

Commitment to Musical Excellence

Commitment to Musical Excellence:
A 75 Year History of the Gustavus Choir

By

David Holdhusen

**CAMBRIDGE
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P U B L I S H I N G

Commitment to Musical Excellence:
A 75 Year History of the Gustavus Choir,
by David Holdhusen

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Dedicated to:
Deedra, Annika, Eleanor,
and all those who supported and mentored me

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	ix
Foreword	xv
Dr. Gregory Aune	
Chapter One.....	1
Introduction	
Gustavus Adolphus College	
The F. Melius Christiansen Legacy	
Chapter Two	7
Choral Music Activities at Gustavus Adolphus College Prior to and Including the Formation of the Gustavus Choir	
G. Adolph Nelson	
The Gustavus Choir is Founded	
Chapter Three.....	33
The Rebirth of the Gustavus Choir from 1945-1954: The Wilbur Swanson and Eugene Casselman Years	
Wilbur Swanson	
The Gustavus Choir is Reborn	
The Eugene Casselman Years	
Chapter Four.....	47
The Gustavus Choir from 1954 to 1980: The Philip Knautz Years	
Philip Knautz's Choral Approach	
The Philip Knautz Era	
Christ Chapel	
The Continued Contributions of Philip Knautz	
Christmas in Christ Chapel	
The Final Years of the Phil Knautz Tenure	

Chapter Five	77
The Gustavus Choir from 1980 to 1994: The Karle Erickson Years	
Karle Erickson’s Choral Approach	
The Karle Erickson Era	
Chapter Six	101
The Gustavus Choir from 1995 to 2007: The Contributions	
of Gregory Aune	
Gregory Aune Becomes Gustavus Choir Director	
Gregory Aune’s Choral Approach	
The Gregory Aune Era	
Chapter Seven.....	125
Conclusion	
Appendix A	127
Repertoire Performed by the Gustavus Choir on its Extended Concert	
Tours	
Appendix B.....	197
Concert Locations for the Gustavus Choir on its Extended Concert Tours	
Appendix C.....	229
Christmas in Christ Chapter Themes	
Bibliography	231
Index	245

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 2-1.....	9
Lyric Quarter in 1891, Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2630.	
Fig. 2-2.....	13
Schuman/Lyric Tour 1919. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-5259.	
Fig. 2-3.....	14
A Cappella Choir with Director Matthew Lundquist. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2689.	
Fig. 2-4.....	17
G. Adolph Nelson. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-1074.	
Fig. 2-5.....	21
G. Adolph Nelson with an Early Gustavus A Cappella Choir. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2729.	
Fig. 2-6.....	25
Choir as part of the May Festival 1935. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-5398.	
Fig. 2-7.....	28
Loading the Bus for the Tour of 1939. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2726.	
Fig. 2-8.....	30
Percy Grainger Greets People at Gustavus. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-4521.	

Fig. 3-1.....	34
Wilbur Swanson. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-1433.	
Fig. 3-2.....	41
Eugene Casselman with the Choir. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2717.	
Fig. 4-1.....	48
Philip Knautz at Piano. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2645.	
Fig. 4-2.....	53
Gustavus Choir in Robes with Conductor Philip Knautz. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2500.	
Fig. 4-3.....	55
Congressman O'Hara with the Choir in 1957. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2724.	
Fig. 4-4.....	60
Christ Chapele Dedication. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2364-02.	
Fig. 4-5.....	61
Christ Chapel Construction. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2362-02 & P-2362-06.	
Fig. 4-6.....	62
Christ Chapel Inside. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2403.	
Fig. 4-7.....	63
Knautz Rehearsing in Chapel. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2709.	

Fig. 4-8.....	65
King Gustav Adolph VI with Choir 1967. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2505.	
Fig. 4-9.....	67
Fine Arts Building Completed in 1971. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2476-03.	
Fig. 4-10.....	68
Paul Allwardt at Christ Chapel Organ. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2476-03.	
Fig. 4-11.....	70
Christmas in Christ Chapel from the 1980s. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2692.	
Fig. 4-12.....	71
O Come All Ye Faithful with Herald Trumpets at Christmas in Christ Chapel in 2005. Photo courtesy Gustavus Adolphus College Public Relations Office.	
Fig. 4-13.....	76
Philip Knautz Conducts the Gustavus Choir. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2649.	
Fig. 5-1.....	78
Karle Erickson. Photo courtesy Karle Erickson	
Fig. 5-2.....	82
Gustavus Choir in Velvet Robes. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-4487.	
Fig. 5-3.....	86
King and Queen of Sweden Greet Gustavus Choir Members. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2519.	
Fig. 5-4.....	91
The Gustavus Choir Performs in Poland. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2523-03.	

