“Once Upon a Time…”
The History and Traditions of the Ball State University Singers

An Honors Project (HONRS 499)

By

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Abstract

Thirty-seven years ago, the Ball State University Singers organization was introduced. This project looks back on the history and traditions of this musical group from the beginning. The story begins with how the ideas of the founding director and members led to the creation of the group. A synopsis of each of the seven directors explains how the organization has evolved over the years while maintaining continuity. Next is a description of the elements that make up the show, including each year's culminating Spectacular. Along with this is an explanation of the group's intent to spread goodwill as well as a detailed list of the many performances and projects in which they have participated toward fulfilling that purpose. Following this is an exploration of the traditions that have developed over the years and how they bind the over 700 alumni and current members of the group. Finally, there is a section narrating my firsthand account of being a member of the group and the things I have learned. This study wraps up the first thirty-seven years, including the present year, of Indiana's Official Goodwill Ambassadors, the Ball State University Singers.
STATE OF INDIANA
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
INDIANAPOLIS

PROCLAMATION

TO ALL TO WHOM THESE PRESENTS MAY COME, GREETING:

WHEREAS, for three decades the Ball State University Singers have given voice to the spirit of Indiana through their songs of faith, laughter and love; and

WHEREAS, they have entertained countless Hoosiers at community concerts, conventions, banquets and business meetings in hundreds of Indiana cities and towns; and

WHEREAS, the Ball State University Singers, who were founded to commemorate the elevation of Ball State Teachers College to university status, continue to represent the exuberant spirit and dynamic growth of one of the nation's premier teaching universities; and

WHEREAS, they were influential pioneers in the American show choir movement, and have for thirty years shared their innovations with the youth of Indiana through school convocations, workshops, festivals, television specials and educational videotapes; and

WHEREAS, in support of critically acclaimed performances in every part of the state, across the nation, and around the world, the Indiana General Assembly has designated them "Indiana's Goodwill Ambassadors"; and

WHEREAS, seven hundred current and former cast members of the Ball State University Singers are commemorating and celebrating their accomplishments of thirty spectacular seasons;

THEREFORE, I, EVAN BAYH, Governor of the State of Indiana, do hereby proclaim January 29, 1994 as

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY SINGERS DAY

in the state of Indiana, and I encourage leaders in education, the arts, business and industry and all Hoosier citizens to congratulate and applaud Indiana's Official Goodwill Ambassadors, the Ball State University Singers.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused to be affixed the Great Seal of the State of Indiana at the Capitol in Indianapolis on this 15th day of September, 1993.

BY THE GOVERNOR, Evan Bayh
Governor of Indiana

ATTN: Joseph R. Hogsett
Secretary of State
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The University Singers Story

Ball State Teachers College was restyled Ball State University in January of 1965. With this change of status came many changes and new beginnings. One of these was the creation a new organization called the Ball State University Singers. Director of Choral Activities and music professor Don Neuen envisioned a musical group that combined choral music with instruments and movement. A small group of students gathered in Neuen’s office to express their interest in this new group. It was there that the first group of University Singers would be formed. Flyers covered the campus promoting the new ensemble and encouraging students to audition. Neuen furthered the intentions of the group by expressing the idea to the Head of the Department of Music, Robert Hargreaves. This in turn was proposed to Ball State’s President, John Emens, in a letter dating November 18, 1964:

"... I have discussed with Dean Bell [then Dean of the College of Fine and Applied Arts] the desirability of developing a 'sharp choral organization' to represent Ball State at dinner meetings, club groups, and the like in a service function. We presented the idea to the regular faculty meeting of the Music Department on Wednesday, November 11, and it was voted to recommend that the group be inaugurated with the Winter Quarter. Don Neuen has expressed his desire to develop a group with the proposed title of University Singers."

President Emens formally approved the proposal exactly one month later on December 18, 1964 and the Ball State University Singers were born. Emens was enthusiastic about the group because the Indiana General Assembly would grant University Status to Ball State in February 1965 "in recognition of phenomenal growth, variety, and quality of programs and in anticipation of its future role." Neuen was appointed director of the group, founded to represent the progressive spirit of the new Ball State University to the world. This sent the professional-quality performance ensemble on its way. Auditions were held on November 4 and 11 prior to the acceptance of the group. Prospective members were promised that, "All efforts will be made to make this organization one of the finest show-groups of the Midwest, one of Ball State’s top publicity and promotional ambassadors." Twenty-seven students were invited to the first rehearsal in January 1965. Some observers applauded the new ensemble for its purpose as an ambassador for Ball State. Others mocked the group’s lighter musical style and variety. No one however, can overlook its tremendous success and continuing tradition of excellence that has extended over the last 37 years. According to many supporters, the "secret to the University Singers success has always been a combination of talent, youthful enthusiasm, and professional performance standards."

The University Singers were an immediate sensation, following their debut performance in January of 1965. Dr. Hargreaves’ proposal for a “sharp choral organization” did go "straight up" as he described to President Emens. The
group’s popularity led to more than twenty appearances on and off campus made during the first five months of existence. The demand for the group increased greatly. A lighthearted musical variety included choral singing accompanied by piano, bass, guitar, and banjo, and individual and small-group specialty acts.

In 1966, the group made a shift from a collegiate choral ensemble toward a professional-scale entertainment organization. This came about from the appointment of a student production manager and secretary. With this came a more involved show with elaborate costumes and large sets. Contemporary music selections and trendy fashions gave the group a new flare. Over the years, state-of-the-art technology raised the level of professionalism even more. The University Singers reached out to all ages by learning the art of variety. Its unique blend of crossing genres and styles made watching this group especially exciting. Long hours of rehearsing and putting the show together added up to the tradition of excellence and professionalism that characterize the University Singers organization.

February 1971 brought the first of a series of concurrent resolutions by the Indiana General Assembly praising the University Singers for their contribution of “unparalleled distinction and honor to Ball State University by their superlative presentations.” They named the group Indiana’s Official Goodwill Ambassadors, representing the group’s fresh, wholesome, friendly image.

Over the past 37 years, the University Singers have utilized their unique talents to reach people across the world. With the support of the Ball State community and the state of Indiana, they have been able to achieve many extraordinary things and perform in countless arenas. These experiences not only touched audiences worldwide, but also influenced the lives of the over 700 members that have participated. From the wholesome, honest image of the show to the countless traditions: the fight song, the Alma Mater, fire-up, Singer’s Day, socials, and Spectacular, Indiana’s Official Goodwill Ambassadors, the Ball State University Singers continues to spread goodwill through their outstanding and innovative entertainment abilities.

(Handbook for Cast Members):

The Spirit of Beneficence

Of course we believe that music should be fun, but we’ve also discovered that our kind of entertainment can make a positive dent in the world. The idea that we could use our talent for good began with the very first Spectacular: scholarship funds we’ve raised have allowed countless aspiring musicians to attend Ball State. We’ve made telethon appearances in support of nation-wide philanthropy and at the local level, helped to restore landmark theatres and even to revitalize public school music programs. Our America Sings!
video project continues to rally school children across the nation who emulate our dedication "to kids who have no hope from kids with hope to share."
Under the Artistic Direction Of...

In 1964, the Ball State University Singers began its trek to becoming America's Number One Collegiate Entertainment Ensemble. Thirty-six years later, the group continues to highlight its highly talented singers, dancers, and musicians. Don Neuen's original vision of a “sharp choral ensemble” became a reality. The tradition was carried on by Jacque (Jack) Trussel, Larry Boye, Rob Lawrence, Fritz Mountford, Michael Davis, and currently Jeffrey Carter. Each director came to the group with different expectations and experiences. Taking the group to new heights, these individuals are the inspiration, the continuity, and the guides behind the organization known as the Ball State University Singers.

Donald Neuen (Director of University Singers 1964 – 1967)

The instrumental figure in the creation of the Ball State University Singers was Don Neuen. In a letter to President John Emens, Department of Music Head, Robert Hargreaves stated that, “Neuen expressed his desire to develop a group with the proposed title of University Singers.” Shortly after, he was appointed as the director of the group, and a professional-quality performance troupe was on its way. Contrary to the current trends of the group, Neuen was focused on “Sound over 'show,'” according to original member Karen Kirkpatrick. Neuen was taking on a big task when accepting the position of director of the University Singers. It was no ordinary choir, but an ensemble that incorporated voice, instrument, and movement. He influenced every facet of the show through his philosophy, “The group must be completely outstanding, not just acceptable.” This commitment to excellence gave the group a strong foundation that would lead to thirty-seven years and counting.

