Evolution of Choral Sound of the St. Olaf Choir and the Westminster Choir

Alan Zabriskie
THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF MUSIC

EVOLUTION OF CHORAL SOUND OF THE ST. OLAF CHOIR
AND THE WESTMINSTER CHOIR

By
ALAN ZABRISKIE

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The members of the committee approve the dissertation of Alan Zabriskie defended on March 3, 2010.

__________________________________________
Kevin Fenton
Professor Directing Dissertation

__________________________________________
Matthew Shaftel
University Representative

__________________________________________
André J. Thomas
Committee Member

__________________________________________
Judy Bowers
Committee Member

The Graduate School has verified and approved the above-named committee members.
I dedicate this to my wife, Jennie.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the evolution of choral sound of the St. Olaf Choir and the Westminster Choir, by describing the choral sound employed by each conductor throughout the history of the choirs including F. Melius Christiansen, Olaf C. Christiansen, Kenneth Jennings, and Anton Armstrong of the St. Olaf Choir and John Finley Williamson, George Lynn, Joseph Flummerfelt, and Joe Miller of the Westminster Choir.

After describing each conductor’s desired choral sound, their methodologies were determined using the following research questions: 1) What methodologies were utilized by each conductor in the selection of singers? 2) What methodologies were utilized by each conductor in the placement of singers? 3) What methodologies were utilized by each conductor with regards to vowels and diction? 4) What methodologies were utilized by each conductor with regards to vocal pedagogy?

The St. Olaf Choir began by achieving a blended overall choral sound that matched the tone quality of one individual voice in each section. The choral sound evolved to include an ensemble of intelligent soloists based on the lyric, art-song approach to singing. F. Melius Christiansen sought a dark blended choral sound where singers matched individual tone quality to that of an ideal. Olaf Christiansen developed a bright overall choral sound that emphasized clarity and meaning of text. Kenneth Jennings produced a free, relaxed choral sound by developing a lyric, art-song approach to choral singing. Anton Armstrong also crafted a lyric art-song approach to choral sound, but one that was made up of a combination of intelligent soloists.

In the beginning, the main choral sound created by the Westminster Choir consisted of a group of singers who produced their own individual tone quality, which was full, dark, and vibrant. The sound has evolved to include a greater emphasis on core, resulting in a bright, blended choral sound. John Finley Williamson sought a dark, rich, vibrant tone quality that
emphasized the individual voices within the ensemble rather than blend. George Lynn
approached choral sound in a similar way to John Finley Williamson. Joseph Flummerfelt also
employed a soloistic approach to choral singing, but achieved a sense of blend through rhythmic
alignment of vowels and placement of singers. Joe Miller generated a core in the choral sound
that resulted in a bright, less-soloistic overall sound.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The unique sound of an ensemble is perhaps the most important musical factor in choral singing. Each ensemble director and choir member dedicates countless hours in the development of the individual voices within the ensemble as well as the development of the ensemble sound as a whole. The resulting choral sound varies from choir to choir and from region to region. Major factors that contribute to the overall sound of each ensemble include the taste of the conductor and the demands of the selected repertoire.

The a cappella movement was a period of great expansion in the quantity and quality of American choral singing. Touring, impeccable singing, impassioned performance, and church robes are hallmarks of the movement that began in the first half of the Twentieth Century inspiring many to participate in choral ensembles. Radio also served to propel a surge in choral singing. Radio performances, exposed the American public to classics, Broadway numbers, and popular music. Finally, professional and community choirs began to receive attention, allowing venues for the expert and the novice to find joy in singing and excellence in music.

While choral singing has become an important part of America and its history, no one approach to choral tone has been recognized as the standard. Most research refers to two

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3 Ibid.


divergent approaches to choral sound. The first increases the dynamic level and the tone quality of the individual singer in order for each singer to sing as a soloist. The second reduces the dynamic level and tone quality of each individual singer in order for all singers within the ensemble to match each other. Other approaches to choral sound seem to fall between these two contrasting approaches.

In “The Development of a Choral Instrument,” distinguished researcher and pedagogue Howard Swan describes various approaches to choral singing and the resulting choral sounds. He indicates that the tone quality produced by a choir is most directly influenced by the conductor’s approach to various aspects of the singing and music making process. Indeed, everything a conductor does ultimately influences the tone of the choir. In his chapter, Swan delineates the approach to choral tone of six different choral ensembles and their conductors: Schools A, B, C, D, E, and F.

Following is a brief description of each of the six schools of choral singing as described by Howard Swan: School A describes the approach to choral singing by John Finley Williamson, founder of Westminster Choir College; School B includes Father William Finn’s approach to voice classification using instruments; School C describes the principles utilized by F. Melius Christiansen as the first choral conductor of the St. Olaf Choir; School D discusses Fred Waring’s unique approach to enunciation as he prepared the majority of his choirs for radio singing; School E presents a “scientific” approach to choral singing by three conductors: Joseph J. Klein, Douglas Stanley, and John C. Wilcox; finally, School F discusses the principles and rehearsal procedures of Robert Shaw in his work with radio, professional, symphonic, and community choirs.

Two of the choral schools described by Howard Swan, Schools A and C influenced the choral movement throughout the United States in the early Twentieth Century. Their role in the training of many choral conductors and extensive touring by choirs at both schools contributed to this impact. Furthermore, their divergent approaches to choral tone have influenced the choral sound sought after by many conductors throughout the country.

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5 Knutson.


NEED FOR THE STUDY

Research has been conducted regarding the divergent choral sounds employed by F. Melius Christiansen and John Finley Williamson, including their methodologies and historical influences. Because of the work of these two conductors, the choral ensembles they founded have influenced the development of choral singing in the United States. Many have modeled educational experiences, choral ensembles, and choral sound after the St. Olaf Choir and the Westminster Choir; these influences continue to be felt today. Howard Swan’s chapter “The Development of a Choral Instrument” summarized the methodologies of Christiansen and Williamson with the St. Olaf Choir and the Westminster Choir, an effort that has continued to perpetuate their influence.

Nevertheless, following the retirement of F. Melius Christiansen and John Finley Williamson, it is likely that there have been changes in the overall choral sound of the ensembles that they founded. Olaf Christiansen, son of F. Melius Christiansen, continued to employ some aspects of the choral sound of F. Melius; however, his extensive vocal training led to many differences in his overall approach to choral sound. The following conductor of the St. Olaf Choir, Kenneth Jennings, also approached choral sound in a different way, mainly because of the introduction of accompanied repertoire. Anton Armstrong is the current conductor of the St. Olaf Choir; little research has been conducted concerning his approach to choral sound.

There have been three additional main conductors of the Westminster Choir; some have employed relatively divergent approaches to choral singing from John Finlay Williamson’s approach. John Finley Williamson trained the next main conductor of the Westminster Choir, George Lynn. Thus, Lynn’s approach was similar to Williamson’s. Joseph Flummerfelt was

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8 Knutson.
Neuen.
Swan.
9 Regier.

10 Christina Marie Armendarez, “The Influence of Fredrik Melius Christiansen on Six Minnesota Conductor-Composers.” (M.M., University of North Texas, 2006).

selected as the conductor of the Westminster Choir mainly because of a more mainstream approach to choral sound. The approach to choral sound of Joe Miller, the current conductor of the Westminster Choir has not been researched.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine and document the evolution of the choral sound of the St. Olaf Choir and the Westminster Choir with the descriptions in Howard Swan’s chapter, “The Development of a Choral Instrument” used as a point of departure as follows

1. To document from an historical prospective the evolution of the choral sound of the St. Olaf Choir (F. Melius Christiansen, Olaf Christiansen, and Kenneth Jennings) and the Westminster Choir (John Finley Williamson, George Lynn, and Joseph Flummerfelt) by answering the following research questions:
   a. What methodologies were utilized by each conductor in the selection of singers?
   b. What methodologies were utilized by each conductor in the placement of singers?
   c. What methodologies were utilized by each conductor with regards to vowels and diction?
   d. What methodologies were utilized by each conductor with regards to vocal pedagogy?

2. To systematically analyze and describe the choral sounds employed by the current conductors of the St. Olaf Choir and the Westminster Choir, Anton Armstrong and Joe Miller by answering the following questions:
   a. What methodologies were utilized by each conductor in the selection of singers?
   b. What methodologies were utilized by each conductor in the placement of singers?
   c. What methodologies were utilized by each conductor with regards to vowels and diction?
   d. What methodologies were utilized by each conductor with regards to vocal pedagogy?

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SOURCES OF DATA

Primary sources for the study included articles written by the conductors, personal interviews with the conductors, personal interviews with colleagues and ensemble members, sound recordings, and videotapes of rehearsals. Secondary sources included articles, theses, dissertations, and books.

DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study did not attempt to provide a comprehensive history of the St. Olaf Choir or the Westminster Choir. Although biographical information was provided for each of the conductors, this study was not intended to be a biography of their lives.

METHOD

The researcher conducted interviews with Anton Armstrong, Joe Miller, Kenneth Jennings, Joseph Flummerfelt, their colleagues, and current and past members of the St. Olaf Choir and the Westminster Choir. The interviews were digitally recorded. The purpose of the interviews was to document the conductors’ and members’ descriptions of the choral sound achieved by the two ensembles and the methodologies utilized to achieve the choral sound. Additionally, the interviews were utilized to verify findings by the researchers’ observations, as was accepted practice for qualitative research.\(^\text{13}\) Anton Armstrong and Joe Miller were observed and video-recorded during three to five rehearsal periods. For describing the choral sound created in performance by each of the conductors, sound recordings of the ensembles were utilized.


CHAPTER 2

ST. OLAF CHOIR—HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The following is an historical perspective of the evolution of choral sound of the St. Olaf Choir as conducted by F. Melius Christiansen, Olaf Christiansen, and Kenneth Jennings. Historical background and other considerations are briefly presented for each conductor. Next, a review of the literature regarding their approach to choral sound is given including information about their preferences and methodologies regarding selection of voices, singer placement, vowels and diction, and vocal pedagogy. For F. Melius Christiansen, a summary of Howard Swan’s description of the sound of the St. Olaf Choir is given. Finally, conclusions are presented for each conductor.

F. MELIUS CHRISTIANSEN

Historical Background and Other Considerations

St. Olaf Lutheran College originally hired F. Melius Christiansen as chair of the music department and director of bands. However, soon after his arrival in Northfield, the members of the St. John Lutheran Church Choir selected him to be their new director. Christiansen quickly began adding students from St. Olaf College into the choir and increased its number from fifteen to over fifty. This infusion of students caused the choir to become closely associated with the College.  

In 1911, music manager, P. G. Schmidt began arranging tour performances for the St. Olaf Band. While arranging these performances, communities and churches indicated interest in

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14 Paul G. Schmidt, My Years at St. Olaf, (Northfield, MN: St. Olaf College, 1964).
hearing the St. John Lutheran Choir as well. Thus, in 1912, the St. John Choir, comprised mostly of students from St Olaf College, embarked on their first tour to Wisconsin and Illinois. However, before departing on the tour, Christiansen sought approval for the students of the ensemble to be excused from their classes. In order for Christiansen to accomplish this, he changed the name of the choir to the St. Olaf Choir. The tour was a success, and the following year they took their new approach to choral singing to Norway, the country from which Christiansen immigrated in the 1888.  

Christiansen’s musical training included two periods of study in Leipzig, Germany to study composition with the famed teacher Gustav Schreck. These periods of study exposed Christiansen to the German mode of choral singing: an approach to choral singing that included boys singing the soprano and alto parts. This approach seems to have most influenced Christiansen’s concept of choral sound. While in Germany, Christiansen became intimately acquainted with the church chorale and the influence of folk music on church compositions.  

Christiansen programmed strictly unaccompanied music for his concerts. This was motivated by three factors: 1) The small city of Northfield lacked skilled instrumental players; 2) It was difficult to travel with instruments during the lengthy tours; and 3) Christiansen felt that the immature voices with which he worked were not capable of penetrating large instrumental forces. The a cappella programming repertoire that Christiansen chose was primarily German and Russian sacred music from the nineteenth- and twentieth–centuries. He also programmed

\[\text{\footnotesize \begin{align*}
15 & \text{Anton Armstrong, "The Musical Legacy of F. Melius Christiansen," } \textit{Choral Journal} 37, \text{ no. 4 (1996).} \\
& \text{Leola Nelson Bergmann, } \textit{Music Master of the Middle West. The Story of F. Melius Christiansen and the St. Olaf Choir}, \text{(New York: Da Capo, 1968).} \\
& \text{David A. Hendricksen, “Twentieth Century Choral Music Programming by Concordia, Luther, and St. Olaf College Choirs, 1950-1986.” } \text{(Dissertation, Ball State University, 1988).} \\
& \text{Shaw.} \\
16 & \text{France Boardman, } \textit{Ideals of St. Olaf Lutheran Choir Explained: A Personal Interview with its Director}, \text{(Northfield, MN: St. Olaf College, 1925).} \\
17 & \text{Armstrong.} \\
& \text{Bergmann.} \\
& \text{Hendricksen.} \\
& \text{Shaw.}
\end{align*}\]
many of his own compositions and arrangements, which he based on chorales and folk music. Christiansen felt that these styles of music most directly communicated to the individual spirit.\textsuperscript{18}

Because of St. Olaf Choir’ genesis as the St. John Lutheran Choir, Christiansen felt that the sole purpose of the choir was “to sing as beautifully as possible the great choral music of the world, with special emphasis on music from the Christian tradition.”\textsuperscript{19} This unique mission led to the selection of only sacred music for performance. Furthermore, Christiansen felt that the Lutheran chorales and hymns had largely lost favor in the Lutheran congregations. As a result, Christiansen worked to familiarize Lutheran congregations with chorales and hymns and to encourage their singing in worship services. He accomplished through extensive touring throughout the United States and Europe.

European tours included performances mainly in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Germany. Tours in the United States included a regular pattern of East Coast, Southeast, Midwest, South, and West Coast.\textsuperscript{20} In addition to the exposure to many audiences, tours also provided opportunities for the choir to excel artistically. Performances on consecutive days and in multiple venues led to musical and artistic success. Members were motivated to do their best to obtain means of adequate expression for the vastly different audiences that attended each concert.\textsuperscript{21}

The annual tours conducted by the St. Olaf Choir also exposed the United States to a new style of choral sound. As suggested earlier, the main influences on Christiansen’s approach to choral sound were the German choirs he heard while studying in Leipzig. These German choirs of the early 1900’s followed the traditional practice of utilizing boys to sing the treble parts. The boys’ voices that Christiansen likely heard created sounds that were void of vibrato, and


\textsuperscript{19} F. Melius Christiansen, "Program Making," \textit{Lutheran Church Herald} 13, no. 27 (1929).

\textsuperscript{20} Hendricksen.

\textsuperscript{21} Shaw.

\textsuperscript{19} Shaw, 6.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{21} Regier.
provided clarity of intonation that he sought to emulate with his choir. An additional influence was Christiansen’s work as an instrumentalist. This led to an approach to choral singing that compared the varying vocal timbres with the various instruments and placed great emphasis on the achievement of pure choral blend.  

**Approach to Choral Sound**

Blend was the primary emphasis of Christiansen’s choral sound. He expected singers to alter their individual tone quality in order to match a preconceived ideal. The strongest ensemble singers were those who could adapt their voice to produce a strong tone quality without being heard above the rest of the singers. Furthermore, Christiansen based his choral sound on that of an orchestra. He utilized a distribution of timbre throughout the ensemble that reflected orchestral tone values. As a result, he labeled voices as reeds, strings, and brass and placed them within the ensemble accordingly.

This desire for constant blend was readily apparent to the members of his ensembles. He would regularly start with one note from an ideal, single, clear, straight voice and would gradually add one voice at a time, instructing the singers to match the tone quality of the first voice. Although the ability to blend was the priority, he did not exclude all solo singers. If the solo singer had the ability and the desire to amalgamate to the group, this type of voice was valuable for adding color and brilliance to the overall sound.

**Selection of Singers**

Christiansen utilized three criteria for the selection of singers for his ensembles: singers that sing in tune, singers that have a timbre or tone color that will blend with other voices and

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24 Boardman.

25 Esther Tufte as quoted in Shaw, 205.
singers whose voices were straight. He had no tolerance for what he referred to as tremolo in the voice. Unless a soloist was willing to match the ideal tone quality, Christiansen did not accept him or her into the choir because of their potential for emerging from the ensemble because of the vibrato in their tone. Although the ensemble voices were not devoid a vibrato, Christiansen felt that the tone quality should be as straight as possible so that individual voices did not stick out and so that intonation was perfect. The tremolo or vibrato was most dangerous in the soprano voice because of the speed of the vibrato especially when singing high pitches.

This desired choral sound is congruent with Christiansen’s background, which included the influence of the German approach to choral singing. Christiansen sought small, thin soprano voices for the ensemble that produced the purest ensemble tone, similar to that of boys’ voices he heard in Germany. He described these voices as small and reedy, a descriptor he also used when selecting tenor voices. He did include a few fluty voices in the soprano section in order to achieve proper dynamic climaxes; however, he placed these voices carefully in the standing formation so that they did not protrude from the ensemble texture.

Christiansen preferred a darker tone for the alto voices in his ensembles, comparing them to the sound of a cello. The alto voice needed to be rich and colorful, but must have no tremolo. He preferred the same type of voice for the baritones. However, because the baritones were often assigned the melody, Christiansen also tested the lyric quality of this voice part by having them sing the interval of a sixth. The bass’s sole requirement was to be able “to sing a low D without scraping the bottom of a kettle.”

In the selection of singers, the personal attitude of the singer was equally as important as the musical talent. The type of singer that Christiansen preferred did not seek to sing in the St.

26 Bergmann. Christiansen, School of Choir Singing.

27 Bergmann. Shaw.

28 Bergmann. Shaw.

29 Ibid.
Olaf Choir for individual honor, but to contribute to the honor of making fine music. He tied this belief to the religious nature of the ensemble: singers who loved God and were devoted to their religion were the best suited for the ensemble. He stressed that interest in the choir must be considered first over any personal matters. In order to be qualified for the ensemble, the singer must commit to the rigorous rehearsal schedule including an hour and a half of ensemble rehearsal everyday and at least one hour of sectional rehearsal every week. Although a good voice was necessary in order to be selected for the ensemble, it was not sufficient; the personality and character of the singer were of equal importance.

Christiansen’s main priority was selecting singers with voices that could blend with others in the ensemble. Because blend was such an important priority, he did not hesitate in eliminating voices that emerged from the ensemble sound even after he selected them for the group. On one occasion, “he felt that a certain voice had developed into menacing proportions during three years in the choir. Without warning he paused during a rehearsal and said to the member, ‘Will you do me the favor of leaving the choir and not returning again?’”

**Singer Placement**

Christiansen used placement of singers within the ensemble to create blend and purity of tone. He placed the light voices in the center of each section so that he could use only those voices for delicate or extremely soft passages. He placed the heaviest voices between the lightest voices (see Figure 1).

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31 Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.”

32 Shaw.

33 Bergmann, 149.

34 Ibid.

35 Knutson.
Coupled with proper placement of the singers within the ensemble, numerical balance also played an important role in the development of proper blend and balance. Although Christiansen would have preferred an ensemble of 40 singers, the limitations of college-aged singers in required an ensemble of 60 singers. He divided the singers among the sections as follows: 10 first sopranos, 8 second sopranos, 7 first altos, 8 second altos, 5 first tenors, 6 second tenors, 6 first basses, and 10 second basses. Christiansen required more sopranos in his ensemble because the soprano voice-type that he preferred was thin and light. Additionally, with an in-depth knowledge of acoustical principles, Christiansen required more basses because they generally sang the fundamental of the overtone series.\(^{36}\)

![Arrangement for a Choir of Sixty](image)

*Figure 1. St. Olaf Choir standard seating arrangement.\(^{37}\)*

**Vowels and Diction**

Christiansen often sacrificed clarity of text for what he considered a beautiful, blended tone by placing primary emphasis 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

\(^{36}\) Ibid.

\(^{37}\) Bergmann, 155.
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.\(^{38}\)

Christiansen taught singers to create a dark overall tone quality on all vowel sounds. He preferred placement of sound in the back of the throat to create a dark sound; this dark sound was the easiest to blend across the ensemble. For Christiansen, the shape created in the cavity of the mouth provided the special tone color. When a tone was placed too far forward the tone was light and more difficult to blend than the darker tones further back.\(^{39}\)

**Vocal Pedagogy**

Christiansen’s expertise was mainly as an instrumentalist. As a result, he spent little time discussing vocal technique in the choral rehearsal; he also did not perform warm-up exercises with the St. Olaf Choir. Instead, at the beginning of the rehearsal, he walked in to the room, gave the starting pitch for the first piece to be rehearsed and the choir began singing. When Christiansen heard something that he did not like, he generally used imagery in order to bring about the desired result:

Once when the sopranos were singing with too heavy and dark a tone, [Christiansen] asked them to sing it more ‘pink,’ meaning light yet with color and warmth; and another time he wanted a high, floating tone to be ‘pure blue.’ After some particularly clumsy phrasing, he told the choir, ‘you sing as if you were throwing water out of a pail and splashing it against a wall, instead of letting it drop from a silver spool like little pearls.’ When the tenors had been singing with a thin, colorless tone, he barked at them, your notes are too bony, put some meat on them! (Emphasis in original.)\(^{40}\)

**Howard Swan Sound Description of the St. Olaf Choir**

Blend was the primary emphasis of F. Melius Christiansen’s choral sound. He achieved the desired blend as each singer subordinated unique vocal qualities to the sound of the whole group.\(^ {41}\) Elements of choral singing that Christiansen emphasized included dynamics, tone

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\(^{38}\) F. Melius Christiansen, "The Language in Singing," *Lutheran Church Herald* 13, no. 6 (1929).

