THE ST. OLAF CHOIR
ANTON ARMSTRONG • CONDUCTOR

2015 Winter Tour

ST. OLAF COLLEGE
SOPRANO I
Elysa Bond, Reading, Mass.
music
Amy Erdalion, Maplewood, Minn.
music
Katherine Kristion, Lakhavas, Minn.
music/mathematics/statistics/Nordic studies
Myrka Lemos, George Hroux, Mich.
music
Samantha Noonan, Lincoln, Neb.
music performance
Emma Ottspy, Spicer, Minn.
mathematics
Samantha Rude, Kaukauna, Wis.
music
Sophie Sparrow, Winchester, Mass.
biology
Sarah Stevens, Rochester, Minn.
economics/statistics/management studies
Kate Wellenstein, Madison, Wis.
history

SOPRANO II
Meredith Arens, Brookfield, Wis.
nursing
Lana Borett, Palm Harbor, Fla.
music/management studies
† Chloe Eby, Menasha, Wis.
music performance
Charlotte Etevel, Apopka, Fla.
physics
Lauren Hahn, Pittsford, N.Y.
music education
Sarah Hammal, Decatur, Iowa
music performance
Hannah Herndon, Peachtown City, Ga.
music/English/women’s and gender studies
Siri Keller, Menasha, Wis.
music education
Danielle Long, O’Fallon, Ill.
music performance
Natalia Romero, Ketyl, Texas
music education

ALTO I
Maria Coyne, Atlanta, Ga.
music performance
Ingrid Ezzy, Menasha, Wis.
Norwegian
Emma Haptop, Davison, N.C.
class music/music performance/Spanish
Katherine Jardon, Red Oak, Iowa
music education
Sophia Magro, Champion, Ill.
music education/psychology
Mary Kate Maney, Western Springs, Ill.
music
Alexandra Mauney, Greenville, S.C.
class music
Kat Middelwold, Northfield, Minn.
music performance
Emily Nyberg, Shoreview, Minn.
music performance
Kirsten Overdahl, Fort Wayne, Ind.
music performance/chemistry

ALTO II
Natalie Ali, Rocky River, Ohio
biology
Kyriakos Anderson, Oak Park, Ill.
English/visual arts
† Alyssa Boudekins, Atlanta, Ga.
music/mathematics/statistics/management studies
Weirin Lada, Milwaukee, Wis.
music performance
Jessica Lawdan, Mendelton, Ill.
music education
Vanessa Lopez, Moscrop, Calif.
music education
† Eleanor Means, Wellesley, Mass.
music/management/media studies
Emily Nielson, Portland, Ore.
biology/nursing
Leah Suffern, New Haven, Conn.
economics/environmental studies
Amy Turner, Plymouth, Minn.
physics

TENOR I
Matthew Bock, Bemidji, Minn.
music performance
William Holt, Tyler, Texas
music
JW Keckley, Carl Junction, Mo.
music performance
Greg Martin, Winter Park, Fla.
music performance
Kaya Petersen, Lakeville, Minn.
chemistry/Asian studies
Gabe Smith, Decatur, Iowa
music
Jacob Soellens, Weaverville, N.C.
music
Zach Wustermeyer, Falcon Heights, Minn.
music/mathematics

TENOR II
class music/music performance
Charlie Bass, New Canaan, Conn.
music
Webster Crist, Bilngyi, Mont.
biology/Nordic studies
John Holmsmorn, Savage, Minn.
music
Aaron Koles, Northbrook, Ill.
music education
Cael Naukaer, Oak Park, Ill.
music/history/management studies
† Tucker Moore, Minneapolis, Minn.
music
Abraham Rusch, Dariiburg, Mich.
class music
Jocque Warner, New Richmond, Wis.
music education

BASS I
Brandon Berger, Worthington, Minn.
music education
Erik Berthelsen, Northfield, Minn.
economics
Phil Biedenbender, New Ulm, Minn.
music theory/composition
Alex Garkman, Mifion, Iowa
music education
† Nathaniel Hendre, Edmond, Wash.
music education
Harrison Hintosche, DeKoß, Ill.
music performance
David Koser, Austin, Minn.
biology
Andrew Parr, Metuchen, N.J.
music education
Duncan Tsuims, Portland, Ore.
music education

BASS II
Jaron Curtis, Cape May, N.J.
music performance
David Deluca, Burlington, Mass.
philosophy/psychology
Jacob Rossing, Excelsior, Minn.
music education
Andrew Horton, Lake Forest Park, Wash.
music
Erik Jones, Andover, Minn.
mathematics
Michael Peanes, Weymouth, Minn.

