

A History of Music Education
in the
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library
11831 N. Seminary Drive. 65W
Mequon, Wisconsin

Church History Paper
2nd quarter
for Professor Westerhaus
April 17, 1986
Chris Cordes

A History of Music Education
in the
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Interest in music as part of education stems from the very Christian attitude that something beautiful is something to be studied. J. P. Koehler (p.220), the first Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) historian, once said,

The appreciation of what is truly pure and lovely is not a matter of indifference in the Christian home, school, and church and certainly a 'must' subject in Christian education. That is in line with Scriptures too (Phil. 4:8).

Naturally it goes without saying that what one studies he strives to grow in. If he is dedicated to studying beautiful music, he will become more and more learned in it.

The area of musical expertise this paper focuses on is not just knowledge, but ability to make music. A true musician in this paper is one who doesn't just play notes and/or write notes, but who knows music, plays music, and can write music. He doesn't just play a piece; he makes music. He understands it and can make it an expression of himself and of the human soul. This is a musician. The underlying question of this paper really is, "What has the Wisconsin Synod done to produce musicians?"

To see a true reflection we look first at the swirling waters of general attitudes in the WELS concerning music. Then we see the attitudes in action at the Synod's schools of higher education where young musicians might hope to smoothe out their

skills. Finally we'll conclude with an evaluation and a projection of WELS musicianship.

General Attitudes in the Synod

Music education in the Lutheran Church has its roots in the music heritage of the Lutheran Church. Often you can hear a Lutheran, with full-blown chest, declare, "The Lutheran Church is a singing church!" This has been our heritage since the time of Luther, who himself was a music lover, a musician. Lehmann (p.28) points out

The most effective innovation of the early sixteenth century Protestant worship service was Martin Luther's establishment of the chorale or hymn as a definite and integral part of the liturgical service.

This key position was well-deserved, as the Lutheran chorale has been a favorite form of hymn ever since the days of the Reformation.

But as with many works of beauty, the chorale suffered defacement through the centuries. When the age of rationalism was in the world there was a change in attitude toward the text of hymns, including the Lutheran chorale. The words were changed to what was "believable" and "rational," even degenerating to Naturlied quality, in which Nature receives the greatest attention. Lehman (p.40) writes, These changes "resulted in church music that was not suitable for the orthodox Lutheran service." This can also be said of the music. Lehmann (p.41-42) relates:

Sometime after the middle of the eighteenth century a change in the ...rhythmic melody took place. With this change all notes of the chorale were given the

same value; rests which were employed in the sixteenth and seventeenth century settings were usually omitted; and the tunes were arranged into a metric pattern with either three or four beats to the measure.

The effect was a dull, plodding tune which certainly was different from the original feeling of the powerful, emotive Reformation chorale.

Musicians in authority in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LC-MS), notably Lochner and C.F. Walther, were working hard to re-establish the old style of chorale. In the Wisconsin Synod, J.P. Koehler was working toward the same goal. But the WELS had other problems, uneducated educators. Sometimes a church would have a cantor, a *Vorsaenger*. Koehler points out (p.67) that often the lack of musical quality in the churches and in their singing was due to poor cantors. He (p.220) also tells us that the teachers and musical pastors were out of sync with the new "so-called rhythmical style of singing," since "the teachers who had come from Prussia in 1870 and earlier pastors were not acquainted with it." They had apparently been stuck in the old straight form of choral singing. This was their education.

But there were chances for improvement --or perhaps better said, change--in WELS musical quality. "Choral singing mainly took its cue from the flourishing German *Gesangvereine* that met for their annual *Saengerfest* in the larger cities of the state." (Koehler, p.220) In addition, "since the 1880's there was the rising Wagner cult, and the annual American tours of Wagnerian singers from abroad not only marked a change in vocal technique but also in the content, selection, rendition, and evaluation of

music in general." (ibid) These touring groups seem to have affected music attitudes in the WELS too. Koehler (p.220-221) also says conservatories were being founded in the large cities, and great masters of music, chiefly of piano and violin, were becoming well known. This gave rise to a bad effect in the church:

The organ and the choir assumed the role of providing art, with such results as the performance in the Sunday worship of slow movements from piano sonatas on the organ, or anything labeled andate religioso, and funeral and wedding marches on those special occasions, no matter what the composition's origin or background; or the choir's equally malapropos renditions from operatic literature.