Jacque (Jack) Trussel (Director of University Singers 1967-1968)

Worldwide, the name Jacque Trussel is synonymous with opera. What the world does not know is that Jacque was once a member of the original group of Ball State University Singers and a past director as well. As a graduate assistant of the group, Trussel was asked by Dr. Hargreaves to take over the job of director when Don Neuen announced his leaving in 1967. According to Trussel, “it was being naive and being a little full of himself” that prompted him to say “Yes.” Having a graduate student in charge of the group brought about doubt by some of the faculty members at the time. Upon hearing statements such as "Singers will be the ruination of the department" and “…a graduate assistant will cause the demise of the group...” the former member decided to take charge. After making the statement to Dr. Hargreaves, “If you think Singers is going to die under my watch, you’ve got another think coming!” Trussel was given Hargreaves' blessing. “The basic format of the University Singers remains the same,” according to Trussel, “with specialists doing trio and quartet numbers
and the whole group doing medleys and some unusual arrangements that suit the particular voices and personalities in the group." Among changes made was the downsizing of the group. The risers were also changed to platforms. These two changes supported choreographic purposes. The music became less folk and shifted to a more theatrical style. Because of this, Spectacular required bigger staging. Many more performances were booked and the profits were greater than all the previous years.

Larry Boye (Director of University Singers 1968-1985)

Following Trussel's exciting year of music, Larry Boye came to Ball State University in the fall of 1968 after developing a highly acclaimed high school pop choir in Manhattan, Kansas. The University Singers achieved international prominence and critical acclaim under Boye's direction. He incorporated imaginative costumes, choreography and state-of-the-art technology. Boye promoted countless experiments to test the possibilities for a student professional-level organization in an educational and institutional setting. He introduced larger sets, character shoes, costume changes, and having the band placed as part of the set. "Mod costumes," according to Boye were used to keep the group current with national trends. In 1967, the traditional collegiate blazers gave way to contemporary fashion, including aqua dresses with matching shoes for the girls, and green v-neck sweaters worn over orange turtleneck dickeys for the guys. "It was a time that the U Singers left its identity as a 'folk' group and became a group that explored rock and roll and Broadway," according to group member Michael Robinson. Involvement in the contemporary electronic music scene began with a few simple and inexpensive additions. A Hammond organ and a Leslie tone cabinet were rented for a more professional sound. The visual special effects used by the touring professionals were matched with the addition of $40 worth of rented strobe lights. With such new and exciting additions to the upstanding musical ensemble came increased audiences.

Many of his innovations influenced the style and character of the Midwest show choir movement in America. The Bob Hope Collegiate Talent Search judged his group to be the number one entertainment group in the nation. Also, the Indiana General Assembly bestowed the name "Indiana's Official Goodwill Ambassadors" on the Ball State University Singers. Larry Boye carried the newly acclaimed group through more than twenty states and on concert tours around the world in his seventeen years of direction and dedication.

According to Larry Boye, "Notoriety comes from exposure." That is exactly what symbolized his seventeen years with the group. In order to fill the many requests for performances, Larry Boye increased the group size to 88 people. With this large number, he had enough members to fill two jazz bands and two groups of 24 singer/dancers with alternates. At times, it was necessary for the group to split. For instance, Boye sent one half to Dallas while the other traveled to Wisconsin. It was an amazing time for the group, especially when all
88 members performed *Spectacular* together on the Emens stage.

Among the vast performances were the presidential inaugurals for Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan in 1973, 1977, and 1981. According to Boye, the group planned for Reagan’s second inaugural in 1985, but a blizzard kept the Singers from making the trip. He also led the group to the World’s Fairs in Spokane and Knoxville. In 1984 the group planned to appear in its third World’s Fair in New Orleans, but the trip was cancelled due to the Olympic Games in Los Angeles. Throughout his years with the group, Boye added to the spectacle by bringing in many celebrities to share the stage with the young performers. The star-struck students had the opportunity to perform with Red Skelton, the Carpenters, Donny and Marie Osmond, William Warfield, Lawrence Welk, Rich Little, Lorne Green, Dionne Warwick, Jimmy Durante, Liza Minelli, and Olivia Newton-John.

**Fritz Mountford (Director of University Singers 1985-1999)**

After Larry Boye retired from Ball State University, the position of director of University Singers was accepted by Fritz Mountford. Through his fourteen years with the group, many new and exciting events took place for the University Singers. The size of the group again shifted as did the costumes and staging. The music also shifted, reflecting the influence of Fred Waring. This was enhanced in 1999 by the addition of the new headset microphones, purchased by a group of University Singers alumni, chaired by former Ball State University President, John Pruis, who had always been a great supporter of the University Singers. All of the sudden, each individual voice could be mixed with each instrument, making the audio technology of the group highly sophisticated. It also changed the look on stage, eliminating the use of microphone stands. This also led to the purchase of a bigger set as well as more independent choreography. It was part of keeping the group current with new trends, mimicking that of professional performers.

Believing highly in the success of student leadership, Mr. Mountford instated a system in which the students were responsible for almost all aspects of the show. It seemed difficult at first for someone to fill the shoes of Larry Boye, but Mr. Mountford was determined to keep the group alive and create new shoes to fill.

Each year, University Singers takes on the task of creating an entertaining production showcasing a variety of talents. The biggest challenge is the fact that the combination of cast members is new every year. This has also been a large part of what the group is all about. I think this process is best accounted in the words of Fritz Mountford:

“It begins when the new cast arrives in August, 'new kids' full of questions and dreams, and returning veterans anxious to stretch into the leadership roles suddenly vacant in our circle. Half-a-hundred aspiring entertainers rushing
around with what seems to be half-a-hundred different priorities and agendas. You remember cast handbooks and insurance forms, class schedules, and of course, music to review and sort and select and arrange; miles of mic cables and connectors to trace and tag and solder… Set painting and costume fittings and photo sessions and organizing production teams and sometimes, I wonder how we ever find the time to learn the on-stage show.

Do you remember the excitement of the first time the Singers truck pulls up to the loading dock for the season’s first show? Then our mammoth tour bus roars in and I can report that even after all these years, their eyes get THIS big and the sharp sigh of the pneumatic door is still a call to adventure. The excitement is still all here: welcome week retreat, pinning the new kids, discovering the Alma Mater and fire-up, building a Homecoming float (and singing the National Anthem with generations of Singers alums); not to mention the post-rehearsal ‘social events’ and our long-running soap opera of extra-curricular infatuations and intrigues.

By the time we swing back the giant door of the Emens stage for Parents Day (now called Family Weekend), the annual miracle has happened. Almost imperceptibly, these half-a-hundred have become one. The family is reborn. And once again, we are the Ball State University Singers.”

### Rob Lawrence (Director of University Singers 1988-1989)

In 1989, Fritz Mountford took a yearlong leave to pursue doctoral studies. Mr. Lawrence, then a graduate assistant at Ball State, took over as acting director. He became the second graduate student to hold the position, upholding the standards set by Fritz Mountford. Among the noted activities under his direction was the filming of America Sings! and other educational videotapes produced by the Hal Leonard Corporation. Although he only served in the interim, he was able to leave his mark as Director of the Ball State University Singers.

### Michael Davis (Director of University Singers 1999-2000)

During the fall semester of 1999, Michael Davis was the doctoral assistant for University Singers. That year, he became the third student to assume the position of director. As before, the shoes he had to fill were large. On top of this, much more concern came about from outside the group. Through this difficult time, Mr. Davis stepped up to the plate in order to keep the group alive. Having to abruptly learn what was needed to fill the role, he took things each day at a time. By the end of the year, he was able to lead the group to another Spectacular performance culminating the first thirty-six years of the group. Pulling the remains of the group together, adding new people (30% of the cast), and celebrating one hundred years of American popular music and the birth of legendary Fred Waring proved to be a daunting task, but was handled well. Michael Davis not only directed for a year but also helped prepare the group for a
new director and the years to come.

**Jeffrey Carter (Director of University Singers - present)**

Coming to the University in the summer of the new millennium, Dr. Jeffrey Carter faced the group as the seventh director. It is the thirty-seventh year and he has begun with a bang. The challenge he is currently working towards is to keep the group fresh and young in heart and spirit. Over the past thirty-six years, the University Singers have created a precedent in which the many members functioned. While seeing this importance and keeping the traditions alive, Dr. Carter finds it important to stay relevant to today's culture and the needs of today's audience. He sees that although the group is steeped in tradition, this time will serve as an evolution of the group. One of his many goals, similar to Larry Boye's idea that notoriety comes from exposure, has already been realized in increasing the presence of the group in the community, doing as many performances as possible. These include taking a small number to community shows to foster goodwill as is stated in the title as “Indiana's Official Goodwill Ambassadors.” Dr. Carter hopes that this increase in presence will also raise ticket sales for the annual Spectacular show in the spring. He believes greatly in the process more than the product. The year can be wrapped up by one of the souvenirs purchased by this group, T-shirts with the wording, “37 and counting…”

“We’ll take that journey together this year. It will embrace numerous facets of the choral and entertainment art, explore human needs and interactions, human emotions and human reactions. In doing so, we’ll be better prepared to give that audience quality, good taste, honesty, sincerity, and fun every stop we make, every step we take, every song, every smile…”

The group is alive and well and looks forward to the next thirty-seven years and beyond.
The Show

"The houselights dim... the curtain rises... and the Ball State University Singers burst onstage in a fun-filled kaleidoscope of America's favorite songs of faith and laughter and love" (Fritz Mountford). Over the years, the audience has come to expect an exciting, high quality, musical variety show. Presenting the onstage part of the show is only the tip of the iceberg. Off-stage before the show and backstage during the show, the group is involved in other specialized roles to insure that the show goes on. Planning, promotion, logistics, and communication along with rehearsals, travel, set-up, and strike are all crucial to the success of the onstage show. In borrowing a concept from the Walt Disney Company theme parks, everything the group does is part of the show. All roles, whether onstage or offstage, are important. Attention to detail all around insures the remarkable longevity of the group's world-class reputation. Each member shares the responsibility to see that every detail is "picture perfect" for every audience.

