

Expatriate and Heritage Choirs of the Pacific Northwest:
An Ethnographic Study

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As of 2009, Chorus America reported that there were “about 12,000 professional and community choruses” in the United States.¹ Of these, choirs dedicated to the repertoire of a particular nationality or geographic-cultural area represent an unknown but not insignificant portion. As the choirs under study in this paper will exemplify, various immigrant groups, or American-born people with ties to their ethnic homeland, have joined together throughout the years to practice choral singing, and to present the repertoire of their heritage to their American neighbors. The interactions of immigrant, ethnic, and American identities, and the various goals of musicking through which those identities express themselves, make fertile fodder for consideration and analysis.

This paper will address itself to three representative choirs in the US states of Alaska and Washington. The primary method of the paper is ethnographic; my goal is to discover and share the experiences of the choir members and organizers that I spoke to. This will give an account of these choirs “from the inside,” as experienced by their participants. Historical information from outside sources, when present, will be given primarily for the purpose of contextualizing my respondents’ contributions.

The Choirs

The three choirs under study in this paper are the Everett Norwegian Male Chorus, of Everett, WA, the Russian-American Colony Singers, of Anchorage, AK, and Vivat Musica, a Polish community choir based in Seattle, WA. All three are voluntary amateur organizations, with only artistic leadership receiving pay for their work.²

¹ Chorus America, *The Chorus Impact Study: How Children, Adults, and Communities Benefit From Choruses* (Washington, DC: Chorus America, 2009), 4. As far as I can tell, there has not been a census of choirs more recent than 2009. Although Chorus America has published subsequent updates to *The Chorus Impact Study*, more recent editions, for example 2019’s *The Chorus Impact Study: Singing for a Lifetime* do not include a count of choirs (either because no census was conducted or because numbers have declined since 2009, which would constitute adverse publicity for Chorus America). Of course, one would expect major changes to the choral landscape as a result of the 2020 (and ongoing) COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on group singing (and organizational survival) that resulted.

² In fact, in the case of the Russian-American Colony Singers, founder-director-conductor Zlata Lund never drew a paycheck for directing the group. The only paid participants were occasional guest

Everett Norwegian Male Chorus

The Everett Norwegian Male Chorus (“ENMC”) was founded in Everett in 1902, making it by far the oldest choir under study here.³ There were nine charter members at the time of ENMC’s founding, and ENMC was itself one of the founding choirs of the Pacific Coast Norwegian Singers Association (“PCNSA”).⁴ According to PCNSA’s website, there are now twelve active choruses in the Association.⁵ According to research carried out by Knudsen, the Everett choir has always been one of the sites of leadership for the entire Association, perhaps making it well-suited as an exemplar of singers’ experiences with the movement.⁶

As an entity and a repertoire, the Norwegian male chorus has a history reaching back to the 19th century.⁷ The practice of dedicated male choruses began in Norway with Den Norske Studentsangforening, The Norwegian Student Choral Society, an organization which remains active today.⁸ A critical cultural event for all Norwegian men’s choruses is the *Sangerfest*, or festival of song, a gathering (usually annual) of all the Norwegian male choruses in a given area. It is clear both from Knudsen’s research and from the responses of my interviewee Jeff Highland that the *Sangerfest* is central to the life of a Norwegian male chorus, and might even be called its reason for being.

The ENMC is an outlier in this study in several ways. The other two choirs focus on the culture of Slavic nationalities, whereas ENMC is obviously Scandinavian in origin. The ENMC is

conductors and soloists. Per our conversation, running the group actually cost Zlata money. Zlata Lund, in conversation with the author, November 2021.

³ Pacific Coast Norwegian Singers Association, “Everett Norwegian Male Chorus,” pcnsa.org, accessed 10 Dec 2021, <https://pcnsa.org/local-groups/everett/>.

⁴ Alf Lunder Knudsen, “The Norwegian Male Chorus Movement in America: A Study,” (University of Washington, 1989), 186.

⁵ Pacific Coast Norwegian Singers Association, “Local Groups,” pcnsa.org, accessed 10 Dec 2021, <https://pcnsa.org/local-groups/>.

⁶ Knudsen, 186-92. Knudsen calls ENMC “one of the pillars of the PCNSA.”

⁷ Pacific Coast Norwegian Singers Association, “History,” pcnsa.org, accessed 12 Dec 2021, <https://pcnsa.org/history/>. “In 1845, Den Norske Studentsangforening — Norway’s first male chorus — was organized by Johan Didrik Behrens. In June 1851, the first *Sangerfest* was held in Asker, Norway.”

⁸ Den norske Stundetersangforening, “The choir,” stundetersangforening.no, Den norske Studentsangforening, 2021, <https://www.stundetersangforeningen.no/en/the-choir/>.

affiliated with a very specific and somewhat rigid tradition--namely, the Norwegian male chorus movement--, something that cannot be said of the other two. ENMC is a male-only ensemble, whereas the other two choirs are gender-inclusive.⁹ Perhaps most germane to this paper, the ENMC's "Norwegian" members are primarily American-born men of Norwegian descent--whereas the Polish members of Vivat Musica and the Russian members of RACS have been primarily immigrants.¹⁰ (Interestingly, one of my respondents, Alf Knudsen, is in fact a Norwegian immigrant, or perhaps "re-immigrant" would be the correct term. Although born in Brooklyn, Alf's childhood and teen years were spent in Norway).

