

p Beau-ti-ful up on the hill —, L
There our thoughts are turn- ing still to ho
gradually louder
love thee Al- ma- Ma- ter, our pr
WAG-NER will for- ev- er be — de

WE FOUND OUR VOICE

A HISTORY OF THE
WAGNER COLLEGE CHOIR

LAURA BARLAMENT

WE FOUND OUR VOICE *A History of the Wagner College Choir*

**WE
FOUND
OUR
VOICE**

**A HISTORY OF THE
WAGNER COLLEGE CHOIR**

LAURA BARLAMENT

“We Found Our Voice: A History of the Wagner College Choir”

By Laura Barlament

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For information about this volume, contact:

Office of Communications and Marketing

Wagner College

One Campus Road

Staten Island, NY 10301

718-420-4498

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was made possible through contributions of many people, not all of whom are cited elsewhere in this text. I would like to acknowledge and thank all of them here.

For providing context, resources, feedback, and corrections, I would like to thank Lee Manchester, Wagner College's director of media relations and unofficial historian; Richard Steen, son of choir director Sigvart Steen and later conductor of the Wagner College Choir; and Lisa Holland, Wagner College librarian and archivist.

I owe thanks to all of the following choir alumni for providing their time, memories, information, photos, and other memorabilia: the late Trygve R. Skarsten '49, Bill Wehrli '53, Jeff '56 M'59 and June Billings '59 Safford, Sue Hayes Taylor '58, Al Wagner '58, Caroline Runyon Zuber '58, Judy Rank Hatke '60, Gail Tollefsen Bellafore '61, Judy Pedersen Samuelson '63, Bill Schroeder '66, Vicki Heins-Shaw '71, Kathryn Hume Arn '72, Allan DiBiase '72, Bruce Bainbridge '73 (son of Wagner choir director and music professor Jack Bainbridge), Gene Barfield '75, Kristine Iwersen Moore '77, Lorraine McNeill-Popper '78, Susan Gosser Tremblay '78, Laura Gordon Conlon '79, Diane Wehrli Mathisen '79, Charles Gysel '80, Sandy Davis '81, Lorraine DiBartolo Flood '83, Annmarie Lambiasi '85, Melissa Sorensen Faherty '88, Sara Schappert Ferguson '97, Victoria Opthof-Cordaro '06, Kara Plant McEachern '06, and Ariel Ubaldegaray '18.

Thanks to former and current faculty and staff of the music department who contributed their knowledge, memories, and connections: David Castleberry, Roger and Barbara Wesby, Shirley Bock, and Ed Brown.

Many thanks also go to students Kolten Bell, who searched 80 years' worth of *Kallista* yearbooks for choir photos; and John Rodriguez, for his help with archival research.

Note: All translations from the German are by Laura Barlament

Stretto, an elite a cappella ensemble, performs at Trinity Lutheran Church, Staten Island, during the Wagner College Choir's fall concert, November 2013. Shown are Roger Wesby, Anthony Babino '09, Elle Brigida '14, Kayla Jardin-Vistocco '17, Cassandra White '14, Dorian Lake '02, and Jonathan Caro '09.



PREFACE

This project started in 2014, the year that Margery Mayer Steen Voutsas passed away. The widow of Wagner's legendary choral conductor Sigvart Steen, she was herself a teacher of music at Wagner who influenced many students both during her husband's tenure as choral conductor and for many years afterward. She died on May 12, 2014, at age 96, and *Wagner Magazine* ran her obituary in the fall 2014 issue. One former student and chorister, Vicki Heins-Shaw '71, wrote a letter about how much Margery and Sigvart Steen had meant to her, which ran in the summer 2015 issue of *Wagner Magazine*. We placed a note next to Mrs. Heins-Shaw's letter, asking for more alumni to send their remembrances of the choir.



In the meantime, my colleague Lee Manchester, Wagner's director of media relations and unofficial historian, had acquired three vinyl LP recordings of the Wagner College Choir under Steen's direction. He digitized them and posted them on the Wagner website in October 2015.

After receiving a number of letters from alumni, prompting others to write additional ones, conducting many interviews, reading and organizing the information contained in many folders of press releases, clippings, programs, and photos held in the Wagner College archives and in the music department, I composed a story about the history of the Wagner College Choir, "We Found Our Voice," for the fall 2016 issue of *Wagner Magazine*. Its eight pages contained only a fraction of the information I had gathered and beautiful reminiscences that would be sure to touch and interest the many Wagner College choir alumni. This small book is the extended version of my research and includes all of the contributions by Wagner College choir alumni.

— Laura Barlament, Director of Communications and Marketing
for Wagner College and Editor, *Wagner Magazine*

This undated picture in the Wagner archives is likely the Women's Choir of 1944–45, during John Bainbridge's first year at the College, when most young men were serving in the war.



Front row: GIBBS, REISCH, POSSELT, VESPER, LUDWIG, BADER, SCHENK, MEYER
 Second row: ARNOLD, KNUDSEN, VAN PELT, GAISE, VILLAUME, GUNDERSSEN, LEHFELDT, HAVIG
 Third row: JAXHEIMER, HEYDENREICH, DIETRICH, LUDDERS, KOCH, CORBIN

The Glee Club

The Glee Club began its year with a membership of thirty. During the first term, however, the attendance dropped considerably, due to the faculty ruling restricting the numbers of extra-curricula activities of the students. The organization, nevertheless, continues to function, rendering service at the various celebrations and school affairs. A welcome in song was extended to President Brezing at his inaugural banquet. Christmas carolling was joyfully performed not only at the college celebration, but also in the several Homes for the Aged and in Staten Island hospitals. Lenten services in Chapel were enhanced by the renditions of Bach Carols.

Repeating the successful presentation of the previous year, sacred music in conjunction with the Lenten Drama added inspiration to the performance. Quartets occasionally assisted the neighboring churches in the rendition of services and in organization entertainments.

The Glee Club remains a part of the cultural education of Wagner College, and as such continues its service to the school.

Introduction:

THE PRE-CHOIR ERA, 1931 - 34

Traveling and spreading the joy of music have always been part of the choral tradition at Wagner College.

The first reference to an organized student singing group in the Wagner College archives is found in a May 1931 German Lutheran church newspaper, *Der Lutherische Herold* [*The Lutheran Herald*]. In a “Report on Mission Work Among Immigrants in New York Harbor in the Year 1930,” Pastor E. A. Sievert describes worship services he is conducting on Ellis Island. A photo accompanying the story shows four members of the Wagner College Glee Club on their way to Ellis Island to support the pastor “with music and song,” as he writes. “May God reward them for what they have done for these people who often feel unfortunate,” he concludes.

The 1932 *Kallista* featured a photo of the Glee Club and noted, “Glee Club spreads its yearly message of cheer by caroling at local hospitals and at the Poor Farm.”

Up to this day, the choir continues to help students find their voices, discover the vast cultural riches of music from all ages and all around the world, and share the joy of human harmony with audiences locally, around the United States, and beyond. As the cover notes of the choir’s 1975 album puts it, they are Wagner College’s “ambassadors in song.”



Quartett des Wagner College Glee Clubs mit dem Immigrantenpastor
auf dem Wege zum Gottesdienst auf Ellis Island

On this page, a photo of the “quartet of the Wagner College Glee Club with the immigrants’ pastor on their way to the worship service on Ellis Island,” from *Der Lutherische Herold*, May 1931.

Opposite page, the first photo of the Wagner Glee Club found in the *Kallista* yearbook, 1932.



WAGNER COLLEGE OF STATEN ISLAND, N.Y.C.

Takes Pride in Presenting

Founding:

SILAS H. ENGUM, 1935 - 43



In May 1935, Clarence Stoughton was named the first lay president of Wagner College. That same year, Wagner College hired its first choir director, Silas H. Engum. He also served as chair of the music department. According to his obituary in the *Staten Island Advance* in July 1997, Engum was a Midwesterner who moved to Staten Island in 1933. As a soloist in the famous St. Olaf College Choir, he was steeped in the Midwestern Lutheran tradition, shaped by F. Melius Christiansen, the genius of *a cappella* choral singing. Engum was one of his students, and most of the Wagner choral conductors who followed him through the early 1980s also trained in the St. Olaf tradition.

During the Engum era, the choir was known as the Wagner College A Cappella Choir. It performed all religious music, in *a cappella* style. They often performed the works of J. S. Bach, Praetorius, Nicolai, and Christiansen. The 1936 *Kallista* boasted that Wagner's choir "sings in the style of the famous St. Olaf choir" and that its 40 members were chosen from 85 applicants.

The choir acquired gowns in fall of 1936, debuting them at the dedication of North Hall (known today as Reynolds House) as a women's dormitory in October 1936. Pictured in the 1936 yearbook, the dark robes had white collars. A story about this occasion in the *Wagnerian* on October 22, 1936, noted, "This year will see the Wagner College choir of fifty-five voices, gowned for the first time in the four years of its existence, when it appears for its concerts on and off the campus."

Opposite page, a program for the 1938-39 concert season, with photos of Irma Gramm '42 and Ruth Haas '42 superimposed on Main Hall.

This page, left, the Wagner College Choir in the 1936 *Kallista*; right, boarding the bus for a performance in 1941-42.



All aboard for New Jersey . . .



The choir in 1943, when enrollment plunged as the U.S. entered World War II. The *Kallista* noted, "Due to the difficulties of transportation the activities of the Wagner a cappella choir were decidedly restricted."

The reference to "four years of its existence" perhaps dates the choir's origin from the first activities of the Glee Club at Wagner. However, later generations considered the choir to have been founded in 1935; the 1949 *Kallista*, for instance, said, "In 1935 forty young people formed a new organization at Wagner College, the Wagner A Cappella Choir."

At any rate, the choir boasted of 55 members from 1936–37 up until about 1943. In its earliest years, it performed throughout New York City. It was also known for caroling in hospitals for Christmas. The choir went on its first tour in March 1939, visiting nearby areas: Long Island, New Jersey, and central New York State. During the following years, it expanded its travel to Pennsylvania and western New York State.

The choir also performed regularly for radio broadcasts on major New York City stations WQXR, WNYC, and WNEW. Its first radio broadcast was on March 13, 1938, on WQXR, featuring the works of Bach, Praetorius, Bortnyansky, and Christiansen.

The choir's membership and level of activity significantly declined during the 1942–43 academic year, as the entry of the United States into World War II affected enrollment of men, who were being conscripted for military service. The 1943 *Kallista* noted, "Due to the difficulties of transportation the activities of the Wagner a cappella choir were decidedly restricted. The usual trip was not taken and activities were limited to appearances at chapel programs and other activities such as Convocation Day and mid-year graduation." The choir was disbanded at some point during 1943, and it appears that choir director Silas Engum left the College as well. In the 1944 *Kallista*, there is no choir photo for the first time since 1936.

The War and Post-War Era:

JOHN L. BAINBRIDGE, 1944-49

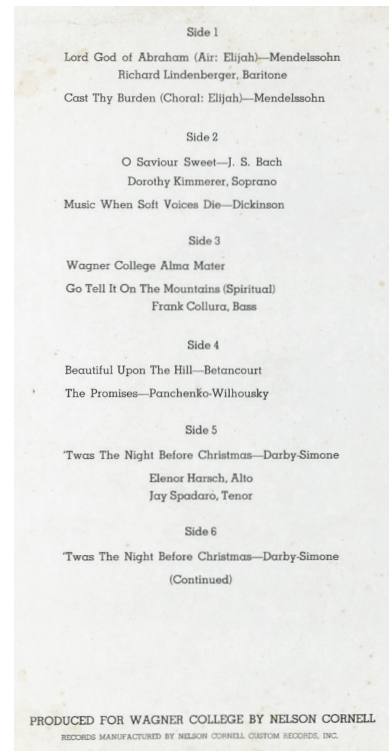
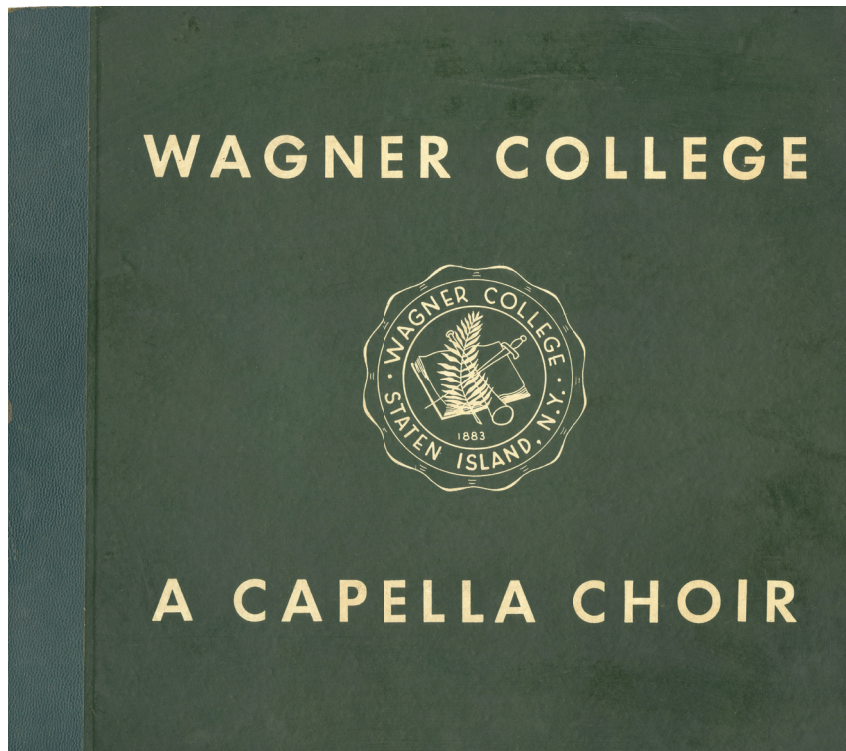


By April 1944, the ensemble had been reorganized as an all-women's choir, which made its debut at the College's Lenten worship service, according to an article in the *Staten Island Advance*. In early 1944, Wagner College had hired John L. Bainbridge to serve as choir director. The 1945 *Kallista* boasts of the 40-voice Wagner College Women's Choir: "Under the able direction of Mr. John Bainbridge, the organization has again become an active part of campus life." Bainbridge also instituted the Madrigal Singers, a chamber group of nine mixed voices — men and women — who led the singing during the daily chapel services.

Under Bainbridge's direction and the post-war college enrollment boom, the choir quickly gained membership and resumed all of its pre-war activities and more. By 1946, there were two groups of Madrigal Singers ("due to the welcome addition of many more tenors and basses," said the 1946 *Kallista*). They sang locally for churches and clubs in Staten Island and performed on WNYC radio. The choir also resumed its spring touring in 1946, appearing throughout New York, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut — the first of an annual tradition that lasted more than 30 years almost uninterrupted. By 1947, the choir once again had a good balance of male and female members and was no longer referred to as a women's choir. It reached its all-time high point of 80 members in the spring of 1948. (The



The choir reached its all-time high point of 80 members in the spring of 1948. This photo is from the 1948 *Kallista*.



This page, the choir's first LP recording (with "A Cappella" misspelled on the cover!) from 1949. Choir Director John Bainbridge was a superb Juilliard-trained organist, and the LP contains tracks accompanied by organ.

Opposite page, the new alma mater reproduced in the 1952 *Kallista*.

College's overall enrollment also boomed during this time, rising from a low of 390 in 1943 to a high of 2,061 in 1949, as the end of war and the GI Bill created a flood of new college students nationwide.)

