

# Conductor's Training Around the World

## TRAINING CHORAL CONDUCTORS IN AFRICA

*Yveline Damas*



African Youth Choir, WSCM 2014,  
Seoul, Rep. Korea

## Current Status

There are two sides to the training of choral conductors in Africa. While academic musical instruction is well established in public and private educational institutions in Anglophone countries (graduate schools, conservatories, universities, institutes), with courses of study offering specialization in choral conducting, the absence of curricula in this last area in the majority of the Francophone countries of sub-Saharan Africa is striking, despite the large number of choirs. Because of this, the *Chefs de choeurs sans frontières* (*Conductors Without Borders*) initiative represents a priceless resource.

## Profiles of the conductors

The choirs are principally church choirs, and the conductors fall into three groups:

- those who have had academic training in music followed by studies in choral conducting;
- those who have had academic training in music education (music teachers) or playing an instrument and who have taught themselves choral conducting through courses or short-term instruction in music (solfège, conducting, or harmony) at the local or international level (internships, festivals, etc.)
- those who have not had academic training but are self-taught thanks to courses or training sessions, and who, after having been members of choirs for varying lengths of time, are driven to be choral conductors by need or because of their passion for this kind of music

## The initiatives

### In Senegal:

- *Les Journées Chorales* (Choral Days) (2004, 2005, 2006, 2007), organized by Emmanuel Noisette, with master classes led by well-known conductors with the support of

the French Cultural Center

- The *Choeurs À l'Unisson (CAL'U)* (Choirs in Unison) festival (2001, 2012, 2013, and 2017), with workshops in conducting led by experienced conductors
- The *sessions intensives estivales* (intensive summer courses) of the *École Nationale des Arts* (10 days: theory, intonation, sight-reading, singing, etc.)

### **In the Democratic Republic of the Congo:**

- Workshops in singing and choral conducting through the *Fédération Congolaise de Musique Chorale (FCMC)* (Congolese Federation for Choral Music)
- Beginners' classes led by Ambroise Kua-Nzambi Toko with the *Académie Africaine de Musique Chorale* and, since 2020, with his *Institut Facultaire de Musique (IFM)*, which, among other areas of study, includes academic curricula in choral singing and conducting (LMD System: Bachelor [Licence], Masters, Doctorate)

### **In Togo:**

- Training classes organized by a government minister with the YMCA in 1996
- Workshops in choral conducting in Lomé with the Goethe-Institut in 1997 and 1998
- Since 2016: workshops in conjunction with festivals in several cities, with Sylvain Gameti and the *Association Togolaise des Compositeurs de Musique Chorale* (Togolese Association of Composers of Choral Music).

## **“Conductors Without Borders” in Africa**

Three principal goals:

- provide choral conducting students with a foundation in solfège and music education
- provide instruction in choral conducting
- discover and expand repertoire

*Conductors Without Borders* began its work in Africa in 2007. Financing was provided by local federations, individual donations, À Coeur Joie International, and the Cultural Services of French embassies in sub-Saharan Africa: the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Togo, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Benin, and Cameroon. Beginning in 2014, financial support from the IFCM allowed Choral Conductors Without Borders to expand its efforts in these countries and to extend its activities to Anglophone countries: Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya.

## Challenges

- a growing need for the management of emerging choirs: living quarters, schools, universities, entrepreneurship
- a growing demand for the technical expertise required to open up to modern and contemporary repertory and the global network
- expanding the role of the choral conductor in technical, managerial, marketing, social, and technological activities
- professional development of choral conductors through career development and assistance in the search for employment



**Yveline DAMAS** is a choral conductor from Gabon, and co-founder and Artistic Director of the vocal group “Le Chant sur la Lowé” (Gabon). She is a founding member of the Afrikiyo! movement to promote music and choral singing in Africa. She is president of the Confédération Africaine de Musique Chorale (CAMC-ACCM), and initiated and participated in the creation of the *Choeur Africain des Jeunes (African Youth Choir)*, which brings together young choral singers of several African nationalities. Yveline is a vice-president of the International Federation for Choral Music and of *À Coeur Joie International*.

