamperti techniques into group vocal techniques. Every choir rehearsal became a group voice lesson. One way he accomplished this was by

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¹⁰⁶⁴. Ibid., 23
having choristers sing in pairs. In this way, he blended their solo Lamperti techniques together making them function as a group. This was something new in the American choral world, which had never been done before.

Choral Diction: Mood and Phonetics

Diction for Williamson centered on the overarching idea that language is made up of sounds. He required that conductors and singers master the science of phonetics, which he sometimes referred to as speech sounds. According to Williamson, song communicated thoughts in phrases with beauty of tone. Those phrases were best rendered through singing vowels and consonants in the context of a legato line. He thought that any kind of time beating put emphasis on a single word or single note and served to “destroy the clarity of enunciation.” Williamson advised conductors to conduct through phrases and not stop on individual beats, for a legato line assisted in the achievement of a beautiful quality of tone.

Properly formed vowels and articulated consonants were critical to his choral work (see Table 6.5). It was crucial to use vowel and diphthong sounds according to dictionary usage, and any properly trained choral director must understand these sounds and how the vowels fit with each word. He wanted

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1066. Ibid., 24.
Table 6.5. Williamson’s vowel taxonomy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diphthongs</th>
<th>Vowel Components</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>eh + ee (say)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>ah + ee (sigh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o</td>
<td>aw + oo (so)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w</td>
<td>oo + uh (one)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ie</td>
<td>ee + oo (view)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ye</td>
<td>ee + eh (yes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ya</td>
<td>ee + aw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(German ‘ja’)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(German ja “ja”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pure Vowels</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ah</td>
<td>Psalm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eh</td>
<td>set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ee</td>
<td>see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aw</td>
<td>saw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oo</td>
<td>soon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ih</td>
<td>sit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ah</td>
<td>sat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uh</td>
<td>sung</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medial Vowel</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ah</td>
<td>task</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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each vowel to carry the color of the mood intended by the composer. Vowels in unaccented syllables required the basic sound of “uh” in “sung,” with a tinge of the printed vowel. Diphthongs split their energies and emphasis in a 95:5 ratio (95% sustained vowel, 5% vanishing vowel), except for “w” and “y” at the beginning of a word, which reverse those proportions (5:95).

Williamson categorized vocal consonants with pitch according to whether they began or ended words (see Table 6.6). He also frequently referred to vocal consonants having pitch (VCHPs) and instructed that when VCHPs opened a word or syllable they must take the pitch of the subsequent vowel. VCHPs that closed a word or syllable took the pitch of the preceding vowel. Choral singers were advised to shape the mouth and throat for a vowel following a VCHP while the VCHP was being sung (so thee ≠ thy ≠ thou ≠ this ≠ the, etc.). Pure explosive consonants were made with the lips, teeth, tongue, and breath in the mouth, whilearticulating consonants (consonants involved in the separation of sounds, for example, a consonant ending a word) required a loose jaw and an active tongue. Voiced consonants necessitated a neutral vowel (“uh”) after they were sounded, as if adding a quick extra syllable.
Table 6.6. Consonants as classified by John Finley Williamson

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocal Consonants Having Pitch (VCHPs)</th>
<th>Pure Explosive Consonants</th>
<th>Voiced Consonants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>l</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>b (≠ p)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>d (≠ t)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>g (≠ k)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ng</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>v (≠ f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>th (thine)</td>
<td>ch</td>
<td>j (≠ ch)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>z</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zh (azure)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Williamson always recommended that sibilants (s, sh, and th/as in thin) be used sparingly. He directed his students to pronounce them fifty percent softer than surrounding sounds. The manner in which the consonant R was sung depended on whether it was at the beginning of a word or within a word.\textsuperscript{1069} R at the start of a word was normally flipped if the word was passive and rolled if the word was active. R within a word was usually sung as “uh.”

Thus, “Lord” = Law + uh + duh (“Lord” ≠ “lard”). He believed that correct use

\textsuperscript{1068} John Finley Williamson, “Good Singing Requires Good Diction,” *The Etude*, 69, no. 9, September 1951, 23, 59.

\textsuperscript{1069} Williamson often referred to the consonant R as a “letter” and not a consonant.
of language should be reflected in daily speech and that the laws of phonetics
must be obeyed: “…good singing means that the individual spells phonetically
and applies his softness and loudness through the phonetical line of sound.”\textsuperscript{1070}

For choir tuning, Williamsons taught his choristers to tune on the words they were actually singing. He believed if practiced two or three times during a rehearsal, it would lead to vowel purity. After vowel purity was attained; the composer’s “mood color” could be studied.\textsuperscript{1071} There were infinite possibilities for richness and vocal color, but vowels in daily speech and singing had to be correct according to the phonetics of the dictionary. He refused to mention vocal placement, preferring instead to concentrate on mood and phonetics. He believed that correct pronunciation was the solution for all rhythmic, phrasing, pitch, and tonal problems. The ultimate solution for pronunciation, according to his teachings, was an emotional relationship with the words:

\begin{quote}
The only possible thing an individual can do is exactly the same thing he did as a child. If he is angry, the size of the cavity within the chest wall automatically changes; if he is joyous there is another change in the cavity. The thought, however, is not of changing the cavity but creating the mood. Creating a mood automatically makes the individual adjust the cavity to express that mood.\textsuperscript{1072}
\end{quote}

\begin{thebibliography}{10}
\bibitem{1071} Ibid.
\bibitem{1072} John Finley Williamson, “The Importance of Vowel Coloring,” \textit{The Etude} 69, no.
Williamson was convinced that style in diction could be achieved via mood. He thought that the instant this occurred, mood, pronunciation, enunciation, articulation, and style in diction became simple.\textsuperscript{1073}

Charismatic Ability to Inspire

Repeatedly, historical evidence suggests that Williamson’s ability to motivate, inspire, and control choirs may have been attributable to what his students repeatedly described as his charismatic personality. His ability to simultaneously captivate, inspire, and even terrify groups and individuals was a skill he used to get exactly what he wanted, in life and in the rehearsal room. Music educator Richard Keggereis commented about Williamson’s magnetic personality and ability to enthral choirs. Based on an interview with one former Williamson student, he explained, “By such stories, gestures, and posturing Williamson was able almost to mesmerize his singers into doing what he wanted.”\textsuperscript{1074} Similarly, music education historian James Keene wrote: “His theoretical formulations were a product of the idiosyncratic methods he was able to use.”\textsuperscript{1075}


\textsuperscript{1074} Carolyn England quoted in Richard Irl Kegerreis, "History of the High School A
Writings, Addresses, and Lectures

Many of Williamson’s writings, speeches, and lectures remain unpublished. According to music historian Joseph Beck, his earliest published material was from around 1920, the year he changed employment from Dayton’s First United Brethren Church to the newly formed Westminster Presbyterian Church. That year he wrote a two-paragraph article for *The Christian Advocate* magazine entitled “The Secret of Training a Choir.” The full text of this article also appears in another journal from 1926, *The Christian Leader*. In 1925, Williamson gave a speech for the Organ and Choral Conference at the annual convention of the Music Teachers National Association, held in Dayton, Ohio. In his speech, he presented the nations’ music teachers with a justification for his Westminster Plan. His address, “Choir Organization and Training,” represented Williamson’s first advocacy of unaccompanied singing on a national scale. According to his plan, fifty percent of all choral music was obliged to be *a cappella* in participating organizations. He rationalized that requirement, stating, “The best way to secure trueness of

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intonation is through *a cappella* singing. Let the choir once experience the
sheer joy that comes from being a part of a chord in tune with just or natural
intervals and the battle is over.\(^{1078}\) As the conductor of a well known *a cappella*
choir, his lecture in Dayton reinforced a growing *a cappella* trend in the United
States during that period.

Drama: Solemnity, Processions, and Pageantry

In his essay “The Saga of the Westminster Choir,” in a subsection
entitled “Sincerity and Dignity,” referring to a drama requirement at
Westminster Choir College, Williamson wrote:

…we believe that the conductor must be not merely a musician, but must
have the dramatic power of a great actor. Mrs. Williamson who conducts
these drama courses, says: ‘The ability to express the reality of mood
through the spoken work, brings to the individual the emotional
freedom through the spoken word that helps bring about perfection in
coordination!’\(^{1079}\)

From the beginning of their endeavors, Williamson and his wife Rhea
had a predilection for all things grand. For example, with the Dayton
Westminster Choir during the 1920s, slow dramatic processions were employed
on concert tours and in services. His choir used a certain way of walking in
those processions. His choristers called this “the glide,” as it involved the group

\(^{1078}\) John Finley Williamson, “Choir Organization and Training” (paper presented at
the annual meeting of the Music Teachers National Association, Dayton, OH, December 28–30,

slowly gliding forward on one leg. Although the reception of such ceremonial movement was well received in churches, not all audiences appreciated it in secular venues such as concert halls. In one newspaper review from 1928, music critic Edward Durney wrote, “Their solemn procession on and off stage is a model of decorum but it would seem that a good deal of walking about might be avoided if they would stay put instead of making their exit after each program group.”

Pageantry may seem unrelated to the subject of choral music; however, it constituted one of Williamson’s choral techniques. In retrospect, his penchant for grandiosity is difficult to conceptualize or discuss because it represented nondiscursive viewpoint—a way of looking at the world that is especially relevant to dance, music, religious ritual, and the representative arts. Williamson used it to create a theatrical context and dramatic backdrop for his choir’s performances, and he wanted his students to know how to use the concept as well. As soon as his choir school moved to Ithaca, New York after 1928, a full two-semester course in pageantry, taught by Mrs. Williamson, became a requirement for students who wished to earn bachelor of music.

1080. This manner of processing is illustrated by Williamson’s Dayton Westminster Choir in the previously cited VHS video recording: Mayfield, The Westminster Presbyterian Church: From the Ground Up.

degrees.

From his earliest work at Dayton’s Westminster Presbyterian Church, Williamson used ceremony and grandiosity as a technique and context to both enrich and inspire choral tone, even though nothing could have been more antithetical or uncharacteristic of Calvinistic worship style. His earliest expressions in this regard can be seen in his attraction to the neo-Gothic architecture of Dayton’s Westminster Presbyterian Church and ritualistic processions. Later, his theatre was Princeton University’s “cathedralesque” chapel, designed by the same architect, Gothic Revival specialist Ralph Adams Cram of Boston. In some ways, choral music for Williamson functioned in the same way as a stained glass window in a great cathedral. The context required drama—in this case, a choir in aesthetic alignment with magnificent energies. The Williamsons’ appreciation for grandness, drama, ritual, and display is interesting in light of the fact that neither had any exposure to solemnity or pageantry in their simple rural Midwestern backgrounds. Their desideratum also appears to have been the contextual energy surrounding a grand event, occasion, or ceremony—what was left over from a pageant beyond the actual event.

Earliest Contributions to Cultivated Singing in the U.S.

During Williamson’s earliest years in Dayton, his obvious bequest to American music history was the communication of a new cultivated genre of choral singing via choir tours. Another of Williamson’s important contributions was eclecticism in programming. For example, some choral musicians associated the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir with an “early music” sound. It is true that their straight-tone sound and a cappella genre would have worked well with such literature. However, because of personal biases and a lack of understanding on the part of F. Melius Christiansen, the well-known ensemble performed almost no Renaissance music during that conductor’s career. It was John Finley Williamson, by contrast, who performed, recorded, and later published many editions of Renaissance music.