I spoke with two members of ENMC, Jeff Highland (president of the PCNSA), and Alf Knudsen (author of the dissertation cited in this section).¹¹

Russian-American Colony Singers

The Russian-American Colony Singers ("RACS"), which on various logos and letterhead also goes by the Russian names *Русский Хоровой Ансамбль на Аляске* ("Russian Choral Ensemble in Alaska") and *Русский Хор на Аляске* ("Russian Choir in Alaska"), was started in 2001 and was continuously active until 2013.¹² RACS revived for a major project/tour on Russian/Alaskan history in the 2016-17 season. After this project ("Over the Near Horizon: A Tribute to Alaska History") RACS disbanded permanently. Over the years, RACS performed a

⁹ Knudsen notes that, when he was writing in 1989, the question of including women within the US Sangerfest movement was under discussion (Knudsen, 4). Evidently, no change was ever made in this regard, since the Norwegian choruses in question are still male-only. Knudsen does not delve further into the politics of this question, nor make explicit why the tradition did not include women in the first place. Though ripe for scholarly inquiry (which, in the present day, would quite possibly also include discussion of gender identities outside the male/female binary), the gender question in the Norwegian chorus movement is not within the scope of this paper.

¹⁰This would not have been true at the time of ENMC's founding, when it was a primarily-immigrant choir. Knudsen, Chapter II.

¹¹ I refer to Alf by his full name when discussing our conversations, and by last name when citing his dissertation.

¹² Russian-American Colony Singers, "About RACS," Russian-American Colony Singers, 2021, http://www.racs.us/RACS/RACS_History.asp. The phrase "Russian-American Colony" has historical resonance, since "Russian America" (*Русская Америка*) was one name for Alaska during the years of Russia's administration there.

wide range of repertoire, focused on cultural exchange and not strictly constrained to Russian-language repertoire only. RACS performed music of several world nationalities, in addition to jazz, American patriotic songs, and others; programming was often chosen to suit the theme of a given concert, but some Russian music was always included, and constituted the core of RACS' repertoire. RACS was a self-standing organization and never part of any larger choral or cultural association.

According to founder Zlata Lund, the original core membership of RACS were a number of singers with whom Zlata was already acquainted back in Russia--they had been colleagues at the State Theater in Magadan.¹³ Within a few years, however, Americans, many with no Russian heritage (or Russian language facility), came to outnumber Russians within the group.¹⁴ (The author of this paper was a choir member from 2007 to 2010). Despite the preponderance of Americans, Russian immigrants continued to make up a substantial proportion of the group's members throughout the choir's life. I was able to speak with three immigrant members of RACS: founder, artistic director, and conductor Zlata Lund, and members Marina and Anna.¹⁵

Vivat Musica

Vivat Musica (often styled "Vivat Musica!") is the choir affiliated with the Polish Cultural Center (*Dom Polski*) in Seattle, WA. It was founded in 2004 and has been continuously active ever since, except for a hiatus during COVID.¹⁶ (Rehearsals started again in October of 2021).

¹³ The Magadan State Music and Drama Theater (*Магаданский государственный музыкальный и драматический театр*), also called the "Magadan Music and Drama Theatre named after M. Gorky". Zlata Lund, in conversation with the author, December 2021.

¹⁴ Zlata Lund, in personal correspondence with the author, November 2021.

¹⁵ My practice in this paper is to refer to public officers and artistic leaders of the choirs by full names, but to non-leading members by first names only.

¹⁶ Vivat Musica, "Vivat Musica! Choir at the Polish Cultural Center," Polish Home Association, 2021, <https://www.polishhome.org/vivat-musica/>. The author of this paper is presently the Conductor and Artistic Director of Vivat Musica.

As is the case with the Norwegian choruses, there is a history of Polish immigrant choirs in the U.S. stretching back to the 19th century.¹⁷ However, unlike ENMC, Vivat Musica has no organizational affiliation with any larger Polish choir association. It is, however, considered a “daughter organization” of the Polish Cultural Center, also known as the Polish Home Association, whose mission is to “promote and uphold such mutual interests as Polish culture, history, and education among the people of Polish descent as well as members of general public [*sic*] in Seattle and its vicinity.”¹⁸

Vivat Musica performs repertoire primarily in Polish, keeping to a relatively traditional set of hymns, carols, patriotic songs, and folk songs, mostly in four parts. Occasionally, Vivat Musica sings sacred music in Latin by Polish composers (a result of Polish culture’s long history with Catholicism). It may be for this reason that a Latin name (translation, “Long Live Music!”) was chosen for the choir.

For this paper, I was able to speak with four Vivat Musica members: Ewa, Iwona, and Mira, all Polish immigrants, and Basia, an American of Polish descent.

The Method

I distributed an initial questionnaire via email to each respondent. This questionnaire was altered depending on the given choir and whether respondents were likely to be immigrants or “heritage” singers. My general aim was to discover the relationship of the individual to music before leaving the home country (if the respondent was in the immigrant category), the reasons for joining the choir, and relationship of the choir’s work to their ethnic identity. If the respondent seemed inclined, and when logistics made it possible, I conducted a subsequent phone interview which allowed me to delve deeper into questions of identity and to allow the

¹⁷ Leon T. Blaszczyk, “The Polish Singers’ Movement in America,” *Polish American Studies* 38, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 50–62. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20148061>.

