

2018 China Inner Mongolia International Choral Week

Ki Adams, IFCM Board member

Inner Mongolia remains deep inside you like a glass of good wine that warms the stomach even after drinking it. Its soft but contrasting colours, the gentle soul of the people, curiosity towards what, at first glance, seems different... but then I found myself in the universality of music! Since I had already participated in the first edition of this choral festival last year, I was prepared for what awaited me, but the experience went beyond every expectation. Friendships were strengthened, curiosity towards Chinese music grew, and everything became, in the end, very familiar and exciting. (Andrea Angelini, International Choral Bulletin editor)

This past summer, for the second time, IFCM partnered with the Culture Department of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region to present an international, non-competitive choral event as part of IFCM's mandate to facilitate choral music education and development throughout the world. Approximately 400 choristers from 34 countries and 5 continents gathered on the grasslands of Inner Mongolia to sing for friendship and cultural exchange and to participate in professional development. Held in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia (10-17 July 2018), the 2018 China Inner Mongolia International Choral Week was organised by the Inner Mongolian Bureau of National Art Troupes, a fully state-run, non-profit cultural institution representing nine art troupes of the Inner Mongolian National Song and Dance Theatre. Participating choirs included the 2018 World Youth Choir, six guest international choirs, and three Chinese choirs:

- 2018 World Youth Choir (Helene Stureborg and Jonathan Velasco, conductors)

- Coro Arturo Beruti (María Elina Mayorga, conductor) – Argentina
- Ensemble Vocal Sénior de la Salle (Robert Filion, conductor) – Canada
- Le Chant sur la Lowé (Yveline Damas, conductor) – Gabon
- Pannon Voices Choir Mixed (Adrienne Vinczeffy, conductor) – Hungary
- Gioventù in Cantata (Cinzia Zanon, conductor) – Italy
- Chulalongkorn University Chamber Choir (Pawasut Piriyapongrat, conductor) – Thailand
- Mongolian Youth Choir of Inner Mongolia Bureau of National Art Troupes (Xue Wei, conductor) – China
- Teachers Choir of Xiamen EgretIsland Voices (Lin Peirong, conductor) – China
- China National Symphony Orchestral Chorus (Wang Linlin, conductor) – China

The festival opened with the *Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Concert Night* and concluded with a closing ceremony concert, *Songs in One World: Singing across the Grasslands*. Both concerts took place at the Inner Mongolia Wulan Theatre and featured all ten choirs. Each concert ended with a special massed choral work commissioned for the 2018 China Inner Mongolia International Choral Week. *Song of Friendship and Peace* was sung by all the choirs together and accompanied by the Symphony Orchestra of Inner Mongolian Bureau of National Art Troupes. Composed by well-known Chinese composer Gan Lin, the lyrics were written by IFCM President, Emily Kuo Vong.



World Youth Choir Session 2018, Helene Stureborg, Jonathan Velasco (conductors) at the Great Wall © CICF

Concert Performances

Throughout the five days, choirs performed in a variety of venues in Hohhot, Baotou, and Erdos in individual concerts and in *Performances of Choirs from Home and Abroad* concerts featuring multiple choirs.

The number of performances, the outstanding concert halls, the close contact with the culture of Inner Mongolia, and the hospitality of its people produced a unique and unforgettable experience. It has been enriching also to encounter the cultures represented by choirs from Gabon, Thailand, Hungary, Canada, and Italy with which we shared some concert galas and exchange activities. No less significant was the opportunity to experience the musical traditions of Inner Mongolia (its instruments, costumes, and voices) which has been absolutely nutritious for our spirit. (María Elina Mayorga, Coro Arturo Beruti, Argentina)

The choir appreciated a very good opportunity to travel and sing in a friendly, non-competitive environment. The members enjoyed singing on a big stage with a beautiful backdrop and in a fine music hall. (Pawasut Piriyapongrat, Chulalongkorn University Chamber Choir, Thailand)