† Adrian Rossing, Monash, Wis.
computer science/statistics
Sebastian Sorens, Iowa City, Iowa
music/philosophy
Charlie Tapio, Falcon Heights, Minn.
chemistry

PIANO
Phil Biedenbender, New Ulm, Minn.
music theory/composition
Aaron Koles, Northbrook, Ill.
music education

PERCUSSION
Alex Garkman, Mifion, Iowa
music education
Tucker Moore, Minneapolis, Minn.
music
Adrian Rossing, Monash, Wis.
computer science/statistics

ST. OLAF DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC
Alison Falldt, chair
Kent McWilliams, vice-chair

MUSIC ADMISSIONS
Mary Hakes, coordinator

OFFICE OF MUSIC ORGANIZATIONS
B.J. Johnson, manager
Terra Wildfield ’95, assistant manager
Kevin Storks ’02, assistant director for marketing and promotion
Mary Davis, performance librarian/mechanical rights administrator
Christina Hanson ’06, assistant to music organizations
Tim Wells, administrative assistant
Ramsey Walker ’14, marketing assistant
† Denotes section leader
• Officers and management

The St. Olaf Choir 2014–15
ANTON ARMSTRONG, CONDUCTOR · B.J. JOHNSON, MANAGER

WINER TOUR 2015
A Finely Tuned Instrument

For more than a century, the St Olaf Choir has brought its message of hope and faith to audiences around the world.

More than 25 years after taking the reins of the St Olaf Choir, Anton Armstrong ’78 jokes that he’s still the “new conductor.”

Never mind that he has now exceeded the length of time his predecessor, Kenneth Jennings ’50, led the renowned ensemble. Or that, like Jennings, he has guided an organization steeped in tradition into a new era.

In its 103-year history, the St Olaf Choir has had just four conductors. Each has built upon the foundational ideals of sharing choral music that stirs the souls of listeners. Each has worked tirelessly to expand the choir’s outreach and sound, globally and culturally. And all have been deeply beloved, legendary figures on campus.

So Armstrong can understand if some people, especially those who can recall the magic of singing under one of his predecessors, still think of him as new. He wrote his doctoral monograph on the history of the St Olaf Choir, studying closely the first three conductors’ repertoire and pedagogy and the ensemble’s impact on the world of choral singing. Doing that research meant that when Armstrong was invited to lead the choir, he knew he was inheriting a finely tuned instrument with a firmly rooted legacy.

“Yet it’s an instrument that is constantly changing,” Armstrong says. “One of the things I gathered from my own research and study of the choir is that each conductor has built on the traditions of those who preceded him, and then worked to open new doors.”

In recent years, the St Olaf Choir, which celebrated its centennial in 2012, has flung those doors wide open. The ensemble is a leader in the international music community, performing at the White House in 2005, touring extensively abroad, and regularly collaborating with ensembles such as the Minnesota Orchestra, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, VocalEssence, Cantus, the American Boychoir, and Magnum Chorum. Some of the finest choral ensembles in the country, Armstrong notes, look to the St Olaf Choir as a pacemaker in repertoire and vocal pedagogy.

While F. Melius Christiansen established the ensemble’s standard of excellence when he founded the St Olaf Choir and his son, Olaf Christiansen, cemented its legacy, it’s the work of Jennings and Armstrong that has taken the St Olaf Choir into a modern age.

