

Ask Dr. Ivan Fuller about the 40 members of Augustana's Music Department and he's quick to tell you they're all more than "just teachers."

Much, much more.

Musical Medicine

"They're more like paramedics. Firefighters. Rescue workers," Fuller says, explaining that, like any emergency responder, musicians spend their lives practicing and studying for that time-critical, life-and-death moment during which their skills are put to the ultimate test.

"When someone walks into a concert hall and brings with them a mind that is confused, a heart that's overwhelmed and a soul that's weary, the musician – if he or she does the job well – can make that person whole again."

Performing has its benefits for the musician, as well.

Take Luke Lynass, a junior biology major from Sturgis, S.D., and a two-year veteran of the Augustana Choir. After days filled with lab work, microscopes, test tubes and equations, Lynass says singing is his creative and spiritual escape.

"Everything else stops once I open the door to the rehearsal room. Our Choir is a choir of ministry. When I sing, I feel closer to God, my faith is re-engaged, reaffirmed. It's not just the song or the words we sing. It's stepping beyond that to sing it for someone else, so that they might feel the same way I feel. It's the presentation of song as a communal endeavor into faith," he said.

Traditionally, camaraderie is

strong among musical ensembles. Through practices, performances and tours, members bond and develop friendships. Lynass says the same holds true for the Augustana Choir.

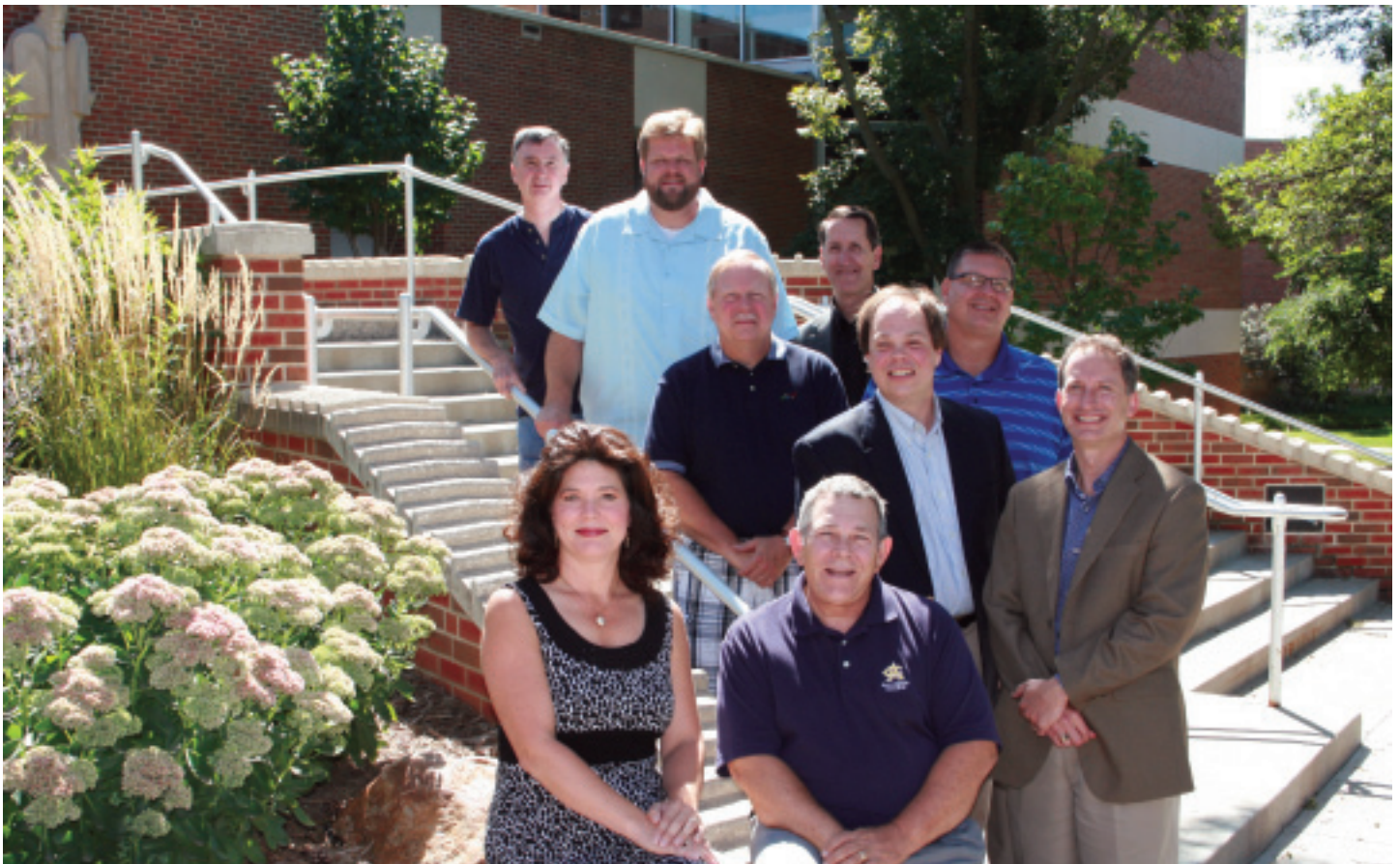
"We all hold hands during every song – a lot of people don't know that. We all wear robes. We take away the elements of ourselves and leave our voices and faces. We're one."