Bainbridge shifted the musical character of the choir a bit. A superb Juilliard-trained organist, Bainbridge was not rooted in the classic Midwestern choral tradition. He introduced novelties such as secular music, accompanied choir music, and something like a barbershop quartet. The men of the choir participated in a glee club contest in Utica, New York, in 1948. The choir's official name, however, was still the Wagner College A Cappella Choir.

One highlight of the Bainbridge era was the choir's broadcast over the Columbia Broadcasting System on Palm Sunday in 1948. Another was its first-ever LP recording, made in 1949. The album featured Bainbridge's characteristic mix of repertoire, from the sacred and classical (J. S. Bach, Mendelssohn) to the secular and popular ("Twas the Night Before Christmas" by Ken Darby and Harry Simeone). The album cover featured the seal of the College surrounded by the words "Wagner College A Capella [sic] Choir." Nevertheless, a few tracks are accompanied by organ (selections from Mendelssohn's oratorio *Elijah*) and piano ("Twas the Night Before Christmas"). Significantly for Wagner College history, the recording included the original Wagner alma mater, "We Stand United" by Frederick J. Melville '18, and the new one, which had been adopted in 1947 and which we sing to this day: "Beautiful Upon the Hill" by Frank Betancourt '41.

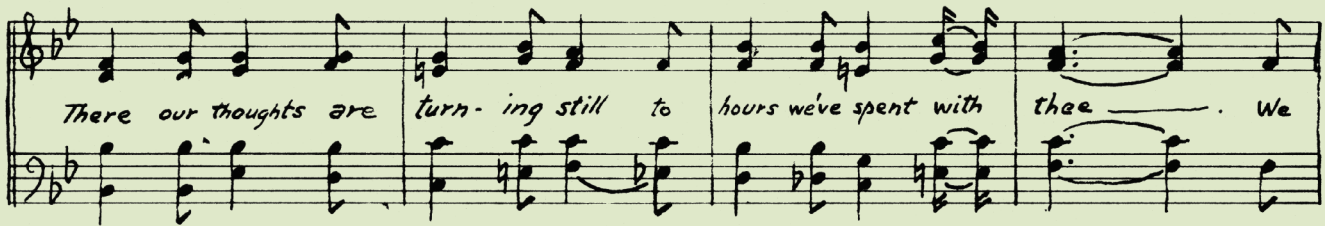
BEAUTIFUL UPON THE HILL

Slowly

p Beau-ti-ful up-on the hill —, Look-ing out to the sea —, ,



There our thoughts are turn-ing still to hours we've spent with thee —. We



gradually louder

love thee Al-ma-Ma-ter, our praise to thee we'll sing —, For

f



WAG-NER will for-ev-er be — deep in our mem-or-y —.





The Establishment Era:

SIGVART J. STEEN, 1949 - 68



Sigvart Steen ushered in a long-lasting and very memorable era of the Wagner College Choir. Dynamic, intense, and committed to choral excellence, Steen was already a noted conductor when he moved to the New York City area in the summer of 1948, so that his wife, contralto Margery Mayer, could further her operatic career.

Steen had degrees from Luther College and St. Olaf College, where he studied conducting with F. M. Christiansen. He had served as a professor of music and choral conductor at Northland College in Wisconsin, had conducted the US Navy's Great Lakes Blue Jackets Choir during the war, and had been a professor and chair of music at Luther College, where he founded the Luther College Nordic Cathedral Choir.

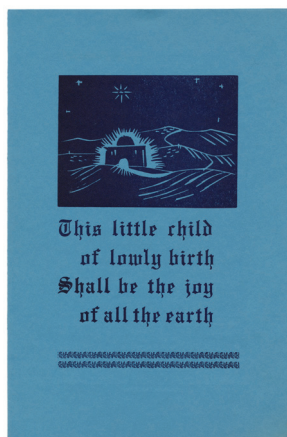
In the fall of 1949, Wagner College hired Steen as professor and chair of music and choir conductor. Bainbridge stayed on as professor of music at Wagner until his retirement in 1973 — but the coming of Sigvart Steen marked a distinctive new era of the Wagner College Choir.

THE CHOIR'S HOME

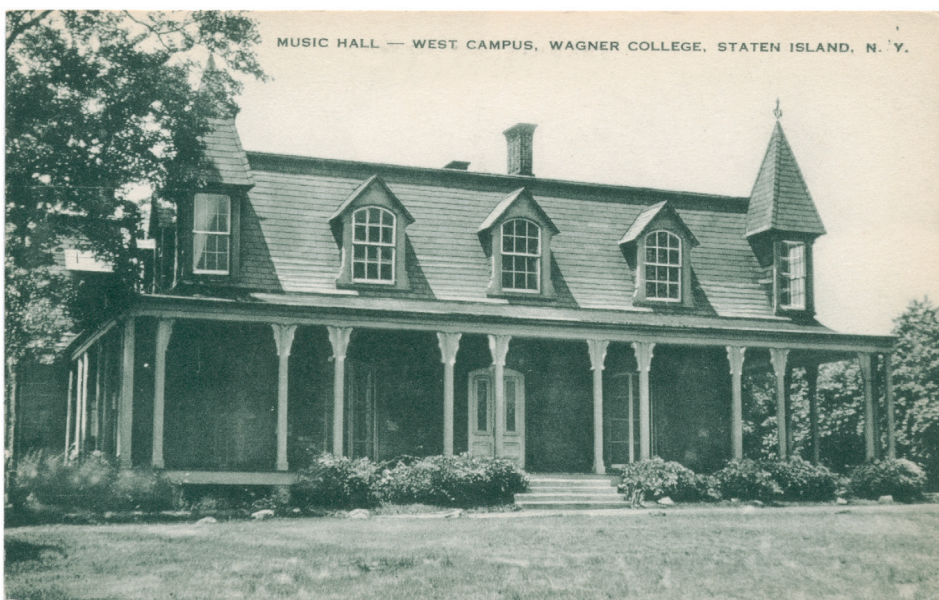
Surely not coincidentally, 1949 was also the year of an important expansion of the College's campus and music facilities. Sometime before June of that year, the College purchased the old Ward family estate that was located across Howard Avenue (then known as Serpentine Road) from the campus. The property encompassed 18 acres and a 19-room mansion built in 1867 by William Green Ward, a wealthy banker who had also served as a colonel in the Civil War and as brigadier general for the New York National Guard. According to a June 8, 1949, article in the *Staten Island Advance*, the College intended to invest \$50,000 into renovating the house to serve as a "music and arts center," with "classrooms and practice rooms for the college's band, orchestra, choir and instrumental and vocal students."

Indeed, the old Ward house became the choir's home for about 35 years. The long uphill schlep from the main campus to the Music Building (as it was known) for choir rehearsals, in all kinds of weather, is a leitmotif of chorister lore. During most of the Steen years, these rehearsals took place daily, first thing in the morning. Once the students reached the building with its wraparound porch, they ascended a large stairway to the second floor, where the choir used the old home's ballroom as

Opposite page, Sigvart Steen conducts the choir at Lincoln Center in 1966. This sold-out performance for 2,500 people in Philharmonic Hall (today's David Geffen Hall) was a triumph of the Steen years. Photo by Bert J. Eckman, Brooklyn, New York.



Above, the front cover of the program for the 1949 Christmas concert. Right, the former Ward House that the College acquired in 1949. It served as the choir's home base for 35 years.



its rehearsal space. This special place — a beautiful old house devoted to the art of music — bestowed a signature romance to the choral identity.

STEEN'S FIRST YEAR

The activities of Steen's first year at Wagner are exemplary of his program throughout his nearly 20 years as Wagner College choir director. The first concert was a solemn, religious Christmas concert, held in the college auditorium (today's Main Hall Theatre). It was described in detail in the *Staten Island Advance* in December 1949: It estimated the attendance at 500, with many people finding standing room only. "The concert was presented in a cathedral-like atmosphere with the audience asked to refrain from applause. Prof. Warren Robinson of the art department had designed a stage setting that simulated stained glass windows and an altar with two lighted candles to increase the effect. The auditorium was darkened and the stage was dimly lighted." All choir music was performed a cappella, but there were also instrumental pieces played by the Wagner Concert Band as well as solos performed by Margery Steen, with piano accompaniment. In subsequent years, the choir gave two performances of the Christmas concert per year, and it was moved to the gymnasium, to accommodate up to 2,000 attendees.

The next big event of Steen's first year at Wagner was a choir tour, the scope of which far surpassed any previous tour. Previous tours had never been longer than a week in March or April, presumably during spring break. Their destinations were cities in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut, although once they had ventured as far away as Massachusetts. Steen, on the other hand, arranged a three-week tour, held during the longer winter break, in January and February. Traveling

throughout New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, the choir performed one concert in a different city every day, except for one day, when they performed two concerts. The next year, they toured five states.

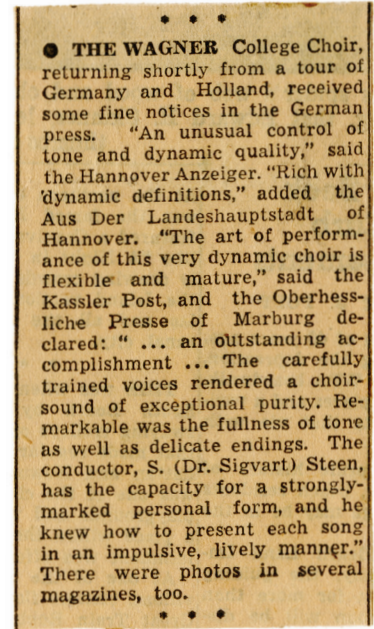
THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION CONVENTION,
GERMANY, SUMMER 1952

Early in Steen’s tenure at Wagner, the choir received an extraordinary invitation: to perform at the convention of the Lutheran World Federation in Hannover, Germany, in July and August of 1952. Steen had spent 1929–30 studying music in pre-war Berlin, and he eagerly accepted this chance to return to Germany. The 27 choir members who took the trip performed a total of nine concerts at the convention before audiences as big as 2,000 people. They made an enormous impression in Germany, still in the throes of post-war recovery.

The Wagner College Choir was the only US college choir invited, and their appearance was covered extensively in the German press. The *Badische Illustrierte*, for example, a popular post-war magazine published in the south of Germany, devoted a page to pictures from the conference. The largest was of the Wagner Choir, and the accompanying caption declared that its performances made the “biggest impression” of the conference. “It left an image of its lively work in all the churches of the city. The Americans were given a special welcome by the Germans, who had not forgotten their help in our time of need after the war.”



The German press gave glowing reviews of the Wagner College Choir’s performances at the 1952 Lutheran World Federation Convention in Hannover.



Left, choir members wait with their luggage near the statue of King Ernst August of Hannover, during the 1952 trip to Germany and Holland. Right, an unidentified U.S. press clipping reviews the choir's triumphant trip. Photo and clipping courtesy of Richard Steen.

Sigvart Steen reported to Wagner College President Delo about the progress of the choir tour in a letter dated July 31, 1952: "We have had unusual good fortune at all times. *No sickness* and the entire personnel of the Choir is housed in private homes — and our students are gradually getting used to bathing *or* sponge washing in *cold* water. The food given to the youth of the Convention is plain and not always palatable because of its sameness (but *much of it*) — so I have supplemented it by paying for an additional meal once each day at some restaurant of their own choice. I felt they must have good meat each day for singing." [All emphasis is his.]

Before leaving Europe, the choir performed in eight other cities: Göttingen, Kassel, Marburg, Frankfurt, and Wuppertal, Germany; and The Hague, Amsterdam, and Rotterdam, Holland. They also performed onboard the SS *Maasdam* on their return to the US. The SS *Maasdam* returned them on August 20 to Montreal, not to New York, so they had to make the rest of the journey by train. They covered the train expenses with concerts in Montreal (sponsored by the Finnish Lutheran organization) and Albany (sponsored by the United Lutheran Church in America, predecessor organization of today's Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) on August 20 and 21, as Steen wrote to Delo in his July 31, 1952, letter.

The *Staten Island Advance* reported on the dire impressions of war-torn Germany brought back by choir member Alice Klumpe '54. "She saw their bombed buildings and poverty, spoke to their children — children without hope for the future — watched the displaced persons waiting on line for a meager daily hand-out and felt deeply the aura of apathy encircling a war-embittered people," the *Advance* wrote.

"I will never forget this experience, and I believe it will carry a lasting influence on my life," Klumpe told the *Advance*.

TOURING

That may have been the only overseas tour that the Wagner College Choir did during the Steen years, but it was not the only international tour. The scope of Steen's 19 three-week January-February tours kept expanding, frequently taking them into Canada. In 1955, they traveled 3,500 miles throughout the Midwest and Canada, singing for as many as 13,000 people during their travels. Washington, D.C., became a regular stop on these tours starting in 1956. In 1960, the tour incorporated 18 states, from the Midwest to California and back through the South. In 1962, they appeared in Florida for the first time, as part of an 11-state tour. The choir's homecoming concert, on February 18, 1962, drew 1,700 listeners to the Sutter Gymnasium. Another highlight of 1962 was the choir's April appearance at Radio City Music Hall for the 43rd Annual United Easter-Dawn Service, which was broadcast nationally on NBC.

Sigvart Steen's son, Richard Steen, notes that touring was a key factor determining the size of the choir during those years. "Up until the early 1960s, the choirs had a maximum of 45 students, dictated by the size of a bus (including two jump seats!). In the mid-1960s, the size was increased to 65, but that required either two buses or transportation by rail." The 65-member choir toured 11 Northeastern and Midwestern states in 1963; went on a 25-day tour of the Eastern United States in 1964; and covered the Midwest, the Pacific Northwest, and Vancouver over 24 days in 1965.

During Steen's tenure, there was only one year without a tour: 1961. In 1960–61, Sigvart Steen took a leave of absence to hold a series of choir clinics around the nation for pastors, music directors, and choirs of Lutheran churches. During his

Scenes from the start of the 1960 cross-country choir tour, which incorporated 18 states over three weeks. The choir's size was limited to 45 members, dictated by the size of the tour bus. Photos courtesy of Gale Tollefsen Bellafiore '61.





The choir on its 1960 tour, as pictured in the 1960 *Kallista*. The tour took them to California, among many other destinations. Here, they are pictured on deck of the *USS Ranger* aircraft carrier at Naval Air Station Alameda. Judy Rank Hatke '60 says, "I remember walking through the ship doors in high heels. We had a tour of the ship. There were all those cute sailors. Dr. Steen had us sing on deck."

absence, the Wagner choir was directed by Harald C. Normann, associate professor of music. Under Normann's baton, the choir continued to perform in New York City. It gave two performances of its annual Christmas concert on December 11, 1960. In addition, the choir was selected to appear on the Great Choirs of America radio series on NBC, a 10-minute segment broadcast on Sunday mornings in May and June of 1961.

RECORDINGS

The choir also returned to recording its music under Steen's direction. In 1956, the Wagner College Choir ("A Cappella" was not part of the ensemble's name, although all of the music recorded was sung a cappella) released its first LP recording with Steen. With a photo of Main Hall on the cover, it featured approximately 44 minutes of music, including the works of J. S. Bach, Grieg, Nicolai, Poulenc, F. M. Christiansen, a Danish folk carol, and others.