Quality Entertainment

Since the beginning, the University Singers have made a commitment to excellence and giving the best possible effort to maintain the highest possible standards in quality entertainment. Don Neuen reaffirmed this when writing:

"The group must be completely outstanding, not just acceptable. The present philosophy of this department is one of all-out efforts to go 'straight up.' This group is in direct line with this effort. It is also important to note that, simply because a great variety of 'Lighter Music' will be performed, it will not be approached as 'trash' to be looked down upon. Foremost will always be quality choral performance of a completely entertaining type of literature. Many out-of-department students are showing an interest in the University Singers, however, the proposal of this new group has received a huge and exciting response from many of our finest music students as well."

Quality is evident in the organization and administration, relations and self-image, and rehearsals and performances of the University Singers. A big part of this has come from the vast amount of talent each cast possesses. Under the direction of Fritz Mountford, it was always made clear that each member was handpicked for his or her individual ability and style. Every new number was arranged to best showcase the talents of each year's cast. Building the show around this concept has created the sincere look the University Singers maintain. Audiences everywhere comment on how exciting it is to watch so many young people dedicated to doing what they do best and their willingness to share it with others. The network of encouragement and support allows each cast member the creative freedom to strive and sometimes falter. However, the sooner mistakes are admitted, the sooner the group can get on with the show. This resolution adds to the quality of University Singers entertainment.
Good Taste

What makes this group even more entertaining is the mentality that the audience comes first. Although many members in the group love to sing, dance, and play music, it has been more important for the audiences rather than performers to enjoy the show. As member myself, entertaining the audience makes the job much more enjoyable and helps me strive to achieve a higher level of excellence and quality. Because of this, having an audience is always a welcome sight. All rehearsals have open doors for people to come and observe what the University Singers do. Giving the people what they want is often ridiculed, but as representatives of Ball State University and the state of Indiana, the University Singers have taken the responsibility for providing people with the kinds of things that set them at ease. “Our brand of entertainment must appeal to everyone.” With this in mind, the group works with the universal concepts like Patriotism, Hometown Pride, Nostalgia, Faith, Laughter, and Love. Every audience is different, so every show is different. Even when touching the progressive ideas, the group never forgets the underlying purpose—audience enjoyment.

Honesty

The Ball State University Singers show is essentially a theatrical experience. Many techniques for creating a wonderful illusion on and offstage are engaged. Each group entices audiences into a world of positive, happy, make-believe, but never with a false or phony presence. The fresh, wholesome, friendly image sometimes stretches the abilities of some of the cast members, but that is the role of the University Singers and it is never played grudgingly or as satire.

Sincerity

All the things that have been achieved over the years by the University Singers have been accomplished through the dedicated efforts of people, whatever their role, who believe in the philosophy of Quality Entertainment. An indisputable fact of show business is, “If there is no audience, there is no show. Everyone in the audience and in the cast can sense and be disappointed by a bored, ho-hum, here-we-go-again attitude by any one of the performers. If one member doesn’t do his or her best, somebody else has to pick up the slack. The University Singers show is a person-to-person production. Everyone has a role and commits to achieving it to the best of their ability. Sincere cooperation, support, and caring among singers, dancers, instrumentalists, technicians, staff, and the "Something Special" has attracted and inspired loyal audiences for years.
Fun

University Singers take their work seriously, but never too seriously. They cannot create fun for the audience without finding fun in their own roles. All the hard work, and all the time and money in the world would do the group little good if they could not continue to offer quality, good taste, honesty, sincerity, and fun to the audiences.

Teamwork

The success of the organization depends on maintaining a balance among the many production and promotion activities. Every facet depends on every other. No one stands alone. Many minds, hands, hearts, and voices must collaborate in every aspect in order for the show to work. As Fritz Mountford always said, "There are no stars in our show." Each moment on stage is the result of an entire team effort. Every good idea is the result of another idea, which is influenced by everyone's creative input before it is shared with the audience. The members are willing to contribute the best ideas and efforts into the show without worrying about who gets credit for it. The current cast is just a part of a bigger team whose members have long since made their invaluable contributions to success and gone on. Their efforts became the foundation of University Singers. Each new cast strives to keep the confidence they worked so hard to earn. It is all for one and one for all to give the audience the quality they have come to expect.
Spectacular

Since the 1964, hundreds of talented singers, dancers, instrumentalists, and technicians have shared their dedication, creative genius, and plain hard work to make their pioneering achievements possible. All of this can be summed up in only one word, spectacular. To celebrate the first birthday in January 1966, the University Singers presented a show in Emens Auditorium. The show was called Spectacular, indicating the incredible effort and outcome. Two sold-out performances raised more than $10,000 for music scholarships, another continuing tradition, while selling more than 3000 copies of the University Singers first live performance album established the fanatic loyalty of an admiring and growing audience. 7,212 people were in attendance with many turned away at the door, substantiating the success of the first Spec. This night would lead to an incredible tradition that remains with the group today. (In thirty-seven years, proceeds from recordings, television appearances, and live concerts have made an education possible for countless Ball State music students.) Since then, Spectacular has served as the culminating performance, highlighting everything the group worked for throughout the year, on the stage that has and will unite every University Singer.

Each year brought new talent and ideas to the stage. Over 700 talented Ball State students have participated in the highly acclaimed Spectacular held each spring. Every cast member recalls with pride the hours spent in rehearsals during "Spec Week," the feeling that it will never come together, and the exhilaration when the curtain rises to a round of thunderous applause with the thrill of knowing that all eyes are on you. Imaginative themes, colorful choreography, dynamic solos and small group features combined to create the final product. University Singers always sparkle on stage, enlightening the hearts of those who share in the magic of Spectacular. These feelings are all part of the tradition of excellence.

In 1968, a Les Taylor arrangement of the Tijuana Brass instrumental hit "A Taste of Honey" provided the theme for Spectacular.

Emphasis was placed on the newest and latest sights and sounds in 1969. Spectacular was opened with the set being built piece by piece in full sight of the audience. At this time, the Singers introduced themselves in rhyme:

We pause for just a moment,
There's one thing we'd like to do
We have some introductions
To pass along to you.
We want to get acquainted
While you find out who is who.
And now with your permission
We'll have an intermission
While we introduce ourselves too!

*Spectacular* 1974 kept the tradition alive of having something for everyone in the show. Act I comprised most of the Singers' road show. A new opening including pictures of each Singer, a rock medley, a light show, and various specials added to make the show pleasant to the eye as well as the ear. Act II saluted the Roaring Twenties and the American composers of the decade, including Cole Porter, Hoagy Carmichael, Ray Henderson, and George Gershwin. Also spotlighted were fashions, dances and news of the 1920s. Scenes ranged from a Southern wharf to an oceanliner to a speakeasy. Films, including newsreel footage, along with slides helped capture the Golden Twenties. It was the first to be presented for three shows, playing for over 10,000 people.

Celebrating the tenth anniversary of the group, *Spectacular* 1975 expanded to record-breaking three standing-room-only performances. This achievement in Emens Auditorium is shared with only comedian Red Skelton and the Broadway musical CATS.

The 1976 *Spectacular* was a patriotic celebration of America's Bicentennial year. Featured guest soloist William Warfield, international star of *Porgy and Bess*, joined the cast on the stage. A red, white, and blue finale including “You’re a Grand Old Flag” and “God Bless America” brought the audience to its feet.

A bare stage was revealed at the opening of *Spectacular* in 1977. According to Michael Robinson, “We really blew everyone away when we opened with a BARE stage and came from the audience in street clothes to perform ‘I Hope I Get It’ and ‘I Can Do That’ from the brand new musical sensation, *A Chorus Line*.

*Spectacular*’s appearance in Emens Auditorium was an annual tradition. Only twice was this disrupted, due to circumstances beyond the control of the group. In 1978, the show was cancelled because of the national energy crisis. The other cancellation came with a blizzard in 1983.

1980’s spring show brought two exciting additions. For the first time a full orchestra was used in *Spectacular*. The most exciting novelty came with the featured “Dancing Waters.” It was the first water show ever to take place in Emens. Larry Boye stated, “more than 20,000 ‘man hours’ had been poured into the production.”