Any early music component in the genesis of cultivated tone in the United States in the early twentieth century was contributed first by Peter C. Lutkin at Northwestern University and later by Williamson, whose contribution in this respect was perhaps more significant than Lutkin’s. Williamson and the Westminster Choir were responsible for performing, recording, broadcasting, and thus introducing U.S. audiences to more early music than did any other choir from 1926 to 1940. For example, the Dayton Westminster Choir’s earliest Victor recording in the 1920s was of an a cappella Palestrina motet for double
choir, *Hodie Christus Natus Est*, a highly unusual choice of repertoire at the time. Also, between 1926 and 1940, no other American choir presented *a cappella* choral singing to more listeners than did the Westminster choir through live performances, national radio broadcasts, and recordings. The choir tours reached thousands, but their reach increased exponentially after 1930, when weekly national radio broadcasts and Victrola recordings became common in that pre-television era.

Williamson's vocal approach to choral music was new for his era and he both aided and influenced choral music by co-founding a choir college, the only exclusively collegiate choral institution of its kind in the country. From that base, from 1926 to 1958, Williamson supported *a cappella* choral music by developing and working with his touring choir.

His choral ideas were new for many ensembles in schools, colleges, and churches in the 1920s. He encouraged directors to focus on the individuality of singers and their holistic development—vocally, physically, and emotionally. He placed attention on each voice as a focal point within a larger choral tapestry—a different perspective in an evolving conversation about choral singing. Lastly, his original notions about choral conducting assigned new responsibilities to an interconnected triad consisting of conductor, choir, and composer.  

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contrast, many did not like his choral aesthetic, did not adhere to his vocal teachings, and criticized the sounds his choir produced. His work also contributed to a “choral divide,” with the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir on one side and the Westminster Choir on the other. However, Williamson was adamant that he deeply appreciated Christiansen’s choral contributions and the two men were very close personal friends.

Williamson: A Music Educator

Although most saw Williamson as a choir conductor, he also functioned as a music educator to thousands throughout the world. In this light, it seems strange that Williamson, a lifelong teacher of music, would not allow the training of music educators at his choir school. As long as Williamson was at the helm of his institution, he refused to be involved in the certification of public school music teachers. However, he had quite a bit to say on the subject. He was critical of music education in U.S., claiming that young people were not given adequate opportunities for music making. Though he grew up in rural Ohio during a period when not all Americans sought a secondary school education, Williamson believed strongly in the rigorous European conservatory approach to music education. This was due to his frequent association with


1084. Wehr, “John Finley Williamson,” 8–9. Williamson ran away from home for four
distinguished individuals whose careers were the result of such a musical background. While he was not at their level of musicianship, he recognized what that level was and not only aspired to it personally, but was uncompromising in his demands that his students attain such a level as well. Williamson made certain compromises for himself in this regard. He did not attempt to reach this level through traditional scholarship, but rather through the practice of music via trial and error.

In many ways, Williamson was on a quest for the best. He believed that certain subjects from the European conservatory tradition should be part of American music education. One of these was solfeggio, which he insisted be taught to all music students. As one who knew from his own experience, he commented, “All the great conductors speak the language of solfeggio.”

Williamson went on to explain, “I feel that American musical education, in a bigger sense, will not get very far unless we employ the same technique which the masters and all the great orchestras have adopted.”

In founding Westminster Choir College with his wife Rhea, Williamson indirectly influenced American music education by means of a progressive ripple effect. Early on, during the Dayton period, soon after financial support

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1086. Ibid.
for his choir became a civic enterprise, his Dayton Westminster Choir performed *a cappella* choral music for the Music Teachers National Association’s national conference when it was held in Dayton. As a result, many American music supervisors and high school choral directors from throughout the country experienced this new genre of choral music for the first time in the mid-1920s. In addition, that outward flow of increased interest in *a cappella* choral singing originated in performance locations throughout the United States because the Westminster Choir, along with the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir, toured nationally for extended periods. With the exception of Christiansen and Williamson, choir touring before 1930 might be said to have been in its infancy, restricted to local venues.

For example, patterned after the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir, the Augustana College Choir of Sioux Falls, South Dakota began choir tours on a limited basis in 1922, one year after that choir’s founding. Augustana’s unaccompanied choir gave concerts in the South Dakota communities of Dell Rapids, Flandreau, Colman, Colton, Oldham, Madison, Volga, Sinai, Brookings, and

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1088. Historical records of choir tour itineraries in the first quarter of the twentieth century indicate that Williamson and Christiansen frequently took their choirs on tours that often lasted four to six weeks or more, much longer than contemporary choir tours.

Arlington. After Easter, the group sang in Irene, Volin, Mission Hill, Yankton, Gayville, Meckling, and Elk Point. It was not until 1927 that the ensemble ventured to Chicago to sing for the biennial convention of the National Federation of Music Clubs.\footnote{Ibid., 96.} During the 1920s, the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir and the Dayton Westminster Choir were the only two college \textit{a cappella} choirs touring the country extensively. Only three choirs had widespread significance: those two and the Northwestern University \textit{A Cappella Choir}.\footnote{Paul Benson, “A Cappella Choirs in the Scandinavian-American Lutheran Colleges,” in \textit{Norwegian-American Studies} 32 (Northfield, MN: Norwegian American Historical Association, 2000–2005), 221.}

Williamson’s Employment of \textit{A Cappella} as a Vocal Technique for Cultivating Choral Sound

John Finley Williamson’s early contributions to the \textit{a cappella} choral art were many and varied. Although he did not invent \textit{a cappella} singing, evidence suggests that he was one of the three most important figures who modeled cultivated choral tone to large numbers of Americans between 1920 and 1940. Williamson reinforced the proposition that an American amateur collegiate \textit{a cappella} choir could tour under professional management and sing at an expert level. In addition, he, along with F. Melius Christiansen and Peter Lutkin, came to represent an ideal for secondary school, college, and university choirs and their directors.
Williamson also introduced a significant body of new a cappella repertoire to American audiences. Much of that literature was new, unfamiliar, and filled a widespread need for a published a cappella repertoire. Finally, Williamson promoted both original and derivative choral techniques based on contemporaneous science and a vocal approach to the choral art. His method of choral cultivation stood in contrast with the techniques by prominent conductors at the time who based their methods on instrumental practices. This method introduced specificity into his practice of vocal refinement and was rooted in the notion that every chorister was a singer requiring choral methods and concepts based on singing as a science.

Criticism of Williamson

During Williamson’s lifetime, a choral world was evolving in the United States with varied aesthetic points of view, and he influenced that spectrum by means of his choral tastes. Although historical data confirm Williamson’s career accomplishments and shortcomings, from the 1920s, other educators and musicians expressed a variety of individual choral preferences, many of which were at odds with Williamson’s. For example, some thought that the overall sound of his choir was dark, pharyngeal, tuned flat, operatic, harmonically faulty, overly vibrant, stylistically erroneous, and unpleasing. Others preferred the straight-tone model of F. Melius Christiansen’s St. Olaf
Lutheran Choir, an ensemble not immune to a variety of choral/vocal problems as period recordings demonstrate.

In addition, throughout his career Williamson’s “inbred” approach to vocal instruction was seen as restrictive, defensive, fear-based, and anti-academic by nature. Many musicians, including quite a few of his own choir college faculty colleagues, believed that he exhibited limited musicianship and employed techniques and tenets they did not agree with or understand. In addition to Williamson’s celebrated charisma, it was well known that both he and his wife had idiosyncrasies that sometimes affected the function of the school they co-founded.

Williamson was also criticized for making up choral methods rather than basing them on hard science or academic knowledge. Extreme choral measures were not out of the question. For example, the author remembers his teacher Professor Lois Laverty, a Williamson chorister in the 1950s, recall that Williamson had Laverty and another female singer walk from Westminster Choir College to the office of a local doctor after a choir rehearsal. Here the physician surgically cut the membrane under the tongues (the lingual frenulum) of both girls to improve their vocal tone. Williamson thought that this procedure would allow the free movement of the tongue which is desired in
singing. Laverty recalled returning on foot to the school with blood running from her mouth and being in considerable pain.

On the other side of the coin, for better or for worse, evidence from the past clearly reveals Williamson’s significant role in helping to cultivate choral tone in the U.S. in the early part of the twentieth century. While he had strong, sometimes-controversial opinions, the success he experienced over approximately forty-four years cannot be denied. Quite a few of his early teachings, many of those explored in this study, have evolved in the half-century following his death. Some of those original ideas, though long forgotten, may be of benefit to choral music educators and choral conductors at all levels and therefore deserve reexamination and study.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to chronicle the genesis of cultivated choral tone in the United States from 1906 to 1928. That transformation was led by three conductors whose disparate careers represented a shared trajectory. Individually and collectively, they pioneered two singing genres with European provenance—a cappella and senza vibrato singing—as early techniques to isolate and refine choral tone. Their work converged in 1928, when it expanded to become the American A Cappella Movement (1928–1938).

Several research queries guided this study: What factors led Peter C. Lutkin, F. Melius Christiansen, and John Finley Williamson to cultivate choral tone in America from 1906–1928? Why and how did each conductor embrace and promote a cappella choral music? How did their pedagogy, performances, and ideals lead to the cultivation of choral singing in the United States? Which of their specific choral techniques, if any, were key components of the genesis of cultivated choral tone between 1906 and 1928? What was the provenance of choral ideals that influenced the genesis of cultivated choral tone in the United States? How might knowledge about the influence of these conductors on choral singing be of use to choral educators and choral conductors today and in the future?
The refinement of choral tone in the early twentieth century did not begin in earnest until focus began to be placed upon vocal sound, and choral directors began to learn about, refine, and make improvements in choral tone according to their individual aesthetic judgments. Original vocal methods and group vocal techniques were gradually introduced in the U.S. from 1906 through 1928. During that time, due to a number of developments that included choir tours, choral music exploded onto the educational landscape following a pivotal Music Supervisors National Conference (MSNC) convention in Chicago in 1928. That meeting of music educators was a nexus between the dawning of refined choral tone in the U.S. (1906–1928) and the American A Cappella Movement (1928–1938), which evolved during that twenty-two-year period.

In this chronology, two overarching choral/vocal developments became readily apparent. First was the ascendancy of a cappella singing from 1906 to 1928. This study found that no historical data suggests that before the beginning of the Northwestern University A Cappella Choir in 1906, any other similar choral ensemble ever existed in any school, college, or university in the United States. Additionally, all historical data examined for this study indicated that the Northwestern ensemble constituted a radical departure from the choral status quo, inferring that this constituted the first example in the history of
American choral education of an official college choir approaching choral music as a subject worthy of study, focus, and cultivation. This is to propose here that the genesis of the Northwestern University A Cappella Choir in 1906—as a profound departure from the college choral ensemble as a non-academic, extra-curricular, social activity—represented a break from the contemporaneous style of American choral music making which preceded it. With the actions of one individual—Peter C. Lutkin—choral educators and conductors throughout the United States very slowly began to think differently about the subject of choral education and choral performance in general. The dye had been cast, but into an empty field.

When F. Melius Christiansen commented that unaccompanied singing without vibrato was a “revival” of an earlier historical style “that the world had forgotten,” he must have been referring to Europe since heretofore-refined *a cappella* choral singing had not been part of the indigenous American musical landscape. In contrast, it had never died in Europe, but rather increased during the nineteenth century.\(^{1002}\) Calling it an “imported genre” would be more accurate, except that initially in the U.S. it did not function as a genre at all.