\(^{39}\) Christiansen, *School of Choir Singing*, 62.

\(^{40}\) Bergmann, 161.

\(^{41}\) Swan, 20.
color, phrasing, vibrato rate, and rhythmic vitality. A major alteration made by solo singers was the overall reduction of vibrato rate and extent; he generally excluded the dramatic voices from the ensemble. Aside from avoidance of excessive vibrato, another factor that influenced the overall choral sound included a numerical balance between the varying sections. Christiansen achieved balance between the first sopranos and second basses and the second sopranos and first altos; the tenor section was two-thirds the size of the alto or bass sections. The choir always performed in sections, rather than quartet or scrambled arrangements. Finally, he generally selected a model voice for each section, and each individual within the section worked to emulate that voice.

The “a cappella tone” was a descriptor used to identify this type of choral singing. Choirs that sang with this choral sound were most successful in singing sacred and liturgical music. Opponents of this school indicated a lack of dynamic range in the singing, with the overall volume never rising above a mezzo-forte. Additionally, by submerging individual characteristics of the voice into the sound of the ensemble, the conductor often created the appearance of a straight-tone approach to choral singing.

Conclusions

Through his influence, choral singing transformed from a purely social experience, to one that had deep religious meaning. For Christiansen, music making was not a social occasion, but a time when true art could be expressed. Christiansen felt that this true art of choral music could only be created with a pure tone. It seems that it is this pure tone that led Christiansen to

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42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., 23.
45 Ibid.
46 F. Melius Christiansen, "Church Music," Lutheran Church Herald 13, no. 1 (1929).
47 F. Melius Christiansen, "The Art of Music," Lutheran Church Herald 13, no. 36 (1929).
emulate the sound of the German choirs he heard early in his musical training. This is an approach to choral sound that since has had an immeasurable influence on choral singing in the United States--many emulated the sound of the St. Olaf Choir. Christiansen’s influence was, indeed, felt across the country and for many years to come. One choral conductor who was influenced greatly by Christiansen was his son, Olaf C. Christiansen, his successor as conductor of the St. Olaf Choir.

**OLAF C. CHRISTIANSEN**

**Historical Background and Other Considerations**

Olaf Christiansen, son of F. Melius Christiansen, was raised in the shadow of St. Olaf College and the St. Olaf Choir. He began his musical study on the e-flat clarinet, playing in the St. Olaf Band from the time that he was in high school. While in high school, he also learned to play the piccolo, leading to an increased interest in all of the band instruments. Following graduation from high school, Olaf enrolled in St. Olaf College to begin studying music.

After attending St. Olaf College for a short time, Olaf began his teaching career at Mayville Normal, a small teacher’s college in North Dakota. While there, he founded the band and served as the athletic director and dean of men. Although he was only there for one year, Olaf experienced great success in the founding of a band and a local church choir; experiences that led him to a serious study of composition and voice at St. Olaf College upon his return to Northfield. While at St. Olaf, he continued playing in the band and began singing in the St. Olaf Choir. At St. Olaf, he also began serious study of vocal technique and pedagogy, leading him to a different approach to choral singing than that of his father.

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49 Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.” 24.

50 Johnson.

Shaw.

51 Johnson.

Shaw.
Upon graduation from St. Olaf College, Olaf moved to New York to study opera with Paul Parks. Parks’ main emphasis with Olaf was diction. During this study, Olaf developed a taste for pure, clean, forward vowels; a preference that would become a prominent part of his approach to choral sound. Olaf began his career as a choral conductor and teacher following his time in New York. He first moved to Flint, Michigan where he taught for one year at a junior high school, and then at a junior college. Courses included the a cappella choir, opera, theory, madrigals, vocal music methods, band, gymnastics, and golf; he also directed a church choir.  

After teaching in Flint for three years, Oberlin College hired Olaf as director of choirs. While there, he founded the Oberlin A Cappella Choir and the Musical Union. The A Cappella Choir was an auditioned choir that toured throughout the country. The choir sang with the larger chapel choir in providing music for weekly chapel services. On tour, the choir sang in churches of all denominations, reflective of the eclectic nature of the pieces they performed. The Musical Union was a large chorus that performed Messiah alternated with Christmas Oratorio. Olaf also taught as many as 60 individual voice students each semester, a task that served to develop a solid foundation of vocal technique and pedagogy.

Olaf’s time in the St. Olaf Choir exposed him to choral music from the Romantic and Baroque periods. While at Oberlin, Olaf began to expand his repertoire as compared to St. Olaf: Elizabethan Madrigals from the Renaissance, and Contemporary music through an association with Norman Lockwood. Lockwood, a professor of composition at Oberlin, was a student of Nadia Boulanger. As a result, Olaf premiered many of Lockwood’s choral works, and programmed many of Boulanger’s.

52 Armendarez.
53 Johnson.
54 Shaw.


Shaw.
In 1939, Olaf took a sabbatical to procure a master’s degree in sacred music at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. While working on this degree, he studied voice with teachers Marshall Bryant and Douglas Stanley. He also studied theology, history, art, hymnody, plainsong, and conducting. Continued study in church music and vocal technique prepared Olaf for his future position at St. Olaf Choir, which he was offered in 1941. St. Olaf College initially hired Olaf as the chair of the music and art department. He also shared the conducting role of the St. Olaf Choir with his father. Upon the retirement of F. Melius in 1943, Olaf began his 25-year tenure as the conductor of the St. Olaf Choir.\(^5\)

Under the direction of Olaf, the St. Olaf Choir continued its reputation as a premier choir of the \textit{a cappella} tradition, singing only unaccompanied works that were sacred in nature. However, two noticeable changes instituted by Olaf as director of the St. Olaf Choir contrasted his father’s programming style. While he continued to include many selections from the Romantic Period, Olaf began to program Renaissance and tonal 20\(^{th}\) Century works much as he did while at Oberlin. Furthermore, Olaf’s extensive study of vocal technique resulted in a different approach to choral singing, resulting in a different overall choral sound than that of F. Melius.\(^6\)

\(^5\) Johnson.

Shaw.

\(^6\)Armendarez.

Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.”


Johnson.

Laugen.

Approach to Choral Sound

Under the direction of Olaf Christiansen, the St. Olaf Choir continued to sing only unaccompanied choral works.\(^{57}\) Olaf placed great importance on the concept of timbre coupled with clarity of text, emphasizing that the proper color of vowels demonstrated the intention of the text.\(^{58}\) This approach to the text resulted in a bright overall choral sound as the singers pronounced vowels with as much [i] color as possible (see Appendix A for a listing of IPA symbols).

Selection of Singers

Auditions consisted of a five-minute interview with Olaf and a callback audition with all the finalists of a section. Olaf utilized the first audition to evaluate musical and non-musical abilities and characteristics. Nonmusical aspects included general appearance, drive, commitment, academics, imagination, and psychological stability. Musical aspects included a sensitive ear, musical memory, intonation, and breath control.\(^{59}\)

More so than his father, where personality was of utmost importance, innate musical talent was the most important characteristic in the selection of singers for his ensemble. The most accurate measurement of this was in the musical memory test in which the singers repeated increasingly difficult melodic patterns (see Figure 2). During this exercise the singer’s musical memory, range, musicianship, and voice size were determined.\(^{60}\)

Olaf insisted that each member of the St. Olaf choir have stronger solo vocal skills than what his father required. Therefore, the selection of the best singers held the highest priority in the audition process. Olaf required that freshmen receive a year of private voice instruction prior


Hendricksen.

\(^{58}\) Armendarez.

\(^{59}\) Olaf C. Christiansen, "Solo and Ensemble Singing," *Bulletin of the National Association of Teachers of Singing* 21, no. 3 (1965).


Christiansen, "Choral Tradition Lives On."

Johnson.
to auditioning for the St. Olaf Choir; following the year of voice lessons, the students’ voice teachers would recommend them for membership in the ensemble.

No sight-reading was included in the audition process. Rather than selecting those who had received the best musical training or were the best sight-readers, Olaf was more concerned with selecting the voices and personalities that would fit best in his sound ideal. Olaf sought personalities similar to what his father sought—those who would be most willing to give to the ensemble experience rather than look for individual recognition. Singers mainly learned the notes in sectional rehearsals; hence, sight-reading was not a priority. Olaf utilized the callback portion of the audition to determine if singers could blend within the section. During the callback, section members sang melodic patterns in a circle. Olaf felt that each section should sound like one instrument rather than a grouping of different types of instruments.

\[61\] Scholz.

\[62\] Armendarez.

Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.”

Johnson.
Figure 2. Musical memory test patterns.  

These tunes may be transposed with slight alterations, extensions, or varied rhythms to become more difficult.

Singer Placement

Olaf’s main criterion for assigning singers to specific sections was vowel clarity on high pitches. Olaf classified those who were able to produce identifiable vowel sounds on upper pitches as sopranos and tenors. A majority of these types of singers possessed the lightest and brightest voices. He also classified Mezzo-sopranos as having lighter or heavier mechanisms. He assigned those mezzo-sopranos who were able to access the upper register with a light mechanism to the second-soprano and first-alto section; he assigned those who could not to the second-alto section. He classified the bass voices in a similar manner: he assigned those basses with lighter mechanisms to the second-tenor and first-bass sections and those with heavier mechanisms to the second-bass section. 64

In order to classify the voices in the audition process, Olaf asked the singers to repeat musical patterns with gradually expanding range. In one pattern, the singer ended on a high note and sustained the pitch for as long as possible in order to determine the singer’s breath control and ability to sing in tune on a sustained pitch. He also felt that the personality singer had influenced their voice type; for example, he classified those whose personalities were light, flowery, bubbly, and quick as sopranos. With regard to men, Olaf often used physical characteristics to classify voices; he classified those individuals with a long jaw, big mouth, large larynx, and long neck as basses. 65

Sixty to sixty-five voices comprised the ideal size of the St. Olaf Choir during Olaf’s tenure. The ideal numerical balance between the sections included eleven first sopranos, nine second sopranos, seven first altos, eight or nine second altos, ten basses, six baritones, six or seven first tenors and six second tenors. 66 Olaf developed varying sounds between the sections that were influenced by the German tradition. The basses sang with an open, heavy sound and

64 Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.” Christiansen, "Solo and Ensemble Singing.”

Kenneth L. Jennings, Interview by Author, Northfield, MN, 15 September 2009, Digital recording.

Johnson.

Scholz.

65 Johnson.

66 Christiansen, “Choral Tradition Lives On.”
he asked them to sing in their chest voice the majority of the time. The tenors sang with a more lyric, light sound using some light mechanism. Altos sang with dark vowels that resulted in a warm, rich sound. The soprano sound was light and lyric, influenced by the boy sound of the German choirs that influenced his father.67

The overall sound displayed an extreme bass presence. Despite the large number of sopranos, the soprano sound was the softest of the sections because of the light, coloratura voices he selected. Furthermore, the selection of specific voice types into each section created an overall sound that varied from section to section.68

Olaf felt that this paralleled the balance of an orchestra with the larger instruments reinforcing the smaller, upper instruments. He also classified the voices within each section by instrument-type and placed them accordingly within the ensemble. He placed the strings in the middle of the ensemble, woodwinds and flutes farther from the middle, and brass on the ends of the ensemble. Thus, he placed the less soloistic and flexible voices in the middle of the ensemble and the more soloistic voices on the outside.69

In performance, Olaf preferred that the singers of the St. Olaf Choir stand as close together as possible. Thus, he asked Wenger to design specific risers that were only ten inches deep. The first row was in the shape of a horseshoe with each of the four risers the same length. This resulted in the appearance of the first row or risers as longest and the fourth row as the shortest (see Figure 3). Olaf believed that this type of standing arrangement aided in the creation of a perfect blend.70

67 Scholz.
68 Hendricksen.
Jennings.
Scholz.
Shaw.
69 Scholz.
70 Ibid.
Vowels and Diction

Olaf’s main priority in programming was the text rather than the music; the music existed to support the words and illuminate them.\textsuperscript{72} He insisted on unification of pure vowels in order to create a beautiful tone and to create clarity of text. He accomplished this by having one ensemble member sing, who naturally produced his ideal of the vowel, and then he added each singer in the section one by one as he or she attempted to match the ideal vowel.\textsuperscript{73}

In order to achieve vowel unification, Olaf worked with his singers to form the vowel in the pharynx; he felt that every vowel could be articulated without opening the mouth or moving the lips. An insistence for vowel unification also occurred in the extreme ranges; he did not allow vowels to become distorted in the extreme high and low parts of the range.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{72} Johnson.
\textsuperscript{73} Jennings.
\textsuperscript{74} Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.”

Armendarez.
Jennings.
Olaf insisted on strict vowel uniformity and associated vocal tone with vowel quality. As a result, he developed vocal technique and vowel quality simultaneously. Olaf’s approach to vowel color was consistent with his overall sound ideal that required a concentration of overtones in order to create ring in the sound. As a result, most vowels were formed with elements of the [i] vowel, resulting in a bright overall choral sound. A majority of vocal exercises that Olaf used began with the [i] vowel sound. Furthermore, the singers sustained the vowels sustained through each beat with crisp movement from one vowel sound to another. The overall effect created a sound similar to an organ (see Figure 4).

His approach to vowels, however, also included the concept of altering vowel color to match the mood of the music. Olaf felt that the singers most effectively colored the vowels using the soft palate; a low soft palate made the sound more mellow and dark; a high soft palate made the sound brighter.

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75 Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.”
76 Hendricksen.
77 Johnson.
Olaf’s approach to diction created a vertical approach to the overall musical line rather than a linear one. He instructed that the consonant of a word should precede the beat and the vowel occur exactly on the beat in order for the words to be clearly heard and the rhythm to be correctly interpreted.

Furthermore, Olaf felt that every musical and textual aspect of the choral singing must be perfect in order to allow the listener to connect with the religious text. As the ensemble eliminated distractions and impurities, the religious message of the text became the audience’s focal point.

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78 Christiansen, Voice Builder, 4.

79 Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.”

Christiansen, "Solo and Ensemble Singing."

Jennings.

Shaw.

80 Christiansen, "Choral Tradition Lives On."
**Vocal Pedagogy**

Olaf believed that instruction regarding vocal technique was an essential part of the rehearsal process. Citing athletics, he claimed that the muscles of the singing mechanism should be thoroughly warmed up in order to excel. As a result, each rehearsal began with 10-15 minutes of warm-ups and vocal training.\(^{81}\)

Olaf felt that artistic singing required physical, mental, and emotional coordination in order to establish accurate pitch, correct vowel quality, controlled intensity, controlled vocal quantity, and controlled duration.\(^{82}\) Therefore, throughout the rehearsal process he placed heavy emphasis on the development of breath, posture, vocal cords, flexibility of resonant space, and a sensitive ear. He established these emphases through a series of stretches and vocal exercises.

Rehearsal began with the training of efficient use of the breath. Olaf first instructed the singers to reach, stretch, and inhale for four counts. Next, while holding the breath, the singers rocked forward and backward on their heels and toes without bending the knees for eight counts. At the end of the eight counts, the singers slumped forward while exhaling for four counts. They then employed the “abdominal squeeze” in order to stay empty for four, six, and then eight counts (see Figure 5).\(^{83}\) In order to perform the abdominal squeeze the singers exhaled while bending from the waist. Then, while remaining slumped over, the singers squeezed the abdominal area inward in order prevent air from entering the lungs and held this position for a varied number of seconds. This exercise aided in the strengthening of the diaphragm muscle, thus resulting in greater control of the breathing mechanism. Olaf also used the abdominal

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\(^{81}\) Armendarez.

\(^{82}\) Christiansen, *Voice Builder*.

\(^{83}\) Ibid., 4.

Johnson.
squeeze during several of the vocal exercises in order to gain control of the breath mechanism during the singing process and to control vibrato.\textsuperscript{84}

Olaf believed that control of breath resulted in the ring in the voice and created a smooth vocal line; a lack of breath coordination resulted in over-blowing, thus eliminating overtones. Proper coordination of breath, allowed the singer to open the throat and create a big sound.\textsuperscript{85}

![Figure 5. Posture, stretch, and breath exercises\textsuperscript{86}](image)

Vocal warm-ups emphasized economy of breath, activation of the lips and tongue, resonance, range extension, and unification of vowels. The prevalence of the [i] vowel in the prescribed warm-ups seems to indicate the importance of establishing the bright ring in the sound

\textsuperscript{84} Jennings.

\textsuperscript{85} Scholz.

\textsuperscript{86} Christiansen, \textit{Voice Builder}, 4.
that Olaf continuously sought a sound that he described as “point,” “sizzle,” “bite,” or “ping” (see Figure 6).\textsuperscript{\textdegree}7

As with his father, under the direction of Olaf Christiansen many felt that the St. Olaf Choir sang with a straight tone. However, Olaf strongly reputed this claim: “There is no such thing as a \textit{straight tone} among well-trained singers. I wouldn’t have a STRAIGHT voice in my \textit{a cappella} choir, but I demand trained voices, super-trained singers.”\textsuperscript{\textdegree}8 He felt that the extent and pitch deviation of the vibrato must be controlled so as not to create a sound that was “too earthy and sensuous for religious music.”\textsuperscript{\textdegree}9 He attributed the perception of straight-tone singing to the creation of a pure unison through careful listening and through sufficient emphasis on singing in tune. Therefore, the voice naturally limited the pitch deviation of the vibrato to a reasonable extent; the vibrato was never totally eliminated.\textsuperscript{\textdegree}0 Instead, Christiansen created unisons through uniformity of pitch, color, and dynamics.\textsuperscript{\textdegree}1

Furthermore, Olaf felt that varying styles of music required varying extents of vibrato; music of the Romantic period required an approach that was more individualistic and richer in texture than music of the Renaissance. However, because of the young age of the singers in the St. Olaf Choir, the singers could not attain the requisite richness the music from the Romantic period required.\textsuperscript{\textdegree}2

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{\textdegree}7 Ibid.
\item Johnson, 326.
\item \textsuperscript{\textdegree}8 Christiansen, "Solo and Ensemble Singing," 17. (Emphasis in original.)
\item \textsuperscript{\textdegree}9 Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{\textdegree}0 Hendricksen.
\item Christiansen, "Solo and Ensemble Singing."
\item Shaw.
\item \textsuperscript{\textdegree}1 Sateren.
\item \textsuperscript{\textdegree}2 Christiansen, "Solo and Ensemble Singing," 17.
\end{itemize}
Figure 6. Vocal exercises emphasizing [i].\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{93} Christiansen, \textit{Voice Builder}, 8-9, 11.
VI. EXTENDING PITCH RANGE: Toneline, Unifying Vowels, Breath

The above exercises may be repeated using the following vowel sounds:

2. Dā
3. Dēh
4. Dē
5. Dāh
6. Đāh
7. Daw
8. Đōh
9. Đō
10. Đōō

VII. UNIFY VOWELS, BREATH
(Smooth Vowel Changes)

Series A                      Series B                      Series C
2. Dee—yā—ā                   1. Đē—yā—āh                 1. Đē—yāh—ōh
3. Dee—yā—ōh                 2. Đē—yā—ōh                 2. Đē—yāh—ōō
5. Dee—yā—ōō

XIII. EXTENDING PITCH RANGE — VOWEL PURITY — VOCAL LINE

Repeat the above exercise using the following syllables:

2. Đē               6. Đōh               9. Đōh
3. Đē               7. Đō               10. Đōō
4. Đēh              8. Dow              11. Đōō
5. Đō
Conclusions

Olaf Christiansen desired to continue the tradition of performing excellent choral music begun by his father. Furthermore, he maintained the practice of only programming unaccompanied, choral repertoire, thus furthering the traditions of the *a cappella* choral movement. Clarity and understanding of text were the highest priorities for Olaf. As such, he continuously worked for perfect unification of vowels throughout the singing range. His approach to singing, firmly grounded in a study of vocal pedagogy, affected the overall sound of the St. Olaf Choir. He trained the singers to produce a bright, forward sound with “ring” and “ping.” As a result, the [i] vowel was predominant in all vowels. Because he equated singing with exercise, he used several minutes at the beginning of each rehearsal to train the breathing and singing muscles.

Finally, Olaf sought to further the mission of the St. Olaf Choir as established by his father to expose the listener to the music from the Christian tradition. This was accomplished not only by programming sacred choral repertoire, but by performing it with such perfection so that the religious message of the text remained paramount; an approach that had become an inseparable aspect of the Christiansen choral tradition. Although not a Christiansen, Olaf’s successor, Kenneth Jennings, sought to accomplish the same type of mission as the Christiansen’s regarding the message of the music. However, he sought to do it with an entirely new choral sound and an ever-widening choral repertoire.

KENNETH JENNINGS

Historical Background and Other Considerations

Kenneth Jennings succeeded Olaf C. Christiansen as director of the St. Olaf Choir in 1968. When then president of St. Olaf College, Sidney Rand was asked if the retirement of Olaf ended the Christiansen tradition. He said, “No, the tradition is bigger than the name and individuals and we expect the same general emphasis to continue.”\(^{94}\) Although excellence did not diminish under Jennings, he instigated a new, freer approach to choral singing and choral repertoire at St. Olaf College.

