

The Speeds the Thing: Fast and Furious Choral Music from Hungary

Choral conductors spend a large amount of time searching for the perfect piece to fit their choir. For many, the most challenging part of selecting repertoire is finding up-tempo choral literature. Slow works abound in our profession but fast-moving contrapuntal lines are hard to locate. Many composers seem to prefer delegating the burden of rhythmic drive and momentum to the piano or other accompanying instrument. Outstanding unaccompanied works with a fast tempo are particularly difficult to find.

In the rehearsal room, we find that faster music is harder to master and it requires more repetitions to achieve excellence. Chorus members tend to learn faster music more slowly; they seem to understand harmonic language more quickly than counterpoint. For the conductor, the process of committing to a faster work is a bit of a risk and the payoff must be worth the effort required. We must make sure that the music we select is outstanding in quality and accessible to our choirs in the amount of time we have to learn it.

In an effort to assist the discovery of exceptional music of a faster tempo, this article presents five outstanding works drawn from the choral music of Hungary. The composers represent several generations and all are craftsmen of the highest quality.

Jozsef Karai

Jozsef Karai was born in 1927 and studied in Budapest and Pécs between 1935 and 1946. In the years between 1947 and 1954 he studied composition with János Viski and Ferenc Farkas and conducting with János Ferencsik, András Kórodi and László

Somogyi at the Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music. A popular choral conductor, he directed several choruses in Budapest and has composed a large body of choral music since 1969.¹

Karai's *Alleluja* (EMC 198163) is one of the composer's best known choral works. It looks to be a work that the composer struggled with for a time because it bears this note on the music: "On the 13th of May, 1981, after the unsuccessful attempt Revised in 1989." The Karai *Alleluia* is an exciting piece of choral music and an excellent opening work or transition out of a slower piece of music. It begins with a chanted line (Figure 1) from a tenor soloist and then moves into a spirited entrance from each voice part.

Figure 1. Karai, "Alleluia", m. 1



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The opening chant is an important part of structure of the work; it is the basis for all of his counterpoint as he weaves the line throughout each voice. (See Figure 2 for a variation of the chant used in the opening part of the piece)

Figure 2. Karai, "Alleluia", m. 3-5



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Although primarily in C Major, the piece temporarily passes through other key relationships that are easy to understand and sing. He arrives at each cadence logically and easily. The different cadences are similar to each other and they give unity to the work. In Figure 3, note how the composer uses a variation of the chant line in the soprano/alto part to arrive at a significant cadence in m. 49.

Figure 3. Karai, "Alleluia", m. 47-49

47 sost.

- le - lu - ja, al - le - lu - ja, al - le - lu - ja. Al - le - lu - ja,

- le - lu - ja, al - le - lu - ja, al - le - lu - ja. Al - le - lu - ja,

Al - le - lu - ja,

- lu - ja, al - le - lu - ja. Al - le - lu - ja,

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Karai's *Alleluia* is a masterpiece of economy and excitement. Other works to explore by the composer include the fast moving *Hodie Christus, natus est* for SSAA (Akkord Music, AKKOR00004) and *De profundis* for mixed choir (EMB 2452).

Sándor Szokolay

Sándor Szokolay is a Hungarian composer born in 1931. A student of Ferenc Szabo and Ferenc Farkas, Szokolay is an award-winning composer of instrumental, vocal, and choral

music.² One of his best known choral works is *Duo motetti*, op. 22 (EMB Z 8374). This work premiered in the 1962 International Choral Competition in Arezzo and features two movements drawn from biblical sources: i. *Domine non secundum* and ii. *Cantate Domino*.

The second movement, *Cantate Domino*, can be effectively used as an opening work for the conductor interested in a fast and dramatic beginning to a concert. It starts with dual-glissando like entrances in the women's and men's voices. (Figure 4)

Figure 4. Szokolay, "Cantate Domino," m. 1-3

The image shows the first three measures of the choral piece "Cantate Domino" by Szokolay. The tempo is marked "Allegro". The score is written for a mixed choir with five staves: Soprano, Alto, Tenor 1, Tenor 2, and Bass. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are "Can - ta - te Do - mi - no". The first measure features a dual-glissando entrance for the women's voices (Soprano and Alto) and the men's voices (Tenors and Basses). The second and third measures continue the vocal entries with sustained notes and glissandos. The notation includes various musical symbols such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Szokolay's music is very theatrical and filled with accented entrances, rhythmic drive and glorious dissonance. The composer's skillful use of repetition keeps the musical material organized and cohesive; the opening flourish that captures the listener in the opening moments of the work appears soon after the beginning and both parts are sung again in a Da Capo.

Szokolay uses high ranges notes and stretto entrances to build the first climax of the work. (Figure 5).

The image shows a musical score for Szokolay's "Cantate Domino," measures 22-25. The score is for a five-part setting (Soprano, Alto, Tenor 1, Tenor 2, Bass) and includes piano accompaniment. The lyrics are "Can - ta - te" and "Do-mi-no!". The music features high ranges, accented entrances, and rhythmic drive. The score is written in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The piano part has a strong rhythmic pattern. The vocal parts enter in a staggered fashion, creating a sense of tension and drama. The lyrics are "Can - ta - te" and "Do-mi-no!".

Figure 5. Szokolay, "Cantate Domino," m. 22-25

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From there, Szokolay continues to employ contrast as a chief part of the composition. Women are set against men and harmonic sections are set against rhythmic flourishes. The rhythmic passages culminate in another dramatic climax that finds relief in a more homophonic section.

After a repeat of the beginning section of music, the piece ends in a dramatic clash between D flat Major and C Major chords (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Szokolay, "Cantate Domino," m. 95-96

Maestoso
(molto sostenuto)

ff

Or - bis ter - ra - rum

ff

Or - bis ter - ra - rum

ff

Or - bis ter - ra - rum

ff

Or - bis ter - ra - rum

ff

Or - bis ter - ra - rum

ff

Or - bis ter - ra - rum

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György Orbán

Like *Daemon*, the *Pange lingua* has a driving sixteenth-note pattern that provides the dramatic energy of the work. In contrast to the driving sixteenth notes, Orban provides a soaring melody that is carried by paired male and female voices. (see Figure 7)

[illegible]

Orban's *Pange lingua* rarely deviates from the driving sixteenth note intensity that he establishes at the beginning of the work. When he does go away from it, he is either bringing a brief moment of repose to the intensity or drawing attention to the dramatic nature of the text. This can be seen in Figure 8, when the composer has the choir sing the same rhythm to draw attention to the dramatic tension in the text "fitque sanguis Christi merum: et si sensus deficit." (Translation: And wine becomes the blood of Christ; and if

sense fails to perceive this . . .) (see Figure 8)

Figure 8. Orban, "Pange lingua," m. 77-80

fit-que san-guis Chri-sti me-rum: et si sen-sus de-fi-cit. Pan.

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Following a dramatic climax, the composer ends the work by repeating the text 'sola fides sufficit' in each voice for seven measures. His goal seems to be to wind down the dramatic energy of the text and music with a meditation on a message of hope. To end the piece, he inserts a short reappearance of the sixteenth-note figure whispering the words 'pange lingua.'

György Orbán's *Pange lingua* is a rhythmically challenging work and well worth the effort. Hinshaw Publishing is making it available in the United States in January 2013. Other notable works include his *Salve Regina* (HMC1498) and *Orpheus With His Lute* (Lanthur Ha Szol) (HMC1766).

Levente Gyöngyösi

Levente Gyöngyösi was born in 1975 in Cluj Napoka, Romania and moved to Hungary in 1989 where he was a student in the Béla Bartók Secondary Music School. Gyöngyösi calls himself a Romania-born Hungarian composer. A student of György Orbán, Gyöngyösi is quickly gaining a reputation as an outstanding

choral composer. He has served as served on the theory music faculty of the Academy of Music since 2002

Gyöngyösi's *Domine Deus meus* is dedicated to André van der Merwe and the Stellenbosch University Choir. It is marked *vivace furioso* and it is a brilliant assault on the listener in terms of tempo, rhythmic energy, and dissonance. It begins with a fanfare-like b-minor chord of open fifths in the upper range and then repeats the fanfare and extends it into an exploration of dissonant chords. (see Figure 9)

Figure 9. Gyöngyösi, "Domine Deus meus," m. 1-4

Vivace furioso $\text{♩} = 108$

ff Do - mi - ne! Do - mi - ne De - us me - us!

ff Do - mi - ne! Do - mi - ne De - us me - us!

ff Do - mi - ne! Do - mi - ne De - us me - us!

ff Do - mi - ne! Do - mi - ne De - us me - us!

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Similar to Orban, Gyöngyösi employs the technique of driving rhythmic patterns as accompaniment to longer melodic lines. He repeats the first syllable of the word 'domine' to add to the rhythmic drive of the piece. The melodic lines build with harmonic interest and dissonance. (see Figure 10)

Figure 10. Gyöngyösi, "Domine Deus meus," m. 29-31



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Gyöngyösi brings relief to the dramatic tension in two ways. First, he occasionally drops rhythmic and harmonic motion to sustain on a single note (Figure 11):

Figure 11. Gyöngyösi, "Domine Deus meus," m. 40-44

do-mi-ne, Do-do-do - do-mi-ne, Do-do-do - do-mi-ne!

Do-do-do-do-mi-ne, Do-do-do-do - mi-ne, Do-mi-ne!

do-mi-ne, Do-do-do - do-mi-ne, do-do-do - do-mi-ne!

Do-do-do-do-mi-ne, Do-do-do-do-do-do-do - do-mi-ne!

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Gyöngyösi also supplies a short homophonic section in the middle of the work (see Figure 11)

Figure 11. Gyöngyösi, "Domine Deus meus," m. 100-108

100 **Sostenuto** $\text{♩} = 92$

intimo *mf* **quasi a tempo, qui** *p* *aperto*

to - rium me - um a - pud De - um, qui

ppp intimo *mf* *p* *aperto*

Ad - iu - to - rium a - pud De - um, con - fi -

ppp intimo *mf* *p* *aperto*

Ad - iu - to - rium a - pud De - um, con-fi-te-bor

ppp intimo *mf* *p*

Ad - iu - to - rium a - pud De - - um,

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Gyöngyösi is certainly a composer to watch as his works increase. His *Gloria Kajoniensis* was recently awarded 1st Prize by the Jury of the European Award for Choral Composers. Other notable works include his *Puer natus in Bethlehem*, also dedicated to André van der Merwe and the Stellenbosch University Choir.