Wayne Hinkel joined the 1983 *Spectacular* as the featured magician.
Larry Boye placed a statement in the program, informing the audience of the dedication of members of the group, giving up their Spring Break to rehearse 14 hours a day. In their spare time, they created costumes and constructed sets. Both of these helped prepare for the upcoming show. This was a tradition of the group under Boye’s direction.

On January 29, 1994 the University Singers celebrated Thirty Spectacular Seasons. The current cast was joined onstage by representatives of more than seven hundred former cast members for a spectacular once-in-a-lifetime finale on the Emens Auditorium stage. For the performance, former cast member Michael Robinson arranged the 30th Reunion Medley. It consisted of the alumni of the group’s favorite songs from their years in the University Singers. Among the numbers included were, “Alexander’s Ragtime Band,” “Someone to Watch Over Me,” “It Had to Be You,” “Brand New Day” from the musical The Wiz, “Let the Good Times Role,” “Jump, Shout, Boogie,” and the touching closing number “Fare Thee Well.”

The year 2000 brought with it many exciting celebrations, including honoring the 20th century. Two of these influenced Spectacular that year, one hundred years of American Popular Music and the 100th anniversary of legendary musician Fred Waring’s birth. Under the direction of Michael Davis, the University Singers prepared a show dedicated to these two themes. A number of pieces arranged by Waring and performed by his professional group, the Pennsylvanians, were selected. Waring’s tradition of close harmony was remembered with “I Feel a Song Coming On.” Countless hours were put into rehearsing the song, but the frustration gave way to a performance much like it had happened years before under Waring’s influence. A section of memorable music provided the background for a slideshow to close the show. To top it off, the group sang Waring’s finale piece “Ev’rytime We Say Goodbye.” The emotion of the piece signified the memory of Fred Waring and more importantly, the triumph of the persistent cast over a turbulent year.
Spreading Goodwill At Home and Abroad

Since the beginning, a major tradition of the Ball State University Singers has been to spread goodwill to audiences everywhere. Starting with a show entertaining the guests, as Ball State became a University, this group began to take bookings for concerts. Under the direction of Jacque Trussel, invitations were accepted widening the circle of performance. Larry Boye increased this even more. Balancing lives as full-time students and as popular entertainers became a challenge. A strictly limited performance schedule was established and immediately filled as more than twenty-five bookings were accepted more than a year in advance. A demanding audience proved too much for the restricted schedule. Educators, statesmen, and leaders of business and industry sought to host the remarkable group. After receiving the title "Indiana's Official Goodwill Ambassadors," the entire state of Indiana became their stage! They did not stop there. Nationwide and overseas travel brought the group to international fame.

(Ball State University Singers: Thirty Spectacular Seasons):

"Traveling with friends to far-away places is both rewarding and fun! As University Singers, the experiences we shared performing and sight-seeing overseas will last in our memories and in the photographic moments captured at every turn in the road."

1965

On January 30, the first performance of the newly formed University Singers in Indianapolis met critical acclaim. A standing-room-only audience gathered in Clowes hall on the Butler University campus to share An Evening of Song with Don Neuen. The next day Indianapolis Star music critic Corbin Patrick introduced "the hit of the evening" to his readers... "a new organization, the Ball State University Singers, who swing Bach or belt a show tune with the best of them." The first performance received the first of countless rave reviews to come.

1966-67

At home in Emens Auditorium, the season was marked by the appearance of Fred Waring's Pennsylvanians. During Waring's visit, the University Singers entertained at an informal after-dinner concert. Fred Waring hired one of the featured acts, the Gentry Trio of George Bowers, Tim Noble, and John Schmutz to tour with the Pennsylvanians the next season. Cast members Terry Kelly and Rich Maxwell also joined the professional group. That year, special effects included a rented piano and a set of $12 dresses, but when the group rose from the orchestra pit for the opening number dressed in cardinal and white blazers,
the heartfelt ovation affirmed the fanatic loyalty of the admiring and growing audience.

1968

Larry Boye became the director of the group in 1968. Following this, the Singers performed the first of a series of summer State Fair shows.

1970

Adding to list of audiences, the group reached out to an audience closer to their hearts as they hosted the first in a continuing series of official Parents Day Variety Shows. As part of the celebration, the University Singers join other musical organizations for a night of entertainment.

1971

The main trip in 1971 brought the cast to French Lick for a performance entertaining the National Governors Conference.

1972

The Ball State University Singers made their way back to Indianapolis to perform the dedication show for the Indianapolis Convention Center. That year also marked their first trek overseas. The University Singers participated in a number of USO tours to military bases in the southern United States, starting in June for the Fifth Army Command touring Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. These tours also led to their first international tour to military bases in Iceland, Greenland, Labrador, and Newfoundland. Because both the people and equipment had to travel on military transport planes, the first tour abroad called for a much-reduced “shoestring” production. However, the group was able to continue its tradition of spreading goodwill to troops all over the United States and abroad.

1973

In the first of a number of trips to Washington D.C., the University Singers entertained the Indiana Society of Washington's Inaugural Ball for the inauguration of President Richard Nixon. Along with many other performances, the group logged more than 25,000 miles and entertained an estimated 7,000,000 people.
1974

The number of performances given by the University Singers increased to 140 shows in a single season. Two of the highlights include trips to the National Bankers Convention in Dallas and the World's EXPO in Spokane, Washington.

1977

Central Missouri State University was the home of the national level of Bob Hope's Collegiate Talent Search in 1978. There the Ball State University Singers won the title of "Nation's Number One Entertainment Group." Included were thirty groups and solo acts from regional competitions around the world. For the finals, the Singers show included "Everybody Rejoice" from the Broadway musical The Wiz, a vocal jazz number called "Dig Me", and a tap-dance feature of "Sweet Georgia Brown." During this event, the Singers discovered that this brand of entertainment set a national standard for student entertainers. It is a responsibility proudly upheld by the group today. After another national election, the group traveled to the nation's capital to perform for the inauguration of President Jimmy Carter. That year they also took Spectacular on the road to South Bend, Indiana.

1978

In the 1977-1978 season, the group traveled over 41,000 miles to spread goodwill around the world. After canceling Spectacular, they crossed the seas again touring Latvia, Poland and the USSR. Despite Director Larry Boye's experience of being locked in a private compartment and separated from the group for twelve hours, the tour was a success.

One cast member in describing memorable moments for an article in the Ball State Daily News recalled:

"We did two encores in Moscow. The last one was an American folk medley including 'When Johnny Comes Marching Home,' 'Shenandoah,' and 'Glory, Glory, Hallelujah.' That one really hit us. It made us realize how glad we are to live in America!"

Dan Slabaugh remembers:

"I remember hiding in the trees and running down to the stage to begin our final performance in Poland. Also, I remember getting our rehearsal shut down by the Russians in Leningrad (St. Petersburg) because we were drawing a large crowd."
Jan (Braun) Richard remembers:

"I had the privilege of chaperoning University Singers on a three week tour to Russia and Poland. The adventure began with delays and luggage hassles. Custom tried to keep LB [Larry Boye] and the equipment in Warsaw and send the rest of us to Moscow!!! What a way to begin.

The night train to Leningrad was interesting, too. Fortunately, the "Quad's" sense of humor kept things fun and the summer palace of Peter the Great and the Hermitage of Nicholas and Alexandra were well worth the ride.

Riga, Latvia was a lovely resort area – much needed after visiting the concentration camp memorial in Salaspils. We survived on ice cream and were tired of washing-out clothes. We were still longing for a clean restroom but there was a lot more 'Excellent' as Jeff Johnson would say than 'Nasty' according to Richard Knight.

We returned to Moscow prior to leaving for Warsaw. The Bolshoi, the Circus, the blankets inside the sheets, the propaganda and looking for amber jewelry [were among the many activities the group took part in].

Warsaw, Poland was much more welcoming. Chopin's home, the old city and the mustard fields were beautiful. I was so lucky to have traveling companions like Madelyn Anderson, Dwight Ferris, Ron Barker, Greg Hartman, Bethany Oyler, MaryAnn Lacey, and Phil Genth. Remember the show for twenty-five hundred people in Sopot, the constant gifts of flowers, the crowd's fascination with Beth Easley's singing, and the Stutthof concentration camp?

Gdansk and Poznan had awesome cathedrals and great shows. Remember coming down a hill through the trees to the stage, the party on the beach, performing the George M routine by the Baltic?

Back in Warsaw prior to our long trip home, we were all threatening to burn our clothes, desperate for junk food, passing out Lomotil, and preparing awards for a final party. We had to pay a fortune to get the equipment back home.

What a tremendous experience we all shared. From the opening number 'Everybody Rejoice' to the close 'Applause,' Indiana's Official Goodwill Ambassadors put on much appreciated, dynamic shows. Maybe the most beautiful song was the National Anthem sung when we flew over the Statue of Liberty."