IN THE BEGINNING

When F. Melius Christiansen came to St Olaf in 1903 he was tasked with leading a group of instrumentalists, not vocalists. He quickly shaped those musicians into the remarkable performing ensemble that is today the St Olaf Band. At the same time, Christiansen — who had extensive musical training and had led several choral ensembles in Minneapolis — was asked to lead a choir at St John’s Lutheran Church in Northfield. As that choir prepared to take its first tour throughout the Midwest in the spring of 1912, it officially changed its name to the St Olaf Choir. The following year, the choir toured Norway and

THE CHOIR EVOLVES

After graduating from St Olaf, Jennings earned a master of music degree from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music and a doctor of musical arts degree from the University of Illinois. He conducted both the Manitou Singers and Chapel Choir during his early years on campus. When it came time to choose a successor to Olaf Christiansen in 1968, the process was simple, Jennings says.

“Olaf called me into the office and said, ‘We’d like you to become the new conductor of the St Olaf Choir,’” Jennings recalls, noting that the offer was “a bit of a shock.” He told Christiansen he’d need time to think it over and was given a day. Jennings accepted, of course, ending the 65-year-long tenure of Olaf Christiansen with the choir in 1968.

Olaf Christiansen was an accomplished musician in his own right, having studied sacred music at Union Theological Seminary and founding the Oberlin Conservatory’s a cappella choir before taking the helm of the St Olaf Choir. Olaf Christiansen remained deeply committed to ensuring the St Olaf Choir retained its purity of tone while exploring new genres and interpretations of music. He added contemporary songs, more Renaissance music, and American folk hymns to the repertoire of traditional church chorales.

The late Ronald Nelson ’49, who sang in the choir for three-and-a-half years, recalled, “we had some spellbinding moments under his direction. Olaf could communicate, in very inexpressible ways, every bit of emotion and tempo and any other dynamic that he was wanting. It was a fantastic experience to sing under him.”

Nelson shared that experience with Kenneth Jennings, a second tenor who would return to St Olaf in 1990—just three years after he graduated — to join the music faculty. Jennings returned to St Olaf with the understanding that Olaf Christiansen planned to have him serve as the choir’s assistant conductor during its upcoming 1955 tour of Norway.

F. Melius Christiansen 1912–43

Olaf Christiansen ’25 1941–68

Kenneth Jennings ’50 1968–90

Anton Armstrong ’78 1990–Present

Members of the 1930 choir on board a ship to Norway, where 40,000 people gathered to welcome them.”

Olaf Christiansen with the choir in New York’s Philharmonic Hall during his final tour in 1968.
The choir began performing larger choral works, including oratorios, masses, and passions, under Jennings’s leadership. He also included more 20th-century works, with a focus on historically informed renditions. Jennings retained much of the a cappella repertoire the Christiansens had established, but also introduced a handful of musical instruments as accompaniment, opening the door for full orchestral collaborations in the future.

Jennings also favored a freer vocal tone for the choir. Under Olaf Christiansen, choir members stood in a U-shape and sang toward other members of the ensemble. Jennings used wider and deeper risers that enabled singers to hear themselves better, sing more freely, and direct their energy toward the audience. “I opened it up because I thought we needed to sing to the people, not to ourselves,” says Karin Laine McMillen ’94, who sang in the choir for three years under Armstrong.

As a student at St. Olaf, Armstrong sang in the choir for two years under Jennings before attending graduate school at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He returned to St. Olaf after a decade at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The choir’s repertoire under Armstrong has become increasingly multicultural, including music of the Pacific Rim, Africa, and Latin America. He has added Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and Ireland to its tour annals, while also emphasizing a more historically informed interpretation of musical origins. At the same time, he cultivates the choir’s rich traditions, most notably with the 2005 and 2013 tours to Norway, during which two PBS Christmas specials were filmed.

“The palate is more colorful and broader now,” Armstrong says. “It retains the characteristic sound it had under the Christiansens, but now it’s not just salt and pepper. There are a lot of spices in it.”

Under Armstrong, the St. Olaf Choir has also begun to move. Members of the ensemble swayed back and forth with the music during certain pieces. Sometimes it’s choreographed, and other times it’s simply an expression of what they’re feeling. “If Kenneth freed up the voice, maybe Anton freed up the body,” wrote Joseph Shaw ’49, professor emeritus of religion at St. Olaf and the author of The St. Olaf Choir: A Narrative.

