

VON TRAPP FAMILY

Life in America

Singing and Tours in America

Musical style and repertoire

The real-life Trapp family were a respected Austrian singing group throughout their career. However, their style was a world away from the Broadway and Hollywood crowd-pleasing popular numbers as later included in the musical and film versions of their lives. Many of their studio recordings survive and have been reproduced as contemporary CD compilations. As for their live performances, in his 2004 essay *Family values: The Trapp Family Singers in North America, 1938-1956*, Michael Saffle writes:

It is difficult to document today precisely what the Trapps performed and where they performed it. Only a very few of their programs have been reprinted. One of these—again, a Christmas program—identifies an arrangement of three short pieces (for "Antique Instruments") and a Sonata by Sammartini (presented by a "Quintet of Recorders") as the evening's principal instrumental selections; shorter vocal works included Praetorius's "Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen," a Monteverdi madrigal, Holst's "Midwinter," and an arrangement of "The Holly and the Ivy." Another program—unfortunately incomplete, but known to have been presented in 1943 at Boston's Jordan Hall—featured a song by John Dowland, transcriptions by Wasner of Tyrolean folk tunes, and a Trio for two recorders and viola da gamba composed by "Werner von Trapp." In spite of their instrumental accomplishments, however, the Trapps were above all a vocal ensemble that sang (and played) music together largely for religious reasons.^[1]

From there they went to the United States, where they applied for immigrant status in 1939. They arrived with very little money, having lost most of the family fortune earlier during a 1935 banking collapse in Austria. Once in the United States they earned money by performing and touring nationally and internationally, first as the "Trapp Family Choir" and then, the "Trapp Family Singers", a change suggested by their booking agent Frederick Christian Schang. After living for a short time in Philadelphia^[2] and then Merion, Pennsylvania, where their youngest child Johannes was born, the family settled in Stowe, Vermont, in 1941. They purchased a 660-acre (270 ha) farm in 1942 and converted it into the Trapp Family Lodge, initially called "Cor Unum". After World War II, they founded the Trapp Family Austrian Relief fund, which sent food and clothing to people impoverished in Austria. By now based permanently in the United States, the family performed their unique mixture of liturgical music, madrigals, folk music and instrumentals to audiences in over 30 countries for the next 20 years.^[3] They made a series of 78-rpm records for RCA Victor in the 1950s, some of which were later issued on RCA Camden LPs. There were also a few later recordings released on LPs, including some stereo sessions. The family singing group disbanded in 1957.