1980

Traveling abroad became a common occurrence for the Ball State University Singers. In 1980 they traveled to Romania, Greece, and Cyprus.

1982

Another first for the University Singers happened in the fall of 1982. The group toured the Midwest, performing 107 shows in 61 cities. Larry Boye's original proposal anticipated a cast of 16-24 singer/dancers, 5 instrumentalists,
and 4 technicians to be on the road five days a week from September through November. The first promotional tour of its kind, the students were eligible for up to 17 hours of college credit, and were paid a daily allowance for traveling expenses. Twenty-six Singers were part of the first tour, which included another World’s Fair in Knoxville Tennessee. Members performed for students of all ages, from elementary through college, and at special evening shows for communities throughout Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio. The vigorous schedule was exhausting, but also a fun and rewarding experience. In the same year, they went back to USSR, Romania, and Bulgaria for a second tour.

Deena (Whitaker) Nystrom shared her experiences. While touring overseas, she said, “the trains were great.” A down side was that there were “no showers.” However, living life on the road proved to be interesting. The University Singers were used to being in front of audiences, but behind the scenes, they were college students. Nystrom also recalled “eating at McDonalds and drinking beer all night long.” When they came back from being on the road, readapting to Muncie life and kicking habits were a challenge. “We also wore TONS of MAKE-Up when we came back due to the habit of performing several times per day.” It was an unforgettable time for many young Ball States students to be spreading goodwill over many miles.

1983

The University Singers traveled to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. They shared their talents for the premier of Chevrolet’s product line.

1984

In 1984, the Ball State University Singers made its second Midwest tour with 14 singer/dancers, 7 instrumentalists, and 3 technicians doing 120 shows in 78 days. They shared the spirit of Ball State University with more than 100 school groups and entertained a combined audience of around 84,000. They also returned to Greece, Crete, and Cyprus. Larry Boye called it the “best trip,” with beautiful destinations. Performing on a freighter proved to be a really strange experience in a very unfamiliar venue.

1985

Fritz Mountford became the director and continued the tradition of big shows on the road. During 1985, the group did a command performance for the Indiana Society of Chicago with the Smothers Brothers.

1987

1988

The University Singers made an appearance at Market Square Arena to sing the National Anthem with Nancy Reagan for the Indiana Pacers in 1988. That year also marked a new way of taking the group on the road. Under the direction of Rob Lawrence, the group filmed America Sings! and other Hal Leonard educational videotapes. This allowed the group to make a lasting impression in a different medium. Without leaving town, the University Singers were able to share their talents all across the country via videotape.

1989

This momentous year served as a rebuilding year due to the School of Music fire. Many renovations took place as the fire destroyed costumes and equipment. Despite this, the group continued to move forward with a Spring Break tour to New Orleans.

1990

Celebrating their twenty-fifth anniversary, the University Singers dazzled its audiences with Musical Magic. In the Collegiate Showcase Invitational in Chicago, the group was named America’s Number One Collegiate Entertainment Organization by a panel of Broadway and Hollywood professionals.

1991

Adding to the celebrity performances, a Christmas Show was given with Pat Boone and Florence Henderson.

1992

Acting as Goodwill Ambassadors, the University Singers raised $57,000 for Indiana’s homeless doing a Hoosier Holidays TV special and cassette with WRTV – Channel 6 in Indianapolis, again reaching into a new arena for the group. That year the group was invited to participate in the pre-Lenten “Fasching” celebrations in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein for another European tour.

Fritz Mountford:

“We went to experience European culture and found ourselves in the whirlwind of a week-long, four-country Mardi Gras surrounded by lederhosen and oom-pah bands!

It was a lesson in contrasts: One night we entertained the entire city of
Gmunden-am-Traunsee at their annual costume ball in the eighteenth-century Kongresshaus. A few days later, we were the featured attraction for a traditional midnight show in the most avant-garde nightclub in Innsbruck. In Laakirchen, we shared the stage with the world champion ‘Mundharmonikachor,’ an entire orchestra of harmonicas and accordions.

Along the way, we posed for pictures beside Mozart’s house in Salzburg and at the fairytale castle, Neuschwanstein. We flat-land Hoosiers were unintentional entertainers on the ski slopes of the Swiss Alps and in a Bavarian Hofbrauhaus or two, but we figure that’s just the Goodwill part of our job!

Jan (Braun) Richard:

“The whirlwind began upon landing in Munich, Germany. We grabbed our luggage and boarded the bus for Salzburg, Austria. Quaint chalets, breathtaking Alps, and ancient cathedrals were the norm. I can still hear ‘Jenny Rebecca’ being sung in Dom Cathedral. Mozart’s home and Mozart’s (candy) balls let us know he was of utmost importance there... not ‘The Sound of Music!’ Eric Appleby’s imitation of Maria running down a hill in Gmunden was a classic.

The Laakirchen School of Music hosted a Singer’s performance where autographs were in great demand. They reciprocated with a show of their own featuring all shapes and sizes of harmonicas. Should I remind Jen Havens of my road-trip back to Gmunden to get her costume? The night show was equally well received.

We were on our way to Luzern, Switzerland. Schwine and potatoes were getting old, so we were looking forward to a change. Little did we know Luzern was in the midst of Carnival! I remember the beautiful wooden bridge, the stone lion, the feather beds, and the endless walking on cobblestones. Our guide Louke really kept us on the move. I remember trying to learn a new currency every few days... Rob Kiser and Ellen Tescher singing ‘All I Ask of You’... The laughs on the bus... The games at the hotels.

Next stop: Neuschwanstein Castle, Germany. A bus, horse drawn carriages, and our legs got us up to the castle. Technicians Don Dornick and Nathan Miley were thrilled we WEREN’T performing there! The bus ride to Munich gave birth to the best brainstorm you’ve ever had, Fritz; the thirtieth reunion.

Despite the lack of sleep and other creature comforts, I know everyone had a great time.

1993

The University Singers have done countless performances close to home. One notable show was in benefit to restore the historic Paramount Theatre in Anderson, Indiana. In the same year, the Singers had the privilege to put on a Christmas show with Judy Collins. They also did a series of shows at Walt Disney World in Florida.
"The 1992-93 Cast of the University Singers took the title of Indiana’s Official Goodwill Ambassadors on the road to Walt Disney World over the Ball State spring break, March 5-11, 1993. While performing at EPCOT, they also had time to cruise the park and catch some of the famous Florida rays.

As soon as the bus arrived at the hotel, some of the cast and chaperones headed for Discovery Island. This water park was just what the doctor ordered after the eighteen hour bus ride from Muncie.

The next few days were spent wandering around the Magic Kingdom, EPCOT, and MGM Studios. While there, members were caught in the action of leading the Festhaus band, performing in the Indiana Jones stage show, dancing in the streets to the music of a live jazz band, and impersonating Prince Ali from the movie Aladdin.

On Tuesday of the trip, the group gave it all they had in three performances at the American Pavilion in EPCOT. They turned out to be a real crowd-pleaser, even attracting the attention of Rich Taylor, the man in charge of all talent at Walt Disney World.

While there, Singers participated in a new educational clinic offered by Disney for all Magic Music Days participants. The clinic entitled ‘Let’s Dance’ allowed the cast to learn some new choreography and experience the life of a Disney World entertainer. They were even privileged to have Goofy come and dance with them.

The last day of the trip was spent on the beach in Clearwater. The cast caught the rays, shopped, and played volleyball. When the day was over, everyone packed up and boarded the bus back home again to Indiana.”

In the fall that year, the University Singers were honored for their goodwill. On August 20, David M. Dominic, then Mayor of Muncie, presented the key to city to director Fritz Mountford. The plaque stated, “In recognition of your outstanding performance and achievements from the Ball State University Singers Past, Present, and Future.”

1994

The group continued to show its support for the Muncie community with PSI Energy “Powerful Performances” to benefit the local Arts Council.

1995

In the spirit of the Goodwill Ambassadors, the Singers took Spectacular on the road to Pendleton to benefit the Chris Coyle Memorial Scholarship fund. They hit the road once again to share a celebration of America’s favorite songs of faith, laughter, and love through the Netherlands, Belgium, and France.
1996

Representing the University, this year's cast entertained Ball State Alumni Family Night at the Indianapolis Children's Museum. They stayed close to home for another benefit performance, the Ball Memorial Hospital Festival of Trees and Lights. In the same year, the University Singers had the pleasure of sharing the stage with former cast and director Jacque Trussel as guest artists with the Muncie Symphony. During Spring break, the cast did shows aboard a Carnival Cruise to the Bahamas.

Michael Robinson remembers:

“I was lucky enough to be asked to join the Singers on a Carnival Cruise from Cape Canaveral, Florida to Freeport and Nassau, Bahamas. The Singers left Muncie at 11:00 am Saturday on the bus. The performance was the last day at sea. Singers were stars and the hit of the cruise. People couldn’t believe they were college students. They were so much better than the ‘real show.’ But more memorable than that, I celebrated my 40th birthday being serenaded by the Singers. I can’t begin to tell you how much it meant to me.