The ensemble continues to receive acclaim under Armstrong’s direction as well. In 2013 the St. Olaf Choir was named one of four finalists in the prestigious European Broadcasting Union’s Choral Competition. American Public Media, a member of the European Broadcasting Union, chose St. Olaf to be its sole American representative to the competition.

With an annual national tour and trips abroad every four years, the St. Olaf Choir continues to bring its message of hope and faith to listeners around the world. While Armstrong is the current link in a chain of strong leaders who have shaped the choir, it’s really the students who have carried the ensemble’s legacy from one generation to the next.

“The conductor gives inspiration, but also receives it from the choir. You hear no sound from my hands,” Armstrong says. “It comes from all those wonderful souls who have been part of the choir and who have contributed in some way.”

For many of those students, singing in the St. Olaf Choir serves as a transformative experience that will remain with them for a lifetime.

“Singing at such a high level allowed us to transcend the music on the page, to reach out to audiences, to convey a message of faith, and to use our gifts in a joyful, incredibly moving manner,” Kunau says. “When you sing with a community like that, you understand the power music has to convey things that the spoken word doesn’t.”

Another critic for the Herald Examiner wrote: “It is a group of young people, all of them letter-perfect, pitch-perfect, tone-perfect, text-perfect in the most difficult classical choral music … Their concert was one of the rarest expositions of the superlative in choral singing.”

Copies of the favorable Chicago reviews were sent ahead to the other cities on the itinerary, which resulted in surprisingly well-attended concerts as the choir made their way to the east coast through cities including Pittsburgh, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and Philadelphia. Excitement mounted with each performance, until the group finally reached New York’s Carnegie Hall. Choir member Leola Bergmann later recalled the historic concert:

Martin Hanson … saw the lights lower over three thousand listeners, heard the comments of the critics during the intermission, and then rushed backstage with a beaming face. ‘The critics are wild, the critics are wild!’ Christiansen and the choir had made it.

New York had listened and liked it, liked it very much.

On its way home, the choir, preceded by its newly earned reputation, performed in Rochester and Buffalo, N.Y., and Cleveland, Akron, and Toledo, Ohio. According to Shaw, “the crowds grew to the point where many had to be turned away.”
For 25 years, Anton Armstrong ’78 has led a generation of Oles in passionate singing, extraordinary music, and much more.

“Body, mind, spirit, voice — it takes the whole person to sing and rejoice.” Now in his 25th year of conducting the St. Olaf Choir, Armstrong offers his singers this mantra that he learned from his mentor Helen Kemp, professor emerita of voice and church music at Westminster Choir College.

Armstrong, who was just 22 when he met Kemp, credits her as one of the most influential people in his life, shaping the way he sees his calling as a vocal music educator and conductor. “She was instrumental in helping me form my understanding of being a servant-artist-teacher,” says Armstrong.

Kemp isn’t the only person who has influenced Armstrong over the years. He remembers a day when he was a teenager, living in New York, and not being particularly excited about the prospect of seeing the St. Olaf Choir in concert. “I had friends going to a Moody Blues concert at Madison Square Garden,” Armstrong recalls. “I was dragged to a St. Olaf Choir concert at Lincoln Center by my assistant pastor, who said, ‘You’ll love this choir.’”

That concert had a profound effect on Armstrong. A later visit to campus convinced him that the warmth of the St. Olaf community outweighed his distaste for Minnesota winters, and he enrolled at the college. A member of the St. Olaf Choir as a student, Armstrong knew both the commitment it takes to sing in the choir and the investment it takes to lead those singers as a conductor.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Armstrong’s teaching style has changed since he started his work as a conductor 37 years ago. “When I first began conducting and teaching, I had a take-charge attitude, the notion that the young people in front of me were there to do my bidding,” he says. “I see myself as a catalyst now, someone who helps bring out the best in them, as musicians and as individuals.” Keeping Kemp’s mantra in mind, Armstrong strives to create whole musicians, not just musical moments.

Over the past quarter-century, Armstrong has influenced thousands of singers through his work as a teacher, a teacher of teachers, a conductor, and a music editor. His gifts have been recognized by Baylor University, which awarded him the 2006 Robert Frost Cherry Award for Great Teaching — the single largest monetary award given in the United States to an individual for teaching. In 2007, Armstrong was the first recipient of the Distinguished Alumni Award from the American Boychoir School, and in 2009 he received the Distinguished Alumni Award from Michigan State University. The St. Olaf Choir gained international recognition in 2013, when it was named one of four finalists in the European Broadcasting Union’s Choral Competition.