Fig. 5-5.....	92
Erickson Rehearses the Choir for the 125 th Anniversary Celebration. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2524-21.	
Fig. 5-6.....	93
Cast of St. Erik's Crown. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2535.	
Fig. 5-7.....	96
Choir Members Touring China. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2685-18.	
Fig. 5-8.....	97
Film Crew Catches Choir Performance. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-2685-12.	
Fig. 5-9.....	100
Karle Erickson Conducts the Gustavus Choir at Christmas in Christ Chapel. Gustavus Adolphus College Photograph Collection, 1855-Ongoing. GACA Collection 162. Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, St. Peter, Minnesota. P-5401.	
Fig. 6-1.....	102
Kenneth and Carolyn Jennings with Gustavus President and First Lady on Tour. Photo provided by the author.	
Fig. 6-2.....	105
Gregory Aune. Photo courtesy Gregory Aune.	
Fig. 6-3.....	110
Aune Conducts the Gustavus Choir. Photo courtesy Gregory Aune.	
Fig. 6-4.....	113
Christ Chapel is Damaged by the Tornado. Photo courtesy Gustavus Adolphus College.	
Fig. 6-5.....	115
Aune Talks Music with People in South Africa. <i>The Gustavus Quarterly</i> , 55: 3 (Spring 1999).	

Fig. 6-6.....	116
Gustavus Choir Performs with South African Dancers. <i>The Gustavus Quarterly</i> , 55: 3 (Spring 1999).	
Fig. 6-7.....	122
The Gustavus Choir Performs in Spain. <i>The Gustavus Quarterly</i> , 63: 3 (Spring 2007).	
Fig. 6-8.....	123
75 th Anniversary Reunion Choir. <i>The Gustavus Quarterly</i> , 64: 1 (Winter 2007-2008).	

FOREWORD

DR. GREGORY AUNE
DIRECTOR OF THE GUSTAVUS CHOIR

In his foreword to the book “Face to Face With An Orchestra”, the late Robert Shaw observed that one of the most remarkable developments in the musical world of this century has been the transformation of choral performance from a social and recreational pastime to a level in which the technical and artistic standards rival that of the instrumental and orchestral genres. The catalyst for this phenomenon can justly be attributed to the vision of F. Melius Christiansen and his work with the St. Olaf Choir. In short order, similar choral programs were developed by the other Lutheran Colleges in the Midwest, among them Gustavus Adolphus College. Long noted for their technical and musical accomplishments, rigorous discipline, and professionally managed concert touring, these choirs also function within the greater mission of these church related colleges. This aspect of their identity is somewhat less tangible, one might say philosophical in nature, but viewed as an equally important, underlying core of these ensembles.

After sixteen years of teaching and conducting the Gustavus Choir, my personal reflections affirm the ensemble’s place within the Christiansen legacy and philosophy. The singers in the Gustavus Choir eagerly accept and embrace the rigorous daily rehearsal regimen that is recognized as part of our tradition. Each day, these students have congregated in the hallway outside my office door prior to our 4:30 p.m. rehearsal, permeating the space with their energy and enthusiasm, eager to invest in an endeavor that they view as an important and meaningful part of their daily routine. Over the years many singers in the Gustavus Choir have expressed to me how the process of achieving technical mastery of the music we study has enhanced their personal and spiritual growth, and has defined their overall experience at Gustavus. I have also observed that as a result of this communal and intensely creative - aesthetically rewarding experience, a deep and lasting bond is forged among the members of the choir. It should be clearly stated that the choirs from this tradition do not have a monopoly, as it were, on fostering the spiritual/emotive side of the individual. However, because of the liberal arts milieu that these institutions embrace,

the high value placed upon music for both the major and non- major in the academic curriculum, and the tradition within which we exist, it is accurate to state that this aspect of the student musician's development is deliberately fostered and nourished. Students that have sung in the Gustavus Choir have been given the rare opportunity to learn discipline for the sake of creating art, imbued with a very real and valued sense of mission in which they engage a wide spectrum of people in a noble and meaningful way. Certainly this book documents and affirms the place of the Gustavus Choir in this long and important Lutheran choral tradition, a tradition that uniquely exemplifies the power of music.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