It was wonderful and Singers were delightful and truly amazing. With every other college student on Spring Break tearing a hole somewhere on this ship, our children were perfect models.”

1997

In keeping good alumni relations, a number of the cast traveled to Florida to perform a series of Alumni receptions with then President John Worthen. Coming back home the entire group hosted the University Relations Fellows Banquet. They also reentered the medium of television, doing a public broadcast of Spectacular '97.

1998

The Ball State University Admissions Department set out to create a new advertising campaign. The University Singers were selected to take part in the production by providing the vocal background. Danielle (Slone) Mullen, Cynthia Justice, Jeremy Roth, and Mark Rollman were chosen to spread Ball State pride through recording the jingle “Everything You Need” for the television and radio commercials. It was another way for the group to gain exposure via television and radio.

Danielle (Slone) Mullen remembers:

“As we left the recording studio with Mr. Mountford, we all had a sense of
pride in being a Ball State University Singer like none other could imagine. It was a feeling of pride in our school, in each other, in Mr. Mountford, and in the Ball State University Singers organization for representing BSU in such an awesome facet. It was one of my most rewarding experiences at Ball State.”

Collaborating with the Ball State University Telecommunications Department and the station WIPB, the University Singers recorded a show to spread Christmas cheer to the Muncie community in the first half, and promote Spectacular in the second.

#### 2000

In the spring of 2000, the University Singers once again took Spectacular on the road with Tour 2000, performing for audiences in Princeton, Terre Haute, and Greensburg, Indiana. Of the many memories created on that tour, one that stood out in cast member Jesse Prater’s mind was the “death of the equipment truck.” On Interstate 70, between Terre Haute and Greensburg a gasket went bad and the truck broke down on the side of the road. In the rain with a show later that day, the group was in trouble. However, a towing company came to the rescue, pulling the truck to North Decatur and then back to Muncie. Despite that setback, the tour went well.
Traditions

Over time, styles come and go. The University Singers have experienced a fair share of crazy fads. Some have maintained a place in the everyday life of the group. These traditions exemplify the effort of countless students to make being a member in University Singers a memorable, once-in-a-lifetime experience. Each year, new cast members are exposed to these traditions as a way of welcoming them into the University Singers' circle.

Fight Song

At Ball State University, the singing of the fight song has brought school spirit to many. The University Singers took the opportunity to learn the tune in order to help spread that cheer in the best way possible. Each year, the students are exposed to this tradition to help build pride in the school and the group.

Fight team, fight for Ball State, we must win this game.
Onward now you Cardinals, bring glory to your name (Rah! Rah! Rah!)
Here's to both our colors, Cardinal and White,
Praying for a victory so fight, fight, fight.
Ball State!

Alma Mater

Similar to the fight song, the Alma Mater became a tradition of the group. Filling the rehearsal room with pride, the group joined together in harmony. Currently, the full rehearsal meeting on Tuesday nights begins with the Alma Mater following the short introduction line "I Hear Music".

Dear Alma Mater hear our vow of faith and trust in thee,
Thy spirit hovers near us now and through eternity.
Thy colors true of red and white shall e'er exalted be.
We'll honor thee both day and night,
Dear Alma Mater we love thee.

Dear Alma Mater hear our cry of laud and praise to thee,
To bring thee honor e'er we'll try, no matter where we be.
Fond memories we e'er shall hold of Ball State U so dear.
Though years may pass and we grow old,
May Alma Mater still be near.
Fire-Up

Before each performance the University Singers gather to join hands, arms crossed right over left, for our traditional pre-show “Fire-Up” beginning around 1973. Nobody seems to know where it came from, but everybody seems to remember it. It is used in preparation for the show. The gathered performers take the time to focus attention on the show and get the adrenaline pumping. The Company Managers usually lead, or choose a group to lead the cheer as the rest of the cast follows chanting:

- Vim, Vigor, Vitality, Drive, Desire, Determination,
- Sparkle, Shine, Glitz, Lines. What are we gonna do?
- We’re gonna ROCK!

Following this, one member has typically led the group in prayer or a moment of silence. A hand-squeeze passes the pulse from member to member, until it travels clear around the circle. During this time, any member can add a special prayer, comment or inside joke, keeping the group close-knit. Then the leader begins a new chant before leaving for the ready line:

- Gimme a yell, gimme a yell, gimme a great big hairy yell.
- And when we yell we yell like #@** and this is what we yell:
- Alabam, Alabam, Alabameago, San Diego,
- Hocus Pocus, Sis Boom Bah, Singers Singers Rah Rah Rah!
- Let’s go, Let’s go Singers! Let’s go Singers!

Hand signals appear in the final part, adding another aspect to this tradition.

Image

Robert Linson stated, while the Vice President of Ball State University, “The University Singers do more in projecting the image of Ball State University than any other academic, public relations, or extracurricular program on our campus.”

From the start, the University Singers set a precedent for all the years to follow. It was that of a group of clean-cut kids out to spread goodwill, laughter, and love. This special “University Singers Look” has been an important part of the show both onstage and offstage. For more than thirty years, the group has been recognized at home and around the world for their fresh, young, contemporary and friendly personality and appearance. The image is based on quality, affecting the design and creation of program content, musical arrangements, choreography, sound, set, and costumes. Because of this, it has become just as important for each member to give that same amount of attention...
to personal appearance. The Singers Look is a combination of costume, attitude, and grooming. At all times, appearance and behavior should add to the show and not detract from it. This includes eliminating anything considered offensive, distracting, or not in the best interest of the overall image. Since the group is in the public eye before, during, and after every performance, the “class act” has remained consistent. This mentality and attention to quality has set this group above the average and has created an expectation from the audience. From the minute they see members of the University Singers step off the bus, they know they are in for a treat. To some, they are considered celebrities because of the polished look and attitude.

Promoting the University Singers’ image as well as that of Ball State grew under the direction of Larry Boye. Although criticized, Boye remained faithful to the prestigious style of the group. When asked “How do you respond to comments that University Singers is nothing but a ‘goody-goody’ public relations group for Ball State?” Boye replied,

“Partially true. We are public relations minded, but what big organization isn’t? Ball State is a rather large organization. We are often referred to as the ‘goodwill ambassadors of Ball State.’ BSU can use this image, we’re glad to fill it.”

On a bus trip, one production manager reminded Indiana’s Goodwill Ambassadors of this timeless message:

“Those who participated in the organization before you labored long and hard, with great sacrifice to earn University Singers the fine reputation among the public, which it now maintains. As unfortunate as it seems, it only takes the actions of a few to mar that reputation. Obviously your actions should be above reproach when in the Singers outfit. The public associates you with Singers, and they do not hesitate to speculate on the caliber of your person.”

Larry Boye introduced the concept of “travel outfits,” which included navy blazers with dress slacks for men and navy blazers with skirts for women. The casual yet attractive attire gave the group a unified look while traveling and helped to immediately identify each individual as a University Singer. It was an effective public relations move representing Ball State and the Quality Show called University Singers, that remains in use today. The current cast still dresses in what they now call “travel attire.” The only changes have been for men to wear only khaki pants and women no longer have to wear the navy blazers. It presents a “professionally glamorous” look for the group.

In addition to this clothing, travel attire consists of each member wearing his or her nametag. This tag states the first name of the member as well as the title Ball State University. Wearing this tag helps members reach out to the audiences offstage and gives them a chance to introduce themselves individually. Another piece was added to the ensemble starting at the thirtieth
reunion. Each member receives a special "University Singers" pin that is placed with the nametag when in travel attire. Currently, each new cast member receives that pin as a form of initiation to the group from an alumnus member, making this tradition more special. Each piece put together creates a look that reflects the prominence this group has received. Travel attire is worn with pride.

Chivalry

One of the biggest traditions of the group has been carried out throughout the years in the form of chivalry. Part of the University Singers image is to set the example of fine young ladies and gentlemen. This takes place throughout each day and gives the group a polished look. The gentlemen kindly escort the ladies up and down stairs and allow them to be first in any lines. It makes a big impression on the stage, but is just as effective if not more behind the scenes. When in public, the group is always performing, whether coming off the bus to greet hosts or loading and unloading equipment. It is another aspect that many other organizations sometimes overlook but makes the University Singers that much more special.

Rehearsal

In order to live up to the expectations of the "Nation's number one collegiate entertainment ensemble" one thing has taken place from the beginning, rehearsal. Many hours have been put into making the show go for the University Singers. In the beginning, the group met in the Hargreaves' music building room 303. As the years went on, enrollment increased. The addition of more involved choreography brought with it the demand for more space. Eventually, the University Singers became housed in room 123 where it remains today. With full length mirrors and a ballet bar, it was perfect for the group. It became known as the Production Center and was attached to an office and storage area known as the "pit." All three areas became a hang out place. As its name implied, the Production Center provided a place for much of the backstage work to be done. In the process, it also contributed to the social connection of the group. Spending so many hours in rehearsal room and preparing for the show led to many friendships, which are so special to the group even today.

