

Conducting Graduate Student Serves the Community through Music by Miles Canaday



In July and October of 2014, music conducting graduate student Taylor Martin conducted rehearsals and performances with a choir comprised not of Lamont singers, but of men in transition out of homelessness. Martin and his colleague, Jamie Wolf, formed the New Life Men's Choir at The Crossing, a program through the Denver Rescue Mission that provides housing, counseling, job training, education and support for men and families to break the cycles of homelessness, poverty and addiction.

Martin and Wolf first considered bringing choral music to the homeless in March 2014. They partnered with St. Martin's Chamber Choir, which became their sponsor and provided a few volunteer singers from their professional roster. Martin and Wolf chose to work with The Crossing because it offers the services and community setting that best fit their vision. The men at The Crossing live and work on campus and have a regimented schedule and high expectations regarding conduct and work ethic.

"It was hard to gauge if there would be any interest—these men are all so busy with their training and work that adding an additional rehearsal each week was a real challenge," said Martin. Yet he was pleased with the singers' enthusiasm.

"The [six] singers were eager to go for it. They jumped in and worked hard," he said.

Although they did not all have prior singing experience, Martin was thrilled that he was able to treat them like a choir. "We were able to achieve a lot of nuance," he said. He expressed gratitude to his Lamont conducting professors, Dr. Catherine Sailer and Kyle Fleming, for their consistent support.

The second session in October was equally as successful, although it was longer and featured more challenging music. The singers were again small in number, but fierce in their commitment to the process, according to Martin. In late December, the New Life Men's Choir went caroling in the north Park Hill neighborhood, and is looking forward to another six-week project in January and February.

"It's important to program music that they connect with, and then to help them find meaning in the music," Martin said. The Crossing requires weekly participation in bible study and discussion, so the members of the choir were "very thoughtful and totally open about sharing their ideas" on the songs they were performing. Martin experienced a rewarding exchange as they pushed him to think differently about the music he had programmed.