Peter Tóth

Like Gyöngyösi, Peter Tóth is one of the newest generation of composers from Hungary. Born in 1965, he currently serves as Associate Professor and department head of the music department at the University of Szeged. He founded Café Momusnzk in 1998, an online magazine dedicated to the classical music of Hungary. In 2009, he founded Kontrapunkt Music Publishing, a company with the stated goal of fostering the publishing and performing of Hungarian choral works.

Tóth's *Magnus, maior, maximus* for women's choir (SSAA) is a brilliant piece of fast-moving choral music. The work opens with a short two measure introductory portion and then introduces a rhythmic figure that becomes a fundamental part of the whole (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. Tóth, “Magnus, maior, maximus,” m. 3-7

Mag-nus, ma-ior, ma-xi-mus, par-vus, mi-nor, mi-ni-mus, gra-dus is-tos rep-pe-ri, per quos gra-dus com-pe-ri au-ge-ri et con-te-ri.

Mag-nus, ma-ior, ma-xi-mus, par-vus, mi-nor, mi-ni-mus, gra-dus is-tos rep-pe-ri, per quos gra-dus com-pe-ri au-ge-ri et con-te-ri.

Mag-nus, ma-ior, ma-xi-mus, par-vus, mi-nor, mi-ni-mus, gra-dus is-tos rep-pe-ri, per quos gra-dus com-pe-ri ri et con-te-ri.

Mag-nus, ma-ior, ma-xi-mus, par-vus, mi-nor, mi-ni-mus, gra-dus is-tos rep-pe-ri, per quos gra-dus com-pe-ri con-te-ri.

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Tóth's composition resembles aspects of Orban's *Pange lingua* and Gyöngyösi's *Domine Deus meus* with the repeated eighth-note rhythmic pattern that is eventually contrasted with a soaring lyrical line. Tóth takes it a bit further, however, by contrasting the pulsing 7/8 rhythm with the more lyrical line appearing in a different meter (4/4). (see Figure 13)

Figure 13. Tóth, “Magnus, maior, maximus,” m. 22-25

22

mf *mf* *mf* *mf*

Mag-nus, ma-ior, ma-xi-mus, par-vus mi-nor mi-ni-mus: gra-dus is-tos rep-pe-ri, per quos gra-dus com-pe-ri,

mf *mf* *mf* *mf*

Mag-nus, ma-ior, ma-xi-mus, par-vus mi-nor mi-ni-mus: gra-dus is-tos rep-pe-ri, per quos gra-dus com-pe-ri,

mf *mf* *mf* *mf*

Mag-nus, ma-ior, ma-xi-mus, par-vus mi-nor mi-ni-mus: gra-dus is-tos rep-pe-ri, per quos gra-dus com-pe-ri,

sempre f

Mag-nus, ma-ior, ma-xi-mus, par-vus mi-nor mi-ni-

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The contrast of rhythmic and melodic elements in the work is fascinating. First, the composer takes care to firmly

establish the 7/8 rhythmic element in the first twenty-one measures of the piece with repetition and some exploration of the music in related keys. The lyrical melody makes it's first appearance in m. 22 in the lowest voice. When the lyrical element first appears, it is in the meter of 4/4 but is set against the 7/8 pattern; the resulting rhythmic dissonance is reminiscent of a person holding two different thoughts in their mind at the same time, (see Figure 13).

The composer continues to exploit this contrast for the rest of the piece, breaking up each occurrence of the lyrical-rhythmic juxtaposition by a few measures of other musical material. The lyrical line is appears again in the lowest voice (m. 29-33) and is joined by the soprano a moment later (m. 36-40) voice. The more lyrical idea is taken up by the other voices in an imitative setting in m. 43-45 and then vanishes for a moment as the more rhythmical music makes a full appearance. (see Figure 14)

Figure 14. Tóth, "Magnus, maior, maximus," m. 44-47

44 *mf*

Par - ve-que sunt gra - ti - e di - vi - ti cont - ra - ri - e,

gra - ti - e, di - vi - ti cont - ra - ri - e, cont - ra - ri - e,

di - vi - ti cont-ra - ri - e, par-ve-que sunt gra-ti - e, di - vi - ti cont-ra - ri - e, di - vi - ti cont ra - ri - e,

mf

Par - ve - que sunt gra - ti - e di - vi - ti cont - ra - ri -

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The juxtaposition occurs one more time in m. 57-64 and then the lyrical element makes a full statement of its idea (m. 69-74). There is a little ending action as the rhythmic idea makes a brief appearance and then the piece ends softly on a unison note.

1 <http://www.dolmetsch.com/index.htm>

2 <http://info.bmc.hu/index.php?node=artists&table=SZERZO&id=94>

Choral Book Review - Giuseppe Verdi: Requiem

Giuseppe Verdi: Requiem

Full score, CV 27.303/00

Vocal score, CV 27.303/03

Venanzio Valdinoci

journalist and singer

When Rossini died in 1868, Giuseppe Verdi proposed bringing together some of the most important Italian composers of the time to write a Mass in Rossini's honour. He gave a sequence to each of them, taking for himself the final 'Libera me'; the initiative was so successful that the work was completed long before the first anniversary of the great composer's death. Unfortunately, for reasons of a political nature, the *Messa per Rossini* was never performed and fell into oblivion, being rediscovered only in 1988.

In 1873, the death of the great author Alessandro Manzoni was felt deeply throughout the country. Even Verdi was greatly

affected by the enormous loss, and decided to dedicate to Manzoni the *Messa da Requiem*, a work he was completing at the time, while revisiting the earlier piece created in honour of Rossini. The composition was first performed in the church of San Marco in Milan on the first anniversary of Manzoni's death, with the composer as conductor and a vocal quartet formed by Teresa Stolz (soprano), Maria Waldmann (mezzo-soprano), Giuseppe Capponi (tenor) and Ormondo Maini (bass).



*(Click on the image
to download the full
score)*



*(Click on the image
to download the
full score)*

This new edition by Carus-Verlag, edited by Norbert Bolin, is based on the original manuscript as the primary source and makes accessible one of the most important requiem settings of the 19th century in a modern scholarly edition. In particular, articulation, phrasing and dynamics are indicated with consistent precision. Editorial additions, by means of parallel passages, attempt to make Verdi's intention clearer through the judicious use of diacritical markings. And a clearly organized disposition of the printed music makes the full score and vocal score easy to read.

The publication is made complete by a less expensive alternative in a clear, playable vocal score by Paul Horn, arranged to maintain the same quality as the full orchestra score.

Edited by Joel Hageman, USA, and Gillian Forlivesi Heywood, Italy

The Teaching of Choral Singing in the Slovenian Educational System

*By Inge Breznik Senior Consultant for Music Education,
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Artistic subjects have the role of educating children so that

they can spend their free time well as either performers or listener-spectators of cultural-artistic material. Music education is directed towards the same goal, namely: educating a child to be an active (re-)creator of and listener to music. The activity of performing music through singing or playing instruments presents the most important part of music education. Choral singing has a rich tradition in Slovenian national culture, which is also reflected in the Slovenian educational system. In this way, singing is made possible for all children through the compulsory subject of music education and via the interesting activity of choral singing, in which children can choose to join. Music education and choirs are led by professional instructors with university degrees[1].

Pre-school education[2]

Within pre-school education, children's singing is included in the field of art[3], defined by the national curriculum. It is performed daily as a part of the regular pre-school educational program.

Many kindergartens feature choirs[4] as a part of their extracurricular programs. They are led by teachers – or their assistants – with an affinity for music. All children can enlist regardless of the level of their musical skills. Choir rehearsals are held once a week for one hour in the morning or the afternoon. The main goal of pre-school choral singing is experiencing, perceiving and enjoying the singing. The children most often perform for their parents within the school region.

Ciciban poje in pleše (Ciciban sings and dances, Ciciban being an affectionate name, taken from Slovenian literature, for a typical small child) is a national gathering of kindergarten choirs and dance groups, organized by the national Public Fund for Cultural Activities; it features at least twenty choirs

and dance groups and takes place in Maribor every year. While not conceived as a competitive event, participants receive expert feedback on their performance.

Elementary school[5]

Singing is part of the compulsory program in elementary schools. It is performed within the subject of music education from 1st to 3rd grade 70 hrs/year, in 4th and 5th grade 52.5 hrs/year, from 6th to 8th grade 35 hrs/year, and in the 9th grade 32 hrs/year. The goals and contents of music education are defined by the school curriculum.

Choral singing is also systematically taught as a part of the extracurricular program, in which children choose an activity according to their own interests. Choir conducting was introduced as a teaching subject for music teachers[6] meaning that a unison children's choir has to be organized in every elementary school (70 hrs/year or 2 hrs/week), as well as a two- or three-voice youth choir (140 hrs/year or 4 hrs/week). Normally all the children who express an interest in choral singing are included in the children's choir, regardless of their musical abilities. However, participation in youth choirs depends on selection by the choirmaster according to musical abilities as well as interest. Goals and recommendations for work with the choir are concept-defined. The role and purpose of elementary school choirs are performances in the school area and at regional or state level[7], as well as international choral events, gatherings, and competitions.

High school[8]

At high school level, in the grammar school program, music

education and singing activities are only included in the compulsory subject of music in the 1st year: 70 hrs/year[9]. Objectives and contents are fixed by the curriculum. Choral activity is managed as a part of the extracurricular program, normally limited to high schools employing a music teacher (grammar schools and high-school centers)[10].

Music school[11]

In the school year 2010/11 the position of the choirmaster as a professional figure was formalized in the network of public music schools. Unison or two- or three-voice choirs can thus be organized in music schools, with seventy hours of rehearsals a year (two hours a week)[12]. Subject goals are defined by the curriculum.

Based on the facts presented above it is clear that the existence of choral singing is only provided systematically at elementary education level or in music schools. The existence of choral singing is dependent on the interest of music teachers and the support of school management at higher levels of education. The majority of elementary- and high-school choirs are led by music teachers who have completed the university program in music teaching, or in some cases also teachers who have completed programs in composition and music theory[13]. Only graduate conductors can direct choirs in music schools under current legislation.