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\(^{94}\) Shaw, 369.
Jennings was born and raised in Connecticut. While growing up Kenneth studied piano. He was drafted in the fall of 1943 into the Army to fight in World War II. While in the army, he met Luther Onerheim, a chaplain’s assistant who had graduated from St. Olaf College. Jennings played the organ for chapel services and took part in the beginnings of the Soldier Chorus in 1944; singing and entertaining troops became their main duty at the conclusion of the war. Upon returning from the war in 1946, he attempted to enroll in St. Olaf College. Although he was told there was no more space, he stopped in Northfield on the way to Colorado College to inquire if space had opened up. Christiansen told him that he would “be a good enough risk” and allowed him to enroll one week prior to the beginning of classes.

Hoping to audition for a degree in piano, he went to Olaf’s office; Olaf asked him to sing as well. Jennings progressed to the second round of auditions for the St. Olaf Choir where he completed a melodic pattern that no one else could. On that basis, Olaf accepted him into the St. Olaf Choir as a freshman. He sang in the ensemble all four years of his studies at St. Olaf College; three of those years, he served as tenor section leader and Olaf called on him to conduct the choir from time to time. During Jennings’ time as a student at St. Olaf College, he studied piano, voice, and composition.

Following graduation from St. Olaf College, Jennings continued his studies at Oberlin Conservatory of Music where he received a Master of Music degree in 1951. Upon graduation from Oberlin, he was appointed chair of the Department of Music at Mitchell College in North Carolina where he served from 1951-1953. In 1953, he received a teaching position at St. Olaf College, serving as assistant conductor for the St. Olaf Choir and as director of the Manitou Singers and Chapel Choir. His duties as director of the Chapel Choir included preparing the choir to sing at Sunday Services at Boe Memorial Chapel. Additionally, the Chapel Choir prepared larger works with organ, piano, and full orchestra, a practice that he would continue as director of the St. Olaf Choir.

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95 Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.”

96 Shaw, 380.

97 Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.”

Shaw.

98 Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.”
As a member of the faculty of St. Olaf College, he continued his music studies during the summers at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University, University of Minnesota, and University Illinois. He received the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in 1966 from the University of Illinois where he studied with Jean Berger and Harold Decker. While completing his degree at the University of Illinois, he traveled to England to complete research for his doctoral dissertation on English psalmody.\footnote{Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.”}

When Olaf announced his retirement to the president of St. Olaf College, Olaf recommended Kenneth Jennings as his replacement. Olaf cited Jennings’ musical abilities and personal qualities as being the right fit for the St. Olaf Choir and that it was time for a change from the Christiansen tradition.\footnote{Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.”} The day after Olaf informed Jennings of his intention to retire and his recommendation that Jennings be the next conductor of the St. Olaf Choir, President Sidney Rand offered the position to Jennings; his new duties began fall, 1968.\footnote{Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.”}

During Jennings’ first year as conductor of the St. Olaf Choir, listeners noticed several changes including a new sound, different repertoire, and use of instrumental accompaniment. Furthermore, a distinct change in emphasis was apparent that employed a more expanded view of choral music rather than an overt religious focus.\footnote{Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.”\
Anton Armstrong, Interview by Author, Northfield, MN, 17 September 2009, Digital recording.}

Selection of repertoire was an important and time-consuming aspect of Jennings’ role as conductor of the St. Olaf Choir. Aside from the addition of accompanied selections, Jennings’ main priority in selecting repertoire was the high artistic quality the music possessed rather than the religious message; this included secular music in addition to sacred. Furthermore, Jennings emphasized a wider cultural variety, including music from China, Japan, Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, and a more varied cadre of American composers.\footnote{Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.”}
Approach to Choral Sound

The performance of a wider variety of choral music led to an approach to choral singing that reflected these various styles and periods. Shaw described the resulting choral sound as vibrant, vital, and flexible with a greater emphasis placed on a beautiful ensemble sound and flexible tonal color than that employed by the Christiansen’s. Jennings accomplished this by emphasizing intonation and teaching his singers to listen within each section and across the ensemble. Jennings believed his approach to singing allowed for spontaneity and flexibility in performing various works. ¹⁰⁴

Jennings was sensitive to the limitations of young singers, ages 18-22. Singers of this age were not capable of a vastly wide variety of tonal colors. Therefore, Jennings sought lyric, smooth, art-style singing with a lyric sound from top to bottom, a tonal concept based on the type of voices with which he worked rather than imposition of an outside sound concept. He worked to adjust his approach to the various musical aspects of a piece such as phrasing, articulation, and dynamics rather than just altering the choral sound. ¹⁰⁵

Selection of Singers

The audition process consisted of two parts: an individual interview with Jennings and a callback where he heard voices he heard. During the individual interview, the singers performed a prepared piece; he utilized the performance to evaluate size, vocal color, vocal control, musical phrasing, and diction. The singers also repeated tonal patterns that he played on the piano in

¹⁰⁴ Shaw, 400.

¹⁰⁵ Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.”

References

Hendricksen.

Jennings, Interview by Author.

Scholz.

Shaw.
order to test for quickness and accuracy of pitch response, range, and intonation. In order to ascertain reading ability, the singers also performed a sight-reading exercise; nevertheless, there was not much emphasis placed on the sight-reading portion of the audition, Jennings was more interested in the overall musicality and personality of the individual.  

Singer Placement

The main criterion for the classification of singers within a section was the ability to sing easily through the passaggio. He classified the most lyric female voices that could easily move through the passaggio without singing sharp as first-sopranos. He classified those with heavier voices and those that could not easily navigate the passaggio as second sopranos. First altos were generally mezzo-sopranos who did not have a developed upper range; second altos were capable of a bigger sound in the low range.

Jennings classified men with the most lyric upper range as first-tenors, and tenors with heavier voices who could not easily move through the passaggio at f4 and f#4 as second tenors. He classified men with heavier voices and those who could easily sing in the low range as second-basses and the more lyric basses as baritones. The overall sound produced by each section was homogenous in nature. He encouraged all sections to sing with a light mechanism by carrying the head voice into the lower parts of the range.

Jennings balanced the choir with more basses than any other section, which served to provide a firm vocal foundation for the other sections. The ensemble was generally comprised of 65 singers. A typical numerical balance between the sections included ten second basses, eight baritones, six second-tenors, five first-tenors, nine second-altos, eight first altos, nine second-

\[106\] Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.”

\[107\] Ibid.

Jennings, Interview by Author.

Scholz.

\[108\] Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.”

Jennings, Interview by Author.

Scholz.
sopranos, and ten first-sopranos. The ensemble sang in four rows with the women in the front two rows and the men in the back two rows (see Figure 7). Jennings placed an inner choir in the very center of the choir comprised of twelve singers—three individuals from each section. He used these members to sing certain passages that were more fitting for a smaller ensemble.\textsuperscript{109}

The acoustical balance thus achieved was somewhat louder in the lower voices, but allowed for a soprano presence throughout (see Figure 8).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure7.png}
\caption{St. Olaf Choir standing arrangement under Kenneth Jennings.\textsuperscript{110}}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure8.png}
\caption{St. Olaf choir acoustical balance between sections under Kenneth Jennings.\textsuperscript{111}}
\end{figure}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{109} Jennings, Interview by Author.
\end{flushright}
\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
Placement of singers within each section was an important practice for Jennings. He placed bigger voices in the middle of the section and strong, independent singers on the ends of the rows. He also considered the individuals’ vocal and musical ability in the placement process. He placed singers with strong voices but lazy ears next to singers with average voices but strong ears in order to counterbalance the deficiencies of the singers and to produce the highest quality sound possible.\footnote{Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.”}

\textit{Vowels and Diction}

Rather than a specific vowel color ideal, Jennings sought an agreement of neutral vowel pronunciation based on natural speech patterns between all sections. He believed that differences in vowel color between the voices were more the result of differences in vocal timbre. Neutrality of vowel was imperative in order to make the text as understandable as possible. He achieved vowel agreement with song-like vocalizes with text and melodies in order to develop text clarity.\footnote{Jennings, Interview by Author.}

Jennings’ study of English choral music influenced his approach to consonants. As a result, he approached consonants through rhythmic consistency with the consonant occurring before the beat and the vowel occurring exactly on the beat. Jennings’ approach to consonants also changed because of varying styles of music. Some styles called for a linear, legato approach while others called for a more angular approach.

\textit{Vocal Pedagogy}

Jennings felt that the following contributed to good singing: “good posture, a posed, alert body, breathing that fills to the bottom of the lungs, a loose jaw, free shoulder and neck muscles, good vocal energy, focus and beauty of tone, understandable diction, an alert ear, good intonation, [and] a consistent goal of singing musically and tastefully.”\footnote{Kenneth L. Jennings, \textit{Sing Legato}, (San Diego, CA: Neil A. Kjos Music Co., 1982), 2.} He felt that vocal...
technique was most effectively addressed through the performance repertoire and through vocal exercises that resembled musical phrases (see Figure 8). The purposes of these exercises were to emphasize correct breathing and posture, limber up the voice and mind, unify vowels, unify the spirit of the ensemble members, and to clarify rhythm, pitch, and articulation problems.\textsuperscript{115}

\section*{4. RICH TONE}

- Sing very legato and beautifully.
- Keep your jaw loose. (Can you move it from side to side a bit without changing tone?)
- Feel your breath evenly without bursts on changes of pitches or words.
- Use the alternate words suggested or make up your own.

\begin{itemize}
  \item Rich tone with open throat, Rich tone on even breath.
  \item Sigh the tone with loosened jaw, Sigh the tone on even breath.
  \item Sing a song with loosened jaw, Sing a song on even breath.
\end{itemize}

Figure 9. Vocal exercises.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{115} Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.”

\textsuperscript{116} Jennings, \textit{Sing Legato}, 5-7,12.
7. FLEXIBILITY

- Repeat the vowel on the slurred notes ("fleh-eh-eh") like a quick, happy chuckle. (Surprisingly this is easier to do quickly than slowly. Do not be overly concerned about accuracy at first.)
- Keep your voice light.

Flex - i-bil - i-ty, flex - i-bil - i-ty, sing with light and short notes;

Flex - i-bil - i-ty, flex - i-bil - i-ty, sing with easy floating breath:

Yah - ah, ah, yah - ah, ah, yah - ah - ah, yah - ah - ah, yah - ah - ah.

Yah - ah, ah, yah - ah, ah, yah - ah - ah, yah - ah - ah, yah - ah - ah.

11. GUIDING ALONG (Sixths)

- Feel the breath and tone like a skater’s long strides.
- Remember that wider ranges, leaps, and longer phrases all require good vocal energy and flowing breath.

Glid - ing a - long on wings of song, we lift our voices

and re - joice; Smooth and se - rene, as in a dream, our voices

raise in hymns of praise, sixths glide on wings of song.

Figure 9, continued.
Jennings’ approach choral singing in a different way than the Christiansen tradition. He felt that during Olaf’s tenure as conductor, the singing had become too stiff. His first priority was to bring a more natural, free sound to the ensemble. Regarding his first year as conductor of the St. Olaf Choir, Jennings states, “I uncorked the vibrato bottle, and I’ve been trying to put it back on ever since!”\(^{117}\) His approach to choral singing called for lyric singers rather than operatic ones. As a result, although vibrato was present in the sound, a limited extent of the vibrato allowed for clarity of intonation and vowel formation.\(^{118}\)

Additionally, Jennings did not seek to achieve a strict blend. He believed that blend occurred naturally as the result of rhythmic accuracy, diction, phrasing, balance, intonation, and vowel uniformity. Blend, he believed, occurred “at a point in front of the choir, not necessarily between two individuals standing side by side.”\(^{119}\)

Conclusions

In succeeding Olaf Christiansen as the director of the St. Olaf Choir, Kenneth Jennings sought to achieve a freer, more vibrant choral sound. He accomplished this through a lyric approach to singing that allowed for a greater extent of vibrato and neutral vowel agreement rather than strict uniformity to a color ideal. Furthermore, Jennings’ inclusion of repertoire with instrumental accompaniment and a broad range of musical styles called for flexibility in choral sound. Finally, Jennings’ approach to choral singing allowed for a vibrant approach to the music and artistry that he sought through choral music.\(^{120}\) “See, think, feel your best so others may hear, respond, be filled, and renewed.”\(^{121}\)

\(^{117}\) Jennings, Interview by Evans Mirageas.

Jennings, Interview by Author.

\(^{118}\) Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.”

\(^{119}\) Ibid.

Jennings, Interview by Author.

\(^{120}\) Armstrong, Interview by Author.

\(^{121}\) Shaw.
SUMMARY

The St. Olaf Choir provided a model for the *a cappella* choir movement in the United States. Through a background as an instrumentalist and extensive study in Germany, F. Melius Christiansen developed a choral sound that called for uniformity of tonal color and relatively straight singing. He accomplished this by asking singers to submit individual vocal characteristics and personality to the whole of the ensemble; he only selected those singers who were capable of blending with other voices. Christiansen’s approach to diction reflected his desire that all voices blend. He used dark vowels to create the best blend and sacrificed consonants to develop a smooth, legato line.

Olaf C. Christiansen succeeded his father as director of the St. Olaf Choir. Olaf utilized his extensive training in vocal pedagogy to alter the overall choral sound of the choir. Singing was a physical activity that required extensive training and constant exercise of the breathing and vocal muscles. Text was the most important aspect of choral music for Olaf. Therefore, he emphasized clarity of text and perfection of all musical aspects so that the listener could focus on the message of the text. Olaf sought forward vowel placement of the vowel, which produced a bright sound throughout the ensemble; an emphasis on consonants created a vertical approach to the melodic line. Finally, although many perceived a straight tone approach to singing, Olaf insisted that the singers of the St. Olaf Choir were allowed to sing with vibrato that was sufficiently controlled to create good intonation and perfect unisons.

Olaf’s successor, Kenneth Jennings, sought to free the choral tone that he felt had become tight and constricted during Olaf’s tenure. He approached choral singing with a lyric style similar to the lieder singers of the time. He felt that vocal technique was best addressed through the selected literature and through vocal exercises with melodic lines and text. Jennings did not insist upon a particular vowel or tonal color, instead, he sought agreement of vowels based on natural speech patterns. Jennings did not encourage blend between the individual voices in the ensemble. Instead, he felt that blend naturally occurred in front of the ensemble as the result of free, relaxed singing and an agreement of vowels. Finally, Jennings expanded the repertoire of the St. Olaf Choir by including accompanied pieces, a wider variety of 20th Century compositions, and secular pieces.
From its earliest years, the influence of the St. Olaf Choir was felt across the country. One choral conductor who was influenced greatly by F. Melius Christiansen and the St. Olaf Choir was John Finley Williamson, the founder of Westminster Choir College.
CHAPTER 3

WESTMINSTER CHOIR—HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The following is an historical perspective of the evolution of choral sound of the Westminster Choir as conducted by John Finley Williamson, George Lynn, and Joseph Flummerfelt. For each conductor historical background and other considerations are briefly presented. Next, a review of the literature regarding their approach to choral sound is given including selection of singers, singer placement, vowels and diction, and vocal pedagogy. For John Finley Williamson, a summary of Howard Swan’s description of the sound of the Westminster Choir is given. Finally, conclusions are drawn for each conductor.

JOHN FINLEY WILLIAMSON

Historical Background and Other Considerations

John Finley Williamson was known primarily as a singer. His parents had no money for music lessons, thus restricting his exposure to music instruction when he was young. This is evidenced by his first public singing performance where the quartet in which he was singing stopped their song in confusion and walked off the stage. This first public performance was not indicative of Williamson’s talent, or of his future in performance. At the age of twenty-one, he began study at the Davis Conservatory of Music, Otterbein University. Upon graduation, he moved to Dayton, Ohio where he began a successful voice studio and attempted to begin his career as an opera singer. However, a botched tonsillectomy operation altered his vocal tone so that a career as an opera singer was not a viable option.¹²²

Instead, Williamson turned to choral conducting. He first organized community choirs; and then the First Evangelical United Brethren church hired him as music director followed by the Westminster Presbyterian Church. He soon moved to the Westminster Presbyterian Church, which prompted the development of Westminster Choir School in 1926 with the mission of developing “ministers of music” for Protestant Churches throughout the country. Williamson sought to create a program that would coordinate education for the individual, service to the community, and worship for the church. This plan remained Westminster Choir School’s primary focus even through transplantation from Dayton, Ohio, to Ithaca College in New York, and finally to its current location, Princeton, New Jersey.\(^{123}\)

Shortly after its organization, the Westminster Choir began a tradition of touring the United States and abroad. The purpose of these tours was similar to that of the St. Olaf Choir and reflected the impetus for founding Westminster Choir School: to promote the use of choral music in church services as a form of worship. He conducted the first tours throughout states near Ohio. However, greater exposure led to requests for tours throughout the United State and Europe.\(^{124}\)

F. Melius Christiansen and the St. Olaf Choir were influential in the early beginnings of the Westminster Choir. After following their tours from city to city, Williamson began to copy their methods for his tours: he programmed only religious music, the Westminster Choir always sang *a cappella* and from memory, and he employed the same straight-tone sound concept that Christiansen insisted upon for his choir. However, as time progressed. Williamson began to establish a new identity for the Westminster Choir.\(^{125}\)

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Lyle.


Wehr.

\(^{125}\) Schisler.
The choice of repertoire is one factor in the unique identity of the Westminster Choir. The repertoire that Williamson utilized for the choir tours evolved throughout the years. In the early years of the Choir, Williamson followed Christiansen’s approach by programming only sacred music of the Romantic tradition. However, two principle influences led to the inclusion of secular music: first, the Westminster Choir was invited to supply choral music for an educational radio series that required secular music; second, Williamson found that European audiences wanted to hear American folksongs, ballads, and spirituals. An additional influence to the selected repertoire was the move of the school to Princeton, New Jersey in 1932. Situated near New York City and Philadelphia, the Westminster Choir performed frequently with the New York Philharmonic and the Philadelphia Orchestra, providing the opportunity for the Westminster Choir to perform numerous major works.\(^{126}\)

In addition to the changes in the programmed repertoire, the choral sound of Williamson’s Westminster choir underwent a series of evolutions throughout his lifetime. After espousing the sound of St. Olaf Choir, Williamson began a serious study of the voice with three teachers, Herbert Wilbur Greene, David Bispham, and Herbert Witherspoon; all were students of the Italian voice teacher, Lampertini.\(^{127}\) This interest in the development of the solo voice as well as the expanding repertoire of the Westminster Choir began an evolution to a divergent approach to choral sound from the straight-tone singing of the early years.

**Approach to Choral Sound**

Williamson experimented greatly with choral tone; he dedicated his life to the single purpose of producing a beautiful choral tone.\(^{128}\) His first approach to choral sound was greatly influenced by the sound of the St. Olaf Choir. Blend was the primary goal leading to straight-tone singing with an emphasis on subordination of individual vocal qualities to the overall sound of the ensemble. However, throughout his first years as a conductor, he found that this mode of

\(^{126}\) Wehr.

\(^{127}\) Ibid.


\(^{128}\) Wehr.
choral singing was lifeless.\textsuperscript{129} Williamson’s continuous study of solo singing led to an evolution of his choral sound ideal until 1939 when the Westminster Choir began performing regularly with professional symphony orchestras over which the choir had to project. As a result, he began to seek a choral sound that projected more and that had life, tonal beauty, and spontaneity, a darker, richer, and more vibrant tone quality with no emphasis on blend.\textsuperscript{130}

\textit{Selection of Singers}

Williamson placed emphasis on musical maturation, personal growth, intellectual growth, and physical fitness of his singers. Once accepted into the choir, he expected the singers to follow strict rules of conduct: “1) no smoking or use of intoxicating beverages; 2) adherence to required amount of sleep, as determined by Williamson; 3) exercise and dietary regulation; 4) attendance without tardiness at all rehearsals; 5) willingness to sacrifice vacations for Westminster Choir tours or rehearsals if necessary.”\textsuperscript{131} As noted in these expectations, Williamson expected his singers to exercise regularly; he had everyone in his choirs do pushups at the beginning of rehearsals. He believed that in order to be whole, one must have a healthy body; he was consistently concerned with people’s stamina.\textsuperscript{132}

Personal character and personality were also an important consideration in the selection of individuals for the choir. He sought students who had a good voice and an outgoing personality and he was less concerned with academic potential.\textsuperscript{133}

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 54.


\textsuperscript{131} Helen Cecilia Schmoyer, “Contribution of the Westminster Choir Movement to American Choral Music,” (North Texas State Teachers College, 1942), 51.

\textsuperscript{132} Wehr.

\textsuperscript{133} Schisler.
**Singer Placement**

Williamson utilized three criteria for determining the voice classification of those who sang in his choirs: quality, range, and register. He placed primary importance on the “lift” of the singer.\(^{134}\) Williamson defined the lift as the “place in the range of the voice where it is necessary to use less breath . . . where the voice becomes easier to produce, and where the singer senses a spontaneous buoyancy in ascending scales.”\(^{135}\) Williamson indicated that all voices have two lifts. Figure 10 identifies the specific pitches for each voice part. As is apparent, the second lift is a perfect fourth above the first. The location of these lifts that allowed the Williamson to classify the voices correctly in the ensemble.

![Figure 10. Vocal lifts as identified by Williamson.\(^{136}\)](image)

Williamson did not have a method for placing individual singers according to sound. Instead, he placed people to enhance the visual aesthetic, according to height and hair color. He felt that placement was most effective with the soprano and basses located in the middle of the ensemble, the first sopranos in front, and the second basses behind, the second altos in the middle next to the first sopranos with the first tenors behind. He placed the remaining sections according to the diagram in Figure 11.\(^{137}\)

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\(^{134}\) Wehr.