\(^{1002}\) Walter Monfried, n.t., *Milwaukee Journal*, n.d. 1951, F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, Rolvaag Library, Northfield, MN; and “Lost Boy on Icy Bay Found World Fame. Death of Christiansen, Noted Choir Director, Recalls His Arrival in State in 1888,” n.d. 1955, Unidentified newspaper clipping, F. Melius Christiansen Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN.
The first appearance of *a cappella* singing on the American choral scene was due primarily, though not entirely, to the influence of the three conductors treated in this study. Certain other individuals, such as Harvard’s Archibald T. Davison, were significant for their continuous supporting role in that process of choral transformation. For example, Davidson’s performance work was largely restricted to the Boston area while his published writings were more significant nationally. For these reasons, Davison and others might be referred to as “second-tier” influencers when measured against the triumvirate of choral conductors examined in this paper.

Had these three conductors not introduced unaccompanied singing and modeled it to audiences, educators, and choral musicians in the United States, the nation likely would not have experienced the *a cappella* movement in the 1930s. In the absence of these three individuals it is likely that some form of widespread cultivation of choral tone would have occurred in the U. S., but in a different manner, under different leadership, with other models and ideals, and probably later.1093

In addition to *a cappella* performance, the second manner of singing that functioned as a technique was straight-tone, or *senza vibrato*, choral singing. To

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1093. The word refinement is used here to indicate an improvement or change based upon training, education, research, or experience. In the realm of early twentieth-century choral music, new techniques were developed which allowed conductors to alter many parameters of choral tone. Those changes involved tuning, placement, breathing, diction, vowel modification, posture, and other vocal parameters that influence group vocal sound.
contemporary readers, both unaccompanied and straight-tone singing represented vocal styles, or ways of singing, but from 1906 to 1928, they were novelties to most Americans. Disconnected from their long European history as choral genres, together, *a cappella* and *senza vibrato* singing were endorsed by the three conductors as early choral/vocal techniques that helped influence widespread changes in choral sound. However, it is critical to mention here that Peter C. Lutkin and F. Melius Christiansen were not disconnected from that history and had experienced both ways of singing in Europe extensively. During that transformative period, a rationale was attached to both ways of singing by these pioneers, who captured the attention and interest of American choral directors and choral educators.

These two ways of singing did not represent the totality of the pedagogy of Lutkin, Christiansen, and Williamson. Each conductor independently generated and employed methods that he believed helped him in his development of vocal tone. Some of those techniques were borrowed and some original, but almost all were regarded as new and cutting-edge at the time they were introduced and practiced. Those methods attracted little attention on their own and would likely have remained isolated had it not been for performances by their prominent choirs. Those widespread presentations first initiated a slow shift in attention from coarse status quo singing to more refined
choral tone. It was the aim of all three of these conductors to surpass the choral standard of the day by creating what they considered an improved alternative.

Conclusions: Peter C. Lutkin

Peter Lutkin’s musical background in Chicago was not sufficient to have engendered his later aesthetic preferences or to propel him into a university deanship that facilitated his future in choral music. While Chicago certainly had music schools in the nineteenth century, its cultural elite looked to European music making as a kind of aesthetic gold standard. Almost immediately upon his return to the United States from Europe in 1884, Lutkin capitalized on how his training abroad was perceived. We know this because in reports he made about new music faculty as dean of the School of Music to the president of Northwestern University, Lutkin introduced them by mentioning their German conservatory training or time spent working with music teachers in Paris. In doing so, he was promoting his own educational background, for though he possessed no academic degrees. Lutkin had studied at the Berlin Conservatory and that city’s Royal Academy of Arts. Those foreign experiences and a bit of exaggeration on his résumé were enough to catapult him to the helm of a music school at a major educational institution.\textsuperscript{1094} They were also

\textsuperscript{1094} Waldo Selden Pratt and Charles N. Boyd, eds., \textit{Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians}, American Supplement (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1920), s.v. “Peter Christian Lutkin,” 6: 275. Almost all of Lutkin’s biographies state that he studied piano with Theodor Leschetizky in Vienna or was a “member of the Leschetizky school.” We are given a
entrees into the drawing rooms of the rich and powerful of both Chicago and Evanston—individuals such Cornelia Gray Lunt, who \textit{The Chicago Daily Tribune} called the “First Lady of Evanston.”*1095 Those European experiences facilitated his involvement with this social stratum for the remainder of his life. His highly regarded and well-supported annual Northshore Music Festival was an example of the benefits of that association. Without the continued generosity of city patrons, such a large-scale event would likely not have been possible.

At the same time, Lutkin’s personal strengths should not be discounted or overlooked. Even in his early twenties, this independent struggling organist and music teacher, the orphaned son of uneducated immigrant farmers, was a talented organizer and administrator. Later, much like his colleague Walter Damrosch in New York City, Lutkin functioned as a music educator of masses of people and thereby helped transform artistic culture in that large Midwestern urban center.

\footnote{1095. Ruth De Young, “Cornelia Lunt Recalls Visits with Lincoln,” \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, 13 February 1934.}

\footnote{Clue as to his actual teacher from his entry in the 1920 edition of \textit{Grove} cited above. Lutkin, perhaps like others, actually studied with Leschetizky’s Russian housekeeper and protégé Varette Stepanoff [spelled Stepanov in \textit{Grove}, the only source found for this information] at Leschetizky’s school in that city. Leschetizky’s name had enormous cachet in American music schools during this period, while Stepanoff, though highly regarded and beloved by Leschetizky and his wife was relatively unknown in the United States. Leschetizky may have assigned Lutkin to Stepanoff because Lutkin was primarily an organist rather than a concert pianist.}
In addition, Lutkin was a skilled self-promoter. Over many years, he repeatedly placed print advertisements in newspapers, magazines, and journals throughout the country. While those music periodicals contained many advertisements from a variety of institutions, as previously mentioned, before 1906 none boasted an *a cappella* choir or an innovative academic curriculum. The public became interested in Lutkin’s accomplishments at Northwestern, and choir directors far afield in Oklahoma, New Orleans, and California knew who he was. These tactics worked in his favor; for as early as 1911 he was elected president of a national music education association, and by 1920, he was on the road to governance of several others. Founding the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the American Guild of Organists may have overshadowed his work with the Northwestern University *A Cappella* Choir, but no activity was perhaps dearer to his heart and soul.

Essentially, from its beginning in 1906, Lutkin’s work with his *a cappella* choir was that of a choral amateur—that is, one who dabbled in the field. However, it would seem that he had extensive experience in the area, as he had worked for thirteen years (1884–97) as a church choirmaster before moving to Northwestern. In two positions, he conducted church choirs of men and boys, but it is likely that they produced coarse, unrefined choral tone typical of the period. At some point after starting his Northwestern University *A Cappella*
Choir, he realized that no methods or techniques for the type of refined European-style singing he wished to emulate existed in the United States. Therefore, the choral ideas and methods he generated did not proceed from vocal pedagogy or a knowledge of the science of the voice because he was not a vocal pedagogue. However, his intention to conduct choral music was greater than any hesitation based on training or experience. Lutkin was working in a field that did not yet exist, so he became an “expert” out of necessity.

In the United States in 1906, cultivated unaccompanied choral singing was unknown. Historical data indicate that from the founding of his ensemble Lutkin purified the quality of his choir’s tone by isolating it from instrumental sound. He realized he was onto something, so he encouraged his students, and later the nation’s choral directors, to listen critically to vocal properties after removing any accompaniment. Because we have no record of his choral experiences in Europe during his student residencies in Germany and France, we cannot pinpoint the derivation of his vocal ideas. However, it is possible that they were German in origin. As mentioned earlier, Lutkin studied in Berlin from 1881 to 1883, when August Eduard Grell (1800–1886), director of Berlin’s Sing-Akademie, championed unaccompanied singing as “naked vocal music.”

However, prior to 1906, Lutkin did write about choirs that

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influenced him and they all employed a straight-tone *a cappella* style. It is probable that during his student days and while travelling he, like Christiansen, experienced the unaccompanied singing of English and European choirs in churches and cathedrals on a regular basis, was inspired, and emulated their singing when opportunities presented themselves in a collegiate choral environment. His 1901 travel article entitled “Notes of a Vacation Tour,” and reports of a similar journey in 1905, suggest that his choral aesthetic developed before 1900, likely during his student days in Berlin.\(^{1097}\)

By 1928, when Lutkin’s choir sang for that year’s Music Supervisors National Conference (MSNC) convention in Chicago, accounts imply that Lutkin’s Northwestern University *A Cappella* Choir functioned as a model of how an unaccompanied choir could sound.\(^{1098}\) For at that “singing convention” MSNC president George Oscar Bowen and other music education leaders invited only what they considered the most “outstanding” *a cappella* choirs in the United States to perform for the attendees.\(^{1099}\) During Lutkin’s career, all historical reviews of his choir were positive, and between the years 1906 and

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\(^{1097}\) Peter C. Lutkin, “Faculty Notes,” in Northwestern University, *Quarterly Bulletin of School of Music 1904–1905* (Evanston, IL: The University, June 1905), p. 9; Lutkin, “Notes of a Vacation Tour.”


\(^{1099}\) Ibid., 19.
1912, there were no other American *a cappella* choirs in secondary schools, colleges, or universities with which to compare Lutkin’s ensemble.

Evidence suggests that he did approach his own choir rehearsals with intensity and focus, placing great responsibility upon singers to be able to sing pitches, to remember them, and to support a proper vocal sound with breath. His early espousal of the straight-tone genre represented another way of isolating choral sound from pitch variations inherent in vocal vibrato. That manner of singing, stripped of all color, allowed Lutkin to further focus his attention on tuning and pitch, and he instructed his singers to do the same. He may also have been the first American choir director of the twentieth century to use diction to cultivate vocal tone by encouraging choral directors to pay attention to sung texts and original languages such as Latin.

Lutkin wrote extensively about his ideas so that American choral musicians of the period were provided with a foundation that supported his vocal culture. Former choristers at Northwestern left the school as missionaries who preached his methodology and ideals, magnifying his work throughout the country and furthering his reputation. As an author, Lutkin was possibly the first American conductor of the twentieth century to start a widespread conversation about choir singing by offering choir directors instruction, advice, and lessons in choral history. His choral writings indicate that he was well
informed about choirs and contemporaneous choral activities throughout the United States and abroad. At a time when there were few boundaries between vocal music in secondary schools, colleges, universities, and religious organizations, he provided national leadership at all levels.

That impact was a result of influential performances by his choir at music education conventions, which captured the attention of the nation’s choral supervisors, school administrators, and music educators. In those infrequent national concerts, his ensemble was presented to the nation as a choral example. Conversely, his choir’s influence was reduced because he limited its touring to surrounding states. For example, his choir’s appearance at the 1928 convention of the Music Supervisors National Conference in Chicago expanded the group’s influence, though he may have considered Chicago a local venue.

At home at Northwestern University, he altered the music curriculum and hired new faculty, both of which reflected his European training. He also created a public school music department in 1913 and hired Osborne McConathy (1875–1947), a well-known music educator and editor to head it. The institution’s academic transformation was widely advertised and stirred interest in what was perceived to be a cutting-edge undergraduate program. Being dean may have also had personal advantages, such as preventing critical
assessments of his choral work over his entire career. At present, no period recordings of his efforts or critical reviews known to be unbiased are available.

