

European Choral Grand Prix 2011

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The 'European Choral Grand Prix' (GPE) competition began in 1988 when four of the oldest international choral competitions in Europe came together to set up this new choral event. The 'Concorso Polifonico Internazionale Guido d'Arezzo' (Italy), 'Concorso e Festival Internazionale Seghizzi' (Italy), 'Florilège vocal de Tours' (France) and 'Béla Bartók International Choir Competition in Debrecen' (Hungary) founded together the super cup of choral singing. The year after, the 'International May Choir Competition Prof. Georgi Dimitrov' (Varna, Bulgaria) joined and, in 1990, the group was further enlarged with the addition of the 'Certamen Coral de Tolosa' (Spain). In 2007, the founders welcomed the 'International Choral Competition Maribor', which joined the original six. The following year, the 'Concorso e Festival Internazionale Seghizzi' left the GPE Association and six members currently remain.

Over the last 23 years the GPE has provided the stage for many successful performances and set outstanding new trends in choral music. The following list details a history of the winners between 1989 and 2010 by country:

- Sweden has won the GPE the most frequently, having clinched four victories with the following choirs: St Jacobs Kammerchor in 1992, The Mats Nilsson Vocal Ensemble in 1994, Lunds Vocal Ensemble in 1999 and

Allmänna Sången in 2005.

- Slovenia and Lithuania both have three winners; the former won with APZ Tone Tomšič in 2002 and 2008 and Vokalna akademija Ljubljana in 2010. The latter succeeded with the Chamber Choir of the Conservatoire of Vilnius in 1991, Jauna Muzika in 1993 and Kamerinis Koris Brevis in 2003.
- The USA and Hungary have two winners each: respectively the University of Mississippi Concert Singers in 1998 and The University of Utah Singers in 2006, and Pro Musica Leanykar in 1996 and Magnificat Children's Choir in 2001.
- The Philippine Madrigal Singers and APZ Tone Tomšič from Slovenia have each won the GPE twice, but with different conductors (1997 and 2007, 2002 and 2008 respectively).
- The following countries have won the GPE once:
 - Denmark (Kammerkoret Hymnia in 1989), Japan (Kallos Choir in 1995), Russia (Vesna Children's Choir in 2000), Latvia (Kamer in 2004) and Argentina (Coro Universitario de Mendoza in 2009).
- One conductor, Stojan Kuret, has won the GPE twice, with Slovenia's APZ Tone Tomšič in 2002 and Vokalna akademija Ljubljana in 2010.

This list clearly highlights the dynamics of international choral life. Interestingly, some of these elite choral groups are still active and successful, whilst others no longer exist. However, some deductions can be made with regard to the future, in order to analyse the GPE's role on the world choral stage.

The 23rd GPE took place in Tolosa on 5th November 2011, a few days after the 43rd edition of 'Certamen Coral de Tolosa'. Six choirs – already winners of the six European choral competitions which form the GPE – came to put their artistic

skill to the ultimate test. First to take to the stage in the Larunbata Concert Hall was the Coro Città di Roma conducted by Mauro Marchetti, which had won the 'Grand Prix Varna' in 2010. Formed in 1979, the Coro Città di Roma represents a new generation of Italian choirs meeting modern technical and artistic criteria, creating a new vision of repertoire and promoting and spreading polyphonic music. The choir has toured in Hungary, Spain, France, Sweden, Belgium and Slovenia, taking part in international festivals and competitions. Their new projects are impressive, involving working with composers Eric Whitacre (2011) and Javier Busto (2012). At the GPE 2011, the choir presented music by Giovanni Maria Trabaci, Hugo Wolf, Eric Whitacre, Sven-David Sandström and Michele Josia.



Javier Busto and 'Kup Taldea'

One of the leaders of modern Basque choral art, the mixed choir KUP Taldea, conducted by Gabriel Baltés, took first place three times and won the 'Florilège vocal de Tours' Grand Prix in France in 2010. Established in 2003, the choir has had a fantastic career so far, winning prizes at three of the six GPE international competitions (Tolosa, Maribor and Tours). For the 2011 GPE competition, the programme included music by Jacobus Handl Gallus, Heinrich Schütz, Felix Mendelssohn-

Bartholdy, Johannes Brahms, Gabriel Fauré, Frank Martin and Ko Matsushita. This choir's excellent professional qualities are sure to attract further international recognition with every future performance on the international stage.



*Kup Taldea, directed by
Gabriel Baltés*

Another young choir, founded by its conductor Harald Jers in 2001, also deservingly attracted a lot of attention at the 2011 GPE in Tolosa – the Consono Chamber Choir from Germany. This choir has won more competitions than are involved in the GPE: the German 'International Chamber Choir Competition, Marktoberdorf' in 2007 and the 'Flanders-Maasmechelen International Choir Competition' also in 2007, the 'Fleischmann International Trophy Competition' in Cork (Ireland) in 2008, the 'Città di Gorizia' Grand Prix in 2009 and the 'Béla Bartók International Choir Competition' Grand Prix in Debrecen which brought them here to compete at the GPE. These are only some of the prestigious awards the 'Consono Chamber Choir' has received. The choir's most unforgettable pieces in Tolosa include *Jupiter* by Michael Ostrzyga and Morten Lauridsen's *Ov'è, Lass', Il Bel Viso?*

The Cantemus Children's Choir from Nyíregyháza (Hungary) is one of the testimonials of contemporary Hungarian choral performing arts. Nurtured lovingly by its founder Dénes Szabó, this choir has won a tremendous number of awards at international competitions all over Europe, as well as the

'Foundation for Hungarian Arts Prize' in 1989 and the 'Bartók Bela – Pasztory Ditta Prize' in 1993. This choir's evident musical quality and high-level pedagogical work have turned it into a unique school, preparing a number of musicians for their professional careers. These qualities have been displayed on many international stages where the Cantemus Children's Choir have triumphed. The choir took part in the GPE after winning the 'Tolosa Grand Prix' in 2010, and sung works by Cristóbal Morales, Tomás Luis da Victoria, Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and contemporary masters such as Kodály, Orbán, Szymko and the Basque music-genius, Javier Busto. Special attention deserves to be given to the performance of *Confitemini Domino*, a new piece by the young Hungarian composer, Levente Gyöngyösi, who never ceases to surprise with his creative musical ideas.



*Cantemus Children's
Choir Javier*

The Svenska Kammarkören, conducted by Simon Phipps, performed at the 'Concorso Pólifonico Internazionale Guido d'Arezzo' Grand Prix in 2010 in Tolosa. Founded in 1997, this ensemble has a remarkable concert life in Sweden – even performing for Swedish National Radio – and abroad, taking part in many international festivals and competitions. The choir's high-level artistic programme included masterpieces by Tomkins,

Brahms, Rachmaninov, Berio, Poulenc, Lindberg and Jan Sandström. The choir and conductor's fine work on a variety of music styles showed true mastery and profound understanding and knowledge. After all these brilliant performances, it is not surprising that this choir was awarded the 2011 GPE, becoming the fifth Swedish winner in its history.

The next GPE will take place in few weeks' time in Maribor, Slovenia. The expectations are as high as ever; Europe's champion will soon be revealed. I urge you to wish all the participating choirs, and their conductors, boundless success in the new challenges they face on the great international choral stage.