\(^{135}\) John Finley Williamson, "How to Classify Voices," *Etude* 68, no. 6 (1950): 23.

\(^{136}\) Lyle, 23.


In the early years, Williamson selected a choir of 60 singers in order to create the appropriate dynamic contrast and vitality. However, as Williamson’s approach to choral singing evolved, he reduced the number of singers to 40, a size he felt allowed for greater musical flexibility.\textsuperscript{139}

Williamson approached the balance of the ensemble according to the acoustical principle that as frequency doubles, energy squares; thus, sopranos sound much louder than basses.\textsuperscript{140} As a result, he divided the voices of the Westminster Choir so that there were more basses and altos than sopranos and tenors, and more basses than altos. Williamson compared the ideal balance with that of a New England church (see Figure 12). The basses served as the foundation of the overall sound, thus Williamson required a greater number of them, and a louder sound. Sopranos were the smallest section, and created the least amplitude.\textsuperscript{141}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure11.png}
\caption{Sectional formation utilized by Williamson.\textsuperscript{138}}
\end{figure}


\textsuperscript{139} Wehr.

\textsuperscript{140} John Finley Williamson, "Make Friends with Acoustics," \textit{Etude} 68, no. 11 (1950).

\textsuperscript{141} John Finley Williamson, "Balance the Voices," \textit{Etude} 68, no. 5 (1950).
Vowels and Diction

Williamson approached singing of words through sounds not through letters; for example, “of” was not sounded with o and f but the sounds [a] and [v]. He classified vowels as fundamental, subordinate, medial and diphthongs (see Figure 13). He classified consonants were in three areas: vocal consonants having pitch, voiced explosives, and pure explosives. He believed that as a singer mastered these phonetic principles, good diction and proper phrasing was the result.\[143\]

Figure 13. Williamson’s Vowel classifications.\[144\]

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143 Wehr.

John Finley Williamson, "Good Singing Requires Good Diction," *Etude* 69, no. 9 (1951).

144 Wehr, 189.
Williamson taught singers to color the vowels according to the mood depicted by the music and by the range of the voice.\textsuperscript{145}

Aligning the vowels across the sections of the choir was also an important acoustic principle. Williamson believed that overtones were created first through eliminating upperpartials in the bass section, and then by aligning the vowels of the upper parts so that they created consonant harmonic intervals with the pitch of the fundamental. Thus, the basses sang dark vowels throughout the range. The soprano, alto, and tenor sections sang with somewhat brighter vowels in order to create the consonant harmonic intervals.\textsuperscript{146}

\textit{Vocal Pedagogy}

Williamson studied solo voice singing extensively. As a result, he treated his choral rehearsals as group voice classes discussing vocal technique in detail. He believed that proper posture was essential to healthy tone production. Williamson sought an active posture as if the singer were participating in an athletic event. The pelvis was rolled forward to create a straight spine and open the rib cage, and the ears were lined up with the shoulder and legs of the singer.\textsuperscript{147}

Once the singers attained proper posture, Williamson believed that breathing was a natural process and that extra attention to the breath process was unnecessary.\textsuperscript{148} He explained that improper breath was the result of unneeded tension in the body, fear (nervousness), and intense emotions. Problems with the breathing process were solved as the singer achieved relaxation and controlled the emotions that were experienced when performing.\textsuperscript{149} The most effective breathing for singing reflected the proper emotion of the music. Williamson taught that different moods created varying types of breath by the singer:

\begin{quote}
The sheer act of trying to say something through an art is as involved as is the art of music itself and requires great activity on the part of the performer. To discover how activity is expressed, put your right thumb on the end of the sternum and the rest of your
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{145} John Finley Williamson, "The Importance of Vowel Coloring," \textit{Etude} 69, no. 10 (1951).

\textsuperscript{146} Wehr.


\textsuperscript{149} Ibid.
hand over the part of the abdomen that lies between the lines of the receding ribs on either side of your body. At the same time, put your left hand at the side of the body on the lower rib line. Say “oh!” first with the mood of quiet satisfaction, second with a mood of great weariness, next with a mood of longing, next with a mood of surprise, next with a mood of tenderness. You will notice that each time you exclaim “Oh!” for a different mood you make a different use of the muscles of the body.  

. . . If [the individual] is angry, the size of the cavity within the chest wall automatically changes; if [the individual] is joyous there is another change in the cavity. The thought, however, is not of changing the cavity but of creating a mood. Creating a mood automatically makes the individual adjust the cavity to express the mood.  

Williamson felt that as the singers’ focused their attention on mood rather than the breathing process, correct breathing became automatic. 

Finally, Williamson believed that problems with breath and lack of oxygen directly caused intonation problems. As a result, he emphasized the natural breath process, and ensured adequate ventilation in his rehearsal rooms and performance venues so that the singers received sufficient fresh air. 

Howard Swan Sound Description of the Westminster Choir 

Williamson focused primarily on the development and personality of each individual singer. As a result, he paid close attention to the physical characteristics of the individual during the audition process as well as the rate, pitch, and resonance of the singers’ pitch. The location of the lift was the single most important characteristic of each singer, allowing the conductor to classify the individual’s voice. The overall choral sound created by this approach is described by Swan as big, dark, intensive, and colorful. 

Williamson developed this sound as correct posture was achieved through dramatic physical activity. He introduced vocal technique through staccato singing, and then, as the range

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152 Williamson, "Keep Your Choir Up to Pitch." 
153 Swan. 
154 Ibid.
Proceeded past the second lift, singer first produced tones with a spoken sound and then sung, creating a sound that was similar to a scream or shout. Another unique feature of the Westminster Choir was the approach to balance. Williamson achieved the desired balance by having the women sing with a light tone and the men with a big tone, thus producing a pyramid effect with the bass part being the loudest and the soprano part the softest. This overall approach to choral singing resulted in an atmosphere that was unrestrictive to the individual singer in terms of the singing voice and the emotional contribution to the music. Opponents of this school indicated that soft dynamics were rarely heard. Furthermore, in the upper parts of the range, the men’s sound was big and dark, while the women’s sound was often described as shrill.155

Conclusions

The result of Williamson’s work in training the individual voice was a full, dark, weighty, and vibrant tone from all voice parts and in all parts of the range.156 Williamson did not address blend; instead, he followed acoustical principles that he felt resulted in the ideal balance of the ensemble. As a result, he often described choral singing as weaving and intertwining threads of a tapestry, where threads of many different colors come together to form a beautiful work of art.157

Williamson’s influence encompassed two distinct areas of choral music. With missionary zeal, he trained individuals to become ministers of music for the Protestant churches throughout the country so that his students would create communities where music was valued, and all participated in the music creating process. He also developed a unique approach to choral singing: one that emphasized and celebrated the contributions of the individual. As a result, Westminster Choir School graduates assumed music leadership roles in churches, colleges, and communities throughout the United States.158

155 Ibid.

156 Trott.

157 Swan.

158 Williamson, "The Art of Choral Conducting."

158 Robinson, "John Finley Williamson: His Contribution to Choral Music."
The retirement of John Finley Williamson as President of Westminster Choir College and conductor of the Westminster Choir in 1958 brought about a tumultuous time in the history of the College. Three different presidents were hired (one interim) between 1958 and 1971; five different conductors of the Westminster Choir were utilized during the same period.

Williamson served as president of Westminster Choir College as well as conductor of the Westminster Choir. However, following Williamson’s retirement, the Board of Directors concluded that the positions should be held by two difference people in order for the needs of each position to be met; while the position of president of Westminster Choir College was handled by the Board of Directors, Williamson hand-picked Harold Hedgpeth as his successor as conductor of the Westminster Choir. However, during Hedgpeth’s second year as conductor, C. Howard Hopkins, dean, and Warren Martin, music director, determined that Hedgpeth was not a strong enough leader or musician to remain in the position.159 “We were committed strongly to the idea that Westminster should be the choral mecca of the entire world.” They did not feel that Hedgpeth could attain this goal.160

Warren Martin assumed the role of conductor for the remainder of the 1959-1960 school year. During the 1960-1961 school year, Martin shared the position with Elaine Brown. During the 1961-1962 school year, Martin served as the only conductor of the choir. However, he did not wish to continue to serve as conductor. He proposed a solution that included having three different conductors lead the choir in tours of various parts of the country. The three conductors were Elaine Brown, George Lynn, and David Fetler. This proposal never materialized and Martin continued as conductor on an interim basis until newly installed president, Lee Hastings Bristol appointed George Lynn as conductor of the Westminster Choir in 1964—a post he held until his resignation in 1969.161

159 Schisler.
160 Ibid., 270.
161 Ibid.
GEORGE LYNN

Historical Background and Other Considerations

George Lynn began serious music study at the age of five, studying piano and organ with James Harrison. At the age of twelve, he was appointed as organist for a Swedish Lutheran Church. Lynn began his collegiate studies at Mansfield State Teachers College in Pennsylvania. However, after hearing a soloist from Westminster Choir School, and subsequently hearing a performance by the Westminster Choir, Lynn decided to transfer to Westminster Choir School. While there, Lynn studied voice and conducting with John Finley Williamson. He entered Westminster Choir School as a piano/organ major, but changed his major to composition after studying composition with Roy Harris.162

Upon graduation from Westminster Choir School in 1938, Lynn held positions at the Upper Montclair Presbyterian Church in New Jersey and the First Methodist Church in Pasadena, California. Following service in the Army during World War II, Lynn attained a Masters Degree from Princeton University. He then secured a position at Westminster Choir College where he taught voice, music theory, and conducting. He also served as associate director of the Westminster Choir.163

Lynn left Westminster Choir College in 1950 and subsequently served as a visiting lecturer at the University of Colorado, and as minister of music at several churches in the Denver, Colorado area. During this time, he continued to compose many instrumental and choral works. He also founded and served as general editor of Golden Music Publishers.164

Westminster Choir College rehired Lynn in 1963, and appointed him Conductor of the Westminster Symphonic Choir and assistant to the President, Lee Hastings Bristol. Bristol also assigned Lynn to revise the curriculum of the College. Bristol appointed Lynn as director of the 


163 Buehler.

164 Buehler.
Westminster Choir during the summer of 1964, a post he held for five years. According to Lynn, he returned to Westminster Choir College at Williamson’s personal request; Williamson indicated that he felt that Lynn could rebuild the choral program to what it once was.\footnote{Buehler.}

As conductor of the Westminster Choir, Lynn included repertoire from myriad times and styles. He took, however, a majority of selections, from Twentieth Century repertoire that included folksongs, Broadway songs, blues, spirituals, and gospel.\footnote{Schisler.}

\section*{Approach to Choral Sound}

Much like his mentor, John Finley Williamson, Lynn believed he created the best choral tone quality as every ensemble member sang with proper individual vocal technique. He often said, “Blend is a mixture of correctly produced differences.”\footnote{Donald Branton, Interview by Author, Phone Interview, 30 March 2010, Digital recording.} Thus, he sought to encourage healthy, soloistic singing throughout the rehearsal process. As a disciple of Williamson, Lynn ascribed to the approach to choral sound that called for full, robust, vibrant singing regardless of the style of music.\footnote{Connie Branton, Interview by Author, Phone Interview, 4 March 2010, Digital recording.}

\section*{Selection of Singers}

Lynn accepted the finest solo singers into the Westminster Choir. He auditioned students in the spring of the preceding year for acceptance into the choir. The audition consisted of an interview with Lynn where he spoke briefly with the singer and heard them sing a solo piece. Members of the Westminster Choir arrived one week prior to the start of the fall semester. Every day during this week, Lynn held three rehearsal sessions, one in the morning, one in the afternoon, and one in the evening. Throughout the week, the singers learned and memorized the

\footnote{George Lynn, "100 Concerts Later," \textit{Westminster Choir College Alumni News} (1968).}

\footnote{Dennis Shrock, Interview by Author, Phone Interview, 30 March 2010, Digital recording.}
entire tour repertoire. On the first day of classes, the Westminster Choir performed the concert repertoire for the student body of Westminster Choir College.\footnote{Branton, Interview by Author.}

\textit{Singer Placement}

When classifying voices, Lynn preferred first sopranos with expressive high notes, second sopranos with rich middle-high notes, first altos with rich middle-low notes, and second altos with expressive low sounds. Lynn required first tenors with an “effortless [sounding] high register,” second tenors with a full middle-high sound, baritones with a “baritone richness,” and basses with a solid sounding low register.\footnote{Buehler, 46.}

Lynn accepted 48 singers into the Westminster Choir with 12 singers on each voice part. He labeled two of the singers in each section as alternates; although they rehearsed with the choir the entire year, they only sang in the concerts and went on tour with the Choir if one of the regular members was unable to sing. Lynn classified each of the voices in the section on a continuum from light to heavy. He labeled the lightest voice 1 and the heaviest voice 12 and assigned each singer to a quartet based upon their number classification. For example, the ones from each of the four sections had the lightest voices, and sang in the same quartet.\footnote{Branton, Interview by Author.} He did this so that each singer felt comfortable within their placement to produce their own voice. By so doing, Lynn created an atmosphere where “they were [able to sing] with their own voice and not with their sense of ‘I hope my gray flannel matches yours.’”\footnote{Buehler, 50.} He assigned numbers one through six to the first part of each section, and seven through twelve to the second part.\footnote{Shrock.}

The Westminster Choir generally stood in quartets in three rows with the heaviest voices in the middle, and the lightest voices on the outside. However, the standing arrangement was

\footnote{Branton, Interview by Author.}
\footnote{Buehler, 46.}
\footnote{Branton, Interview by Author.}
\footnote{Shrock.}
\footnote{Buehler, 50.}
\footnote{Shrock.}
flexible depending on the style of music. For example, at times he asked the ensemble to sing in sections rather than quartets in order to emphasize a polyphonic texture.\footnote{Ibid.}

Lynn expressed the desire to achieve the same type of balance as Williamson, equating the balance between the sections of a good choir with a New England church (see Figure twelve on page 50). Thus, the bass sound was the fundamental element that received the most prominence in the overall choral sound. Lynn encouraged the other sections to sing at an appropriate dynamic level so that the basses could be consistently heard.\footnote{Buehler.}

**Vowels and Diction**

Much like Williamson, Lynn felt that natural pronunciation heightened the meaning of the text. Lynn’s approach to vowels followed the basic principles of Williamson’s vowel pronunciation guide (see Figure 13 on page 50). He insisted that singers pronounce the consonants so that the text could be understood. However, because tone was Lynn’s primary emphasis in the choral experience, he felt that the consonants should be “appliquéd” onto the overall tone; he did not want the consonant to interrupt the tonal color.\footnote{Shrock.} Lynn used two analogies to explain the difference between vowels and consonants. First, he compared vowels to a current of electricity: “The vowel is the flow of current and [I could] go over and turn the light off and say, ‘That’s a consonant. The power is still there.’ Then [I could] turn it on again.”\footnote{Buehler, 63.} Second, from one of his voice teachers he learned to compare singing to the flow of a river of vowels with a consonant thrown in from time to time.

**Vocal Pedagogy**

Lynn did not specifically address vocal technique in the rehearsal process with the Westminster Choir. All singers in the ensemble participated in individual voice lessons, and took voice classes each year. Thus, Lynn did not feel it was not necessary to address individual
technique. Instead, he sought to create an environment where individuals had freedom to produce their own tone quality.¹⁷⁸

Two areas related to vocal technique that Lynn did address in the rehearsal process included posture and breath. He ascribed to Williamson’s belief that singing was a dramatic, physical activity. He believed that because singing was a physical activity, those who were physically strong created the better overall tone quality. Lynn also believed that the singers created breath control through a control of emotions. It was the singers’ responsibility to portray emotions, but not to feel them. He felt that if singers experienced emotions during the performance, breathing became constricted. Thus, in the rehearsal process, he worked for breath to become a natural part of the singing process unrelated to the emotion of the music.¹⁷⁹

Conclusions

Lynn created a full, robust, dark overall choral sound with the Westminster Choir that was consistent regardless of musical style. He accomplished this in the rehearsal process by placing the singers according to weight of their voice, thus creating an environment where individuals felt free to sing with their own individual tone quality. Accordingly, Lynn’s main priority was the creation of tone; he emphasized natural pronunciation of vowels with little emphasis on consonants.

Lynn resigned as director of the Westminster Choir in 1969 in order to more fully devote himself to composition. Ray Robinson, whom the board of directors had recently appointed as president of the college, determined that it would be best to conduct a two-year search for Lynn’s replacement. He appointed Arthur Sjogren as the interim director of the Westminster Choir with the assumption that he would lead the choir until the conclusion of the search. However, Sjogren was not successful in connecting with the students of the Westminster Choir. Thus, Robinson relieved him of the position at the conclusion of the 1969-1970 school year. During the

¹⁷⁸ Branton, Interview by Author.

¹⁷⁹ Buehler.
subsequent year, Warren Martin and Elaine Brown shared the role as conductor of the choir. Robinson appointed Joseph Flummerfelt as the new director of the Westminster Choir in 1971.\textsuperscript{180}  

\textbf{JOSEPH FLUMMERFELT}

Historical Background and Other Considerations

Flummerfelt began taking piano lessons from his mother when he was very young, and his interest in the organ led to organ lessons. At the age of five, he came home from church one Sunday and played the four-part arrangement of “Stand up for Jesus” he had heard at church that day. His mother, who was a piano teacher, taught Flummerfelt piano and organ lessons from the time he was a young boy until he entered college. As a sophomore in high school, he acquired his first church job as an organist and he discovered a love for choral conducting, and helping people to sing beautifully.\textsuperscript{181}  

Flummerfelt attended DePauw University majoring in church organ music and the faculty gave him many opportunities to conduct and teach choral ensembles, musicals, and opera. Interestingly, he did not study conducting while at DePauw, because he “could always sort of conduct, and [he] sort of knew what to do.”\textsuperscript{182} While at DePauw, he became acquainted with Robert Shaw who encouraged him to study with Julius Herford; he attended a summer workshop given by Herford following graduation at DePauw. Flummerfelt’s studies with Herford exposed him to new repertoire and means of studying scores. Flummerfelt’s experiences with Herford also solidified his previous feelings that music had a human spiritual meaning.\textsuperscript{183} Following his studies with Herford in the summer of 1958, Purdue University hired him as the university

\textsuperscript{180} Everett.  

Schisler.  

\textsuperscript{181} Everett.  


\textsuperscript{182} Flummerfelt.  

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid.  

Shangkuan.
organist and the administration assigned him to form glee clubs in the auxiliary Purdue campuses. The following summer, he became acquainted with Elaine Brown with whom a few of his friends had been studying at Union Seminary in New York. He attended a summer workshop led by Brown and she invited him to come to Philadelphia as an intern with the Singing City and to pursue a master’s degree at the Philadelphia Conservatory of Music. Upon attaining his master’s degree, he attended the University of Illinois where he studied with Harold Decker and eventually received a DMA in choral conducting. The summer after completing his coursework at University of Illinois, he travelled to France to study with Nadia Boulanger for nine weeks.  

From Robert Shaw and Nadia Boulanger, I learned the importance of inner rhythm and a commitment to the printed score. Elaine Brown influenced me enormously through her commitment to the power of music to build community. Harold Decker’s integrity and his ability to work with choral sound were also significant influences. And of course, working with nearly forty of the world’s great orchestral conductors from the U.S. and Europe, my musical growth has been continually stretched and deepened.

Upon completion of his doctoral coursework and his studies with Boulanger, DePauw University hired him as the Director of Choral Activities, a position he held for four years. Florida State University then hired him to serve as the Director of Choral Activities; during this time, he completed his doctoral degree and taught for three years. During his time at Florida State University, he became closely acquainted with Robert Shaw as the conductor of the Atlanta Symphony Chorus, with whom he collaborated on two performances. Italian composer Gian Carlo Menotti was in residence at Florida State University while Flummerfelt was the conductor of the University Singers. The University Singers performed three of Menotti’s compositions; this collaboration resulted in an invitation for Flummerfelt to take the University Singers to the Spoleto festival in Italy during the summer of 1971. Flummerfelt was subsequently hired as Artistic Director for the Spoleto Festival in Italy and the Charleston, South Carolina Spoleto Festival.

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184 Everett. Flummerfelt. Shangkuan.

185 Shangkuan: 10.
Festival in 1977. This experience afforded opportunities for Flummerfelt to collaborate with international conductors, vocal and instrumental soloists, dancers, etc.  

During Flummerfelt’s time at Florida State University, the administration of Westminster Choir College continued their search for a replacement for Williamson that would return the school to a position of prominence. The Board of Directors appointed Ray Robinson as president of Westminster Choir College in 1969. Because of the resignation of George Lynn as director of the Westminster Choir that same year, Robinson began a search for a new conductor. Robinson was interested in hiring a conductor who had previously been unaffiliated with Westminster Choir College and who would bring a more mainstream approach to choral singing than had previously existed at the college. He organized an unofficial search committee for the position that consisted of Robert Shaw, Roger Wagner, Elaine Brown, and Julius Herford. Shaw first told Flummerfelt that Westminster Choir College was interested in considering him for the position of Director of Choral Activities during the summer of 1970. Following interviews in Tallahassee, Florida and Princeton, New Jersey, Flummerfelt was hired as the Director of Choral Activities at Westminster Choir College in 1971 where he taught for 33 years.

