

I. Frederik Melius Christiansen

- A. Born April 1, 1871, in Berger, Norway
- B. Family of amateur musicians
 - 1. F. Melius began playing clarinet at age six
 - 2. Began piano study with Oscar Hansen
 - i. Trained in German classic music gave Christiansen
 - a. Foundation of the masterworks
 - ii. Also worked as copyist for Hansen
 - a. Training for arranging and score preparation for ensembles
 - iii. Organ studies were also added later on
 - a. Paid brother Kristian with liver sausage to pump the organ while he practiced
 - 3. Studied violin with Professor Olsen
- C. Father believed that music was not a true profession, so F. Melius left Norway to pursue further musical study.

II. Immigration to America

- A. Traveled to New York in 1888
 - 1. Only stayed long enough to get through immigration, then onto a train for California
- B. California
 - 1. Not able to find work as a church musician
- C. Moved to the Midwest
 - 1. Job opportunities
 - i. Third Regiment of Wisconsin at Eau Claire
 - ii. City Band of LaCrosse
 - iii. Scandinavian Band of Marinette
 - 2. First job as band director
 - i. Age 19
 - ii. Scandinavian Band of Marinette
 - iii. Also obtained position as organist and choir director at Our Savior's Lutheran Church
 - a. Composed sacred choral music at this time out of necessity
 - 1. *Et Raab, Et Bud* (A Cry, A Message)

III. Augsburg Seminary

- A. Almost all students and professors were from Norway
- B. Christiansen entered in 1892
 - 1. Major turning point in his life
 - i. Became American citizen
 - ii. Opened his views of politics and music
 - 2. Wanted to become a concert violinist
 - 3. Conducted the student chorus and taught singing and harmony to help with finances
- C. Left Augsburg to enroll in Northwestern Conservatory of Music
 - 1. Still involved with performance groups at Augsburg as well as numerous Scandinavian choral groups
 - 2. Worked as a freelance musician in the Minneapolis area

IV. Norwegian Church Music

- A. Quality considered very low at this point
 - 1. Mainly anthems by Dudley Buck
 - 2. Landstad's hymnbook

- B. Interest had risen with the development of annual singing festivals
- C. Christiansen and Urseth decided to write sacred pieces for mixed chorus
 - 1. *12 Korsange* (1894)
 - 2. Published monthly bulletin, *Sangserie*, devoted to music
 - 3. Also published *Korsangen* (The Choir Singer)
 - i. Christiansen still believed at this time that he was a violinist, not a composer.
 - a. His compositions at this time are said to be full of “emotional clichés and a stereotyped harmonic pattern” (Bergmann, 66)
 - ii. Had no formal training in composition
 - a. Imitated what he had heard as a child

V. Study in Leipzig

- A. Spent much time at St. Thomaskirche listening to the choir
- B. Violin student at the conservatory
 - 1. Singing and choral music was not encouraged in his study at this time
 - 2. Received his diploma from the Royal Conservatory in 1899

VI. Return to America

- A. Professor of violin at Northwestern Conservatory
- B. Director of Kjerulf Club, a men’s singing society
 - 1. Wrote *Ungbirken* (Young Birch) for TTBB
- C. Very successful as musician in the Minneapolis area
 - 1. Called to head the music department at St. Olaf College
 - i. Director of bands, chorus, and teacher of violin and music theory

VII. St. Olaf College

- A. Main job was to build a music department
 - 1. Regarded the position as an experiment for a year
 - 2. Music had been an interest, but not established
 - i. School band, glee clubs, Choral Union
 - 3. Music department officially established in his second year
 - i. Music theory, harmony, counterpoint, composition, history, voice, piano, and violin
 - 4. Department should present a unified concept about their program
 - i. “The choir and band are a natural outgrowth of the culture here. They have grown naturally from a little seed way back in history and like the flowers in the woods, grew under favorable conditions. That we were successful was because the flavor of St. Olaf was given to the world and they seemed to like it.” (Shaw, 65)
- B. Rehearsal style
 - 1. Focused on short phrases
 - 2. Gave attention to each section for accuracy
 - i. Known as a perfectionist who knew exactly what he wanted and expected it from his ensemble
 - 3. Not well received by students at the beginning
 - i. Even after many years, relationship with students was relatively impersonal
 - ii. Encouraged them “to further the cause of music among people” (Bergmann, 135)
- C. Touring
 - 1. Took band on first tour in 1904
 - 2. Tradition continues
 - i. College advertising was initial purpose
 - a. Also performing music in areas that usually didn’t get live music
 - ii. First tour to Norway in 1906

3. Choir toured for the first time in 1912 and to Norway in 1913
 - i. Had first major national tour to New York in 1920
 - a. Sound was said to have the precision of a small orchestra
- D. Turned over the band to another conductor to focus on the choir
 1. Disliked oratorios and focused more on hymn-style singing
 2. Divided Choral Union into ladies' chorus and men's chorus for training