¹⁸ Polish Home, “Home,” Polish Home Association, 2021, <https://www.polishhome.org/>.

respondents to reminisce at greater length. In total, I conducted three phone interviews: two with RACS members, and one with an ENMC member.

Findings

In this section, I will place a premium on presenting verbatim quotes from my respondents. I am inspired by the ethnographic method of Juan Flores' book *The Diaspora Strikes Back*.¹⁹ Flores makes the individual stories of his interviewees the centerpiece of his book, and in the middle section, he presents the stories without comment. He presents each as an integrated narrative, something I do not have space for in the present paper; nevertheless, I intend to emulate his ethos of foregrounding the interviewees. In most cases, an answer from one respondent will stand in for a group of respondents with similar answers; in other cases, a response will be presented because it is especially unusual or interesting. In instances where I could not resist sharing an especially long quotation, I have used a smaller font.

Musical Experiences in the Old Country

My respondents expressed a range of experiences. Because the original founding members of RACS were a group of professional singers from Magadan, there is a bias toward highly-experienced musicians in my sample of three respondents (two of them were professional musicians from this original group; one, Marina, was not). The respondents from Vivat Musica are all amateur musicians and express a more generalized experience of music prior to leaving Poland. As you will see, Alf from ENMC has a unique story all his own.

Zlata Lund (RACS): *I was born to a singing mother and so was pretty much doomed to get a music education from very early age. At four and a half I was admitted to a special music pre-school at the Conservatory of Music[...]When I was six y[ears] o[ld] I went to a full curriculum music school[...]studying[...]piano[...] solfeggi, choir, music theory and music literature. After graduating from high school I got my degree at the College of Music and Arts in Magadan as a piano teacher. Then*

¹⁹ Juan Flores, *The Diaspora Strikes Back: Caribeño Tales of Learning and Turning*, (New York: Routledge, 2009).

I worked as a choir artist in the music theatre. As far [back] as I remember myself, we sang as a duet[, myself and] my mother Natasha.

Marina (RACS): *Growing up in a very little town of Drazhny in a remote Magadan Region, in the Russian extreme North-East, I had not had an opportunity to learn music or to have a voice teacher, but I had always enjoyed listening to music and loved to sing. My only exposure to the musical world was through the radio and the songs records [sic] on my parents' record player. As a child, most of all, I loved listening to the Radio Music Theatre shows that were broadcast on Saturdays. I marveled at magical stories, that later I learnt were based on operas' and ballets' librettos; I was mesmerized and enthralled by the beautiful music that made those stories so vivid in my imagination. I was very lucky to be exposed to the music of great composers, like Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Mussorgsky, Borodin, Rossini, Puccini, Wagner...right there in our small apartment.*

When I was seven, my mother jumped at the rare opportunity to sign me up for piano lessons with the "traveling" musician who came to town. I made the cut at his "auditions" and had a lesson together with the several other children. I remember I learned how to draw the treble clef. The same evening at home, with a great deal of excitement, with the ruler, I drew five lines on a sheet of paper and practiced drawing that mysterious sign again and again, looking forward to my next class. Alas! That was my one and only class (no rhyme intended). The musician turned out to be truly "a traveling": He collected the money and left.

Though I never learned to read music, I sang in a choir, participated in various musical productions throughout my grade and high school years, and later in life, as a university student, I was involved in planning and organizing student festivals and concerts and performed as well.

Iwona (Vivat Musica): *Music was always big part of my life.... listening to music, going to operas, playing piano, singing in choirs, casually singing with friends around camp fires or anywhere it was possible etc.*

Alf Knudsen (ENMC): *I personally felt 'deprived' of a real musical experience as a young person due to: WWII when Norway was run over by the Nazis and German forces, occupying the country for five years (1940-1945). When and if schooling took place, the limited programs were 'dictated' from Berlin. My schooling was to start in 1940.²⁰ Our schools became soldiers' barracks; my first days of school were in Frk Høie's (Miss H's) living room. Community groups were very restricted, band, orchestras, choruses & choirs were 'put on the shelves'...*

Because I had been 'farmed out' to my Grandparents in Stavanger, Norway in 1936 –(after my father's 'disappearance' in the US). My Mother returned to Brooklyn NY where I was born, to make a 2nd 'run for the gold' – our chances of 'reconnecting' abruptly stopped in 1940. My Grandfather died shortly thereafter and [grandmother] had little or no income... 'frills' such as joining the church boys' choir (one of the few permitted to function) were out of the question ...

Grandmother was one of 13 siblings – all decent singers. Growing up on a farm in Norway, singing was their entertainment, social outlet, etc.

No farm could sustain a family of that size and the children moved on, mostly in the vicinity, but the family contact maintained and the 'entertainment' was for the most part their family singing.

²⁰ From this clue, I deduce that Alf was born in 1934 or so, making him five, six, or seven in 1940, when primary schooling would normally begin. This would also accord with a later paragraph which implies (though the wording is ambiguous) that he was 17 in 1952. I did not ask Alf directly about his exact age.