Rehearsals currently consist of six hours being spent per week together. The glee club practices vocals and choreography Mondays from 4-6 P.M. and Wednesdays from 4-5 P.M. Tuesday nights from 7-10 P.M. the entire cast congregates for weekly announcements and rehearsal together or separate depending on the schedule. Prior to this is the weekly production meeting where team heads meet together to put the production aspects all together.

The tradition of rehearsal has remained strong over the past 37 years and will continue. Hard work and dedication make this group very professional and allow for such a spectacular reputation. It also brings the group together as a
family, another significant tradition of the group.

Rehearsal Retreats

Preparing large-scaled shows takes time, sometimes more than is allotted during the week. To carry out this task, the group created a tradition of having rehearsal retreats as they are now known. These consist of a number of days in which the group spends entire days learning the show. During the years when Larry Boye was director, these took place during spring break week in preparation for Spectacular.

Along the way, it was noted that not only were these times for refining the show, but they allowed the group to become closer, helping build group dynamics. Currently the “Early Week” retreat begins the Wednesday or Thursday before classes begin in August. In three days, the new cast gets acquainted while also learning a few pieces of music. It is the first taste of University Singers for many people and has a large impact on the rest of the year. Many friendships begin to bud and the family increases. Founding member Jan (Braun) Richard visits the group during that time to present the new members with their Singers pin, formally welcoming them. This retreat sets the pace for the year to come.

Two other retreats take place throughout the year. During the fall months, one takes place either on campus or away. In recent years, the group has traveled to Epworth Forest and Camp in North Webster, Indiana for a weekend getaway in the woods. In 1999, members not only rehearsed for three days, but also had the opportunity to socialize while staying in cabins at the Oakwood Resort in Syracuse, Indiana. Many memories were created and will always remain in the auditorium at Epworth. The other retreat takes place the weekend before second semester begins in January, refueling the year after the long break. Most times, these retreats allow the group to work with guest choreographers such as Deena Dehart, Jason Johnson, Brent Holland, Stevie River Rawlings, and others. These traditions take hard work but are also a lot of fun.

Singers Day

On January 29, 1994 the University Singers celebrated Thirty Spectacular Seasons, a hallmark anniversary of ideas, events, and people. Governor Evan Bayh proclaimed that, “The Ball State University Singers have given voice to the spirit of Indiana through their songs of faith and laughter and love.” He congratulated the group as influential pioneers in the American show choir movement and as student entertainers and educators. He proclaimed January 29 Ball State University Singers Day in Indiana. Since that year, Singers Day has been filled with celebration as members dress in Singers’ attire and decorate the halls and offices.
Social Events

Although the University Singers spend countless hours preparing and performing shows, much time is dedicated to the social aspect of the group. Being with the group for so many hours during the weeks in and out of school has made this group a family. Members get the opportunity to meet new people and build lasting friendships. In some cases, the group has experienced couples forming, which led to later marriages. Whatever the situation, the friends made while a part of this group share something special, the dedication to prepare and love to perform. Some of the activities that help this effort are Homecoming, Thanksgiving Dinner, Halloween parties, Christmas parties, and Formal. Currently there is a production team assigned specifically to this cause. All these efforts to bring the group together socially add to the uniqueness of this special organization. Performing is one thing, but being on stage with your friends and sharing talents makes for an outstanding show. Audiences have commented for years on how much we perform well together, and it can be attributed to this side of the show.

From the beginning of the year, get-togethers help congeal the group. Unofficial parties help members get to know each other outside the rehearsal room. Two gatherings have made an impact over the years celebrating Halloween and Christmas. Halloween parties provided an arena for members to gather in costume and show off their creativity while having a great time. For a few years, this event took place with the help of alumnus Michael Robinson, who was gracious enough to host. Many students remember well going to Michael’s. It was a great opportunity for the group to join alumni and have a great time. Another event that has taken place over the last few years and continues currently is the Christmas party at founding member Jan Richard’s house. This is a more formalized party where members put on seasonal clothing and celebrate the holidays with food and Christmas carols. Starting in 1999, the group also exchanged gifts as part of a Secret Santa tradition. This tradition as well as the other gatherings have helped this group build strong friendships over the years.

Homecoming is also a big event for the University Singers. Throughout Homecoming week, a number of activities take place for all groups on campus. The Singers compete in these games in the Independent category for Ashley points, measuring participation and school spirit. Participants have made strong showings in events such as the bed races, Air Jam, Talent Search (their favorite arena, which they usually dominate), banner decorating, and float design. Over the last few years, the group has made a strong showing, winning awards in individual events and claiming first place in the Independent division. In 1998, the group surprised the school by winning first place over all the divisions, including the Greeks. It was well deserved as University Singers participated in every event and others came to support their team members. This event has helped the University Singers in continuing the social as well as school spirit.
Starting in 1997, the annual Thanksgiving dinner took place in the apartment of three members. Only a portion of the group was present, but it led to a big event that now takes place in the rehearsal room. Each member brings a different dish for a potluck, enough for all to share. Alumni members are also invited, keeping alive the connection to the Singers alumni family. The rehearsal room is well decorated for the season and gives the group a chance to reflect on the year so far. These events along with everyday meetings in the office and around campus allow members to get to know each other better and keep the University Singers family tradition strong.

Another event that takes place each spring arose in 1998. The University Singers Formal was another way for the group to bond outside the performance arena. It serves as a night for everyone to get dressed up and spend the evening with dinner and dancing. As with everything else, preparation adds to the social aspect of the group as members join to decorate the hall, creating many new memories. It is all part of enhancing the cohesiveness of the group.

Honorary Cast Members

Since the beginning, the University Singers organization has been supported by benefactors dedicated to insuring the success of the University Singers. In recognition of their exemplary service, encouragement, and support, the tradition of welcoming them as honorary cast members began. Among this distinguished group are past Ball State University presidents John Emens, John Pruis, Robert Bell, and former Vice President Robert Linson. The list also includes Robert Jolliffe, former Stage Manager of Emens Auditorium, Earl Williams, past Manager of Emens Auditorium, Joseph Naumcheff, once Director of Admissions, David Froenicke, past Manager of Emens Auditorium, and Jan Shafer. Current Ball State staff and faculty have also been honored such as Cleve Scott, the Director of Music Engineering Technology, Nancy Baker, Coordinator of Music Services, Charlotte Shepperd, Director of Alumni Communications, and Sylvia Ewert.

Celebrity Appearances

Over the years, many notable stars have shared the stage with the University Singers. Red Skelton, the Carpenters, Lawrence Welk, Rich Little, Lorne Greene, Bobby Darin, Pat Boone, Olivia Newton-John, Liza Minnelli, Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, Florence Henderson, The Osmonds, Mac Davis, Jimmy Durante, Dionne Warwick, Loggins and Messina, Judy Collins, and the Smothers Brothers are among some of the most notable. They shared their talent, laughter, and tears with many cast members, and brought the joy of music and friendship to the group. Some even returned for more, such as with Red Skelton. He performed with the University Singers in countless shows, including the
performance in 1986 where he received an honorary Ball State University doctorate.

"You're in good hands with Ball State"

During the 1970s, the popular slogan of the All State Insurance Company brought a tradition to the University Singers. Playing on the words led the phrase "You're in good hands with Ball State." Little things like this created memories that still link many University Singers.
Once Upon A Time

After the 30th reunion in 1994, a new tradition came about. New members become inducted into University Singers family with the help of one of the founding members, Jan (Braun) Richard. Jan comes to rehearsal as a liaison to the cast from a group of over 700 Singers alumni. The process of this event is to give an overview from Jan’s firsthand account to help set the scene for what the group is all about. During this time, new members are given their University Singers’ pin, uniting the group. It all starts with the famous, every changing, story, “Once Upon A Time...”

“As a member of the original group I’m probably the oldest living Singer you’ll ever meet. During the mid 60’s a group of students - much like yourselves - decided they wanted to perform music in a different style than what was then called Concert Choir. Don Neuen was the catalyst behind this process. He convinced Robert Hargreaves and President John Emens that this new group would be a showpiece for Ball State and a fundraiser for the Music Department. In conjunction with the new University status, University Singers was born and both predictions came true.

We didn’t have all the technology you have. It wasn’t invented yet and we certainly didn’t move like you do but at the time we were IT!

The First Spectacular sold out for 2 shows!

Don Neuen went on to achieve great recognition in the choral world and is now the endowed chair at UCLA and director of the choir at the Crystal Cathedral.

After his departure - Jack Trussel - a then grad asst. - took over the group for one year. Jack went on to become famous in the Opera World, performing at the Met., in Paris, and etc.