For seventy-five years, The Gustavus Choir has been an indispensable contributor to the educational environment of Gustavus Adolphus College. The ensemble provides the campus, and the community of St. Peter, Minnesota, as well as areas beyond, with outstanding choral music deeply rooted in the traditions of the Lutheran Choral School, established by F. Melius Christiansen and the a cappella choral movement. From the earliest choir activities on the Gustavus campus to the choir's current mission and philosophies, this stance has been firm. Of the six men who have conducted the ensemble, four of them have some direct tie to the Christiansen family legacy.

The literature performed by the choir reveals information about the philosophies and traditions of the group, as well as insight into its evolution.¹ The traditional programming for the Gustavus Choirs has been music that is primarily unaccompanied and of a sacred nature. F. Melius Christiansen is greatly responsible for the rebirth of a cappella sacred choral music in the colleges of the United States by bringing this style back to the concert halls.² The earliest collegiate choral ensembles, like those at Gustavus Adolphus College, were generally glee clubs, which were more socially oriented. These organizations sang mostly "good old college songs" and usually did not perform them at a high quality.³ Christiansen believed that a cappella choral music could be interpreted in a more refined manner and that there was more of a natural connection between the music and text. He believed that singing unaccompanied also improved the technique of the individual singers. These factors, combined with the age of his singers and the relative ease of touring without the burden of instruments, led to the tradition of a cappella programming.⁴

¹ Fenton, 169.

² Armstrong, 11.

³ Van Camp, 11.

⁴ Armstrong, 11-12.

This tradition has been fully embraced throughout the history of the Gustavus Choir.

Since its initial concert tour in 1932, the Gustavus Choir has consistently earned acclaim throughout the world, from audiences and critics alike, for its artistry in performance.⁵ The tradition of the extended concert tour showcases the best of the on campus students, while providing an outreach opportunity for the college. Touring aids in attracting prospective students to the college, allows a time for touching base with the alumni, and provides a venue for fundraising. Most importantly, the extended concert tour allows the students to delve more deeply into the literature and grow as musicians with each performance. By performing the same music numerous times in widely varying venues, the choir comes together learning to adapt and develop the discipline needed for consistent artistry.⁶ Throughout its history, the Gustavus Choir has gained an international reputation as a quality performing ensemble. It is widely recognized for its performance excellence, as a result of annual tours throughout the United States, Europe, Asia, and Africa. These tours, presented mostly in churches, have served to promote choral music and Gustavus Adolphus College in numerous communities. They have enhanced the artistic understanding of the students in the choir by providing opportunities for them to perform in a variety of venues and locations, while at the same time promoting Gustavus Adolphus College and its mission.

The Gustavus Choir has long stood as the premiere choral ensemble on the campus of Gustavus Adolphus College. It is a tradition rich group that binds its members across generations. Whether it be singing “Praise to the Lord,” or touring across the country, the choir has developed a lasting place on the choral landscape. Throughout its history one common element has been a constant for the Gustavus Choir; the ensemble’s commitment to musical excellence.

Gustavus Adolphus College

Gustavus Adolphus College is a small private, liberal arts college located in St. Peter, Minnesota and affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.⁷ The roots of the college can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century when the first significant wave of Swedish

⁵ Gustavus Adolphus College. *The Gustavus Choir in Concert*. Concert Program Notes. 2006.

⁶ Wahlund, interview

⁷ Gustavus Adolphus College, *Gustavus Music Showcase*, Program Notes, March 20, 2005.

immigrants began to settle in Minnesota. In 1858 the Lutheran Minnesota Conference was organized and two years later the conference became the largest part of the Augustana Synod. The congregations that made up these organizations believed in the importance of a Christian education. In 1860, the Synod formed Augustana College and Theological Seminary in Chicago to train teachers and pastors for this area. The people of Minnesota believed this school to be too great a distance away to serve its needs.⁸

In 1862, the idea for a school emerged from a meeting of the Minnesota Conference. Later that year, Erik Norelius united eleven “older students,” who traveled to Red Wing, Minnesota, with the children of the Red Wing congregation to form a school, for which he served as its only teacher.⁹ The following year, the Minnesota Conference adopted the school and voted to establish its permanent location in the settlement of East Union in Carver County. At this time it received its first name from the synod, the Minnesota Elementary School. The name was later changed to St. Ansgar’s Academy in 1865 to commemorate the 1000th anniversary of St. Ansgar’s death.

