

History of ACDA-MN: A Narrative written by Wayne Kivell; Updated by Bruce Becker

Founding of the National Organization

The American Choral Directors Association began in 1959 because of the vision articulated by a small group of choral directors who met informally in Kansas City at a national convention of the Music Educators National Conference.

The first issue of ACDA's official publication, the Choral Journal, appeared in May of 1959. It was printed in an eight page octavo-size format and contained the constitution, the names of the national officers, and a list of the 81 charter members who had paid dues as of that date. Among those named were three Minnesotans: Olaf C. Christiansen, St. Olaf College, Northfield; Murrae Freng, Alexandria High School; and Lamar Runestad, St. Peter High School. The second issue of the Choral Journal (January 1960) also adds Minnesotans Walter Collins, University of Minnesota; Keith Forstrom, Fairmont; and Curtis Hansen, Brainerd High School. All who joined the first year were considered charter members. The third issue (May 1960) contained a photo of Curtis Hansen and announced that he had been named the new vice-president of ACDA.

Founding of the MN Chapter

Within several years individual state chapters of ACDA began to form throughout the United States. These organizations grew rapidly in some states within the first decade. Iowa proved to be a strong leader among the states that now make up the North Central Division. Harvey Waugh became Minnesota's first state president in 1962. Since there was no state organization as such until 1972, state presidents were not elected but rather appointed by the national board. In 1964, Harvey Waugh convened a business meeting at the annual Minnesota Music Educators Association (MMEA) Mid-Winter Clinic. A similar meeting was held in 1967. In 1965 ACDA sponsored its first session at the MMEA Mid-Winter Clinic. Entitled "A Choral Program in a School of 67 Students," the session featured the Hendrum High School Choir and Girl's Chorus under the direction of Melva Sulerud. A. B. (Bud) Engen presided at that session. Other sessions were sponsored in 1966, 1968, 1970, & 1971. Of particular interest is the 1970 session on "The Solo Voice" which featured a panel consisting of June Swanson and Helen Engen (St. Olaf College), Oliver Mogck (Bethel College), and Roy Schuessler (University of Minnesota).

In February of 1972, ACDA national president Morris Hayes of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire met with a group of Minnesota choral directors at the MMEA Convention at the old Radisson Hotel in Minneapolis. The purpose of this meeting was to plant the seeds for the development of a state ACDA organization in Minnesota. Wayne Kivell was appointed to succeed Philip Steen as state president effective July 1 of that year. Steen was unable to attend the North Central Convention the following month in Indianapolis, and requested that Kivell attend the board meeting in his place. Among the agenda items of this meeting was the site selection for future divisional conventions. Des Moines, Iowa, was chosen for 1974 and Columbus, Ohio, for 1976. Kivell volunteered Minnesota to host the 1978 convention in Minneapolis. It was now imperative that a state ACDA organization be formed in Minnesota.

Development of ACDA-MN

In July 1972, Minnesota had a total membership of 66 choral directors. The membership doubled during the next two years. During Wayne Kivell's presidency, from 1972 to 1974, the first state "board" was developed. It was a six-member steering committee comprised of Ken Denzer (St. Paul Highland Park Jr. High), Dorothy Fleming (St. Paul Johnson High School), Donn Mattson (Marshall High School), Jon Romer (Gustavus Adolphus College), David Thomas (Inver Hills Community College) and Kivell (Northfield High School). The first ideas that emerged from this committee included the creation of the Star of the North newsletter, the first ACDA column

in Gopher Notes, the organization of student chapters, and a contemporary music forum which was held at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter.

In 1973 the state was divided into six districts. Each district had a representative on the state board, in addition to one member chosen at-large and the state president. The state's six districts expanded to seven in 1991 when the Metro district was divided into east and west. However, continued rapid growth in the metropolitan area led to total redistricting in 1995. Several suburban counties were aligned with out-state areas, thus creating six new state districts which were more equal in membership. In 2012, the membership voted to return to the original seven-district structure, permitting District Chairs to better represent their geographic regions.

In 1979, Diana Leland, Vernon Opheim, and Wayne Kivell drafted state ACDA by-laws that aligned Minnesota with ACDA's national structure. This was the first step leading toward ACDA of Minnesota becoming an independent, affiliated organization in 1993. Affiliated states have autonomy in financial affairs.

State Conventions

In 1974 the first state convention was held at Normandale Community College in Bloomington. Though the first convention took place in January, the state board determined that future conventions would be held the weekend before Thanksgiving. The board felt strongly that the state convention should prepare and inspire directors for their year's work and not be the culmination of a year's activity. The board also felt that the November date would conflict less with the MMEA clinic but still allow performing groups adequate time to prepare for a convention performance. The term "State Conference" came into use following a ACDA national office preference in 2010.