Lutkin’s overall contributions were not limited to choral music, because he also composed many works for keyboard, though they have largely fallen out of use over time. We are not certain of his possible failings in the area of choral performance due to a lack of primary source evidence. However, any possible shortcomings in the areas of vocal science, such as tuning vowels or making sure his choir had core resonance in the sound, must be examined in light of his work as a music teacher of thousands.

His career was significant in part, because it represented the first twentieth-century choral refinement to take place on a national stage. His choir was one of the first ensembles in the country to tour, and his writings were some of the first in American music history to approach choral singing from an analytical thought-provoking point of view. As the first of the three conductors examined in this study, Lutkin’s pioneering choral work both preceded and influenced later efforts by F. Melius Christiansen and John Finley Williamson, both of whom knew and respected him.

Conclusions: F. Melius Christiansen

Of the three conductors covered in this study, F. Melius Christiansen often elicited the use of superlatives, for better or worse. For example, he was
perhaps the most emulated, popular, and prolific American choral conductor during the chronological limits of this inquiry. Later surveys, from the 1930s, list Christiansen as the most influential choral conductor in the country. He was also perhaps the most personally insular, self-reliant, and self-confident. Philosophical beliefs appeared to frame his work, musicianship, spirituality, and personal life.

Throughout his career, Christiansen was guided by an unshakeable trust in his own aesthetic instincts. He stopped taking classes at the Augsburg Seminary early on because he, like John Finley Williamson, preferred experiential learning to book learning. His distrust of scholastic endeavors may have been a reaction to his lack of interest in and incompatibility with formal learning styles at the time. As a result, he was reticent but also undaunted by the idea of styling himself as an expert in a field in which he had no formal background. A concurrence of humility, reserve, and uncommunicativeness appears to have been an interesting part of what was portrayed by his former choristers as his charismatic persona.

There were many parallels between the careers of Christiansen and Lutkin. With regard to choir touring, while the latter restricted his

presentations, perhaps to the chagrin of Northwestern University officials, Christiansen did the opposite and enjoyed performing. This was probably due as much to his financially strapped sectarian college as to his inclination to tour and perform. The St. Olaf administration quickly realized that those ventures could generate money, and the longer the tour, the better. Those trips took the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir to hundreds of venues in America, as well as to some abroad, during its first twenty years. During the decade of the 1930s and after, the choir’s annual tours reached hundreds of thousands of people in the United States. It was common for this choir to draw audiences of from three to five thousand persons at each tour stop. Christiansen’s college administration must have been grateful, as his tours earned enough money to construct a new building on the St. Olaf campus.

The engine that powered Christiansen’s communication of ideas and techniques was a tremendous confidence in his own abilities. As a composer, for example, when perhaps aptly criticized by the New York Times for writing useless melismas and uninspiring instrumental-style vocal passages patterned after J. S. Bach, he continued undeterred. For years, Christiansen created choral works that may not have passed muster with erudite critics but were consistently popular compositions that sold well. That is not to imply that he was not skilled at choral writing. For example, forty-one years after his death,
Concordia College Choir conductor Réne Clausen writes of the “rich sonority” of Christiansen’s best well-known motet “Beautiful Saviour.”

Christiansen introduced many original ideas before 1928, which served to encourage American choral musicians to think differently about the choral art. Those concepts included the use of a tripartite design, and sonata or symphonic form, for program building. He also modeled the performance of unfamiliar choral repertoire, such as that of the Russian Orthodox school. By including those unfamiliar liturgical compositions on choir tours in English translation, he introduced that choral genre to choral directors and educators throughout America.

As a dedicated educator, he imparted his new concepts in a variety of ways. For example, early on he communicated with American musicians on a national level by publishing books, arrangements of a cappella choral music by other composers, original choral compositions, and other educational material. Furthermore, during the 1920s Christiansen and his ensemble made some of the nation’s first Victrola recordings of choral music, even though he deemed those first recordings unacceptable and quickly had them destroyed.

His singing techniques included costal breathing and breath control—specific vocal procedures introduced during a period that was devoid of choral

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methods. While some of his practices are no longer widely employed today, it is significant that he generated them in the first place. Christiansen also advocated singing with an open throat and loose, flat tongue, and advised against choral sliding. Recorded evidence indicates that the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir under Christiansen did quite a bit of the latter, as did Williamson’s ensemble.

An important tool developed to refine his choir’s vocal tone was Christiansen’s theory of the “inner choir,” a technique that may have had German roots but was new to the U.S. Further study of the provenance of that method might prove valuable in understanding how he used it for choral blend. Christiansen’s new concept that vocal balance affects intonation encouraged his students to strive for perfect vocal equilibrium. He advocated a dark, backward vocal placement to achieve a smoothness and purity of tone, because he believed that a pharyngeal placement was easier to blend. Christiansen’s promotion of that idea is confusing, as many of his contemporaneous disciples taught their choirs to focus vocal tone upon the teeth (e.g., Jacob Evanson, mentioned previously). To further complicate understanding, his vocal method contained another instruction that singers should phonate with their teeth widely apart on “e” and “a” vowels. The combination of these three teachings
might be described as a contradictory admix by contemporary vocal pedagogical standards.

Christiansen, as a skilled violinist, believed that being continuously required to tune his violin had served to sharpen his ability to hear pitch and to be aware of it while performing music. He had also observed that more often than not, choir directors who were singers or played keyboard instruments did not have this same acute sense of pitch. According to Christiansen’s thought, there was a sharp correlation between his ability to tune a violin and a choir. As a result, he recommended that students of choral methods be taught how to tune stringed instruments. He suggested for the first time that this more exacting approach to tuning could improve the flatness of leading tones and sevenths he often experienced.

A related issue, vibrato, was banned by Christiansen because he thought it caused blending and tuning problems. His advocacy of straight-tone singing was well known and increasingly in direct opposition to contemporaneous vocal theory. By 1945, at the end of World War II, largely due to the widespread popularity of the singing style of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir, the Chicago
Singing Teacher’s Guild published a pamphlet railing against the practice.\textsuperscript{1102} Today it is a common singing style used by many American choirs.

Christiansen also encouraged directors to find the most effective or “comfortable key” for a piece of music. That suggestion was controversial, as it conflicted with the wishes of the composer and the notion that a composition was created in a certain key with a specific sound in mind. His rationale was that a comfortable key reduces vocal tension. Today, matching a composition to a singer’s individual tessitura is not a revolutionary concept.

Christiansen’s ostensibly new beliefs about conducting were not his own, having originated with Arthur Laser and Hans von Bülow in Germany, and his support for the use of a baton for choral conductors was likely derived from his European experiences. His notion of a spiritual bond between choir and conductor was born out of nineteenth-century German romanticism and can be traced to von Bülow. Christiansen wanted his choristers to sense each other’s energies from the very beginning of a piece of music. Even though his famous “choral onset” was an illusion, as explained previously, could it also (if actually practiced) represent a portal to a desirable state of consciousness for choral singers as a rehearsal method? At this point, the ensemble might symbolize an interconnected organic entity rather than a body of separate

\textsuperscript{1102} Concerning the Straight Tone (Chicago: Chicago Singing Teacher’s Guild, June 1945), 1, 4.
individuals under the control of a conductor to whom they may or may not feel connected.

Is possible that the current choir’s handholding while singing—a long-standing tradition—represents a desire to manifest that sort of energetic connection? Anton Armstrong, the present conductor of that choir stated that handholding “creates a sense of unity.”

The New York Times quotes one bass singer in the St. Olaf Choir, who explained, “We can sense what the next person is going to do. We squeeze hands when we breathe in the middle of a phrase, so two of us won’t breathe at once. And hand signals comfort us onstage.”

Eleven years earlier, students in the choir similarly maintained “that clasping hands during performance creates an experience of solidarity and unity, both musical and spiritual.”

Another way Christiansen began refining choral sound between 1912 and 1928 was by requiring his choir to execute subtle effects in rehearsals and performances, which most choirs of the period could not do and thus did not practice. That resulted in the use of a wide range of dynamics, including both

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1104. Ibid.

1105. Bruce Burroughs, “Well-Respected Traditions of St. Olaf Choir,” Los Angeles Times, 9 February 1989. The handholding tradition (which was present but not initiated during the tenure of St. Olaf conductor Kenneth Jennings) was likely instituted between 1950 and 1968, during the time of conductor Olaf C. Christiansen (1941–1968), son of F. Melius Christiansen (after Jennings graduated from the college in 1950).
soft singing and an emphasis on legato execution. He also taught his ensemble
to sing expressively and give attention to phrasing. Within phrases,
Christiansen insisted on the unification of vowels and the precise rendering of
consonants. That created textual nuance, which made word and text painting
possible. He also used critical selectivity when auditioning and selecting
choristers to ensure the purity of tone. At the time he introduced these
methods, they were new.

What was believed to be the case by cognoscenti such as his best friend
Paul Schmidt and his sons Olaf and Paul, but not generally accepted about
Christiansen—his secret, so to speak—was that his choral model and many of
his techniques and conducting philosophies seem to have been almost entirely
derivative. During his entire career and after, he remained virtually silent
about the origin of concepts he had learned from others. It appears, curiously,
that he was never specifically questioned about them, so by default they were
seen as his own. Due to his silence on this subject, most saw him as an amazing
innovator and original thinker. However, especially during his choir’s first
years, Christiansen’s early signature choral sound was largely a copy, a
recontextualization—his version of the sound of a German boys choir. He

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1106. Schmidt, My Years at St. Olaf, 55–56; Leonard Van Camp, “The Formation of A
Cappella Choirs at Northwestern University, St. Olaf College, and Westminster Choir College,”
227–38. This topic was discussed in detail in Chapter Five.
achieved that sound by having his college-age sopranos (many of whom might be classified as soubrettes) sing senza vibrato and by blending that conglomerate tone to resemble boys. A study of contemporaneous Saturday programs from the archives of the Thomaskirche in Leipzig, which Christiansen attended weekly for two years, indicates that he regularly heard a particular sound in a variety of genres. Later tour programs from St. Olaf College show that he programmed some of that literature to be sung by his Northfield choir.

Christiansen’s reproduction of sound, style, and repertoire on later St. Olaf programs, his attendance at these weekly concerts, his return to Leipzig for an additional year of study, and his total lack of reference to the depth of Gustav Schreck’s influence (except to his best friend Paul Schmidt) together suggest that his initial models during the first fifteen years of the choir’s history were perhaps entirely imitative.

Regardless of the origin of Christiansen’s choral models, contemporaneous recordings indicate that he created remarkable choral effects. When mimicking tone, his own personality, ego, and preferences came to the fore. From a chronological distance, more than a few might argue that in his St. Olaf Lutheran Choir the young women did not sound like boys at all.

Nevertheless, his choir was not immune to criticism. Christiansen was criticized for the unresonant, “rancus tone [sic]” of his sopranos and the non-
sonorous sound of his altos. Critics sometimes considered the vocal production of his soprano and alto sections to be open, but not colorful or rich, and therefore not well suited for conveying intense emotion or accomplishing dramatic effects. Christiansen’s tenors were depicted as lyric, while their singing quality was characterized as not being of great beauty. His basses were occasionally described as “chesty,” non-resonant, and not having enough palatal (soft palate) lift. The ensemble was also occasionally portrayed as “ethereal” by nature and not able to sing above a mezzo forte.

In addition, Christiansen could be monotonous, repetitive, prejudiced, and closed-minded when programming choral music. He also chose to limit his repertoire choices, excluding entire historical and national schools of music. For example, unlike Lutkin and Williamson, he almost never performed English or early music repertoire.

