

# Eleven Mini-Portraits of Today's Key Personalities

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

This article presents eleven people who are currently the most interesting, active, creative, and quality-surpassing personalities alive today.



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**STOJAN KURET** (1957) graduated in conducting from the Ljubljana Academy of Music and studied piano at Giuseppe Tartini Conservatory in Trieste (Italy), where he teaches. He conducted APZ Tone Tomšič in Ljubljana (2002-2010) and still conducts the VAL – Vocal Academy Ljubljana male choir. They each garnered much international success with the Grand Prix of Europe (won twice by him in 2002 and 2010), thus making him the only conductor to win it with different ensembles. Awarded the 2011 Guidoneum Award in Arezzo/Italy, he also conducted the RTV Slovenia Chamber Choir and the Italian youth choir

Coro Giovanile Italiano and collaborates with the ČarniCe female vocal group. He is keen on performing less-performed literature and encourages the creation of new compositions.

**KARMINA ŠILEC** (1967) has thrilled home and international audiences with interesting productions through her ensembles Carmina Slovenica and !Kebatola! and through the artistic concept of 'Choregie' – a type of vocal theatre. She has expanded the scope of vocal music to include complex, multimedia artistic events that have been presented at international art festivals and through concert tours worldwide. She also creates and stages projects with many ensembles worldwide. Awarded the Robert Edler Prize, over twenty top prizes at choral competitions, the ITI Music Theatre Now Award, the Prešeren Fund Award, and many others, she is also a guest conductor, international lecturer, and jury member. She teaches choral conducting at the University of Maribor.



**DAMIJAN MOČNIK** (1967) is a composer, a conductor, the artistic leader of music activities at St. Stanislaus' Institution, and the professor of music at the Diocesan Classical Gymnasium in Ljubljana, where he developed the concept of a choral pyramid of five 'gymnasium' schools and two alumni choirs. Conducting two choirs himself (the St. Stanislaus Youth Choir and Megaron Chamber Choir), he has also won numerous awards abroad. He founded and has conducted the Slovenian children's choir



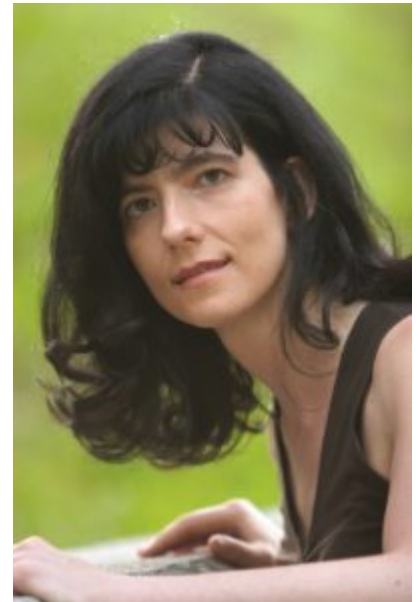
and has written many commissioned and competition-winning works that have been performed by numerous top choirs around the world (CD published by Carus). He is also an acknowledged guest composer and conductor (Europa Cantat 2006 Mainz; Seattle Pacific University; University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; Taipei Male Choir; and others.)

**ANDRAŽ HAUPTMAN** (1968) is a conductor and pianist and has studied at the Academy of Music in Ljubljana. He has conducted the Primorski akademski zbor Vinko Vodopivec male choir and has achieved his greatest successes at home and abroad (including participating in the 1997 EGP finale in Tours) with the Ave Chamber Choir (1984–2011). They collaborated with Eric Ericson at the European symposium for choral music in Ljubljana (1995) and have also collaborated with Gary Graden.



Numerous new Slovenian works, which the choir has performed with great success, were written on Hauptman's initiative. The Ave Chamber Choir has also recorded eight CDs under his leadership.