When the school opened in East Union in 1863 it was housed in a small church. As land and money were acquired, several renovations took place to expand the building and the campus.¹⁰ Throughout the period that the school was located in Carver County, the subjects taught were the same as at Norelius’ original school in Red Wing. Students received an education in Christianity, Swedish, English, history, geography, arithmetic, writing, and singing. The total enrollment for the school during the East Union days, 1863-1876, numbered approximately 700 students, the largest class being 68.¹¹

Throughout the college’s early existence, debate on educational philosophy raged within the Synod between those who wanted centralization, and those who wanted to strengthen the conferences. Finally, a compromise was reached which allowed individual conferences to establish colleges, but kept Augustana as the primary institution for the entire Synod and was to be the only theological seminary.¹² As the population of Minnesota grew and high schools developed throughout the state, Erik Norelius, now a leader in the Conference, recognized the need for a college. He began to search for a location for the institution. In

⁸ Peterson 9.

⁹ Lund 13.

¹⁰ Peterson 19.

¹¹ Lund 26.

¹² Peterson 27-28.

1873, a board of directors was chosen and the name Gustavus Adolphus Literary and Theological Institute was chosen to replace St. Ansgar. After failing to raise the funds necessary to move to East Minneapolis and partner with the University of Minnesota, the small town of St. Peter promised \$10,000 and 10 acres of land in order to persuade the college to be built in its current location. In May of 1874, ministers of the conference, forming the first Board of Education, signed the charter of Gustavus Adolphus College, named to honor Swedish King Gustav Adolf II, who defended Protestantism during the Thirty Years War. Two years later, the construction of Old Main was complete and the first classes were offered.¹³

Since its founding, academic institutions have recognized Gustavus Adolphus College as having a distinguished reputation. It has been identified in numerous publications as one of the top colleges in the United States.¹⁴ The college offers more than 50 majors and 15 pre-professional programs and prides itself on providing a rich learning environment for its students. In addition to seeking a balanced educational tradition, the mission statement also emphasizes the ideals of the Christian faith. The school was founded by the Lutheran Church and the Church continues to play an important role in the life of the college. Gustavus Adolphus College is firmly rooted in its Swedish and Lutheran heritage. It is this legacy from which the institution's mission is derived.¹⁵

The F. Melius Christiansen Legacy

As a Lutheran college, situated in the heartland of America, the connection between the Gustavus Choir and the F. Melius Christiansen choral heritage is easily drawn. Gustavus Adolphus College music faculty members agree that this choral tradition is simply part of the culture of the school and is a legacy that is willingly embraced.¹⁶ The Christiansen heritage was clearly evident to former Gustavus Choir director, Karle

¹³ Lund 33-35, Peterson 30.

¹⁴ Gustavus Adolphus College, *The Gustavus Choir in Concert, 1993*, Program Notes, 1993.

¹⁵ Gustavus Adolphus College, *Gustavus Adolphus College academic catalog, 2006-2007*, (St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College, 2006).

¹⁶ David Fienen, interview by author, 12 June 2006, St. Peter, MN, Tape Recording, Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, MN, and Michael Jorgensen, interview by author, 12 June 2006, St. Peter, MN, Tape Recording, Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, MN, and Doug Nimmo, interview by author, 14 June 2006, St. Peter, MN, Tape Recording, Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, MN.

Erickson, when he chose the F. Melius Christiansen arrangement of “Praise to the Lord” to serve as the choir’s signature selection. Erickson chose this piece primarily because it was composed by Christiansen. It was his hope that the composition would impact the members of Gustavus Choir as “Beautiful Savior” had impacted those from St. Olaf.¹⁷

The legacy of the Christiansen family is an important factor in the development of the Gustavus Choir and one that has influenced the history of choral music in the United States. The book, *Choral Conducting Symposium*, lists the ideology of F. Melius Christiansen as one of the “six schools of thought that in theory and practice have greatly influenced choral singing in America.”¹⁸ In 1963, Leonard Van Camp distributed a questionnaire to choral directors in the United States asking them to indicate those people who influenced their decision to enter the choral music profession. More than 200 names were submitted by respondents, from school teachers, parents, and church choir directors, to professional conductors. More than ten percent of those who responded, by far the highest percentage, designated F. Melius Christiansen, or one of his two sons, Paul or Olaf, as that person of influence. Robert Shaw was the only non-Christiansen named in the top four.¹⁹