Lynass credits Dr. James Johnson, professor of music and director of choirs, for fostering the Choir's solidarity.

"Dr. J. often says that the purpose of the Augustana Choir is to present a sermon in song to anyone, anywhere, anytime. He is the glue that keeps us grounded in what we're doing so that we can experience and present the best faith and sense of community possible. He has 72 different voices to tend to in order to make the Choir work. The ability he has to bring us together emotionally, spiritually and artistically is truly a gift."

From now until Spring, audience members and Augustana student performers will have ample opportunities to heal each other, both on and off campus. Beginning with last month's Pennington/Voegel recital, student musicians will perform another 22 concerts and recitals before commencement in May, including a new Christmas celebration in addition to on-campus Vespers services.

"Vespers this year is going to be incredibly exciting because, for the first time in decades, it's going to be held at home, on campus," Fuller said.



Faculty members of the Augustana Music Department include, from left to right, front row: Dr. Lisa Grevlos and Dr. Scott Johnson; second row: Dr. Bruce Ammann, Dr. Christopher Stanichar and Dr. Ivan Fuller; third row: Dr. Rick Andrews, Dr. Russell Svenningsen, Dr. John Pennington and Dr. Paul Schilf. Not pictured: Dr. James Johnson.

“The Augustana Choir, faculty and members of the South Dakota Symphony will be performing a cantata by Cyprian Consiglio called the “Song of Luke” in the Chapel of Reconciliation. It’s going to be a musical worship service – very intimate; very beautiful; something we’ll all cherish.”

Consiglio, a Camaldolese monk, ordained priest, recording artist, performer and composer, collaborated closely with Dr. John Pennington, professor of music at Augustana, in developing the oratorio, based on the narrative of Jesus’ infancy, according to the Gospel of Luke. The production will include 25 songs, featuring four solos, four dancers and a cameo by Consiglio, who will perform the role of the narrator. The production will also be broadcast on South Dakota Public Television on Christmas Eve.

“To be able to perform on campus, in honor of Christmas, during our Sesquicentennial year – it will be amazing. Our music this year is really going to be the ultimate celebration of the joy of Christmas and the wonder and excitement that is Augustana,” said Johnson.

In addition to Vespers, the orchestra and four student choirs will be performing in a brand new Christmas Celebration at Our Savior’s Lutheran Church on Sunday, Dec. 5, and the Augustana Band, Brass Choir and

College Community Band will perform at the Christmas Extravaganza at the Washington Pavilion on Thursday, Dec. 9.

The ability for student musicians to perform – on campus, at local venues and in venues across the U.S. and internationally, including the Augustana Band’s upcoming trip to Egypt and the Augustana Choir’s planned trip to Norway, Sweden, Finland and Estonia – has been a major factor in the Music Department’s success through the years.

Lynass agrees.

“Musicians can perform for income, art, joy – yet the humility in which we present ourselves in other communities is remarkable. It defines us and sets us apart. Sure we’re a small college in the middle of the country, yet we can do the things we do. We can leave an impression on those who hear us.”

Impressions, indeed. Last year more than 420 students – 25 percent of the study body – participated in 23 different musical ensembles.

Despite the fact that nationwide, K-12 music programs are constantly at risk due to budget cuts and enrollment challenges, particularly in rural areas, Fuller says interest in Augustana’s music programs has been stable.

“People who are connected to the arts at a young age will continue to feel that passion

throughout their lives.

“Last year we had 33 music majors and 31 music education majors. We certainly have more non-majors than majors who participate in music ensembles. I think it really comes down to the fact that all of us find satisfaction in doing the things we’re good at. For so many kids, music is the skill they’ve developed; it’s their creative outlet,” he said. “For example, take the biology major who participates in music as a way to stay balanced; as a way to express emotions, passions, ideas. That’s the kid who says, ‘this is how I stay sane.’”

Fuller hopes that, in time, students will be able to participate in even more performances on campus.

For now, Augustana’s musical rescue workers are doing all they can to achieve the Music Department’s vision – to be known as one of the premier church-related music departments in America.

“In my mind, the quality of this department is second-to-none. The one-on-one instruction our students receive is really unmatched. It’s exceptional, both for our majors and for our non-majors who are simply passionate about music,” Fuller said.

Read more about the music department at www.augie.edu/academics/music/faculty.