It was interesting to meet choirs from other countries; we appreciated both their musical performances and the traditional costumes of several of the musical ensembles. It was great to get an insight into the choral cultures of each other. (Adrienne Vinczeffy, Pannon Voices Mixed Choir, Hungary)

Our first encounter with the other participating choirs was

backstage at the rehearsal for the opening ceremony concert. We did not speak the same languages, but we shared our love for music. We spontaneously sang together an African song, “Yaya Noé”, accompanied by the percussionist of the Italian choir. The magic of music and friendship took place. We gave the best of ourselves, to share the beauty of Africa within us, and tried to keep all these voices from all over the world with us. (Yveline Damas, Le Chant sur la Lowé, Gabon)

Sharing the stage with some of the finest choral ensembles from all over the world has ignited in us the desire to do our best and, at the same time, let ourselves be enchanted by new sounds and traditions. The educational, artistic, human, and cultural value of this experience has fully met our expectations through the service and the way the organisation took care of us. (Cinzia Zanon, Gioventù in Cantata, Italy)



Coro Arturo Beruti, dir. María Elina Mayorga, on a stage nicely set up for them by the local organiser © Romina Suarez

International Choral Forum and Masterclasses

In addition to choral performances, IFCM organised an International Choral Forum for choral conductors in the region and two mornings of International Masterclasses for conductors, university music students, and school-age choral singers. The masterclasses were presented by three IFCM board members (Cristian Grases, USA; Niels Graesholm, Denmark; and Ki Adams, Canada) and *International Choral Bulletin* editor, Andrea Angelini (Italy).

I gave a lecture on Renaissance choral music in two important Italian cities: Venice and Rome. I was struck by the curiosity of local musicians towards topics that could seem, apparently, light-years away from their culture. It is really true that music has a great power to arouse unexpected wonders. (Andrea Angelini, International Choral Bulletin editor)



Chulalongkorn University chamber Choir, dir. Pawasut Piriyaongrat, Thailand, on a stage nicely set up for them by the local organiser © Kunchit Jitratan

Cultural Opportunities

Throughout the festival, complementary cultural excursions were arranged to museums, temples, and horse shows.

The spectacular and professional horse show brought members of our choir to tears; the museum visit added new information to our knowledge of your magnificent history and culture; the visit to the temple was an impressive experience; and the fantastic new buildings of the developing and increasingly beautiful city of Hohhot will stay in our memories forever. (Adrienne Vinczeffy, Pannon Voices Mixed Choir, Hungary)

Mongolia amazed us with the beauty and singularity of its songs, by the richness of its costumes. We were particularly moved by a life-sized show about the history of Inner Mongolia. We discovered a tradition, a nation's attachment to horses, in a grandiose show that moved some of us to tears. (Yveline Damas, Le Chant sur la Lowé, Gabon)



Pannon Voices Choir Mixed, dir. Adrienne Vinczeffy, Hungary, on a stage nicely set up for them by the local organizer

Tour Components

Due to the extraordinary partnership between IFCM and the Culture Department of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, all accommodation, meals, and ground transportation were provided by the host organisation. To facilitate all tour activities, each choir was provided with several on-the-ground assistants who served as interpreters, tour guides, and general support staff.

After a long journey, nearly 26 hours including stopovers, our group, composed of 35 people, arrived in Hohhot, Inner

Mongolia, and was met by two guides: a smiling young lady and a tall young man, dressed in pure Mongolian attire, a majestic tunic, a beautiful belt, and leather boots. We were immediately comforted by their welcoming smiles and the promise of a rest in a real bed! (Yveline Damas, Le Chant sur la Lowé, Gabon)