In addition to his leadership of the St. Olaf Choir, Armstrong is the artistic director of the St. Olaf Christmas Festival, an event that requires year-round planning. He teaches vocal pedagogy for the young singer, conducting classes, performance studies in voice, and conducts the Collegiate Choral (a non-auditioned women’s ensemble comprised of St. Olaf students, faculty, and staff). He is in his 24th year as conductor of the Troubadours, the boys’ ensemble of the Northfield Youth Choirs.

Armstrong also mentored students in Luther Seminary’s Master of Sacred Music conducting program (from 1990–2014) and serves each summer as the music director of the Stangeland Family Youth Choral Academy of the Oregon Bach Festival, a high school choral program he founded in 1998. He is a graduate of the American Boychoir School, St. Olaf College, the University of Illinois, and Michigan State University. He previously taught at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

CHORAL CONNECTIONS

Armstrong is committed to sharing the experience that comes from making truly beautiful choral art. He has traversed the globe with engagements in locations ranging from New Zealand to Israel and South America to Scandinavia. Along with St. Olaf Artist in Residence Sigrid Johnson, Armstrong lectured at the 2008 and 2011 World Symposium on Choral Music and served as co-chair of the artistic committee for the 2014 World Symposium on Choral Music held in Seoul, South Korea.

Armstrong’s experience with international music has greatly influenced the St. Olaf Choir. “We are constantly examining repertoire from a global perspective, but the core of our being is still a proclamation of the Christian Gospel — a message of faith, love, and truth,” says Armstrong. He says the choir’s repertoire has grown significantly during his 25 years as conductor, which has, in turn, “opened a world of music for our students,” says Armstrong. It has also helped influence the repertoire of other choirs, including the popularity of South African freedom hymns and American gospel music. “You can now see it permeating throughout the fabric of the greater choral community,” he says.

Ongoing collaborations with other ensembles are a priority for the choir, which has repeatedly partnered with ensembles such as VocalEssence, the Minnesota Orchestra, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, and the American Boychoir.

Additionally, Armstrong provides choirs with new music through his work as editor of the Anton Armstrong Multicultural Series of Earshong Publications and co-editor (with retired faculty colleague John Ferguson) of the St. Olaf Choral Series, published by Augsburg Fortress Publishers.

These collaborations and connections are a way to ensure that the music Armstrong helps create — with its powerful message of faith and hope — has ripple effects that reach beyond the boundaries of St. Olaf College and its choir.

“I want the power of music — that Spirit — to transform those who perform and those who will hear the message.”

— Anton Armstrong

CONSISTENCY AND CHANGE

Armstrong’s conducting philosophy has evolved over his 25-year tenure, and the St. Olaf choral program has changed and grown, too. “Our entire choral program continues to be recognized with greater acclaim at a national and international level,” he says. “That pleases me because it means we’re still doing something that’s worthwhile here, and something that influences and benefits the lives of others.”

Armstrong credits the “incredible team of choral and vocal colleagues” for the growth and quality of the St. Olaf choral program as a whole. “We’ve moved away from the idea of a ‘pecking order’ in our choral program,” he says. “Instead, we focus more on the function each choir serves. I’m proud that we have over 600 young people singing on this campus.”

The college has changed during his tenure, too. Over the past 25 years, Armstrong has seen St. Olaf’s academic reputation grow, the faculty, staff, and student body become more diverse, and the college’s orientation become more student-focused. “We realize here to serve the best needs of the students. Their needs guide our decisions in terms of hiring and the programming that takes place,” he says.

And yet, for Armstrong, some things haven’t changed. “I chose this school 40 years ago because of the basic values of this community — a place that values hard work, a life of faith, and the content of your mind and heart. I still believe those are essential aspects of St. Olaf community,” he says.

