



Press Contact:

Connor Boritzke Smith

Assistant Director of Music Organizations

Phone: 507-786-3646 | E-Mail: smith66@stolaf.edu

Press Materials/Photos available online at: stolafchoir.com

Acclaimed St. Olaf Choir commemorates 100th anniversary of its first national tour as it presents concerts across the Northeast U.S., Jan. 18 – Feb. 11, 2020

Anton Armstrong celebrates 30th year as conductor of the St. Olaf Choir during 15-city tour that includes concerts at Carnegie and Severance Halls in New York and Cleveland

(Northfield, Minn.) – When the St. Olaf Choir embarks on its 2020 National Winter Tour in January 2020, it will commemorate the 100th anniversary of its ground-breaking first national tour to the East Coast. The upcoming tour includes its 12th concert at Carnegie Hall, where after its first performance a *New York Times* reviewer reported in 1920: “It may be numbered among the few ‘virtuoso’ choirs that have been heard here in recent years.”

Throughout its history the St. Olaf Choir has set a gold standard for choral singing, and the ensemble’s 75 singers and Armstrong will perform in 15 cities from Saturday, Jan. 18, through Tuesday, Feb. 11, 2020, presenting concerts in some of the nation’s finest concert halls (in addition to Carnegie Hall), including Severance Hall in Cleveland, OH, and Mechanics Hall in Worcester, MA, in a nine-state tour to Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. *(The tour itinerary, concert program, as well as highlights of the historic 1920 tour follow on the next pages of this press release.)*

“Hearing the St. Olaf Choir in concert is more than just a musical experience,” says Anton Armstrong. “Our singers, performing at the highest artistic level, convey a message of hope. Our music provides a bridge to what can unite us at a time when the world is so divided. We often hear from concertgoers who tell us they are not only struck by the sound and uniformity of the St. Olaf Choir, but also by the earnestness of what comes through the voices of our young singers. Our singers touch the hearts and souls of listeners, and our audiences leave transformed.”

The 2020 National Tour also marks Anton Armstrong’s 30th year as conductor of the St. Olaf Choir, only the fourth to lead the ensemble during its 108-year history. In addition to his role as a professor of music at St. Olaf College, he is in demand in the international choral scene as a guest conductor and lecturer. Like his three predecessors, Armstrong carries forward the international reputation of the St. Olaf Choir, an ensemble that is rooted in St. Olaf College’s tradition of faith and commitment to a global perspective.

2020 NATIONAL TOUR PROGRAM

Conductor Anton Armstrong has assembled a program that draws from the St. Olaf Choir’s history, as well as includes contemporary works by composers who have had strong ties to the St. Olaf Choir. A champion of music from cultures around the world, Armstrong has also programmed music – both sacred and secular – that range

from works by the Renaissance Jewish composer Salamone Rossi to Jordanian-born Shireen Abu Khader (who now lives in Toronto).

The concert program is divided into four sections, with the first section titled **Songs for Praise and Rejoicing**. It features works from the 16th to early 19th century: Johann Michael Haydn's *Laetatus Sum*, a Psalm setting by Italian Jewish composer Salamone Rossi titled *Elohim Hashivenu*, and Johann Sebastian Bach's *Der Geist hilft unsrer Schwachheit auf* (BWV 226).

Songs of Adoration (the second section) begins with music from the 20th Century: Ralph Vaughn Williams' *Gloria (Mass in G Minor)* and 19th century Moravian composer Woldemar Voullaire's *Selig sind die reines Herzens sind*. Songs of Adoration then continues with contemporary works by composers with Minnesota ties: Ralph M. Johnson's *On Horizon's Brim*, Matthew Peterson's *Adoramus Te*, and Jake Runestad's *Alleluia*. Both Johnson and Runestad live in the Twin Cities, and Johnson and Peterson (who now resides in Sweden) are alumni of St. Olaf College.

The third section of the concert program – **Songs of Justice and Compassion** – showcases Rosephanye Powell's *Sorida*, Alexander Gretchaninov's *Our Father*, and *When Thunder Comes* by St. Olaf College graduate Mari Esabel Valverde. It also includes an arrangement by Eric Nelson, Professor of Music at Emory University, of *When Memory Fades* by Jayne Southwick Cool, David Scholz's arrangement of *Set Me As A Seal* by Robert V. Scholz, and F. Melius Christiansen's arrangement of Christoph E.F. Weyse's chorale *O Day Full of Grace*.

Songs of Love and Hope, the final section of the concert program, opens with Shireen Abu-Khader's arrangement of the traditional Arabic song *Lamma Badaa Yatathannaa*. The St. Olaf Choir will perform *Danny Boy* arranged by Joseph Flummerfelt, the pre-eminent American choral conductor who died in March 2019. The ensemble and Armstrong will pay tribute to René Clausen, a St. Olaf College graduate who is now in his 34th and final year as conductor of the Concordia Choir in Moorhead, Minnesota, with a performance of his work *O My Love's Like A Red, Red Rose*. The set closes with the African American spirituals *My Lord, What a Mornin'* arranged by Harry T. Burleigh, *A City Called Heaven* arranged by Josephine Poelinitz, and Moses G. Hogan, Jr.'s arrangement of *My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord*.