On my Grandfather side, his father a barber by trade, was also a violinist and organizer of the (supposedly) first brass & woodwind band in Norway.

The little 'musical training' thus far [i.e. up to 1945] came 'from within'...

[...]

At the tender age of 17, Alf was invited to join the Stavanger Symphony Orchestra (Stavanger Byorkester) as 2nd Trombonist, a result of his determination and performances with Kongsgård skoleorkester, Ynglingen Musikkorps av 1882, Ynglingen Symfoniorkester (the local YMCA orchestra) and Stavanger Musikkorps av 1919.²¹ Having already appeared as soloist on trombone and euphonium, Alf's only 'formal' music education was at three intense live-in music seminars[...]

After having taught himself the bassoon – his instrument of choice in Ynglingen Symfoniorkester – he was invited to continue his bassoon 'career' in the Stavanger Symphony Orchestra during their 1953, 1956 and 1957 concert seasons.

He also sang in the school choirs whenever and wherever there was one.

Reasons for Participating in the Choir

The first quotation below, from Jeff Highland of ENMC, does a good job of expressing the range of reasons given by my respondents for their participation in their respective choirs. A recurring theme in my conversations with RACS members, which was not evident among respondents from the other two choirs, was a quasi-political mission: what founder Zlata Lund has called “people’s diplomacy”--members and leaders viewed RACS as playing a role in healing the Cold War animosities between American and Russian people.²²

Jeff Highland (ENMC): Clearly, the men who participate in our choir do so for musical reasons, and for social reasons. There's a true, sort of, singers' brotherhood among our guys. Music has a way--especially when you're making a harmony--of bringing people together in very nice ways[...]. That's a blessing. We meet and socialize and sing and rehearse because it's beneficial to us. But we do sing for a purpose: we prepare songs for concerts; we sing out in the community as often as we can. [Regarding his own personal reasons for participating]: Like many members of local choruses in the PCNSA, it was a family tradition. My step-father followed his father, and I joined to support my step-father. [...] I have a personal affinity to the musical culture expressed through rehearsing and performing with the Everett Chorus and with other choruses in the PCNSA.

Ewa (Vivat Musica): I participate in this choir because I love to sing and it is the only Polish choir in this area. It gives me a sense of belonging to Polish community and keeping the national identity. Also gives me a chance to explore songs from different parts of Poland. And to present them to our American friends. I like a camaraderie [sic] of our practices and keeping in touch with like minded friends.

²¹ This sentence and those that follow are in the third person because Alf is here “‘stealing’ some stuff from a bio by [his] daughter Kathleen.” Alf Knudsen, in personal correspondence with the author, December 2021.

²² This notion of “people’s diplomacy,” as we shall see in a later section, was conceived not only as operative between Russians and Americans, but also as an imperative to bring together and celebrate many other ethnicities that made up Anchorage, and Alaska at large.

Zlata Lund (RACS): *To answer your question what was the motive of leading RACS is this: simply to contribute to a social life around us, to be useful, to share our culture with people around us. Perhaps some political reason as well. We grew up during Cold War of lots of political propaganda pouring lies on each other. The Russian American political relationship was hardly ever good. When I came here I realized the extent of it and always wanted to object [to] it. I wanted to prove that we are good together, we contribute to each other in so many different ways, we can be friends and family etc. And I loved seeing it and doing it! That is why our fundraisers with Russian dinners and traditional fun times were equally important to the concerts on the stage. It was pretty much the mission. What was the source of energy to do it all? Singers, people! All who joined us along the way. I loved dearly and appreciated all and every one.*

Anna Bondarenko (RACS): *We wanted to continue Russian music tradition in Anchorage.[...] RACS brought friends and music together. It was more than just singing. It was like a family. We shared many great memories, singing, parting [partying?], traveling together.*

Notions of National Identity

I asked respondents (particularly those with whom I conducted phone interviews) to comment on how they define their identity, either their ancestral ethnicity or their national identity from their birth country. In line with Appadurai's notion of identities and communities consisting of a series of overlapping "-scapes," my respondents' answers ranged from enumerating personality traits, to offering political and religious definitions, to claiming cultural properties like art and literature.²³

Jeff Highland (ENMC): *The importance of Norway is that it ties me to my past[...] I'm proud to be of Norwegian ancestry[...] I think Norwegians, because of their struggle for independence in the 1800s, against Denmark and Sweden, have a particular affinity to their Norwegian culture. That Norwegian culture focuses a lot on nature, focuses a lot on family, focuses a lot on the sea, mountains, and a real attention to, and pride in, the country of Norway. I think that's one characteristic of Norwegians that we continue to see: a sort of love of country, heritage, and a real pride in what Norway has made of itself. [...] So that's one characteristic. What else? I think Norwegians don't brag; they're pleased with themselves and their country, but they're not very assertive, and that's always appealed to me. And, of course, I have always tied my Norwegian tradition to my Lutheran tradition. A lot of Norwegians[...], heritage-wise, have appreciated what their faith and their country mean to them.*

Zlata Lund (RACS): *Now, you're talking to a person who was born and raised during Soviet times. It is my identity, and all of those of my generation and a few generations before--not after, but before. What I was taught--to answer your question--what I was taught. Because it's two different things. How we develop*

²³ Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," *Public Culture* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1990).

our own identity, and what were we taught. Everywhere, in every country in the world, right? Some information we receive from schools and books and news media and all that [inaudible], but some of the identity people get from grandmother--sayings, traditions, fairy-tales, and it's a different area. Kind of a philosophical discussion. So my identity that I was taught was Soviet.