For a while at least they got away with it. Had they been influenced by the leaders of the Missouri Synod, things probably would have been different. As said above, the Missouri Synod had leaders who were musicians and who took an active role in the music being made in their churches. Lehmann (p.15) says of the Missouri Synod:

(A) factor which brought about early consideration of proper use of music and hymns in the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church was the great interest that many of the early leaders had in music and hymnology. In addition, several of the leaders were accomplished performers.

In contrast, note the situation in the Wisconsin Synod:

Since none of the early Wisconsin Synod pastors had the reputation of being musicians, or of being musically educated, no concern about the music itself is recorded in any of the early proceedings, reports, or minutes of the Synod or its various sub-divisions. The only concern here, as with the Missouri Synod, was the text. (p.25-26)

This is not to say our early fathers had nothing to say about the quality of music in the Synod. The only thing their talents led

them to do was take enough of a minimal interest to leave it up to the congregations. From the WELS Constitution of 1850 (the Synod's birthdate) and the revised constitution of 1863, Lehmann (p.25) gleans this attitude:

The pastor and the church council are given the right to establish and carry on all proceedings for their own congregation, as long as neither Scripture nor the Confessions of the Lutheran Church are violated.

Such was the tenor of the times in WELS attitudes about music.

This cacophonous situation took a turn for the better in the mid 1890's. In Milwaukee a group of people interested in singing music (therefore learning more about it) got together under the directorship of Wm. Boeppler. He "had been a Reformed preacher abroad and had established himself in Milwaukee as a teacher of music." (Koehler, p.221) The group was called the A Capella Choir of Milwaukee, and they experienced a time of success and enjoyment with the muse of music. Koehler (p.221) seems to have felt a slight warmth in his heart for the director, as he informs us dryly, "The technical proficiency of the choir master and his singers became a matter of note." This Boeppler was connected with another bright spot on the horizon. The man who would later be the first president of the High School Society, John Frank, started a conservatory. Here apparently was a musician who cared enough to want to educate others musically. It was at this conservatory that Boeppler also taught.

Up to now we have not seen the WELS in action to promote and provide music education. Boeppler holds a bridge to this function, for he was also "musical instructor at the Wauwatosa

seminary." (Koehler, p.221) He also had connection with WELS parochial school teachers. These teachers would bring a smile to the face of any champion of music. Notice the benefit they gave to the church through their zeal for self-improvement:

The parochial-school teachers organized a choir of their own in order to receive Boeppler's instruction in choral singing and conducting, and thruout the state there was marked improvement in the work of the church choirs, from the esthetic point of view. (ibid)

Koehler's (ibid) evaluation is encouraging: "Even though the liturgical needs of the church and congregational edification did not receive their due, it was a beginning of better musical appreciation."

Boeppler eventually moved on, and the man to fill his shoes was a certain Franz Salbach. he seems to have been vocally trained, as "he made appearances as a concert singer." (Koehler, ibid) His service to musical education in the WELS seems to have been a little more extensive: "Outside of the A Capella, he also gave lessons at the Seminary, at the College in Watertown, and at the Lutheran High School in Milwaukee, when it was organized."

(ibid) But, alas, he didn't last long:

(Salbach) didn't measure up to the expectations of the original founders and guarantors of the A Capella, and when they withdrew their further backing, the choir seemed doomed.