Newsletter

The Star of the North began as a two-page mimeographed and stapled newsletter edited by Wayne Kivell. Over the decades, the newsletter has been given significant changes and improvements. The second editor, George Berglund, receives credit for making the transition to off-set press in 1976. In October, 1979, the newsletter was upgraded to a professional typeset magazine format and contained its first pictures and advertising. The blue background masthead appeared on the December 1979 issue and remains in some form to the present day. Berglund's eight-year commitment as editor is the longest; but succeeding editors Paul Rusterholz, Martin Dicke, Ken Hodgson, Mark Howarth, David Scholz, Ryan Connolly, Kari Douma, Mark Potvin and Bret Amundson each made significant contributions. The Star of the North received national commendation as an outstanding state newsletter in 1991 under Hodgson's leadership. National awards were again received in 1997 and 1999 (Mark Howarth, editor), 2003 (David Scholz, editor), 2005 (Ryan Connolly, editor) and 2007 & 2009 (Kari Douma, editor), and two awards in 2011 with Mark Potvin, editor. Due to increasing print, production and postage costs, the Star of the North became an electronic publication in 2010.

Summer Dialogue

The idea for Summer Dialogue began at the 1984 division convention. State president Roger Tenney invited a group of Minnesotans to join him for lunch at an Arby's restaurant in Sioux Falls. The luncheon became a brainstorming session on how to rejuvenate choral musicians for their teaching and directing responsibilities. As a result of this luncheon, a six-member committee was chosen. Axel Theimer, Robert Scholz, Avis Evenrud, Geneva Eschweiler, Rolf Anderson, Chet Sommers, Alice Larsen and Tenney met several times and worked out two principal ideas. The first was the creation of workshops that would be held in the various state districts over several years. The second focused on the need for a summer ACDA activity that would promote communication, discussion, and sharing of ideas. Fifteen months later, in the summer of 1985, the first

Summer Dialogue became a reality on the campus of St. John's University, Collegeville. Axel Theimer and St. John's hosted the first six Dialogues until the time and location were changed to coincide with the All-State Choir camp in 1991. That change allowed Dialogue to utilize the All-State Choir directors as clinicians.

Festivals and Honor Choirs

ACDA of Minnesota has always been committed to the sponsorship of choral activities throughout the state. A series of church music seminars and junior high workshops were held in various districts in the mid-1970s. ACDA would frequently co-sponsor choral festivals with high schools and colleges. In 1986 the first Male Chorus Project was held in conjunction with the annual November state convention. The project continued in succeeding years independent of the convention. In 1989 the first Treble Choir Project was initiated. The following year these two festivals were combined. Renamed the Men's Choir/Women's Choir Festival, it is held annually on the last Saturday in October at St. John's University.

In 1991 the "Star of the North" festivals for chamber choirs, jazz choirs, and show choirs made their debut and continue to be hosted on college campuses in the metropolitan area. These unique festivals allow high school and collegiate singers to rehearse and perform outstanding choral literature side by side. At least one honor choir is organized and performs at each state convention under the leadership of an outstanding guest conductor. Honor choirs have included elementary (grades 4-6), junior high/middle school Anacrusis (grades 7-9), and community colleges.

Each fall a student chapter on one of the Minnesota college campuses organized and hosted a symposium designed for students and beginning choral conductors. Beginning in the mid 2000's, the Student Symposium was scheduled to coincide with the State Conference program, allowing student members to attend both symposium and conference sessions.

Minnesotans have been honoring choral directors in the name of F. Melius Christiansen since 1974. Following his term as state president, Bruce Becker had a vision of honoring "Christy" with a unique collaboration of choirs upon the event of his 125th birthday. Many people worked countless hours to make this significant choral event possible. This special 1996 celebration was a tribute to ACDA of Minnesota and its commitment to furthering the legacy of F. Melius Christiansen and our choral heritage. A similar event was held in 2006 marking his 135th birth year. In 2009, the FMC Endowment Fund Committee sponsored the first Collegiate Choral Festival featuring five collegiate choirs with headline guest conductor Craig Jessop.

Division Conventions in Minnesota

By the time ACDA of Minnesota hosted the North Central Division Convention in Minneapolis in 1978, it was a vibrant organization with quality leadership. A strong program of concerts and interest sessions drew over 1000 registrants to the ten-state gathering--the largest ever to attend any division convention up to that date. At the conclusion of the convention, Minnesota's membership stood at 430. Ten years later, in 1988, Minnesota again hosted the North Central Convention. The Minnesota membership then surpassed 600 following the convention. Minnesota again hosted in 1998. However, with the inclusion of North Dakota in the rotation, Minnesota did not host again until 2010.

