

Jakarta World Choir Festival

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A Choral Cornucopia

By Jonathan Velasco, conductor

From Tommyanto Kandisaputra and the Bandung Choral Society, the team that produces the highly successful Bali International Choir Festival (now in its 9th year), comes the latest addition to its roster of events: the Jakarta World Choir Festival. The festival's premier presentation took place between 24-27 October 2019, in the Taman Ismail Marzuki centre, in a hall with excellent acoustics in the middle of an arts complex in central Jakarta.

The competition involved 44 choirs performing across nine categories, with a Grand Prix competition featuring the category winners at the end. The jury was composed of choral luminaries Prof. Hak Won Yoon and Hee Churl Kim (South Korea), Maestra Catharina Leimena (Indonesia), Susanna Saw (Malaysia), Andrea Angelini (Italy) and Jonathan Velasco (Philippines), with Tommy Kandisaputra acting as artistic director of the jury, and indeed of the entire competition.

Guest choirs were also invited to perform during the festival. These included the Hak Won Yoon Chorale under Prof. Hak Won Yoon himself (who incidentally celebrated his birthday during the festival!), and the Archipelago Singers conducted by Ega Azarya, recent Grand Prix winner of the Busan Choral Festival and Competition in South Korea, among others.



A total of 24 gold medals and 14 silver medals were awarded during the competition. The Grand Prix was won by Fisheries Choir from Malang, Jawa Timur, Indonesia, under the inspiring direction of Alfredo Agustinus Randy Kowi. They are now qualified to directly join the Grand Prix of the 9th Bali International Choir Festival in 2020.

The quality of singing was generally high, with several outstanding choirs from Indonesia and South Korea winning in the various categories. The highest scores were obtained by the winners in the Pop & Jazz category (Paduan suara Mahasiswa Gema Gita Bahana, Insan Kharin Rahim Amuda conductor), Mixed Choir category (Concordia Choir Nommensen HKBP University Medan, Tumpal Paulsen Gultom conductor), and in the Folklore category (Fisheries Choir, Alfredo Agustinus Randy Kowi conductor). The South Koreans avoided an all-Indonesian shut-out by winning the Senior Choir category (Yonsei Music Academy Choir, Hyun Chul Lee conductor).

The new choral arrangements heard from many of the choirs were notable. There were new arrangements of various folksongs by Indonesian composer Ken Steven, which captured the intricacies in rhythm and harmony in the songs of various Indonesian tribes and islands. Dinar Primasti's arrangements for pop music sounded refreshing and earned him a special award for outstanding arrangement in pop music.

The festival also had an educational side, with workshops by the jury members as well as some Indonesian choral specialists. There were also 10 friendship concerts and 6 special concerts where the participants had a chance to listen to a wide range of repertoire.

The jury had a good time enjoying the fine performances by the choirs and was able to appreciate the wonderful hospitality of Tommy and his team. The food served was excellent and took guests on a gastronomic tour of this culturally rich country.

The next city for the World Choir Festival series is Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, from 21-24 September 2020. See you there!



Jonathan Velasco is a much sought-after conductor, clinician and judge in the choral world today. He was a member and assistant choirmaster of the University of the Philippines Madrigal Singers from 1982-1989. He was also a member and assistant conductor of the World Youth Choir, becoming its first Asian conductor in 1996. He has since conducted this prestigious ensemble two more times, in 2000 and 2018. Velasco and his choirs have won first prizes in major choral competitions in Europe. He regularly sits on panels of choral competitions in Europe and Asia. He currently conducts the Ateneo Chamber Singers. Velasco is advisor to the board of the

International Federation for Choral Music, and Philippine representative to the Interkultur World Choir Council. He was elected the first President of the Philippine Choral Directors Association in 2008. Email: choirmaster@gmail.com

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