The choir's third LP (second under Steen) came out in 1964. The album cover imagery and text emphasizes the Lutheran and Christian character of the College and of the choir, with a picture of a cross carved by the Rev. Dr. Arne Unhjem, professor of religion at Wagner, on the cover. It contains about 40 minutes of Christian compositions by many different composers. Pieces by Russian composers and "Alleluia" from *Brazilian Psalm* by Jean Berger, a German Jew who escaped the Nazis and spent time in Brazil before settling in the US, expand the scope of the choir's repertoire.

JUST RELEASED!

WAGNER COLLEGE CHOIR

DR. SIGVART J. STEEN — *Conductor*

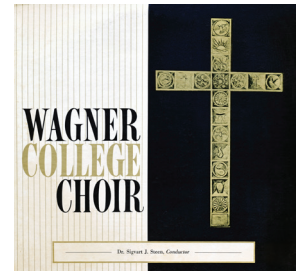
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ADDITIONAL STAFF

It should be noted that many members of the College administration and music faculty helped Sigvart Steen to achieve all of his goals for the choir, to organize and publicize its many activities, and to fulfill the high standards of excellence that he set. A list of names drawn from choir programs includes:

- MARGERY MAYER STEEN, voice teacher, chaperone, 1949–75
- ESTHER ANDERSEN PETERSEN, voice teacher, 1950–65
- IAN A. MORRISON, choir manager, dean of men, 1950–52
- DR. HARALD C. NORMANN, manager, 1953–54; conductor, 1960–61
- MARY LOUISE HANSEN, voice teacher, 1953–60;
assistant conductor, 1959–66
- THELMA EVENSEN, accompanist and musical assistant, 1955–58
- JEFFREY J. SAFFORD, director of public relations, tour assistant, 1962–65
- HENRY J. HEIL, assistant director of development, tour assistant, 1965–67
- WALTER BOCK '38, director of church relations, tour assistant, 1968–69
(after Steen's death, he continued in this role until 1979)
- AL WAGNER '58, theater professor, 1963–95, concert production
and recording

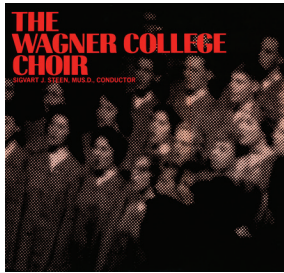
The organization of the Steen choir tours, in particular, required months of collaboration with the College's public relations manager. Steen also frequently employed one or two choir members, who learned much while helping with tour logistics.

The choir's first two albums under Sigvart Steen's direction came out in 1956 and 1964.

THE FINAL YEARS

Opposite page, Sigvart Steen takes a bow on stage at Lincoln Center's Philharmonic Hall in 1966. He had already been diagnosed with cancer of the bone marrow, yet he never stopped his strenuous work with the choir. Photo by Bert J. Eckman, Brooklyn, New York.

Below, the album cover of the choir's final recording under Steen, released in 1968. Bottom, the choir with Steen in the fall of 1968. Steen died in December 1968. Photo courtesy of Kathryn Lee Hume Arn '72.



The tour of 1966 was another highlight of the Steen years — particularly its final stop back in New York City. At the conclusion of a 7,000-mile, 24-concert, coast-to-coast journey, the choir performed a sold-out homecoming concert at Philharmonic Hall (later known as Avery Fisher Hall, and today known as David Geffen Hall) in Lincoln Center, on February 17, 1966. Performing for more than 2,500 people in one of New York City's most prominent venues was a fitting way to mark the 40th anniversary of Sigvart Steen's collegiate choral conducting career and a testament to the abilities of the Wagner College Choir that he had led and shaped so effectively. The performance, sponsored by the Lutheran Medical Center in Brooklyn, showcased the choir's range, from Palestrina and J. S. Bach to Mendelssohn and Brahms to folk songs from Finland, Austria, and Germany. Reflecting the core Midwest Lutheran choral tradition, they also performed works by F. Melius Christiansen and pieces arranged by Paul Christiansen.

One year earlier, however, Steen had been diagnosed with cancer of the bone marrow. Despite suffering pain in his back and ribs, Steen continued his work with his customary vigor. He led the choir for a program of local concerts, and they made a tour of eight states, Canada, and Washington, D.C., in 1967. The next year, the choir toured Florida and made its third LP record under Sigvart Steen's direction. This 1968 record featured works by Brahms, J. S. Bach, and other composers of Christian (and, more particularly, Lutheran) music. It included the popular choral setting of "Beautiful Savior" by F. Melius Christiansen, a favorite in the Lutheran a cappella choir tradition.





For the 1969 tour, Steen was planning another coast-to-coast journey, this time encompassing the breadth of Canada as well as of the Upper Midwestern US. "Steen was vigorously rehearsing the choir for its annual Christmas Concert [in December 1968] when he fell seriously ill and was admitted to the hospital," writes his son, Richard, in a biographical essay. The next day, he was scheduled "to conduct a Christmas concert before more than 2,500 college students and Staten Islanders," noted the *Wagnerian* of January 17, 1969. Remarkably, the concert went on, under the baton of student conducting assistant Allan DiBiase '72. Sigvart Steen died on December 20, 1968, having "made music with his students up to the week before he succumbed to the fatal illness," says Richard Steen.

PASSING OF THE BATON, 1969

Despite the shock and sadness choir members must have felt, they voted to continue with the tour in Steen's memory. The widowed Margery Mayer Steen as well as Walter E. Bock, Wagner director of church relations, would accompany them. But who would conduct them on tour — another faculty member? Another professional? No, it was one of their own — the talented junior music major Allan DiBiase '72. Steen had been mentoring him closely, as DiBiase had already been serving as Steen's assistant conductor.

The tour lasted 23 days, during which the choir performed 20 concerts and made a few special appearances, such as singing for the Chicago Sunday Evening Club, a television program seen by an estimated 250,000 viewers in the Great Lakes region.

The itinerary for the choir's epic winter 1969 tour through Canada and the Upper Midwestern United States, organized by Sigvart Steen and undertaken soon after his death.

WAGNER COLLEGE CHOIR
ALLAN F. DIBIASE, Conductor
DR. WALTER E. BOCK
Director of Church Relations

**1969 TOUR
ITINERARY**

SATURDAY, JANUARY 25
6:15 a.m. leave Wagner College
4:00 p.m. arrive Montreal, Quebec, Canada
St. John's Lutheran Church
3594 Jeanne Mance Street
The Rev. John H. Peters
Telephone: (514) VI 4-6297
8:00 p.m. Concert, First Presbyterian Church
Jeanne Mance & Prince Arthur Sts.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 26
9:30 a.m. leave C.N.R. No. 133
11:55 a.m. arrive Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
St. Peter's Ev. Lutheran Church
400 Sparks Street
The Rev. Arthur F. Conrad
Telephone: (613) 232-9811
3:30 p.m. Concert, St. Peter's Ev. Luth. Church
7:30 p.m. leave C.N.R. Super Continental

MONDAY, JANUARY 27
11:00 p.m. arrive Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
First Lutheran Church
300 Victor Street
The Rev. John V. Arvidson
Telephone: (404) 722-7444

TUESDAY, JANUARY 28
8:00 p.m. Concert, First Lutheran Church
11:30 p.m. leave C.N.R. Super Continental

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29
9:20 a.m. arrive Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada
Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church
807 McMillan Avenue
The Rev. Fred W. Leuz
Telephone: (306) 852-3033
8:00 p.m. Concert, Third Ave. United Church

THURSDAY, JANUARY 30
9:45 a.m. leave C.N.R. Super Continental
2:45 p.m. arrive Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
10014 81st Avenue
Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church
The Rev. Hans Holmbein
Telephone: (403) 432-1694
8:00 p.m. Concert, Trinity Ev. Luth. Church

FRIDAY, JANUARY 31
8:15 p.m. leave C.N.R. Super Continental

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 1
11:00 a.m. arrive Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
Eldorado Motor Hotel
2330 Kingsway
Telephone: (604) 434-1341
6:30 p.m. arrive First Lutheran Church
42nd & Wales
The Rev. A. Husted-Christensen
Telephone: (604) HE 1-9623
8:00 p.m. Concert, First Lutheran Church

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2
8:00 a.m. leave G.N.R. No. 257
11:50 a.m. arrive Seattle, Washington
Getsemane Lutheran Church
911 Stewart Street
The Rev. Dr. J. Benner Weaver
Telephone: (206) MU 2-3620
4:00 p.m. Concert, Getsemane Luth. Church

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3
8:05 a.m. leave G.N.R. No. 460
12:05 p.m. arrive Portland, Oregon
Central Lutheran Church
N.E. 11th & Schuyler Sts.
The Rev. Jerrold L. Moulton
Telephone: (503) AY 2-2022
7:30 p.m. Concert, Central Lutheran Church
9:45 p.m. leave G.N.R. No. 4 & 28

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 4
2:30 p.m. arrive Whitefish, Montana
Christ Lutheran Church
711 Second Street
The Rev. Dennis L. Hanson
Telephone: (406) 822-2615
8:00 p.m. Concert, Central School Auditorium

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5
6:00 a.m. leave G.N.R. No. 32
2:50 p.m. arrive Glasgow, Montana
First Ev. Lutheran Church
941 Second Avenue North
The Rev. Orla E. Magis
Telephone: (406) 222-4862
8:00 p.m. Concert, First Ev. Lutheran Church

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6
12:05 a.m. leave G.N.R. No. 28
6:55 a.m. arrive Minot, North Dakota
Clarence Parker Hotel
P.O. Box 1240
Telephone: (701) 830-4853
6:30 p.m. arrive First Lutheran Church
North Broadway at 30
8:00 p.m. Concert, First Lutheran Church

see p 245-5130

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7
7:10 a.m. leave G.N.R. No. 28
9:35 p.m. arrive Benson, Minnesota
Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church
Oakwood Ave. at 10th Street
The Rev. Frithjof W. Eide
Telephone: (612) 942-3371
8:00 p.m. Concert, Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8
7:30 a.m. leave Our Redeemer's Luth. Church
9:00 a.m. arrive Clinton, Minnesota
Trinity Lutheran Church
10:00 a.m. leave Trinity Lutheran Church
4:00 p.m. arrive Minneapolis, Minnesota
Curtis Hotel
Minneapolis, Minnesota, 55404
Telephone: (612) 333-5144
5:00 p.m. arrive Calvary Lutheran Church
3801 Chicago Avenue
The Rev. Marvin A. Palmquist
Telephone: (612) 877-2504
8:00 p.m. Concert, Calvary Lutheran Church

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 9
6:35 a.m. leave G.N.R. No. 32
2:30 p.m. arrive Chicago, Illinois
Peik-Congress Hotel
337 South Michigan Avenue
Telephone: (312) HA 7-3800
6:30 p.m. arrive Orchestra Hall
290 South Michigan Avenue
8:00 p.m. Concert, Orchestra Hall

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 10
1:30 p.m. leave Peik-Congress Hotel
4:30 p.m. arrive Elkhart, Indiana
Grace Lutheran Church
81 W. Main Street
The Rev. John F. Schnabel
Telephone: (317) 522-4928
8:00 p.m. Concert, Grace Lutheran Church

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 11
9:00 a.m. leave Grace Lutheran Church
2:00 p.m. arrive Toledo, Ohio
Billcrest Hotel
90th and Madison Sts.
Telephone: (419) 245-4261
4:00 p.m. arrive Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
125 Glendale Avenue
The Rev. Gerard D. Busch
Telephone: (419) 382-5644
8:00 p.m. Concert, Holy Trinity Luth. Church

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 12
1:00 p.m. leave Hillcrest Hotel
4:30 p.m. arrive Cleveland, Ohio
Messiah Lutheran Church
3200 Mayfield Road
The Rev. David Munford
Telephone: (216) 442-0941
8:00 p.m. Concert, Messiah Lutheran Church

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13
9:00 a.m. leave Messiah Lutheran Church
3:00 p.m. arrive Tonawanda, New York
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
2669 Sheridan Drive
The Rev. Sherwood W. Bryant
Telephone: (716) 832-3390
8:00 p.m. Concert, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14
8:00 a.m. leave Good Shepherd Luth. Church
4:00 p.m. arrive Albany, New York
First Lutheran Church
181 Western Avenue
The Rev. William H. Ritterberger
Telephone: (518) 463-1329
8:00 p.m. Concert, First Lutheran Church

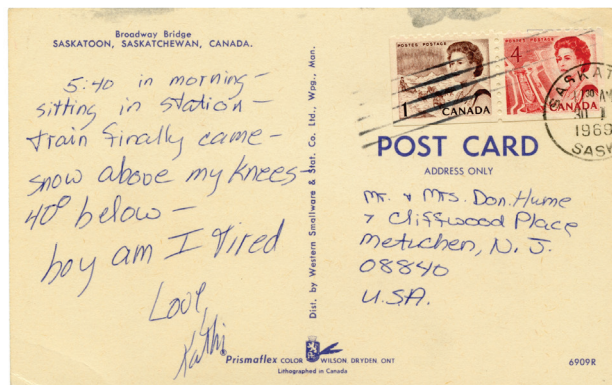
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 15
11:30 a.m. leave First Lutheran Church
11:50 a.m. arrive Luncheon Reception
15 Loudon Heights North
Loudonville, New York
4:00 p.m. arrive Kingston, New York
Redeemer Lutheran Church
Wurts and Rogers Sts.
The Rev. Dr. David C. Gaise
Telephone: (914) 338-8930
8:00 p.m. Concert, Trinity Lutheran Church
Spring and Home Sts.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 16
10:30 a.m. leave Trinity Lutheran Church
2:00 p.m. arrive Wagner College
Staten Island, New York
4:00 p.m. Homecoming Concert
Frederic Sutter Gymnasium

Unless otherwise indicated, mail for choir members should be sent in care of the local pastor. Address mail as follows:
Mr. or Miss
The Wagner College Choir
c/o The Reverend
(Street Address)
(City) (State) (Zip)



Mementoes of the 1969 tour from choir member Kathryn Lee Hume Arn '72, giving evidence that the weather was truly extraordinarily cold, even for Canadians. Her postcard home gives a snapshot into the harsh conditions the students endured on this trip.



Walter Bock's blow-by-blow report of the experience was entitled, "The Deep Freeze Tour, or 'You Must Gargle with Salt.'" It recounted unending train delays caused by the extreme weather, accompanied by lack of sleep and illness of various choir members. On August 10, 2016, DiBiase wrote these reminiscences of the 1969 tour:

There is no way to easily describe the 1969 tour that came very quickly after Dr. Steen's death. I had helped set up the tour, which was the most extensive of my time in the choir. The train trip across Canada and back across the northern USA was during one of the coldest years on record, culminating in -40° temperatures, the trains freezing to the tracks, and delays in the Rockies due to avalanches. We performed at Orchestra Hall in Chicago and some very large cathedrals and churches in Canada. It was a very big program of music as well, with some really major works. In this short form here, all I can say is that none of it would have happened had it not been for Wally Bock and Margery Mayer, who helped finish the arrangements for the tour, chaperoned, and gave me guidance every step of the way. As the *Staten Island Advance* put it (if I remember correctly), it was a true "baptism by fire."

Bock's account generally takes a humorous tone about all of the ups and downs of the tour, but he notes one stop with particular tenderness: Clinton, Minnesota, Sigvart Steen's childhood home and burial site. "We took along a floral offering which would be placed on his grave," he wrote. "The choir sang a short concert at Trinity Lutheran Church, for Dr. Steen was a native of this community. It was a very emotional experience for all who had known and loved Dr. Steen. The numbers sung were representative of Dr. Steen's faith and his dedication to this faith."