Joining the St. Olaf Choir and Armstrong on their tour is violinist and violist Charles Gray, professor of music at St. Olaf College. He will lead a 12-person chamber ensemble that will perform with the St. Olaf Choir on this tour. A former member of the Rochester Philharmonic in New York and the Grand Rapids Symphony in Michigan, Gray is currently a substitute member of the Minnesota Orchestra and the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra.

ST. OLAF CHOIR LAUNCHED GOLD STANDARD FOR CHORAL SINGING IN AMERICA DURING HISTORIC 1920 EAST COAST TOUR

Known as the St. Olaf Lutheran Choir in 1920, the St. Olaf Choir created a major sensation under the direction of its founding conductor F. Melius Christiansen. "Exquisitely balanced, fresh and euphonious in quality and trained to a precision equal to that of the Bach Choir," wrote H.E. Krehbiel in the *New York Tribune* on April 28, 1920. M.M. Howard of the *Buffalo Express* offered this assessment on May 1, 1920: "The work of the St. Olaf Choir is in some respects the last word in choral singing."

"If there is such a thing as a virtuoso chorus, we have it here," James Rogers proclaimed in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* on May 4, 1920, and Karleton Hackett in the *Chicago Evening Post* published on May 8, 1920: "Now in choral affairs we shall date from the visit of the St. Olaf Choir."

The historic 1920 tour revealed that the St. Olaf Choir was transcending America's limited early 20th Century choral tradition with the introduction of a cappella singing of the highest level, creating a new model for the widespread choral growth across the nation that followed. The St. Olaf Choir established an international reputation for its unique combination of superior choral singing and the presentation of challenging choral programming with a vast repertoire encompassing the entire history of Western music, from Renaissance polyphony to new music representing cultures from around the world.

In 1920 the St. Olaf Choir's founder and conductor F. Melius Christiansen encouraged leaders of other choruses to follow in its path, including his friend John Finley Williamson, founder of the Westminster Choir and co-founder of the Westminster Choir College in Dayton Ohio. In a letter dated Nov. 2, 1925, Christiansen wrote to Williamson: "I am sure you will do a great work for the furtherance of artistic choir singing in America, and I cannot see why it should not be possible to elevate and to bring this on the level with orchestra music. We have the field before us – and it is a great field."

Since then, the St. Olaf Choir established a long history of innovation. It became one of the first to tour the nation regularly after the first tour in 1920. The St. Olaf Choir also began recording in the 1920s and performed on air when radio was in its infancy. The annual St. Olaf Christmas Festival has aired on national and international radio and television for more than 40 years and continues to serve as a prototype for these types of holiday broadcasts.

ST. OLAF: A TRANSFORMATIONAL CHOIR

"When they opened their mouths to sing, an even wall of sound emerged: words clear, notes true. But more than that, the notes were felt ... (The St. Olaf Choir is) good because of its remarkable balance and mellow tone ... It's good because of its dynamic shadings: its ability to sustain, then build from, nearly inaudible pianos, or to distinguish between a forte and a fortissimo ... Dr. Anton Armstrong, the group's leader since 1990, is clearly a gifted choral director – and a teacher to the core." ~ The New York Times

After founding the St. Olaf Choir in 1912, "F. Melius opened a whole new paradigm that never existed before," Anton Armstrong says. "Prior to the St. Olaf Choir, glee clubs and oratorio societies were the choirs of the day. A cappella singing in America was new for its time. The St. Olaf Choir was a catalyst in what we know today as the parish choirs that are now a regular part of faith communities across the nation."

The singers commit to balancing full course loads with rehearsals five days a week, and many are students majoring in fields across the academic spectrum at St. Olaf College. They perform concerts entirely from memory. Anton Armstrong has conducted the St. Olaf Choir since 1990. There have been only three conductors of the St. Olaf Choir before Armstrong: Kenneth Jennings, Olaf Christiansen and the founder and first conductor F. Melius Christiansen.

The St. Olaf Choir has also performed in a number of symphonic collaborations including performances of Maurice Duruflé's *Requiem for Voices, Orchestra and Organ, Opus 9*, with the Minnesota Orchestra under the baton of Osmo Vänskä in April 2010 at Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis. The St. Olaf Choir has also performed with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (SPCO) and in May 2020 will once again collaborate with the SPCO in performances of the Mozart: Requiem. These collaborations and other opportunities have led the St. Olaf Choir to sing under the direction of Sir Neville Marriner, Neemi Jarvi, Sir David Willcocks, Stanislaw Skrowaczewski, Andreas Delfs, Helmuth Rilling and Robert Shaw.

