

America Cantat 7, Bogotá, Colombia, 23-30 March 2013

*It is a pleasure for me to share feedback from participants and workshop leaders in order to give an objective and personal view of the event, which was organized by the Choral and Orchestral Corporation of Colombia (CCOC). The festival was attended by 1,200 participants representing 36 nations. A total of 51 choirs took part and there were eleven workshops, three round tables, the world premiere of the commissioned work *Canta América*, a parade and massive welcome concert for local and international delegations in the Bogotá bull ring. Audience members totaled 21,000 and they attended fifty-two concerts in sixteen venues.*

*Oscar Escalada
composer, arranger, musical director and musicologist*

América Cantat VII Leadership

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- Music (América Cantat): **Ricardo Denegri**
- Permanent Secretary-America Cantat: **Oscar Escalada**



Oscar Escada and Ricardo Denegri, co-founders of America Cantat Choral Festival

Commentaries on the Event

Koenraad De Meulder (Amberes, Belgium), Managing director-Koor&Stem, Flanders Choral Organization, Treasurer- European Choral Association – Europa Cantat

Low Budget-Rich Rewards

The 'Cantat concept' has spread throughout the world. Turin, Italy presented the eighteenth Europa Cantat festival, and Bogotá, Colombia hosted the seventh America Cantat. Preparations for the nineteenth Europa Cantat in Pecs, Hungary are well underway. The idea continues to attract mainly young

singers from Europe, Latin America and many other parts of the world. At América Cantat VII more than 1,500 participants were exposed to the rich and varied choral repertoire of Latin America, including music from countries such as Argentina, Venezuela, Cuba, and of course Colombia. The event began with a gala opening concert in the Bogotá Bull Ring, in which the participants were encouraged to take an active role in the week's events. Arrangements of popular tunes such as *Colombia Tierra Querida*, *Son de la Loma* and *La Pollera Colorá* almost brought down the house.



Opening official greetings with Jorge Zorro Sánchez, AC VII Pro-Tempore President, the Bogotá Cultural Deputy and Ricardo Denegri

The high point of the official opening in the Teatro Mayor was the wonderful *Ecological Operetta* in Four Acts by Alberto Grau, arranged for orchestra by the young Colombian conductor and composer Jorge Alejandro Salazar. María Guinand led a brilliant and energetic concert with choir and orchestra made up entirely of young musicians, and the performance was given a standing ovation. The premiere of *Canta América*, a new work by Spanish composer José Buenagu, was also given.



*Opening concert, theatre
Mayor Julio Mario
Santodomingo*

During the morning sessions there were workshops with varied repertoire. The organizers of the festival invited conductors and teachers from around the world: Robert Harris (USA), Mark Anthony Carpio (Philippines), Elise Bradley (Canada), Luimar Arismendi (Venezuela), Digna Guerra (Cuba), Silvana Vallesi (Argentina), Ricardo Portillo (Argentina), Hiran Santos Monteiro (Brazil), Julián Gómez (Colombia), and Josep Vila (Spain).

The seventh America Cantat confernece also offered performance opportunities for choirs throughout Latin America and abroad. The Latin American choirs Schola Juvenil de Venezuela and Entrevoces from Cuba were among the best at the festival. The Santa Cecilia choir from Colombia and North Sydney Choir (Australia) joined forces to present a fine concert of the Mass in C Minor (KV 427) by Mozart in Cristo Rey church. Studio Vocale from Germany gave several fine concerts in Bogotá, and pop groups Witloof Bay (Belgium) and Cat's Pajamas (USA) gave performances of lighter repertoire.

The Time Ensemble was, without a doubt, a standout in the concert programming. The choir is made up of former singers in the World Youth Choir, and as such, is an important ambassador for the cause. A beautiful piece by American composer Dan Bosque featured on the program. We can expect much from them in the future. Finally, the University of the Philippines

Madrigal Singers and the Swingle Singers gave the fine performances we have come to expect.



Michael Anderson, IFCM President, and Oscar Escalada, with the Swingle Singers

América Cantat has represented itself well. An enthusiastic group of volunteers proved that a great undertaking need not require a large budget, which gives us much to reflect upon for similar European festivals.

Virginia Bono (Santa Fe, Argentina) Director of Estudio Coral Meridies, Coro Juvenil AsomArte and Coro Femenino del Instituto Coral de Santa Fe.