[1] In kindergartens, the program is taught by educators with a university degree, their assistants with a high-school degree, and by class- and subject-teachers with university degrees in elementary and music schools, as defined by the curriculum.

[2] In 2010/11, 891 kindergartens carried out the pre-school program with about 76.000 children aged 1-6.

[3] The curriculum addresses six fields of activity: motion, language, art, society, nature, and math.

[4] The exact number of kindergarten choirs in Slovenia is unknown.

[5] In 2011/12, there were 451 elementary schools with about 160.000 pupils aged from six to fourteen.

[6] Children's choirs are led by music or class teachers; youth choirs exclusively by music teachers.

[7] Communal and regional events take place each year and a national choral gathering in Zagorje ob Savi every second year (organized by the Public Fund for Cultural Activities).

[8] In 2011/12, there were 127 high schools with 87.500 pupils aged from fourteen to eighteen.

[9] Music is a part of the compulsory curriculum in grammar schools. Artistic grammar schools have more musical subjects that are vertically upgraded over the four years.

[10] There is no exact data available concerning the number of active high-school choirs. Based on the number of grammar schools, high-school centers and high-school choirs participating at national choral gatherings, it is estimated that about twenty high-school choirs are active in Slovenia.

[11] There are sixty-four public music schools in Slovenia with about 25.600 children aged from six to fourteen. Enrollment at music schools is subject to a test of a child's musical abilities and skills.

[12] The exact number of active choirs in music schools is unknown.

[13] Music Teaching is available at the Academy of Music, University of Ljubljana, and the Department of Music at the Faculty of Education, University of Maribor; Composition and Music Theory are taught only at the Academy of Music in Ljubljana.

Edited by Mirella Biagi, UK

Singing World 2012, St. Petersburg, Russia

**Tenth International Festival of Choral Art – Eighth
International Choral Competition**

Andrea Angelini

ICB Managing Editor, choral conductor & teacher

Commissioned by Tsar Peter the Great (1672-1725) as ‘a window looking into Europe,’ St. Petersburg is a fine city whose elegance is reminiscent of Europe’s most alluring capitals. Little wonder it is the darling of today’s fashion photographers and travel essayists: built on more than a hundred islands in the Neva Delta linked by canals and arched bridges, it was first called the ‘Venice of the North’ by Goethe, and its stately embankments are reminiscent of those

in Paris.

An Imperial city of golden spires and gilded domes, of pastel palaces and candlelit cathedrals, it is filled with pleasures and tantalizing treasures. Baroque churches overloaded with architectural ornaments have a fairy-tale quality; and the city is rich in fountains, palaces, canals, gardens, and the famous 'prospects' running through the city ... St. Petersburg reveals a new stage setting at every corner. Two revolutions have occurred there and yet the imprint of the Enlightenment and the magnificence of the Tsars still linger in the atmosphere.

It is therefore no wonder that a Choral Festival is organized every year in this magnificent city. Singing World is one of those music events which you have to see or, better still, take part in, at least once in a lifetime. This year the organizers hosted 46 choirs and vocal groups from 15 countries of the world and the total number of the participants amounted to 1500 people. The art of choral singing was demonstrated by groups from Australia, Brazil, China, Finland, France, Germany, Hong-Kong, Israel, Latvia, Poland and Russia.



*Children and Youth Choir
Sofia from Krasnoyarsk,
Russia*

Within the six days of the Festival 20 concerts of choral music took place, one of which, according to an earlier established tradition, was held at the Cascade Centre in Peterhof. It is good to note that many other traditions, formed during previous festival, were also kept. Consequently, on Saturday 4th August a concert entirely devoted to St. Petersburg composers was held, and on Wednesday 7th August a concert of works of Russian sacred music took place at the Kazan Cathedral.

The 'Singing World Festival' is dedicated to Yury Falik, a Russian composer who is well-known here.

"He left the world quickly, in 2009, like the 'Stranger' in Blok's poem, who *goes by, exuding mists and fragrances* for only two minutes... Always prim and elegant (wearing a Pierre Cardin tie or a fashionable neckerchief), with a bag slung over his shoulder, and the edge of a symphonic score peeping out of his bag – Prokofiev, Stravinsky or his own – for the next concert in the Great Hall of the Philharmonic Society where, surrounded by the orchestra or soloists, he will again jump, agile and unrestrained, on to the conductor's podium and raise his hands, and the hall will be filled with music perfectly polished during rehearsal. Or he will sit down at the piano in a classroom of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, to the left of a student and make concise, witty and very precise remarks..."

All through his colourful creative life Yury Falik composed quantities of symphonic, instrumental, chamber and vocal music. However he could be described as the most often performed Russian composer of choral music. He left a tremendous artistic legacy: five volumes of a *cappella* music.

In keeping with tradition the international jury was presided by Prof. Valery Uspensky, Artistic Director of St. Petersburg's Rimsky-Korsakov State Conservatoire Student

Choir, head of the Choral Conducting Department of the same music institution and People's Artist of Russia. The other members came from Slovakia, Latvia, Italy, Ukraine and Russia. The jury's task was huge and very difficult because there were so many choirs and also because the level was quite high. It was not easy to choose the winners of the various categories. At the end the Grand Prix went to a French children's choir, Capriccio, from Nevers, which also won also the prize awarded by the audience. For a complete list of all the prizes awarded, the official report can be downloaded from <http://goo.gl/47LoY>.



*A crowded State Academic
Capella Hall!*

The final round, which saw the triumph of the Capriccio children's choir, took place in one of the most beautiful music halls in St. Petersburg, the State Academic Capella.



The joy of the Children's Choir Capriccio after the announcement of their winner

This is the oldest professional music institution in Russia. It has determined the activities, the establishment and the development of all Russian professional musical culture, and, for several centuries it has been the musical face of Russia.



The balcony at the State Academic Capella Hall © Andrea Angelini

In 1701, in St. Petersburg, the court choir was established, and in 1763, the Imperial court chapel. In 1738, to meet the needs of the choir, a decree of Empress Anna Ioannovna provided for the founding of the first special music school. In 1882, the first Russian symphony orchestra was founded,

called the Court Capella. After the 1917 revolution, the structure of the Capella was destroyed and classes were cancelled. The choir, the symphony orchestra and the music school were separated from one another, and one of the major music centres disappeared from the European musical map. Today, the country's and St. Petersburg Governments have together begun the process of reviving the oldest music institution in Russia.

On the last day the Neva was grey, like the sky... it did not seem at all like August, but in the hearts of all of us who attended the festival, all the memories of the warm atmosphere still remained, reminding us that the human voice is the most sophisticated and beautiful of all instruments.

Edited by Gillian Forlivesi Heywood, Italy

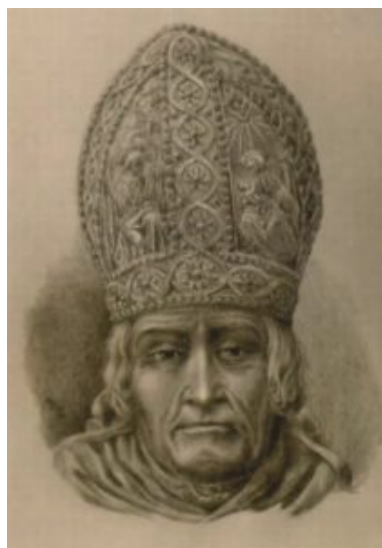
Choral Music in Slovenia

By Tomaž Faganel conductor & musicologist, lecturer, juror, singer

Since the Middle Ages, singing has been the central identifying cultural and musical conception for Slovenes in the land between the Alps and the Adriatic, closely connected with the nation's historical and cultural tradition. The remains of medieval culture, historic sources, codices, and art placed choral music composition a full millennium back into the past. The rare remaining documents and the oldest written sources of the broader area confirm the presence of

Latin chant, and of a wide range of secular song in the vernacular of the time (e.g. Oswald Wolkenstein 14th century), while some surviving codices (Stična MS, first half of the 15th century), later musical sources (Kranj Antiphonal, late 15th century), and many multi-genera musical arrangements mention singing in Latin in monasteries and city churches. The chronicler of the Episcopal visitation to the church in Aquileia mentions singing being performed 'under the rules for composition' current at the time – 1486 – and cites sister Aurora, soprano and organist from Velesovo monastery.

Balthasar Praspegius, a scholar from Mozirje, published a Latin dissertation on singing, in Basel in 1501. An earlier scholar was Jurij Slatkonja (Georg Chryssipus, 1456–1522), founder of the court chapel in Vienna (today's Wiener Sängerknaben), Bishop of Vienna and leader of the emperor's musicians. Some of the music attributed to him was harmonized by Heinrich Isaac. The Ljubljana priest Georgius Prenner, the author of over 39 motets, was also a Viennese court musician.



*Jurij Slatkonja,
1456 – 1522,
founder of the
Vienna court chapel
(today's Wiener
Sängerknaben)*

In the mid-16th century, Protestantism also influenced church music through texts in Slovenian. Primož Trubar (1508–1586) supported singing in the vernacular during a religious renewal which brought about the first Slovenian books and songbooks. Numerous songbooks, church literature, and a translation of the Bible by Jurij Dalmatin confirm the rise of a sense of nationality, evident in music, language, and general culture.

In a conflict of religious renewal and subsequent counter-reformation, Jacobus Handl-Gallus (1550–1591), the undisputed giant of 16th century European music, choir master, humanist and prolific composer who considered himself Carniolus (from Carniola, the ancient name for Slovenia), ventured forth from present-day central Slovenia into the world, finally reaching Prague. His enormous printed opus of motets (374), masses (16) and Latin secular songs (100) is one of the most vital and evolutionally important pillars of Renaissance music. After him another 'Carniolus', Gabriel Plautzius, entered the world of German-type early Baroque with a collection of motets and church concerts with continuo (1621).



*Jacobus Gallus (Jacob
Handl) (1550-1591)*

Monasteries and cities and their schools, emphasizing music and singing, remained the centers of musical power in Slovenia

throughout the 17th century. From 1597, a central role was played by the Jesuit college, where all the important intellectuals and musicians had studied. The influence of Jesuit tradition in Slovenian music was felt at least until the end of the 18th century. The composer Janez Krstnik Dolar (1621–1673) from Kamnik, later principal of the Austrian Jesuits and a musical leader in Vienna, also originated from this institution. Time has preserved 14 of his compositions: masses, psalms, sonatas and ballets, in Italian-type Baroque concerto style.

