Carlo Sperati began a new era in music at Luther College. He grew up in Norway where his father was a well-known conductor and performer. In spite of youthful evidence that he might be destined for a career in music, he decided at age 17 to go to sea. For seven years he worked on a variety of ships, sailing both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. When he finally docked in New York, rooming at the Brooklyn Norwegian Seaman’s Mission, he was contemplating his call to be a pastor; and, indeed, his purpose in coming to Luther College in 1884 was to prepare for the seminary. Sperati began using his musical gifts as soon as he arrived on campus. Organizing and conducting college musical groups, he also directed the Luren Singing Society and was organist and conductor of the Lutheran church choir.

After graduating from Luther and Luther Seminary, Sperati served parishes in Washington State. In addition he taught music courses and conducted the band at the newly formed Pacific Lutheran University. In 1905 Sperati answered the call from President C.K. Preus to come to Luther, succeeding Haldor Hanson who was the first professional musician on the faculty. Sperati was hired to teach both vocal and instrumental music as well as religion. He again became active in the surrounding community, resuming the conducting of Luren as well as the Lutheran church choir. After reorganizing the Decorah Choral Union, Sperati conducted the community’s first performance of The Messiah in 1907. He was the only full-time music faculty member until 1928.

Although he also conducted both the orchestra and the choir, Sperati focused his attention on the band. He soon organized a second band and a beginner’s band, and by 1911 one-third of the students played in one of them. A man of enormous energy, Sperati led a tour to the Pacific Northwest already in the summer of 1906. Regularly touring in the Midwest, the Concert Band traveled again to the Northwest in 1911 and quickly achieved national recognition.

The Norwegian Government invited the Band to Norway in 1914 to participate in the centennial observance of that country’s independence. The tour (beginning on April 15 and ending on August 19) included 73 concerts, one of which was in Chicago’s Orchestra Hall. On the 17th of May the Band marched in Christiania’s festive parade celebrating the Norwegian Centennial. The band toured Norway again in 1936 as part of Luther’s Diamond Jubilee.

Many Luther College graduates, inspired by Sperati, went on to successful careers as teachers and directors of music. Luther honors their work by granting the Carlo A. Sperati Award to an outstanding music educator, the first to Weston Noble in the college’s centennial year of 1961 and annually at Homecoming since 1971.