*Translated by Richard Kutner, USA*

## TRAINING CHORAL CONDUCTORS IN ASIA

*Ko Matsushita*



Asia Pacific Youth Choir, WSCM 2014, Seoul, Rep. Korea

When Ko Matsushita was asked to write about “How to Train Choral Conductors in Asia,” he felt that the scope of Asia is so vast, and there are so many countries that it is impossible to talk about “the Asian way.” Therefore, he offered to introduce his own method (see his article here). He also wrote a brief report on the current status of choral conducting education in some of the leading choral countries in Asia. Here it is.

### Malaysia

There aren't any Conducting Courses in any of the universities or colleges that have a Music Department. In fact, there are only a handful of universities and colleges that offer the single-semester conducting subject. Therefore, if anyone is keen to learn about choral conducting, they will look for

private teachers. The conducting teachers who have graduated mainly come from overseas.

## **The Philippines**

Students can study at the University of the Philippines, St. Paul University, University of Santo Tomas, etc. There are many good instructors.

## **Taiwan**

Fu-Jen Catholic University, National Taiwan Normal University, National Sun Yat-sen University, and several other universities have doctoral or master's choral conducting graduate programs. In addition, the Taipei International Choral Festival offers a week-long conducting master class and basic class every summer.

## **Singapore**

There are no formal conducting courses from colleges and universities. Most of the conducting courses and workshops are organized by the people from the local choral community. London College of Music offers Choral Conducting examinations at the diploma level (Associates, Licentiates, Fellowship). The Singapore Federation for Choral Music and Konzert Pte Ltd has been mentoring and preparing candidates to take this examination for the past ten years.

## **Hong Kong**

The Chinese University of HK Bachelor/MA has conducting courses, and HK Baptist University DMus has the option to major in conducting courses.

## **Indonesia**

No university or college has conducting course or offers a conducting degree. The music education departments in two of the universities offer conducting courses for one semester and Choral literature as optional courses. Conductors learn

conducting from workshops offered annually by the Foundation of Choral Music Development as well as by individual choral activities. Those who want to pursue conducting degree would go overseas.

## Thailand

There is no choral conducting program. However, Ms. Pawasut Jodi Piriyapongrat offers the class as part of the Music Education program at Chulalongkorn University at undergraduate and master's levels. In addition, Mahidol University also has choral conducting as an elective at the master's level.

## Japan

Some music colleges offer courses for choral conductors, but they are very few and far between. Therefore, if someone wants to study choral conducting, many of them study with a teacher privately or travel overseas to study.

There are also a lot of workshops on Choral conducting organized by private sector, such as my school, Young Choral Academy.

*Edited by Rebeka Angstmann, UK*



Composer and conductor born and raised in Tokyo, **Ko Matsushita** is currently the conductor and artistic director of 15 choirs, which are often invited to perform not only in Japan, but all over the world. They have also achieved excellent showings in the choral circuit and have won awards in international competitions. Matsushita is a prolific composer and arranger and his works are performed around the world. His compositions have various styles, such as works based on traditional Japanese music, Masses, motets, etudes for choirs, and so on. His work has been published extensively in Japan, Europe, and the United States, such as in Edition KAWAI Tokyo, Edition ICOT Tokyo,

Carus-Verlag Stuttgart, SULASOL Helsinki, among others. In 2005, he was awarded the Robert Edler Prize for Choral Music. Recently, in 2019, he gave a keynote speech at the International Kodály Symposium in Kuching, Malaysia. He is currently the CEO of the International Choral Organization of Tokyo, the Artistic Director of the Karuizawa International Choral Festival, Tokyo International Choir Competition, and Japan International Choral Composition Competition. He is also an Honorary Member of the National Association of Italian Choir Directors, a member of the Founding Directors of the Asian Choral Association, and a member of the World Choir Council. Furthermore, he is a Special Guest Professor at Kobe College. <https://komatsushita.com/en/>