The Christiansen legacy was born in 1907 when, after returning to St. Olaf College following an extended period of study in Leipzig, F. Melius Christiansen organized a mixed octet that would tour in the summer of 1908 to sing primarily his newly composed chorale settings. These chorale arrangements became very popular with the students, who enjoyed the challenging nature of the compositions. Soon after, the students joined with the members of the choir from St. John’s Lutheran Church, where Christiansen served as choir director and organist. This ensemble’s collaboration with St. Olaf College President J. N. Kildahl in the song services of St. John revitalized the Lutheran tradition of chorale singing.²⁰ By 1911, the members of the choir were almost entirely connected to St. Olaf College either as students or faculty members. The following year the invitation came for the choir to travel to Eau Claire, Wisconsin, which

¹⁷ Karle Erickson, interview by author, 13 June 2006, St. Peter, MN, Tape Recording, Erickson Home, Eden Prairie, MN.

¹⁸ Howard Swan, “The Development of a Choral Instrument” in *Choral Conducting Symposium*. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998). 11.

¹⁹ Leonard Van Camp, “The Development and Present Status of A Cappella Singing in the United States Colleges and Universities” (D.M.A. diss., University of Missouri-Kansas City, 1964), 115.

²⁰ Anton Armstrong, “The Musical Legacy of F. Melius Christiansen,” *Choral Journal* 37, no. 4 (1996): 9.

began the tradition of extensive tours. It was for this tour that the name was changed from St. John's Church Choir to St. Olaf Lutheran Choir, which eventually became the St. Olaf Choir.²¹ It is this organization that continues to serve as the model for the traditional collegiate a cappella choir in the United States. That is, an ensemble that tours extensively throughout the world, performs primarily music of a sacred nature, pays particular attention to intonation and choral blend, and demonstrates a discipline and control in both rehearsal and performance.²²

The F. Melius Christiansen School of choral singing continues to influence singers and conductors throughout the world. It also has provided a foundation around which many choral ensembles have been shaped, especially in the church related colleges and those within the Lutheran tradition.²³ Many quality choirs subscribe to the philosophy of precision that this school represents.²⁴ The Gustavus Choir was born into the Christiansen heritage and has developed a legacy of choral singing that is firmly ensconced in its traditions.

²¹ Albert Rykken Johnson. "The Christiansen Choral Tradition: F. Melius Christiansen, Olaf C. Christiansen, and Paul J. Chirstiansen" (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1973), 2.

²² Gregory J. Aune, "The Choral Methodology and Philosophy of F. Melius Christiansen: A Tradition Continues," *Choral Journal* 37, no. 4 (1996): 15-17. and Van Camp 22.

²³ Armstrong 14.

²⁴ Swan 131.

CHAPTER TWO

CHORAL MUSIC ACTIVITIES AT GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS COLLEGE PRIOR TO AND INCLUDING THE FORMATION OF THE GUSTAVUS CHOIR

From its founding in 1862, Gustavus Adolphus College has included vocal music as a vital part of its curriculum. In its earliest days in Red Wing and Carver County, Minnesota, singing was listed alongside writing, arithmetic, Swedish, Christianity, and others, as subjects to be taught.¹ These initial vocal music classes focused primarily on the foundations of singing. Participation in vocal music was obligatory. Students met with professors of the Music Department twice a week to practice. The “do-re-mi-system” or “sol-fa-system” was used to teach reading skills that included singing the major and minor scales in sharps and flats, as well as chromatic tones. In addition to these exercises in vocal technique, the students practiced hymns, anthems, and choruses as a part of their vocal training. The college sought to prepare its students to become music teachers and organists in order to take the musical traditions into area congregations.²

Choral ensembles did not officially exist as recognized societies until the 1880s. However, choral singing as part of a student’s vocal training did produce choirs that performed at campus events prior to this. This “Choir” played a significant role in commencement exercises each year

¹ Lund 27.