It seems to have been saved ~~saved~~ through the efforts of Dr. Hoenecke, "very likely at Salbach's instance." (ibid) Hoenecke "prevailed on his colleague Koehler to assume the presidency of the organization, and at (Koehler's) instance the choir devoted itself to the *Volkslied*, the chorale, and the St. Matthew's

Passion by Bach." (ibid) Eventually Salbach departed, and

When Salbach left Wisconsin and the A Capella was liquidated, Koehler offered the Seminary board to take charge of the musical work, in order that it might be integrated more with the theological course of the students. (ibid)

In this way Koehler saw to it that Seminary students got musical education.

But music education at the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod's own theological seminary was not in harmony with the feelings of some: "The work at the Wauwatosa seminary was hampered by the usual opposition that had no use for the historical point of view in theology, not to mention other angles." (ibid)

Now, Koehler himself was a musician, but for some reason the chorales, which were his main effort with the Seminary choir, were not put into male chorus arrangement. Obviously, at first there was no time for this. But it doesn't seem to have gotten done. There was, however, an easy remedy. The High School had sopranos and altos who wouldn't mind singing with the Seminary choir, so Koehler made use of them. Koehler found that the most convenient place for rehearsal was the school of Immanuel Lutheran Church, a Missouri church. This provided one sore spot for the music program. A certain WELS pastor objected to the seminary choir's use of a Missouri church when his was just as adequate. The same sentiment got to the Seminary Board who called Koehler on the carpet for it. After what seems to have been a somewhat heated discussion as to why the Seminary choir

should hold its rehearsals in a Missouri School, Koehler explained the situation, at which point "Albrecht clinched the matter by the statement that he had told them so to begin with, and (then) Graebner moved that it was none of the Board's business"! (ibid)

What did Koehler do with music education at the Seminary? When he brought music instruction to the Seminary, he brought study of the chorale, among other studies. The students were getting history lessons on the chorale and learning something about style of singing. In effect he trying to make singers into musicians, in the realm of the great Chorale, at least. Koehler (ibid) gives the aim of the Seminary choir: "To serve the cause of the chorale and clarify ideas about church music that were still obscure in the current conception."

His work with the Seminary choir went beyond just singing the music. He also had the choir perform. At one point he presented a series of performances of the chorales to the public, thus educating the public on style. He would have the choir sing one chorale in unison, then in 16th and 17th century harmonizations, and then in a figured composition by Bach. He would also lecture at these presentations on "the history, text, and music and brought home to the audience the beauty of the chorale." (ibid) He even had occasions to give lectures and deliver papers to synod meetings, such as the synod convention of 1905 (ibid, p.220-221), in this way increasing awareness among the synod leaders of the importance of quality music and real

musicians. Unless there was another convention in 1905 from which the Proceedings of August 17-22 came, it may have been Koehler's address which prompted this official statement:

The nurture of congregational singing and church music is mainly the task of our parochial school teachers. Therefore it is absolutely necessary that they receive thorough instruction in music while preparing for the teaching profession at our Lehrerseminar. (Meyer, p.22)

This takes us to New Ulm, Minnesota, where the Minnesota Synod had established their own seminary, Dr. Martin Luther College (DMLC). Though it was not part of the Wisconsin Synod until the Joint Synod of 1892, it still plays a part in the historical waters of the WELS. Besides, you will enjoy seeing the progress made at DMLC. In the Catalogue of 1884-85, the school's first year, there is no mention made of music education. The next year (p.15), however, notes that "two musical societies have been formed, namely, a Brass Band of twelve, and an Orchestra of five members. Both are under the leadership of our musically gifted Prof. Burk." Vocal and instrumental music could be studied "by private arrangements." And they had a "pedal organ" for only those students "who are educated for the work in the holy ministry or in parochial schools." (ibid) By the 1887-1888 school year, the school was modulating into something a little more serious:

A course, Vocal, one hour per week, was prescribed for the preparatory and the academic departments for classes D and C, i.e., the first two year. (sic) The normal department included the same course plus these: Music--theoretical and practical, Piano--a term of 25 lessons at \$10, Cabinet Organ--a term of 25 lessons at \$10, Violin--a term of 25 lessons at \$12. Students must furnish their own instruments; organs and pianos

can be rented in town. (Meyer, p.22)

At this point it doesn't appear they made a great effort to make strong musicians out of them, but it was a start. Optimism, however, isn't the theme of the day at this point. This education was not really being offered, and wasn't until 1908, when Fritz Reuter came. From the same Joint Synod Proceedings quoted above, Meyer (p.22) quotes, "But because of the present lack of instructors, it is impossible to offer an adequate course in music." They tried to remedy the problem by recommending "that the Board of Control be authorized to secure an assistant instructor in music to make up for the present lack, at least in part." (ibid) Unfortunately, music education stayed in the dumps until 1907, when, lacking enough faculty members "to do justice to the musical training necessary for Lutheran teachers," they were having to resort to "various teachers" to try to maintain even organ and piano lessons. (ibid, p.23) Under this setup

there was a lack of properly outlined course (sic), and also a lack of correlation. Voice training was almost entirely neglected... (But) efforts were being made to outline the course definitely, partly demanding a definite prerequisite in piano playing before permitting one to take lessons on the pipe organ. (ibid)

Music education at DMLC got a ^{shot} boost in the arm when Fritz Reuter came in the Spring of 1908.

He came from Saxony, where his Lutheran convictions had run afoul of the authorities. With his German training as a teacher, he here devoted himself entirely to church music and with his thorough musicianship, mastery of the organ and as a prolific composer won no small distinction. (Koehler, p.221)

Koehler must have admired Reuter deeply. He says (ibid) of him, "It was chiefly his work and the zeal with which he inspired his pupils that accounts for the improvement of musical manners in our section of the church." This tells us something of his impact on making musicians in the WELS.

Every musician needs discipline. Discipline can be ground into some, but sometimes it can be inspired in some. This is the talent of a good teacher. Reuter himself was disciplined, and his zeal was clearly evident. From the very start this is true. Since he came toward the end of the school year, 1908, he didn't have many class periods available to him in the daily schedule. (We would gasp at what was considered "not many": "22 periods during the regular school hours" (Meyer, p.25-26). But then, a few years later he was carrying 32 periods, according to the Catalogue of 1911-12.) Since he didn't have many class hours available, he "spent most of his time teaching singing... Outside of regular class periods, he practiced with a male choir, a mixed choir, and a girls' (sic) choir, and trained an orchestra for commencement." (ibid) This was before he started a full year.

The curriculum changed greatly. By 1911, the school offered the following music instruction:

Organ: hymns with prelude, interlude, and cadenza, postludes in different forms
Theory: use of the different 7th chords and their inversions, 9th chords, unusual harmonies, alteration, enharmonic ambiguity of the chords (diminished 7th's), modulation, intervals for vocal parts ("Der Satz fuer Singstimmen"), two- and three voice arrangement of *Volkslieder*, exposure to significant chorales
Sacred Music: historical development, keys and sacred

keys ("Kirchentonarten nach Brosig"), accompaniment, history and growth of the organ, historical development of the gospel sacred music, organ composition
Violin: lessons, including duets, quartets
Piano: recital pieces of a well-known master
Singing: men's choir, mixed choir, history of the hymn, spiritual and secular hymns, folksong, exposure to pieces from Schuetz, Bach, Handel, Richter, Felix and Arnold Mendelsohn, et al.
Music history: significant composers old and contemporary (Catalogue 1911-12, p.20-22)

It should be noted that the above was required fare for students training for the teaching ministry. Not much of it was required for theology students.

By 1937-38 (p.19), DMLC was requiring of its students in the teaching department a certain proficiency at the piano: "Male students entering our Normal Department must be able to play at least third-grade piano music." There weren't any improvements in what was required.