Approach to Choral Sound

Three main influences affected Flummerfelt’s overall choral sound. First, Flummerfelt based his choral sound on the idea that singing is an organic process and that music symbolizes human emotion specifically and humanity in general. He felt that the ensemble created this musical emotion by working with the singers to accentuate the harmonic tension and relaxation of the music. He believed that this experience influenced all aspects of the singing and music-making process and that the process created musical emotion. Too much refinement or control of the singing process detracted from the natural, artistic nature of the choral art. This approach to choral singing did not result in a specific overall sound, instead, the sound changed from year

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186 Flummerfelt.

Shangkuan.

187 Everett.
to year depending on the makeup of the ensemble, and from piece to piece depending on the stylistic requirements.188

Second, the German vocal pedagogue, Frauke Haasemann, influenced the overall choral sound of the Westminster Choir. Haasemann first came to Westminster Choir College with her colleague, Wilhelm Ehmann, during the summer session in 1974. Ehmann and Haasemann had worked together for many years in Germany with the professional choir, Westfälische Kantorei. Ehmann conducted the choirs and Haasemann did the warm-ups and voice building. After three summer sessions, Ray Robinson invited Ehmann and Haasemann to come to Westminster Choir College to perform and record the six Bach motets during the 1977-1978 academic year during Flummerfelt’s sabbatical leave in the spring of 1978.189

Haasemann preceded Ehmann during the fall 1977 term and worked with Flummerfelt in preparing the vocal technique of the students for singing the Bach B-Minor Mass. Following Flummerfelt’s departure, Ehmann arrived in January 1978 to prepare and record the motets. Haasemann’s voice building work intrigued Flummerfelt and Robinson. Furthermore, because Flummerfelt was not a singer, there was a need on campus for an expert in choral singing.190 Thus, Robinson contracted Haasemann to stay for the 1978-1979 school year. She remained until her death in 1991.191


190 Flummerfelt, Interview by Author.


Adam Luebke, Interview by Author, Tallahassee, FL, 30 October 2009, Digital recording.

Andrew Megill, Interview by Author, Princeton, NJ, 2 October 2009, Digital recording.

Trott.

Everett.

Brenda Smith, Interview by Author, Phone Interview, 22 March 2010, Digital recording.

Shrock.

Allen Crowell, Interview by Author, Phone Interview, 26 March 2010, Digital recording.
During her time at Westminster Choir College, Haasemann taught conducting and voice building. She also warmed up the Westminster Symphonic Choir and the Westminster Choir. She integrated her vocal exercises at the beginning of rehearsal with the musical styles that were to be performed during the rehearsal. This approach to voice building served to create a variety of sounds depending on the variety of musical styles. As a result of her work, Flummerfelt found that the overall sound of the Westminster Choir was brighter and more focused, especially in the sound of the women’s voices.\textsuperscript{192}

The caliber of singers in the Westminster Choir was the third influence that greatly affected the choral sound that Flummerfelt achieved. Because the choir was comprised of graduate and undergraduate vocal and choral majors, all participated in private voice lessons. Therefore, Flummerfelt dealt with mature voices, many of whom were training for professional singing careers. This caliber of singer in the ensemble resulted in a mature, resonant overall choral tone quality. Flummerfelt encouraged his singers to sing freely, with a great deal of resonant space and breath flow. Additionally, he sought to allow each individual singer to develop his/her own sound, and then worked to create a type of ensemble sound from the mixture of the voices.\textsuperscript{193}

\section*{Selection of Singers}

Auditions for the Westminster Choir took place in the spring and consisted of two parts. The purpose of the first five-minute audition was to identify the best musicians available for the coming year. He accomplished this through vocal exercises, sight-reading, and rhythmic

\begin{itemize}
\item Everett.
\item Smith.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{192} Flummerfelt, Interview by Author.

\begin{itemize}
\item Smith.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{193} Flummerfelt, Interview by Author.

\begin{itemize}
\item Jordan.
\item Luebke.
\item Megill.
\end{itemize}
exercises. The vocal exercises generally included five-tone scales, whole tone scales, and range extensions in order to determine intonation, musicality and appropriate section assignment. He also used coloratura exercises in order to determine the flexibility and agility of the voice throughout the range. Flummerfelt wrote a sight-reading exercise to determine the singers’ musical ability. The exercises included difficult modulations and leaps. As a result, singers who performed the exercise perfectly either had perfect pitch, or were superb sight-readers.

From the initial interview, Flummerfelt also determined the singer’s personality. He watched their face and posture as they entered the room in order to determine their passion for singing and anticipation and excitement for the audition. Flummerfelt did not recall those who appeared aloof and haughty, regardless of their singing ability. Instead, he carefully examined those who demonstrated excitement and depth of personality in order to determine if their musical ability matched the desired personality characteristics.\(^{194}\)

From the initial audition, Flummerfelt determined those singers whom he would recall; he gave these singers were four score excerpts to prepare to sing as part of an ensemble including a coloratura piece from the Bach B Minor Mass, a chromatic section from a Brahms part-song, a 20\(^{th}\) Century composition, and a folk song. The recall was also an individual audition, however, Flummerfelt invited the staff accompanist, the head of the voice department, Frauke Haasemann (during the earlier years), and Andrew Megill (during the later years). The committee listened to hear if the singer was able to adapt to the varying musical styles while maintaining an overall musical approach to the singing.\(^{195}\)

Although voice quality was important, Flummerfelt placed greater emphasis on the musical maturity of the singer. Through hearing the folk song, the committee was best able to witness the singers’ ability to sing with appropriate phrase shape and musical nuance.

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\(^{194}\) Flummerfelt, Interview by Author.

Jordan.


Megill.

\(^{195}\) Flummerfelt, Interview by Author.

Lee.

Megill.
Musicianship was also very important. Individuals who were not often the best singers in the audition pool but who sight-read perfectly and demonstrated good intonation were often selected for the ensemble.\(^{196}\)

**Singer Placement**

Flummerfelt asked the singers to indicate their desired voice part on the audition form. However, he classified each voice into a specific section based upon what he heard and what a particular section needed. In the cases where he desired to assign someone to a voice part that was different from what the singer indicated, he sought the permission of the voice teacher to change the voice part.\(^{197}\)

For each section, Flummerfelt sought the following characteristics: first sopranos were required to float easily and spin in the upper range; second sopranos had a somewhat heavier mechanism especially in the middle of the range; altos were selected on the basis that they could access the chest voice in a healthy, vibrant manner; first tenors had similar quality to the first sopranos—they could move easily through the passaggio and float and spin with a light mechanism in the upper range; baritones were slightly heavier than tenors, and basses were selected for their ability to sing low pitches with clarity.\(^{198}\)

The choir was consistently comprised of forty singers. Numerical relationships between the sections included 12 basses, 8 tenors, 10 altos, and 10 sopranos. In order to seat the singers, Flummerfelt would wait until the third rehearsal so that the singers could get used to singing

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Flummerfelt, "Does it Sing?."

\(^{197}\) Flummerfelt, Interview by Author.

Megill.

\(^{198}\) Flummerfelt, Interview by Author.

Jordan.

Lee.

Megill.
together. He would have them line up by section from shortest to tallest, and listen to them sing a *forte* five-tone scale two at a time. Flummerfelt asked ensemble members to sing in a soloistic manner so that he could hear their natural voice; he was not interested in matching voices; instead, he listened for an alignment of vibrato, and balance of colors that enabled ensemble members to sing comfortably with their own voice.\(^{199}\)

Flummerfelt did not ask the singers to alter their sound in order to create a type of blend; he did not use the term blend in the rehearsal process. Instead, he asked singers to create an ensemble sound by singing freely and singing the right vowel at the right time on the right pitch. Thus, ensemble occurred naturally rather than through asking the singers to match their individual tone color and quality to an ideal.\(^{200}\)

Flummerfelt often emphasized flexible balance between the sections in rehearsals. Flummerfelt placed greatest emphasis on the balancing of chords. During rehearsals, the choir sang in two rows in the shape of a rectangle with the basses on the left, tenors on the right, and sopranos and altos in the center (see Figure 14). During performance, the choir sang in four rows on risers in a sectional formation and a mixed formation. Within the sectional formation, the sopranos and basses stood on the left with the sopranos in front of the basses and the altos and tenors stood on the right with the altos in front of the basses (see Figure 15). For some performances, Flummerfelt flipped the sectional arrangement so that the basses and sopranos were on the right and the altos and tenors on the right. He used a mixed formation for pieces that required less uniformity of tone quality such as music from the Romantic tradition.\(^{201}\)

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Flummerfelt, Interview by Author.

Jordan.

Lee.

Megill.

\(^{200}\) Flummerfelt, "Blend."

\(^{201}\) Flummerfelt, Interview by Author.

Luebke.
Vowels and Diction

Flummerfelt sought unified neutral vowel sounds throughout the choir. He determined neutral vowels by the style and language of the music being sung. For example, the ensemble sang English vowels in a way that matched the spoken language. Overall vowel color varied depending on the musical context and language of the piece. The singers modified vowels in the extreme parts of the range with open, dark vowel colors in the top of the range and closed, bright vowels in the bottom of the range. Additionally, Flummerfelt taught singers that any word beginning with a vowel should be preceded by space or silence in order for the word to be understood. Flummerfelt utilized whole tone scales and four-part chords during the warm-ups in order for the singers to adjust their ears and approach to vowels to match what they heard. Furthermore, he asked ensemble members to “re-sing” the appropriate vowel especially through
sustains and melismatic passages. Flummerfelt used vowels to color the overall tone quality of the ensemble. When seeking a richer, more open tone quality, Flummerfelt asked for more open, dark vowels with a great deal of resonant space. When seeking a straighter overall sound, he asked for brighter, more closed vowels. He accomplished this through the use of neutral syllables in the rehearsal process. He used the [i] vowel for Renaissance music and the [o] and [a] vowels for Romantic literature. When introducing text, he asked the singers to continue coloring the words with these vowel sounds. Flummerfelt also varied his approach to diction, integrally relating it to the overall articulation of the piece and the style of the language; for example, German called for much harder consonants than French did.

The ensemble utilized consonants for both clarity of text and for expression. Flummerfelt was willing to sacrifice beauty of tone in order to create the desired dramatic effect. It was not only of utmost importance for Flummerfelt that foreign language diction was accurate, but that the singers internalized the expressive elements of the text. He accomplished this by bringing in language experts to the rehearsal in order to evaluate the pronunciation and inflection, and provide feedback.

Vocal Pedagogy

From 1978-1991 Frauke Haasemann maintained the role of voice builder for the Westminster Choir. The voice-building period lasted ten minutes at the beginning of each rehearsal. Following the warm-ups, Haasemann would sit to the side of the podium in front of the choir in order to be able to interject suggestions regarding the vocal technique of the students.

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202 Flummerfelt, Interview by Author.
Luebke.
Megill.

Flummerfelt, Interview by Author.
Haasemann and Jordan.
Luebke.

204 Flummerfelt, Interview by Author.
or to respond to questions from Flummerfelt throughout the rehearsal process. This team approach resulted in a collaborative environment where Haasemann played an integral role in the final performance product.

Haasemann based her approach to vocal pedagogy on a hierarchical order of techniques that build upon one another in order to produce healthy vocal technique. She divided the warm-up period into two sections: General Exercises and Specific Exercises. The general exercises were similar from rehearsal to rehearsal and included the following emphases:

1. Exercises for awakening the mind and imagination
2. Relaxation of body
3. Posture (standing and sitting)
4. Expanding the vocal tract
   4.1. Relaxation of jaw, tongue, and lips
   4.2. Opening of the space mouth and throat
5. Breathing
   5.1. Activation of the diaphragm
   5.2. Exhalation
   5.3. Inhalation
   5.4. Support
6. Resonance/Placement
7. Dynamics
8. Crescendo/Decrescendo (*messa di voce*)
9. Register Consistency
10. Range Extension
   10.1. High range
   10.2. Low range
11. Flexibility (runs)

Many of the general exercises utilized by Haasemann include imagery and imagination. For example, in working to attain singer relaxation, Haasemann walked the choir through a routine of waking up in the morning and taking a shower, hanging wash, going to work, apple
picking, etc. She utilized similar imageries to teach correct diaphragmatic activity, i.e. panting like a dog, barking like a dog, laughing, puffing on a window, cooling soup, etc.

When discussing resonance and placement, Haasemann utilized exercises that began with an “m” through humming, imitating a cow, and singing, “bumble bee.” In order to activate the vocal resonators, she used phrases that included, “out of your forehead, not out of your voice,” “out of your third eye—in between your other two eyes,” “out of the chimney on top of your head,” “get the feeling of yawning,” and “have a floating, spinning feeling.”

Haasemann utilized specific exercises in a flexible manner depending on the style of music that Flummerfelt was going to rehearse in that session. She utilized and built upon the concepts presented in the general exercises in order to create and execute the specific exercises. Thus, as the singers mastered the general exercises throughout the school year, she spent a greater amount of time with the specific exercises.

205 Haasemann included the following areas as specific exercises:

12. Execution of Leaps
13. Legato
14. Staccato
15. Martellato
16. Accents, *sforzati*
17. Rhythmic Development
18. Diction
   18.1. Vowels (diphthongs, Latin, Italian, German, French)
   18.2. Consonants
19. Vowel Modification (for blend, intonation)
20. Finding the *falsetto* voice for men
21. Ear training for choirs
22. STYLE: Renaissance
23. STYLE: Baroque

206 Haasemann and Jordan, 51.

207 Ibid.

208 The video companion to *Group Vocal Technique* shows Haasemann conducting the general and specific exercises with choirs of various ages.
Specific exercises for these concepts are presented in *Voice Building for Choirs* by Wilhelm Ehmann and Frauke Haasemann,\textsuperscript{209} and *Group Vocal Technique* by Frauke Haasemann and James Jordan.\textsuperscript{210}

Following Haasemann’s death, Flummerfelt did not feel that it was necessary to address vocal technique in the choral rehearsal because of the caliber of singers within the Westminster Choir. Instead, he addressed singing issues that he heard within the music rather than as an isolated issue of vocal technique. Flummerfelt expected singers to warm up their own voices prior to rehearsals and performance in order for each singer to be able to produce their own unique tone quality. He utilized a few exercises at the beginning of rehearsal only to encourage each of the singers to fill the space and to develop a unified dynamic level.\textsuperscript{211}

Flummerfelt sought to develop a healthy and vibrant sound coupled with a freedom of airflow. Because he believed the conductor was the instigator of the breath, he worked to demonstrate the specific type of breath he desired for each individual piece. He emphasized that the conductor and the singer breathe together at the same time, and in the same way, in order to create the desired sound and technique. Furthermore, Flummerfelt sought a “full-bodied” approach to singing where he emphasized the achievement of head resonance and chest resonance, thus creating a warm, rich overall sound.\textsuperscript{212}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{208} Haasemann and Jordan.
\item \textsuperscript{209} Ehmann and Haasemann.
\item \textsuperscript{210} Haasemann and Jordan.
\item \textsuperscript{211} Flummerfelt, Interview by Author.
\item Luebke.
\item \textsuperscript{212} Ehmann and Haasemann.
\item Flummerfelt, “Does it Sing?.”
\item Megill.
\item Trott.
\end{itemize}
Flummerfelt elicited the greatest variation in tone quality and vocal technique through his conducting gesture. He varied the overall gesture style drastically to create a visual display of his desired sound. He instructed singers to incorporate his gestures as they rehearsed so they would embody the desired sound quality. For example, in order to create a light, French quality, Flummerfelt asked singers to pull a ribbon out of their mouths: he found that this image caused singers to focus the sound in front of the face. For a deeper, German type of sound, the gestures moved lower in order to create a more full-bodied approach to singing.²¹³

He encouraged individual vibrato for most styles of music as long as the vibrato was in tune. When the vibrato was not in tune—meaning the oscillations occurred below the pitch—Flummerfelt encouraged a greater extent of breath to create a natural, free vibrato. Furthermore, vibrato was often out of tune because there was a lack of understanding of the musical line.

Conclusions

Flummerfelt sought a free, relaxed overall choral sound that he created through the development of a free flow of breath on the part of the singers and the conductor. Rather than blending the sounds of each singer, Flummerfelt preferred to allow individual singers to produce their own voice within the ensemble; the ensemble members achieved a type of blend by producing the right vowel on the right pitch at the right time. Emphasis on the individual voice created an overall choral sound that varied from year to year depending on the makeup of the ensemble. Frauke Haasemann’s work with the Westminster Choir influenced the overall choral sound of the ensemble. She utilized specific exercises built upon general principles of vocal technique to create variation in the overall sound depending on the style of music. Following Haasemann’s death, Flummerfelt created flexibility in sound through varying vowel colors, emphasizing different aspects of diction, altering the type of breath taken by the singer, and through the conducting gesture.

²¹³ Megill.
SUMMARY

Williamson founded the Westminster Choir School with the purpose of training musicians to work in the church setting. As a result, during the initial years, John Finley Williamson emulated the overall choral sound and purpose of the St. Olaf Choir. However, as the move of the Westminster Choir School to New York altered the overall purpose of the ensemble and the institution. Frequent collaborations with major symphony orchestras required a new approach to choral sound that allowed the Westminster Choir to project over the orchestra. As a result, Williamson sought a choral sound that projected and that had a darker, richer, and more vibrant tone quality with no emphasis on blend. He created this through an active approach to singing and development of the individual within the ensemble.

Joseph Flummerfelt also emphasized the value of individual voices within the ensemble. Singers were encouraged to sing with their individual tone quality while working to sing the right vowel on the right pitch and the right time. Furthermore, he placed voices within the ensemble so that they felt they could sing freely without working to match any other voice within the ensemble. The overall sound of the ensemble was flexible depending on the makeup of the ensemble and the type of music. Flummerfelt achieved this by encouraging a constant free flow of breath and a conducting gesture that embodied the musical style.

Although Christiansen and Williamson founded the St. Olaf Choir and the Westminster Choir on similar principles and with similar approaches to choral singing, subsequent years resulted in a divergence in choral style. The following two chapters describe the approach to choral sound of the current conductors of the St. Olaf Choir and the Westminster Choir. Chapter four describes the methods of Anton Armstrong, director of the St. Olaf Choir. Chapter five describes the methods of Joe Miller, director of the Westminster Choir.
CHAPTER 4

ST. OLAF CHOIR—CURRENT PERSPECTIVE

Four individuals have directed the St. Olaf Choir. The approach to choral singing of F. Melius Christiansen, Olaf C. Christiansen, and Kenneth Jennings were described in Chapter 2. This chapter describes the approach to choral singing of Anton Armstrong, current conductor of the St. Olaf Choir. Historical Background and Other Considerations are presented followed by a description of Armstrong’s approach to choral sound including a discussion of selection of singers, singer placement, vowels and diction, and vocal pedagogy. Finally, conclusions and a summary are presented.

ANTON ARMSTRONG

Historical Background and Other Considerations

Anton Armstrong was born in West Hempstead, Long Island, New York in 1956. His family attended the Lutheran Church of the Epiphany where Armstrong gave his first solo performance as a kindergartener. He continued singing and performing at the church as a member of the Junior Choir and as a pianist for the devotionals at the parochial school where he played hymns by ear. Because of his apparent musical abilities, Armstrong’s parents allowed him to study piano beginning in 1966.\(^{214}\)

Carl and Carol Weber, music directors at the Lutheran Church of the Epiphany and graduates of Westminster Choir College, also championed Armstrong’s musical abilities. Carol

\(^{214}\) Armstrong, Interview by Author.

Shaw.
Weber first exposed Armstrong to the importance of text to choral music, and the idea that everyone should sing from birth to the grave. The Weber’s took Armstrong to a summer music camp at Westminster and took him to concerts of the American Boychoir. After hearing the Boychoir, Armstrong expressed a desire to attend the school. After being refused by his parents for one year, he was allowed to attend the school from 1969-1971. Upon his return to West Hampton, Armstrong attended the Cathedral School of St. Paul; while there, he served as organist and organized a mixed choir with a nearby girls’ school.\textsuperscript{215}

Armstrong first heard the St. Olaf Choir in 1972 at a concert performed at the Lincoln Center in New York City. Upon graduation from the Cathedral School of St. Paul, Armstrong began considering universities with strong music programs and church music programs. After visiting several campuses, he determined that St. Olaf College would offer the best experience for him. While at St. Olaf, Armstrong sang with the Chapel Choir for two years, and the St. Olaf Choir for two years. He also directed the Liturgical Choir for three years. He graduated from St. Olaf College in 1978 with a degree in vocal performance.\textsuperscript{216}

Following completion of his bachelor’s degree, Armstrong began a master’s degree at the University of Illinois where he studied with Harold Decker, a student of Olaf Christiansen and a teacher of Kenneth Jennings and Robert Scholz. While at the University of Illinois, Armstrong served as a choir director at St. Matthew’s Lutheran Church and conducted the senior choir, the handbell choir, and a children’s choir. Armstrong completed his master’s degree in choral conducting in 1980 and was subsequently hired at Calvin College, the institution where Olaf Christiansen had taught, as a sabbatical leave replacement and then as a full-time faculty member. During this three-year period, Armstrong conducted the concert choir and men’s and women’s choruses. He also taught voice, choral conducting, music history, and music theory. In 1983, he began working on a doctorate at Michigan State University where he studied with

\textsuperscript{215} Armstrong, Interview by Author.

Shaw.

\textsuperscript{216} Armstrong, Interview by Author.

Jennings, Interview by Author.

Scholz.

