

Eightieth Anniversary Celebrations at the Belarusian State Academy of Music

By Natalia Arutyunova, PhD, Deputy Director of the Belarusian State Academy of Music

Edited by Katie Sykes

In November 2014 the Belarusian State Academy of Music's Department of Choral Conducting celebrated the 80th anniversary of its foundation.

One of the oldest departments of the Academy of Music (then the Belarusian State Conservatory), the Department of Choral Conducting was founded in 1934.

The history of the Department is inextricably linked with some of the great names of Belarusian music. Among the founders of the Department are graduates of the Tchaikovsky Moscow State Conservatory Isidor Bary, Lydia Schwartz and Nikolai Maslov. In the post-war years the Department was led for more than 20 years by Professor Ilya Gitgarts, a graduate of the Rimsky-Korsakov Leningrad (St Petersburg) State Conservatory, Honoured Artist of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR), and conductor of the National Academic Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theatre of the BSSR. A number of outstanding figures, including Mark Schneiderman, Samuil Ratner (a graduate of the Leningrad Conservatory), Anna Zelenkova (a graduate of the Vilnius Conservatory and the Moscow Conservatory, where she worked with Professor A. Sveshnikov), and Victor Rovdo, worked on the formation of the

Conservatory's Belarusian choir school. Members of the Department have included Alexei Kogadeyev (People's Artist of the BSSR), Vasily Vorotnikov (Honoured Worker of Culture of the BSSR), Konstantin Poplawsky (Honoured Artist of the BSSR) and many other masters of choral conducting, whose names belong to the history of Belarusian music.

From 1963 to 2007 the head of the Department of Choral Conducting was Professor Victor Rovdo, People's Artist of the USSR and Doctor of Arts. He was succeeded by Professor Valery Avramenko, and since February 2011 the Department has been headed by Associate Professor Inessa Bodyako.

The following are currently teaching at the Department: Professor Mikhail Drinevsky (People's Artist of the BSSR), Associate Professors Nikolai Hvisyuk, Larissa Shimonovich and Tamara Slabodchikova, and Svetlana Gerasimovich (Doctor of Arts). People's Artists of Belarus are constantly invited to work at the Department: recent invitees include the outstanding composer Leonid Zakhlevny as well as Nina Lomanovich, chief chormaster of the National Academic Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theatre of Belarus. Our young teachers (Yuri Karayev, Kyrill Nosaev, Andrei Kuntsevich, Vladimir Glushakov, Olga Yanum, Olga Izhik, Andrew Savritsky, Victoria Krasovskaya and Denis Ivanov) play an active role in our pedagogical work.

The Department's staff, who represent different generations and branches of the Belarusian choir school, are involved in a variety of scientific and educational events, constantly work with teachers of musical colleges and children's art schools, and lecture on choral music at the Advanced Training Department of the Academy of Music. The Department of Choral Conducting produces highly-qualified choral conductors who fruitfully work in concert halls, institutions of higher and secondary education, and music schools in Belarus and abroad. Graduates of the Department are principal conductors of the National Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre of the Republic of Belarus, the State Academic Choir, the G. I. Tsitovich

National Academic Choir, the Academic Choir of the Belarusian Television and Radio Company, the State Chamber Choir of the Republic of Belarus, the Belarusian Musical Capella 'Sonus', and other creative groups.

In the early years of the Conservatory's history, a student choir was formed. Its unchanged leader for 45 years (1962-2007) was People's Artist of the USSR Professor Victor Rovdo. Under his leadership, the departmental choir became a highly professional team which, with its greatly refined and skilful choral and ensemble singing as well as its high culture of singing in general, captivated listeners all over the Soviet Union. The most important creative achievements of the choir in the 1990s included winning the Grand Prix at the International Choral Competition for Musical Institutions of the CIS and Europe (Moldova, Kishinev, 1995), a Grand Prix Oscar and three Golden Diplomas at the II International Choir Competition (Germany, Darmstadt, 1997), the Grand Prix at the XVI International Festival of Sacred Music (Poland, Hajnówka, 1997), and the Grand Prix at the International Festival 'Mighty God' (Belarus, Mogilev, 2000).

Since 2007, the artistic director and conductor of the academic choir has been Inessa Bodyako, a former pupil of Professor V. Rovdo, laureate of various international competitions, and Head of the Department of Choral Conducting. This new era in the choir's history has seen some excellent results. During the past five years, the choir has won the Grand Prix and the Audience Award at the Yu. A. Falik Sixth International Choir Competition 'Singing World' (St Petersburg, Russia, 2010), three Golden certificates and a Silver certificate at the Fifth International Festival 'Harmony' (Limburg, Germany, 2011), First Prize, Audience Award and Special Jury Prize at the Fourteenth International Choir Festival (Neuchatel, Switzerland, 2012), Grand Prix and a Platinum Medal at the K. Xinghai International Competition (Guangzhou, China, 2012), and a Diploma (second degree) in the

Thirty-third International Festival of Sacred Music 'Hajnówka 2014' (Poland, Hajnówka, 2014).

The student choir of the Academy of Music was honoured to give the first performances in Belarus of Handel's oratorio *Israel in Egypt*, *Requiem* by A. Schnittke, Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, *Mass in Buenos Aires* by M. Palmeri, and a series of cantatas entitled *Intimate Conversations* by N. Sidelnikov. Thanks to our Belarusian-German cultural projects, the student choir went on tour to Germany, where they performed Mozart's *Mass in C Minor* (Altenberg, 2006), Shostakovich's *Thirteenth Symphony* (Bonn, 2008), Handel's *Israel in Egypt*, Donizetti's *Anna Bolena* (Altenberg, Dortmund, 2009), and Verdi's *Le Corsaire* (Dortmund, Cologne, 2011). In 2010, the student choir was awarded a special diploma for its remote participation in the festival 'Chorus Inside', 'for contributing to the development of peace and friendship through choral music and the establishment of friendly relations within the global choral community'.