Marina (RACS): *[In] what it means to be me, being a Russian played a great role. Of course, with that came all the cultural aspects of being a Russian: literature, music, all kinds of art. But when I was growing up, we were certainly brought up with a, you probably would call it, a propagandistic slant--but we never thought of it that way. In school, we sang songs about "Mother Russia," and the image of my native land was of a loving, beautiful expanse, of a great space under the peaceful sky, gorgeous meadows, beautiful mountains: everything you can find that inspires peaceful coexistence, love towards each other, and pride in being Russian.[...] The spirit of Russia was [seen as] being a beautiful, powerful and peace-loving entity.[...] Yes, I think I have associated myself--I don't know how narcissistic that sounds; I don't want to sound like that--but I was truly proud of the accomplishments of Russian musicians and writers and artists.*

The Role of Music in Identity-Formation and Maintenance

All of my respondents, in one way or another, indicated that music plays a role in keeping them connected to their ethnic heritage or their country of origin. Zlata Lund and Marina, of RACS, also made comment on music's role as a means by which they imbibed the Soviet political identity in which they were raised, while the quote from Jeff Highland gestures toward the role of music in the original formation of the concept of the Norwegian nation.²⁴ This ethnography therefore belongs to a body of literature, going all the way back to Herder in the 18th century, that expresses the understanding that music is a central expression of, and important contributor to, national identity.²⁵

Basia (Vivat Musica): *Polish culture is centered around the songs sung at the events. They celebrated National Polish Holidays, gatherings, Holy days, and help[ed] the work go faster.*

Jeff Highland (ENMC): *We are very proud, those of us who are musical, that Norway continues to significantly rely on its musical traditions[...]. I've heard it said that the first things [any group of] early emigrants from Norway did after settling in this country were to build a church and to start a male chorus. In the 1800's, Norway*

²⁴ For more information on music's role in Russian and Soviet national identities, and particularly its intentional deployment by the Soviet government, see Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism from Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), and, in particular, Chapter 6 "Music Nationalism in Stalin's Soviet Union."

²⁵ For more on Herder and national identity, see W. Wilson, "Herder, Folklore, and Romantic Nationalism," *Journal of Popular Culture* 6 (1973): 819-35.

was trying to assert its independence from Sweden, and the singing of national songs became a way of celebrating the uniqueness of Norway.

Zlata Lund (RACS): *When we were growing up we were singing songs in choral groups, in schools. Mostly, I would say maybe 80%, of the musical literature and information we were getting in schools was patriotic, ideological, Lenin[...], and then Stalin, and all about those figures. Back then, it was quite powerful! [...L]ots of our ideology during Soviet times--the mechanisms of it, the technologies--were taken from the teachings of religion: Christianity, the Bible--the mechanisms only. It [Soviet ideology] was a religion. It's my own opinion--I didn't read it anywhere, it's my feeling of it. And we were just singing songs; the music was beautiful, but back then we were just learning what we were taught.*

Iwona (Vivat Musica): *Is this choir an important part of my Polish identity? For sure!!! [...Singing in this choir makes me feel proud and more Polish!*

Alf Knudsen (ENMC): *In spite of the hardships, (or perhaps because of) we went through, I have always felt a loyalty to Norway and grew to love its music. The more I studied it the 'closer we became' – perhaps the difficulties we went through 'together' gave us loyalty and strengthened our ties to the 'old country'.*

Keeping and Maintaining Identity: Aspects of Tradition and Transition

Perhaps the most thought-provoking area to which my interviews led was consideration of the various continuities and transformations of personal identity and self-perception that occurred upon immigration. I asked Zlata and Marina whether it was hard, easy, or automatic to hold on to their Russian identities after arriving in the U.S., and their answers are illuminating. They expressed a number of interesting assertions, including the idea that immigration caused them to appreciate aspects of their own identity that they had formerly disregarded or even looked down on. Jeff Highland's quote below does not answer this question directly, since Jeff is not an immigrant. But Jeff speaks of his own activities tying himself back to Norway, as well as Norwegian attitudes that he sees projected toward America, and therefore I see his answer as touching on analogous areas.

Alf (ENMC): *I have felt like an immigrant all my life. I have felt I was in debt for what I received and learnt during my formative years.*

Zlata (RACS): *Justin, it is not possible to lose your identity, I don't think. Maybe I shouldn't say that for everybody--I can just speak for myself. [...W]hen I came here, first learning the language was difficult. And then--many many people experienced this--we tried to lose our accent. I mean, those more-or-less intelligent people who speak their language well,*

and when you speak your language well, you want to speak other languages just as well. That's a natural drive! But then, very quickly, I realized: there is no way I'll lose my accent. I came to this country at 26, it's a little too late to lose the accent. So I had to, kind of, accept it. I said: well, okay, that's my identity.