² *Tenth annual catalogue of Gustavus Adolphus College at St. Peter, Minnesota, for 1885-1886*, (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Book Concern, 1886), 18 and *Catalogue of Gustavus Adolphus College, at St. Peter, Minnesota, for 1889-1890*, (St. Peter, MN: The Herald Book Print, 1890), 29.

during the 1880s, singing various numbers on each occasion.³ In May of 1885, the “College Choir” performed as part of the Jubilee Festival of Gustavus Adolphus College at Swedish Lutheran Church in St. Peter, Minnesota.⁴

The first official choral ensembles associated with the college were formed in the early 1880s; an exact date of formation is unclear. These organizations were the Caliope, a male quartet, the Thalia, a mixed quartet. Later in the decade, another mixed quartet, the Sappho, was established. Several unrecognized organizations may have existed prior to the formation of these ensembles, but do not appear in official college records.⁵ The *Catalogue of Gustavus Adolphus College* first listed choral groups during the 1887-1888 school year. The Male Chorus under the direction of O. A. Allen consisted of sixteen voices. The Polyhymnian Octette, an eight member mixed ensemble that established a reputation as a concert company, was directed by a young Carl Seashore. A student at the time, Seashore went on to become a noted music psychologist and was the author of the *Seashore Measures of Musical Talent*, the first standardized musical aptitude test.

The following year the band director, Dr. Reinhold Lagerstrom, assumed the responsibility of leading the Male Chorus, which would later become the Lyric Quartette. It was at this time that the tradition of touring began at Gustavus Adolphus College as the Male Chorus joined with the college band on a concert tour through central Minnesota during the Christmas break.⁶ The traveling tradition would become a hallmark of the ensemble and later the Gustavus Choir.

The Lyric Quartette began as a nine voice male, a cappella ensemble that included its director, Dr. Lagerstrom, as one of its second basses. The Quartette performed primarily folk music from the United States and Sweden. The group quickly became the most visible vocal ensemble on

³ *Commencement Program*, (St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College, 1883) and *Commencement Program*, St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College, 1885) and *Commencement Program*, St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College, 1887) and *Commencement Program*, St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College, 1888).

⁴ Programme of Jubilee Festival of Gustavus Adolphus College at Swedish Lutheran Church, St. Peter, Minn, (St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College, 1885).

⁵ “Conservatory of Music,” In *Breidablick*, (St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College, 1912), 124.

⁶ *Catalogue of Gustavus Adolphus College at St. Peter, Minnesota, for 1887-1888*, (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Book Concern, 1888), 36 and *Catalogue of Gustavus Adolphus College, at St. Peter, Minnesota, for 1888-1889*, (St. Peter, MN: Tribune Steam Print, 1889), 40.

the Gustavus campus. Known for its precision and harmonic mastery, its tours throughout the state of Minnesota were very well received by audiences and critics alike.⁷



Fig. 2-1 Lyric Quartet in 1891

Photo courtesy Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, GACA Collection 162, P-2630.

The success of the Lyric Quartette opened the door for an influx of new choral ensembles at Gustavus Adolphus College. During the 1892-1893 school year, the Conservatory Chorus, a fifty voice mixed ensemble, was assembled for the purpose of performing sacred and secular music by master composers. This group was also under the direction of Reinhold Lagerstrom.⁸ The first known performance of the choir was in the spring of 1893 when it appeared in *The Pipe Organ Concert* at the Swedish Lutheran Church in St. Peter, Minnesota. The literature performed by this

⁷ *The Lyric Concert Co. The Lyric Quartette*, (St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, 1893).

⁸ *Gustavus Adolphus College Catalogue for the year 1892-1893*, (St. Peter, MN: Herald Power Print, 1893), 47.

choral organization strayed from the a cappella establishment in favor of larger scale works and was usually accompanied by the organ.

In addition to the Conservatory Chorus, the Pipe Organ Concert also featured the Lyric Quartette, and a women's choir. The Ladies Octette sang "Be Still," by Möhring, marking the first time a strictly women's ensemble performed at a Gustavus Adolphus College event.⁹ The following year, this ensemble, now known as The Gounod Ladies Quartet, first appeared in the college catalog. By 1895 the Quartet began sharing concerts with the already established Lyric Male Quartet. These concerts featured performances by each group individually, but also included the performance of one selection as a mixed choir.¹⁰