Growing the Tradition:

ARNOLD RUNNING, 1969 - 79



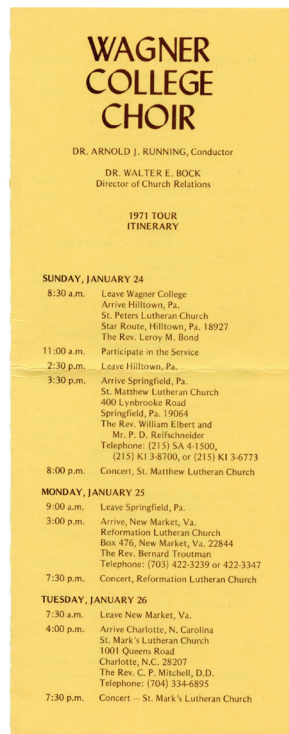
Hired in the fall of 1969, Arnold Running, like Steen, trained in the F. Melius Christiansen tradition at St. Olaf College. The son of a Lutheran minister, Running went on to attain his master's from the prestigious Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, and his doctorate from the University of Iowa. Before coming to Wagner, he experienced great success as a choral director at Parsons College in Iowa and Augustana College in South Dakota, leading both ensembles on tours of the United States and of Europe. The Augustana choir appeared in Norway several times; in 1962, the King of Norway awarded Running the St. Olav Medal, which honors people who have advanced Norwegian culture around the world.

During this turbulent time of US history, Running brought his small band of dedicated choral singers an environment of peace and harmony. On the album cover of the 1975 choir LP, Running's bio reflects this characteristic that so many of his choir alumni cherish: "A gentleman and a gentle man, he rules his choir with love, and it is as much his quiet reserve as his technical skill that has won the respect of those who have trained under him."



Opposite page, from the 1972 Kallista.

This page, from the 1976 Kallista.



Above, this itinerary of the 1971 tour details a trip to 15 cities in the East and the Midwest. Right, from the 1974 *Kallista*.



Running continued the Wagner choir tradition of extensive annual US tours, although during his years the choir traveled for two weeks rather than for three. Running also introduced some significant innovations: The choir's first tour under his direction included 47 choir members — and 15 instrumentalists! The chamber orchestra included violins, celli, bass, oboes, horn, trumpet and trombone. Traveling in New York and New England, they performed a challenging program including pre-Baroque composers like Josquin Des Prez and Heinrich Schütz, a J. S. Bach cantata, the Mozart Coronation Mass, and 20th-century compositions, as well as a selection of folk songs, carols, hymns, and spirituals.

The late 1960s and the 1970s saw a huge expansion of campus facilities at Wagner College, with the construction of the Horrmann Library, the Union Building (the choir's 1970 tour homecoming concert followed its dedication), and Harborview Hall. The addition of a 14-story residence hall meant that North Hall was no longer needed as a dormitory. It became the "New Music Building," greatly increasing the space available for the music department, as the old Music Building (the Ward home) continued to house the choir rehearsal room and other music studios and offices.

A major highlight of the Running years were the choir's series of European tours. Running led the choir on three month-long trips, in May–June of 1972, 1975, and 1978. (In addition, the choir went on two-week US tours in January 1972 and January 1975!) Since 1962, Wagner College had operated a satellite campus in Bregenz, Austria, and every year the choir tour began or ended in that town that was such a large part of the Wagner experience for more than 25 years. The rest of the tour locations were spread among the cities of West Germany, such as

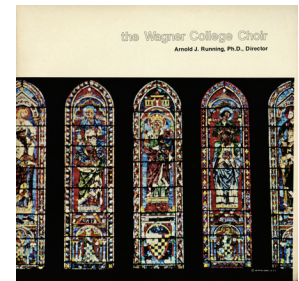
Munich, Berlin, Hannover (where the 1952 choir had triumphed at the Lutheran World Federation's meeting), Darmstadt, Kassel, Bonn, and Stuttgart.

The choir always also stopped at a few smaller places, especially the Stuttgart-area town of Schorndorf. Eugen and Martha Megerle, important supporters of Wagner College and especially of the choir, originally came from Schorndorf. It was the Megerles' generosity that made these trips affordable for the students.

The 1975 choir album was recorded during the tour, at the Church of the Twelve Apostles in West Berlin. The program focused on music of the Americas, with several spirituals and an American folk hymn, *The Peaceable Kingdom* by 20th-century American composer Randall Thompson, and *Misa Criolla* by Ariel Ramirez. The last, a folk mass based on the rhythms and traditions of Hispanic America, introduced the students and audiences to something "new, exciting and colorful," according to the LP cover text. It included instrumental accompaniment by keyboard, guitar, and percussion.

The choir celebrated the US bicentennial in 1975–76 with a program of American music, including folk songs, hymns, spirituals, and pieces by famous American composers such as Aaron Copland. They took this program on a two-

Under Arnold Running, the choir released an album in 1975. It was recorded on tour, at the Church of the Twelve Apostles in West Berlin. Below, the 1970–71 choir with Arnold Running.



← *St. Nicolai Kapelle Bille:* →

Anlässlich der Wiedereinweihung der St. Nicolai-Kirche

Chorkonzert

Wagner College Choir

Arnold Running · Ltg.

Staten Island, New York

mit Werken u. a. von Heinrich Schütz, Leonard Bernstein
Hans Friedrich Micheelsen, Oliver Messiaen,
mit Spirituals und Folksongs

**Sonnabend, den 17. Juni 1978, 20 Uhr
in St. Nicolai, Alfeld**

1



2

These two pages feature items from the 1978 Germany tour scrapbooks of Lorraine McNeill-Popper '78 and Diane Wehrli Mathisen '79: 1 and 7, locally produced posters advertising the choir's concerts; 2, a snapshot of Walter Bock '38, director of church relations and choir tour assistant from 1968 until 1979; 3, 6, and 8, snapshots of choir members; 5, a collage of places, tickets, postage stamps, and products from the tour. In addition, 4, the program of the choir's 1977 performance in Avery Fisher Hall in Lincoln Center — its second appearance on this stage (called Philharmonic Hall when the Steen choir performed there in 1966).



3

Avery Fisher Hall

Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts

Sunday Evening, March 20, 1977 at 7:30

The Wagner College Choir

ARNOLD RUNNING, Director

JACOBUS GALLUS HANDEL
(1550-1591)

Ascendit Deus

God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Alleluia! *Palm 47:5*

JOSQUIN DES PREZ
(c. 1450-1521)

Tu Pauperum Refugium

You are the refuge of the destitute, the comforter of the weary, the giver of asylum and courage to the laborer: you who point the way to the wanderer, my Lord and my Redeemer, I take refuge in you alone. You are the true God, Jesus Christ. I adore you and from you I await my salvation. Help me, Lord, that my soul may never sleep in death.

THOMAS WEELES
(c. 1575-1623)

Alleluia, I Heard a Voice

Alleluia, I heard a voice as of strong thundering, saying: Salvation and glory and honor and power be unto the Lord our God, and to the Lamb forevermore. Alleluia. *Revelation 5:12, 13*

JOHANN HERMANN SCHEIN
(1580-1630)

Die mit Tränen säen

They who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who cried as he went out carrying the seed will come back singing for joy, bringing in the harvest. *Palm 126:5-6*

ANDREA GABRIELI
(c. 1510-1586)

Magnificat

My heart praises the Lord; my soul is glad because of God my Savior, because he has remembered me, his lowly servant! From

now on all people will call me happy, because of the great things the Mighty God has done for me. His name is holy; he shows mercy to those who fear him, from one generation to another. He stretched out his mighty arm and scattered the proud with all their plans. He brought down mighty kings from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly. He filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away with empty hands. He kept the promise he made to our ancestors, and came to the help of his servant Israel; he remembered to show mercy to Abraham and to all his descendants forever! *Luke 1:46-55*

Glory to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever. Amen

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
(1685-1750)

Komm, Jesu, Komm

Lento

Come, Jesus, for I am weary. My strength declines; more and more; I long for your peace, for life's bitter road is difficult for me. *Alligro moderato*

Come, I yield myself to you.

Alligretto

You are the way, the truth, and the life.

Chorale

In faith I grasp your hand extended

And say to all the world, farewell.

My life is spent, my grief has ended.

My spirit comes with you to dwell.

My soul shall be with my creator.

For Jesus is to life the one true way, The Savior. *German text, Paul Täglichs*

Intermission

In consideration of the performing artists and members of the audience, those who must leave before the end of the performance are asked to do so between numbers, not during the performance. The taking of photographs and the use of recording equipment are not allowed in this building.

4

week winter tour of Florida. In 1977, however, the tour moved to March. This two-week tour with stops in Pennsylvania, New York, Ontario, Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio concluded with the Wagner College Choir's second appearance in Avery Fisher Hall. Sponsored by the Lutheran Charities Fund and the New York Area Fraternal Branch of the Lutheran Brotherhood, the program included Handel's *Ascendit Deus*, Gabrielli's *Magnificat*, and J. S. Bach's *Komm, Jesu, Komm*, as well as psalm settings in Norwegian by Grieg and a selection of folk songs, hymns, and spirituals.



5



6

Wagner College Chor New York

Chorkonzert

Programm

<p>O Praise the Lord of Heaven Die mit Tränen säen Cantate Domino Magnificat</p> <hr/> <p>Chichester Psalms</p> <hr/> <p>Es sungen drei Engel O Sacrum Convivium Volkstümliche amerikanische Hymnen und Spirituals Laß uns erfreuen</p>	<p>Ralph Vaughan Williams Hermann Schein Heinrich Schütz Andrea Gabrieli</p> <hr/> <p>Leonard Bernstein</p> <hr/> <p>Hans Friedrich Mischeelsen Oliver Messiaen</p> <hr/> <p>Healey Willan</p>
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Musikalische Leitung: Dr. Arnold Running
Direktion: Dr. Walter Bock
Ausführende: Studenten des Wagner College, Staten Island, New York, USA

EINTRITT FREI

Donnerstag, den 1. Juni 1978 – 19.30 Uhr – Theater am Kornmarkt, Bregenz

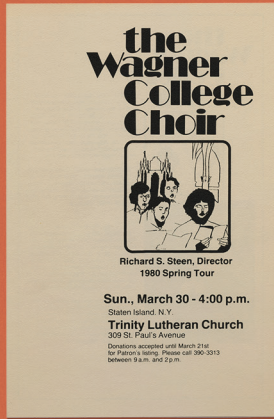
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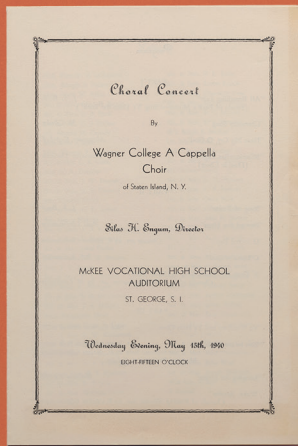
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The 1978 Europe tour proved to be the final highlight of the Running era. From May 30 to June 25, 1978, the choir sang in Bregenz (twice, at the beginning and end of the tour), Stuttgart, Schorndorf, Darmstadt, Bonn, Düsseldorf, Bocholt, Soest, Alfelt, Langenhagen, West Berlin, Bad Hersfeld, and Fürth. The following academic year was Running's last at Wagner. The following years were rocky ones for the College as well as for the choir. Nevertheless, the students who participated in choir still basked in the joy of music-making.

A SELECTION OF CHOIR PROGRAMS FROM THE FIRST FOUR DECADES



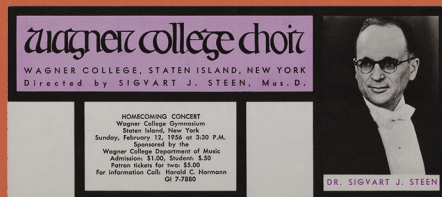
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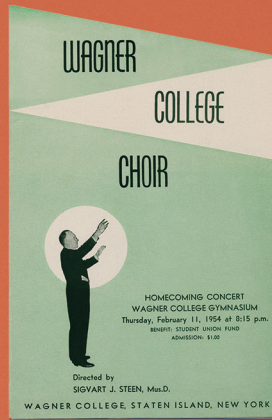
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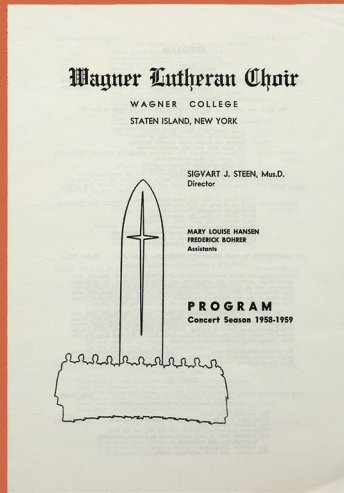
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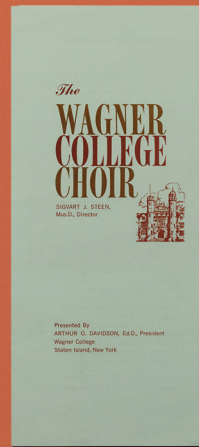
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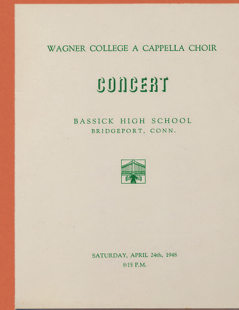
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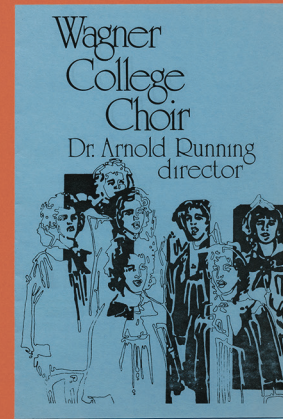
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1. March 30, 1980, Trinity Lutheran Church, Staten Island. Richard S. Steen, director.
2. May 15, 1940, McKee Vocational High School Auditorium, St. George, Staten Island. Silas H. Engum, director.
3. February 13, 1955, Homecoming Concert, Wagner College Gymnasium. Sigvart J. Steen, director.
4. February 12, 1956, Homecoming Concert, Wagner College Gymnasium. Sigvart J. Steen, director.
5. February 17, 1963, Homecoming Concert, Wagner College Gymnasium. Sigvart J. Steen, director.
6. 1958-59 Concert Season. Sigvart J. Steen, director.
7. February 11, 1954, Homecoming Concert, Wagner College Gymnasium. Sigvart J. Steen, director.
8. April 24, 1948, Bassick High School Concert, Bridgeport, Connecticut. John L. Bainbridge, director.
9. May 19, 1979, Commencement Concert. Arnold Running, director.

A Part-Time Interim:

RICHARD STEEN AND JAN MEYEL, 1979–86



Dr. Running's former students say he was forced to retire in 1979. It was a time when the College was at its nadir, veering to the edge of bankruptcy. The Ward house was closed in 1984, because its heating system was deemed irreparable. Neglected, the grand old house fell victim to vandals and fires; it was demolished in late 1992 or early 1993. Reynolds House (as it is known today) housed the music department, and the choir rehearsed in a Spiro lecture hall. The choral directors were part-time instead of full-time faculty, limiting the choir's activities. Yet students from this time still recall the joy of the music they made.

Sigvart Steen's son Richard grew up at Wagner College and became a musician himself. In fact, he gave his first voice recital in Guild Hall in 1968, with Allan DiBiase as accompanist. He graduated from St. Olaf College, earned a doctorate at the Yale School of Music, and worked as a music professor and choral conductor at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington. He then served part time as Wagner's choral director from 1979 to 1981. He led the Wagner College Choir on a wide-ranging tour in March of 1980, encompassing nine states and Washington, D.C.

