

# World Youth Choir Summer Session

*Betzabé Juárez Vargas*

*World Youth Choir Singer (Mexico)*

Many years ago, some people had a dream, to create a place where nationalities do not matter, nor skin colour, political or religious beliefs, a place where all speak the same language and live together as one. 21 years ago, that dream became real, the name: World Youth Choir, the language: music.

The World Youth Choir is indeed an educational experience in every sense; young singers from all around the world come together for a month just to sing in one of the most important and unique choirs in existence, where they get to perform music at the highest level. I could not be more proud to be part of such an amazing project. In the beginning you know that you will get the chance to sing new repertoire, work with important conductors, improve as a musician and test your musical standard, but this choir is so much more than that.

This summer session, we were hosted by one of the most beautiful places on earth, Puerto de la Cruz, Tenerife, Canary Islands, this thanks to the Cultural Association Reyes Bartlet (CARB) and Moviment Coral Catala who, along with the World Youth Choir patron organizations: the International Federation for Choral Music, Europa Cantat and Jeunesses Musicales International, believed in the project and helped to keep the dream alive.

And so the session began. It is very exciting to see how young

singers from around the world come together with only one purpose, to create music. The first day is all about welcome. You can see new singers who do not know exactly what to expect, all excited and nervous about this amazing experience, and also old members hugging each other and getting to know all these new people with whom they are going to spend so much time.

Under the baton of Mr. Ragnar Rasmussen (Norway) and Mr. Josep Vila I Casañas (Spain), we had days full of singing, studying and rehearsing, with the additional help of our excellent section leaders, Maria Valdmaa, Lhente-Mari Pitout and Kristopher Snarby, in order to ensure that this cohort would not fall below the musical excellence and high standard that the World Youth Choir is known to have.

But not everything was hard work, we got the chance to experience Tenerife in a very V.I.P way; the organizers took us on a tour to the Teide, a gorgeous place where we had a great time, also during the rehearsal camp some of us managed to go to the beach, Lago Martiáñez, Loro Parque and some others for a walk in the city and at night salsa dancing. During our time at Puerto de la Cruz, a group of volunteers were with us every day with big smiles and working very hard: Oti Bazo, Susi Pérez, Marianne Fernández, Sergio Rodríguez, Lisa and Nieves Su Ming, Leire Acosta, Aitor Mora, Cristo Velázquez (President of CARB), we will always be thankful for your efforts, the good company and the time you spent with us.

This summer session Marina Velasquez from CARB joined the choir, she was our guardian angel, she took care of every detail and we appreciate all her hard work and the love that she put into this project.

Too soon, it was time for our first concert; you could hear among the members: "Are we ready? Will it be a good concert? Will we be able to perform this difficult music?" We felt we could use more rehearsals, but then, we were on stage at this

beautiful church and the show began. The result was wonderful, we sounded like one soul, a big voice that speaks through music; I can only try to describe the feeling of being there with all these people who just met a couple of days before, but it felt as if we had been working together for much longer, and the most magical thing is that it got even better: as we got more comfortable with the music, we connected more with the conductors and so, we gave our best to every different audience.

The first part of this year's repertoire consisted of choral music by Scandinavian composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this was under the baton of Mr. Rasmussen who, with a unique style, let us dazzle the audience with a different performance every concert. The challenge of this repertoire lay in really expressing the contrasting moods that the pieces offered: "Våren" by Edvard Grieg, an evocation of spring with a beautiful melody, "Warning to the rich" by Thomas Jennefelt, where we had to demonstrate not only good singing but acting as well; "Luceat" by Mikko Heiniö, "Laudes Debitas Deo Nostro" by Wolfgang Plagge, "Peace I leave with you" by Knut Nystedt, "Credo" by Egil Hovland, "And death shall have no dominion" by Sverre Bergh, and finally, we got to sing to the mountain wind with "Biegga Luothe" by Jan Sanström, you could hear a soloist *yoiking* accompanied by the ceremonial drum. The versatility that this choir can achieve will never stop surprising me.

The journey that came after was a bit different, but very exciting as well, Mr. Vila I Casañas took us on the most interesting trip through the choral music of the Mediterranean. We sang: "Esbozos sobre un tema cántabro" by Jesús Eguiguren, "Campanes sobre el mar" by Joan Maria Thomas, "Chácaras Blancas" by Juan José Falcón Sanabria, "Ohihu hau" by David Azurza, "Dos canciones de anochecer" by Alejandro Yagüe to poems by Federico García Lorca, "Les neus que es fonen" by Enric Morera, "Lela" by Rosendo Mato, "Nawa Isbahan" by Juan Pablo de Juan, "Canto negro" by Xavier Monsalvage and

“Després” by Feliu Gasull, which was one of the most challenging pieces of the entire repertoire. This was commissioned by the Catalan Choral Organization for the World Youth Choir 2010, it was quite an experience to sing it and Mr. Vila did a great job putting together what in the beginning seemed impossible. When we finally got through the piece the feeling was really overwhelming, we had a lot of fun and most of it was because we enjoyed so much working with Josep.

Las Palmas was the first place to witness a very colourful country presentation, at this concert we all dressed up in our traditional costumes, we had the chance to bring our country on stage, 80 singers from 38 different countries standing in the same place. Music is one of the few things that really unifies the world, we were all standing there despite any conflict or doctrine, when you witness something like this, you have no doubt of why the World Youth Choir is UNESCO's Artist for Peace, and being a part of something as important as this is something that I could never compare with anything.

During our concert tour we visited very charming places such as Tenerife, Las Palmas, Donostia-San Sebastián, Burgos, Menorca and Barcelona. This would not have been possible without the collaboration of Canarias's Government, Cabildo de Tenerife, Puerto de la Cruz, Las Palmas and Burgos's Town Hall, the Confederation of choirs of País Vasco, Joventuts Musicals of Ciutadella and Linguamon.

There is someone who works before, during and after every session, dedicating a big part of his life just to see that this project moves in the right direction; that is the project manager Mr. Vladimir Opačić, he organizes everything so we can find our way easily through this wonderful experience, but he is more than just the manager, he is the one who welcomes every member into this special family, he promotes respect, friendship, tolerance, and most of all he encourages the choir to give its best in every rehearsal and concert, he is a true

ambassador of the World Youth Choir message and we could not be more lucky to have him as our guide.

The last concert was filled with emotions because we realized that it was time to go home, for some of us this might be the last concert with this wonderful choir, meaning that we might not see each other or sing together for a long time. We sang for the audience but most of all, we sang for us, for our friends, for those who were there and for those who were in our hearts; suddenly the past weeks seemed to have passed too quickly, all this experience felt as if it had happened in just one short second; that night we sang, laughed and cried, for me it was the best concert, all of these emotions were printed in the music and, therefore, you would not be able to listen to anything like it anywhere else.

Nowadays we need a place that reminds us that we can live in peace and join forces to achieve something pure, a place that gives us the strength to keep preparing ourselves to be professionals, which is why this choir must live a long life.

This choir made me see myself differently; it changed the ideas I used to have about my talents and limits. Being among these great people put things in perspective not only in professional terms, but also in a very personal way, to live, explore and manage myself for the rest of my life. This can only be learned at home, and this is what it is for me, a second home.

In the end, the World Youth Choir is a big network, not only of top quality musicians, but also of amazing human beings with extraordinary souls, here you can find your best friend, soul mate or even your partner for life.

The World Your Choir does change your life forever!