Shaw.
Charles Smith. While a graduate student, he taught choral conducting and literature and conducted the Women’s Glee Club.\textsuperscript{217}

Armstrong completed his doctoral work in 1987. His dissertation, entitled \textit{Celebrating 75 Years of Excellence: The Evolution of the St. Olaf Choir}, examined the evolution of the mission of the St. Olaf Choir as well as the changes that each conductor brought to St. Olaf College.\textsuperscript{218} While completing his dissertation, Calvin College rehired Armstrong where he served 1986 to 1990, attaining the rank of Associate Professor. As a member of the Calvin College faculty, Armstrong conducted the Campus Choir comprised of freshman and sophomore students and taught choral conducting, choral methods, and music appreciation. He was also active in the community, serving as music director and conductor of the semi-professional Calvin College Alumni Choir, conductor of the St. Cecilia Youth Chorale, artistic director of the St. Cecilia Music Society, and conductor of the Grand Rapids Symphony Chorus.\textsuperscript{219}

Following an international search, St. Olaf College hired Anton Armstrong as the fourth director of the St. Olaf Choir in 1990. At 34 years-old, Armstrong was the youngest conductor of the choir by six years. In order to fulfill the mission statement of St. Olaf College that paired a global perspective with being rooted in the gospel, Armstrong expanded the overall repertoire of the ensemble to include multi-cultural folk music and contemporary music in addition to the traditional classical and Norwegian selections of previous conductors. Jennings had introduced music from the Eastern bloc and the Orient; Armstrong sought to expand the repertoire further by performing music from African American, South American, Caribbean, African, and Asian influences.\textsuperscript{220}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{217} Armstrong, Interview by Author. \\
Shaw. \\
\textsuperscript{218} Armstrong, “Celebrating 75 Years.” \\
\textsuperscript{219} Armstrong, Interview by Author. \\
Shaw. \\
\textsuperscript{220} Christopher Aspaas, Interview by Author, Northfield, MN, 15 September 2009, Digital recording. \\
Armstrong, Interview by Author. \\
Scholz. \\
Shaw. \\
\end{flushright}
Approach to Choral Sound

Armstrong based his desired choral sound on a lyric, art-song approach to singing. One main reason for this type of approach was that all the singers with the St. Olaf Choir were between the ages of 19 and 22; he felt that a lyric approach was best suited for this age group. The resultant sound was vibrant, but also allowed for clarity of intonation. Furthermore, Armstrong sought to create beauty of musical line rather than volume. Much like the art-song soloists of the day, an artistic aesthetic treatment of text played an important role in the development of the choral sound. Armstrong did not emphasize blend in the choral rehearsal process, rather he considered the overall sound as a mosaic of intelligent soloists that merged to create the overall picture. He created a blended sound was created by selecting only those singers who possessed a lyric tone quality. In order to accomplish this, Armstrong worked with the singers in rehearsal to create uniformity of vowel sounds, pitch, rhythm, consonant articulation, dynamics, and phrasing while still allowing them to contribute their individual color and singing as intelligent soloists.\(^{221}\)

For Armstrong, the whole person must embody the choral sound not just the voice. Armstrong often recited a mantra he learned from Helen Kemp, “Body, mind, spirit, voice; it takes a whole person to sing and rejoice.” Armstrong nurtured each individual human being in his ensemble through the music. He emphasized that the full expression of each individual brought about the greatest beauty in the voice. By so doing, the expression of the music received prominence rather than just the vocal technique of the individual.\(^{222}\)

\(^{221}\) Aspaas.

Armstrong, Interview by Author.


Luebke.

\(^{222}\) Armstrong, Interview by Author.

Hanawalt.
Selection of Singers

Selection of singers played a major role in the overall choral sound that the St. Olaf Choir produced. When auditioning singers, Armstrong sought those who best fit the overall sound ideal described above. By so doing, Armstrong created the type of sound that he desired naturally without asking singers to modify aspects of their individual voice.

Auditions for the St. Olaf Choir consisted of two parts: an individual audition and interview with Armstrong and a callback where individual sections met together in order to achieve the desired ensemble sound. For the first round of auditions, Armstrong met privately with each singer and talked with them in order to determine personality and character. Next, he tested for range, flexibility, elasticity, and release of the voice utilizing an exercise that spanned an octave (see Figure 16).223

Figure 16. Vocalize utilized by Anton Armstrong in audition.

Armstrong tested musical memory through short, increasingly complex melodic phrases that he played on the piano. He began with diatonic and tonal phrases, followed by modal, and those that contained whole tone scale figures, tritones, and large leaps. Through the tonal memory, Armstrong heard intonation, overall musicality, the quality of the ear. Armstrong placed more emphasis on sight-reading than his predecessors did; he used a little-known Bach chorale in order to test sight-reading ability.224

Armstrong selected only those singers whose voices fit within the lyric mode of singing. A main criterion in the selection of singers for the St. Olaf choir was the flexibility of the voice and the ability to sing with the light mechanism throughout the range. This type of voice allowed for the achievement of a type of blend that did not required singers to alter their

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223 Ibid.
224 Ibid.
individual tone quality. Furthermore, this type of choral singing allowed the audience to understand the text, a main priority for the St. Olaf Choir under Armstrong.²²⁵

When classifying women’s voices, Armstrong listened for the natural tessitura of the voice. Soprano voices were capable of utilizing a light mechanism in the top of the range with ease, flexibility, and good intonation but still with core and color. Mezzos were those who did not have the ease of the upper range, but who had a rich, solid middle range. Altos created a rich, dark tone. Tenors, like sopranos, were capable of singing in the upper range with a light overall sound that was flexible. Basses provided the acoustical foundation, thus were those who sang with a great deal of core, especially in the lower range.²²⁶

In the audition, Armstrong also spent a great deal of time determining the personality and character of the individual; he was interested in finding individuals who were most invested in the St. Olaf Choir rather than in themselves. Before Armstrong selected a singer for the ensemble, he investigated their academic record, spoke with other professors, and inquired the singer with the other students in order to determine their true character and fit within the community. Additionally, he sought a commitment from each student to participate in the choir until graduation from St. Olaf College. As a result, many members were part of the ensemble for two or three years.²²⁷

**Singer Placement**

Armstrong seated the choir so that singers were able to sing as freely as possible while achieving an agreement of vibrato rate, timbre, and pitch. When placing singers, Armstrong had the singers sing the “I sigh to sing” vocal exercise that spanned an octave; he focused on those

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²²⁵ Ibid.

Hanawalt.

Scholz.

²²⁶ Armstrong, Interview by Author.

Aspaas.

Luebke.

²²⁷ Armstrong, Interview by Author.
areas of the range that contain passaggi in order to listen for areas of the range where the singers were most susceptible to register shifts.\footnote{228}

Armstrong built sectional balance upon a foundation of a solid bass sound. The St. Olaf Choir was consistently comprised of 75 singers. Numerical relationships between the sections included twenty sopranos, eighteen or nineteen altos, seventeen or eighteen tenors, nineteen to twenty-one basses; Armstrong felt that the basses and sopranos needed the largest numbers in order to create an acoustically equal balance.\footnote{229}

Under Armstrong, the St. Olaf Choir sang in a sectional formation where he placed the sopranos on the left with the basses behind. He placed the altos on the right with the tenors behind (see Figure 17). Within the soprano section, the second sopranos all stood in one row in front of the first sopranos who were on the second row. Armstrong placed the sopranos this way in order to hear the second sopranos better and to allow freedom for the first sopranos by not placing them right in front of the conductor. The same concept applied to the tenor section: the second tenors stood in front of the first tenors. In addition to aiding in balance, this standing arrangement also allowed the lyricism of the first tenors to influence the overall sound of the second tenors. For Armstrong, sectional block formation allowed for the best means of communication with each section. However, at times the choir stood in scrambled formation for intonation purposes.\footnote{230}

\footnote{228} Anton Armstrong, Rehearsal Footage of St. Olaf Choir, Northfield, MN, 16 September 2009, Digital video.

\footnote{229} Aspaas.

Armstrong, Interview by Author.

Scholz.

\footnote{230} Armstrong, Interview by Author.
Vowels and Diction

Under Armstrong’s direction, the mission of the St. Olaf Choir continued to emphasize religious text and music. Armstrong continuously emphasized the meaning of the text within each piece. Armstrong encouraged the singers to paint individual words within the texture of the piece in order to bring out the message. He selected pieces in order to expose congregations and audiences to Lutheran and other sacred hymns. As a result, Armstrong emphasized clarity of text over all other musical aspects. Armstrong spent a great deal of time in the choral rehearsal discussing and practicing proper pronunciation of all languages.231

Armstrong stressed the importance of ending consonants in order to make the text understandable. When singing English text, the St. Olaf Choir used shadow vowels following all voiced consonants at the end of words both within a phrase and at the end of a phrase so that the audience could easily understand the words. Armstrong indicated when a shadow vowel should occur with his left hand closing into a fist; thus, the location and timing of the shadow vowel was consistent and clean throughout the ensemble. The singers inserted a glottal attack on words

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231 Ibid.

Anton Armstrong, Rehearsal Footage of St. Olaf Choir, Northfield, MN, 14 September 2009, Digital video.
Anton Armstrong, Rehearsal Footage of St. Olaf Choir, Northfield, MN, 15 September 2009, Digital video.
Armstrong, Rehearsal Footage, 16 September 2009.
beginning with a vowel sound both at the beginning of a phrase and within the phrase. In rehearsal, Armstrong indicated the location of glottal by forming a bracket with the forefinger and thumb of his left hand.\(^{232}\)

Consistent rhythm also played an important role in the understanding and expression of text. Armstrong instructed the singers to become aware of the *tactus* by having them tap their shoulder to the subdivision of the beat while rehearsing. This kinesthetic exercise allowed for accurate placement of consonants for both clarity of rhythm and the understanding of the text.\(^{233}\)

In keeping with the tradition of St. Olaf Choir, Armstrong approached vowel pronunciation from a Northern European standpoint. The [i] was pronounced with a great deal of resonant space more toward the direction of the [y] sound, the [ε] was pronounced in the closed [e] position, and the closed [o] vowel was utilized throughout. As the range extended, the singers increased the overall resonant space in order to create a consistent vowel color throughout the range.\(^{234}\)

*Vocal Pedagogy*

Armstrong worked to establish a free release of the breath to allow the singer to sing to her/his maximum potential. Armstrong accomplished this by using many of the exercises from *Sing Legato* discussed in Chapter 2.\(^{235}\) The exercises that he utilized emphasized his main priorities regarding choral tone: with “Sigh the Tone” he worked to bring the head voice down into the lower range and to create an evenness of tone throughout the range; he utilized “Rich Tone” to promote a great deal of resonant space in the voice throughout the range; “Flexibility”

\(^{232}\) Armstrong, Rehearsal Footage, 17 September 2009.

\(^{233}\) Armstrong, Rehearsal Footage, 15 September 2009.

\(^{234}\) Armstrong, Rehearsal Footage, 16 September 2009.

\(^{235}\) Jennings, *Sing Legato*. 

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promoted a light overall tone in order to negotiate the quick passages—he also used this exercise to emphasize word stress and overall musicality.\textsuperscript{236}

Armstrong sought a freely released, vibrant sound from each individual within the ensemble. However, he did not allow “flutter” to enter into the sound, which he described as an overly fast vibrato that oscillated below the pitch. He felt that the flutter was the result of excessive weight in the voice and a hyper-function of the larynx. In order to eliminate flutter from the voice, Armstrong encouraged singing with the light mechanism with a free flow of breath. He also encouraged the singers to “sing with more spirit than flesh.”\textsuperscript{237}

Armstrong also utilized kinesthetic gesture with the singers in order to establish release of tension in the body and free release of the sound and to encourage the use of the whole body while singing. Especially during the warm-up period, following massages given to each other, the singers moved their arms to demonstrate the articulation, phrase direction, and desired tone quality for each warm-up. The singers then carried these gestures into the pieces, especially when Armstrong addressed one of the aforementioned areas of the singing. Furthermore, Armstrong utilized kinesthetic gesture in order to bring about difference in the overall choral sound for specific styles of music. For example, when singing a Bach motet, the singers danced around the room, for a Palestrina motet, the singers drew long lines in front of their bodies with their hands. The singers then transferred this established kinesthetic energy to their bodies in performance where movement by each singer was encouraged and accepted.\textsuperscript{238}

\textsuperscript{236} Armstrong, Rehearsal Footage, 14 September 2009.

Armstrong, Rehearsal Footage, 17 September 2009.

Shaw.

\textsuperscript{237} Armstrong, Interview by Author.

Armstrong, Rehearsal Footage, 17 September 2009.

Hanawalt.

\textsuperscript{238} Armstrong, Interview by Author.

Armstrong, Rehearsal Footage, 14 September 2009.

Armstrong, Rehearsal Footage, 17 September 2009.

Shaw.
Armstrong taught the singers to listen from the very first rehearsal. The unison chant, “Thee We Adore, O Hidden Savior, thee” from the Evangelical Lutheran Hymnal\textsuperscript{239} was consistently used as the first music sung each year. Through the rehearsal of the chant each year, Armstrong emphasized listening and focus as the priorities in choral singing. This resulted in a focus on vowel unification, a sense of ensemble, consonants, tone color, phrasing, communication between conductor and choir, etc. that allowed the singers to become exposed to Armstrong’s approach to choral singing.\textsuperscript{240}

All of the warm-up exercises ended with a sustain in the last sequence. In these moments, Armstrong slowly lifted his left arm in a curved position in order to indicate lift and lightness. The purpose of this sustain was to eliminate any excessive weight that may have entered the voice during the warm-up and to ensure that breath energy and direction were present throughout the entire phrase. During the first few warm-ups of a rehearsal, as the singers were reminded of a lyric approach to singing, a noticeable shift occurred from a heavy mechanism to a light mechanism and the beginning of the sustain. However, as the warm-ups progressed, the voices of the ensemble began to utilize the light mechanism throughout the warm-up so that no shift was necessary during the sustain.\textsuperscript{241}

Summary and Conclusions

Under Anton Armstrong, the St. Olaf Choir expanded its repertoire and mission to include the global community. As a result, while based upon the lyric art-song approach to choral singing, the overall sound was flexible in order to sing many different styles of choral music. These styles included traditional and contemporary Western European choral music as well as music of African American, African, Caribbean, Asian, and South American influences. The main influence in the overall sound of the St. Olaf choir was a selection of singers who sang with a lyric quality and could maintain a light mechanism throughout the singing range. Armstrong emphasized this lyric approach to singing in rehearsal through extensive warm-up exercises and through kinesthetic gesture.

\textsuperscript{239} Evangelical Lutheran Worship, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006).

\textsuperscript{240} Hanawalt.

\textsuperscript{241} Ibid.
The message of the performed music was Armstrong’s main priority. As a result, he emphasized text throughout the rehearsal process through insistence upon shadow vowels following all voiced consonants, rhythmic consistency across the ensemble, and understanding and painting of the text. Finally, Armstrong believed that choral singing must involve the entire human being throughout the music making process, thus reflected in the mantra he repeats often, “Body, mind, spirit, voice; it takes a whole person to sing and rejoice.” He felt that musicians best accomplished this through ensemble participation and working as a group to achieve a life of worth and service.
CHAPTER 5

WESTMINSTER CHOIR—CURRENT PERSPECTIVE

Three individuals have directed the Westminster Choir long-term. The approach to choral singing of John Finley Williamson and Joseph Flummerfelt were described in Chapter 3. This chapter describes the approach to choral singing of Joe Miller, current conductor of the Westminster Choir. Historical Background and Other Considerations are presented followed by a description of Miller’s approach to choral sound including a discussion of selection of singers, singer placement, vowels and diction, and vocal pedagogy. Finally, conclusions and a summary are presented.

JOE MILLER

Historical Background and Other Considerations

Miller began serious music study at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville where he received a bachelor’s degree in music education and voice. While at the University of Tennessee, Miller studied conducting with David Stuizenberger. Upon receiving his degree at the University of Tennessee, he taught high school choir in Knoxville.242

He continued his studies at the College-Conservatory of Music, University of Cincinnati where he received a master’s degree and a doctorate degree in choral conducting with a cognate in voice. While at Cincinnati Conservatory, Miller studied voice with David Adams and conducting with John Leman, Elmer Thomas, and Earl Rivers. Whiling studying voice at

Cincinnati Conservatory, Miller gained a technical understanding of the voice that has influenced his choral teaching. 243

Upon completion of his doctoral coursework at Cincinnati Conservatory, Miller accepted a sabbatical replacement position at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington. In 1994, California State University-Stanislaus hired him as Director of Choral Activities. During his five-year tenure, Miller completed his doctoral document and attained the Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the College-Conservatory of Music, University of Cincinnati. Western Michigan University subsequently hired Miller as Director of Choral Activities in 1999. While at Western Michigan, Miller’s choirs participated in European Competition. The University Chorale won the Grand Prize at the Robert Schumann International Choral Competition in 2002 and the Silver Medal at the 28th International May Choir Competition in 2005. 244

In 2006, following a two-year search, Westminster Choir College hired Miller as Director of Choral Activities and conductor of the Westminster Choir. As conductor of the Westminster Choir, Miller sought to program music of all different styles and times. However, a majority of the selected repertoire stemmed from 20th Century and Renaissance musical traditions, styles of music that consistently called for a bright overall choral sound.

Approach to Choral Sound

Miller’s approach to choral singing sought to embody the sound of the individual singers within the ensemble and bring the sound to a forward placement in order to create core in the sound. He began by developing core to the sound that was a balance of chiaro and oscuro (bright/dark) and that produced a vibrant sound. The resulting sound, however, tended toward the chiaro, thus creating a bright overall sound. In order to meet the stylistic requirements of the

243 Ibid.
244 Ibid.


music, Miller sought to manipulate the sound color and quality. He altered the sound and made it flexible through a manipulation of vowel sounds towards either a bright or a dark color.\footnote{Jordan.}

Based on the belief that the best singing is physical, Miller’s approach to singing sought freedom of the singers’ bodies. The warm-up period at the beginning of each rehearsal included many physical warm-ups in order to engage the body. He then gradually introduced singing was to the physical warm-ups so that singing and movement occurred simultaneously. Miller then consistently encouraged the singers to seek freedom of the body with movement throughout the rehearsal process.\footnote{Miller.}

\textit{Selection of Singers}

The audition process consisted of two parts. The first audition consisted contained three components: a prepared piece, sight-singing, and pitch memory. Miller utilized the prepared piece to learn how the student prepared for the audition and how they presented themselves in a performance situation. He also observed the students’ facility with languages and the nuance of the musical phrase. Following the prepared piece, Miller gave the students one minute to look at the sight-reading exercise before singing it. Miller used this time to observe the singers’ internal listening skills and ultimately their ability to sight-read. Pitch memory tested the accuracy of the ear and the singers’ ability to quickly recall melodic phrases.\footnote{Miller, Interview by Author.}

\footnote{Joe Miller, Rehearsal Footage of Westminster Choir, Princeton, NJ, 30 September 2009, Digital video.}

\footnote{Joe Miller, Rehearsal Footage of Westminster Choir, Princeton, NJ, 2 October 2009, Digital video.}

\footnote{Jordan.}

\footnote{Lee.}

\footnote{Megill.}
Miller utilized the callback audition in order to listen for those singers who sang best within the section. During the callback audition, Miller distributed a new piece that the singers sight-read. He then broke each section into small groups to hear several voices at the same time. During each group’s performance, Miller listened for consistency of quality throughout the range, color of the voice, and ability to quickly learn a piece and sing it musically. Miller then assigned each singer to sing in a quartet. He gave them a piece to learn and rehearse with their quartet; each quartet then sang the piece for the group. During the quartet process, Miller observed the singers’ ability to adapt to voices of other sections, lead a group, and facility of coping in a group setting.\textsuperscript{248}

Because of the large number of singers auditioning for the Westminster Choir, throughout the audition process Miller only communicated with each of the singers in order to give instructions relative to the audition process. As a result, other than the brief observation during the quartet section, he judged the singers mainly on singing and musical ability rather than personality and interaction with the conductor.\textsuperscript{249}

\textit{Singer Placement}

Singers indicated on the audition forms for which voice part they were interested in auditioning, Miller then assigned them to a specific section for the call back audition. Miller listened most carefully to those who indicated a preference for singing soprano. He then assigned lyric sopranos to the soprano section for the call back audition and he assigned the most dramatic sopranos to the alto section for the call back. Thus, he maintained a more lyric sound throughout the soprano section.\textsuperscript{250}

Miller attempted to place a range of different vocal colors within all sections in order to develop a larger palate of colors with which to work. As a result, within each section, he included voices that were light with a pure quality, voices with a lyric quality, and voices with a more dramatic quality. He classified voices by the amount of formant energy in the sound. He

\textsuperscript{248} Miller, Interview by Author.
\textsuperscript{249} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{250} Ibid.
defined formant as the energy of the partial tones created by each singer.\textsuperscript{251} Miller found that some singers’ voices contained more resonant energy throughout the frequency range and some created less resonant energy. Miller classified voices within each section according to the strength of the formant energy that they created throughout the singing range. Thus, within each section, he included voices with little formant energy through voices that had a great deal of formant energy, inclusive. Generally, he assigned the singers with the strongest formant energy to the second part of each section, and singers with the weakest formant energy to the first part of each section. He sought an acoustical balance between the sections both numerically and acoustically.\textsuperscript{252}

A typical standing arrangement for rehearsal included two rows in a horseshoe with the women on the front row and the men on the back row (see Figure 18). The first sopranos stood on the left side of the horseshoe with the second sopranos to their right. The altos stood the same with the first altos to the immediate right of the second sopranos, and the second altos on the far right of the horseshoe. The men stood in inversion to the women’s row with the second basses on the far right followed by the first basses, second tenors, and first tenors respectively.\textsuperscript{253}


\textsuperscript{252} Miller, Interview by Author.