Armstrong’s mission, and that of his predecessors, hasn’t changed either: “I want to get beyond entertainment. I want to make a powerful difference,” he says. “I want the power of music — that Spirit — to transform those who perform and those who will hear the message. For me, that has been a very powerful reason for why we do what we do.”
CHARLES GRAY  
As professor of music at St. Olaf College, Charles Gray teaches violin, viola, and chamber music, and serves as director of the annual St. Olaf Summer Music Camp. He is also employed on the music staff at St. Andrew’s Lutheran Church in Mahtomedi, Minn., as conductor of its 45-piece orchestra.

Gray attended Wheaton College, the University of Michigan, and the Eastman School of Music, where his major teachers included Paul Makanowitzky, Sylvia Rosenberg, Atar Arad, and members of the Cleveland Quartet. Previously a member of the Rochester Philharmonic (New York) and the Grand Rapids Symphony (Michigan), Gray was a frequent performer with the Minnesota Orchestra from 1991 to 2010. He was violist of the Casella String Quartet, winner of the Cleveland Quartet Competition and the grand prize at the Fischoff Chamber Music Competition. He has also given solo performances at the American Choral Directors Association and American Guild of Organists national conventions. He has assisted composers John Ferguson, Charles Forsberg, Ralph Johnson ’78, and Kenneth Jennings ’50 in editing numerous solo violin and viola parts for their use in combination with choir.

In 2008 the American String Teachers Association named Gray the Minnesota Master String Teacher of the Year. That same year, Gray arranged and recorded the string parts to the song I Apologize, sung by Atlanta vocalist Ann Nesbit, which was nominated for a Grammy in the Rhythm and Blues category.

This is Gray’s 12th tour with the St. Olaf Choir, and he has performed more than 330 concerts as soloist with the ensemble.

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**THE ST. OLAF CHOIR • 2015 TOUR PROGRAM**

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**I**

- The Lord’s Prayer  
  (*without pause*)
  Robert Stone (1516–1613)

- I Will Not Leave You Comfortless
  William Byrd (1539–1623)

- Furchte dich nicht (BWV 228)
  Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

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**II**

- Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe
  Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809–47)

- In Winter’s Night
  Waldemar Åhlén (1894–1982)

- Sanctus (Mass)
  Leonard Bernstein (1918–90)

- Evening Meal (The Lord’s Supper)
  Ralph M. Johnson (b. 1955)

- The Lord Is the Everlasting God
  Kenneth Jennings (b. 1925)

- Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying
  Philipp Nicolai (1556–1608)

  setting by F. Melius Christiansen (1871–1955)

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**III**

- Veni Creator Spiritus
  Anthony Bernarducci (b. 1983)

- With What Shall I Come (*Premiere performance*)
  Rosephanye Powell (b. 1962)

- Kalá, Kallá (*Five Hebrew Love Songs*)
  Eric Whitacre (b. 1970)

- Lullaby (*Three Nocturnes*)
  Daniel Elder (b. 1986)

- Flight Song (*Premiere performance*)
  Kim André Arnesen (b. 1980)

- Past Life Melodies
  Sarah Hopkins (b. 1958)

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**IV**

- Pilgrims’ Hymn (*The Three Hermits*)
  Stephen Paulus (1949–2014)

- This Little Light of Mine
  arr. Anthony Leach

- Give Me Jesus
  arr. L. L. Fleming

- The Battle of Jericho
  arr. Moses G. Hogan Jr.

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**OPTIONAL SELECTIONS**

- Danny Boy
  arr. Joseph Flummerfelt

- Beautiful Savior
  arr. F. Melius Christiansen

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**Singing in the St. Olaf Choir is an accomplishment for any singer. But being a member of the choir with two of your siblings is remarkable. Such is the case for Adrian Rossing ’15, and his sisters Chloe Elzey ’15 and Ingrid Elzey ’17 of Menasha, Wis.**

Adrian currently serves as the choir’s student manager and will graduate this spring with a computer science major and a statistics concentration. After graduation, he plans to work as a software developer at C.H. Robinson in Eden Prairie, Minn.

Chloe, the choir’s soprano section leader, will graduate with a major in vocal performance. She plans to continue graduate studies in vocal performance and pedagogy next year.