The impish Christiansen was beloved by his choristers, and choral musicians throughout the United States wished to emulate him, learn from him, and replicate almost everything he and his choir did. Yet, even

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1108. Ibid.

1109. F. Melius Christiansen to Edith Christiansen, 20 August 1930. St. Olaf College Archives, Rolvaag Library, Northfield, MN. In letters to his wife Edith from England, at the end of their 1930 St. Olaf Lutheran Choir tour to Scandinavia and Germany, he made fun of British culture, which he felt was stuffy and overly reliant upon history. For example, he made fun of the tombs of English kings in Westminster Abbey.
considering his lack of vocal background and understanding, what cannot be
contested is that many of his ideas worked and eventually made
Christiansen and his ensemble notable via national choir tours. Because of his
multidimensional approach toward modeling refined choral singing to the
nation, coupled with various educational publications, he became a significant
driving force for choral refinement in the first third of the twentieth century. It
is worth mentioning that the manner in which Christiansen first aided the
transformation of choir singing on a national level before 1928 is probably no
longer possible today. However, despite subsequent choral evolution, many of
Christiansen’s forgotten practices and original concepts, including several
described in the present study, may deserve reexamination and might be of
benefit to choral conductors and choral educators, now and in the future.

Conclusions: John Finley Williamson

John Finley Williamson was an inspired idealist whose contributions to
refined choral tone in the United States before 1928 all into three categories.
First, he developed a body of vocally based techniques in two areas: choral
singing and conducting. Secondly, he presented his ensemble’s results through
extensive tours, which reinforced the impact of other choirs (e.g., the St. Olaf
Lutheran Choir) while offering an aesthetic alternative to their sound. Thirdly,
Williamson was a charismatic music educator who founded a choir school in Dayton in 1926 for the advancement of his practices.

Williamson’s choral techniques are significant because they began as solo vocal practices. Of the three conductors scrutinized here, only he was a singer, the only one with conservatory vocal training, and the only one who understood and had technical knowledge of the vocal art. Moreover, he did additional study with several of the most celebrated American voice teachers of the early twentieth century, which further informed his pedagogy. While Lutkin and Christiansen were instrumentalists and approached the voice instrumentally, Williamson could think about choral music from the perspectives of a well-trained vocalist. This enabled him to recontextualize specific Lamperti teachings on tonal purity, singing on the breath, legato singing, natural breathing, perfect intonation, and the singing of exquisite small tones in choral performance as group vocal techniques.

Along those lines, in 1926 Williamson implemented his idea of the choral rehearsal as a class voice lesson. He argued that a choir director needed to know how to teach choristers how to sing, which was not the case in choral settings where conductors were instrumentalists. Because his concept required specialty training heretofore unavailable, his idea functioned as a suggestion to all colleges and universities that they must insist upon a strong vocal
foundation as part of any choral education program. Williamson’s single idea had the potential to promote the continued evolution of choral tone because he proposed enabling individual choristers to understand breathing, vocal registration, resonance, vocal “lift,” vibrato, vowel modification, and diction. No longer were choral singers wandering in a wilderness of uncertainty; now they were empowered by highly specific vocal skills. His earliest choral rehearsals at his Dayton Westminster Choir School were laboratories in which he turned Italian *bel canto* vocal methods into tools for group singing.1110

Williamson’s original teachings involved a variety of topics including vowels, harmonics, the authentic voice of singers, choir design, and the importance of trust between conductor and ensemble. He believed that vowels were controlled by the volume of singing and the conductor (who managed vowels by gestures and phrase conducting). Williamson taught that vowel color was determined by overtones. Also affecting vowels was his derivative concept of the lift of the breath (explained earlier) and pattern of vowel modification (i.e., that as pitch ascends closed vowels open and open vowels close). He created codified rules for the pronunciation of both vowels and consonants and taught that a legato line was important for the proper function of both. Williamson also believed that harmonics were critical in a choral context

because all other voice parts tuned to bass overtones. New to the American choral conversation was his idea of continually seeking the “natural voice” of choristers. His triangular concept for the design of a choir (based on physical acoustics) was exemplified by his own ensemble, with basses being the most numerous and sopranos the least. We do not know whether his ideas about trust between conductors and their choirs came from his mentor Christiansen, though it is possible.

Of the three individuals treated by this study, Williamson was perhaps the most heavily criticized. Criticism was primarily aimed at his failures, his original ideas, his aesthetics, and his personal idiosyncrasies. The first of these, his failures, drew the least criticism. For example, although his Westminster Plan would have further cultivated choral tone in ecclesiastical settings, he failed to put that scheme across to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States because it would have likely affected the finances of every organization that adopted the proposal. Another failure, a personal shortcoming, involved his own ignorance about certain technical aspects of his own subject, music. For example, Williamson was criticized by his students, the choir school faculty, and others for his unfamiliarity with historical vocal styles.

The Westminster Choir conductor was also criticized for his various original opinions, most of which were generated during the early years of his
career (during the chronological limits of this study, 1906–1928). By way of illustration, his concept of “pace” was not well understood, and for some it was an ephemeral, almost metaphysical notion. However, for Williamson choral conducting was a meta-process: its foundations, methods, practices, and value having higher levels of abstraction. He believed that there was a conflict between time beating and “rhythmic magic” (which he referred to as pace). That idea included his proposition that the conductor does not need to beat time accurately and that a steady beat is the responsibility of the choristers. His new teaching that there was no value in conducting patterns was unconventional and likely troubled choral directors who used, understood, and trusted beat patterns. Williamson’s choral conducting techniques and gestures were experientially generated. This sometimes caused individuals who did not fully understand his ideology to reject it as ignorance, controversial ideas, or both. Westminster Choir College conductor Joseph Flummerfelt’s account (discussed previously) of observing Williamson for the first time is a good example of how auditors sometimes reacted to initially experiencing his

1111 Here, Williamson’s use of the word “rhythmic magic” challenges musicians at the level of language. For example, one can only give a non-specific definition for magic and Williamson was referring to specifics for which he had no symbol. In his use of this term, he transitioned to a higher level of abstraction—a non-discursive level where, as an choral artist, language both failed him and confused his auditors.
conducting. In other words, from their point of view, he did not appear to know what he was doing.

Williamson was also criticized for his aesthetics. Although his wife and he were enamored with the vocal sounds his choir produced, as well as his apparent ability to audiate lovely vocal tone, not everyone agreed with his concept of beautiful singing. His critics cited tuning problems sometimes resulting from out-of-tune fundamentals, which in turn caused faulty overtones. He was also criticized for his ensemble’s dark, pharyngeal vocal placement, a phenomenon that increased in his choirs over his career.

Choral conductor Wilfrid Bain described the tone of Williamson’s Westminster Choir in his 1938 dissertation as “hard and harsh and very often unwieldy… with sudden changes of tempo and dynamics sacrificing the beauty of the phrase line.” He believed that Williamson had a tendency to overemphasize phrases and to overuse swells in producing effects not intended by the composer. The conductor was criticized for failing to produce a beautiful blend and for having a penchant for singing sharp, very often “overblowing.”

1112. Dr. Joseph Flummerfelt was a later successor to Williamson (for 33 years: 1971–2004) at Westminster Choir College in Princeton, New Jersey.


open and force the tone, “ruining the individual part of the voice.” Bain wrote candidly: “There is too much loud singing.” Although some authors have contended that his choir sang with a bright tone during his Dayton period, this study finds that early recordings of Williamson’s Dayton choir do not support this contention. His 1926 recording of Palestrina’s double-choir motet *Hodie Christus Natus Est* reveals a colorless soprano tone with fast vibrato, slightly sharp tuning possibly due to an abundance of overtones, a very dark color from basses and tenors, and a less dark color from female voices. The latter creates what might be described here as a “sectional mismatching of vocal color.” In many respects, this research concurs with the previous comments by Wilfrid Bain. For example, in places, his 1926 choir sang loudly, resembling a Verdi opera chorus. Although it is possible that he had his choir sing without vibrato before 1930, his earliest extant recordings do not support that proposition.

1115. Ibid.

1116. This reference to pitch takes vowel color, harmonic rhythm, and overtones into account and refers to a homophonic section at the beginning of the work. While old recordings may indeed not portray pitch accurately, the tactus of the Palestrina piece in question was approximately 72 bpm. There was heavy reliance on head-voice in this example and it appeared that the pitch of the female voices was indeed affected by the vowel color as well as the sopranos and altos pushing the pitch very slightly higher. Several decades ago, this original recording was incorporated into a historical CD by the audiovisual department at Westminster Choir College using professional equipment in playing back the 78 rmp Victrola recording. In both recordings, the pitch of female singers appeared to be slightly sharp. This might also have been attributed to the host of overtones present, which was creating an allusion of sharpness while obscuring the fundamental. That was a common criticism of Williamson’s employment of *Bel Canto* technique in a choral context. However, this research study acknowledges that many factors may separate us from the actual sound of Williamson’s 1926 ensemble.
During the 1920s, it is likely that the tone of Williamson’s choir was never like his mentor’s Northfield ensemble, which was a highly blended straight-tone choir sound.

On a personal level, Williamson was criticized for what has been called his anti-academic approach to learning. His rule prohibiting his choir school students from studying under a non-Williamson teacher was not always supported by his students or, not surprisingly, by other members of his own faculty. The son of an uneducated rural fundamentalist preacher, he was also known to be closed-minded, intolerant, and reactive concerning human differences, with the exception of race. Sometimes, Williamson was stubborn and prone to what might be called exaggeration. Understandably, following his retirement he found it difficult to let go of an institution he had inspired, founded, and nurtured over many years.

From a different perspective, Williamson was indeed a significant choral pioneer whose gifts of charisma and intuition, perhaps not that different from the talents of the snake-oil salesmen of his rural Midwestern youth, are described to this day as transformative. As an independent thinker and creative idealist, his career represented a highly individual aesthetic that contrasted with other contemporaneous choral streams. He dedicated his life to the expression of those viewpoints, and through a variety of communicative means
he inspired many choir directors to reexamine the way they evoked sound from
their ensembles. On a personal level, more than a few of his students portray
Williamson as one who, by a variety of means, made a difference in their lives
as well as the lives of those he touched with his music making. His extreme
choir-touring schedule begun in the early 1920s eventually reached hundreds
of thousands of individuals throughout the world.

We do not know exactly when Williamson began to apply his vocal
pedagogical approach to choir training, though it was likely between 1915 and
1920, before he began his position at Dayton’s Westminster Presbyterian
Church. This was a period of praxis for an aspiring opera singer transitioning to
choral conductor because of a surgical accident. It was then that Williamson
introduced to his choir a host of ideas derived from notable American and
Italian vocal pedagogues of the early twentieth century. Williamson’s tonal
verities did not change; that is, there was neither evolution nor vacillation.
Once learned and embraced, those core vocal truths supported all of his early
and later pedagogy. His subsequent vocal experiments, while based on those
principles, involved his desire to create a grander, more operatic choral sound
which could be heard in combination with the major orchestras [The New York
Philharmonic Orchestra and the Philadelphia Orchestra] with which his choir
was performing and recording. Even in his early emulation of Christiansen, his
choir’s earliest vocal tone was created through the filter of his core vocal tenets. Much later, Williamson published those early truths in an important series of articles. With the assistance of Westminster Choir College theory faculty, he also began publishing *a cappella* choral works in five choral series, including rare early repertoire, adding to the corpus of choir music available to choral directors during that period. Several of his original ideas from the first decade of his career, such as the role of empathy in conducting and pace, have not been sufficiently explored and therefore are possible topics for future inquiry.