\textsuperscript{253} Ibid.
Within each section, Miller placed the singers according to the amount of formant energy in the voice. On the women’s row, he placed the singers with the weakest formant energy on the left and those with the strongest formant energy on the right. The men’s row was opposite; he placed those with the weakest formant energy within the section on the right and those with the heaviest formant energy on the left (see Figure 19). Consequently, some of the color of the voices within the strongest formant energy influenced the voices with the weakest formant energy, and the clarity of the voices with the weakest formant energy influenced the voices with the strongest formant energy; thus creating a homogeneous overall sound.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴ Ibid.
²⁵⁵ Ibid.

Figure 18. Westminster Choir standing arrangement under Joe Miller.²⁵⁴
When singing repertoire that required a mixed formation, Miller placed the singers in quartets according to strength of formant energy. He then placed the quartets similarly to the sectional formation with the quartet on the front row with the weakest formant energy placed on the far left and the quartet with the strongest formant energy placed on the far right of the row. He placed the quartets on the back row in reverse order so that the quartet with the weakest formant energy was placed on the far right and the quartet with the strongest formant energy on the far left.\footnote{Miller, \textit{The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique}.}

**Vowels and Diction**

Miller’s main priority was hearing a unified vowel sound across the ensemble. However, because of the difference of individual voices, he considered it impossible for every singer to sing exactly the same vowel sound. Although each vowel sound creates peaks in different formant frequencies, thus making them distinguishable from each other.\footnote{Ibid.} Miller averred that

\footnote{256 Ibid.}
\footnote{257 Ibid.}
\footnote{258 Miller, \textit{The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique}.}
the frequency peaks vary somewhat from singer to singer. This principle resulted in the perception of different vowel qualities from each singer when they attempted to sing the same exact vowel sound.\textsuperscript{259}

Therefore, he approached vowel unification through the tuning of formants by asking the singers to modify their individual vowel in order that the frequency peaks matched. This created a perception of a unified vowel sound. He accomplished this in the beginning of the rehearsal process by having the singers sing a vowel sound individually and then instructing them how to modify their particular vowel in order to achieve a perception of unification (i.e. one singer more closed, one more forward, etc.). Following several experiences with this type of exercises, the individual singers became capable of modifying the vowels themselves according to the prior instruction that they had received.\textsuperscript{260}

Miller’s approach to consonants depended upon the period of the music. When singing Classical and Baroque styles of music, the ensemble articulated the consonants as part of the rhythm. Within other styles, such as music from the Romantic, Twentieth and Twenty-First traditions, Miller utilized consonants for dramatic or musical affect, or to add different colors to the sound. For example when singing a soft piece, Miller instructed the singers to utilize consonants that were somewhat louder and longer, and when singing a loud piece, Miller instructed the singers to utilize softer consonants so as not to harm the overall vocal production and wear down the voice.\textsuperscript{261}

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\textsuperscript{259} Miller, Interview by Author.


\textsuperscript{260} Megill.

Miller, Interview by Author.

Miller, Rehearsal Footage, 29 September 2009.

\textsuperscript{261} Miller, Interview by Author.

**Vocal Pedagogy**

Miller addressed vocal technique in the choral rehearsal with a diagnostic approach. As he perceived vocal problems during the rehearsal process, he addressed them using imagery. For example, when he heard a problem with breath support, he played imaginary tug of war with the singers with a rope or string depending on the necessary level of support for the desired sound. In another instance, he asked the singers to imagine walking into the water with a beach ball and to sense slight resistance as they pushed the ball down into the water.\(^{262}\)

Singing was a physical activity for Miller that required a loose, relaxed body and posture. Thus, it was important for the body to become relaxed and physically engage from the opening moments of the rehearsal. Each rehearsal period began with stretching of the arms, shoulders, and leg muscles. Then Miller asked the students to begin some dance movements that included sliding one foot back and forth on the ball and then alternating back and forth with the other foot. They loosely swung the arms front to back as they prepared to attain proper posture. The first vocal exercises of the rehearsal also included movement; while singing the first exercise, the singers loosely swung their arms side to side.\(^{263}\)

In rehearsals, Miller consistently addressed the development of core in the sound, which he felt would allow the ensemble members to sing healthily for long periods. He accomplished this first by addressing it through an extensive warm-up period, and then several times throughout the rehearsal periods. During the warm-up period, the majority of exercises focused on bringing the sound forward into the mask of the face in order to create a bright overall sound. The consonant sounds [j], [v], [n], and [m] coupled with the vowels [i], [y] and [e] were utilized to bring the sound forward into a nasal placement. Following are examples of utilized exercises:

\(^{262}\) Miller, Interview by Author.

Miller, Rehearsal Footage, 30 September 2009.

Miller, Rehearsal Footage, 1 October 2009.

\(^{263}\) Miller, Rehearsal Footage, 29 September 2009.

Miller, Rehearsal Footage, 30 September 2009.

Miller, Rehearsal Footage, 1 October 2009.

Miller, Rehearsal Footage, 2 October 2009.
Once the singers established a forward placement, Miller instructed them to gradually add resonant space to the above exercises in order to create a balanced sound. He accomplished this by combining [i] and [u] vowel sounds and by utilizing the [y] and the German umlaut [ø].

Miller also used imagery to create core in the sound. For example, he asked the singers to bring an imaginary megaphone up to their mouths and speak into it. Then, he asked them to turn the megaphone around so that their faces were in the bell and to bring the sound forward to fit into the smallest part of the bell. When a vowel sound did not have a sufficient amount of core, he asked the singers to take an imaginary apple into their hands, bite the apple and speak the vowel, then bite the apple and sing the vowel.

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264 Megill.
Miller, Interview by Author.
Miller, Rehearsal Footage, 1 October 2009.
Miller, Rehearsal Footage, 2 October 2009.

265 Miller, Interview by Author.
Miller, Rehearsal Footage, 29 September 2009.
Miller, Rehearsal Footage, 30 September 2009.
Miller, Rehearsal Footage, 2 October 2009.
Summary and Conclusions

Miller based his approach to choral singing on a balance between \textit{chiaro} and \textit{oscuro} with an emphasis on achieving core in the sound at all times. Warm-up exercises and imagery utilized within the rehearsal process stressed the importance of bringing the sound forward into the mask and adding sufficient resonant space to create a sound that emphasized forward placement but that also contained depth.

Miller emphasized a physical approach to singing that developed a freedom of movement and posture throughout the singing process. Additionally, he placed the singers according to level of formant in order to develop a homogenous sound that allowed the singers freedom to sing with their natural vocal quality. The singers achieved unification of vowel sounds through a tuning of formants; each singer modified their individual vocal quality in order to match the group vowel sound. Finally, the ensemble altered the overall choral tone quality by coloring the vowels bright or dark in order to meet the stylistic requirements of singing various styles of music.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

From their inception, the St. Olaf Choir and the Westminster Choir have served as models for the a cappella choir movement. At the beginning of Twentieth Century, choirs throughout the country modeled their sound after the perfectly blended sound of these choirs. However, as the Westminster Choir moved from Dayton, Ohio to its current location in Princeton, New Jersey, the overall sound of the Westminster Choir changed. Seeking a fuller, more mature sound that would project over an orchestra, the Westminster Choir sound became more soloistic, dark, and full under the continued direction of John Finley Williamson. This new sound stood in stark contrast to the blended sound that the St. Olaf Choir continued to employ under F. Melius Christiansen.

These two contrasting choral sounds have continued to serve as models for choral ensembles throughout the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries most notably because of Howard Swan’s research presented in “The Development of a Choral Instrument.” However, as new conductors led both choirs, the overall choral sound of each ensemble began to evolve based on the expertise and taste of the conductors. Thus, it became important to study the evolution of the choral sound of each ensemble.

Within this chapter, a summary of the evolution of the choral sound of the St. Olaf Choir will be presented including the four conductors of the choir: F. Melius Christiansen, Olaf Christiansen, Kenneth Jennings, and Anton Armstrong. Next, a summary of the evolution of the choral sound of the Westminster Choir will be presented including the three conductors of the choir: John Finley Williamson, Joseph Flummerfelt, and Joe Miller. Finally, a synthesis of the evolution of sound will be given followed by recommendations for future research.

266 Swan.
ST. OLAF CHOIR

Since its organization in 1912, four conductors including F. Melius Christiansen, Olaf Christiansen, Kenneth Jennings, and Anton Armstrong have led the St. Olaf Choir. Following is a description of the choral sound sought by each conductor and a summary of the methodologies each employed to achieve their ideal choral sound.

F. Melius Christiansen

Christiansen sought to emulate the choral sound of the all-male choirs he heard while studying in Germany where boys were used for the treble parts. Thus, blend became a main priority and Christiansen expected singers to alter their individual tone quality in order to match specific voice types and colors. He instructed women to sing with a bright overall tone quality. He began rehearsals with one note from an ideal voice and added other voices one by one, as they attempted to match tone quality of the first.

Christiansen only selected singers who were vocally capable of adapting their tone quality to match the ideal. Furthermore, Christiansen sought those singers whose demonstrated personality characteristics germane to a group setting. In rehearsal, beauty of tone quality was Christiansen’s main priority. The ensemble sustained pure, dark vowel sounds throughout the phrase; too much emphasis on consonants created a hindrance to the pure sound of the vowels. When Christiansen heard faults in the vocal tone, he used imagery to develop the type of sound that he desired.

Olaf C. Christiansen

Olaf’s approach to choral sound resulted in a bright overall sound that allowed for clarity of text and the emphasis of the proper vowel color in order to demonstrate the intention of the text. The ensemble members sang a majority of vowels with as much [I] color as possible. Olaf felt that every vowel could be articulated without opening the mouth or moving the lips. Thus, the singers worked to form the vowels in the pharynx. The singers held this vowel concept in the comfortable and extreme parts of the range; they did not modify vowels in any part of the
range. Olaf sought a ring in the sound in all vowels sounds. Olaf closely related vocal training within the ensemble to the approach to vowels.

In selecting singers for the St. Olaf Choir, Olaf sought those whom he felt had innate musical talent as demonstrated by their ability to repeat increasingly difficult musical memory patterns. He also expected much stronger vocal skills than his father did; all students were required to take one year of voice lessons before being eligible to audition for the St. Olaf Choir. He classified voices by instrument-type: strings, woodwinds, flutes, and brass. He then placed the singers within the ensemble according to their instrument-type.

Each rehearsal period began with 10-15 minutes of warm-ups that engaged the body and voice. Control of breath aided in the attainment of the ring in the voice, thus many vocal exercises also emphasized an active approach to breath control.

Kenneth Jennings

Jennings performed a wider variety of choral music than his predecessors did, including accompanied choral pieces did. He based his choral sound on a lyric, art-song approach to singing that allowed for more vibrancy and that was flexible to meet the demands of singing many different styles of music. The audition consisted of an interview where Jennings evaluated vocal and musical ability and the singer’s personality. A main criterion for the classification of singers was the ability to sing easily through the passaggio.

Jennings approached vocal technique, vowels and diction through the performance repertoire and vocal exercises that resembled musical phrases. These exercises emphasized a natural, free approach to singing that allowed for vibrato and individual vocal character. The ensemble achieved blend at a point in front of the choir through rhythmic accuracy, diction, phrasing, balance, intonation, and vowel uniformity.

Anton Armstrong

Similar to Jennings, Armstrong sought a lyric, art-song approach to singing, but one that emphasized a choral sound that incorporated a mosaic of intelligent soloists. He emphasized that choral sound was embodied in the combination of each whole person within the ensemble and their individual expression. Thus, the expression of the music received prominence within the
choral rehearsal. Through the audition process, Armstrong selected those singers whose voices matched the lyric sound ideal and whose personalities would invest fully in the St. Olaf Choir experience.

Armstrong selected a wider variety of repertoire than his predecessors including music from a global perspective did. He sought to emphasize the meaning of the text within each piece; Armstrong’s approach to diction reflected this desire. Armstrong sought to establish a free release of breath and sound through kinesthetic movement in order to achieve a lyric tone quality.

WESTMINSTER CHOIR

Since its inception in 1926, three main conductors including John Finley Williamson, Joseph Flummerfelt, and Joe Miller have directed the Westminster Choir. Following is a description of the choral sound sought by each conductor and a summary of the methodologies each employed to achieve their ideal choral sound.

John Finley Williamson

Although Williamson modeled his first choral sound after the St. Olaf Choir, he soon found that this type of choral singing was lifeless and did not allow the choir to be heard over an orchestra. Therefore, Williamson emphasized soloistic singing throughout the ensemble, resulting in a darker, richer, weightier overall choral sound. For Williamson, there was no emphasis on blend and no change for varying styles of music. Williamson selected the most talented soloists with outgoing personalities for membership in the Westminster Choir.

Williamson felt that good diction and proper phrasing was the result of approaching singing of words through vowel sounds rather than the letters themselves and that vowels should be colored according to the mood of the music. Because he desired an alignment of vowel sounds across the sections, he asked the basses to sing with darker vowels than the rest of the sections in order to create overtones with consonant harmonic intervals. Williamson taught that healthy vocal technique was based on a foundation of proper posture and breath. He sought an
active posture as if the singer were participating in an athletic event. The singers determined the
type of breath by the emotions brought about by the music.

Joseph Flummerfelt

Westminster Choir College hired Joseph Flummerfelt as conductor of the Westminster Choir because of his more mainstream approach to choral singing as compared to John Finley Williamson. Flummerfelt approached choral singing as an organic process, which resulted in a free, mature, resonant overall choral sound that was flexible for singing various styles of music. Flummerfelt sought the best overall singers and the most mature musicians for his ensembles. He selected singers who demonstrated passion for singing and anticipation for participating in the Westminster Choir. Flummerfelt did not discuss blend in the rehearsal process; singers were encouraged to create their own vocal quality. He sought an ensemble sound created as each member sang freely the right vowel at the right time on the right pitch and as the sections achieved proper balance.

Because of the caliber of singers within the Westminster Choir, Flummerfelt did not address vocal pedagogy and technique specifically. Instead, he achieved variation in tone quality through his conducting gesture, and through vowel sound. He utilized vowels and diction as the main tools in communicating mood and meaning. As a result, Flummerfelt emphasized proper pronunciation of vowels that was reflective of the spoken language. He utilized various vowel sounds to color the overall tone quality; for a bright sound, he colored all vowels with the [i] sound, for a dark sound; he colored all vowels with the [o] or [a] sound.

Joe Miller

Joe Miller sought a choral sound that embodied the sound of the individual singers, but that also contained a forward placement in order to create core in the sound. In seeking a chiaroscuro balance, the overall sound tended toward the chiaro, thus creating a bright overall choral sound. Miller subtly altered the overall tone quality for various styles of music by manipulating the vowel sounds toward bright or dark. Miller selected singers who demonstrated superior vocal and musical abilities; he did not consider personality in the audition process.
Miller taught that the body should be actively engaged in the singing process. He achieved this by combining singing and movement throughout the rehearsal process. Miller continuously sought the achievement of core in the sound through bright vowels and consonants and using imagery. He desired a unified vowel sound across the ensemble achieved as singers modified their individual vowel sounds in order to achieve unification rather than matching a preconceived vowel sound.

**SYNTHESIS**

Thus, the overall sound of both ensembles altered considerably from the founders to the current conductors. The St. Olaf Choir moved from a sound that emphasized blend and forward placement to the current approach that emphasizes singers as intelligent, lyric soloists. The Westminster Choir moved from a sound that embraced the individual solo voice to the current approach that emphasizes core in the sound, resulting in a bright, blended overall choral sound.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>St. Olaf Choir</th>
<th>Westminster Choir</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F. Melius Christiansen</td>
<td>John Finley Williamson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olaf Christiansen</td>
<td>▪ Individuals as soloists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenneth Jennings</td>
<td>▪ George Lynn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Individuals as soloists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anton Armstrong</td>
<td>▪ Joseph Flummerfelt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Mosaic of intelligent, lyric soloists</td>
<td>▪ Singing as organic process—flexible quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ German model - blend</td>
<td>▪ Joe Miller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Blend – bright vowels</td>
<td>▪ Core – bright overall sound</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Throughout the a cappella movement, the type of preferred solo voice may have had an effect on the resultant choral sound of the time. Research could be conducted in order to determine if the preferred choral sounds of the conductors of the St. Olaf Choir and Westminster Choir reflected the soloistic preferences of the corresponding times.

The choral sound of all ensembles has evolved from conductor to conductor. Future research could include a side-by-side comparison of the evolution of choral sound of other major choral ensembles with the St. Olaf Choir and Westminster Choir.

Choral sound tends to vary from region to region throughout the United States. In fact, Williamson’s change from a blended sound to one that was more soloistic corresponded with the move of the Westminster Choir from Ohio (a region of the country where a blended sound was the norm) to New York (a region where a soloistic choral sound was accepted). This regional tendency may be attributed to the fact that choral conductors who were trained in one region tend to stay within the same region; it may also be attributed to audience preference within each region, or available performance venues or performance forces. Further research in this area could be conducted to determine the cause of such regional preference.
## APPENDIX A

### IPA SYMBOL KEY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IPA Symbol</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[i]</td>
<td>me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[a]</td>
<td>hot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[v]</td>
<td>very</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[o]</td>
<td>note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[y]</td>
<td>Like [i] (me, but with the lips rounded as for [u] (“moon”).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ɛ]</td>
<td>bed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[e]</td>
<td>may (without diphthong)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[j]</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n]</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[m]</td>
<td>me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Ø]</td>
<td>ü</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Please describe your training as a choral conductor.
   a. Where did you study?
      i. With whom did you study conducting?
      ii. With what choirs did you sing?
   b. Are you trained primarily as a vocalist or instrumentalist?
      i. With whom did you study voice?
   c. Other than your current position, where have you taught and for how long?

2. How would you describe your ideal choral sound?
   a. What has influenced the type of choral sound that you prefer?
      i. i.e. geographical, music style, training, type of school, etc.
   b. What strategies do you employ in the rehearsal process to achieve your desired choral sound?
   c. Does your choral sound vary from style to style? If so, what strategies do you employ to alter the tone quality?

3. Please describe your audition process.
   a. What voice types do you look for to include in your ensemble?
      i. Does this change from year to year or remain consistent?
   b. Are there other factors that influence the selection process?
      i. i.e. personality, appearance, etc.
   c. What influences your assignment of voices to specific sections?
      i. i.e., soprano, alto, tenor, bass
   d. What type of sectional balance do you seek?
4. What type of standing arrangement do you prefer for rehearsal and performance?
   a. Do you prefer a mixed or sectional arrangement?
   b. What is the reason for your preference?
5. Please describe your approach to vowels and diction.
   a. Do you consider vowel unification important? If so, how do you seek to achieve vowel unification?
      i. Is there a specific vowel color that you seek (i.e. bright, dark, towards a certain vowel sound, etc.)
   b. What role do consonants play in your concept of choral sound? How does it affect your approach to blend and sound?
6. Please describe your approach to addressing vocal technique during the rehearsal process.
7. What styles/time periods of music do you program?
   a. Are there one or two styles/time periods that you program more than others? Why?
8. Are there any other facets of your approach to choral sound that we have not discussed?
APPENDIX C

COLLEAGUE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. In what capacity have you been associated with ________________?
   a. Have you observed him in rehearsals? In concert?
   b. What is his approach to choral singing?
2. Describe his desired choral sound.
   a. What strategies/methods/activities does he employ in the rehearsal process to achieve the desired choral sound?
   b. Does the choral sound vary from style to style? If so, what strategies does he employ to alter the tone quality?
3. Please describe the audition process for the _______________ Choir.
   a. What voice types does he look for to include in the ensemble?
      i. Does this seem to change from year to year or remain consistent?
   b. Are there other factors that influence the selection process?
      i. i.e. personality, appearance, etc.
   c. What influences his assignment of voices to specific sections?
      i. i.e., soprano, alto, tenor, bass
   d. What type of sectional balance do you hear?
4. Please describe his approach to vowels and diction.
   a. Does he consider vowel unification important? If so, how does he seek to achieve vowel unification?
      i. Is there a specific vowel color that he tends to seek (i.e. bright, dark, towards a certain vowel sound, etc.)
b. What role do consonants play in his concept of choral sound? How does it affect his approach to blend and sound?

5. Please describe his approach to addressing vocal technique during the rehearsal process.

6. What styles/time periods of music does he program?
   a. Are there one or two styles/time periods that he programs more than others?
      Why?

7. Are there any other facets of his approach to choral sound that we have not discussed?
APPENDIX D

DISCOGRAPHY OF ST. OLAF CHOIR RECORDINGS


**Christmas Festivals**


Ris’n With Healing In His Wings (2002). The Choirs of St. Olaf College. St. Olaf Records E-2564.


APPENDIX E

DISCOGRAPHY OF WESTMINSTER CHOIR RECORDINGS


1942. Serbian Crib Carol. Westminster Choir. Columbia 17351-D.


APPENDIX F

ST. OLAF CHOIR REHEARSAL TRANSCRIPT

Armstrong points to the left to for singers to begin massages.

Performance:  Hum – descending by half steps.

\[\text{music notation image}\]

Armstrong:  Switch massages, please.

Performance:  Hum – ascending by half-steps.

\[\text{music notation image}\]

Armstrong:  Open throat, don’t press.