The choral music of the late 17th and entire 18th centuries remains mainly linked to monasteries, city churches, chapels and schools. Exclusively vocal-instrumental music arrived in Slovenia through migrations of musicians, priests and friars from the south German, Czech and Italian areas, and reflects the classicism of many forms only in basic outlines. Musical and historic sources testify to widespread singing activity in Novo Mesto, Kamnik, Ljubljana, and some seaside cities and other towns. After Trubar, choral or sung church music was no longer Slovenian; the majority of our known musicians of the time were not of Slovene origin, much less was their repertoire Slovenian.

We can only talk of truly 'Slovenian' choral music, and indirectly church choral music, being created and performed after the mid-19th century, when Gregor Rihar (1796-1863) – the first to compose in Slovenian – strengthened the vitality of Slovenian choral music mostly through his own compositions. In the middle of the 19th century, middle-class musicianship was revived through singing, which also influenced the development of choral singing and composing in the public music schools which were beginning to appear. National self-awareness and the cultural awakening of nations after 1848 provided additional encouragement for the development of choral music, especially in the Austro-Hungarian empire, of which Slovenia

was then part. Since then, choral music in Slovenia has had Slovenian texts, an awareness of Slovenian nationality, and close links with Slovenian poetry. It found its earliest momentum among Slovenes in Vienna, and spread in Slovenia through reading societies, new choirs and associations. Its musical and stylistic roots, however, lie in middle-class music of the German cultural world and in Romanticism which was felt in Slovenian music only after a perceivable delay owing to several cultural-sociological reasons.

Many composers wrote for choirs: Davorin Jenko, Jurij Fleišman, Miroslav Vilhar, a number of members of the Ipavec musical family, Anton Hajdrih, and two very important naturalized Czech musicians in Slovenia, Anton Nedvĕd and Anton Foerster, among others. The evolution of choral music was also encouraged by music societies, the foremost being – after 1872 – Glasbena Matica, and by Matej Hubad and Fran Gerbič, important musicians. Publishers and music schools also helped; the Slovenian Caecilian Society's church music school and *Cerkveni glasbenik* (Church Musician) journal were dedicated to the development of church music. Its natural progress in style was partly diverted by the Caecilian reform of church music, and was temporarily directed toward evolutionary neutral polyphony and Latin, but the Slovenian tendency persevered. At the turn of the century, the circle of composers around Anton Foerster and Hugolin Sattner was most important. The publication of *Novi akordi* (New Chords) journal (1901-1914), edited by Gojmir Krek, was important in giving a contemporary view of music, also publishing most of the choral works of some of the aforementioned musicians but publishing mainly the works of Emil Adamič, Anton Lajovic, Risto Savin, Josip Pavčič, Stanko Premrl, Janko Ravnik and Marij Kogoj.

After World War I, Slovenian choral music develops in directions set by *Novi akordi* and an extended circle of composers, following several different lines and disunited in style. While mostly impervious to the newest European musical

trends, Slovenian music showed tiny flashes of impressionism, and later, neoclassicism as an exception to the rule. It was to be found mostly in a post-romantic frame with recognizable nationalist features, and it co-dependended on the level of the choirs performing it. The parallel life of church choral music is not very different, but reflects specifics of its type. Its central creators after partial deviation from the Caecilian movement were Stanko Premrl, Franc Kimovec, and especially Vinko Vodopivec, Matija Tomc and Alojzij Mav before and after WWII.

World War II interrupted the evolutionary flow of choral music and a new form of choral music arose: strongly motivated choral songs of resistance with recognizably revolutionary elements, which then evolved through the addition of mainly cultural-political emphasis after 1945, owing also to planned and directed cultural policy. Many composers also active in other creative fields devoted themselves to this choral type: Karol Pahor, Pavel Šivic, Marjan Kozina, Radovan Gobec, and others.

A colourful variety of styles remained a characteristic of Slovenian choral music throughout the following decades, although remains of Romanticism and its derivatives could still be perceived. A deviation from state-directed culture is represented by composers who found an opportunity to make a partly independent musical declaration by means of frequent expressionist notes in socially-themed poetry. Vinko Ukmar and Marijan Lipovšek reached for such contents in their choral compositions and indicated a possible direction of contextual-artistic relaxation and a meeting with contemporary features of the European choral music of the time.

A gradual contact of Slovene composers with developments in contemporary music in Western Europe in the late 1950s and early 1960s can be perceived in their choral music. Some anthological works, mainly by Lojze Lebič, and later by Jakob Jež, move away from the usage of the time and continue

(followed by the compositions of Uroš Krek and others), to make available a wide variety of styles and possibilities for the human voice and for choirs during the mid-1970s.

Over the decades, performers consistently improved in quality, ranging from the best amateur formations, to the Slovenian Radio semi-professional choir (which had been moving towards modern performing standards since the late 1960s), to the professional Slovenian Chamber Choir (since 1991). All these formations represent important encouragement for composers. The choral department of the Public Fund for Cultural Activities has had significant influence on the evolution of choral music and performance norms through its organizational-musical support, usefully complementing institutional and private forms of conductor- and singer-education.

Church choral music is more cautious in searching for the new, and the influence of Caecilian aesthetic norms and of several decades of circumscribed activity is still being felt. The first steps toward the contemporary in church choral music were made by Jože Trošt, followed by Maks Strmičnik, Andrej Misson and Ivan Florjanc, also renowned outside the field of choral music. The current cultural-aesthetic climate has blurred the line between sacred and profane through differing aesthetic views, composers' solutions and techniques, and the quality of performance. Ambrož Čopi, Damijan Močnik and some representatives of the upcoming generation of composers follow the tendencies of the time and the ability of performers.

When speaking of Slovenian choral music, we should not overlook folk music. From the mid-19th century, popular influences have been present. Various types of traditional songs for several voices remain an important and enduring phenomenon for national identification, although these original forms are gradually dying out. However, folk melodies can be recognized in current musical compositions, traditional harmonization, skillful disguises and concert adaptations of

folk music.

The events of recent decades and the current climate in the Slovenian choral world encourage composers (some of whom are themselves active conductors) and the colorful pyramid of various choirs of all types offers plenty of space for them to develop their inspiration and to find compromises between ideas, options, and reality, developing a tuneful relationship between pleasure and serious study. They may use basic traditional themes in their compositions, or give free rein to their curiosity in searching for new solutions. Performing choirs and their conductors all face similar questions on aesthetics, professionalism and artistic responsibility.

Edited by Gillian Forlivesi Heywood, Italy

Choral Music Events, Competitions and Festivals in Slovenia

By Mihela Jagodic, Head of choral activities at JSKD (Public Fund for Cultural Activities)

Choral Events of the Public Fund of the Republic of Slovenia for Cultural Activities (Jskd), www.jskd.si: major Slovenian institution covering all branches of amateur culture and art. Headquarters in Ljubljana and branch offices across Slovenia stimulate a proportionate development by local, regional, national and international programmes.



*VAL – Vokalna Akademija
Ljubljana, dir. Stojan
Kuret*

Each of its 59 branches takes an active part in organizing their annual choral events where choirs are professionally consulted by the best Slovenian conductors (around 120 concerts).

Levels

Local: annual local presentation of all Slovenian choirs who sing three songs each. Experts present advise conductors and decide which choirs should go forward.

Regional: alternating biennial regional competitions (six) for choirs going forward from the local level and non-competitive concerts (six) with themed programme.

National:

- National Competition *Naša pesem* (Our Song – biennial, since 1970): up to twenty-four top choirs and vocal groups are evaluated by the jury according to standards of exacting international competitions,
- National Competition of Children and Youth Choirs (biennial, since 1968): for up to forty children's, youth, girls' choirs,
- Festival of *a cappella* vocal pop and jazz *Sredi zvezd*

(Amidst the Stars, since 2002): competition for selected small ensembles and performances by guest groups,

- Open-Air-Festival of Slovenian choirs (since 1970): joint concert of about two thousand singers, mostly senior, accompanied by brass orchestra.

International

Maribor International Choral Competition (biennial, since 1992).

For up to twelve selected female, male and mixed choirs of 16-48 singers. Folk songs (non-competitive) and three competitive programmes. Member of the European Grand Prix for Choral Singing Association since 2008. www.jskd.si/maribor

JSKD's system of advancement and consulting is internationally unique and contributes to quality progress. www.jskd.si

Vocal Season Series of The Slovenian Chamber Choir (Ljubljana, since 1991)

www.filharmonija.si

The choir is an individual unit within the Slovenian Philharmonic and holds approximately thirty performances per season, aiming for vocal/instrumental projects with Slovenian and foreign orchestras, and a *cappella* music concerts in the Vocal Season series. The Slovenian Chamber Choir has performed with Ericson, Kaljuste, Theuring, Penderecki, Haenchen, Gronostay, and Muti, among others. Artistic director Martina Batič.

Koper International Choir Festival (Koper, since 2001)
organized by Obala Koper Mixed Choir,

<http://zborobala.net/old/festival/?page=9>

Biennial autumn festival at the seaside introduces concerts of invited home and foreign ensembles, workshops, seminars, and lectures. The programme focuses on diversity, with different-style programmes from world literature, presentations of Slovenian literature, and novelties. It supports the creation of new works.

'Symphonic Voices' International Concert Cycle (Koper, since 2009) organized by APZ Univerze na Primorskem, <http://www.soup.si/sl/apz>

Hosting top international and home choirs and orchestras and aiming to offer a variety of musical events at the seaside, cycles of concerts take place throughout the year.

Festival of Slovenian Folk Song Arrangements (Prevalje, since 2009) organized by the Mohorjan Prevalje cultural association, <http://www.zborovski-festival.si/>

Annually presents new folk song arrangements for different adult ensembles and lectures on folk music.

Sacred Season Series (Ljubljana, since 2010) *organized by the Schellenburg Cultural Society and Surrexit Mixed Choir*, <http://ursulinke.rkc.si/javno/gradiva/2012-sakralni-abonma.pdf>

The organizers wish to compensate for a deficiency of sacred cultural-artistic content by organizing quality concerts throughout the year.