The End Point of a Convergent Trajectory: The American *A Cappella* Movement

The upper chronological limit of this study, 1928, intersects with the beginning of the American *A Cappella* Movement (1928–1938). That decade-long phenomenon has sometimes been portrayed as emerging from a murky past of disparate choir activities. Those incomplete accounts omit the story of the beginnings of choral transformation in the U.S. from 1906 to 1928—a prologue, which has never been the subject of any research study. That period of choral cultivation arose in a simple and unlikely fashion at the beginning of the twentieth century and evolved slowly for a quarter of a century ending in 1928 with the MSNC convention in Chicago. According to such thinking, this unaccompanied choir trend, or “bandwagon,” died with the onset of World War II and was revived more than a decade later in the form of the select high
school and college “chamber choir.”

That movement did not die with World War II, which the United States entered after 7 December 1941, but has continued, in a transformed context, to the present day in thousands of educational institutions throughout the country. Many, if not most, American choirs perform unaccompanied choral music in a host of musical styles from classical to popular. In popular culture, they are represented by ensembles such as the Grammy Award-winning San Francisco-based classical group Chanticleer, and television programs focusing upon popular forms of the genre such as “Glee” (Fox network), and “The Sing-Off” and “Smash” (both on the NBC network). In his 2008 book *Pitch Perfect: The Quest for Collegiate A Cappella Glory*, author Mickey Rapkin stated: “There are over twelve hundred collegiate *a cappella* groups in the United States alone.”

A musical comedy film *Pitch Perfect* based on Rapkin’s book treats unaccompanied collegiate singing in movie format.

Today’s student-run ensembles hold competitions and take their art on the road by participating in choir tours, competitions, and national gatherings such as conventions of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA).

This contemporary evolution of choral groups may be confusing from an


historical perspective because they are portrayed as choirs, when some groups seem to represent extracurricular activities in the “glee club” style. One difference is that in many cases, the music making of these choirs is highly cultivated, even virtuosic, they follow rigorous rehearsal schedules, present choir tours, and frequently compete with similar ensembles. Today, student-led a cappella groups coexist with college, university, and high school chamber choirs. Those and school, college, and university a cappella choirs of various types provide a range of choral opportunities for choral singers at all levels. For example, both Westminster Choir College and St. Olaf College continue to hold summer choir camps to train secondary school choral students. In this way, many of the ideals of John Finley Williamson and F. Melius Christiansen live on in transformation, even if singing techniques have evolved.

The choral luminaries featured at what might be described as a seminal Music Supervisors National Convention in 1928 included two of the three conductors studied here as well as their students and devotees. Why were these three individuals significant and selected for this study? Were not other conductors equally noteworthy in the early cultivation of choral tone in the United States? During that convention, Clarence C. Birchard (1866–1946), a

1119. As of 2014, the Westminster Choir College summer high school program is titled “High School Vocal Camp,” while St. Olaf College’s program is known simply as “Music Camp.”
founder and president of a Boston music and textbook publishing company, inadvertently pointed to the answer to these questions in his address to the attendees entitled “The Need of Choral Music in a Democracy”:

Reliable figures are hard to come by as to the number of mixed choral organizations; but relatively the number is small, and when we have named the Oratorio Society of New York, the Apollo Club of Chicago, the Handel & Haydn of Boston, St. Olaf Choir, the Festival Choruses of Cincinnati, Worcester, North Shore Festival, the Oranges, Ann Arbor, Lindsborg, Harrisburg, Spartanburg, Conneaut Lake, West Chester County and a few others, we have pretty well covered the ground. The tendency in church singing in cities and large towns is probably toward more chorus choirs. In country towns the church choirs are usually of the primitive sort and the standard of music is low. There are hopeful signs in the schools specializing in choir singing, notably Northwestern University under Dean Lutkin and the Dayton Westminster Choir under John Finlay [sic] Williamson. Such is a brief statement of this country as an adult singing nation.  

Here, while various choral societies are named, the only individual conductors mentioned are Lutkin and Williamson, and the only choir from an educational institution cited by name was the St. Olaf Choir.

Records indicate that most of the choral music was sung unaccompanied at what MSNC president George Oscar Bowen intended to be a “singing convention.”  

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and center. During the event, John Finley Williamson delivered a speech entitled “Vocal Technic for the Conductor” and Peter Lutkin spoke on “The Objectives of Public School Music Education.” Two of the choirs heard were the Northwestern University A Cappella Choir and the A Cappella Choir of Flint Central High School from Flint, Michigan, the latter directed by Christiansen disciple Jacob Evanson. The audience was stirred and believed that if Lutkin, Christiansen, and Williamson could achieve what they believed to be “professional results” from both high school and college students, they could do likewise. This was what college deans, college choir directors, high school music supervisors, high school principals, school boards, and music department chairpersons had hoped for: a proven formula with concrete choral models backed up by results. Such a recipe inspired widespread emulation in the form of a decade-long national movement. This cultivation of the choral art had reached an apex by 1928. Soon after, a cappella choral music would flower during the worst economic downturn in the nation’s history. What all three conductors had in common that brought them to that point of convergence in 1928 was an inspired charismatic idealism combined with, in the words of John Finley Williamson’s benefactor Katharine Talbott, devotion to a “great

cause. “1123

1123. Katharine Houk Talbott to John Finley Williamson, 3 October 1935, telegram. John Finley Williamson Papers, Talbott Library, Princeton, NJ. Bedridden after suffering a heart attack, Katherine Talbott sent the following telegram to Williamson: “DISTRESSED BEYOND WORDS NOT TO BE WITH YOU FOR THE OPENING OF SCHOOL BUT AFTER ALL PHYSICAL PRESENCE IS NOT NEEDFUL IN THE WORK OF THOSE WHO ARE INSPIRED WITH THE PRIVILEGE OF SERVICE IN A GREAT CAUSE MY LOVING GREETINGS TO YOU ALL AND SHALL HOPE TO SEE YOU BEFORE LONG VERY SINCERELY KATHERINE H TALBOTT [sic],”
Implications for the Choral Art and Future Directions

The changes that came out of the period of cultivation of choral performance from 1906–1928 meant a shift or transformation in the way that choral music in music education was perceived. Looking at choral music in a different way transformed it after this era of early choral evolution, first in the American A Cappella Movement from 1928–1938. All three of the conductors examined in this inquiry were music educators. The transformation they effected at the beginning of each of their careers has not stopped and continues. Much of the change in choral thought that occurred during the first quarter of the twentieth century was guided by core values and lessons that continue to be of value as “future advice” for music educators.

*A Cappella as a Tool – Extrapolation*

Is there value in considering choral techniques and methods, which may perhaps be considered unfamiliar, strange, or novel? In the era of early choral evolution in America (1906–1928), unaccompanied singing, which might have been described in exactly these ways during this era, was used as a tool for choral conductors and choral educators. During the early 1990’s there was a widespread return to interest in *a cappella* singing at all academic levels—a kind of second *a cappella* movement in the United States. Since that time, unaccompanied ensemble singing has been a well-liked genre or way of choral
performance associated with high schools, colleges, and universities. In this role, it functions as a style of singing. Is it possible that unaccompanied singing might be used in the future as a choral tool or method for the cultivation of choral tone as it was between 1906 and 1938? To ascertain the possible benefits of such a proposition, a reexamination of the use of a cappella singing as a tool might be the subject of future research efforts.

The Critical Importance of Vocal Science for Future Music Educators

It is perhaps surprising that the “Father of A Cappella Singing” in America, F. Melius Christiansen, did not understand the very instrument he was working with: the human voice. As a result, his choir techniques, while new and sought after, were generated from his aesthetic impulses rather than from technical vocal information available at the time. The very earliest recordings of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir demonstrate his lack of vocal competency. Both male and female voices in his ensemble sometimes sang with squeezed, closed throats; high larynxes; and lowered soft palates, sometimes producing a tense strident tone that Christiansen forced to be in tune. He did not correct vocal problems other than adjusting his choir’s pitch. Because his choir’s sound was a revelation at the time, it was rarely criticized, and instead became a model for choral educators. These lessons in choral history make it clear that understanding the human voice can enable choral
transformation. For that reason, future choral educators might benefit from a background in vocal science, which would encourage experimentation and research in improving status quo techniques, methods, and knowledge.

The Embrace of Sacred Choral Repertoire as Art

The fact that all three conductors examined in this study performed mostly sacred music might serve to portray their work as irrelevant for contemporary choral educators, or quite to the contrary, push it onto center stage. All three subjects of this research performed much sacred music as an expression of their own private spirituality; they were also explicit in their tenet that religion was a personal matter. During the first quarter of the twentieth century and the decade of the 1930s, school, college, and university choirs copied the ensembles directed by these men by outfitting their choirs in religious vestments in the context of public music education. Rarely, this was met with disapproval from contemporaneous music educators who thought this was inappropriate in the context of public education. However, the three conductors programmed sacred music because they believed in the quality of the musical construction of religious masterworks from the Western canon and thought that this value should be experienced by students as part of their choral music education. It might be stated here that each used sacred music, not as religious expressions, but rather as examples of great art. Because their
programming was initially copied in educational institutions across the nation, their use of this repertoire as a choral ideal rather than a religious expression was also seemingly embraced.

In a world of diversity in contemporary secular public education and amidst increasing political and religious tensions, the multicultural exploration of sacred musics as art might be considered as a lesson from the era of early choral evolution in America (1906–1928). From the beginning of their work, each of these three conductors stretched the boundaries of what was possible as choral music during this period. For example, African American choral music, Russian liturgical music, and Swabian folksongs were sung on tour programs of the three conductors. While none of these genres would be considered unusual today, they were all unknown at the time they were introduced.

For these American conductors, steeped in this literature, Western sacred music represented an opportunity to experience the lessons of counterpoint from the creative minds of European and American masters. In this way, it served to encourage students of one era to enjoy the religious musical utterances of another when framed as art. During this period, sacred music as art was increasingly performed in educational institutions at all post-elementary levels throughout the nation. While the use of sacred music is a
sensitive issue in contemporary public education, could its future incorporation in the educational curriculum have benefits such as increasing the musical scope of both music educators, students, and audiences? Could this repertoire from both Western and non-Western societies open up other musical worlds to those involved and promote an aesthetic appreciation of aspects of other cultures as art?

*Access the Power of Technology for Choral Cultivation*

Lutkin, Christiansen, and Williamson each embraced the intersection of technology with choir performance. For Christiansen and Williamson, the beginning of recording in the United States during the 1920s was seen as a way to communicate their recontextualized choral art to the country. Recordings were equated with communication and communication enhanced cultivation of choral singing. By the date of this study, almost half a century later, many secondary, college, and university choirs have continued their cultivation of choral tone inspired by their knowledge of what is possible in the world of choral performance. As choral cultivation continues into the future the example of the three conductor’s embrace of recording technology serves as an example to future music educators of the continuing communicative power of technology in promoting new thought about the choral art.
Future Directions for Research on the Choral Triumvirate

All three conductors treated in this inquiry generated choral techniques and many of these methods have been forgotten. Music educators might benefit from a reconsideration of some of these methods, as more than a few of these seem to generate questions. One issue that comes to mind is “Should choral musicians pay closer attention to solo vocal research methods and techniques?

