

Conductors Without Borders: Third Choral Conducting Training Session, Libreville, Gabon

Third Choral Conducting Training Session
Second Children's Choir Conducting Training
Session
Libreville, Gabon, 27-31 October 2014

*by Thierry Thiébaut, President of A Cœur Joie International,
IFCM Board member*

English translation edited by Laura Clarke, UK

- Organizations: A Cœur Joie Gabon Federation
- A Cœur Joie International
- International Federation for Choral Music
- Conductors Without Borders (CWB)

Despite the unforeseen absence of Anne-Marie Cabut due to a family bereavement, the organizers decided to hold this training session, as cancelling it would have been a big disappointment for the children involved in this project who were very much looking forward to it.

Yveline Damas led the session instead, with the help of Thierry Panghoud and Willy Ondo Beyeme. Songbooks and recorded accompaniments provided by Anne-Marie included: *Tongo*, *Do-re-mi*, *Bubble Gum* (very successful), *My Heart Will Go On* (Titanic), with the addition of the canon *Rock My Soul* that had been part of a previous session's program.

On the first day, the children learned the *Fruit Canon* and as a group we read the melody of the *Cossack Lullaby*. The

children worked every evening from five to seven o'clock and performed with the choir in residence on the Friday night at the Protestant Center Baraka. Although we had a single group of children aged seven to fifteen, the age differences posed no problem. The songbook provided by Anne-Marie included fourteen pieces intended for two distinctive age groups. This songbook provided the children with enough material for them to further their learning. We would like to thank the team of local choral conductors who subsequently took over the session – the children loved this and they are already looking forward to their next choral adventure. The quality of the final concert was encouraging for all.

This session was coupled with a training session for choral conductors.

The children and the trainees benefited from a very pleasant stay in air-conditioned rooms thanks to A Coeur Joie Gabon, which provided the necessary space. The location downtown in a very quiet neighborhood was a further advantage for an activity of this type. We would like to thank Yveline for her initiative in restoring the building, which is now the heart of A Coeur Joie Gabon and an ideal place to host a training session.

We had a total of ten trainees in 2013, and have twelve this year. Five of them had participated in last year's session and a couple of them in the 2012 session. Their level of autonomy slightly improved. These trainees were able to conduct the final concert.

Music classes are regularly organized by A Coeur Joie Gabon. This is a very good initiative as the trainees are not particularly good at sight-reading. Also a basic level of music theory is required for each of them: major and minor chords, note identification, and other aspects could be advantageous in saving time during these training sessions. Local musical assistants could help develop these essential

basics.



The heterogeneity of this group was not in any way an obstacle to the quality of the teaching. We focused in particular on rehearsal techniques, music notations, binary, ternary and non-isochronous meters, and gestures (beat time and pulsations). The choir in residence joined the trainees every day from seven to nine in the evening and formed a group of sixty singers divided into four very well-balanced voice sections. We usually started with a warm-up of the muscles and the voice and some breathing exercises. Every trainee had a chance to conduct during the session. During the final concert, in which seven pieces were performed, eight of the trainees formed a small vocal ensemble and sang *Amour Sans Amour* (Seghers/Daniel).

The concert went well and allowed the conducting trainees a chance to note the technical aspects on which they need to focus in order to improve. With this in mind, and so as to benefit from the good energy of this session, the next session has already been planned for February 9 to 14, 2015. A progress chart for each trainee will be updated after each session.

A very fruitful three-hour meeting with all the trainees took place the day after the final concert. Not only did we get some interesting feedback from the participants on the final concert, but we were also able to set out the points on which further sessions should focus. The material (specifically the scores) will be sent to participants in a timely manner before

the session, so that each participant can prepare in advance and to allow more steady progression.

I proposed the addition of an individual class with each participant every day in the early afternoon, in order to help them analyze the scores and work on their vocal training. This was positively received.

The participants are all very enthusiastic about continuing their training but they also know that some of them will have to devote themselves to being local instructors in the future. Different ability groups will be formed to give the most appropriate levels of education. Following the steps of A Coeur Joie DR Congo, A Coeur Joie Gabon will very soon have well-trained conductors who are able to take care of some aspects of the training entirely by themselves.

I would like to thank Yveline Damas again for the perfect organization of this session and for the ideal location that she provided. Her own involvement and that of the singers of her choir *Chant sur la Lowé* in particular provides very strong support to the future of choral singing in Gabon.