Jan Meyel, an affable and talented vocalist, then took over as choir director from 1981 to 1986. He was the founder of the Opera Theatre of New Jersey and a longtime cantor at Temple Israel Reform Congregation in Staten Island. He was active as a performer, singing bass in duet with tenor Bernie Barr in the US, Canada, Europe, and South America. He continued to teach and perform at Wagner until about 1989. Former students like Annmarie Lambiasi '85 remember his "larger-than-life personality," his warmth and humor. The choir did not go on tours, but performed at local churches and on campus, with repertoire ranging from Lutheran hymns to classical pieces to Broadway medleys.



Left, the choir under the direction of Jan Meyel (white suit) in the 1983 Kallista.



A Turn of Fortune:

CASTLEBERRY, GARDNER, AND UNGER, 1986–96

The choir's fortunes started to turn in the mid-1980s. A new music department chair, Ronald Lee (a graduate of Luther College, where Sigvart Steen had founded the Nordic Cathedral Choir), hired David Castleberry in 1986 as the first full-time faculty member and choir director since Arnold Running's retirement. Castleberry held a doctorate of musical arts in conducting from the University of Texas at Austin. He left Wagner in 1990 to become director of choral activities at Marshall University (where he remains to this day) — but not before doing significant work with the Wagner College choir.

When Castleberry arrived, the choir's membership had dwindled down to only about 20, he recalls. It was not even represented in the 1985 and 1986 issues of the *Kallista*. Castleberry's time at Wagner coincided with quite a bit of administrative turnover — President Sam Frank left in 1987, followed by Provost Carlyle Haaland serving as interim CEO, before Norman Smith was appointed president in July 1988. All of them, however, were supportive of the rebuilding of the choir. During Castleberry's second year at Wagner, the choir resumed its annual spring tours. During one week of March 1988, the 45-member choir sang seven concerts at high schools and churches in Washington, D.C. They sang a diverse repertoire of works from great composers ranging from Alessandro Scarlatti to J. S. Bach to Brahms to Vaughan Williams — plus, continuing the Jan Meyel tradition, selections from the musical *Oliver!* It was its first tour since 1980 — a tradition that has continued unbroken to this day, 28 years later.

Castleberry's choir also was the first to return to Europe since the last Running tour in 1978. Castleberry remembers it coming about this way: In December 1989, President Smith threw a big Christmas party at the beautiful Italianate villa on Howard Avenue that was then the president's house. Smith asked the choir to perform at this event. "It was a love fest," says Castleberry. The alumni were gushing about how great the choir sounded, which they remembered from years gone by. Martha Megerle, who had sponsored the choir's Europe tours in the 1970s, was there as well. Castleberry didn't know who she was, but she approached him and said, "Why don't you take the choir to Europe?" He said, "That's a great idea but it's very expensive." She said, "How much?"

He and Ronald Lee, the music department chairman, did some research and came up with the figures. President Smith discussed the costs with her, and she underwrote



Opposite page, top, the choir under the direction of David Castleberry (right, front row) in the 1990 *Kallista*; center and bottom, choir members singing, and the whole choir under the direction of Jeff Unger (front row, with Barbara Lee, accompanist) in the 1995 *Kallista*.

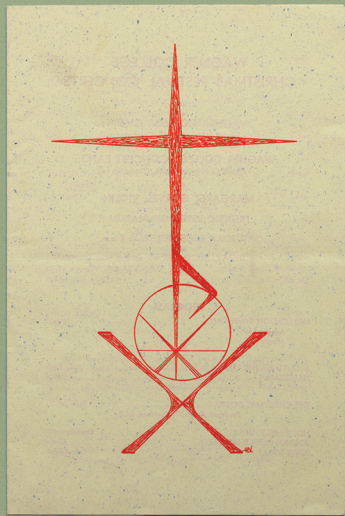
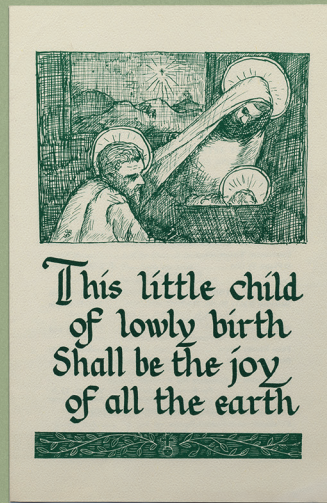
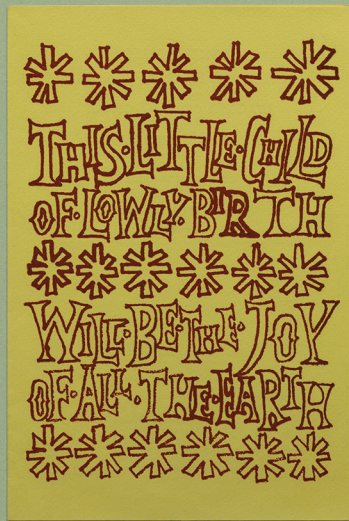
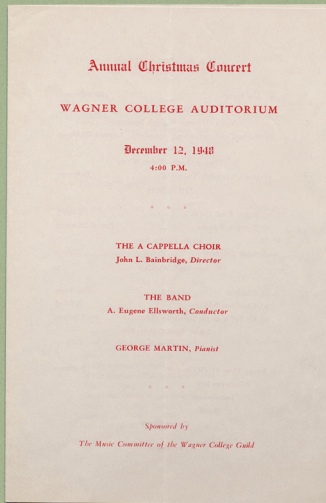
This page, top to bottom: David Castleberry, Patrick Gardner, and Jeff Unger.



Top, the choir on tour in Germany, led by David Castleberry (front), in a picture from the 1991 *Kallista*. Below, David Castleberry with choir benefactor Martha Megerle in Schorndorf, Germany, 1990.

the trip. Forty singers went on the 20-day tour, performing throughout Germany and Austria and in Venice. Martha Megerle met the choir for their concert in Schorndorf, and her two daughters traveled with the choir for a few days. “For me, it represented a culmination of four years of building,” Castleberry says.

When Castleberry departed Wagner to become the choir director at Marshall University, he connected the department with another excellent conductor, Patrick Gardner, who led the choir until 1993 — when he went to Rutgers, where he is still director of choral activities. Jeffrey Unger, who was previously a high school and college choral conductor in New Jersey, then led the Wagner College Choir for three years. Gardner and Unger both maintained the choir’s local performing schedule and annual tours in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions. Each added excellent repertoire to the choir’s performance schedule and incorporated local orchestral talent into their concerts as well. During Unger’s years, the choir was close to 50 voices strong. New singing ensembles showcased female and male voices and different styles of music. The Treble Choir was conducted by Kay Standifer. In 1995, it debuted a piece by Galt MacDermot, a Staten Island resident famed as the composer of the groundbreaking musical *Hair*. Unger also created the Coney Island Boys, a barbershop quartet. Costumed in straw hats, they charmed audiences during their sections of Wagner Choir concerts.



1. December 11, 1955,
Wagner College Gymnasium.
Sigvart J. Steen, director.
2. December 16, 1956,
Wagner College Gymnasium.
Sigvart J. Steen, director.
3. December 12, 1948,
Wagner College Auditorium.
John L. Bainbridge, director.
4. December 14, 1953,
Wagner College Gymnasium.
Sigvart J. Steen, director.

5. December 12 and 13, 1964,
Wagner College Gymnasium.
Sigvart J. Steen, director.
6. December 7, 1980, Zion
Lutheran Church, Staten Island.
Richard S. Steen, director.
7. December 10, 1950,
Wagner College Auditorium.
Sigvart J. Steen, director.



Expansion and Excellence:

ROGER WESBY, 1996-PRESENT



Roger Wesby came to Wagner College in 1996 with wide-ranging musical and cultural experiences that he has poured into his work with the Wagner College Choir. His wife, Barbara Wesby, is the choir's accompanist and an adjunct faculty member who teaches composition and musicianship. Both are composers as well, and they have had long experience with teaching music in El Salvador and Costa Rica as well as in the United States. In addition, Roger Wesby has a background in jazz: For quite a while early in his career, he says, he was torn between pursuing classical trumpet, jazz trumpet, and choral conducting. He even had his own big band in Costa Rica, before he finally settled on choral conducting as his main focus, returned to the United States after 14 years abroad, and earned choral conducting degrees from the Westminster Choir College and Indiana University.

Every year, Wesby has led the choir on spring tours covering the Northeast, the Southeast, California, and Florida. Along with choir alumni, the Wagner College Choir returned to Germany and Austria in 2013 — the first such trip since the Castleberry choir's in 1990. Under Wesby, the Wagner choir has joined other US choirs several times for concerts in Carnegie Hall, and they have performed great works such as Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, Brahms' *Requiem*, and Orff's *Carmina Burana*. And the innovations continue: In March of 2017, they struck out into uncharted Wagner Choir territory, with a 10-day tour of Spain.



Opposite page, the choir performs at St. John's Lutheran Church in Stamford, Connecticut, during its spring 2008 tour, directed by Roger Wesby.

This page, the choir rehearses in Campus Hall, preparing for its spring 2012 tour of Germany and Austria. Photo by Anna Mulé.

Fitting with his diverse background, Wesby says, “There is worthy music in every genre.” The choir’s repertoire now includes music ranging over a 500-year span of history by composers and folk traditions from around the world. Audiences appreciate the diversity of the programming, says Wesby. “If you can represent a whole world in a program, diversity keeps everyone’s interest up.” “It also fits the ideal of the liberal arts,” adds Barbara Wesby. “Choir is a credit course, so why not give them the best of all these different traditions, the languages and all the culture?”

Roger Wesby’s own summary of his choirs’ accomplishments, as well as bios of Roger and Barbara Wesby, are well worth reading and repeating here:

WAGNER COLLEGE CHOIR

BY ROGER WESBY (FALL 2015)

WAGNER COLLEGE CHOIR has a long tradition of musical excellence. Since the tenure of Dr. Sigvart Steen, founder of the Nordic Choir at Luther College and longtime director of choral activities at Wagner College, the choir has toured extensively, performing the great choral masterworks of church and concert hall alike in Europe, Canada, and all across the United States, in venues which include Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, and the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. Wagner Choir has performed with the Staten Island Symphony Orchestra, the Staten Island Philharmonic, the New Brunswick Chamber Orchestra, at Riverside Church in Manhattan, and the Miller Theater at Columbia University; participated in the installation of Metropolitan New York (ELCA) Bishops Stephen Bouman and Robert Rimbo; and toured extensively in the Northeast, the Southeast, California, and Florida. The choir recently performed three collaborative concerts with the semi-professional chorus Schola Cantorum on Hudson and a concert version of Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess*. In preparation for the 2013 tour of Germany and Austria, the choir performed Brahms’ *Requiem*. Special anniversary and holiday concerts, a return to Carnegie Hall, and an extraordinary performance of Duruflé’s *Requiem* were some of the highlights of 2013–2014. Last season, the choir toured with its *A New York Romance* concert, performed cantata movements by Bach with orchestra, premiered two new works by conductor Wesby, and performed Orff’s *Carmina Burana*. Fall of 2015 saw a mini-tour of upstate New York and a performance of *Messiah* in the Music Hall of Snug Harbor Cultural Center, and the spring of 2016 saw the choir returning to Florida for a seven-city tour featuring new works by Roger and by Barbara Wesby and wrapping up the year with *A Pocketful of Songs*, a program of songs from a 500-year period. THE CHAMBER SINGERS have also performed at Carnegie Hall, with the Staten Island Symphony, at Brooklyn College, and in numerous campus and community concerts. *STRETTO* has performed at Wall-to-Wall



Joni Mitchell at Symphony Space, for Jazz Vespers at St. Peter's Church, Manhattan, and Trinity Lutheran Church on Staten Island, at the National Arts Club, Gramercy Park, and at Snug Harbor Cultural Center on Staten Island. The ensemble recently took part in the 25th annual commemoration of the life and works of composer Alec Wilder in Manhattan. The choirs' membership is drawn from across all of the disciplines of the College. Under the leadership of Dr. Roger Wesby, the choir has expanded its repertoire with world music and jazz-inspired arrangements and undertaken performances of the traditional classics with a new level of discipline and an approach stressing stylistic authenticity.

Born in Worcester, Massachusetts, ROGER WESBY graduated from Eastman School of Music. His service in the Peace Corps, teaching and performing in national art centers in El Salvador and Costa Rica, led to professional opportunities in Costa Rica. There Wesby served as conductor of the National Symphonic Chorus and Director of the School of Music at the National University, conducting its chamber choir and jazz ensemble. He received a master's degree from Westminster Choir College where he studied with Joseph Flummerfelt and earned the title of Doctor of Music at Indiana University, studying with Robert Porco. He was Director of Choral Activities at the University of Kentucky and founded the Lexington Children's Chorus and *New Voices*, an elite vocal ensemble. He was Director of Choral Activities at Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois and conductor of the Handel Oratorio Society. An active clinician, guest conductor and published composer/arranger, Wesby has created hundreds of arrangements and compositions for choir, jazz ensembles and orchestra. He was Choir Director of Lutheran Summer Music at St. Olaf College. He has written articles on the history

Singing for the annual September 11 memorial service on campus, in 2014, directed by Roger Wesby. Photo by Anna Mulé.



Performing the fall concert at Trinity Lutheran Church, Staten Island, in November 2013.

of jazz and blues for the Encyclopedia of New Jersey. He composed *Jazz Mass*, which has been used in several Lutheran Churches, and was commissioned to compose a 150th anniversary liturgy and anthem for Trinity Lutheran Church, the college's founding church on Staten Island. Wesby was the inaugural Featured Composer for *Schola Cantorum on Hudson's* 2009-2010 season. He guest conducted the New Brunswick Chamber Orchestra and premiered with them the commissioned work *River Songs*. He produced and conducted a choral-orchestral concert featuring many of his arrangements of Ellington and Weill and culminating in the concert version of *Porgy and Bess*. North / South Consonance Chamber Orchestra commissioned and premiered his *diss-FUNK-shun* in the fall of 2013. In 2015 he premiered two new works, *Deliver Me* for Black History Month and the commissioned *Wake the Harp of Heaven* for the Dauphin County Music Educators Association 60th annual Choral Festival, which he guest conducted. In response to the massacre of nine people in Charleston, South Carolina, in June of 2015, he composed *I Will Arise*, performed on fall and spring choir tours. Wesby founded and annually curates two heritage festivals at Wagner College: *Viva Italia!* and the *Tribute to Black Music*. He is the recipient of the outstanding Service to the College Award, Outstanding Research Award and the Diversity Award.



BARBARA WESBY was born in Central Pennsylvania. From an early age she showed talent in composition, piano, dance and acrobatics. She was the recipient of a Fred Waring Award and composed an operetta and several choral and vocal works before graduating from high school. She studied composition at the Eastman School of Music with Warren Benson and Samuel Adler. As a Peace Corps volunteer she taught in El Salvador and Costa Rica. She was head of the Theory Program and later Director of the National Youth Symphony Program and taught at the National University of Costa Rica. She co-founded the Lexington Children's Chorus and received grants from the Kentucky Council for the Arts as composer-in-residence of the chorus. She has been the recipient of numerous grants from the Staten Island Arts Council to create and present original works. In 2011 she composed *Here at the Shore* for North/South Consonances and soprano Carla Wesby and *Songs of Abraham* for Richmond Choral Society. She is currently developing a chamber opera, *Four Good Women*, supported by a grant from the Arts Council. Barbara Wesby teaches Theory, Musicianship and Composition and serves as accompanist to the choirs at Wagner College and as Organist / Choir Director at St. Sylvester's Roman Catholic Church on Staten Island. She has composed and published numerous vocal, choral and chamber works and is an active organist, harpsichordist, pianist and choir director.