Performance:  Hum – ascending by half steps.

\[\text{music notation image}\]
Armstrong: No H. Connect the breath and motion with the arm, open throat. Now open – [no], [na], [no]

Performance:

Armstrong: Unify the vowel, make sure the [a] vowel has length in it, the [i] vowel has shape and richness. [ni], [ne], [na], [no], [nu].

Performance:

Armstrong: Shape the vowel as you breath. During sustain – release. When some of you get to the last note you actually stop the breath (demonstrates a sustain with pressed sound). You have to keep blowing your voices and keep releasing the air.

Performance: Sing Legato – all together, tenors/basses, sopranos/altos.

Armstrong: I’m very pleased, the balance is working nicely.
Performance: Rich Tone

1. Rich tone with open throat, Rich tone on even breath.

2. Sigh the tone with loosened jaw, Sigh the tone on even breath.

3. Sing a song with loosened jaw, Sing a song on even breath.

Performance: Sigh the Tone

Sigh the tone, sigh the tone with a smile inside;

Sigh, smile on an even breath.

Armstrong: Make sure you sigh the first note, including basses – release it. Voice the [h] without scooping the pitch, add the shadow vowel on tone and inside. Tone needs more of the shadow vowel. When you come to the unisons, take the weight off.

Armstrong: Open your books to #5. Sing a Little Louder

Performance: Sing a Little Louder.

Sing a little louder in crescendos with a fuller voice.

Sing a little softer in decrescendos with a lighter voice.
Armstrong: Part of the whole thing with this is to sing a crescendo and take the weight off. When we sing “Praise to the Lord,” I don’t want it to get bombastic—it’s not “Onward, Christian Soldiers” going off to war. So, just keeping that wonderful color, you have to listen.

Armstrong: Look at #11. This drop of the sixth tends to get the bottom to drop out of the voice. Keep it connected, bring the light mechanism down to the bottom of the exercise.

Performance: Gliding along.

Armstrong: What the average singer tends to do is sing lower and heavy there at the end.

Armstrong: Staccato

Performance: Staccato – use the vowel – it’s [sta] not [stə].

Staccato is short and snappy. Staccato is short as notes can be!
Performance: 13531 – Yo ho ho ho – unify the vowel, take the weight off.

Armstrong: I wander – it’s [a] in wander.

Performance: I wander

Armstrong: When singing the melismatic notes in there, make sure that you take the weight off of the voice. Breathe earlier—you have all that time to breath, don’t do it at the last minute.

Performance: Flexibility—alternate with I wander.
Performance: Do, ti la sol fa . . .

Armstrong: Adjust the weight just before you get to the last pitch. Don’t wait until you get there and then adjust. Be proactive.

Performance:

Performance: Sing [i], sing [e], sing [a]

Armstrong: Use the kinesthetic release. Not to beat anybody up, but if you’re just standing there, you cannot touch your voice. Don’t tell me that if I put a microphone down each one of your throats that I wouldn’t hear something that wasn’t quite right. And that’s why I want you to have a kinesthetic release. Until you get your voices going, and let your voice release, you should not be standing there. Your technique is not that strong yet. Use these things in your practice, because that is where you’re going to build these habits. Each one of you is fortunate enough to be monitored privately in a lesson—that’s great. You need to bring that intelligence into this room to make it work.

Armstrong: Take out “Jesus Christ, the Apple Tree.” I believe the markings for this have been reinforced by your section leaders. Sopranos, let me just give you a few more markings, and you can reinforce them as we go along. (Armstrong indicates breath and sustain moments.)
Armstrong: Let’s take the soprano soli at the beginning on “no.” Sing with space on the highest pitch—it’s just a little black note, don’t let it freak you out.

Performance: Armstrong reminded of “tactus” throughout.

Armstrong: Really observe the molto ritardando. Sometimes you have quarter note tied to eighth or a dotted quarter note. You need to give dynamic direction to the line. Several times what he’s set up here is these incredible suspensions. For example, altos, at m. 15, you have that wonderful tie—give it shape. You have it again at m. 17 and again two measures later. Let’s start at m. 13.

Performance:

Armstrong: Good, so much better—do you see what we’re talking about? Then, when you come back in, soften up and lighten up. Sopranos, in your line, decrescendo to the G.

Performance:

Armstrong: Tenors and basses, this is going to be a great male section, but can it be more intimate. You sound like Vikings right now.

Performance:

Armstrong: Tactus – when I say that, you take care to get the eighth pulse and tap it on your shoulder. That’s the one thing that drives me nuts with singers is that they cannot keep tempo. Tenors and basses—at your entrance.
Armstrong: 1st tenors – that’s a little too much. That’s nice to be able to say, but hush.

Performance: Tactus

Armstrong: I’d like to do this ritardando without going into subdivision, so really watch me there. Sopranos, it’s blessing of all blessings when I get a soprano section like this. There were a couple of places where I conducted this summer, where it wasn’t quite like this. Now, just because the note goes up does not mean that it needs to get louder. Save that for the crescendo that is indicated. Begin at m. 30.

Performance:

Armstrong: Sopranos, let’s hear you at pickup to m. 39 with the altos.

Performance:

Armstrong: Really nice unison. Altos can you give us even more at 40, and while you’re coming down, sopranos, you still need to energize that line. Let’s try it now with text at measure 24, the third beat. “And, pleasure”—sing with a double consonant.

Performance: More spirit than flesh.

Armstrong: Can you get your eyes up on me? As you come in, add to the resonance, but try not to add weight.

Performance:

Armstrong: A little more height, sopranos, be prepared for that. And, that’s why I’d like you to decrescendo to that F. One of you modifies too wide.
Performance:

Armstrong: Good. When you get here, tenors and basses, can this be more intimate and introspective? And, then watch carefully altos and sopranos, molto decrescendo. Can we start at m. 34?

Performance:

Armstrong: Now you can be lieder singers, good lieder singers. Not opera singers, lieder singers. This is what makes you all distinctive: that you watch and listen.

Performance:

Armstrong: Don’t put the [t] so early, sopranos. Say it.

Performance:

Armstrong: Stand, let’s sing this all the way through.

Performance:

Armstrong: Bracket apple. You’re going to have to ‘not all die at the same point.’

Performance:

Armstrong: Begin again at m. 13—just sopranos and altos. You can’t accent “ty” of “beauty.” Use your imaginations, I don’t want to have to feed you all of those.

Performance:
Armstrong: Now, I may take a little time with the interludes with the men, and then we’ll get going again. That was a nice balance, basses.

Performance:

Armstrong: When I start to wave my arms, you’re dragging.

Performance:

Armstrong: Can you all make sure that at m. 36, the word “thrive” really does thrive? Begin at m. 35.

Performance:

Armstrong: Have a seat. Please, take out “Praise to the Lord.” Sing it on “ta, ta, ta.”

Performance: Shape the slurs.

Armstrong: Men – no. You flashed me. You came in like a bunch of men. Altos, keep the tactus going. I don’t want you to slow down.

Performance:

Armstrong: Tenors and basses chill for a minute. You always need to watch at 65. M. 65 on ta, just women. The [t] tells me if you’re exactly in the right place, and you’re not. The [a] happens on the ictus, not the [t]. Hold your scores so you can see me.

Performance:
Armstrong: The purpose of going back through this is that you need to clean this up by tomorrow. I need you to know where these pitches are by tomorrow. Circle the problems in your scores, don’t just keep going through it singing it the wrong way. This is Christiansen the organist. He composed it with his fingers, and then put the words with it. This is not a vocal part. Again on “ta,” no tenors and basses.

Performance:

Armstrong: Get your eyes out of the music, there are going to be some places that I want to check. On “ta” again.

Performance:

Armstrong: At m. 64, beats one and two are already going to start to slow down, I’m not going to wait for beat three. Altos, don’t be afraid of the crossed voicing.

Performance:

Armstrong: Altos, can you decrescendo to the f-sharp, g-sharp? Let’s take it from m. 65 again.

Performance:

Armstrong: Alto 2’s, you’ve heard d-sharp from the first altos, make sure that you sing d-natural. This business needs to be cleaned up. Tomorrow I’m going to go to town on you, I’m being nice today.

Performance:

Armstrong: You have to watch and put the “t” on every note. Some of you are rushing the eighth note. Tenors and basses when you come in with the cantus firmus, I want
to hear you, but chill a little bit. Start, sopranos at m. 65 and treat this time as the second time.

Performance: Eyes, eyes.

Armstrong: You’re making the e-natural the most important note in the phrase, it’s not. It’s just the word “the.” Altos, that c-sharp needs to be unison, especially after that skip.

Performance:

Armstrong: Basses, put the rest in there, let the women have their say. Back it up to m. 100.

Performance:

Armstrong: Good. On Thursday, I want that to sound like a piece of music. So, you need to take apart those places. You need to do that on your own. Tenors and basses, I don’t want this to be bombastic. This is dance music—Renaissance dance music. Take out “Ubi Caritas.” This is a piece that we will be using on tour. It’s not very well known across the country. We will be doing this on tour for sure. Please stand.

Performance:

Armstrong: Not bad for not even a week yet.
APPENDIX G

WESTMINSTER CHOIR REHEARSAL TRANSCRIPT

Begins by stretching with the choir.

Miller: Cleansing breath. Relax, say “ah” and stand with really bad posture. Bring the spine up and stand with relaxed posture. Swing your arms.

Miller: Look at your neighbor, pretend you’re in third grade and say “nya, nya, nya, nya, nya.”

Performance:
Miller: Turn that into tone and sing

Performance:

Miller demonstrates the exercise with a backward placement, then with a forward placement.

Miller: Sing the exercise with a forward placement. Let’s start it again.

Performance:

Miller: (Sings) Do – fi – sol – ra – do

Performance:

Miller: Now sing it piano.
Performance:

Miller: Put all of the vowels in the same line

Performance:

Miller: (Miller gives a pitch) Basses and altos down a fifth. Mi – me – ma – mo - mu, oscillating half-steps.

Performance:

Miller: Go up a minor third and find each other. Oscillating whole steps.

Performance:

Miller: Shake it out. (Singers shake their arms, stretch up, and move back into correct posture.)

Miller demonstrates next exercise.

\[\text{ni__ nu__ ni__ na__ no__}\]

Performance:

Miller: Sing it more legato

Performance
Miller: Great. We’re going to start with Poulenc today. Sopranos sing on “nu”, everyone else on “ni.” Here we go.

Performance:

Miller: That much again one more time. Tenore, it needs to be lots more head voice. (Miller demonstrates.) About that loud too. Altos, match the color of the basses.

Performance:

Miller: (Miller demonstrates the type of phrasing that he wants.) You all should sing into the rest and don’t just sing to it and kind of stop. Almost ignore the rest. And for now, let’s exaggerate that and almost sing through the rest. Tenore, much better. When you have the amoebas, they’ve got to have grit. At the beginning.

Performance

Miller: Only sing as softly as you can make the most beautiful sound.

Performance: Mezzo-forte now.

Miller: You did that last time also, the c-natural is quite out of tune. (Miller demonstrates.) Make sure that really stays in your resonance.

Performance: Miller interrupts.

Miller: Be ready, make a sound together.

Performance: Don’t forget, long down beat. Yes!
Miller: Alright, now, going back. Beginning at number 4, at the second bar, would you sing the D-Major chord.

Performance:

Miller: Ignore the tenor pick-up and sing the next note. Altos, you just go down a step, f-sharp to e.

Performance:

Miller: There we go, sing it again.

Performance:

Miller: (Miller sings tenor line, demonstrating appropriate phrase.) Sing it tenor, on text.

Performance:

Miller: Go on altos.

Performance:

Miller: If you have some sound down there, make some noise.

Performance: Hold the next note. It’s b-natural now.

Miller: Tenors, let’s go back and just do the two melodies: tenor melody and then the alto melody.

Performance:
Miller: (Miller demonstrates appropriate use of head voice.)

Performance:

Miller: Good, now can I hear all the other stuff. Not the melody, just the other parts.

Performance:

Miller: I’m going to work from the piano for a second. Right there at D.

Performance:

Miller: Good, same thing again. First chord, hum it. Now, on a hum.

Performance:

Miller: Good tenors, you have to make sure we get a really good half-step to the b-sharp right after your melody, going on after that. Put the melody with that now. Start with the d, tenors.

Performance:

Miller: Let’s hear that humming chord, G, E, and B. I’m on the third bar of B. Hum it.

Performance:

Miller: Good, go on.

Performance. Go on.
Miller: There’s no reason why we should not be singing these notes correctly. Without the melody, again. Let’s start at the D-major chord. Sing that for me, ah.

Performance:

Miller: Now without the melody, go on.

Performance:

Miller: No, no, no, sopranos. Please don’t talk. Look at the second chord. Why is that G-sharp hard to find? Because you have E-sharp there, and then a B. So you have to make sure that you hear that second chord. Just bass and soprano.

Performance: Miller has the choir hold specific pitches.

Miller: Now, put the tenor with that.

Performance:

Miller: Go on with the altos and text.

Performance:

Miller: Back to the D major second bar of 4. On ah, hold it.

Performance: That’s it!

Miller: Sopranos—more ‘u’ color on that. Now, the last page needs your attention. Let’s go on to the next piece. Page 20, ladies and gentlemen. Look at your poem. I think you’re looking at the top—I have my sentences kind of divided out there. Do you see “Finally overcome by their own . . .” That’s the sentence that we’re in. “By which time the
crowd had gathered outside the school, drawn through suburbia by the rumor of flowers in full bloom. Drawn through the air like butterflies to _____, like honeybees to honeysuckle, like hummingbirds dipping their tongues in. Some to soak up such over exuberance of thought, others to savor the ______.” So, in the last part of that, who are “some.”

Student: The crowd.

Miller: The crowd, so all the shootings have just happened, everyone is gathering. Now, look at page 20. And what we have try to do is try to capture what this is. So basses, what is “zah, zah, zah, zah, zah.” Any ideas before I start hacking away at this?

Students: Sounds like hushed chatter to me, hub hub. It sounds like your hearts pounding because you’re in shock.

Miller: It is stunned, isn’t it? So, basses and tenors, let’s do you part in a stunning manner. And this is choir 2 that starts at the top of 20. Stand up Choir 2 basses. (Miller divides the basses and tenors into four parts.) If you all find that it’s easier in your sectionals to changes voicing, that’s fine with me. Can you hold that first chord?

Performance: Accent! Softer, though—more sting.

Miller: All right tenors, by yourself.

Performance:

Miller: When you sing “sah,” can it be [a] shaped with the [ʌ] vowel?

Performance:

Miller: Okay, women, let’s take you now. Let’s hear it now.
Performance:

Miller: No, it’s a triplet.

Performance:

Miller: Sopranos, if you keep thinking about that a, that helps. Let’s just take the sopranos.

Performance:

Miller: Good, now let’s do it fast.

Performance:

Miller: That’s it. Altos, let’s take you now.

Performance:

Miller: So you have to sing “boo” on the top.

Performance:

Miller: Look at the now, we have lots of whole steps. Whole tone scale—alright?

Performance:

Miller: Let’s put the two together now.

Performance:
Miller: Good, let’s do it all again.

Performance:

Miller: Ladies, look at the end, “the going’s on.” Have you figured that out? (Student – yes.) Good, let’s do it all.

Performance:

Miller: One last time. (Miller demonstrates on the piano.) On text.

Performance:

Miller: That’s it. Gentlemen, let’s start us out.

Performance:

Miller: Now, choir 2, top of the page.

Performance:

Miller: Let’s go on. In the next section, bar 125. Every time that you have “surprise,” make it an eighth-note rest, with one exception, when you get to bar 142. Let’s sing to there, and then I’ll have you mark the rest of it. In bar 142, the first one is an eighth note. The second one is a tenuto—full value. And then we have two together. In bar 143, make sure you know where the beats are. (Miller demonstrates the correct rhythm.) Top of 25, they’re all full value, and then everything is the way it’s marked. So bar 125—look back at the poem for a second. Read the sentence that starts, “finally.” One of the most gruesome verses of the entire thing. So at bar 125, what is the surprise? (Student responds—shots.) That’s right. So, we need to work for it to sound suspenseful, almost as if muffled ears, and you could hear everything hitting you. Let’s start at 125
everyone. Gentlemen, sing G on “doo” for us, and then everyone hold the chord for “prise.”

Performance:

Miller:  Now, let’s read the section.

Performance: More percussive. Altos are in now. Find the fourth!

Miller: Let’s do it again. Can the eighth notes be tenuto? A nice long sound.

Performance:

Miller: Good. Next chord.

Performance:

Miller: Sing that chord again.

Performance:

Miller: All right, let’s sing these chords on “looo.” Chord by chord.

Performance: Miller indicates chord changes.

Miller: Good, let’s go back, everyone to “honey bees.” Bar 62. Stand!

Performance:

Miller: I just gave the pitch. I lined up the entire thing. You didn’t pay attention. Come on!
Performance:

Miller: Sit. It is an odd transition that happens at the bottom of 19. Basses, you’ve got to get a good e-sharp to g which is just a whole step. Tenors, you have to make sure you take us right to f. Which you didn’t do that time. Let me work on that transition next time. We’ll piece it together. Please be responsible for knowing that entire section, all the way to bar 142. Let’s sing ________. We are on the bottom of page 9. On “loo,” legato.

Performance:

Miller: Yes, let’s go back. Loud!

Performance:

Miller: (Demonstrates a shallow, closed sound, and then an open resonant sound.) Let’s do the second. Go back.

Performance:

Miller: Good. Now men and no women.

Performance:


Performance: (Miller demonstrates a lifted sound with his left hand.)

Miller: Good, now, going on. Like water.

Performance:
Miller: Okay. Speaking text in rhythm.

Performance:

Miller: Can we go back and can you stagger your breath so we don’t hear a section breath at the same time. (Miller demonstrates the entire phrase on one breath.) Let’s go back and speak the entire thing.

Performance:

Miller: Notice it says more tranquil and ritardando there. Singing, now on text.

Performance:

Miller: Good, going back to the top of page 7. Sing it on “di.”

Performance:

Miller: Top of page 7. Speak it on text.

Performance:

Miller: Singing, top of page 7—fast.

Performance.

Miller: All right. Let’s look just a moment at the next piece on the board. Name the composers that built music on their own scales. (Students give various answers). If you take a look at this, it’s built on this crazy scale based on Lydian. It’s kinds of a pentatonic scale
based on whole tones. Ladies, when you get to the bottom of the page, it’s Lydian. I want to sing this at the beginning.

Performance:

Miller: Now, going on. You all sing, “di.” Altos here are your pitches. Sing slowly.

Performance:

Miller: Gentlemen, go on.

Performance:

Miller: That’s the chord, here it is rolled up. Last chord, go.

Performance:

Miller: All right, “Flower of Beauty.” (Miller places the ensemble in quartet based on numbers previously assigned.) Altos, in the second bar, do you sing or speak the word _____? You sing it—second altos sing it. That’s an exception. Everyone, where do you begin singing? All right, here we go.

Performance:

Miller: Hum the first chord. Balance the tenor part.

Performance:

Miller: Altos, second page, do you sing the word “on” or speak it? You sing it—it’s an exception, bring it out. Tenors, on the word “rain,” do you sing it or speak it? You sing
it, bring it out. Say, “small love.” Let’s take time to really “v” that sound when we get there. Let’s go again.

Performance:

Miller: Sing that chord again, make sure it has lots of bright color.

Performance:

Miller: Good, let’s start it again.

Performance:

Miller: Say, “kiss.” (Miller elongates the “k.”) It’s really a long sound—it’s not about the hardness of the “k” it’s about the length of it. Second verse again.

Performance: Balance to the lowest bass—sopranos, too much.

Miller: Good, let’s do a little Monteverdi. Stay right where you are.

Performance:

Miller: You notice that is memorized. If you haven’t figured out your part, it’s very easy. You have to memorize the words at the beginning and then you have to remember the sequence. Get to work!
APPENDIX H

IRB WAIVER

Human Subjects Application - For Full IRB and Expedited Exempt Review

PI Name: Alan Noel Zabriskie
Project Title: Evolution of Choral Sound of the St. Olaf Choir and Westminster Choir

HSC Number: 2009.3020

Your application has been received by our office. Upon review, it has been determined that your protocol is an oral history, which in general, does not fit the definition of "research" pursuant to the federal regulations governing the protection of research subjects. Please be mindful that there may be other requirements such as releases, copyright issues, etc. that may impact your oral history endeavor, but are beyond the purview of this office.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Alan Zabriskie holds a B.M. degree from the University of Utah (2002) in Music Education and an M.M. in Choral Conducting/Music Education from Brigham Young University (2006). He holds a Ph.D. in Choral Conducting/Music Education from The Florida State University (2010). He taught for five years in the Clark County School District in Southern Nevada, including four years at Centennial High School.

Alan's Chamber Singers performed at the 2007 ACDA National Convention in Miami, Florida. The Chamber Singers was one of only seven high school choirs invited to perform, and only the second choir ever invited from the state of Nevada. Alan has served as chorus master for the Utah Lyric Opera and Florida State University Opera. Additionally, he has served as an adjudicator and clinician in choral festivals and conferences in Florida, Nevada, and Utah. Alan’s textbook *Foundations of Choral Tone: A Proactive and Healthy Approach to Choral Blend* was released in October 2009.

Alan’s research interests include choral sound, the perception of choral tone quality and intonation, and vocal pedagogy in the choral rehearsal setting.

Alan is a member of NCCO, ACDA, and MENC and has served terms as secretary of the Nevada Music Educators Association and as treasurer of the Nevada Chapter of ACDA. He also co-chaired the Clark County School District Mixed Honor Choir.