
MMEA All-State — A Brief History

by Stephen Schultz

The sponsorship of All-State organizations became a service of the Minnesota Music Educators Association in 1944 when performing groups were organized to perform for the fall convention of the Minnesota Education Association. The first All-State concert was held on October 27, 1944, when guest conductor Robert Shaw directed the 1000-voice choir, accompanied by 125 students in the orchestra at the annual meeting of the Minnesota Education Association in the St. Paul Auditorium. It was reported in the first issue (November, 1944) of the *Gopher Music Notes* that Robert Shaw created quite a lot of excitement when he took off his shirt while conducting rehearsals. Seventy-one schools sent students to this event. Minneapolis and St. Paul schools supplied more than 600 of the total membership and 75 students came from Duluth. Some of the small schools represented included Eagle Bend, Rothsay, Coleraine, and Bloomington.

The first All-State band was organized two years later, and performed with the choir at MEA on October 24, 1946. Harold Bachman was the first conductor of the All-State band, leading the ensemble in Sousa's *Gladiator March*, *Pavanne* by Morton Gould, and *Manin Veen* by Haydn Wood. Radio station KUOM made a transcription of the concert and distributed it to Minnesota radio stations wishing to broadcast the program as a public service feature.

MMEA performing groups continued to assemble during even-numbered years (with the exception of 1950) to perform at the fall MEA convention. An All-State choir appeared on each occasion, and the All-State band and orchestra alternated appearances. The first All-State camp was organized at Bethel College in September, 1962, where the orchestra rehearsed in preparation for its appearance at the Minnesota State Fair. In 1964, under the leadership of MMEA president Murrae Freng, the summer camp format was established for the band and choir at Bemidji State College, and each of the All-State groups began performing twice annually.

In 1975 all three All-State organizations performed at the same Midwinter Clinic for the first time. A plan to rotate the camps among various college campuses was implemented in July, 1976. An All-State jazz ensemble was added in 1982 in cooperation with the Minnesota chapter of the National Association of Jazz Educators. John Radd was director of the first All-State jazz ensemble. In 1999, a second All-State band was added.

One of the highlights of the All-State has been the participation of nationally known guest conductors. The list of past conductors includes Antal Dorati, John Paynter, Weston Noble, Dale Warland, Henry Sopkin, Paul Christiansen, James Croft, Marvin Rabin, Lucien Cailliet, H. Robert Reynolds, Miles Johnson, Frank Bencrisutto, Fred Sturm, Jim Warrick, Henry Charles Smith, Don Craig, and Douglas McEwen. The members of MMEA hope that the experience of working with outstanding conductors and sharing their gift of music will be a cherished memory long after the camps and concerts are concluded.