Michala Williams '17 was the featured soloist and Roger Wesby the conductor at the Opening Convocation in 2015. Photo by Anna Mulé.



VOICES OF THE WAGNER COLLEGE CHOIR

The following first-person accounts by choir members are essential reading to understand the experience and spirit of the Wagner College Choir. They are organized by choir director and era, covering the 1940s to the 2010s.

THE WAR AND POST-WAR ERA: JOHN L. BAINBRIDGE, 1944 - 49

TRYGVE R. SKARSTEN '49 (1928-2014)
EXCERPTS FROM HIS MEMOIR, "GRANDPA REMEMBERS" (2005)

College Choir

I also sang in the Wagner College Choir under the direction of John Bainbridge. His selection of choral anthems left much to be desired. Nor did he seem to know how an a cappella choir was supposed to sing. We would present concerts singing from sheet music with accompaniment instead of having memorized it beforehand. He definitely was not of the school of F. Melius Christiansen and the St. Olaf College Choir. Even with my untrained ear, I could hear voices that would stick out and tremolo like they were singing in an opera. Mr. Bainbridge was of Ivy League background where they sang cute little ditties in the name of American culture and were astounded when a little Midwestern college stormed into Carnegie Hall in the 1940s and showed sophisticated New Yorkers how choral music should be sung. I have been hard on Mr. Bainbridge because I thought we could have done much better. His expectations were low and our concerts showed it. During one concert in Manhattan, we nearly fell apart, we were so bad. I'm sure the audience noticed it too. Otherwise, he was a very nice guy, nearly too nice.

Grandpa Meets Grandma for the First Time — Sometime in March 1949

The first year in the Wagner Choir I sat with three different girls while we traveled on the college bus to our various concerts. One whom I kind of liked a little was Ruth Kaijeralainen. She was of Finnish Lutheran background. The other two

Opposite page, Ariel Ubaldegaray '18 in 2016. Read his thoughts about the choir on page 70. Photo by Jonathan Harkel.

were Italian twin sisters by the names of Nancy and Mary Carlucci. Though they were Italian, they were staunch Protestants and belonged to the Italian Presbyterian Church on Willowbrook Road. I enjoyed being with them and we had a lot of fun together. But it was always in a group setting. I never went out on a date with any of them. Why? — Because I was not ready to get serious with anyone. ...

... My parents were good friends of Helger and Marget Jensen ... They belonged to the South Ozone Evangelical Free Church where a Pastor Jens Stangeland was their pastor. They spoke very highly of him. As the years went by, they told us that Pastor Stangeland had moved to Staten Island and taken a new call to the Tottenville Evangelical Free Church. He and his wife, Clara (Granny), had a daughter named Ruth who was a couple years younger than me and who was planning to enter the Wagner College School of Nursing on Staten Island where we lived. They told me to make sure that I look her up. I said I would and that was as far as it went for a while.

... Some time thereafter, we were giving a choir concert at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church on West 65th Street in Manhattan. Tryg Tonnessen, who also sang 1st tenor in the college choir, asked me during intermission if I had met Ruth Stangeland yet. I said, “No.” “Why don’t you go over and say hello? She’s right over there,” he said. “You mean she is in the choir?” I asked. “I didn’t know that.” I immediately walked down a few steps to the landing of the back stairway of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church where Grandma was talking to some other choir members and introduced myself. And that’s how we met. To think that I had been sitting with two Italian girls and a Finnish girl for most of the choir season when I could have been sitting with a Norwegian!

THE ESTABLISHMENT ERA: SIGVART J. STEEN, 1949–68

BILL (WILBERT) WEHRLI ’53
CHOIR TOUR MEMORIES

In January of 1950, we left campus in the morning and stopped at a restaurant just over NY-NJ border. After lunch, Dr. Steen had us form up in the “concert form,” and we gave an impromptu mini-concert in the restaurant to generous applause.

In January or February of 1951, while traveling on the Pennsylvania Turnpike en route to New Kensington, west of Pittsburgh, we stopped for lunch at the midway rest area, where we ran into the Concordia College Choir, led by Paul Christiansen, son of F. Melius Christiansen of St. Olaf College fame. We had an



impromptu mini-concert as dueling choirs. It was a great time. Back on board the bus, Dr. Steen told us that the reason we were required to wear jackets and ties, and dresses for the women, was so we would appear as professionals. The Concordia students were wearing army fatigues, jeans, etc. They looked rather ragtag and sloppy compared to us — point made.

On the last leg of the tour in February 1952, we sang in a little farming town of Stafford Springs, Conn. After dinner in the church basement — the usual — ham, scalloped potatoes (practically the same time every night of the tour), we were treated to lots of homemade pies. We really pigged out on dessert. Dr. Steen was PO'd that we ate so much, so he made us walk to the concert venue — about 2 ½ miles, temperature was 6 degrees — so we could walk off some of the dessert. We were young and didn't mind.

Almost every morning on tour, our hosts would serve us bacon and eggs. It got old, as did the ham and scalloped potatoes.

Sigvart Steen conducts a choir rehearsal, circa 1953–54, in the Music Building (the old Ward House). This rehearsal must have been one of the first of the semester, as the singers are using sheet music. Steen required his choirs to memorize all of their music.

JEFF SAFFORD '56 M'59
Choir member, PR director and choir tour chaperone
A "COLLEGE CHOIR MARRIAGE," PERSPECTIVE I

My relationship with the Wagner College Choir spanned eleven years, 1954–65. I joined the choir in my junior year, 1954. The 1955 annual choir tour took us to the Midwest,* the highlights being extreme cold (-8 in Chicago), and a choral presenta-

tion before 8,000 delegates to the Lutheran World Federation, held in Milwaukee. The latter was a truly emotional experience; in fact, while singing “O Day Full of Grace,” the better part of the bass section choked up — couldn’t sing because of the pressure and beauty of the occasion. Sigvart J. Steen, chairman of the music department, and our director, was furious with the bass section. But when I tried to explain our problem, “Sig” backed off and said that he understood — that he had had a similar experience in his college days at either Luther or St. Olaf.

The next year, 1956, our tour was more local — the Eastern Seaboard for the most part.* That’s when I met June Billings, my future wife. June came from a Brooklyn Swedish family. I took an immediate liking to her — she had been Homecoming Queen at St. Francis College in Brooklyn, and would become Homecoming Queen at Wagner in 1957. We seniors had an interesting get-together prior to each choir tour, which lasted in those days as much as 23 days on the road. The choir seniors would convene in order to determine which guys would chaperone which gals while on tour. As it happened, another bass also had his eyes on June, but I persisted, and won. The rest is history: 59-plus years of marriage to this very bright and beautiful Swede. We always describe our relationship as a “college choir marriage.”

In 1962, I came back to Wagner as director of public relations. Sig Steen soon made a proposition to my boss, Dr. Lincoln Harter, VP for college development. “How about releasing Jeff for travel with the choir as nominal tour director and for Wagner College publicity?” The good Dr. Harter thought it a great idea, so in 1963, ’64, and ’65 I accompanied Sig and the choir on three tours, the 1965 tour taking us all the way west to Seattle and Portland. And to give the choir a sense of the old days, in 1965 we traveled by rail, from start to finish. And even sang for Sunday service at Hope Lutheran Church in Bozeman, Montana, where June and I now reside. Little did we realize then that we’d end up in 1968 with June teaching English at the high school and I American history at Montana State University.

I learned much about Sig while on those long tours. For one, he hated over-heated coffee. It brought out a visceral anger I shan’t forget. And he loved to take showers, singing and moaning in joy all the while. He also had little use for prima donnas.

June and I still sing together at Hope Lutheran. We’ve also combined her artistic skills with my music history passion by organizing four three-day musical and historical symposiums at MSU celebrating the lives of J. S. Bach (1985), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1991), Johannes Brahms (1997), and Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (2009). Internally, we dedicated these symposia to Dr. Sigvart J. Steen.

** Notes on the choir tours mentioned: According to archival materials, the 1955 tour was a 24-day, 28-concert tour throughout the Midwest and Canada. In 1956, the choir’s tour took three weeks to visit eight states and perform 25 concerts, including stops in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Chicago, and Washington, D.C.*

JUNE BILLINGS SAFFORD '59

A "COLLEGE CHOIR MARRIAGE," PERSPECTIVE II

It is 60 years since I sang with the Wagner College Choir, and I am still noteworthy, singing in a Lutheran church choir with my husband Jeff Safford '56, a bass, whom I met in the college choir. We both have such positive memories of life under our dynamic, demanding conductor who required we choir members give our all at rehearsals as well as performances, as that is what he did. Good role modeling for young lives. Our experiences were amazing, singing the best in church music, providing goose bumps for a life time.

My freshman year would have been my last were it not for the fact Dr. Steen learned of my situation and, as it was a monetary issue, granted me a voice scholarship to keep me singing and learning through another year. Jeff and I both think he was playing Cupid, wishing to keep us together as a couple. There is vindication in the fact that next year we will celebrate our 60th anniversary. There was also a time when I sought housing on the Island near the college to save me from a daily Brooklyn commute. He, with generous help from his wife Margery, successfully intervened on my behalf once again. There is no question but that my time singing under Dr. Sigvart J. Steen in the Wagner College Choir improved my lot in life. There is much to sing about in my life and Jeff's, thanks to Wagner.

SUE HAYES TAYLOR '58

UNFORGETTABLE CHOIR VOICES AND PERSONALITIES

Although I was only in the Wagner College Choir for 2 ½ years (I had to leave school due to illness, though I did finally graduate in '61), it was the most memorable experience of my college career. Dr. Steen was such an imposing figure, yet he demonstrated great affection and concern for his singers (especially those who "got" his message). Who does not remember his finest student (of the mid-1950s), Olivia Brewer Stapp '57, as she closed our concerts, singing "Beautiful Savior"? Can you hear that song today, without shedding a tear? To think that we were privileged to be singing (and laughing — how she loved to laugh) with a future opera singer who starred at the Met, and with the NYC Opera, among other venues, after she became a great success in Europe. And there was sweet Bobbie Cole, with her light operetta voice. She sang at my wedding to Marty Taylor '57, 58 years ago.

Dr. Steen was instrumental in helping me receive a voice scholarship with Mrs. Steen. She was extremely patient with me during the times I was ill, and she made sure that I made up every lesson — no matter how inconvenient it was for her to fit me in. Years later, when I had my own two sons, I realized how truly dedicated she

was, when she arranged her schedule to accommodate me during her dinner prep time. I can still see Richard, sitting on the stairs in his Dr. Dentons, during my lessons, waiting for dinner. A few years ago, after a reunion at the Sagamore at Lake George, Henry '59 and Ruth '59 Heil, or Walter Baumhoff '59, sent a recording to me, *Margery Mayer, The Radio Years*. I had no idea she had been such an accomplished singer. She simply never mentioned it to me.

Because of the Sagamore reunion, I was able to re-unite with Margery, and even connect with her online. Most importantly, I was able to thank her for all she had done for me. I never became a professional singer, but I did become a conscientious mother and teacher — with a little help from the Steens.

The choir tours were highlights of each school year. We all were grateful for the hospitality of our hosts, but it took a lot of self-control to give thanks for the ubiquitous dinner of baked ham, scalloped potatoes, and jello with shredded carrots.

I was happy to read that the Wagner College Choir albums are available for download. Several years ago, my son, Jeff, made a CD Christmas gift for me, using the recording in which I sang. It was one of the most thoughtful gifts I have ever received. It demonstrates how much my children understand the role that the Choir played in my life. There are so many wonderful memories.

CAROLINE RUNYON ZUBER '58

EXCERPT FROM "MAGICAL YEARS," PUBLISHED IN "A VERY SPECIAL PLACE: REFLECTIONS ON STUDENT LIFE AT WAGNER COLLEGE BY MEMBERS OF THE CLASSES OF 1956-1961" (MAY 2008)

I was an on-hill resident in Guild Hall. As a newly-licensed driver, I was disappointed to learn that freshmen were not allowed to have cars on campus. I soon discovered that leg muscles grown accustomed to using the accelerator and brake were not ready for the long up-hill trek to the Music Building three mornings and two afternoons a week for choir.

The single most important part of my days at Wagner was my membership in the choir. Dr. Steen was beyond words. My voice teacher, Mary Louise Hanson (then unmarried until she became Mary Louise Hansen) was not only a great teacher but also a real friend. The extended choir tours defined those years, when we sang in Lutheran churches, colleges, and famous concert halls around the country. Night after night for three weeks we rolled along, our concerts following church suppers given by our hosts; afterwards we stayed in people's homes. These memories are priceless. In the days before "reality TV," I experienced the diversity of the lives of everyday folks in many different parts of our country. Being a member of the Wagner Lutheran College Choir was an unparalleled experience.

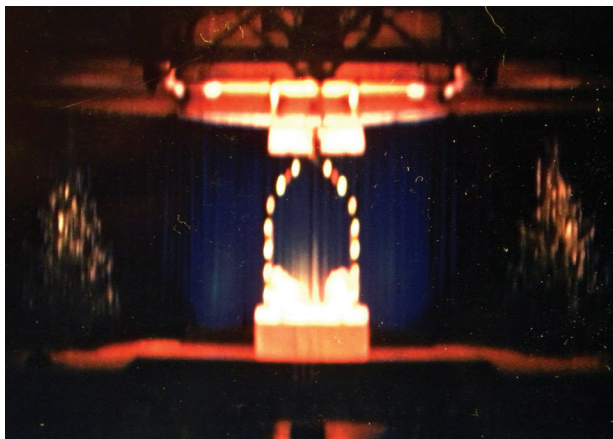
AL WAGNER '58

Faculty, 1963–95

SETTING THE STAGE FOR CHOIR CONCERTS

My remembrances of the Wagner College Choir and Dr. Steen are based on my having done the lighting for their Christmas and other concerts. The attached pictures give an indication of my involvement with the programs.

I enjoyed working with Dr. and Mrs. Steen as they appreciated my lighting skills. I went on to working professionally in theater directing, designing, and/or acting in over 483 productions, returning to Wagner in 1963 to eventually tenured assistant professorship, retiring in 1995 to move to Florida.



This is of the altar piece designed and implemented by Dr. Harry Normann with lights added by me.



This picture shows an Air Force band on the floor, with the choir on the stage behind them. Each group was lighted independently when performing. At the base of the velour curtains behind the altar, across the stage, were lights from below with red, blue and green colors, allowing me to change the color of the curtain with shafts of a wide variety of colors.

The college played host to a concert by opera and movie star Lauritz Melchior in the gym on a setting with lighting including a follow spot and effects by me. The choir provided chorus singing for the concert.



One of my choir friends was Olivia Brewer [Olivia Brewer Stapp '57 H'88], who went on to a career in opera as Olivia Stapp and received an honorary degree from Wagner College. Olivia and I worked together in the Varsity Players. Above is a picture of her with actor Tony Atwell in front of a set piece I created for one of our shows.



First Day of Rehearsal

There are so many things that made my days at Wagner special, but top of the list is the days with the Wagner College Choir and Dr. Sigvart Steen.