Part of the evolution of choral music in America between 1906 and 1928 involved John Finley Williamson’s recontextualization of specific Lamperti teachings on tonal purity, singing on the breath, legato singing, natural breathing, intonation, and the singing of exquisite small tones. Further research in this area might focus upon a closer examination of how Williamson utilized those Italian teachings and whether they might be applied in other ways in a choral context. With regard to specific techniques, his concept of the vocal “lift” deserves further study, as do his theories of choral conducting with regard to beat patterns and what he referred to as “rhythmic magic.”

The teachings of Christiansen that may deserve a second look include his notion of self-referential choral performance in which singers are continually aware of the color, size, and intensity of their sound. To assist future choral conductors and choir singers in tuning voices, he proposed that they be required study a stringed instrument. Christiansen’s suggestion is one
that could possibly be of benefit for choral music educators and practitioners in experiencing how to modify pitch for tuning choirs.

A challenging area for future Lutkin research involves the hidden aspects of his calling and vocation. Locating and examining any surviving recordings of his choirs could contribute significantly to Lutkin studies. For example, might radio station archives or individual personal collections hold such recordings? Another topic for study is the whereabouts of Lutkin’s private writings, library, and papers. His son, Harris Carman Lutkin (1886–1961), an attorney, and member of the law faculty at Northwestern, apparently removed all papers, documents, compositions, writings, records, and memorabilia from Lutkin’s Northwestern University School of Music office following his death. What became of those materials and whether they still exist would be of interest to future scholars who undoubtedly would benefit from having access to his personal papers and effects. Such an investigation might reveal much about his educational residencies in Berlin and Paris and lead to a better understanding of hidden aspects of Lutkin’s European education and career.

*Choral Individualism*

All three influential conductors similarly dealt with a subject for which they lacked techniques and methods. They did not contend with naysayers, experts, academics, authorities, and critics, as there were not any in the field of
choral music at the time. At the national level of large music education organizations, leaders were observed their work and were supportive. There was a context of positivity in what might be considered a vacuum of ignorance—a world in which uncultivated group singing was a recreational activity. Each conductor plunged headfirst into their chosen subject and stirred the nation’s choral educators and conductors to think differently about the choral art. It would not be exaggeration to state here that collectively they created a theoretical superstructure around this subject at all academic stages. Does such a freewheeling approach, in a different era and cultural context hold lessons for future music educators and choral conductors?

Perhaps foremost in this discussion of choral individualism is the subjective topic of inspiration, which clearly was a vital part of the formulae of all three conductors, for they not only were themselves inspired, but they inspired others. In each case, their inspiration was not dependent upon expertise but upon their courage to think independently and to believe in one's original ideas. These music educators demonstrated that thinking deeply about a subject can transform it and that starting with a blank slate is not necessarily always a bad idea. The combination of their process and their circumstances suggests that status quo choral music making is only as powerful or "entrenched" as one allows it to be. The actions of the three conductors
challenge all future choral educators to think courageously and independently about every aspect of the choral art and to know that as a result they might too forge new directions, new thought, and benefit fellow practitioners.

Many foundations the three conductors laid had flaws. Individually, each was confident, undaunted, innovation-oriented, and their creative processes were critical. Each conductor was inspired by their personal aesthetic ideals, which demanded new approaches. They were not interested in being correct or right, but only effective. Their imagination far overrode fears and inadequacies creating a veritable fountain of choral methodologies, methods, tactics, advances, and even choral styles. As choral individualists, each operated on their own channel with deference to, knowledge of, but little interest in, other channels. On those individual frequencies, each conductor created an entire choral world.

The three conductors each had small beginnings, were not concerned with power, and sought working situations, which were malleable and may have appeared unattractive to other professional musicians or music educators. They slowly built their choirs by looking inward. F. Melius Christiansen was unsure of taking a part-time position working in a tiny rural college surrounded by Minnesota cornfields that had never approached music seriously. John Finley Williamson started as a church choir director in Dayton, Ohio because a failed
tonsillectomy nixed his chances for an operatic career and Peter C. Lutkin came to Northwestern to take over a insolvent music conservatory with almost no students or faculty. Each conductor wished to sculpt their choirs as an expression of their own values, ideals, aesthetics, and uniqueness. Their choral individualism may serve as a powerful paradigm for future choral educators as all three conductors demonstrated that embracing such a formula not only could, but also actually did, transform the American choral art from 1906 to 1928.
APPENDIX

PART I.
PETER C. LUTKIN

Figure A-1. Peter Christian Lutkin

Figure A-2. Press Photo of Peter Lutkin, 1930

1124. Unidentified News Photo, c. 1900, Vintage News Service Photos NSP06444.

1125. Courtesy of Northwestern University Archives, Evanston, IL.
Figure A-4. Peter C. Lutkin Family, 1928

[Left to right: Lelah Carman Lutkin/Mrs. Peter C., Harris Carman Lutkin/son of Peter C., Peter Christian Lutkin II/son of Harris Carman, Hazel H. Lutkin/Mrs. Harris C., Peter C. Lutkin]
Figure 4-5. Frederick Melius Christiansen, ca. 1897. Courtesy of Saint Olaf College Archives, Northfield, MN.
Figure A-6. Christiansen’s birthplace location
[The location of the Berger settlement at the southernmost tip of Hurdal Lake in Akershus County in the southeastern region of Norway].

Figure A-7. Photo of locale near Christiansen’s birthplace at the southernmost tip of Hurdal Lake

[Hurdalsjøen or Hurdal’s Lake is located in Akershus County, Norway. This large inland lake is located in three municipalities, one of which is Eidsvoll, near the settlement of Berger, the birthplace of F. Melius Christiansen.]
Figure A-8. Glassworks Factory Band in Larvick

[Seated at lower left corner, F. Melius Christiansen. Lower right corner, Carl Christiansen, F. Melius’s older brother. Center, Oscar Meier-Hansen, Christiansen’s music teacher. At his left, F. Melius Christiansen’s father Anders Christiansen.]

Figure A-9. F. Melius Christiansen and Anders Christiansen, his father, ca. 1930.\textsuperscript{1129} 

[photo taken during the choir’s 1930 St. Olaf Norway tour]

\textsuperscript{1129} n.d., Courtesy of Saint Olaf College Archives, Northfield, MN
Figure A-10. Larvick Kirke in Larvick, Norway [F. Melius Christiansen’s boyhood church]

Figure A-11. Old master painting in Larvick Kirke.\textsuperscript{1130}

[Detail of German painter Lucas Cranach the Elder’s (1472–1553) “Suffer the Little Children to Come unto Me” hanging in Christiansen’s boyhood house of worship, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Larvick, Norway]

\textsuperscript{1130} The painting, valued in 2011 at approximately 5 million American dollars was stolen from the church on March 8, 2009. The church also contains a portrait of Martin Luther by the same Renaissance artist.
Figure A-12 Photo of F. Melius Christiansen ca. 1888\textsuperscript{1131} [shortly after he migrated to Washburn, Washington from Norway]

Figure A-13. The cover page of F. Melius Christiansen’s first published instrumental composition, “Bonny Castle Waltzes.” The work was published by the National Music Company in 1892.\textsuperscript{1132}

\textsuperscript{1131} Courtesy of Saint Olaf College Archives, Northfield, MN.

\textsuperscript{1132} Ibid.
Figure A-14. Norwegian music textbook used by F. Melius Christiansen at Augsburg Seminary

Figure A-15. F. Melius Christiansen (center foreground) and his men’s chorus at Augsburg Seminary, photo ca. 1895

1133. Courtesy of Saint Olaf College Archives, Northfield, MN.

1134. Simpson, 62.
Figure A-17. Königliches Konservatorium für Musik, Grassistraße 8, um 1910. Royal Conservatory of Music in Leipzig in 1910.\textsuperscript{1135} [F. Melius Christiansen studied here during two residencies in Leipzig]

Figure A-18. Staircase at Königliches Konservatorium der Musik zu Leipzig, Grassistraße 8, Leipzig, GR. Photo in the public domain.

Figure A-19. A portion of F. Melius Christiansen’s Course Schedule at the Leipzig Conservatory showing the choral class for which he registered but never attended.\textsuperscript{1136}

\textsuperscript{1136} Courtesy of Saint Olaf College Archives, Northfield, MN.
Figure A-20. Legitimations Card of F. Melius Christiansen, Royal Conservatory of Music, Leipzig Germany.\textsuperscript{1137}

Figure A-21. 1904 Photograph of St. Thomas Church, Leipzig, from the North-West; with the old Thomas School, since demolished.\textsuperscript{1138}

\textsuperscript{1137} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{1138} Charles Maclean, "Bach Festival Impressions," \textit{The Musical Times} 45, no. 741 (November 1904): 733.
Figure A-22. A portion of F. Melius Christiansen’s Course Schedule at the Leipzig Conservatory showing his subject, Harmonielehre [“Harmony teachings”] and class times with Gustav Schreck.\(^{1139}\)

Figure A-23. *Königliches Konservatorium für Musik* graduation announcement from F. Melius Christiansen to his wife Edith Christiansen in Northfield, Minnesota. Extracted from a letter to Edith Christiansen.\(^{1140}\)

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\(^{1139}\). Courtesy of Saint Olaf College Archives, Northfield, MN.

\(^{1140}\). Ibid.
Figure A-24. The 1911–1912 St. Olaf Choir

Figure A-25. The 1912–1913 St. Olaf Choir wearing mortarboards while singing aboard their steamer the SS Kristianiafjord (1912), the first boat of the Norwegian-American Line. This photo was taken during the choir’s 1913 concert tour of Norway.

1141. Ibid.

1142. Courtesy of Saint Olaf College Archives, Northfield, MN.
Figure A-26. King Haakon, Queen Maud and Crown Prince Olaf on July 17, 1913. The St. Olaf Choir sang in the presence of the new royal family on July 11th, six days prior, in the nation’s capital Christiania (Oslo), Norway. Bain News Service, publisher. George Grantham Bain Collection (Library of Congress).\textsuperscript{1143}

Figure A-27. Crowds in Norway welcoming the St. Olaf Choir on their 1913 concert tour of that country. Photo from a glass negative.\textsuperscript{1144}

\textsuperscript{1143} Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA, hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print

\textsuperscript{1144} Courtesy of Saint Olaf College Archives, Northfield, MN.
Figure A-28. Martin H. Hanson (1865–1931), St. Olaf’s concert manager, 1920–1922.1145

1145. Courtesy of Saint Olaf College Archives, Northfield, MN.
Figure A-29. Advertisement from the NY Times Jan. 15 1922

Figure A-30. Photo from 20 April 1920 of F. Melius Christiansen and the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir on their concert tour of the east coast.


1147. Courtesy of Saint Olaf College Archives, Northfield, MN.
Figure A-31. Photo of F. Melius Christiansen and the 1921–1922 St. Olaf Choir inside St. John’s Lutheran Church in Northfield, Minnesota. ¹¹⁴⁸

Figure A-32. The 1924–1925 St. Olaf Choir. This academic year included the ensemble’s first West Coast tour. ¹¹⁴⁹

¹¹⁴⁸. Ibid.

¹¹⁴⁹. Ibid.
smooth = good

Vibrato = I have never heard it in voices. Can it be demonstrated in physics laboratories?

Tremolo = I hear too much of this. The two last seems to go together and are bad. 