Over the next several years, the college saw the formation and disbandment of numerous choral organizations, made up of all combinations of singers. The Gounod Ladies Quartet ceased to exist, but other women's ensembles continued the traditions of treble singing that it had established. The Conservatory Chorus and The Lyric Quartet became the staples of the growing and evolving choral department at Gustavus. The Lyric Quartet continued its tradition of touring, branching out beyond Minnesota by bringing concerts into the surrounding states. In May of 1898, the Conservatory Chorus performed *The Holy City*, an oratorio composed by Alfred Robert Gaul, at the Swedish Lutheran Church in St. Peter, Minnesota.¹¹ This marked the first of what would become an annual tradition of oratorio performance by this ensemble. The popularity of this ensemble and its mission to perform large accompanied literature were typical of collegiate organizations of the time. By the turn of the century, the Conservatory Chorus had joined the college band and Mozart Orchestra as the permanent musical organizations of Gustavus Adolphus College open to all students at no fee. The Lyric Quartet expanded its membership and became the Lyric, and continued as an ancillary musical

⁹ *Program for the Pipe Organ Concert, in the Swedish Lutheran Church*, (St. Peter, MN, Gustavus Adolphus College, 1983).

¹⁰ *Gustavus Adolphus College Catalogue for the Year 1894-1895*, (St. Peter, MN: Herald Power Print, 1895), 54-55 and *The Lyric Male Quartet and The Gounod Ladies Quartet Assisted by Mr. Leonard N. Pehrson, the Popular Trombone Soloist, Will Give a Select Concert*, (St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College, 1895).

¹¹ *The Holy City, Concert Program*. (St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College, 1898).

group while all other choral ensembles existed in connection with the literary societies.¹²

In 1905, Reinhold Lagerstrom relinquished control of Lyric to C. J. Knock and the Conservatory Chorus to J. Victor Bergquist. Following the 1906-1907 school year, Lagerstrom resigned his professorship, ending a nineteen-year service to the music department at Gustavus.¹³ Knock and Bergquist continued the many traditions previously ensconced in these ensembles. During this time, the Conservatory Chorus swelled to more than 100 members and became exclusively the performers of classical sacred cantatas, anthems, and oratorios. In 1909, both of these organizations became the responsibility of Per Olson for one year before he surrendered leadership. A. Waldemar Anderson became the next music faculty member to assume the responsibilities of the college band and orchestra, as well as the Conservatory Chorus and the Lyric organization.¹⁴

During this era of music professor transition, Gustavus Adolphus College saw the formation of a new choral ensemble, the Echoes Ladies' Chorus, a twenty member female choir, which was the same size as the well-established male ensemble, The Lyric. This ensemble, founded in 1905 by Carl Knock, quickly became a part of the Gustavus Adolphus College musical landscape as a group to rival the Lyric in popularity on campus. Soon the Echoes joined the Lyric as a music organization no longer under the umbrella of the literary societies. In 1913, Professor Anderson took over directorship of this ensemble. The group changed its name to the Schumann Ladies Chorus and began a long and distinguished run as a quality college women's glee club. It was also at this time that the organization began its own tradition of touring by traveling through the state of Minnesota.¹⁵

¹² *Catalogue of Gustavus Adolphus College for the Academic Year 1900-1901*, (St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College, 1901), 17-18 and *Catalogue of Gustavus Adolphus College for the academic year 1901-1902*, (St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College, 1902), 17.

¹³ Lund 87.

¹⁴ "Conservatory of Music," in *Breidablick* (St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College, 1912), 126. and "The Lyric," in *Breidablick* (St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College, 1912), 134.

¹⁵ *Gustavus Adolphus College Catalog of the academic year 1910-1911*, (St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College, 1911), 18 and *Gustavus Adolphus College Catalog for the academic year 1912-1913*, (St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College, 1913), 40 and *Gustavus Adolphus College Catalog for the academic year 1913-1914*, (St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College, 1914), 37 and *Gustavus Adolphus College Catalog for the academic year 1914-1915*, (St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College, 1915), 17-18.

By 1916, the Schumann had joined with the Lyric to present a “Home Concert” in the spring of each year. These concerts included individual performances by each chorus, featured soloists and small groups from the ensembles, and combined the two organizations to perform a selection as a mixed choir.¹⁶ In the spring of 1919, these two choruses completed a successful joint tour marking the first time these organizations traveled as one entity.¹⁷ While the joint Schumann–Lyric tour did not become an annual event, it did solidify the Schumann’s standing as a musical organization on campus and hinted, for the first time, at the possibility of a touring mixed choir affiliated with Gustavus Adolphus College.