*And then, I learned very quickly, by looking at other Russians who immigrated around my time, I saw that immigration can be of two types that I figured out: some people **assimilate**, and other people **integrate**. And I believe this may be applied to other people, other nations as well. Some people integrate into society, meaning: I am appreciating, and I am learning and consuming new culture, I am learning new rules, I'm learning a new philosophy of life, new laws to follow, but I also bring the best I know from my own culture to contribute to the common table: and that's where my singing, my RACS, my labor of love, came from. I believed that I do have something beautiful that I want to share with people. This is my identity, and I wanted to show people.*

But I met some other of my fellow Russians, who are of my age, who moved here a little bit before me[...]who assimilated: they wanted to forget all of their past, and be born new in this country, in this language. I don't know how successful they think they were, but I was very happy where I was. With RACS, you were witness to what we were doing, how we were doing it.

Earlier in our interview, Zlata commented on how age and the move to America changed her estimation of the Soviet propaganda songs she learned in her youth:

Back then, [the patriotic music] was not significant [not ascribed any significance], it was just common. We were going, we were taught. We did not appreciate, we did not think much about it. Only with time, with age, and when I moved to the United States, that's when realization came. It came right at the moment when I became older with RACS, and even now, looking back. I started analyzing, evaluating all of those songs, and it became near and dear to my heart. [laughs] You won't believe this, but it is very funny. My mother and I drove a new car we bought in Seattle back to Alaska. At moments when I was falling asleep, or was tired, Mom said, "let's sing! Let's sing something!" And we were singing those patriotic, propaganda songs that we sang in childhood, in school. It was so awesome. It was so powerful--it was good-quality music. It was not some simple "Twinkle, twinkle little star." Only now I realize: was it my identity? Probably! Probably.

A little later, Zlata observed how her new American perspective changed her estimation of Russian folk culture:

In addition to this, when RACS started, and we were having those dinners where we brought balalaikas [i.e. when Zlata began working with folk music seriously], then the Russian traditional, old, not-as-school-curriculum teachings--like wisdom--and depth, were coming. And only here in the United States, I started appreciating that. Digging, studying, learning, wondering about where these come from or those come from--I started studying my own history in-depth. That's how it happened with me.

Another thing I want to add to this: when I was in music college--like in every other college--there is elite, and there is primary. In my music college, solo instruments such as piano, violin were of the elite class. Then there were folk department faculty. Bayan, balalaikas, the folk-instrument orchestras. And, in our mind, our stupid, young, invincible mind, it was kind of second-class. Seriously! It was simpler, or whatever. It was very wrong to think that way, but it was a reality. And only when I moved to the United States, my goodness! I started appreciating our sarafans, our kokoshniks, those silly-looking things. If somebody in my younger days in music college had told me that I would be in a sarafan, in this dress, with my traditional head-piece, playing balalaika on the stage? If somebody would tell me this a long time ago, I would be offended--like, no way! Ever! But here, to me it was near and dear, and I appreciated every minute of it!

Marina (RACS): *Well, of course, I never thought about this concept of being Russian when I lived in Russia, but coming here to America, I realized how important it is for my personal identity, to recognize it. Perhaps, when establishing myself in a new place, [I thought] that*

would give me a certain standing, or security. Because transitioning into a completely new cultural environment could be overwhelming, and hanging on to what it means to be me [was necessary]. [...] On one side, I was so glad that I came from a different culture, a different country. On the other hand, there was so much to get used to, that sometimes, in that process of transition, my Russianism [sic] got in the way, because there were so many cultural differences that I had to cope with, and sometimes it was overwhelming. [...] I think it was pretty natural to me [to maintain a Russian identity]. Because I was able to speak English, it was easier for me, although I always was self-conscious about my accent, but I could get my ideas across and I felt, perhaps, more confident in accepting my Russianness, and expressing it to other people. And it may also be just my personality: I love to share what I have. My Russianness came in meeting friends, cooking Russian meals for them; with children I always read in Russian to them [...]. We always listened to Russian music and watched Russian movies. [...] We did maintain, always, those Russian traditions: we celebrated holidays, we cooked special meals for special occasions. [...]

[With] the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the devastation that came with it, and the hardships that my fellow countrymen experienced, [there was] a sense of belonging and guilt at the same time: that I am not there, sharing their suffering with them. It was very complex. A complex set of feelings.

Jeff Highland (ENMC): *I've been studying the Norwegian language for the last ten years, since my retirement. My commitment to that is pretty strong, I would say. I think the most important thing, to me, is that I've been proud to be of Norwegian ancestry because Norway is a country in Europe that has faced West, as opposed to East. Sweden and Finland look to Europe, but Norwegians have always looked to America, and so we have a significant Norwegian population in this country, and it's founded all sorts of communities across the country.*

Smaller and Larger Communities: The Choirs as Ambassadors

I was also interested in how these choirs relate to their larger surrounding communities. I was curious whether participants viewed the choirs as primarily aimed at their given ethnic community, or as outward-facing, as ambassadors to those outside their specific community. Ultimately, respondents gave answers that gestured in both directions.