Ingrid plans to major in Norwegian with an environmental studies concentration. She may miss her older siblings after they graduate, but she will still have the companionship of her younger sister, Monika Elzey ’18, a first-year student at St. Olaf this year.
It was choral music that brought Bob and Sigrid Johnson together. They met as students in the Concordia College Choir in Moorhead, Minnesota, and for nearly four decades, choral music has defined and enriched their careers. Bob has served as manager of Music Organizations for the college and Sigrid as vocal artist in residence and conductor of the Manitou Singers. Both will retire in May after more than three decades filled with impressive contributions and warm collegiality.

For 37 years, Bob “B.J.” Johnson has heeded the call as the full-time manager of St. Olaf’s Office of Music Organizations. He has taken care of myriad details, from figuring out how to pay for tours to booking flights, hotels, and concert venues. He often plans two or three years in advance while simultaneously putting the finishing touches on performances taking place in a week or two.

His work has enabled St. Olaf Choir conductors Kenneth Jennings ‘50 and Anton Armstrong ‘78 to focus their energy on making great choral art. “With Bob’s leadership, I’m able to achieve something bigger, something much more significant than I could otherwise,” says St. Olaf Choir Conductor Anton Armstrong ‘78.

In 1976, at the suggestion of Jennings, the Music Department appointed Johnson, who had been on the staff of the University of Michigan’s music society. Once described as a cross between the great New York impresario Sol Hurok and the great circus master P.T. Barnum, Johnson says he has enjoyed his dual roles as concert producer and event promoter over the years. Throughout his time at St. Olaf, he has encouraged the conductors of the St. Olaf Choir to think big, and his entrepreneurial sense has brought about many innovations.

He got St. Olaf in the recording business by reestablishing the St. Olaf Records label, and has led the choir on tours worldwide. His knack for building relationships has ensured that the St. Olaf Christmas Festival was filmed every four years to air on public television, for a total of 11 productions, including two PBS holiday specials filmed on location in Norway’s historic Nidaros Cathedral.

“It seems that each time we had a collaboration with public television, things just got better. They had our trust and we had their trust. It was just a wonderful collaboration,” says Johnson. In 2007 and 2011, Johnson also led the charge in simulcasting the St. Olaf Christmas Festival in several hundred theaters around the nation.

A leader in forging alliances with other colleagues and supporters of choral music, Johnson served on the steering committee that brought the 2002 World Symposium on Choral Music to Minneapolis. In 1990 he was instrumental in founding the College Music Tour Managers Association.

Johnson has led the St. Olaf music organizations on tours annually throughout the United States, and on 15 international tours, from Seoul, Korea, to Snåsa, Norway. In fact, the St. Olaf Choir visited Norway four times under Johnson’s management, including the 2005 tour that included three of the college’s touring ensembles. “That was a fabulous tour, when we brought the St. Olaf Band, St. Olaf Choir, and St. Olaf Orchestra to Norway all at the same time,” he recalls. “That was another exciting adventure.”

While Bob was managing the business side of St. Olaf’s music organizations, Sigrid, his spouse of 44 years, has trained a generation of singers at the college. As the conductor of Manitou Singers, a select 100-voice choir for first-year women, Sigrid creates the female vocal foundation of the St. Olaf choral program, says Armstrong. “Every year she starts from the ground up with a new group of singers, the majority of whom are not music majors,” he says.

Along with her work at St. Olaf, she has served as associate conductor to two of the finest choral organizations in the country: the Dale Warland Singers and Phillip Brunelle’s VocalEssence. “Sigrid has the ability to help both of those wonderful conductors develop a core sense of what their ensembles could sound like,” says Armstrong. Throughout her career, she has also maintained an active schedule as a guest conductor and clinician at choral conferences and music festivals across the country and throughout the world.

The Johnsons know that retirement will bring a new lifestyle, and there will be trade-offs. They look forward to what the next chapter of their lives will bring, but they both anticipate missing their daily contact with students, faculty, and staff within the St. Olaf community.

“The students are beyond belief,” says Sigrid. “They have enriched me.”