América Cantat VII was everything that I had hoped it would be: a place to see colleagues, an atmosphere of constant creativity, multiple stages with varied offerings, a chance to meet, create and make contacts, and an opportunity to learn and take in great music. We enjoyed special guest choirs of very high quality, which introduced new music as well as standards of the choral repertoire. Other choirs, many of them from Colombia, took roles as workshop ensembles with energy and intent. We enjoyed unforgettable concerts, in corners of the hotel, in open air on Monteserrate hill, in churches, museums and theaters. The opening was colorful and enjoyable,

in best Latin American style, and the official opening concert was a model of organization and musical excellence as groups of young musicians from Colombia, Venezuela and Australia came together under the baton of great maestros.

I returned happy to my country, renewed and comforted by delightful sounds and new friends, with new ideas and energy. I will always remember the Colombian landscape, as well as the happy, easy smiles of the MADZ, Time Ensemble, the precision and musicality of Entrevoces, the energy and rhythm of the young singers of the Schola Cantorum of Venezuela, the beauty of the works presented by the Coro Universitario de Mendoza, and the joy of so many other choirs which added their voices in Bogotá.

Jorge Córdoba Valencia (México DF, México) Composer and Music Director: Ensemble Vocal Femenino Tuúmben Paax

There is a well-known saying "It was better in the old days". Sometimes it holds true, but not in the case of América Cantat. I have had the good fortune of attending the previous two festivals (Mexico 2004, Cuba 2007) and have seen the same emphasis on quality and improvement year after year. The excellent organization of this festival created a unique atmosphere and such wonderful energy that even the most dour individual was changed. Group singing always creates magic moments.

Another great aspect was the generous audience welcome. Those not necessarily choral cognoscenti showered the performers with applause. Choral music has an advantage over other musical forms; the instrument is the human voice itself, and we indulge in two art forms at once: music and poetry, which are unquestionably sisters in the service of great art.



Incorporating Colombia into OAC. Left to right: D.Guerra (Cuba), J.Córdoba (México), O.Escalada (Argentina), J.Sánchez (Colombia), R.Denegri (Argentina), M.C.Prieto (Colombia), M.Guinand (Venezuela) and M.B. de Calle (Colombia)

Robert A. Harris (Evanston, Illinois) Orchestra director and composer, Professor Emeritus of choral studies, Bienen School of Music of Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois

It was a great pleasure to have been a workshop leader in the América Cantat VII festival. It was indeed a delight to work together with choral singers, directors and fellow clinicians from America and Europe. My workshop was well attended, with between 125-150 participants, the majority of whom also participated as singers. There was a variety of experience among the singers, from members of choirs participating in the festival to others with less experience in performing and reading music. But all were highly engaged in learning more about the African-American repertoire (spirituals), and especially interested in the point of view of an African-American choir director. The outpouring of positive comments and expressions of gratitude for what we learned and experienced in rehearsal and concert was moving and memorable.

This wonderful experience offers further proof that choral music knows no cultural or linguistic boundaries, and that the Afro-American spiritual is loved and appreciated by all peoples of the world.



Left to right: María Guinand (Venezuela), Jorge Alejandro Salazar (Colombia), Robert Harris (USA), Oscar Escalada (Argentina), Josep Vila (Spain), Francesco Leonardi (Italy), Jorge Córdoba (México) and Ricardo Denegri (Argentina) at Monserrate sanctuary

Josep Vila i Casañas (Barcelona, España) Director of the Orfeó Català and Cor de Cambra del Palau, Professor of Choral Conducting at the Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya

América Cantat VII, which took place during Holy Week in Bogotá, was a wonderful experience. From the point of view of a European conductor, submerging myself for a week in high-quality Latin American repertoire was both fascinating and enriching. I was especially impressed with many of the modern

compositions, arrangements of folk music, and works based on Caribbean rhythms and dances. The high level of the arrangements, and in some cases the level of virtuosity of the performers, left me amazed, and I must mention the Coro Universitario de Mendoza, Argentina, the Joven Coro Sinfónico Simón Bolívar and the Joven Schola Cantorum de Caracas, both from Venezuela, and the Coro Arcadia from Colombia. Watching Cuban conductor Digna Guerra, and the purity, efficiency and expressiveness of her gestures, made a huge impression. The sound of her choir, Entrevoces, had an extraordinary transparency, and her interpretations never failed to inspire.

I have nothing but words of appreciation and admiration for conductor Cecilia Espinosa and the members of her choir Tonos Humanos, who lent such energy to my workshop on Renaissance European Madrigals. My heartfelt congratulations to all who worked on this event. Be sure not to miss miss the next one: América Cantat VIII.

Translated from the Spanish by Joshua Habermann, USA

Edited by Carmen Torrijos, France