RACS presents a special case here for two reasons. First, at the time of RACS' founding, the Russian community in Anchorage was small and rather disconnected, in contrast to the well-established Polish and Norwegian communities in Seattle and Everett, respectively. Second, RACS, as discussed earlier, viewed itself as having a uniting mission, not only between Russians and Americans, but, as Marina's answer will make clear, among the many ethnic groups that make up the Anchorage, and Alaskan, community. Multiculturalism has been a key aspect of Anchorage's identity and self-perception as a city, and Marina's comments speak to

this.²⁶ I will end this section, and the paper, with Zlata's particularly touching account of a very pronounced instance of "people's diplomacy" drawn from the history of RACS.

Jeff Highland (ENMC): *We sing out in the community as often as we can[...]We find the community very welcoming to us, when we can sing out. And when we have our Sangerfests, when all of our choirs on the [west] coast get together once a summer, we draw quite a lot of people from the area, wherever we're singing, and we sing in different cities up and down the coast.*

And we have quite a few Norwegian guys in our choir, but over the years, we've had all sorts of people.

Mira (Vivat Musica): *We call ourselves the "business card" of the Polish Community in Seattle. The variety of our repertoire shows Polish history and culture.*

Marina (RACS): *We made an emphasis on Russian-American, although the name does have a historic context. But the idea was, we wanted to bring Russians and Americans together, in spite of the years of animosity and government stand-offs, and all the difficulties and turmoil in the relationship between our two countries. We just wanted to show that, on the human basic level, we're all people with the same values, with the same main ideas of peace and happiness. We thought that music might bring out the best in people of both [cultures]. Anybody! We had a few Korean ladies and Filipino ladies coming to our concerts; they considered themselves American, and they wanted to learn about Russian and American music. I think it was a broader view of our purpose, not as narrow as just for the Russians. But it definitely played the role of bringing Russian people together, and showcasing the beautiful Russian music, folk music.[...]*

I also was so happy to sing "Sakura" in Japanese! It's just one of my favorites, ever! [...]Singing in different languages, for different audiences: that was also very profound. We didn't just sing music from Russia and America, because we wanted to reflect our community in Anchorage as well. [We sang in] Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Swahili[...]

And, of course, when we were putting together the program for the transfer of Alaska, the 150th anniversary, we also invited other artists, that could either perform the Native dance or the song in the [Alaska] Native languages. So we were not exclusively a Russian group for the Russian people. [...]For that project, we made a] great trip to Juneau and Sitka[...]We were in Sitka, and we were performing in the community center--the acoustics were awful, we couldn't see each other at all--but it happened that people really loved our performance! And one evening, we ladies were walking, just admiring Sitka's architecture and nature, and a group of Native ladies came and said, "are you the ladies from that Russian-American chorus that sang yesterday?" Of course, we said, "yes, we are." And they were so excited, and so thankful, they invited us to their very special ceremony of welcoming the herring. The herring were spawning, and they welcome that event with special dancing and singing. And, for the first time, I saw the real, tribal, beautiful performance of the Tlingit community, and we were just honored to be picked off the street and invited to this wonderful ceremony!

²⁶ Although this characterization is partially a reflection of my subjective impression as a native of Anchorage, one will find it echoed in Marina's comments. To give just one piece of evidence in support of this characterization, though, I will note that for decades now, many of Anchorage's secondary schools have ranked among the most diverse in the nation. See, for example, Matt Tunseth, "Anchorage Public Schools Lead Nation in Diversity," *Anchorage Daily News* (Anchorage, AK), May 23, 2015.

Iwona (Vivat Musica): *Singing beautiful Polish songs, at different occasions, for different people, in different places...being able to see people's emotions, their happiness, joy... or tears... I feel that we are needed, here in America.*

Zlata (RACS): *I always wanted to bring my singers, my American singers singing Russian music, to Russia. All of a sudden [in 2008], these people in Vladivostok decided to invite us. And that whole year, we were raising money, and people were planning, and I was doing all the paperwork, the passports and visas and stuff. And by July, everything was ready to be in Vladivostok in September. But in August 2008, there was a war between the Republic of Georgia and Russia[...], but the greatest information war happened between Russia and the United States.[...]The situation was not safe. And, my goodness, we were all concerned! To go, or not to go? God knows how it might develop: it could develop in much worse ways. [...]And my singers were raising questions during rehearsals. And I called everyone I knew in Russia, different parts of Russia, saying, "What should I do? Should I go or should I not? What's my responsibility? I have eighteen people with me." And everybody said, "it's okay, Zlata, you're fine." [...]All right!*

*I came to the rehearsal, and I said[...] "If there is a good time for us to go to Russia, this is the best time ever. In the United States, they're talking about how 'Russians are bad[...]' In Russia, they say, 'Americans are bad[...]' It's an informational war. All that Russians are seeing right now on their TVs are ugly Americans who are, whatever, politicians! And here we are. We are Americans who are singing Russian music for so many years, and we are singing it **that** well! We are people's diplomacy. We are people-to-people. We are manifesting the people's diplomacy. Politicians are coming and going, bringing their policies and taking them away with them. But us people, we stay. We should know each other, we should sing together, we should raise kids together. And that is our mission, so: we go to Vladivostok." And, we came to Vladivostok!*

And on that ferry [back to Vladivostok from a sightseeing trip the group took to Russian Island], there were people who were not smiling at all. My own Russian people were looking at me like, "oh, enemies." [...]And there was one [Russian] soldier who was sitting among us. And my co-organizers from Vladivostok, they started passing out bread and giving toasts[...]And I was saying my toasts, and with my toasts, I was letting [the other people in the boat] know who we are, and what we are doing here.