Awards

The F. Melius Christiansen Lifetime Achievement Award in choral music was set up with the Christiansen family, and first presented in 1974. In 1988, two new awards were established: Choral Director of the Year and Outstanding Young Choral Director. These are presented, in addition to the FMC Award, at each annual state conference. The ACE (Advocate for Choral Excellence) awards were first presented in 2008, recognizing the

efforts of special leaders throughout our seven geographic districts who support choral music in their communities.

Commissioned Works

In 1975 the first composition for the Minnesota All-State Choir was co-commissioned by ACDA and MMEA. This co-commissioning of a choral work for one of the All-State choirs, by a Minnesota composer, still continues today. In 2010, a new ACDA-MN Commissioning Task Force was created to further the development and support of commissioning projects. Four commissions were sponsored for world premieres at each of the State Honor Choir events during the 50th anniversary year of celebration in 2011-12. In addition, two commissioning consortium projects were introduced bringing together school and community choirs to partner with a composer. In 2011, David Dickau of Minnesota State University-Mankato was commissioned for the SATB piece "Music in the Night", while in 2012 composer Carolyn Jennings of Northfield was asked to compose a new SSA piece entitled "Some Glad Day".

Electronic Communications

In 1996 Susan Zemlin launched the ACDA of Minnesota website, which was further developed by Garrett Lathe. Under the presidential leadership of Mary Kay Geston, in 2006 the board approved hiring Tom Hale to maintain the website on a regular basis. In addition to a more robust web presence, ACDA of MN members received regular email communications about organizational activities, along with paid announcements from other organizations. The use of online credit card purchasing was added to the website.

In 2010, the board approved updating the website to the Drupal Content Management System. The Drupal system is now the centerpiece for electronic communications for ACDA of MN. It continues to provide online credit card purchases, but now members can register for conferences, purchase eblast communications, and web postings all through the website. The ACDA of MN newsletter, *Star of the North*, is only available online as an interactive magazine or as a PDF for download and printing. ACDA of Minnesota members have a special "Members-Only" section of the website that provides easy access to all of the other members' contact information and their involvement in choral music. District chairs can easily communicate directly with their members and find their district members information online. Administration of the Drupal system is centralized for the Executive Director and Webmaster, to provide easy access to everything from updating web content to tracking online orders and maintaining the membership database. The Drupal platform will allow for further growth and expansion of electronic communications for many years to come!

In 2012, and as part of the 50th anniversary year of celebration, the organization moved to create an entirely new website design, featuring the latest in website development and navigation features. ACDA-MN Web Editor Tom Hale and designer Katryn Conlin collaborated to produce an impressive new website.

With the launch of the new website on August 13, 2012, the organization also initiated a new way to communicate regularly with the membership via *The Daily Beat*. Relevant topics, important notices along with paid announcements advertising concert events, job postings and audition notices would now be featured in one message per day.

50th Anniversary 2011-12

Upon assuming the new office of Executive Director in 2009, Bruce Becker was approached with an offer by prominent Minnesota composer René Clausen to compose a new major choral work that would be gifted to ACDA-MN in celebration of its 50th anniversary year. That was the impetus to organize the 50th Anniversary Task Force to begin planning a major year long celebration that would culminate in the 2012 State Conference

weekend of events. Three major public concerts were added to the traditional State Conference program entitled: *A Minnesota Choral Mosaic* featuring Cantus and VocalEssence; *The Tribute Concert: Celebrating Influence and Inspiration* featuring The St. Olaf Choir, Magnum Chorum, Concert Choir of the Angelica Cantanti Youth Choirs, Concert Choir of the Northfield Youth Choirs, and an ACDA-MN Anniversary Directors' Chorus all under the direction of Minnesota native Craig Hella Johnson; *A Golden Grand Finale* featuring The Concordia Choir-Moorhead, The University of Minnesota Singers, The Singers, Minnesota Boychoir, and an ACDA-MN State 11-12 High School Honor Choir all collaborating on the world premiere of Clausen's major work.

In addition to the three public concerts, the Task Force planned other events that included the development of a new corporate logo, six commissioning projects, *Minnesota Sings!* a series of regional choral festivals scheduled in nine locations around the state, an official ACDA-MN Commendation Program that recognized over 200 choral music programs throughout the state, the launch of a newly designed website and The Daily Beat membership messaging program, a Governor's Proclamation, development of the extensive ACDA-MN archival pages including the *In Remembrance Honor Roll* of deceased Minnesota choral directors, a 50th anniversary banquet, video archival histories, and the selection of a 50th anniversary motto: *Our Legacy: A Distinguished Past...A Vibrant Future!*