## TRAINING CHORAL CONDUCTORS IN EUROPE

*Benjamin Hartmann*



EuroChoir 2018



## Music Academies

Traditionally, music academies (and some universities) offer a formal education in choral conducting. While previously there existed only programs for school music, church music, or orchestral conducting, in which choral conducting could be studied as a minor or secondary field of study, choral conducting has since established itself as its own artistic discipline. In bachelor's and master's programs and sometimes in masterclasses one can learn all the tools of the trade of choral conducting: conducting technique, rehearsal methodology, repertoire, music theory and aural training, piano and voice – as well as themes such as voice physiology, old and new music, vocal improvisation, dealing with young and old voices, etc. The training is quite wide-ranging, but often takes place in the sheltered cosmos of a college, which limits practical performance opportunities. Choral conducting students generally have individual instruction in the main subject of choral directing, voice lessons, and lessons in various other subjects as well as instruction in front of an ensemble, where they direct a studio choir and are guided in rehearsals (in a conducting internship or practice choir). Choral conducting students frequently sing in the university choirs or chamber choirs and also take on rehearsals and conducting duties with the university ensembles.

## Exchange Program

Through networking in programs such as ERASMUS+, one can get a much clearer picture of the European choral landscape. One becomes familiar with the musical idiom of another culture and other approaches to choral work in other countries, and expand one's repertoire knowledge. Experiences abroad in the Baltic and Scandinavian countries are very popular among students, as these regions have a particularly active and diverse choral landscape at their disposal.

## Masterclasses

Further practical experience can be gained within the context of continuing education and masterclasses. Here the advantage is in gaining access to good, sometimes prestigious choirs and getting to know their working methods and standards. Choral associations often offer continuing education or choral conducting courses aimed at emerging or practicing school or church musicians. The new ideas gained through coursework can then be immediately put to the test in their school or church choirs. Choral conductors often also gain their first experiences with professional voices in master classes. The director of the master class can then sensitize them to the special needs of professional choir work. An intensive masterclass trains one's own conducting technique, methodology, and ear in the shortest possible time.

## Forum Dirigieren and Academies at Radio Choirs

While aspiring choral conductors most often work with amateur singers, there is a growing number of initiatives that also give them the opportunity to gain experience with semi-professional or professional voices: in Germany, the Forum Dirigieren (Conducting Forum) of the Deutscher Musikrat (German Music Council) has made a name for itself as a support program. Within the framework of their academies, individual radio choirs also offer support for young choir conductors, who can thus become familiar with the everyday life of a radio choir, gain their first rehearsal experience, and assist the principal conductor. It is very welcome that more and more colleges are networking with professional ensembles or hiring their own professional ensembles in order to raise their choral conducting training to a higher level.

*Translated by Katie Maxfield, Canada*



**Benjamin Hartmann** is a German conductor specializing in vocal music. Having been trained as a singer, pianist, music pedagogue and conductor in Leipzig, Yale, Stockholm and Cambridge (UK), he is now based in Stuttgart and Salzburg, where he has recently been appointed Artistic Director of the Salzburg Bach Choir. He directs his own Verum Audium vocal ensemble and the Maulbronn Chamber Choir at the World Heritage Site of Maulbronn Abbey. Benjamin has collaborated with ensembles including the Swedish Radio Choir, RIAS Chamber Choir, BR, MDR and WDR Radio Choir, Stuttgart Chamber Choir, Gaechinger Cantorey, Capella Amsterdam and Helsinki Chamber Choir among others. He is passionate about new concert formats in vocal music and teaching conducting. Email: [info@bpch.de](mailto:info@bpch.de)

## TRAINING CHORAL CONDUCTORS IN LATIN AMERICA

*Ana Patricia Carbajal Córdova*



### Conductors Without Borders, Caracas, Venezuela

On many occasions, having listened to a good choir, I have asked what training the conductor has. The answers to that question have varied enormously, and even though some of the conductors haven't had any professional training in choral conducting, there's no doubt that they all share a passion and commitment to choral singing.