“It has been a real family,” says Bob. “On the other hand, I understand from my retired colleagues that retirement is a great next chapter. And I’m looking forward to traveling without 75 people behind me.”
The one-hour PBS holiday program Christmas in Norway with the St. Olaf Choir has been recognized for excellence by the Upper Midwest Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences. The St. Olaf College production, produced by PBS affiliate Twin Cities Public Television (tpt), received two Upper Midwest Regional Emmy® statues for Special Event Coverage, and one for the program's director Phillip Byrd. In the Special Event category, Anton Armstrong ’78, Jeffrey O’Donnell ’02, and Bob "B." Johnson were presented with Emmy® Awards, along with tpt creative workers who worked on the production.

“When you have peers outside the field of music recognize the stature of the choir and the very nature of that type of program, it affirms the work that we do and the level of excellence we strive for,” Armstrong said in a recent interview.

The St. Olaf Choir’s centennial tour of Norway in 2013 culminated in the filming of this very special Christmas program, which was filmed in Trondheim’s historic Nidaros Cathedral. Joining the St. Olaf Choir and conductor Anton Armstrong was Nidarosdomens Jentekor, the cathedral’s resident girls’ choir. In addition to conducting the St. Olaf Choir, Armstrong served as artistic director of the program. Johnson, longtime manager of St. Olaf Music Organizations, served as production and concert manager; and O’Donnell, executive producer of the weekly radio program Sing For Joy and director of broadcast and media services at St. Olaf, was the program’s audio producer.

CD, DVD, and Blu-ray recordings of Christmas in Norway with the St. Olaf Choir are available at stolafrecords.com or by calling 888-232-6523.
Summer Music Camp Opportunities at St. Olaf

June 21–27, 2015

• Music Camp for Band, Choir, and Orchestra
• Piano and Organ/Church Music Academies

For more information, visit stolaf.edu/conferences/summer-camps.

College Scholarship Competition

St. Olaf summer music programs will award five outstanding camp participants $1,000 scholarships. Eligible students are rising seniors who then enroll as a first-year student at St. Olaf for the fall 2016 term. Recipients will be chosen by the camp faculty, with one musician chosen from each of the large ensembles: band, choir, orchestra, piano academy, and organ academy. Each award is a renewable scholarship for up to four years, for a total of $4,000 each.

For more information, visit stolaf.edu/conferences/summer-camps.
Saturday, January 24, 7:30 p.m.
First Presbyterian Church
Greenville, South Carolina

Sunday, January 25, 3 p.m.
Schwartz Center for Performing Arts
Emory University
Atlanta, Georgia

Friday, January 30, 8 p.m.
Luther Memorial Church
Madison, Wisconsin

Saturday, January 31, 7:30 p.m.
Fourth Presbyterian Church
Chicago, Illinois

Sunday, February 1, 4 p.m.
Chenery Auditorium
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Monday, February 2, 7:30 p.m.
Severance Hall
Cleveland, Ohio

Tuesday, February 3, 7:30 p.m.
Andrews B. Hale Auditorium
Robert Wesleyan College
Rochester, New York

Wednesday, February 4, 7:30 p.m.
Mechanics Hall
Worcester, Massachusetts

Thursday, February 5, 7:30 p.m.
Battell Chapel
Yale University
New Haven, Connecticut

Friday, February 6, 8 p.m.
Stern Auditorium/Perelman Stage
Carnegie Hall
New York, New York

Sunday, February 8, 4 p.m.
Trinity Lutheran Church
Lansdale, Pennsylvania

Monday, February 9, 7:30 p.m.
Princeton University Chapel
Princeton, New Jersey

Tuesday, February 10, 7:30 p.m.
Heinz Hall
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Wednesday, February 11, 7:30 p.m.
St. Peter in Chains Cathedral
Cincinnati, Ohio

Thursday, February 12, 7:30 p.m.
First Presbyterian Church
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Friday, February 13, 8 p.m.
Covenant Fine Arts Center Auditorium
Calvin College
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Saturday, February 14, 7:30 p.m.
Pick-Staiger Concert Hall
Northwestern University
Evanston, Illinois

Sunday, February 15, 3 p.m.
Orchestra Hall
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Monday, February 16, 7:30 p.m.
Boe Memorial Chapel
St. Olaf College
Northfield, Minnesota

For ticket information, visit stolaftickets.com