



'LUREN' THEM IN WITH A SONG...FOR 150 YEARS!

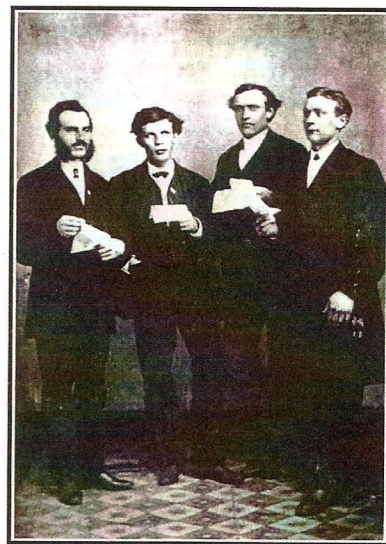
BY KRISTINE JEPSEN • PHOTOS COURTESY LUREN SINGERS

The story of how a small quartet expanded - over the course of 15 decades - to a large ensemble that has brought Norwegian music - and more - to countless listeners worldwide.

On March 15, 1868, four young men, all Norwegian immigrants in the busy settlement of Decorah, gave in to a bit of homesickness and gathered to sing the songs of their youth. Soon, their parlor pastime had a name: the Luren – for a bugle-like Norwegian horn, the lure – Quartet.

This year, the Luren Singers, a now-expanded men's ensemble dating to that first quartet, celebrates 150 years of performance. In all that time, the men of its membership have continued to bring Norwegian folk song, classical pieces in Norwegian, and even American folk songs and popular crowd-pleasers to listeners year-round.

"We aim to be prepared at the drop of a hat, with something for everyone," says director David Judisch. "Our repertoire is vast, conservatively speaking."



(Continued on next page)



Above: the Norwegian Singers Association of America 2016 officers.
Below: the Luren Singers December, 2017 - photo by Chip Peterson.



“Uff-da,” he might have said at the start, but Judisch is entirely of German descent, though he’s loved by the Luren fellowship just the same. Now retired as professor of voice and vocal performance at Luther College, Judisch took the podium with Luren as a favor to a colleague, thinking it would last a season. That winter turned into 43 years (and counting!), including several performing tours hosted in Norway.

Luren Singers, in turn, host Norwegian touring ensembles in Decorah, including the women’s choir Cantus from Trondheim, made famous by their performance of the opening yoik folk song of the Disney movie *Frožen*.

This spring, don’t be alarmed if the group of men you skirt on the sidewalk of Water Street burst out in Norwegian song. Or, should you spot a dapper group in formal wear drifting across the Luther College campus. Lucky you, you’ve stumbled upon Sangerfest! On even years, Luren joins nine other Norwegian-American choirs – hailing from Chicago, Madison, Minneapolis, Sioux Falls, and Rockford, Illinois – in Sangerfest, a word that means, literally, singing festival. Choirs within the Norwegian Singers Association of America rotate in hosting the three-day event – each once in a decade. In 1966, Decorah’s first year as host, the Sangerfest parade and performances around downtown drew such large crowds that, it’s rumored, Nordic Fest was born.

2018 marks Sangerfest’s return to Decorah, with guest Norwegian choir *Brødrerøster* performing and joining in the Sangerfest finale, a Grand Concert accompanied by an orchestra of Luther College faculty, local musicians, and students. (See sidebar for details.)

A women’s chorus – Northern Lights – has also evolved from the membership of the Luren Auxiliary, often spouses of members, and they will perform at Sangerfest 2018 as well.

Members of Luren hail from several different small Driftless towns, and take civic involvement seriously, Judisch says. Should a hat get passed at a Luren concert – after they’ve raised rafters with spirituals, arrangements of favorite hymns, even barbershop and show tunes – the money is donated locally, usually to food pantries and fundraisers. Each summer, too, Luren members can be found in red aprons at their booth at the Winneshiek County Fair, serving tasty slices of homemade pie and ice cream – apple, cherry, peach... strawberry-rhubarb, if you’re lucky. Funds go toward touring expenses and scholarships for Luren’s accompanists, often Luther College students as they pursue graduate studies in music.

In the end, it’s this camaraderie – the Luren family – that keeps members in their concert dress: white dinner jackets with black bow ties. To date, seven members have been lifting their voices for 40 years or more. One member, Mr. John Nelson, has been with Luren 55 years. But they’re a welcoming bunch too – new or interested singers are encouraged to sit in on a rehearsal. (Just contact a member for dates and times, listed at lurensingsociety.com.)

“We’re from all walks of life,” Judisch observes, “teachers, lawyers, tradesmen, politicians, computer programmers, all together. We sing for our children’s weddings, and we sing for members’ funerals. The credo goes: ‘If you’re too busy to sing, you’re too busy.’” There’s no requirement that members have Norwegian ancestry, either, he explains, just a passion for the music. “Look at me! My only Nordic connection is that I moved to a Norwegian-American town. And they still adopted me.”



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Kristine Jepsen grew up in a country church faithful to the Norwegian singing tradition, a circumstance that means she knows by heart verses 1, 2, and 4 of most of the green hymnal. When not singing along with local bell-towers, she’s writing for literary journals and working on a memoir about farming at the dawn of the local-foods era. More at kristinejepsen.com.

SANGERFEST 2018

Join Luren Singers and the Norwegian Singers Association of America for Sangerfest 2018

Celebrating! Our Norwegian Heritage
Center for Faith & Life, Luther College, Decorah

Thursday, May 31, 7 pm - Parade of Chorus Concert
Each of NSAA’s 10 choirs performs, along with a Veteran’s Choir, the Northern Lights women’s chorus, and the Norwegian choir *Brødrerøster*.

Saturday, June 2, 7 pm - Grand Concert
Features approximately 250 members of NSAA men’s choirs, two professional soloists, an orchestra of Winneshiek County players, and the *Brødrerøster* choir from Norway.