In June 2019, the St. Olaf Choir and the St. Olaf Orchestra combined forces in Norway in June 2019 and shared the stage during four joint concerts in Stavanger, Bergen, Trondheim, and in Oslo where King Harald V of Norway

attended at the Oslo Opera House. This tour has been the St. Olaf Choir's fourth during Armstrong's 30-year tenure as conductor, and the eighth visit since the St. Olaf Choir was founded in 1912.

Other recent international tours have included a 2017 tour to Japan and Korea, a 2013 tour to Norway, a 2009 tour to England, Wales and Ireland, a 2005 tour of Norway, a 2001 European tour including Paris, Prague, Bratislava, Vienna, Leipzig, and Berlin, and a 1997 tour to Australia and New Zealand. Annual national tours attract audiences totaling 25,000.

For more info visit: stolafchoir.com.

St. Olaf Choir 2020 National Tour Program

Songs of Praise and Rejoicing

<i>Laetatus Sum</i>	Johann Michael Haydn (1737-1806)
<i>Elohim Hashivenu</i>	Salamone Rossi (c. 1570-c.1630)
<i>Der Geist hilft unsrer Schwachheit auf (BWV 226)</i>	Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Songs of Adoration

<i>Gloria (Mass in G Minor)</i>	Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)
<i>Selig sind die reines Herzens sind</i>	Woldemar Vollaire (1825-1902)
<i>On Horizon's Brim</i>	Ralph M. Johnson (b. 1955)
<i>Adoramus Te</i>	Matthew Peterson (b. 1984)
<i>Alleluia</i>	Jake Runestad (b. 1986)

INTERMISSION

Songs of Justice and Compassion

<i>Sorida</i>	Rosephanye Powell (b. 1962)
<i>Our Father</i>	Alexander Gretchaninov (1864-1956)
<i>When Thunder Comes</i>	Mari Esabel Valverde (b. 1987)
<i>When Memory Fades</i>	Jayne Southwick Cool (b. 1947) arr. Eric Nelson
<i>Set Me As A Seal</i>	Robert V. Scholz (b. 1939) arr. David Scholz
<i>O Day Full of Grace</i>	Christoph E.F. Weyse (1774-1842) arr. F. Melius Christiansen

Songs of Love and Hope

<i>Lammaa Badaa Yatathannaa</i>	arr. Shireen Abu-Khader
<i>Danny Boy</i>	arr. Joseph Flummerfelt <i>Sung in loving memory 1937-2019</i>
<i>O My Luve's Like A Red, Red Rose</i>	René Clausen (b. 1953) <i>Sung in honor of René Clausen and his 34 years as conductor of the Concordia Choir, Moorhead, MN</i>
<i>My Lord, What A Mornin'</i>	African American Spiritual arr Harry T. Burleigh
<i>City Called Heaven</i>	African American Spiritual arr. Josephine Poelinitz
<i>My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord</i>	African American Spiritual arr. Moses G. Hogan Jr.

Optional Selections

<i>Beautiful Savior</i>	arr. F. Melius Christiansen (1871-1955)
-------------------------	---

St. Olaf Choir 2020 National Winter Tour Itinerary

Andover, Minnesota

Saturday, January 18 – 7 p.m.
Andover High School

Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Sunday, January 19 – 3p.m.
Pablo Center at the Confluence

Madison, Wisconsin

Wednesday, January 29 – 8 p.m.
Luther Memorial Church

Naperville, Illinois

Thursday, January 30 – 7:30 p.m.
Wentz Concert Hall, North Central College

Chicago, Illinois

Friday, January 31 – 7:30 p.m.
Fourth Presbyterian Church

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Saturday, February 1 – 8 p.m.
Covenant Fine Arts Center, Calvin University

Ann Arbor, MI

Sunday, February 2 – 3 p.m.
Zion Lutheran Church

Cleveland, OH

Monday, February 3 – 7:30 p.m.
Severance Hall

Rochester, New York

Tuesday, February 4 – 7 p.m.
Andrews B. Hale Auditorium
Roberts Wesleyan University

Worcester, Massachusetts

Wednesday, February 5 – 7:30 p.m.
Mechanics Hall

New Haven, Connecticut

Thursday, February 6 – 7 p.m.
Battell Chapel, Yale University

New York, New York

Friday, February 7 – 8 p.m.
Stern Auditorium / Perelman Stage
Carnegie Hall

Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania

Sunday, February 9 – 4 p.m.
Parmer Hall
Calvin and Janet High Center for Worship and
Performing Arts, Messiah College

Columbus, Ohio

Monday, February 10 – 7:30 p.m.
Mees Hall at Capital University

Urbana, Illinois

Tuesday, February 11 – 7:30 p.m.
Krannert Center for the Performing Arts
University of Illinois

Tickets are now available for all tour concerts online at stolaf.edu/tickets.