

Europa Cantat Celebrates its 50th Anniversary

And is getting younger and younger at the same time – Press Release

Sonja Greiner,

General Secretary

Those who attended the impressive opening ceremony or the colorful atelier concerts of the EUROPA CANTAT festival in Utrecht in July 2009 could meet singers of all generations – those of the generation of the founders, who are now over 80; choirs of all kinds and age groups; children and young people from Benin and Hong Kong who shared the stage with their peers from all over Europe; and even a 5-year-old soloist who brought the audience to tears. It is difficult to imagine that the Europa Cantat federation, which organized such an innovative, colorful, young and multicultural festival, was founded half a century ago. However, the aims of the founding fathers are still valid today.

On 15 May 1960, a group of conductors mostly from countries which had participated in World War 2 (Austria, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and Yugoslavia), came together in Geneva and decided to found a European Federation of Young Choirs. The founding fathers (yes, it was really only “fathers” at the time) had the war in mind and were looking for ways to increase understanding among peoples through their young choirs. The driving forces were two conductors from France and Germany, César Geoffray and Gottfried Wolters, as well as the choral organizations “A Coeur Joie” (France) and

“Arbeitskreis Musik in der Jugend” (Germany). A series of international youth meetings on the Lorelei in the 1950s had prepared the path for this idea: What better way to promote understanding for each other than a 10-day-event, during which the young people would not only sing for each other, but mostly with each other, sharing accommodation and meals so that they would be spending virtually all their time together.

In 1961 the first EUROPA CANTAT festival took place in Passau with 69 choirs from 12 different European countries. The list included a choir from what was Yugoslavia at the time, as well as a choir from Leipzig whose singers experienced the special atmosphere of an international meeting a few days before the building of the wall – an experience most of them would not be able to repeat for many years. During the festival Gottfried Wolters went on stage together with a French colleague, Roger Motz, who had been blinded during the war. They told the young people how they had discovered that they had been fighting on the same day on the two sides of the river Rhine. Therefore, one might have been responsible for blinding the other, and – with the EUROPA CANTAT festival – they now wanted to avoid that something like that could ever happen again.

This principal idea of promoting tolerance and peace through singing together at intercultural events, and to promote and disseminate European choral repertoire, is still behind the huge programme of the federation which changed its name in the 1990s to become “Europa Cantat – European Federation of Young Choirs”. On 9 February 1963 the association was registered in Bonn as a charitable association according to German law, supported by the German Youth Ministry from the very beginning, and recently also by the European Union. Today, Europa Cantat has over 40 member organizations from 28 European countries as well as hundreds of member choirs and individual members. Its programme includes the tri-annual festival as well as all kinds of events for choirs, singers, conductors, composers and choral managers.

During the anniversary year Europa Cantat will organize a number of events (see www.EuropaCantat.org). On the birthday itself, President Sante Fornasier will be present at the Hearts-in-Harmony concert in Barcelona, where children and young people with disabilities will sing a concert together with other young people; Europa Cantat means singing together across all boundaries, not only geographically speaking.

At the age of 50 Europa Cantat also feels ripe for further change. Thus the last General Assembly in autumn 2009 decided to merge Europa Cantat with the European Association of Choral Federations – AGEK (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Chorverbände). From January 2011 the members of the two associations will speak with one voice on behalf of choral music in Europe, under the name of “European Choral Association – Europa Cantat”.

Further information on www.EuropaCantat.org

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