By 1937-38 (p.40-42) the course descriptions look a bit different, but these may have been the fare already in Reuter's days:¹

Singing: Advanced ear training and sight singing, part singing, 25 chorales, hymns
Organ: playing of chorals and cadences, Bach, pre-, inter-, postludes of various kinds, liturgical work, modulations
Harmony: general theory of music: scales and intervals, triads and their inversions, seventh chords and their inversions, harmonizations, Heacox's Harmony for Ear, Eye, and Keyboard, suspensions, retardation, alteration, organ point, modulation, harmonization in four, three, and two parts for mixed, male chorus and women voices, musical forms
Construction of the Organ and its Use in the Service
History of Church Music: historical development of the Lutheran choral, liturgy, choral and organ music from

¹ These are courses from the college department.

the 16th century on
School Music

Conducting: techniques of the baton, rehearsal
conducting

Program Building: music for our Lutheran choirs,
conducting and rehearsing under observation

Choir and Band: in the choir they were exposed to
sacred and secular choruses, motets, anthems, songs by
old and modern masters

By 1962-63, the only addition to the curriculum that is an
advancement is "Vocal Technique" (p.26). But this may have been
only a remedial course, since it was only offered in the freshman
year.

Finally, the courses currently available to a student of the
teaching ministry which are improvements over the past are:

Perception of Music: perceive the elements of music
and to apply them to various types. It supports this
training with historical insights.

Theory of Music I: besides what was historically
offered, there seems to be these additions in this
simple course: linear construction of triads in the
major and minor modes, part-writing

Counterpoint

History of music: takes the student from the Baroque
Era through the 20th century (p.50-55)

Organ: intonation and transposition of hymns, choral
and solo accompaniments, keyboard harmony and
improvisation, and increased credit hours available for
further development of technical skills

Piano: also offers increased credit hours

It should be noted that any courses in advanced music are
not required of the students, and that the amount of expertise
required at a keyboard (piano or organ) is "two semester hours of
credit." (p.52) DMLC also offers "Advanced Study Programs" (cf
the application form, Vertical files) which include Perception
of Music, and courses at different levels on organ and piano.
This is the development of music education at DMLC.

Next we jump back in time and geography to the school on the Rock River, Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin. There isn't much to say about music education there. In the first two years of its existence, 1863-65, it had no music education. (Koehler, p.120) But in the school year 1865-66, Koehler (ibid) indicates that a Mr. Gaebler of Watertown was engaged to teach music. What he taught was not indicated. How far they developed from can be seen from where they are right now. In the Preparatory department they offer: music history; sight singing and ear training; playing the recorder; exposure to Lutheran chorales and folksongs; introduction to two and three part form, rondo, theme and variations, fugue, and sonata allegro; beginning principles and applications of music theory; dictation; and four part writing. In the college department they offer: elementary music theory (includes such goodies as elementary notation, major and minor scales, terminology, reading of notes; singing of hymns); a study of music compositions and history through the 20th century; elements of chord building and connection; figured bass; part writing; use of primary and secondary chords; 7th chords; modulations and transposition; analyzation of Bach chorales; and a music seminar semester which emphasizes music history. It should be noted that the courses required of collegiates are the two courses that cover the study of music compositions and history through the 20th century. This is the development of music education at Northwestern College.

There is one school that has had no mention in this paper up

to now, mostly because it is so new to the Wisconsin Synod. This is Wisconsin Lutheran College, the Synod's only purely liberal arts college. This sounds a new note in the WELS staff of music educators. It began in 1973 as a two year college and offered music from then on, though not very high-powered in the early years. It didn't offer music as a major, but by 1976-77 it did offer some courses in music appreciation; theory (included notation, rhythm, scales, intervals, chords and their applicataion toward developing vocal, manual, and aural musicianship skills); intro to part writing; harmonic and structural analysis in the diatonic idiom; supporting keyboard skills; and lessons in piano, organ, and various other instruments. By 1980-81, they had expanded to offering theory which included 7th chords, non-harmonic tones, additional harmonic analysis, harmonization of a melodic line, using figured bass, secondary dominants, modulation and altered chords, study of the transpositions and capabilities of the orchestral instruments (included arrangement exercises for various combinations of instruments), music history from Medieval through the 20th century eras. As one can see, this isn't a whole lot more than even Northwestern College offers today, but things were about to change.