Celje International Youth Choir Festival (Celje, biennial since 1946) organized by Celeia Institute, http://www.celeia.info/MMPF2013_IYCF2013

Three categories (children's, youth, girls'). Evolved into a manifestation of the European character. Accompanying events: professional conferences for teachers and conductors, musical workshops, choral concerts, open singing.

Attacca Festival (Maribor, since 2006), organized by Carmina Slovenica, www.zbor-carmina-slovenica.si/

Includes the Attacca Concert Cycle, the Attacca International Festival and special programmes (e.g. for socially deprived groups). Attacca brings quality, rounded programmes of the 'Choregie concept' (presentation of music, movement, drama and other stage elements together), with special emphasis on music composed after 1950.



*Carmina Slovenica, Maribor,
dir. Karmina Šilec*

Edited by Gillian Forlivesi Heywood, Italy

Review of Choral Scores

Programme Ideas by Debra Shearer-Dirié

Emanuele d'Astorga *Stabat Mater*

SATB and accompaniment

Oxford University Press

It was in the 14th century that the *Stabat Mater* text was popularized by travellers singing from town to town in Europe. It was only much later, however, that the text found its way into the Roman Liturgy, after it had first appeared in a 1495 edition of Italian poems by Jacopone da Todì. In 1727 Pope Benedict XIII extended the text to the universal Church under the title *Septem Dolorum BMV* ("The Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary") which was celebrated on the Friday after Passion Sunday.

Emanuele d'Astorga (1680 – 1757) was born in Augusta, Sicily. Robert King, the editor of this publication, suggests that Astorga "was one of the most colourful figures in early eighteenth-century music." Astorga, a professional musician who later became a composer, is well-known for his chamber cantatas. His setting of the *Stabat Mater* is perhaps his most enduring work and illustrates typical musical traits from the Baroque period.

(Click on the image to download the full score)



Stabat Mater VS for OUP 2nd proof 100512

Scored for a solo quartet (SATB), mixed choir, strings and organ, this edition is part of the Classical Choral Works series and is produced for the non-specialist choir allowing the notation to be uncluttered and easily viewed. The barring, time and key signatures are written in a modern, standard way. The keyboard part has been created in a playable form and at times simplified.

The work is divided into 9 parts with the chorus movements appearing as pillars in movements 1, 4, 7, and 9. The motivic material in the first movement, *Stabat Mater*, with its descending 5th then rising minor 6th interval – which emerge out of the combined sustained notes of the sopranos and altos in the opening section – evokes the lamenting of Mary beside the cross. This musical material is gently passed from one voice part to the next as Astorga establishes the sorrow of the scene. So precisely set to the words *pertransivit gladius* (a sword pierced through), Astorga creates a rising chromatic line in the lower voice part while the top voice line descends, creating a sense of the sword piercing the flesh as it enters.

The second and third movements are scored for a solo trio (*O quam tristis et afflicta*) and a solo quartet (*Quis est homo*). The fourth movement (*Eia Mater*) starts simply with a single line with the intervallic line never leaping too far and always coming back within itself. The fugal entries are calmly placed to the text "Oh Mother, fount of love." As the movement progresses the lines become more chromatic as we feel the force of the Virgin's grief. Movements 5, 6, and 8 are for solo voices once again, with the chorus presenting itself in movements 7 and 9. The final movement (*Christe, cum sit hinc exire*) moves between *Adagio* to *Allegro* with its fugal entries finishing the entire work in C major. King suggests that this movement "gently directs the listener away from the Virgin's sorrow towards the Carmelite missal's more optimistic 'palm of victory'."

The work is approximately 30 minutes in length and can be performed with a string quartet accompaniment, or small string orchestra, with the suggestion of the addition of a theorbo to the chamber organ continuo part. The work is simple enough in its setting of the chorus parts and yet Astorga's writing allows us to experience the intense nature of this text. Astorga's *Stabat Mater* is not often performed; however, with the publishing of Robert King's edition, it would be the perfect choice for the Easter season.

Will Todd *The Call of Wisdom*

SS (or SA) and organ. Also available for SATB

Oxford University Press 2012 W 172

Will Todd's output ranges from large scale oratorios to smaller scale pieces to his jazz mass setting *Mass in Blue*, which was premiered in 2003. His works are published by Tyalgum Press, Boosey & Hawkes and Oxford University Press (OUP). *The Call of Wisdom* is one of his pieces published by

OUP and available in both a SS (or SA) setting as well as an SATB setting. Both settings are accompanied by organ.



*(Click on the image
to download the
full score)*

The piece was commissioned by St Paul's Cathedral for the Diamond Jubilee Thanksgiving Service this year, and appears to be unique in that it is beautifully simple in its make-up, yet stunning to the listener in its effect. A single vocal line begins with an eight bar melody that ranges no more than a 6th and is elegantly simple in character. In contrast to this first melody, the second melody begins with a glorious major 7th providing quite a contrast to the first melody. This opening interval is delightfully melodious as the ninth in the harmony provided by the organ part. Again only eight bars in length, these two sets of melodic material are the basis for the whole piece as it interchanges each section, at times adding a flowing descant line above.

The text is by Michael Hampel who has used biblical passages from Proverbs 8, and at just four minutes in length, this piece would fit into a programme of sacred music to cleanse

the palate of the listener; or it would work equally well in a secular programme. Todd states that his music is about bringing people together. I think this piece does just this, simple enough for a church choir to perform with much attention to creating beautiful phrases, and a children's choir could be a beautiful addition to the unison lines.

Gabriel Jackson *Vidi aquam*

SSATB and organ

Oxford University Press New Horizons N 89

The music of Gabriel Jackson is regularly performed and recorded worldwide. As Associate Composer to the BBC Singers, he has composed several substantial commissions. Jackson's *Vidi aquam* was commissioned by the Friends of Lincoln cathedral for their 75th anniversary. It combines the texts of the *Vidi aquam*, the antiphon sung during the Paschal season, with *Confitemini Domino* and finishes with the *Gloria Patri*.



(Click on the image
to download the
full score)

Jackson's *Vidi aquam* is for the more advanced vocal group that is able to provide an elegant shape to the melismatic lines, as well as to the piece as a whole.

**Béla Bartók 25th
International Choir
Competition and Folklore**

Festival, Debrecen

Maria Bartha, ICB French language coordinator

After a short or long flight to Budapest you still need more than two hours to reach Debrecen, situated 200 km away from the capital. You arrive in a pleasant place, with beautiful flowers, spacious squares, and an old tramway dominating the main street, part of which is reserved for pedestrians. Invited guests have a hotel in the town centre, just beside the cultural centre where the choir competition takes place. Excellent quality, excellent service. Some guests happily see and greet those colleagues they have met at different choir competitions in other countries, other towns.

This time they are here for the Béla Bartók 25th International Choir Competition and Folklore Festival taking place in Debrecen from 25th to 29th August 2012. This year, choirs from fourteen countries and four continents have arrived to participate in the event.

2011/2012 is a special season in the town's history. The city was established 650 years ago as an independent royal town and it is celebrating the 150th anniversary of the beginning of local music education. Moreover Zoltán Kodály, who was deeply involved with the musical life of the region, was born 130 years ago. In 2011, several events celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the Béla Bartók Choir Competition and the twenty-fifth competition itself takes place this year.

We can watch a colourful parade as all the choirs cross the small wooden bridge and gather in the square in front of the open stage. Most of them are young choirs, wearing their traditional costumes, and singing the typical folk songs of

their respective countries. Their faces are shining with joy; they will meet again in other circumstances tomorrow, but for the time being they enjoy meeting similar young people from faraway countries and are eagerly waiting for the evening to become better acquainted with them.

The city of Debrecen is pleased to host the competition once more. The mayor of Debrecen, Mr Lajos Kósa, addresses a warm welcome to all the participating choirs, and to those personalities of the national and international choral singing community who honour the competition with their presence. He also greets the members of the international jury who are present.

Sessions begin early next morning. A brief reminder of the competition rules: only a *cappella* works may be presented at the competition. Both in the semi-final and the final, in each class a choral composition by a Hungarian composer is compulsory before the presentation of the optional pieces. The optional programme must include only contemporary choral compositions. Hungarian is not the easiest language to learn; it is difficult to find another language similar to it, and since the compulsory pieces in several classes have Hungarian texts, of course the pronunciation differs from one choir to another. However, participants do not find it a problem, since the professional organising committee arranged to give information both in Hungarian and English simultaneously, enabling participants to understand all that happens during the daily events.

Loudspeakers all around the town broadcast the performances so people in the street, while walking to the supermarket, can follow in real time what is happening in the concert hall. The audience also plays an important part in attending the performances. Even during the morning sessions the concert hall is almost full, and it is really hard to find a seat at the evening concerts.

Debrecen is very fond of the Béla Bartók International Choir competition and particular attention is given to this major event, expressed also through a unique initiative: since 1970, at each competition the town has commissioned original contemporary choral works from young composers, and these are premiered at the opening ceremony concert, interpreted by the well-known professional Kodály Choir of Debrecen. This choir was founded by György Gulyás, who was also its conductor for some years and who also initiated and founded the Béla Bartók competition, devoted from the very beginning to contemporary choral works.

The competition takes place over several days in the Kölcsey Centre Grand Concert Hall, with professional equipment and excellent acoustics to ensure high quality performances.

On the occasion of the opening gala concert, Mr Béla Somogyi, Deputy Mayor of the Municipality of Debrecen, responsible for cultural affairs, and also President of the Competition, reminds us briefly that the legendary György Gulyás launched the competition in 1961, fifty years ago. He invited Zoltán Kodály to be the first honorary president, but as Kodály was living in Switzerland and could not attend the first competition, he replied to the invitation with the following words: "Although I cannot be with you personally, I am with you in my soul and thoughts. Vivat, crescat, floreat." May it live, grow and flourish.

Did he think at that time that half a century later the competition would be still alive and still guarding its main goals and main concept, the promotion of contemporary choral music, and becoming at the same time a notable event for the international choral community? The competition is indeed still living, growing and flourishing.