And then all of a sudden [tenor] Tim Fosket [a non-Russian-speaking American] said, "Zlata, may I sing my song?" and I said, "How are you going to sing your song?" And he was prepared! He had a little cheat sheet, a little book that he wrote the words in. And I said, "go ahead!" And he stood up, with his giant height, tall as he is, and he started singing that song. [sings:] "Я встретил вас - и все былое/ В отжившем сердце ожило..." And it's very beautiful, the most famous romance, a love song, in Russia. And, Justin, he sang it the way he never, ever sang it before. He brought tears to my eyes, with how heartfully he sang that. Even that little soldier, who [before] was sitting and not even looking at us, I remember that face: he was sitting and looking up to Tim with open mouth, amazed, like "wow!" I remember that image. My tears were pouring at how great a job he did. And that was it! That was the end of the war on that ferry.

People [outside our group] started asking questions, and they started accepting vodka and toasts, and the bread that was passed around. It was so touching to me: that's it! You see how simple it is; singing a song, and then the negative feelings toward each other were gone. That was one of the most incredible experiences and feelings. That's why I was doing RACS. It was phenomenal. They were asking where they could go to see our performances! Excellent.

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Chorus America. *The Chorus Impact Study: How Children, Adults, and Communities Benefit From Choruses*. Washington, DC: Chorus America, 2009.

This study by Chorus America seeks to ascertain the extent, and the effects, of choral singing in the United States. Although it is hardly a rigorous peer-reviewed study, it at least attempts to bring together extant data on the various choirs in operation at the time of its publication. The *Study* is updated and re-issued regularly, with the most recent edition being from 2019.

Flores, Juan. *The Diaspora Strikes Back: Caribeño Tales of Learning and Turning*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

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Knudsen, Alf Lunder. "The Norwegian Male Chorus Movement in America: A Study." PhD. diss. University of Washington, 1989.

Knudsen's dissertation proved an invaluable resource for understanding and contextualizing the information about the Everett Norwegian Male Chorus contained in this paper. Although I only cite Knudsen a few times, his work relates a rich history of Norwegian male chorus singing with discussions not just of the PCNSA but other regional organizations and the US, discussions of the changing repertoire over time, and much more. A fascinating resource for topics of music considered under the aspect of national or immigrant identities.

Den norske Studentersangforening. "The choir." studentersangforening.no. Den norske Studentersangforening, 2021. <https://www.studentersangforeningen.no/en/the-choir/> .

Pacific Coast Norwegian Singers Association. pcnsa.org, accessed 10 Dec 2021, <https://pcnsa.org/>.

The PCNSA website contains a wealth of helpful information about the association and its member choruses. I consulted pcnsa.org to determine the dates of Everett Norwegian Male Chorus's founding, the date of the founding of the PCNSA, and other details that provided background for my writing. Much of this information was also corroborated by Knudsen's dissertation.

Polish Home. "Home." Polish Home Association, 2021. <https://www.polishhome.org/> .

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That multiculturalism is--or, at least was, from the 90s through the early 2000s--a major part of the self-perception of Anchorage, almost went without saying to me as an Anchorage native. In fact, I did not even realize how unique Anchorage was in this regard until I lived in other cities. Calling up a hard source or statistic

to back this up would not be as simple as giving Anchorage's place on a ranking of cities by diversity. Anchorage's diversity is of a particular kind, based not only on how *many* members of given ethnic identities are to be found in the city, but also their integration and interaction. Many large cities that may be more diverse by mere population percentages are less diverse in experience and practice. The diversity of Anchorage's schools and individual neighborhoods (as the article makes clear, a particular district in Anchorage was actually the most diverse neighborhood in the U.S. in the 2010 Census) indicates the extent to which different ethnic groups actually live in the same areas and grow up together--whereas, in many large cities, the ethnic minorities are grouped into enclaves and individual school zones or neighborhoods show little diversity.

Vivat Musica. "Vivat Musica! Choir at the Polish Cultural Center." Polish Home Association, 2021. <https://www.polishhome.org/vivat-musica/> .

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Wilson's aim is to characterize the ideas and career of Johann Herder, and to demonstrate the importance of the figure and ideas of Johann Herder on the subsequent nationalisms that have arisen through the 19th and 20th centuries. Wilson's evidence comes from Herder's own writing first and foremost, but also from contemporaneous historical documents, from the writings of Herder's "intellectual descendants" in Germany, and from Herder's own influences. Wilson concludes that romantic nationalism is "first and foremost a folklore movement," and predicts that folklore will remain an essential element of nationalism for the foreseeable future. Folklore must be understood to include a wide range of cultural activities, especially music (although in Herder's work music was subordinate to folk poetry, the two must often have come hand-in-hand). Herder thus stands at the beginning of a long line of scholars who would situate cultural activity, including music, at the center of national identity. Even when later theorists deconstructed or problematized this relationship, they were still discussing the interaction between music and conceptions of national identity--a discussion that is ultimately unavoidable.