I was lucky to be chosen for the choir in my freshman year. Three other members who came from the same high school were also chosen then: Marian Frudden, Nancy Montgomery and Deanna Beckmann.

It was a journey and an experience that was never to be forgotten.

On the first day of rehearsal, we were given music and told that it would be collected within a week. Wow! We spent a great deal of time in the piano room of our dorm trying to memorize the music and be prepared for the collection. Fortunately, there were many choir members who had been in the choir for several years and were able to carry the bulk of us while we learned as we went along. I remember many of these members, among them, June Billings, Walter Baumhoff, Richard Petersen, Lilly-Ann Lindstrom, Roger Nelson, Judy Rank, Paul Walley, Matt Hyland, Priscilla Rylance, Fred Preuss, Sally Reibel, Ruth Healy, and of course Mary Louise Hansen and Thelma Evensen, our chaperones, and with Margery Mayer Steen, the voice teachers for the choir members.

Our first concert, after only a few weeks, was to perform at a Wagner Convocation. We sang "Oh, Day, Full of Grace." I was thrilled to stand with the choir, all robed in silver-blue robes, black shoes and silver-blue beanies. I can still sing the song today.

The choir with Sigvart Steen, backstage at Lincoln Center's Philharmonic Hall in 1966.



The Spirit of Dr. Steen

Along the way there were voice lessons, daily choir rehearsals, and so many experiences to remember. One comes to mind that made an impression that remains with all of us today.

Dr. Steen took us, the entire choir of about 40 at that time, to the foyer of the Music Building, dialed the pay phone in the lobby, and had us sing “Beautiful Savior.” We were singing for former choir members who were having a very trying time with their ailing child. Whenever I get to sing “Beautiful Savior” today, I remember the empathy and love that that phone call provided.

That was a spirit that Dr. Steen embodied for all of us. The music was a time to lift our voices and praise the Lord in a way that not one of us could do alone.

Singing and Seeing the World

Of course, one of the highlights of choir life was the anticipation and completion of the annual choir tours.* In 1958 and 1959, we made shorter tours including Washington, D.C., Toronto, Canada, and so many cities along the way. We would travel most of the day, and then get to the church where we would perform that evening. The church provided us with dinner, and after the concert we would go home with church members. I understand that this still happens today. A former choir member with whom I sang has hosted Wagner choir members on three occasions.

The concerts were always a cappella. Our full attention was on Dr. Steen. And we ended each concert with “Beautiful Savior.” We would all sing the first verse and then, as we began to hum, Dr. Steen would point to one of the choir members, and have them sing the next verse. They all sang so beautifully — Nancy Montgomery, Paul Walley, and so many others.

In 1960, the choir did a cross-country tour — 31 concerts in 30 days. We were all in one bus, which was a Campus Coach, with Hank as our driver. We had long drives each day, but we didn’t mind because we got to catch up on some sleep, see wonderful sights across our amazing country, and meet new people and places each night. No singing was allowed on the bus.

We sang in little-known places like WaKeeney, Kansas, and Winnemucca, Nevada, and in other cities all had heard of: Denver, Salt Lake City, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. We sang with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir — 44 of us amidst a choir of 365 voices. We sang “My God, How Wonderful Thou Art.” We sang in the Red Rock Amphitheater, Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, the new Civic Center in San Antonio, and so many wonderful churches along the way.

There was always time allotted for us to enjoy the areas. We walked the wharf in San Francisco, put our feet in the ocean when we reached the Pacific, got to go

across the bridge to Mexico — there is a story here that some of you will certainly recall — crossed the Rocky Mountains, stayed in a hotel in New Orleans (my parents joined us there and entertained Dr. and Mrs. Steen) ... So many incredible experiences, and so much special music.

We were given a dollar a day for lunch. There were no fast food places then. Most of our stops were at Howard Johnson, where for \$1 we could have a good lunch of chili, ice cream, and a drink.

Of course, because we missed weeks of classes, we were expected to bring our textbooks and prepare. I was a biology major, and there were labs to make up and so much material to get to when we got home. Of course, the books hardly got opened during the tour.

Each one of the choir members has special memories of the days with the Wagner choir. We became one big family and shared so many incredible performances and exciting experiences.

A few years later my brother, Skip Tollefsen '66, came to Wagner and sang with the choir. My husband also went to Wagner (MS 1963). My dad, George Tollefsen, became president of the Board of Trustees. Wagner has been part of our family for many years.

P.S. — I have continued to sing all these years. I am an alto with the Richmond Choral Society since 1972. I sang in the Robert Shaw workshops for six summers, from 1982 to 1987. We also sang at the Mostly Mozart concerts. I went to France to sing with Robert Shaw in 1988, and his choir from all over the globe.

** The 1958 tour encompassed 24 concerts in five states and Canada, including Toronto, Boton, and Syracuse. The 1959 tour, also three weeks long, included 24 concerts in eight states, including Richmond, Virginia; Philadelphia and Pittsburgh; Lexington, Kentucky; and Dayton, Ohio. The 1960 tour, from January 22 to February 21, took the choir to 18 states, including the Midwest, California, and the South.*

JUDY RANK HATKE '60

THE FOLLOWING LETTER WAS WRITTEN IN RESPONSE TO THE FALL 2016 ISSUE OF WAGNER MAGAZINE.

I was so thrilled to read your excellent edition of Wagner Magazine that came in yesterday's mail. The history of the Wagner Choir especially interested me, as I was a member under Dr. Steen from 1956 through 1960.

I was a "fellow alto" with Gail Tollefsen Bellafiore '61, who contributed to your article. She was spot on when she stated, "Our full attention was on Dr. Steen." We had to memorize all the music and practiced for 1½ hours each day.

When performing concerts, Dr. Steen never used a pitch pipe or any other instrument to give us our notes. What he did have was a marvelous assistant named Thelma Evensen, who had perfect pitch.* She sang with the sopranos and would quietly hum our starting notes so the audience couldn't hear. Then Steen would throw his arms out to start us off. This is the amazing part: We were so synchronous that we all began together — but a few beats after Steen's initial directive.

One time, however, during our tour to California in 1960, we gave a concert after spending a day of having too much “fun and frolic.” Thelma gave us our notes, Dr. Steen threw up his arms — and we came in with the most godawful sound. He tried again. Again, we messed up. He marched off, leaving us to stare at the audience, and the audience to stare back at us and wonder what was going on. When he finally came back, he took out a borrowed pitch pipe and loudly tooted it. We shaped up after that and didn't dare go overboard with the “fun and frolic” again.

I loved my choir years. I've sung with groups since then, but nothing matched the quality we had with the Wagner College Choir. I'm happy to be able to see the current choir when I'm in Florida and they're on tour. It's fun to compare notes with the younger generation of choir members after the concerts.

** Thelma Evensen was a Staten Islander who earned her bachelor's and master's degrees from Juilliard. She served as organist and choir director at Zion Lutheran Church, where the Steens were members, and she was a musical assistant for the Wagner College Choir in the mid-to-late 1950s.*

JUDY PEDERSEN SAMUELSON '63

“OPEN MIKE” NIGHT IN NEW ORLEANS

I was a freshman on the 1960 choir tour. We went to California via the northern route and returned traveling through the southern states. We got to New Orleans around Mardi Gras and stayed in a hotel. I believe it was my first ever hotel stay. We had a free day, which was unusual, and toured around New Orleans with groups of friends. When it came time for dinner, several of us looked for a place to eat and finally settled on a place which happened to have a bar. Now I'm sure most eating establishments in New Orleans had bars, I think we couldn't find one without a bar, but I'm not sure if we were looking or not.

When we finished dinner they announced that it was an “Open Mike” night and invited anyone in the place to perform. We calculated that our group had two sopranos, two altos, two tenors and two basses. We could sing a choir piece. We decided to sing “My God How Wonderful Thou Art.” Matt Hyland was a tenor soloist and could sing while we accompanied him. What a proud group we were.

Next morning as we were having breakfast in the hotel, Dr. Steen came and sat next to me, and I proceeded to proudly tell him about our performance the night before. He didn't say much, but I got whispers on the bus all day, questioning the disclosure as we were headed north and toward more churches and concerts and the way back to Wagner. The following night as we prepared for our concert, Dr. Steen had some remarks and launched into a scathing berating about the group that dared to sing his sacred music in a BAR. He thought it was a sacrilege.

We arrived a few days later for the Homecoming concert. I saw my brother, Carl Richard Pedersen '56, in the lobby before the concert. I told him the story, as he had been in the choir a few years earlier and had worked closely with Dr. Steen. He assured me that we weren't the first choir members to sing in a bar while on tour, and the choir always sang better after one of his beratings.

Another memory I might share (now that you've got me going) is listening to the choir record when I was a kid (about 12 years old). My sister, Evelyn Pedersen Gordon '52, and her soon-to-be husband, Bill Gordon '52, sang on the record, and we played their music over and over. I thought I could hear Evie's alto and Bill's tenor voice.

ALLAN DIBIASE '72

THE STUDENT CONDUCTOR'S "BAPTISM BY FIRE"

A Musical Life

My musical career [was] ... adjunct to my academic career. ... But regarding music: After graduating from Wagner in 1972, I continued doing accompanying work at Wagner and Staten Island Community College, where I was employed curating the library music collection. I worked with Richard Steen during his tenure as conductor of the Wagner College Choir, did recital work with him for many years in NYC.

Eventually SICC became CSI, and then there was the move to Willowbrook. I completed my doctorate in the social foundations of education at Rutgers in 1992 and began teaching as an adjunct in the philosophy department at CSI. During this time, I eventually became director of college life at CSI but continued to do music work with singers and the music faculty and staff both at Wagner and CSI.

We moved to New Hampshire in 1996. Upon that move I began teaching in the Plymouth State Graduate Program in Education part-time and also working as a collaborative accompanist in the Department of Music, Theatre and Dance. This September will be twenty years in the latter position. I've done a lot of full, classical recital work with faculty and students at Plymouth and around New England. Music directed musical theatre productions at Plymouth and elsewhere in NH. And done some original composition work with faculty at PSU.

The Steens' Influence

In 1970 I married Grace Schneider, a 1968 Wagner graduate who went on to her master's in education at Wagner in 1969. This fall we'll have been married 46 years. We met as singers in the Wagner College Choir together and I do remember us announcing our engagement prior to Sig Steen's death, December 1968. I remember showing him the ring before I gave it to Grace. To be in the choir, you were required to study voice privately. Grace studied with Mary Louise Hansen and Margery Mayer Steen. I studied with Margery for my entire time at Wagner and often served as her studio accompanist. At some point I was Grace's accompanist for a half recital she presented in Main Hall.

Prior to 1969 I worked as a college work study student in Dr. Steen's office. Among other things, I helped set up the choir tours, which was a major undertaking in planning alone. But Dr. Steen clearly enjoyed it as much as he did conducting and working with choir members. His knowledge of Lutheran pastors and parishes across the USA and in Canada was incredible. One day I was enlisted to help clean up the office and got very explicit instructions from him about how to make the dust follow the broom! But it was seeing him in action, both in the choir room and the office, that was formative.

It is hard to put into words exactly what Dr. Steen and Margery Mayer did for us. Other than the actual music training both Grace and I received, they cultivated a love of music and music-making in us. They took us to the Met for opera performances, welcomed us into their home and gave us life-long appreciations of music of all kinds but especially, in my case, of 19th-century German Lieder. I was able to follow up this music interest (among many others) over the years in performance with Richard Steen, and, eventually, through audition, it got me my position at Plymouth State (playing Schubert).

This kind of personal mentoring was not at all unusual at Wagner at that time. I remember taking a requirement in Western Civilization with Leland Wilshire. It was a stunning academic course that really opened my eyes to how scholarship can be done. I remember having sessions at his house off campus, Mrs. Wilshire making dinner for the entire class. That move became a staple in my career in teaching graduate classes at Plymouth State. Should also add that Leland's brother, Bruce, on the graduate faculty in philosophy at Rutgers, was a member of my dissertation committee there.

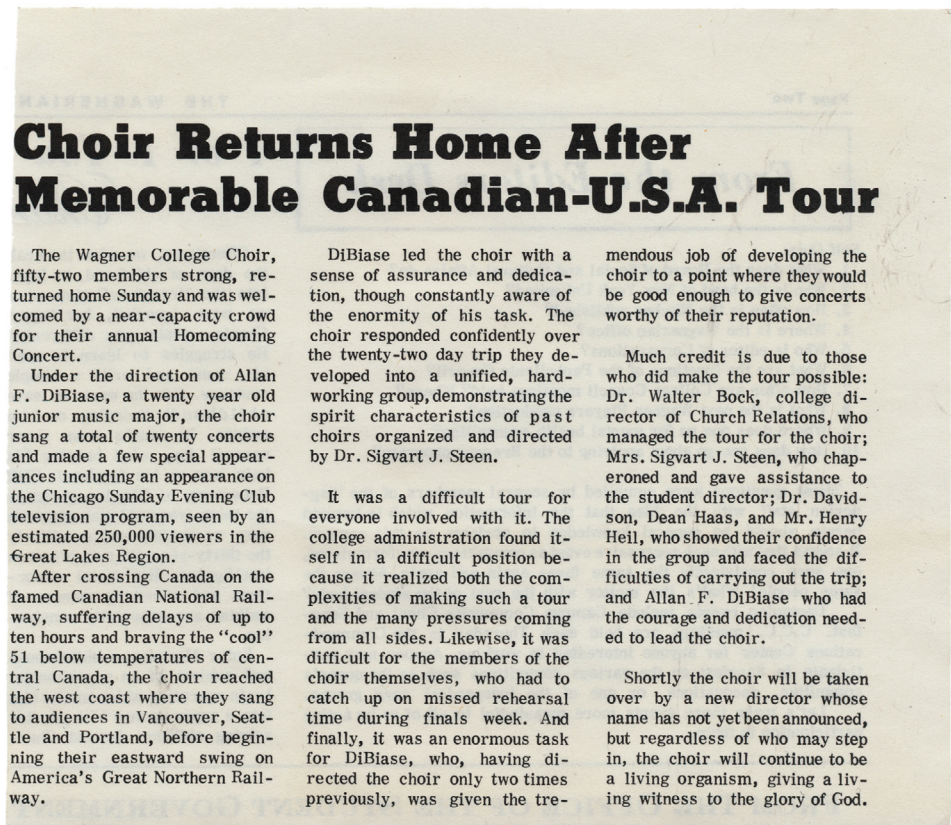
Open to All

As you know, the Wagner choir was not primarily composed of "music majors." It was open by audition to the entire student body, and part of what was so wonder-

ful about it was just that. For instance, Grace was an education major all the way, but due to credits in choir and voice effectively has a minor in music. Brett Murphy '71 M'75, a baritone soloist with the choir (but not a music major), has gone on (avocationally) to a singing career in Vermont with the DeComier Singers (among other musical endeavors).

... I should also add that Grace was a soloist in the choir under Dr. Steen and also on the tour I conducted. She was the "Beautiful Savior" soloist, a long tradition in a cappella Lutheran choirs.

There is no way to easily describe the 1969 tour that came very quickly after Dr. Steen's death. I had helped set up the tour, which was the most extensive of my time in the choir. The train trip across Canada and back across the northern USA was during one of the coldest years on record, culminating in -40° temperatures, the trains freezing to the tracks, and delays in the Rockies due to avalanches. We performed at Orchestra Hall in Chicago and some very large cathedrals and churches in Canada. It was a very big program of music as well, with some really major works. In this short form here, all I can say is that none of it would have happened had it not been for Wally Bock and Margery Mayer, who helped finish the arrangements for the tour, chaperoned, and gave me guidance every step of the way. As the *Staten Island Advance* put it (if I remember correctly), it was a true "baptism by fire".