Larry Boye - affectionately known as LB - was the director who took Singers to new heights. Lavish costumes, staging, click tracks, larger group and travel, travel, travel were the elements in his many years with us.

He left for new challenges at Disney World and now is an Associate Director for the world traveling Young Americans.

The Mountford years came next. Fritz had a new style, more concentration on vocal and less on glitz. His attention to detail was a tremendous asset to our archives and our headsets were purchased during his reign. Rob Lawrence was director for one year while Fritz got his Doctorate. All the directors maintained in their own way the same initial idea. Share music through friendship, enthusiasm, humor, love, and tears and as a family, which I am so proud to have you be a part of. You won’t appreciate it now but someday you’ll realize what a special group you are a part of. There are hundreds, who have come before you, encouraging you and thanking you, as I do, for keeping our dream alive.
We have a new director now, Dr. Jeffrey Carter. I am so anxious to see what wonderful new elements he will add to our history.

So... besides welcoming you to a new year and a new family, I want you to know that you now have an eccentric aunt that you can call any time, well almost, who will be a shoulder to lean on, who will take you out to eat, who loves to have you for Christmas and will always be there clapping the loudest and longest.

Please wear your Singers pin with pride as I do. Welcome to the family.”

Jan Richard

These words sum up the existence of the University Singers so far. The future looks bright. I hope that the readers of this have a better understanding of the history and traditions of this exciting group. To everyone that has come before me and will come after me, thank you for contributing to such a fine, legendary ensemble. It is the talents of each of you along with the support of audiences worldwide that make the University Singers unique. In the words of past director Fritz Mountford, “Thanks for sharing...”
Things I Have Learned

Over the past two and a half years, I have had the distinguished pleasure of being involved with the University Singers. For the first two years, I played the role of a singer/dancer. I held the positions of Library Coordinator and Assistant Company Manager during these years. This year, I have acted as a transitional advisor and historian. My experience so far has been eventful to say the least. In the beginning, I came to the group knowing very little. Through “Early Week” retreat, I was introduced and welcomed to the University Singers family. I was given a pin and a hug from Jan. It was a great feeling to belong to a family away from home. To make it better, we were the best of the best performers from all the high schools around. I was in for a treat.

During that year, I was exposed to many things. One that stood out most to me was the uniqueness of the group. We rehearsed for many hours and sometimes it seemed like we got nowhere. But when looking back it is obvious that each tiny detail added up to a production unequaled by any high school show choir or college program I had seen. On the other hand, I was also exposed to what it was like working with about forty-five other musicians on this level. At times it was hard to deal with, but we all had our own experience and talents to share. Again, in the end everything added up to one amazing product.

I will never forget the first performance. We put on our travel attire and boarded the bus. When we arrived, we stepped off the bus and were revered like celebrities instantly. I had never felt that before. What was more powerful was realizing that we were performing from the moment we reached the eye of the public. It was not just about the thirty-minute production we did on the stage. It was about the uniformity of forty-five college students and the pride that carried our heads high. Of course the show was “fabulous” as became THE word that year and we were received well. However, it was then that I realized what it meant to be one of Indiana’s Official Goodwill Ambassadors. It is amazing to think that such a huge role can be played in spreading goodwill through music.

Throughout the year it became clearer what this group was all about. It was not about each member being showcased, it was about the collaboration of talent into a show that spread goodwill to the audience. The fact that each of us had something special to add made it sincere. Overall though, it was the audience we were reaching.

As with most organizations, there are rough times. This group has seen them, especially in the 1999-2000 season. Strong personalities characterized this cast. As Dr. Thalia Mulvihill once said during the first ever University Singers Leadership Retreat, “You have the personalities to solve world hunger.” But she also added, “that also means those same strong personalities could create world hunger.” I learned a lot from her. Times did get rough that year. In the middle of
the first semester, the director left to pursue other interests, as did a few members. Then came the fear that the University was going to shut down the group for good. All of the sudden we were given choices. We could shut ourselves down and make a peaceful exit. They kept telling us that over 700 alumni of the group rested on our shoulders and we shouldn't let them down. Through this rough time, we had to make a decision. It was amazing what happened next. The meaning of the group came out in each member one by one. I will never forget walking into the office seeing people reading handbooks and learning more about the group. We followed what they told us about saving the pride of the alumni, but chose a different path. We chose to hold on and keep the group alive. It was going to take more than a few rugged weeks or strong personalities to break us apart. People put aside petty differences to fight for something much bigger, the University Singers family. All of the sudden, we sat in the circle with heads held high and sang with more pride than ever.

However, the road was not smooth from there on. Coming back from Christmas break, we were handed even more setbacks. More students left the group for many different reasons. When all was said and done, one third of the cast had to be replaced all in time for a show two weeks later. With a doctoral assistant as the interim director, the production team sat in the meeting and again set out to make decisions. The words of Andrea Fulda brought us back into the swing of things, "We can do this and Spectacular will be good." She was right and again we set out to maintain the traditions set by the previous 35 years of Singers. The show did go on and it was a great one. Although the audience did not know everything that went on during the year, they could see the emotion and pride in our performance. As always, we were well received and had succeeded in keeping the tradition alive.

This year is yet another stepping stone for the group. With a new director and new cast members comes new talent and new ideas. Taking a more observant view of the group has showed me what the ever-important audience sees. It is fun to watch the performers sing, dance, and play their instruments. But it is more fun to watch them entertain with more than just songs on the stage. They entertain as they set the stage, as they greet the audience after, as they tear down, load and unload equipment, and as they rehearse for upcoming shows. They entertain as they step off the bus and as they sign autographs for children who believe they are celebrities. The University Singers brings happiness to all those who have the opportunity to take part in the show. Spreading goodwill is a great thing and keeps this group alive. I have learned so much from being a part of it. I take the things I learned with me and will use them always as well as hold the memories in my heart. They are my family and no matter where I go, no one can take that away. Through the dedication to share their talents, this organization has spread goodwill to me and I am forever grateful.

Thank you all.
Acknowledgements

This project could not have been completed without the help of many people. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for everything that you have contributed to this. I appreciate all that you have done for me and for this fine organization.

Jan Richard

Thank you so much for being my mentor and guide throughout this process. As the “eccentric aunt” and founding member, you have been an invaluable resource and support. I thank you for all the fun memories and that fact that we now have the opportunity to share them on paper. You are the best.

Dr. Joanne Edmonds

I thank you for helping me think up this topic and allowing me to follow through. You are a priceless advisor for me in my endeavor to finish my honors curriculum. Your words of wisdom gave me the confidence to believe that I can achieve great things. Thank you so much.

Dr. Jeffrey Carter

This project has been an interesting road for both of us. I thank you for allowing me to root through all the archives and take rehearsal time to ask for help from the cast. I also thank you for your contributions to the director’s section and for helping me edit this document.

Dr. Fritz Mountford

Thank you Mr. Mountford for introducing me to this group and showing me the true meaning of what it is to be a University Singer. Also, thank you for giving me the opportunity to learn the process of the group through leadership experiences. I am also grateful for your work on the handbooks used during your years as director. They gave me a lot of useful information. As you always say and I say back to you, “Thanks for sharing.”

Dr. Larry Boye

Meeting “LB” was an experience that I will never forget. Listening to your account of the group was entertaining and informative. I had no idea that so much went on during those 17 years. Thank you for the interview and more importantly for what you brought to this organization.
Dr. Thalia Mulvihill

Thank you for helping the University Singers learn the potential they are capable of and showing ways of reaching it. We appreciate your input and support.

Michael Davis

To the student who tried his hardest to hold the group together, thank you for all your efforts.

Hudson Akin

For quickly developing a list of all the registered alumni of University Singers, I am grateful.

Michael Robinson

Thank you for all your work with alumni relations and for sharing you experiences as a University Singer.

Allison Alt, Megan Bosworth, Suzanne Denise Carley, Lauren Jinks, Karen Kirkpatrick, Danielle (Slone) Mullen, Deena (Whitaker) Nystrom, Jesse Prater, Dan Slabaugh, and Beth (Rivar) Slusher

Thank you all for sharing your experiences in-depth with me and being patient with my email.

The University Singers Alumni

Thank you to all the alumni who made this group what it is today. It is amazing to be part of such a large family. Each member has added something unique and special to this organization. I am especially indebted to the hard work the past 36 casts put in, leading to this 37th spectacular year of University Singers.

The Current Cast

Thank you to this year’s cast for helping me with this project. You have been all very supportive and helpful. I have learned a lot from watching this year progress. It makes me happy to see the traditions continuing in this 37th year. Keep up the good work and thanks again.
Ball State University Singers Thirtieth Spectacular Season

Prepared in 1994 commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Ball State University Singers. Thanks to Carolyn Davis and GARFIELD and Paws, Inc. for production of the book.

Handbook for Cast Members

Prepared by the University Singers under the direction of Fritz Mountford.