At present, the student team is actively working on a project entitled 'Choral Pages of the Twentieth Century'. As part of the project, performances of contemporary Polish, Swiss, Bulgarian and Latin-American choral music have already taken place. Student choir members regularly take part in master classes with leading international choral musicians.

Teachers of the Department contribute a great deal of time to practical choral conducting and judge international and national competitions and festivals. The Department is the initiator of the city children's choral music festivals, which have taken place annually in recent years. Since 2009, the Department has conducted at the Academy of Music's V. Rovdo Open Competition for Choral Conductors.

On the occasion of our eightieth anniversary the Department organized and conducted many and varied events throughout 2014 which were a kind of creative report on the multifaceted

activities of the Belarusian Choir School. They also served as a platform for communication between different generations of Belarusian choral conductors, as well as for meetings with renowned international masters of choral music.

The V. Rovdo Third Open Competition for Choral Conductors was the first of a series of commemorative events. The guests and judges of the contest were: the famous choral master Povelas Gilis, Professor of the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, laureate of international competitions and artistic director and chief conductor of the Lithuanian Song Festival and of 'Gaudeamus', the International Song Festival of students of the Baltic States; Mikhail Shuch, Honoured Worker of Arts of Ukraine, member of the National Union of Composers of Ukraine, Associate Professor of the Dragomanov National Pedagogical University, and member of the World Organization of Choral Music. The contest, which was successfully supported by the student choir of the Academy of Music, gathered eighteen participants from Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, Lithuania and China.

September 2014 saw an important event of the anniversary year for the Department: a large-scale arts project, the City Festival of choral music, held during the City of Minsk Day. Various musical groups performed at the Festival, which was held in the Upper Town on Freedom Square, including soloists, the student choir and orchestras of the Academy of Music, the Russian Folk Instrument Orchestra, the Belarusian Folk Instrument Orchestra, and the Wind Orchestra, as well as children's choirs and youth choirs from Minsk.

As a part of the commemorative events a very special concert was held. The student choir of the Belarusian State Academy of Music performed under the direction of Inessa Bodyako in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory during the B. Tevlin Tenth International Autumn Choir Festival. The student choir and its director brilliantly acquainted Russian listeners with the highest achievements of Belarusian choral music and

received high praise from the directors of the Moscow Conservatory.

Our jubilee celebrations sounded a powerful polyphonic chord during concerts held during the Festival 'Viva Choir!' (November 15-22, 2014), which took place in the Great Hall of the Academy of Music. The festival opened with a concert given by professional and amateur choirs under the direction of a former pupil of Associate Professor Larissa Shimonovich. Over two and a half hours, the choirs performed vocal compositions of varied styles and characters written by both national and internationally-renowned composers.

The next concert brought together the creative forces of the Department's graduates, but – only men: K. Nosayev, A. Snitko, A. Kuntsevich, V. Glushakov, A. Klimovich, P. Shepelev, A. Savritsky and M. Drinevsky. Under their leadership, a concert entitled 'Men-Conductors!' featured unique creative teams: the boys' choir of the E. Glebov children's music school №10, the fantastic children's choir 'Tonic' of the children's music school №1, the boys' choir of the Republican Gymnasium College of the Belarusian State Academy of Music, the amateur choir of the State Minsk Linguistic University 'Cantus Juventae', the associate professors' and professors' choir of the Belarusian State Agrarian Technical Academy, as well as professional choirs, including the male voice chamber choir 'Unia', the Academic Choir of the National State TV and Radio Company (Honoured Group of Belarus), and the G. Tsitovich National Academic Choir of the Republic of Belarus.

The Festival ended with a reunion concert for graduates of the Department of Choral Conducting entitled 'Singing Together'. The concert included a performance from the choir of the Academy of Music under I. Bodyako, A. Savritsky, A. Kuntsevych and K. Nosaev and a theatrical performance entitled 'How it was – how it is – how it will be!'. Among the audience were graduates and teachers of the Department, budding musicians, venerable masters and ardent fans of choral music.

Along with the Festival a thematic exhibition, 'VIVA CHOIR!', was organised, timed to coincide with the eightieth anniversary of the Department of Choral Conducting of the Belarusian State Academy of Music. The exhibition presented theses, research papers, monographs, books, and manuals on the history and theory of choral music and vocal-choral performance in Belarus.

The striking final event in the Department's jubilee celebrations was a creative and educational project organised by the Academy of Music with the participation of Andrea Angelini (Italy), eminent conductor and organist, well-known musicologist, conductor and artistic director of the professional vocal ensemble Musica Ficta and the Carla Amori chamber choir, and artistic director of the choral festival 'Voci nei Chiostri', an international choral workshop held in Rimini. In mid-November 2014 he conducted master classes with the student choir of the Academy of Music and gave a lecture on the performance of Renaissance Italian choral music. Dr. Angelini also spoke at the plenary session of the International Scientific Conference 'Belarusian Performing Arts in the Context of Artistic Culture', organized by the Academy of Music, with the support of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Belarus. Angelini's report, entitled 'From Monteverdi to Willaert: choral music in Venice in the Renaissance epoch', was of great interest to students and musicologists. The project was rounded off by a concert given by vocal and choral students from the Academy of Music, in which Dr Angelini featured as a conductor of the student choir.

The anniversary year of the Department of Choral Conducting of the Belarusian State Academy of Music is over, but the Department's team of teachers and students are already working on new creative projects, which will undoubtedly contribute to the glorious pages of the annals of this Belarusian choir school.