Talking to various choral directors in Latin America has made clear that very few countries in the region have degrees in choral conducting as such, although in some countries there are degree courses in music which also lead to a choral conducting qualification.

The following is the information I have gathered following a number of months researching this question: the Cuba University of Arts in La Habana offers a degree in choral conducting; Argentina is home to various universities which

offer this same degree; Chile, Brazil, Costa Rica and Venezuela have universities which also run these courses; in Mexico this course is offered at conservatoires but not at any universities, and we are currently working hard to establish this degree programme at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Various public and private higher education institutions offer similar courses, although there is usually no supervisory body to ensure consistency, and most of the time it is impossible to study advanced subject matter or repertoire because the students are at different levels.

Our higher education institutions urgently need to establish professional choral conducting courses. Even though choral conductors' training involves more than just professional studies, it's clear that these courses will lay the foundations to build a better future for choral music in Latin America.

*Translated by Christopher Lutton, UK*



**Ana Patricia Carbajal Córdova** is a choral conductor and cultural promoter from México City. She founded the vocal ensemble Voce in Tempore in 1989 and Voce in Tempore Association in 1997 to promote and distribute professional choral music in México. Since 1997, she has been promoting and hosting EnCantada, a music-radio show broadcasted by Opus 94 of the Mexican Radio. She has a Master in Promotion and Cultural Direction and works as a teacher of the Music Faculty of UNAM (National University of Mexico) where she also coordinates the choral programs. She is the director of the young choral initiation workshop Tsiris and coordinator of Encuentro Coral Infantil (Children's choral meeting) at the University La Salle. She also coordinates the choral program of the International Festival of University Choirs. She is a representative of Central America and the Caribbean in the Board of the International Federation for Choral Music. She is invited on a regular basis as a presenter

at festivals and choral workshops. [www.voceintempore.org](http://www.voceintempore.org)

## TRAINING CHORAL CONDUCTORS IN LATIN AMERICA

*Jo-Michael Scheibe, Christopher Haygood*



EXPO, WSCM 2014,  
Seoul, Rep. Korea

In the United States, the undergraduate (initial university)

level of choral conducting may be approached from several possible avenues of degree study.

The Bachelor of Music Education with a choral or vocal emphasis affords at least two semesters of conducting. The BME prepares students to teach elementary and secondary choral music in public or private schools, includes methods courses targeted to address the pedagogical needs of future teachers, and offers undergraduates the opportunity to conduct in supervised rehearsal situations over the span of a semester prior to graduation.

The Bachelor of Music in Voice fosters vocal performance skills and requires students to follow the core music curriculum approved by the university or college in question, including a semester of choral or basic conducting. The Bachelor of Arts in Choral Music, offered in larger schools of music, allows students to pursue comprehensive choral studies – choral conducting, choral development, choral arranging, diction – in conjunction with their general education.

Generally, undergraduate studies related to choral music include one to four semesters of conducting, with a limited number of institutions offering private undergraduate conducting study. Frequently, first-semester courses survey basic conducting gestures suitable for both choral and instrumental ensembles, while additional semesters emphasize gestural language specific to choral ensembles.

The summer provides opportunities ranging from choral workshops to the Master of Music degree. Choral workshops address tone building, preparation of major works, and choral conducting. These workshops serve as a resource for choral conductors with varying skill sets who desire a forum in which to strengthen their techniques and pedagogy. The *Choral Journal* of the American Choral Directors Association publicizes summer workshops held in the United States and globally throughout the year.