As the Schumann and Lyric organizations were evolving and continuing to make a name for themselves and the college, the Conservatory Chorus was also beginning to shift its ideology. The choir’s membership continued to swell, with enrollment pushing well beyond 150 musicians, including both campus students and city residents. As the group grew, the oratorio became the exclusive performance genre for the ensemble, with the performance of G. F. Handel’s, *Messiah*, becoming a frequent occurrence. In 1917, the group changed its name to the Oratorio Chorus to reflect this transition in performance thought.¹⁸

The fall of 1921 brought a change of leadership to the choirs at Gustavus Adolphus College. Dr. Matthew Lundquist assumed the directorship. Under his guidance, the Oratorio Chorus’s performance of *Messiah* became an annual commencement event. The Schumann and Lyric organizations further contributed strongly to the institution with each group continuing its tradition of annual concert tours.¹⁹ Dr. Lundquist’s greatest contribution to the musical landscape at Gustavus came in the fall of 1922, when he proposed the formation of an a cappella chorus.

¹⁶ *Schumann – Lyric Home Concert*, Concert Program, (St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College, 1916) and *Schumann – Lyric Home Concert*, Concert Program, (St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, 1917).

¹⁷ “The Past, Present and Future,” In *The Gustavian*. St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College, 1920), 80-81.

¹⁸ *Gustavus Adolphus College Catalog for the Academic Year 1916-1917*, (St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College, 1917), 17 and “Musical organizations,” in *The Gustavian*. (St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College, 1917) 165.

¹⁹ *Gustavus Adolphus College Catalog for the Academic Year 1920-1921*, (St. Peter, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College, 1921), 19-20.



Fig. 2-2 Schuman/Lyric Tour 1919

Photo courtesy Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, GACA Collection 162, P-5259.

At a joint meeting of the Lyric and Schumann organizations on September 28, 1922, Dr. Lundquist presented the suggestion for a Gustavian Choir, a mixed a cappella chorus. He noted that, “if this idea goes through as I have planned it, we will be pioneers of an entirely new field of music.” The intention of the proposed choir was to sing primarily the music of the Swedish Lutheran Church. Lundquist believed that the hymns of the church would provide the foundation for the music to be performed. He noted:

Our psalm book is a rich goldmine from which untold riches can be obtained with proper handling. Our ancient, mighty chorales are masterpieces of pure religious music. With correct harmonization they can be made into something tremendous if interpreted feelingly by a well-trained chorus.²⁰

Dr. O. J. Johnson, President of Gustavus Adolphus College, was also present at this meeting of the choruses and heartily endorsed the formation of this new group, noting that students would be missionaries. “You have an opportunity that cannot be overestimated in presenting this religious

²⁰ “Dr. Lundquist Proposes Occopello Chorus,” *The Gustavian Weekly*, 3 October 1922: 1.

music to our people.” It was his belief that there was no reason the Gustavian Choir would fail.²¹

Both the Lyric and Schumann Choruses responded enthusiastically to the proposal. After a brief discussion, it was unanimously decided to adopt the plan and form the Gustavian Choir for at least that year. The Schumann and Lyric organizations would remain intact and exist as separate performance groups. By combining the members of these two ensembles the new choir would take shape.

The newly formed a cappella choir soon began rehearsing. In January of 1923, a tour was proposed that would take the ensemble through southern Minnesota and parts of Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota. The planned tour was to begin at the end of April and extend into the early part of May. As the prospects for this tour strengthened, a rehearsal was added bringing the total number of practice times per week to three.²²



Fig. 2-3 A Cappella Choir with director Matthew Lundquist
Photo courtesy Gustavus Adolphus College Archives, GACA Collection 162, P-2689.

Throughout the spring semester, in preparation for the tour, the choir performed at various campus and local events. One such performance included Cap and Gown Day at Gustavus. At this service the choir performed two numbers by F. Melius Christiansen, including “Praise to the Lord,” a piece that would become the signature selection of the Gustavus Choir 58 years later. In addition to these Christiansen pieces, this first edition of the Gustavian Choir performed other musical standards of the a cappella tradition including Richard Wagner’s *Pilgrims Chorus* and a chorale by J. S. Bach. At the end of April, 1923, the choir took these

²¹ Ibid. 2.

²² “Tour Prospects for College Singers Very Encouraging,” *The Gustavian Weekly*, 13 February 1923, 1.