Several works by young composers are performed at the opening gala. The composers are invited to join the choir on the stage and are presented to the audience. What a festive moment, when

a couple dressed in local traditional costumes walks to the stage each time, to congratulate the composers and present them with flowers. Up to this year, about a hundred works have been commissioned and the competition is thus a catalyst for promoting contemporary music, presenting unknown challenges each time.

The opening ceremony ends with a previously quite unknown masterpiece of Kodály, *The Music Makers*, composed to celebrate the 700th anniversary of Merton College, Oxford, in 1964. The special feature of this performance is that it is conducted by one of Kodály's students, the same László Heltay who directed the concert forty-eight years ago. He agreed to conduct on this occasion the Hungarian premiere in Debrecen of this piece by Kodály.

So now the competition is officially inaugurated; sessions will continue for two days.

In 2005, in Kyoto, the International Federation of Choral Music classified this competition one of the ten best choir competitions worldwide.

This should come as no surprise, for the tradition of singing in Debrecen goes back several centuries. As has already been mentioned, the town is also celebrating this year the 150th anniversary of organised musical life in Debrecen. Goodwill and voluntary work led to the foundation of the "Zenede" (music institute). The languages of education at the time were Latin and German, and the first institute where musical education was given in the Hungarian language was the Conservatory, which gave to the Hungarian and international music world many famous choral masters, musicians, historians, and conductors. It was the first institute to which Zoltán Kodály gave his name during his lifetime, since music education in the institute was based on his famous method which is still serving as a model for music teaching in many countries.

The members of the international jury at the choir competition worked harmoniously together, according to Peter Broadbent, whose loyalty to Hungary and to the Debrecen competition is beyond any doubt.

Maria Bartha: Peter, was your work on the jury a simple or difficult task? Did you agree with your colleagues?

Peter Broadbent: The work of Jury 'B' was generally conducted with remarkably few disagreements, in a splendid spirit of cooperation and a very friendly atmosphere. The disappointing standard in the Children/Youth and Equal Voice classes caused some discussion about which prizes should be awarded, but there was complete agreement about the order, and a lot of helpful and constructive comments from colleagues. The standard of the mixed and chamber choir classes was obviously very much higher, and once again there was agreement about the order of the results, and very good discussions about the programmes along with an appreciation of the quality of the compulsory pieces.

The international jury was actually divided into two sections, Jury A and Jury B.

Members of Jury A were Philip Brunelle – President of the jury and conductor (USA), Ursa Lah – conductor (Slovenia), Ferenc Sapszon – conductor (Hungary), Csaba Somos – conductor (Hungary), Philippos Tsalahouris – composer (Greece).

Members of Jury B were Peter Broadbent – President of the jury and conductor (United Kingdom), Mykola Gobdych – conductor (Ukraine), Levente Gyöngyösi – composer (Hungary), Harald Jers – conductor (Germany), Ágnes Török – conductor (Hungary).



The members of the international jury at the choir competition worked harmoniously together

The announcement of the results took place on Sunday and the winners of the various classes were as follows.

Children's choirs:

The Lautitia children's choir (Hungary) obtained sufficient marks for the Second Prize (the First Prize was not awarded) and was also proclaimed the most successful children's choir.

Youth choirs:

The Zoltán Kodály mixed youth choir (Hungary) finished with the best result and won the Second Prize (here too, the First Prize was not awarded)

Chamber choirs and mixed choirs:

The Kamēr...Youth Choir (Latvia) won the First Prize in both classes.

Equal voice choirs (female choirs):

The Bartók female choir of the University of Miskolc finished second; the first place was not awarded.

The **Grand Prize** of the Béla Bartók 25th International Choir Competition was awarded to the Youth Choir Kamēr... from Latvia.

Besides the above mentioned prizes, several special prizes were also awarded, including one offered by Mrs Zoltán Kodály, born Sarolta Péczely. This prize was to be awarded for high level interpretations of Kodály's works. The winner of this prize was the Hymnia chamber choir from Denmark, conducted by Flemming Windekilde

In the Kölcsey Centre concert hall the applause of several hundred listeners acclaimed the winners and their conductor Janis Liepins, who is only twenty-three years old. The choir obtained a triple success since – as mentioned above – it was also the winner in the classes of chamber choirs and mixed choirs. The presentation of this choir states:

'A youthful passion combined with sensitive musicality – these are the qualities that best define the youth choir Kamēr.. founded in 1990. In recent years Kamēr .. has worked with programmes specially commissioned for the choir, building up a unique repertoire. The choir's largest project so far has been "The World Sun Songs", which featured 17 new choral works specially commissioned for the choir's twentieth anniversary, including new pieces by eight contemporary Latvian composers. Conveying emotions as well as performing with the highest vocal quality are of equal importance for the choir. This is also expressed by the ellipsis encoded in the choir's name Kamēr, which means "while" in English. While we are still young, anything is possible'

At the closing concert of the competition Kodály's *Psalmus Hungaricus* was performed by the city's official choir and symphony orchestra, with excellent soloists. As well as the competition sessions, choral folklore shows took place on the stage, and there were flash mobs and surprise concerts at various locations. Other choirs gave concerts of sacred music. During the competition participants could see scenes from

different periods of Bartók's life by visiting the special exhibition in the hall.

There is not enough space to narrate the fifty-year history of this competition, but József Balogh, the Festival Director, knows it by heart. Using selected documents, he put together a retrospective presenting the major events of these fifty years. A few facts and figures will help to illustrate the continuous and lasting development of this unique festival.

Since its inception, the Béla Bartók choir competition has been organized on a solid professional basis and at a very professional level. Today an Artistic Committee coordinates the event and decides on classes, number of participants, compulsory pieces, and the selection of candidates. The committee also proposes international jury members and suggests composers.



*Philip Brunelle, President
of Jury, and Paul D. Head,
conductor of the University
of Delaware Chorale*

The organisers have established close contacts with professional partners and national music institutions, whose representatives are invited to attend the sessions and events. The National Federation of choirs and orchestras was

represented by its President, Éva Kollár, who presents the situation and role of the event within the national framework and within an international context.

MB: What does the Béla Bartók Choral Competition represent in the context of the Hungarian choral scene?

Éva Kollár: Since the foundation of the Béla Bartók Choral Competition in 1961, this international musical event plays a very important role in Hungarian musical life. Considering the country's situation during the recent past, the participation of foreign ensembles at a 'socialist' nation's festival – behind the iron curtain – was an extreme event; however the influence of these high level guest choirs was generally fruitful for the host ensembles as well as for Hungarian composers. The new connections with the foreign musical world opened up new possibilities for the home organizations and for the whole Hungarian choral scene.

From the musical point of view, the unique character of this competition focusing on contemporary choral music has formed a rich new repertoire for choirs. This period corresponded with a special time, the explosive development of music education deriving from Zoltán Kodály's flourishing ideas for music in schools. The result was an effective and successful new wave in choral life for both children and adults.

This is what makes the Béla Bartók Choral Competition so notable, and it has kept its original character and quality over the years. The organizers order new compositions each time the event takes place, providing a frame for performances in front of a national and international audience.

Today the Béla Bartók Choral Competition, together with the Zoltán Kodály National Choral Competition, covers an important role in Hungary, enabling ensembles of various formations to perform high level musical work and providing a venue for its

debut before an international audience in Hungary.

MB: Why is Hungarian choral music, which is so beautiful, not very much performed abroad? Is it only on account of the difficult language, or is there another reason?

EK: As a member of the jury at several international choral events, I have noticed that at almost every festival or competition Hungarian compositions are heard. There are the best-known composers, of course, such as Zoltán Kodály, Béla Bartók, Lajos Bárdos and Miklós Kocsár, but more and more works of György Orbán, Miklós Csemiczky, János Vajda, Levente Gyöngyösi and Péter Tóth are becoming familiar to choirs from other nations.

It is true that pieces written in Latin are the easiest and most widely available for choirs around the world. The phonetic characteristics of the Hungarian language present a really difficult task for the singers. The rules of pronunciation are logical, but the structure of the phrases, the particular vowel sounds, and the cadences of our language make it slightly strange to the European ear, while choirs in Japan – for example – find it much easier to learn Hungarian texts. They seem to share some relatively common musical sense with our music.

There is sometimes a connection between Hungarian works and Hungarian folk music arrangements, giving these pieces a special character, which is as interesting for audiences as it is difficult for foreigner performers. The typical rhythm, the recitative manner of diction, *parlando*, and the frequent dance tempo make this music unique and require much greater efforts from singers from all over the world.

There is a third problem with the widespread performance of Hungarian compositions: publicity. The problem for organisers is that they have fewer occasions for presentation and for

commercial advertisements. It is not only a question of poor financial resources; at times they are also slow to act. This is something we need to change very soon.

Last but not least, you may wish also to know something about Hungarian food, so let's ask the expert opinion of Peter Broadbent again: he is very familiar now with Hungarian specialities.

MB: Peter, tell us some of your experiences with Hungarian food ...

PB: Traditional Hungarian food often seems rather heavy for western European tastes, but I have eaten very well on all my visits to Hungary. There are an increasing number of restaurants where a more modern and lighter approach to typical Hungarian recipes can be found, with meals which are not too intimidating in terms of quantity. The classic dishes like *Gulyas* soup, *Pörkölt* (a casserole), *Halászlé* (fish soup) and the famous *Hortobagyi Palacsinta* (pancakes) are wonderful, but I think best eaten in a friend's home.

Are your ears already accustomed to the dissonant chords of modern music? Should your choir wish to learn more about the competition or how to experience it, you can visit the website below.

Website : www.bbcc.hu

Maria Bartha: Bachelor degree (flute) from Kodály Zoltán Conservatory in Debrecen, Hungary. State diploma (French, English) from the “Academy for Foreign Trade” in Budapest. Work at Interkoncert in Budapest, at the Opera & Ballet Department. In France, co-founder of Bussy-St-Georges Music School, President of a music theatre for children in Bussy. Twelve years at the International Hotel Association, seventeen years at OIV (International Organisation of Vine and Wine), an intergovernmental organisation with 43 member states; among other duties, coordinator of sixteen scientific working groups. Follow-up of students (master degree); also in charge of the preparation and follow-up of the organisation of international wine competitions, in collaboration with local staff. Complementary studies in geopolitics, auditor at CNAM (University for lifelong learning) and IRIS, Department of geopolitics and foreign affairs, two years’ specialisation in European Union affairs.



