

The Case and Cornell Glee Clubs at Church of the Covenant

by Mike Telin



Long before the creation of the hit television series, glee clubs were a fixture on the campuses of many American colleges and universities. On Saturday, April 7 at 8:00 pm at Church of the Covenant, the Cornell University Glee Club (left) and Case Men's Glee Club (below), will present a concert that will feature folk songs and spirituals, selections by

Renaissance composers, and pieces from across the world. Tickets are [available online](#).

“We have two historic Men's Glee Clubs that have been around for over one hundred years coming together for a concert — that doesn't happen very often,” Jason Falkofsky, music director of the Case Men's Glee Club said during a telephone conversation. “We were founded in 1868, and are the oldest student-run organization on Cornell's campus, and the Case Men's Glee Club (founded in 1897) is the oldest student organization on that Campus,” Robert Isaacs, director of the Cornell University Glee Club (CUGC), said during a separate interview. “The sense of community and brotherhood that has lasted through the years with both organizations is really something.”

The concert was initiated by Cornell during the planning of the Ensemble's annual tour. “This is not our first visit to Cleveland,” Isaacs said. “I looked it up, and the Glee Club was there as early as 1891. The students organize the tours themselves.

They decide on a region they want to go to. They map out the itinerary, and when that falls into place they start contacting alumni, venues, and collaborators. We're so pleased that the opportunity to sing with the Case Club has worked out. Singing something with other Clubs and having that peer-to-peer experience is always a treat."



Jason Falkofsky agrees about the importance of the shared experience. "This past fall we spent some time with The Ohio State Men's Glee Club, and even though we were just singing in rehearsal, the opportunity to talk with folks who are interested in the same things we are is great. You realize that there are other people who enjoy the same things that you enjoy."

CUGC's Great Lakes Tour will also include a joint concert with the Purdue University Men's Glee Club as well as presenting workshops for young people. "Cornell students like to demonstrate what they love about singing, and making singing cool for high school kids," Isaacs said.

The Case portion of the program will include Daniel Gawthrop's *Lifted in Song*, Marshall Bartholomew's arrangement of *Little Innocent Lamb*, and Ron Jeffers *Workin' for the Dawn of Peace*. CUGC's selections will be chosen from a roster of works that includes Leonard Bernstein's *Almighty Father* and Patrick Quigley's arrangement of *Danny Boy*.

Isaacs said that the theme of CUGC's program is "Journeys". The ensemble is on a journey, the music is about journeys, and listening to music takes the listener on a journey. "We're performing works from Scotland, Italy, Japan, Spain, Russia, Estonia, and the U.S. It's been a fun challenge for the guys to have to sing in nine languages over the course of the tour." Both ensembles will come together for Franz Biebl's *Ave Maria*. "It's a piece that's long been associated with the Cornell club —

they were the ones who brought it back from Europe and rescued it from obscurity in 1970.”

In keeping with tradition, CUGC’s Great Lakes Tour repertoire will feature a commissioned work. This time it’s *In the Beginning* by Swedish composer Anders Edenroth. “Anders is a wonderful guy who has been the main driving force behind one of the world’s finest a cappella groups — [The Real Group](#). They’re based in Sweden and have been around about 30 years. I worked with Anders in the U.K., and when I asked if he was interested in writing a piece for tenors and basses, he said that he was.”

Isaacs said that when he and Edenroth were discussing texts he mentioned that writer Pearl Buck was a Cornell alum. It turned out that Edenroth admired her for her work and we chose her poem *In the Beginning*.

“The first line of the poem is ‘I remember when I was born,’ and it follows the notion of having been in a place prior to life, and then suddenly springing into the world,” Isaacs said. “We spent some time figuring out who had the rights to the poem, but we did eventually find her family and we were given permission. Anders has written a terrific setting of it — there’s some beautiful choral writing and then a driving section that is influenced by popular music that is compelling and captivating to hear. It’s a lot of fun to sing and we’re excited to give the world premiere on this tour.”

Isaacs and Falkofsky both feel that the experience of running an organization is an important part of the students’ education. “I am a professor of music, but I also see myself as being a mentor for leaders,” Isaacs said. “They have an opportunity within the Glee Club to take on real projects with real budgets, make real commitments, and to interact with so many different stakeholders. The experience they get from doing that translates directly into their first jobs out of college. I hear from alumni again and again that they are so grateful not only for their musical education but also for the opportunity to take on real leadership that they received through the Glee Club.”

Falkofsky, who is a Cleveland native and in his second year as a doctoral student at Case studying choral music education, said that he is learning from the experience of working with a student-run ensemble. “Most recently I taught at St. Ignatius High School, so I’ve been working with a men’s chorus for ten-plus years,” he said. “I really enjoy this type of ensemble, but now my biggest learning curve has been understanding how things operate at the college level — how to manage the artistic components of the ensemble while the students are running the managerial side. I’m also learning to allow my sense of control to subside and let the students assume the leadership role.”

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