

A Humble man sings praises of men's choirs

By Jonathan Turner, jturner@qconline.com | Posted: Saturday, August 29, 2015 6:18 pm

ROCK ISLAND — Aaron Humble is singing a new tune at Augustana College, but it's one he has been practicing for his whole life.

The 37-year-old tenor, who has a bachelor's degree in vocal performance from Millikin University in Decatur, and a master's and doctorate in voice from Indiana University, is a new assistant professor of music at Augustana.

He conducts the Wennerberg 20-member Men's Chorus and teaches private voice, as well as music appreciation and ear training.

"I always told people, if I could find a job where I conducted a men's choir and taught voice, that would be my dream," Dr. Humble said. "The academic landscape of these jobs has gotten pretty ugly," with fewer and fewer available.

Dr. Humble, a native of northeast Ohio, who has sung in male choirs since his sophomore year of high school, has performed in nearly every state in the U.S., as well as in Canada, West Africa, Italy, France, the British Isles, the Caribbean, Oman, Dubai and Palestine, where he was a judge for three episodes of "Palestinian Idol" in July 2011.

During a 10-year tenure in the internationally known men's choir Cantus in the summer of 2011, Dr. Humble taught voice at Dar Al-Kalima College in Bethlehem, Palestine.

"It's really fascinating because all of the Palestinian cities are walled off from each other," he said. "They're very isolated and cut off from each other."

The college turned to the arts as a way for young Palestinian people to make a living, he said.

"They're putting together programs that would appeal to the tourists," he said.

During that summer, Dr. Humble worked with an Augie student who was doing an internship there.

"She actually accompanied me on piano in church one Sunday," he said. "She left a strong impression on



New Augustana college conductor of Wennerberg Men's Chorus, Aaron Humble.

me."

While with the nine-member Twin Cities-based Cantus, Dr. Humble also performed solo with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and Boston Pops and was heard many times on public radio on "Performance Today" and "A Prairie Home Companion."

Another Twin Cities resident — Quad City Symphony music director Mark Russell Smith — conducted the award-winning Cantus in Kurt Weill's "Seven Deadly Sins" in 2010 with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra.

Since its founding at St. Olaf College in 1995, Cantus has sung in more than 12 languages, including Japanese, Gaelic, Latin, Czech, Zulu, Hebrew, Balinese and Punjabi.

In men's choirs, "you get as close as brothers," Dr. Humble said, adding that tenors, baritones and basses get more chance to shine, compared to a full co-ed choir. "There's something really special about that. There's a safety you feel when you're with each other.

"Some guys are able to open up a little more, and sing in a different way, where maybe they'd be embarrassed to sing in front of sopranos and altos," he said.

While in the Twin Cities, Dr. Humble had a private voice studio, taught at McNally Smith College of Music, and was artistic director of the Minnesota Compline Choir.

Dr. Humble, who believes his performing career makes him a better teacher, said he was ready for a change. While he'll miss Cantus, Dr. Humble plans to sing in recital at Augustana and other area schools.