

## Singing in the New Year—*German in Song*

By Vicki Dischler



Students perform at their final *German in Song* concert. The concert, “Sing mal wieder: eine Feier deutscher Musik”, can be viewed at <http://vimeo.com/41162513>

Music is a powerful tool for language acquisition. Instructors at all levels use music in teaching German. I designed my *German in Song* course to embed into memory German language structures and phrasing through the medium of song, while dissecting the music for its historical and social context. As a lifelong performer of music, I wanted to involve students in the effort—and fun!—it takes for any group to work together to create a repertoire. I had been attending the concerts of various excellent a cappella groups on campus, which inspired the creation of *German in Song* (326).

My class design included an innovative format of student collaboration. For example, after singing each song, the students voiced ideas on how to modify the arrangement to facilitate their learning of language and music performance. Students studied relevant music terminology and were able to express their contributions exclusively in German. The culmination of the course was a public end-of-semester concert. My students came from a variety of musical backgrounds, including music concentrators, and experience with other choirs or bands. There was a great deal of talent in this unique group.

Students prepared for the singing portion of each class period with canons for three to five voices, then moved into more complicated pieces. The

semester began with students learning songs by the Comedian Harmonists, a German vocally-focused harmony ensemble that performed between 1928 and 1934. It was a great challenge to emulate the blended harmonies and instrument sounds of this witty group. I applied for and received a grant from Arts at Michigan. This allowed class members to attend Max Raabe and the Palast Orchester at Hill Auditorium on March 10, where we experienced songs from this era, including some that we were working on. We continued with works by Mozart, Schubert, and contemporary songs by the Wise Guys, an a cappella band from Cologne who sings about personal and political aspects of modern life. The potency of music for mastery of language was obvious as students often left the classroom singing and claimed to have the songs in their head “all the time”!