For choral conductors employed by schools, churches, or other entities during the regular academic year but wishing to complete graduate study in choral music, some institutions in the United States host summer residency programs. These degree programs consolidate coursework into short, intensive spans of time and yield a Master's degree upon completion.

For graduate study in choral conducting in the United States, preferences for a particular teacher or approach may supersede preferences for certain institutions. All universities limit admission to graduate programs. The MM in Choral Music and Choral Conducting includes consecutive study in choral conducting techniques; however, sequential Choral Literature courses are not standardized among institutions.

The terminal degree most frequently pursued in Choral Conducting is the Doctor of Musical Arts. The duration of DMA programs varies from two to five years depending upon the curriculum requirements of the granting institution. Choral Literature courses span one to four semesters with attention to compositional era, liturgical practice, and world music. Fewer institutions offer a MM or DMA in Sacred Music, but these curricula combine a similar choral conducting sequence with more intensive analysis of the sacred canonical repertory.

DMA programs in both Choral Music and Choral Conducting explore gestural study in both the classroom environment and private instruction. Doctoral students may devote up to three years to concentrated exploration of choral conducting techniques. This includes ensemble conducting assignments, lab choir conducting, and one or more recital projects. The choral conducting core curriculum also frequently includes orchestral and instrumental conducting components.

Pedagogical knowledge of vocal technique, diction, and applied voice augment graduate study in choral music. This area of expertise may work in conjunction with a cognate in vocal arts



or function as part of a common core for the graduate degree. Several institutions expect their doctoral students to complete studies in one or more supplementary areas, for example, musicology, music theory, sacred music, early music, orchestral conducting, or music education.

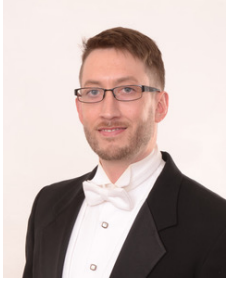
The study of choral conducting in the United States is characterized by diversity and breadth of approach. The focus of degree programs shifts depending on the priorities of the respective institutions and faculty. This diversification of methodology provides choral musicians with a multiplicity of pathways toward self-discovery and development; often, course requirements and degree expectations may be found online. For international students who speak English as a secondary language, institutions of higher education in the United States require a passing score in the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). The authors of this article welcome contact from interested individuals seeking additional information.

*Edited by Katie Sykes, UK*



**Jo-Michael Scheibe** chaired the Department of Choral and Sacred Music at the USC Thornton School of Music from 2008 to 2020 and continues to teach and conduct as a full-time professor in the department. Scheibe served as National President of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) (2011–2013), Western Division President (1991–1993), and National Repertoire and Standards Chairperson for Community Colleges (1980–1989). He currently serves on the board of the International Federation for Choral Music (IFCM) and is on the planning panel for the 2023 World Expo in Portugal. Ensembles under his leadership have sung at seven national ACDA conventions, two national conventions of the National Association for Music Education, the National Conference of the National Collegiate Choral Organization, and the 2014 World Choral Symposium in Seoul, South Korea. Email:

JScheibe@usc.edu



Dr. **Christopher D. Haygood** currently serves the Michael and Anne Greenwood School of Music of Oklahoma State University as Interim Director of Choral Studies. Christopher has conducted choirs across the United States, Europe, Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. He has prepared choruses for collaborations with Helmuth Rilling, *The Tonight Show*, and Jennifer Hudson. Christopher appears as guest lecturer on Intelligence Theories and Rehearsal Strategy, Student Leadership in Rehearsal, and specialized topics in Choral Literature. His publications appear in the *International Bulletin of Choral Music*, *Teaching Music through Performance in Choir Series*, and *Choral Conducting Companion*. Christopher was the 2018 recipient of the First Lady of OSU Distinguished Music Professor award. He received the DMA in Choral Music from the USC Thornton School of Music. Email: christopher.haygood@okstate.edu