A clipping from the *Wagnerian* on February 21, 1969, about the 1969 choir tour.

GROWING THE TRADITION: ARNOLD RUNNING, 1969-79

GENE BARFIELD '75
THE WAGNER CHOIR FAMILY

Creating Musical Magic

It isn't possible to separate the experience of having sung in the Wagner College Choir from the music. The music was, ostensibly at least, the reason we students were part of that experience. What Dr. Arnold Running, then director of the choir, managed to bring forth from us, most of whom were not music majors, continues to astound me to this day, more than 40 years later. We did not believe, at times, that we were capable of creating such magic.

Hearing John Fletcher's wonderful tenor voice soar, filling the farthest reaches of magnificent old churches throughout Germany, as the choir sang a piece by Mendelssohn; how Bill Breitenbuecher's voice, coming from a skinny-as-a-rail kid who you'd never imagine had enough breath to make it so, reminded me of a rare, resonant reed stop on the finest pipe organ; anything at all that Robin Lindenbaum ever sang, never often enough for me because her voice was so gorgeous.

Dr. Running was a reticent man whose Dakota vocabulary was at times a source of amusement to us. The one time I can remember him expressing anything but love and support for us, he turned to an unruly choir during rehearsal one day and shouted, "Don't play horse!" The whole choir sat in stunned silence. Later that evening some of us figured out he was referring to 'horseplay,' a word we bratty East Coast kids didn't often hear, especially applied to us and our occasionally less than attentive behavior.

Until I found myself doing it I never once imagined I could be a useful part of performing a mass by Haydn, or master the intricacies of line and rhythm in Three Psalms by Bernhard Lewkovitch. We mastered, or re-mastered in a certain way, the idiomatic performance requirements of some songs in ways that possibly did not accurately reflect their ethnic origin. But that didn't matter at all to happy audiences throughout the United States and particularly in Germany, where most of the posters advertising our concerts had, at the bottom in big block letters, the words "Und Negro Spirituals!"

Realizing Our Potential

Oh yes, choir was about the music. But that isn't the half of it.

We were, after all, students, a status and position that implies a subordinate position to those placed above us by training, experience, age and a tenured professorship. But our relationship with Dr. Running was never subordinate, except in the way children might feel subordinate to a father whom they loved and respected deeply. It couldn't help but become personal in ways that go far beyond an "I talk, you listen" summary. Those of us who were lucky enough to be taken on by him as vocal trainees got an hour each week of voice training, along with an hour of foreign language skills (in my time we sang in four dialects of English, as well as in German, Polish, Portuguese, Latin, Spanish, and more), with no little bit of ethics, religious studies, history, musicology, philosophy, and a host of life skills that couldn't possibly be described in a catalog of college courses. There isn't room for them all, not the way we got them from him. Gracefully, gently, firmly, with wisdom and patience, and a superb collection of his own abilities to back up his lessons, his message was always, "You can do better. I know you can"

It's true that I was tricked into auditioning for the choir, something I would never have dared to do otherwise, knowing with rock-solid certainty that I could never begin to be good enough to be accepted. I still don't believe I was good enough. But Dr. Running saw something I did not. He raised me up, taught me and led me, to a level of adequacy, if certainly not brilliance, I never imagined I had in me.

No other course at the College was, I think, capable of offering its students the prospect of realizing so much of their own potential. More than once we railed about how for all the work we put into rehearsing, performing, traveling, we only got one crummy credit for our effort each semester. But I dare to speak for others when I say that I think most of us would agree we got the better end of the deal. Far better. We learned many specific things that can be cast in an academic mold. And we built a community among ourselves, one we were thrilled to share in the best possible ways with anyone who would show even the slightest interest, one that endures to this day. Night after night after night, ten measures into the first piece we sang, we had reached out and invited audiences to take part in it, and they did. I can't remember a single instance of an audience not responding with enthusiasm that sometimes surprised even them. We were told that after a performance in a church in Fürth in Germany, we had received the first known instance of applause in the 700-year history of that church. I don't know if that's really true. But I can believe it might be.

True Collegiality

The way choir became personal was not always specifically anticipated, but coming from the intensity of the experience no one ought to be surprised. Nowhere else on campus, not even in the athletic or theater communities, could one find



Arnold Running (center) with some fun-loving students in the 1972 *Kallista*.

seniors greeting baby freshmen, taking them under their wing, providing skilled instruction, emotional sustenance, the respect and support that comes only from true collegiality, than one found every day in the College Choir. I can't imagine that marriages were made anywhere else on campus as often as they were among choir members. And friends for a lifetime.

Tears are running down my face now, because I'm thinking of the seniors who took me in hand, and far more so than even my parents ever were, are responsible in part for whatever I may have accomplished, whatever I may have attained then and since. I am so grateful to Artie Tuttle, our baritone section leader, and to Janet Larson, Lorelei Heidenstrom, Audrey Milics, Davey Haar, Anne Beck, Rhea Urquhart, and my dear, late friends Ron Riccobono, Dave Koza and Warren Sieber, so many others too. Who would have ever expected such grace, such wisdom, such inspiration from a bunch of college kids. We found these things, and learned them and hopefully were able to pass a bit of them on, in the Wagner College Choir, with our beloved Dr. Running. I can say this now with certainty because I've already lived most of my life: I have lifelong friends, because of choir.

My experience differed in one sense that has remained with me ever since, probably because I would never let it go. When I enrolled at Wagner no one knew I was homeless. One didn't speak of such things back then. The College itself became my home for the next few years. And the choir became my neighborhood, its members my extended family. I felt as though I had really only been born, at the age of seventeen, when I arrived at Wagner. Before that day when Paul Nye, a neighbor in Towers dorm and a member of the choir, and Dr. Running schemed to get me

over to the choir building, for something I never realized was an audition until it was over, I was a lonely, depressed, isolated kid who woke up every day surprised to still be here.

No doubt there are other members whose experience wasn't felt as intensely as I felt — no, feel — mine to be. No doubt there are others who do feel exactly as I do.

If the purpose of Wagner College is to train people for life, to provide them with information, experience and sensibilities to go out into a world in need and do well, for themselves and for the world about them, then I say that the College Choir is one of the most important means the College ever had, has now and ever will have, to accomplish that great purpose.

Oh, and we sing, too. Like angels.

KRISTINE IWERSEN MOORE '77

DR. RUNNING'S "LOVE PRINCIPLE"

Although I was a nursing major, my four years at Wagner center around the choir. I was too immature to appreciate what a fine human being Dr. Running was. His patience, kindness and musicianship seemed know no bounds. I sang with some very fine choral conductors for about 30 years after graduation, but I always have kept a very special place in my heart for Dr. Running and his "Love Principle." (You who sang with him know what I am talking about!) Once a year or so, Dr. Running would explain to the choir that his approach to making music with others was to approach every rehearsal with love. When he did that, everything simply worked out the way God planned.

I remember my father (also a choral musician) being astonished at the beautiful tone Dr. Running got out for the choir all four years.

LAURA GORDON CONLON '79

A CHORAL TRADITION

Growing up, I always knew the Wagner College Choir was a special thing. My parents, Evelyn Pedersen '52 and William Gordon '52, had met and fallen in love in the choir. My sisters and I learned songs that they had sung together in the choir and we had sing-a-longs when we went on long car rides. Besides, my Uncle Carl (Pedersen '56) and aunt Judy (Pedersen Samuelson '63) also had been in the Wagner choir.

When I started at Wagner, I was nervous about auditioning. When I went to the audition, I met Dr. Arnold Running. I had been in my high school's choir so I hoped

I would do well. Dr. Running had me sing scales and repeat notes he played on the piano. He also had me sing the Lord's Prayer on one note. It turned out I was accepted.

We used to have practice every afternoon at 4:00. We all knew to pay strict attention or receive the wrath of Dr. Running. I met two girls — Susan Gosser Tremblay '78 and Patricia Schricker '78 — who told me they were going to Bregenz, Austria, the next year for the College's study abroad program. It intrigued me and I ended up spending the fall of 1976 semester in Bregenz. What an experience! The choir had a tour scheduled for Winter 1975–76 in Florida. This was my first plane ride and first time in Florida. It was a wonderful experience and the tour was spectacular!

I spent the next four years going on choir tour in the US and one trip to Germany and Austria. There were so many traditions and experiences to learn about. After every meal on tour, one choir member was given the job of thanking our hosts. We usually practiced, had dinner, and then prepared for the nightly concert. Then we'd be told who we were going home with that night. The next day on the bus, we would report on our experiences. One day on tour was designated "Valentine's Day" and we would send Valentines to everybody in the choir. There might be a special Valentine, as there were often tour romances. Some of these romances lasted only for choir tour, but some extended into the next semester.

I have so many happy memories of going on choir tour, Dr. Running, and Wagner. I could go on and on about this but I'll spare you! To this day, I'm still friends with many of my fellow choir members. It was my favorite Wagner experience!

A PART-TIME INTERIM: RICHARD STEEN AND JAN MEYEL, 1979–86

LORRAINE DIBARTOLO FLOOD '83, MSN, RN
PROUD TO REPRESENT WAGNER COLLEGE

I joined the Wagner College Choir in the fall of 1979 (freshman year). Singing in St. Joseph Hill Academy Glee Club for four years persuaded me to continue my love of singing in college. Dr. Richard Steen was the choir director, and his passion for music was demonstrated at each and every practice and performance. The choir included a diverse group of male and female students, who came together at least twice a week, to create one harmonious voice. While we all were different majors, at choir practice and performances, we were all the same — singers.

My favorite memories of choir were the annual choir tours. Visiting Atlanta, Georgia, staying with another choir member and the host family, was such a great

experience. The churches and their congregations were so welcoming and appreciative. It is a wonderful feeling to do what you love, and that was true for all of us. We were proud to represent Wagner College!

For me, as an alto singer, my fondest memory is my very small Christmas solo, at St. John's Lutheran Church. Though it was only a verse or two, it was like a Broadway debut for me! Dr. Steen had a way of making each of us, whether alto, soprano, baritone or bass, feel important and vital to the success of the program. He was an expert in vocal technique, pushing us to do our best, and to do it the proper way. To ensure our vocal skill development, voice lessons were taken concurrently each semester if you were a choir member. A big thank you to Ms. Eva Lazar, for her patience, expertise, and love of voice and performance.

The hardest piece I recall was Handel's *Messiah*, Hallelujah Chorus. We would start months before the holidays to prepare. Yet, at performance time it was the most moving and joyful piece of music!

Why did I stay in the choir all four years of college, especially being a nursing major? Quite simply, my love for music and singing. Being a choir member provided me with discipline, time management, and leadership skills. All of these have added to my success as a nurse leader today.

To Dr. Steen and the Wagner College Choir (1979–1983), thanks for the memories.

A TURN OF FORTUNE: CASTLEBERRY, GARDNER, AND UNGER, 1986–96

SARA SCHAPPERT FERGUSON '97

FROM A PHONE INTERVIEW WITH LAURA BARLAMENT

I was a music major with a concentration in voice at Wagner, but one reason I loved the choir so much was that it wasn't all music majors. We just had everyone who liked to sing. We had a unique sound, with beautiful trained and untrained voices, all voice types.

Dr. Unger was a perfectionist. One trick I learned from him, which I still use when I'm directing shows at Shawnee Playhouse [a regional theater in Pennsylvania], is to position the voices in the ensemble for the best sound, matching up different timbres and vibrato. Also, from Wagner College Choir I learned to love all different styles of music. There are so many types of pieces out there for choir, so many styles and sounds you can get.

EXPANSION AND EXCELLENCE: ROGER WESBY, 1996-PRESENT

KARA PLANT MCEACHERN '06

AMAZING EXPERIENCES

I transferred to Wagner as a sophomore from a state school in Massachusetts. Being a member of the choir at Wagner was one of the best things I did after transferring.

I was the choir tour manager my junior and senior years, planning a Northeastern tour in the spring of 2005 and a Florida tour in spring of 2006. So many memories were made on those trips, meeting new people and building stronger friendships.

Another [memory] would be performing at Carnegie Hall in the fall of 2003. At the time I didn't realize how amazing it was to be able to perform there, and now looking back, I still can't believe I sang at Carnegie Hall.

Dr. Wesby was one of the most important people of my college career at Wagner, and I thank him for all of his support, guidance, and believing in me for my three years at Wagner. I was also a member of Espresso and Stretto, close harmony jazz ensembles, and loved that as well.

I, of course, could go on and on about all the performance experiences I had, Choir Camp, vocal lessons, and classes I took while at Wagner. I went back for my 10-year reunion a few weeks ago, and it felt like nothing had ever changed and I was transported back to a time when life was simpler and sometimes even more rewarding. I'm a proud Wagner College Choir Alum and wouldn't trade my time at Wagner for anything in the world!



Roger and Barbara Wesby stand behind choir members Laura Woodruff Duni '07, Kara Plant McEachern '06, Alaina Vitoulis Kimberly '05, and Sharon Webster Schaeffer '05 during the 2005 tour.

ARIEL UBALDEGARAY '18
PROFESSIONAL AND HARD-WORKING

I am a junior arts administration major from Staten Island, on a music scholarship at Wagner College. Throughout my life, I have always been involved in choir, whether it was singing classical choral pieces, musical theater, or contemporary. I came into Wagner knowing that I would enjoy College Choir because my friend Sylvia Maisonet both recruited and told me about the fun she had in Dr. Roger Wesby's College Choir.

On the first day of choir, we did vocal warm-ups that I'd never encountered in my previous years in choir. It made me feel excited to join such a professional and hard-working group of musicians. Working with the Wesbys for the past few years has truly been a privilege and a great experience because they have so much knowledge about musicianship theory and music history. The type of music we encounter on a weekly basis in rehearsals ranges from sophisticated Aaron Copland pieces to soulful jazz masterpieces by the Wesbys to dramatic Bach chorales.

As an aspiring musician, College Choir has taught me to be disciplined, humble, and versatile as a singer and composer. I can truly say I have a huge place in my heart for the experiences that this group of people have given me so far, from traveling to different states and now going on tour in Spain this upcoming spring semester.



Ariel Ubaldegaray looks toward conductor Roger Wesby as the choir performs for the 2016 Opening Convocation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Laura Barlament, Wagner College's director of communications and marketing and editor of *Wagner Magazine*, received a B.A. in German and English from Agnes Scott College and a Ph.D. in English literature from Emory University. She is a flutist by hobby and has performed in the alto section of the Richmond Choral Society.



Anyone closely associated with the Wagner College Choir (former members, Wagner College educators, and lovers of the choral art) will find this a very interesting read from start to finish. The evolution of the Wagner College Choir is an interesting story in itself, especially as remembered in the letters from choir alumni. This account substantiates how generations of students upheld constant values: the strength of synchronized collaboration, the choral literature promoting humanitarian values, and members sharing the love of fine choral music in performance before *diverse* audiences across the country. This book will rekindle vivid memories more vividly due to the author's enthusiasm for the subject and knowledge of the musical arts. The story line (including branching to the *Leitmotiv* of Ward Hall) succeeds in showing how successive generations of students continued to collaborate towards the greater good and an other-centered communication through many traditions of songs. In Laura Barlament's capable hands, what might have become as mundane as a travelogue on singing reads more like the Meistersingers' journey.

— Richard Steen, Wagner College Choir Director, 1979–81