Edited by Gillian Forlivesi Heywood, Italy

The Tradition of Choral Singing in Albania

Suzana Turku

choral conductor & Vice Minister for Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Albania

Albanian musical culture is as ancient as the Albanian people who lived in the Balkan Peninsula and were known under the name of *Pellazgë*. An important part of their culture is the art of choral singing. Choral singing in our country, apart from being a part of our folklore and therefore an intangible folk heritage value, is also considered of great value within the artistic culture which was fostered by the Albanians throughout their national history.

Albanian *a cappella* folk singing, known as iso-polyphony and handed down to us over the centuries, is nowadays internationally well known and recognized for its particularly great values: the UNESCO honored it by including it in the category of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Besides being part of our intangible heritage, *a cappella* singing still vitalizes the musical life of our country. Iso-polyphony is still widely practiced by the inhabitants of the southern territories and is based on two dialects: *Lab* and *Tosk*, each with its different style and particularities. Iso-polyphonic choral singing has influenced and oriented choral art, with many connections between them. Besides traditional folk group singing, choral singing has also seen considerable improvement in our country.

Right from the first century of our era, at the time when music was influenced by the Christian religion, various composers were active, such as Nikete Dardani (340-414), who was born in Dardania and who wrote several sacred works. His masterpiece is a *Te Deum*, still genuinely testifying to the long tradition of choral singing in Albania. Nikete Dardani is always remembered on 7th January according to the Catholic calendar.

During the Byzantine period, from the fourth to the eighth centuries, the well-known Jan Kukuzeli was a real musical talent and one of the great reformers of Byzantine music, on account of which he was appointed head of the Imperial Chapel

of Constantinople. During his pilgrimage to Mount Athos in Greece, he created various religious vocal works including *The Biblical Psalm* (N°.117), *The cherub song*, *The great Papadik Iso* [Great Pope Gerguri] among others. He also created the very important Kukuzeli theoretical system, which was highly innovative, and he influenced the creation of the Byzantine musical alphabet. Jan Kukuzeli composed many religious that influenced the artistic quality of music and improved the art of singing. Because of the longevity and the values of two of his works, *Commitment to prophets*, and *The last supper*, the Italian musicologist Giuseppe Ferrari, in his work *Albania and Byzantine Liturgical Music* (published in Palermo in 1979), wrote: "... these two works can be heard not only in the Greek monasteries but also in the great cathedrals. In Constantinople cathedral I was interested to hear the Kukuzeli works and I thought about Durrës and Kukuzeli, proud to be Albanian ..."

The period after Kukuzeli provides no data reflecting significant developments in musical culture, but between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries we find choral pieces written by many Albanians living in the Italian territories during the Ottoman invasion, notably the sacred choral music of Gjergj Danush Lapacja with his 1532 work *Antifonarit*, which is preserved in the Diocese of Monopoli in Italy.

Even in the period of musical classicism and romanticism, many Albanians composed choral music while living abroad. Particularly noteworthy are *Mesha* and *Oratori* by Luigi Albanesi (1821-1897) or *Ave Maria Coelorum* by Mihovil Mijo Qurković (1852-1936), an Albanian composer who lived in Croatia.

Choral singing in Albania has a long history of progress and tradition but it is hard in some cases to find historical documentation testifying to this on account of 500 years of Ottoman occupation with its subsequent political issues.

Despite all the difficulties and intermissions in this tradition during various periods of Albania's political history, the art of choral singing is as ancient as the Albanians themselves, who mostly perform it in the churches. During all these periods, choral creativity was concentrated on, and music was performed exclusively in connection with religious life.

It was the Albanian Revival in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that, despite mobilization against occupation, also gave new inspiration and orientation to Albanian folk music following the examples of other European countries. For this reason, a new way of approaching secular choral music, emphasizing the war of liberation and patriotic values, became very popular not only in churches but also in other public domains.

The art of choral singing was characterized by heroic and patriotic themes, used to promote Albanian enlightenment ideas during this liberation period. From now on, Albanian music passed through many periods, the first of which is represented by the Albanian Revival period as far as the Declaration of Independence (1912), when choral music followed the example of other Balkan patriotic music. Meanwhile the first choirs were organized in close conjunction with cultural and patriotic organizations at the beginning of the twentieth century. Among the greatest composers of that time are Palokë Kurti, Frano Ndoja, and Thanas Floqi who, besides composing orchestral music, created many choral pieces, frequently in the style of folk songs. The choral pieces, inspired by democratic and patriotic motives, spread all over the country, becoming more popular and beloved every day over and above other types of music. Choral inventiveness during this phase is distinguished by great creativity of songs with patriotic motives, the main national theme before the Declaration of Independence in 1912.

The texts of choral songs of this period were mostly inspired by the heroic fight against occupation, in which the Albanians

were engaged. Among them figure *You Brave Soldiers, For the Motherland, All We Lads, My Honor Calls Me, Missing the Motherland*, and *Sons of Skanderbeg*[1], which are still part of the contemporary repertoire of Albanian choral music. Many authors of the texts of these songs, such as Mihal Grameno, Asdreni (Aleksander Stavre Drenova), Pashko Vasa, and Hil Mosi were at the same time leaders of the national independence movement.

The second period is represented by the musical progress taking place in Albania after the Proclamation of Independence, and extends from 1912 to 1944. This was a period during which the professional and dynamic aspects of Albanian music were most widely developed. Patriotic and cultural organizations which were formed during the Albanian Revival continued working on the extension and development of choral music all over the country. In a short time, cultural centers were opened in many cities, including Korçë, Shkodra, Gjirokastër, Elbasan, Vlorë, Durrës, and Berat. Their activities vitalized the artistic life of the main Albanian cities and lent a new approach to choral singing. During this period, choral creativity was inspired by patriotic themes in all aspects of its harmony and arrangement. The best-known composers of the time were Lec Kurti, Thoma Nasi, Martin Gjoka, Fan Noli, and Kristo Kono, who composed many religious and secular songs in folk style. Choirs became more and more professional and attractive. The main reason underlying progress was the participation and help given by many composers who had studied in the West.

The most important vocal group of that period was the Lira Chorus founded in the city of Korçë in 1920 under the direction of the composer Nasi, who had studied composition in the USA. Later it was directed by the singer Mihal Ciko and the composer Kono, who had both studied in Italy. Some of their best works are *Vlora-Vlora* and *Hymni i Vatres* (*The Hymn of Hearth*), composed by Nasi, *Çu ngrit lulja në mëngjes* (*The*

flower rose in the morning) and *Zoge ku më je rritur* (Where did you grow) by Kono. Later, Kono gave major examples of the choral singing perspective in works like *Albanian Choral Rhapsody N.1* and *Albanian Choral Rhapsody N.2*, composed in 1938 and 1939 respectively.

The Lira Chorus was disbanded in 1939, when Albania was occupied by Italian troops, and revived only after the end of the war. In 1932 a girls' choir was also created at the 'Queen Mother' school in Tirana under the direction of the singer Jorgjia Filce (Truja), who had studied in Italy. In the choir's repertoire there were many works by European composers of the time besides Albanians. It was also involved in many stage plays between 1930-1940.

The work of church choirs such as the Scuola Cantorum in Shkodra, or the choirs of churches such as Shën Thanasi, Shën Gjergji and Shën Ilia in Korçë was notable at the time. The Scuola Cantorum was founded at Shkodra Cathedral on the initiative of the cardinal and composer, Father Mikel Koliqi in 1932. In his monograph on Cardinal Mikel Koliqi, *Symphony of a Life*, Professor Gjon Simoni writes: "... in a place of honor in the choral repertoire were also the works composed by Cardinal Mikel Koliqi with religious themes such as *Viri Galilei*, *Confirmat Hoc Deus*, *Cor Jesu*, *Sacerdotes Domini*, and *Ecce Sacerdos ...*"

The choral singing tradition in Shkodra has been acclaimed since the nineteenth century, but the Scuola Cantorum is considered an especially emblematic part of it. A very important role in this must be attributed to the Catholic Church in Albania. Under the direction of Cardinal Koliqi the choir became a place where an entire generation of musicians grew up and became famous: Prenkë Jakova, Çesk Zadeja, Tonin Harapi, Tish Daija, Simon Gjoni, to name but a few.

Even during the Second World War there were other choirs such as the Orthodox Church Chorus founded in Tirana under the

initiative of the Archbishop of the independent Orthodox Church of Albania Visarion Xhuvani in 1942. From its foundation until 1945, the choir was headed by the well-known soprano Jorgjia Filce who has already been mentioned for her various initiatives with the pupils of the Queen Mother school and the Tirana Technical School. The choir maintained its tradition of church music even in other cities like Durrës and Elbasan. After 1945 the choir was conducted by Kostandin Trako, who had trained as a choir-master in Bucharest, Romania. Under his influence the interpretative qualities and repertoire of the choir improved.

Furthermore, during the Second World War, a male-voice choir was also created at the Tirana Radio Center, headed by the singer Ciko until 1947, when it was attached to the Albanian Philharmonic Chorus. The chorus worked very hard at the interpretation and harmonization of choral folk music for male voices. Other choirs were created during the Second World War, such as the Anti-fascist Youth Chorus formed in 1944 near Tirana, headed by Trako, and many others including that headed by Gago Avrazi which, after the end of the war, became the People's Army Artistic Ensemble Choir.

The songs created during the war are known as Partisan Songs. They were inspired by other world revolutionary songs, mostly from the Balkans. They were also influenced by patriotic songs from the time of the National Revival, city songs and others, demonstrating a close connection to folk songs following the Albanian folk musical metrics of 7/8, 5/8, 4 + 5/8 etc. These inspirational partisan songs were well known for their spirit of mobilization and bravery. *Marsh Partizan* (Partisan March), *Malet me blerim mbuluar* (Green covered mountains), *Partizani n'luft po shkonte* (In the war the partisan was going), *Shqiponjat Partizane* (The partisan eagles), are the best known songs even nowadays. Among the most famous composers of partisan songs were Dhora Leka, Sofokli Paparisto and Mustafa Krantja, as well as Kono and

Trako, who have already been mentioned.