In 1984 the school became a four year college and offered, among other degrees, a BA in Music Theory and in Church Music, requiring 36 credit hours of music and 57 credit hours of music, respectively. It boosted its course offerings to: requiring

exposure to live performances, a couple different musical groups to sing/play in; conducting skills; survey of choral literature; continuing development of part writing skills and harmonic analysis; keyboard classes that integrate what is learned in the theory classes; continuing development of score reading; advanced levels of sight singing and ear training skills; introduction to duodecapronic music and new techniques of analysis; harmonic progression as a means to improvization; theology, history, and practice of church music; counterpoint (especially of the great Bach and the great Fux); extensive composition in order to develop a feeling for musical expression based on how music history and theory combine; hymnology; and exposure to literature of sacred music.

And that is not all! Currently on the agenda for this next year is a proposal to offer Music Education and Music History/Literature as two additional music majors. It should be noted that, in this proposal, the core curriculum requirements of a BA in music include proficiency at the 200 level of musical performance.

Conclusion

"Necessity is the mother of invention." But how good an invention one makes is dependent on how much necessity one feels. It should be clear by now that none of the Synod schools except Wisconsin Lutheran College really offer the extent of course work required to make strong musicians, musicians who are able to

survive in the competition of the musical world. None of them except Wisconsin Lutheran College offer enough so that a budding musician can enter a Masters program in a music college/university. This is not to fault them, however, since their design and purpose is not to create such musicians (though they always hope that a talented student might pass through their program). Northwestern College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary only desire to bring their students to an appreciation for good music. DMLC only desires to make sure it supplies teachers to WELS day schools who are at least able to play the melody line of a song, and so to lead the children in music.

If there is any question about DMLC's music courses, I would have to question its minimal requirements. If the Synod wants to have its children be more than "mediocre music knowers" it won't get there by only requiring two semester hours of keyboard ability. But then, maybe Synod isn't interested in that kind of music awareness in its children. It isn't a matter of salvation, after all.

If there is any question I have about Wisconsin Lutheran College, it has to do with timing. Are they offering too high an ability to our Christian youth so that these musicians will find themselves unable to be employed anywhere except outside the Synod? Won't a young graduate with a music degree, after pursuing further study in a graduate program, be frustrated? Maybe this won't be a problem by the time the current proposals are implemented and there are students graduating under the

proposal's structure. Perhaps by then there will be a few positions in our churches and schools for "ministers of music" or music professors. Only the Lord and his time-table will tell. Music education in the WELS has come a long way. There is a long way to go. But a bright future seems to lie ahead as history is in the making.

ch History Bibliography
quarter
r Professor Westerhaus
arch 26, 1986
Chris Cordes

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Dr. Martin Luther College Catalogues.
- Dr. Martin Luther College (New Ulm) ---vertical files in WLS library.
- Koehler, John Philipp. Leigh D. Jordahl, ed. The History of the Wisconsin Synod. Sentinal Publishing Company: St. Cloud, MN., 1970.
- Lehmann, Arnold Otto. The Music of the Lutheran Church, Synodical Conference, Chiefly the Areas of Missouri, Illinois, Wisconsin and Neighboring States, 1839-1941. University Microfilms, Inc.: Ann Arbor, MI, 1967.
- Meyer, Edward H. The Life and Work of Fritz Otto Reuter. (Masters research project for Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Ill., June, 1972.)
- Norwestern College (and University) Catalogues.
- Wisconsin Lutheran College Catalogues.