The expenses were low as we were only responsible for our own airfare. The organisers took very good care of us. The food was delicious, and the hotel was open to menu suggestions. It was clear that the organisers went above and beyond to make our stay comfortable so that we could focus only on singing well on the stages. Our interpreter and choir liaison did a really good job translating and organising things for us. We were prepared to be very flexible so, for us, there were no serious problems. Everything went considerably smoothly. (Pawasut Piriyapongrat, Chulalongkorn University Chamber Choir, Thailand)

The nice hotel; the fantastic, delicious and exciting dishes; and the kind gesture of samples of your cuisine awaiting us in our rooms after the concerts all contributed to an unforgettable experience and our desire to visit your fascinating city once again in future. (Adrienne Vinczeffy, Pannon Voices Mixed Choir, Hungary)



Le Chant sur la Lowé (Gabon) and the Inner Mongolian Youth Choir of Inner Mongolia Bureau of National Art Troupes sharing culture, singing and more © Christian Rekoula

IFCM is committed to creating and organising international choral events that have the potential for changing the ways human beings view those who come from different cultural backgrounds and traditions. The singers who participated in the 2018 China Inner Mongolia International Choral Week returned to their own countries with new knowledge of other cultures, new understandings of each other, new appreciation for differences and commonalities, new choral repertoire from other musical traditions, and new friends around the world.

Cultural exchanges promote mutual appreciation, and the sharing of art can be achieved through mutual learning. When the World Youth Choir sang Eight Chestnut Horses and The Moon Represents my Heart, when the Teachers Choir of Xiamen EgretIsland Voices sang Pastoral, when everyone sang The

Beautiful Prairie and My Sweet Home, we all, as choral artists, felt the charm of music without borders, the charm of cultural diffusion. In the future, we sincerely hope that we will have the honour of inviting more friends from five continents to bring us more beautiful voices and that we have the opportunity again to bring the voices of Inner Mongolia to the world. (Wuyuntana, Mongolian Youth Choir of the Inner Mongolian Bureau of National Art Troupes, China)



Gioventú in Cantata, dir. Cinzia Zanon, Italy © Gioventú in Cantata

The China Inner Mongolia International Choral Week will take place again in 2019. Read how Cristian Grases described his experience in Hohhot this summer and start thinking about bringing your choir to Inner Mongolia next summer.

Every region in the world has a special pride. People are

deeply connected with their landscape, their food, their architecture, their music, their dances, their handcrafts, their history and heritage, etc. In fact, people from a particular region are what they are because they become a living expression of the sum of all of these regional elements of life. I have heard this phenomenon commonly referred to as the “culture” of a region... we each have our own. This summer I had the privilege of experiencing the culture of Inner Mongolia. I was delighted to taste the vast culinary spectrum presented to us at each meal, I lost myself in the beauty of the landscape, I felt reflected in their happiness and joy for life, I was touched by their intimate connection with nature and their ancient ties with horses and, most of all, I was mesmerised by the depth of their songs. The people were kind, friendly, and first-rate hosts. They were also eager to learn about other cultures, and I was glad to share some aspects of mine as a Latin-American native. This sharing of cultures made us instant friends. I hope many ensembles around the world will consider coming to this wonderful festival to graciously gift their culture to the Inner Mongolian people. Be prepared to be profoundly changed as you dive into theirs. (Cristian Grases, IFCM Executive Committee member)

Look out for the Call for Choirs soon on the IFCM website and the IFCM eNEWS. You will not be disappointed!

Edited by Mirella Biagi, Italy/UK



Ki Adams, a native of Birmingham, Alabama (USA), is an honorary research professor at Memorial University of Newfoundland (Canada) where he taught in the undergraduate/graduate music and music education programs for 25 years. Currently a board member for the International Federation of Choral Music and Treasurer of the World Youth Choir Foundation, Ki is Founding Co-Director of The Singing Network, a collective for generating and producing a series of voice-singing-choral experiences ranging from workshops, seminars, master-classes, and dialogues to the biennial *International Symposium on Singing and Song*. Email: kiadams@mun.ca