**URŠA LAH** (1969) studied music teaching in Ljubljana and choir conducting in Tromsø (Norway). With Veter (1993-2009) and APZ Tone Tomšič (2002-2009), she set up many premiere performances and won numerous awards, including the Grand Prix of Europe (2008). While conducting the RTV Slovenia Chamber Choir (1998-2002) she held the first performances of some contemporary Slovenian compositions, enriched the radio archives with Slovenian and foreign twentieth-century works, and prepared numerous vocal and instrumental projects. Living in Norway, she conducts the Finnmark Opera Choir and the choir of the Arctic Philharmonic Orchestra and teaches at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Tromsø.



**HELENA FOJKAR ZUPANČIČ** (1970) is a music teacher, choral conductor, and vocal coach renowned for a healthy, homogenous, and beautiful choral sound and convincing stage performances. She has performed concerts around Europe with the St. Stanislaus Girls' Choir Ljubljana and St. Nicholas Choir Litija with outstanding results at demanding competitions (including winning the 2009 EBU Let the People Sing in Oslo, with her outstanding girls choir). This year, they performed at the European Festival of Youth Choirs in Basel, Switzerland. She has conducted the Slovenian children's choir (2004-2009) and records and performs with the RTV Slovenia Chamber Choir.



**AMBROŽ ČOPI** (1973) is a composer and conductor who studied piano and composition at the Academy of Music in Ljubljana and has received numerous awards for his works, which are presented on two of his own CDs published by Astrum (Slovenia) and Sulasol (Finland). Čopi remains a lyricist leaning towards Romanticism, and his works are rich in sound and harmony.



Best known for his sacred and folk arrangements, he has won eleven gold prizes at national competitions as well as fifteen first prizes and several gold plaques at international competitions with his choirs, the crowning achievement being his EGP 2009 finale performance with APZ Univerze na Primorskem. He has also initiated the International Choral Festival, international biennial of contemporary music, and 'Simfonic voices' concert cycles in Koper.

**MARTINA BATIČ** (1978) graduated in music teaching from the Ljubljana Academy of Music and finished her post-graduate studies in choral conducting at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater Munich. She has also conducted the choir of the Slovenian National Opera and Ballet Theatre, Ljubljana (2004-2009). Winner



of the Eric Ericson Award at the acclaimed international competition for young choral conductors, she has collaborated with the Chor des Bayerischen Rundfunks, SWR Ensemble, Netherlands Radio Choir, Swedish Radio Choir, and Eric Ericson Chamber Choir. She conducted at the jubilee concert marking the 90th anniversary of composer Ingvar Lindholm, and also the workshop at Europa Cantat 2012. She has been the artistic leader of the Slovenian Chamber Choir since 2011.

**SEBASTJAN VRHOVNIK** (1978) is the Conductor and Assistant Professor of Choral Conducting at the Ljubljana Academy of Music and leads various choral courses at home and abroad. He is currently the Choirmaster of the Mixed Choir of the Academy of Music, the Obala Koper Chamber Choir, and the APZ Tone Tomšič of University of Ljubljana. Under his baton, choirs have achieved remarkable successes at international competitions within the past few years (Arezzo, Spittal, Maribor, Cork, Seghizzi). As a guest conductor, he has collaborated with the RTV Slovenia Chamber Choir, the professional Slovenian Chamber Choir, and the choir of the Maribor Opera House.



### **Outstanding among children's choir conductors are:**

**MAJA CILENŠEK** (1968), founder of the Children's and Girls' Choir at Koper Music School, which have won national and international competitions several times. She has performed numerous new vocal and vocal/instrumental works by Slovenian composers including Ambrož Čopi, Uroš Rojko, and Matej Bonin.





**KATJA GRUBER** (1966) has successfully conducted different choirs, and won the gold plaque at the national competition with a male group. Lately, she has continued to gain successes with the Children's Choir of Nazarje Elementary School – including double consecutive overall victories at the national competition. She is the author of *Katjina upevalnica*, a handbook of warm-up part-singing for children's choirs.



*Edited by Steve Lansford, USA*