Figure A-33. F. Melius Christiansen’s drawing of vocal sound from a ca. 1939 letter to his son Olaf.\textsuperscript{1150}

Figure A-34. Photo ca. 1917 of Paul G. Schmidt, Professor of Mathematics, Geology, and Astronomy at St. Olaf, and longtime St. Olaf Choir manager during the entire tenure of F. Melius Christiansen.\textsuperscript{1152}

\textsuperscript{1150} F. Melius Christiansen to Olaf Christiansen. Undated 1939.

\textsuperscript{1151} Courtesy of Saint Olaf College Archives, Northfield, MN.

\textsuperscript{1152} Viking Yearbook, Northfield: St. Olaf College, 1916–1918, p. 13 [Faculty].
Figure A-36. Photo portrait of F. Melius Christiansen’s family ca. 1905. F. Melius, Edith Lindem Christiansen, and (left to right) Olaf (born 1901), Jacobi (born 1900), and Edith “Tulla” (born 1903), who died in infancy.

Figure A-35. Undated photo of F. Melius Christiansen’s German-born son Elmer, who died in infancy.

1153. Courtesy of Saint Olaf College Archives, Northfield, MN.

1154. Ibid.
Figure A-37. Photo of the Christiansen family home at 812 St. Olaf Avenue, Northfield, Minnesota. Within walking distance from St. Olaf College, the home was built in the Arts and Crafts style by Edith Christiansen’s father, Marinette, Wisconsin, a Norwegian cabinetmaker by training, who provided lumber from his lumberyard in Marinette, Wisconsin for the construction of the house. Photo taken by the author, August 25, 2010. During a tour of the home by the author, the present owners produced several photographs of Christiansen’s children playing on the floor inside the home. The owners had found those photos upon taking ownership of the property.
Figure A-38. Unidentified caricature of F. Melius Christiansen.\textsuperscript{1155}

Figure A-39. F. Melius Christiansen’s two or three-level plan for music education in high schools [undated ms.]\textsuperscript{1156}

\textsuperscript{1155} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{1156} Ibid.
PART III.
JOHN FINLEY WILLIAMSON

Figure A-40. Photographic portrait of John Finley Williamson, c. 1889, with his English-born parents, Rev. William Walter Williamson and Mary Ann Finley.\footnote{1157}

Figure A-41. Photo of Rhea Beatrice Parlette, 1888–1967, near the time of her marriage to John Finley Williamson in June of 1912.\footnote{1158}

\footnote{1157} Courtesy of Westminster Choir College Archives, Princeton, NJ.

\footnote{1158} Courtesy of Westminster Choir College Archives, Princeton, NJ.
Figure A-42. Dayton’s Great Flood of 1913. This photograph shows a couple on the roof of the home awaiting rescue by boat, which was exactly the case for John Finley and Rhea Williamson.

Figure A-43.
Photo of the interior of the sanctuary of First United Brethren Church of Dayton, Ohio, the site of John Finley Williamson’s first choir conducting position. This was his wife Rhea’s church.


1160. Courtesy of Westminster Choir College Archives, Princeton, NJ.
Figure A-44. Exterior View of the newly completed Westminster Presbyterian Church of Dayton, OH, Photograph from 1 May 1926.1161

Figure A-45. Photo ca. 1930. Interior view of Westminster Presbyterian Church, Dayton, OH.1162

1161. Courtesy of Westminster Choir College Archives, Princeton, NJ.

1162. Courtesy of Westminster Choir College Archives, Princeton, NJ.
Figure A-46. Photograph of the interior of Third Street Presbyterian Church of Dayton, Ohio, the temporary meeting place for the newly-formed Westminster Presbyterian Church and the home of the Dayton Westminster Choir from 1920-1923.\textsuperscript{1163}

Figure A-47. Postcard photograph, ca. 1910, showing the exterior of the 3000-seat Memorial Hall in Dayton, Ohio, where the congregation of the newly formed Westminster Presbyterian Church convened for 3 years from 1923 to 1926, during construction of their worship space.

Postcard photograph by S. Kresge. In the public domain.

\textsuperscript{1163} Ibid.
Figure A-48. The Dayton Westminster Church Choir and John Finley Williamson in 1923. Note that while the choir wore religious vestments, their conductor chose formal secular attire. 1164

Figure A-49. The Dayton Westminster Choir ca. 1927 standing on the steps of the Westminster Presbyterian Church in Denver, OH. John Finley Williamson is seen front and center wearing a black gown. 1165

1164. Ibid.

1165. Ibid.
Figure A-50. The Dayton Westminster Choir in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on November 27, 1926, the year the Westminster Choir School came into being.\textsuperscript{1166}

Figure A-51. Westminster Choir School Crest. The Latin motto \textit{Spectemur Agendo} translates as “Let us be judged by our deeds.”\textsuperscript{1167}

\textsuperscript{1166} Courtesy of Westminster Choir College Archives, Princeton, NJ.

\textsuperscript{1167} Ibid.
Figure A-52. Postcard Photo ca. 1920 of the 5000-seat Billy Sunday Tabernacle in Winona, Lake Indiana, where the Westminster Chorus-Choir from Westminster Presbyterian Church in Dayton, OH sang on the group’s first Tour in the summer of 1921. Postcard in the public domain.
Figure A-53. Advertisement for the Dayton Westminster Choral Association. It’s stated purpose was, “Tower from time to time in the service of better Choral Music in America, in the Church, in the Concert Hall, and the Home.”

1168. Courtesy of Westminster Choir College Archives, Princeton, NJ.
Figure A-54. Photograph of the Dayton Westminster Choir for its professionally managed tour to the eastern seaboard ca. 1925.¹¹⁶⁹

Figure A-55. Photograph from the 1929 European Tour of the Dayton Westminster Choir. From German Federal Archive Image 102-07655. Press photograph in the public domain.

¹¹⁶⁹. Courtesy of Westminster Choir College Archives, Princeton, NJ.
Figure A-56. Williamson conducting his Dayton Westminster Choir in London, England on the choir’s 1929 European Tour.¹¹⁷⁰

¹¹⁷⁰. Courtesy of Westminster Choir College Archives, Princeton, NJ.
Dayton Westminster Choir Tours 1920–1929

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Destination City (Cities)</th>
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<tr>
<td>1920–1921</td>
<td>No Tour</td>
<td>No Tour</td>
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<tr>
<td>1921–22</td>
<td>July</td>
<td>Winona Lake</td>
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<td>(one week)</td>
<td>“Practical Training School”</td>
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<td>Fall</td>
<td>Small Concerts</td>
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<td>in and around Dayton</td>
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<td>1922–23</td>
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<td>November</td>
<td>Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Ashtabula, Canton, Detroit, Flint, Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids.</td>
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<td>1923–1924</td>
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<td>Winona Lake</td>
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<td>1924–25</td>
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<td>1925–1926</td>
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<td>Northeast Cities including: Carnegie Hall, NYC Symphony Hall, Boston Academy of Music,</td>
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<td>Philadelphia Orchestra Hall, Chicago</td>
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<td>Carnegie Hall, Pittsburgh</td>
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<td>1926–1927</td>
<td>Nov 9 –</td>
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<td>(Westminster Choir School)</td>
<td>December 15</td>
<td>(one of three separate tours)</td>
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<td>1927–1928</td>
<td>Fall Tour</td>
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<td>(Westminster Choir</td>
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<td>Choir Tour</td>
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<td>Orchestra</td>
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<td>European Study)</td>
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<td>1928–1929</td>
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<td>“Tour to the Boat”</td>
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<td>March 9</td>
<td>White House Performance</td>
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<td>at Carnegie Hall in NYC</td>
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<td>1929</td>
<td>March 29–July 29</td>
<td>European Tour</td>
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<td>(the final tour of</td>
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<td>33 concerts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Choir before leaving</td>
<td></td>
<td>locations included:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dayton)</td>
<td></td>
<td>London, Bristol, York,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Paris, Zurich, Berlin,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Heidelberg, Baden,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dusseldorf, Vienna,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Frankfurt, Prague and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Budapest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure A-58.
Dayton Timeline for Financial Support of the John Finley Williamson’s Touring Choir based at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Dayton

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Financial Support</th>
<th>Ensemble’s Touring Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1922–1923</td>
<td>Westminster Church Choir Association</td>
<td>Westminster Choir&lt;br&gt;(in 1920 group titled: Westminster Chorus–Choir; changing to Westminster Choir in 1921) then Dayton Westminster Church Choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923–1924</td>
<td>Dayton Westminster Choir Association (a civic enterprise) “Church” dropped from title</td>
<td>Dayton Westminster Choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924–1929</td>
<td>Katherine Talbott – exclusive support of all tours</td>
<td>Dayton Westminster Choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>Left Dayton&lt;br&gt;Move to Ithaca</td>
<td>Westminster Choir&lt;br&gt;“Dayton” dropped from the title</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure A-59. Oil portrait of Katherine Houk Talbott, 1864–1935, hanging, as of 2015, in Williamson Hall Lounge, Westminster Choir College, Princeton, New Jersey. Photo by the author, July 2011.

Figure A-60. Photograph of Runnymede, the Dayton estate of Katherine Talbott, built in 1927. Located in the Oakville section of Dayton, it burned in 1943, eight years after her death in 1935.1171

Figure A-61a. Katherine Talbott’s Runnymeade Playhouse, the site for many Dayton concerts by the Dayton Westminster Choir.1172

Figure A-61b. Katherine Talbott’s Runnymeade Playhouse, the site for many Dayton concerts by the Dayton Westminster Choir.1173

1172. Ibid.

Thomaskantor Karl Straube. Photo from page 1, Paul Walcker, *Die Riesenorgel Von Breslau*. Frankfurt a. O.: Bratfisch, 1914. In the public domain. [Williamson met with Straube (a successor of Gustav Schreck) during a summer European study tour, financed by Katherine Talbott.]

1174. Courtesy of Westminster Choir College Archives, Princeton, NJ.
Figure A-64a. 1927–1928 Tour Programs displaying Williamson’s sectional approach to programming.  

1175. Courtesy of Westminster Choir College Archives, Princeton, NJ.
Figure A-64b. 1927–1928 Tour Programs displaying Williamson’s sectional approach to programming.176

176. Courtesy of Westminster Choir College Archives, Princeton, NJ.
Figure A-65. Westminster Choir students exercising according to the “physical culture” requirements of their director, John Finley Williamson.\footnote{1177}

![Figure A-65. Westminster Choir students exercising according to the “physical culture” requirements of their director, John Finley Williamson.]

Figure A-66. Herbert Witherspoon, 1873–1935, one of John Finley Williamson’s voice teachers.\footnote{1178}

\footnote{1177. "[Choir School Runners]." \textit{Newark Sunday Call}, 24 October 1937. Courtesy of Westminster Choir College Archives, Princeton, NJ.}

\footnote{1178. Photo from the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Bain Collection, Reproduction number: LC-DIG-ggbain-23539 (digital file from original negative).}
Figure A-67. Photograph, ca. 1933, of Westminster Choir procession.\textsuperscript{1179}

Figure A-68. From “Instructions for the Student Minister of Music.”\textsuperscript{1180} Undated typewritten manuscript.

\textsuperscript{1179} Williamson, John Finley, "Instructions for the Student Minister of Music [Typewritten Manuscript]," Westminster Choir College, Princeton, NJ, ca. 1933. Courtesy of Westminster Choir College Archives, Princeton, NJ.

\textsuperscript{1180} Courtesy of Westminster Choir College Archives, Princeton, NJ.
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Mason, Lowell.


Mason, Lowell.


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