VIII. St. John's Lutheran Church

- A. Lack of suitable music forced Christiansen to write pieces
- B. The death of his three children made him rethink his faith and pushed him further into his work and studies
 1. Believed religion was a private thing
 2. *Psalm 50* was written after the death of Carl
- C. Worked on committee to revise Norwegian Lutheran Hymnal
- D. Christiansen believed that the church choir was the beginning of the St. Olaf Choir as it is known today
 1. Officially began in 1912
- E. Kildahl-Christiansen *Sanggudstjenester* (Song Services)
 1. Chorales and sermonette service
 2. Booklet issued with chorales from these services
 - i. *Beautiful Savior*
 - ii. *O Bread of Life*
 - a. Known as "developed chorales"

IX. Return to Leipzig

- A. Went to study with Gustav Schrek in Leipzig (1906)
 1. Study of folk music and its influence on church music
 - i. Re-harmonized about 70 chorales
 2. Study of orchestration and instrumentation
 - i. Began to think in terms of symphonic structure
 - ii. Moved toward more classical form of composition

X. Technique

- A. Experiments developed his techniques and procedures
 1. Spent many hours experimenting with voices, ears, placement, and personalities
 - i. Studies in physics of sound and intonation as well as voice and language
- B. Belief that every member in the choir loses identity for the sake of the ensemble
 1. Looked for singers with pure voice, excellent ear training, and relaxed personality
 - i. Voice must be straight for pure intonation
 - a. Christiansen states, "The voice should be straight as an Indian woman's hair or a telegraph wire." (Bergmann, 145)
 - b. A great solo voice has tone color, but not a tremolo
 - ii. Referred to the timbre of the voices as specific instruments in the orchestra
 - a. Sopranos are either flutes or oboes in tone quality
 - iii. Voice must have uniformity of color throughout the range, smoothness, tone, and flexibility
 - a. Critics comment that Christiansen sacrificed intelligibility for good tone
 - iv. Didn't focus on rhythmic feeling or accuracy
 - v. Looked for singers with courage, buoyancy, and feeling and would respond to the many elements of the music
 - vi. Believed that there are solo voices and choir voices and that there needs to be special

1. Visited libraries on the East Coast to meet other choral composers and look for new works
 - i. Repertoire choices built the program
 - ii. Felt that folk song was the best foundation for choral compositions
 - a. Music that spoke to generations about their history
 - b. Human experiences
 - iii. Also enjoyed sacred works from the classic masters

XII. Choral Compositions

- A. "Composing is seeking into the unknown" (Bergmann, 181)
- B. Cantatas
 1. *Store ting har Herren gjort*
 - i. Written for the union of the three Lutheran synods
 2. *Reformation Cantata*
- C. Oratorio
 1. *The Prodigal Son*
 - i. Still didn't agree that oratorios were popular and the lukewarm response to this performance solidified this feeling
- D. The St. Olaf Choral Series
 1. Begun in 1919
 2. First volumes contained anthems from Bach, Handel, and Mozart
 3. Next volumes were only Christiansen's compositions
 - i. Republished many of his pieces from *Sangusstjenester* in English
 4. His earlier compositions sought expression in strict contrapuntal arrangements of 16th-century chorale melodies
 - i. "Developed chorales"
 5. Later compositions had more of a lyric, romantic feeling
 - i. Focus on Scandinavian folk melodies
- E. Composing in later years
 1. Became more erratic and hurried
 - i. Composed a book of 12 organ pieces in less than three weeks
 2. Declining interest in text
 - i. Choosing text for the vowel content, not the meaning of the words
- F. Developed a viewpoint of the choir as a symphony orchestra
 1. Focused on producing the general style and quality of the orchestra
 - i. Tone
 - ii. Clarity of lines

XIII. Influence on Choral Music in America

- A. Considered the pioneer of unaccompanied singing in America
 1. St. Olaf Choir was among the first ensembles to obtain a high level of performance
 - i. Northwestern University was also developing a cappella singing at this time with Peter Lutkin
 2. Passed on tradition to new conductors through experiences
 - i. Pacific Lutheran University: Gunnar Malmin
- B. Olaf Christiansen
 1. Started a cappella choir at Oberlin College in 1929
 2. Replaced F. Melius at St. Olaf in 1944
- C. Paul J. Christiansen
 1. Head of music department at Concordia College
- D. United Norwegian Lutheran Church Choral Union
 1. Raised standard of church music

E. Quality and level of ensembles

1. Pieces written for St. Olaf Choir are now being sung by high school ensembles

F. Christiansen Choral School

1. Developed in 1935

2. Project by F. Melius, Olaf, and Olaf's brother-in-law, publisher Neil Kjos

G. Directly influenced John Finley Williamson

1. Inspired Williamson to establish Westminster Choir School