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[Uw-madison Grad Takes Over A Summer Choral Group That Had Been Cut.](#)

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By GAYLE WORLAND gworland@madison.com 608-252-6188

Recent UW-Madison School of Music graduate Ben Luedcke was figuring out how to balance his summer lawn-mowing business in Milwaukee with his directorship of a Madison church choir when he heard the news: The university's longtime summer vocal ensemble had been nixed.

"It's a budget cut, plain and simple," said John Schaffer, a professor of music theory and director of the School of Music. "If I had the money I would keep it going."

For the past decade of its estimated 20 years' existence, the UW Summer Choir had expanded under the leadership of UW associate director of choral activities Bruce Gladstone from a handful of singers to more than 60 in 2008. Some were students taking the course for one college credit; the majority were serious vocalists from the community who enrolled as "special students" for the summerlong opportunity to sing.

But last fall, the class fell off the summer roster.

"The summer budget's been cut maybe 20, 30 percent. So things just get chopped off the bottom," Schaffer said. The music school's top seasonal priority, he explained, is to offer courses that teachers need to keep up their certifications. "The summer choir was more typically done as a nice service and elective function for the students."

But Luedcke, 26, saw it as the last summer institution of its kind in the city.

"As UW and the city in general face economic hard times, budget cuts and seemingly diminishing funding of the arts, I did not want to have this tradition die," said Luedcke, who also directs the Choral Arts Society in Madison and is music director at Lake Edge United Church of Christ.

So last spring he e-mailed veteran community singers and visited the university's seven academic-year choral groups to advertise his intentions. With Gladstone's blessing, he re-formed the group as a student organization called the Madison Summer Choir. Students would donate \$10 and community members \$25 to pay for music performance rights and a

rehearsal pianist.

"Ultimately what it came down to is that this was going to be a heck of a lot of fun, a great ensemble, and great experience for me and my future career," Luedcke said.

But the job isn't without ethical concerns. Conducting for free and asking the nine string musicians performing at Friday's concert to work unpaid "in a way does not help the denigration of the value of the arts," he said.

"I was torn about doing that. But what have we accomplished if the organization just dissipates?"

The choir's upcoming concert, "It's the Little Things That Count," will feature Haydn's "Little Organ Mass" and other vocal works about small things.

However, reviving a choir is no small project, said Gladstone, who praised Luedcke's efforts.

"It's a lot of work to do this, and he's giving of himself to give people this experience," he said.

Alto JoAnn Tiedemann, who sings during the fall and spring with the UW Choral Union and participated in the "Madison Summer Sings" at Madison Area Technical College until the demise of that choral gathering in recent years, signed on with Luedcke's group not just because it's important to keep the voice and "musical brain" in tune, she said.

"If this is the last opportunity in town for amateur singers to sing in the summer," she said, "I wanted to support it."

\ IF YOU GO

What: Madison Summer Choir concert

When: 7:30 p.m. Friday

Where: Mills Hall, Mosse Humanities Building, 455 N. Park St.

Admission: Free

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