The third period covers all musical progress between the end of the Second World War and 1960. At the beginning of this period, Albanian music developed greatly. Many professional musical institutions were opened, among them choral ones, and the first Albanian music school began its activity. In later years it would make an enormous contribution to the preparation of composers. After the end of the Second World War, under pressure from communist ideology, choral music was encouraged all over the country to support communist-inspired national propaganda. During this phase many choirs were created, such as the People's Army Artistic Ensemble Choir (1945), the State Philharmonic Chorus (1947) which became part of the Opera and Ballet Theater (1953), the State Artistic Folk and Dance Ensemble Chorus (1957) and the first music school, Jordan Misja (1946). Following that example, other choirs were organized all around the country close to other cultural centers and became a very important element in the cultural life of Albania.

Apart from folk choral singing, other varieties of music appeared such as the cantata, vocal suite, vocal rhapsody, vocal poem, and oratorio, and many stage works such as the opera where the chorus plays an important role. The most famous choral works of the time are the vocal-symphonic poems like *Borova* and *Labëria* by Kono and *Dasma Shqiptare* (Albanian wedding) by Kostandin Trako, as performed by the State Philharmonic Chorus. Apart from the national music repertoire there was enormous interest in international composers, and Albanian choirs also began performing in other countries including USSR, China, North Korea and Vietnam.

The interpretative quality of the professional choir grew constantly through artistic courses and schools. The quality of choral music creativity began to reach a very high level thanks to composers who had studied abroad like Kono, Trako, Jakova and Dhora Leka, Zadeja, Daija and Gjoni, who studied in

eastern music schools. All these figures made their contribution towards improving and modernizing choral music in Albania.

The fourth period extends from 1960 to 1990. During this period, Albanian music reached the level of a fully developed culture with its own quality and national identity. Qualified choirs intensified their activity and creativity all around the country. All this was possible thanks to the opening of new musical education centers, the opening of the first Music Conservatoire (1962), the possibility of having more professional music information from abroad and better organization of events. Many composers, conductors and vocalists who studied in the Albanian music school lent real prosperity to a large opus of the national choral tradition. During this period a new affluence of musical creativity and a new dimension of event organization can be perceived. Directors concentrated more on music for the stage and on vocal concert creativity.

The first Albanian opera *Mrika*, composed by Prenkë Jakova, was followed by many others by various artists including Kono, Grimci, Nova, Gaci, Tonin Harapi, Mula, Kapidani and N. Zoraqi. The main theme still remains Albanian resistance against occupation over the ages. Very often these operas evoke the character of 'Skanderbeg', or the anti-fascist resistance of the Albanian people during the Second World War. A general view of Albanian opera of that period would show the dominance of grandiose scenes where the role of the chorus was particularly important. The most successful are *Skënderbeu* by Jakova, *Lulja e Kujtimit* by Kono, *Zgjimi* by Harapi, and *Komisari* by Zoraqi.

Large choral works were developed at this time: for example, *Kënga e maleve* (The mountain song), the vocal suite *Vullnetarët* (The Volunteers), *Poema e Dritës* (The poem of the light) by Harapi, the cantata *Komisari* (The commissioner) by F. Ibrahim, the oratorio *Partizani* (The Partisan) by T.

Hoshafi, and choral poems like *Përse mendohen këto male* (Why these mountains are thinking) and *Shqiponjat fluturojnë lartë* (Eagles fly high) by T.Daia.

Together with stage and concert choral songs, the harmonization of choral folk songs became popular, where many composers like Zadeja, Harapi, and Milto Vako made their contribution with many works including *Shkon djali termal* (The boy goes beyond the mountain), *Kur me zbret nga Voskopoja* (When descending from Voskopoja) and *Kurvelesh zemra ime* (My heart Kurvelesh) by Cesk Zadeja and *Pranvera filloi me ardhe* (The spring is coming), by Tonin Harapi.

The period from 1960 to 1990 was very rich, with cultural activities all over the country. From 1967 onwards, the 'May Concert' was organized in Tirana where children's choirs from many music schools all over the country took part together with professional choirs. This fourth period brought technical perfection in singing technique and in vocal qualities. Until 1967 the Orthodox and Catholic church choirs continued their choral singing activities. Later the communist dictatorship forbade the performance of religious rites and with the closure and destruction of all religious buildings, choirs were also suppressed. Despite the progress that choral music had made over the years, it could hardly remain undamaged by communist propaganda and ideology.

The fifth period runs from 1990 to the present, a period covering the fall of the dictatorship and the restoration of democracy. After 23 years of silence, choral music returned to the Orthodox and Catholic churches under the leadership of such personalities as Gjon Simoni, Gjon Kapedani, Milto Vako, and Zef Coba, with many high quality pieces including *Deus in adiutorium intende*, *Requiem* by Harapi, *De Profundis*, *Ave Maria* and *Stabat Mater* by Simoni and other non-religious works such as *Rini më e bukur se Pranvera* (A youth more beautiful than the spring) (Cantata for mixed choirs) *10 Kenge për kor mikst*,

(Ten songs for mixed chorus) *Dremi liqeni*, (The lake is asleep) *Requiem për humbjen e ëngjëjve* (Requiem for the angels lost) by Ibrahim, *Gaudeamus*, *Lutjet e Nënë Terezë* (The mother Theresa prayers) and *Lotet e Planetit* (The planet tears) by A.Peci.

Other choirs were also created in this period: Kori i vajzave (The girls chorus, 1992) headed by Vako, Pax Dei (1993) and Engjejt e vegjel (Little angels) (2001) headed by S.Turku, Rozafa Expression headed by Coba and the continuation of the Lira Chorus in Korça, headed by J. Nano. Albanian choirs began their international activities too during this period. The Pax Dei chamber choir, which I myself directed, took part in more than 50 national and international activities in countries including Italy, Switzerland, France, Germany, Israel, Cyprus, and Greece, during the period 1994-2000. The Rozafa Expression choir and the Lira Chorus also took part in such activities in Shkodra, Korçë, Durrës, Tirana and in Greece, Montenegro, Italy and Macedonia.

The art of choral singing – other than the ancient Albanian folk tradition – despite its comparatively short life-span of hardly more than a century, has played a very important part in the history of musical culture in Albania. Choral music is well-known and liked all over the country, maintaining a predominant role over other musical genres. Song and singing have accompanied the Albanians during the centuries of their fight for freedom, independence and prosperity.

Apart from being a national heritage and wealth, choral singing is also the best way to express solidarity and mutual affection, and it possesses not only cultural values but also an educational role for the new generations.

May express to all of you my sincere gratitude for your attention and the interest shown in traditional choral singing in my country.

[1] Skanderbeg (Gjergj Kastrioti) is one of Albania's iconic figures, a national hero who fought against the Ottoman Turks in the fifteenth century. The name 'Skanderbeg' derives from Iskander Bey, the name given to him by the Turks.

Edited by Helen Baines Clayworth, Spain & Gillian Forlivesi Heywood, Italy

Critic's Pick...

VOCES8 – A Choral Tapestry





Reviewed by Jonathan Slawson, Journalist

Signum Classics presents VOCES8 in *A Choral Tapestry*, recorded at the Brinkburn Priory in 2011. Produced by Nicholas Parker and engineered by Mike Hatch on behalf of Floating Earth Productions, this CD serves as a model for all choral ensembles around the globe.

VOCES8 features an all-star roster of Andrea Haines (soprano), Emily Dickens (soprano), Chris Wardle (countertenor), Barnaby Smith (countertenor), Charles MacDougall (tenor), Robert Smith (tenor), Paul Smith (baritone), and Dingle Yandell (bass). The solos are interwoven seamlessly with the choir and both the ensemble and solo sections are, without question, some of the most breathtaking music making I have ever heard.

I offer a special ‘shout out’ to Chris Wardle and Barnaby Smith, not to suggest that they are better than the rest of their solo counterparts, but rather that it is simply so refreshing to hear such crystal clear countertenor voices floating above the rest. Their voices add incredible depth to the music, and leave the listener in complete awe (and perhaps jealousy!).

Those who are familiar with my column are aware of my usual distaste for ‘potpourri’ CDs like this, which traditionally explore multiple styles and patch them together in what VOCES8 calls a ‘tapestry’. I say this usually because it is nearly impossible to perform this significant breadth of music with such depth and clarity, and give each piece its own unique (and authentic) identity. It is so often easier to master one style rather than present multiple styles – sacred, secular, spiritual, motet, etc... – and breathe life to the pieces so that each track is profound and bears its own unique charm. VOCES8, however, does this, and they do so beautifully.

I say this with one caveat: Go Down Moses. It’s just too pretty. Dingle Yandell’s bold declaration goes right to the core of the piece; despite this, the ensemble, however, retreats to an ethereal elegance. It’s gorgeous; however, in my opinion, it is not stylistically correct. I am curious to hear what other listeners think as well, and look forward to hearing whether or not you agree.

In so many ways though, VOCES8 nailed the stylistic nuance of each piece. Whether it’s the soaring lines in the opening *Os Justi*, or the bright playfulness of the motet *Vigilate*, buoyancy of the Cantate Domino (which, by the way, I think is one of the best recordings of this piece I have ever heard), their interpretation of the ever popular *Steal Away*, or the haunting ethereal qualities of the *O Magnum Mysterium*, this ensemble’s sense of “ensemblship” goes beyond that which I have ever heard.

This recording is truly a masterpiece. Bravo.

For more information on VOCES8, visit their website at:
www.voces8.com

And listen to music samples here:
<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/album/a-choral-tapestry/id487123957?ign-mpt=uo%3D4>

Jonathan Slawson holds a Bachelor of Music degree from Westminster Choir College and a Masters of Nonprofit Management at the New School University. His professional interests cross arts education, policy, and management. Currently, he works for the League of American Orchestras as their Donor Support Manager. Prior, he was the Development Assistant for Lincoln Center's capital campaign. He served as Lincoln Center's Government and Community Relations Intern and has written for Disney's, *In Tune Monthly* Magazine, where he was editor of the Teacher Guide. He also worked at New World Stages (Stage Entertainment) and the McCarter Theatre Center. He has taught music at Maureen M. Welch Elementary School, the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, and Stagestruck Performing Arts Center. He serves on Blair Academy's Board of Governors, and was the recipient of the Westminster Choir College President's Award in 2009, the university's top honor.



Do you have a CD that you would like reviewed in the journal?

Please contact me at jonathan.ryan.slawson@gmail.com