

ABSTRACT

The Lutheran Choral Tradition:
A Study on the Historical Progression of the Choral Sound, Principles, and
Philosophy

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The Lutheran Choral Tradition was, and still is, at the forefront of the modern choral world. The tradition originated in the Midwest of the United States, with the arrival of F. Melius Christiansen to the United States, and his founding of the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir in 1911, now known as the St. Olaf Choir. The tradition spread quickly to other colleges, the most notable being Luther College (Decorah, IA), Concordia College (Moorhead, MN), Augustana College (Rock Island, IL), Augsburg College (Minneapolis, MN), and Pacific Lutheran University (Tacoma, WA). The tradition has thrived, and has continued through the Scandinavian-American Lutheran College

choirs to the current day. This paper will focus on the “Power 3” schools: St. Olaf Choir, Luther College Nordic Choir, and the Concordia Choir, with an emphasis on the spiritual and aesthetic aspects of the various choirs of the “Power 3” schools.

The purpose of this study is to (1) review the historical development of the Lutheran Choral Tradition from its onset to current day, (2) identify the major influential people in the choral field, along with their contributions to the Lutheran Choral Tradition, (3) document traditional styles, philosophies and practice in the Lutheran Choral Tradition, (4) identify the philosophies responsible for the choral sounds of the Lutheran Choral Tradition, focusing on the past and current choral sounds of the “Power 3” colleges, with emphasis on the aesthetic, spiritual, and emotional qualities of the “Power 3” colleges, and (5) identify that, although not from the same lineage in regards to teacher-student, all conductors share a lineage in regards to spirituality, emotion, and numerous other aesthetic qualities in the “Power 3” choirs.

This study emphasizes the importance of the Lutheran Choral Tradition to not only the history of choral music in Scandinavian-American Lutheran colleges, but to the overall choral sound in the United States. The study represents the first investigation of identifying techniques and overall choral sound of the Lutheran Choral Tradition, with emphasis on spirituality, vulnerability, and emotion. The study is based on first-hand interviews with

present and past leading conductors in the tradition at each of the “Power 3” schools, first and second-hand interviews with past leading conductors, interviews with singers under the tutelage of past conductors, historical accounts of the schools and choirs, and observations on live performances, videos, and audio recordings of the “Power 3” schools throughout the eras of each leading conductor.

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