Festival Mundus Cantat: Choirs on the White Sandy Beach of the Baltic Sea

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The Tenth International Choir Festival Mundus Cantat Sopot 2014 was held on May 11-26, 2014 in Sopot, Northern Poland. The jubilee of the festival was celebrated with numerous unique music performances that gained a wide appeal among local audiences, holding them spellbound. Choirs from many countries including Japan, Brazil, Ukraine, Sweden, Russia, Czech Republic, Germany and Poland took part in this special edition of the Mundus Cantat festival. The organizers invited two charismatic special guests to make the event even more memorable: XCor from Venezuela – a band using vocal play technique, who by their exotic arrangements in salsa, pop, bolero and meringue rhythms absolutely won the audience's hearts, and Tuna Universitaria Derecho de Córdoba – a spectacular group of Spanish students performing romantic Andalusian serenades who, wearing their original, old-fashioned costumes gave rise to great enthusiasm in a significant female contingent of the participants.

The Opening Ceremony was the official beginning of the Tenth Mundus Cantat. During that Gala, the organizing committee had a chance to draw conclusions from all the ten years of the festival's activities. All the people who co-organized, supported, sponsored and sympathized with the festival were honored. The artistic part of the Gala commenced with the resonant tones of an ancient Polish anthem *Gaude Mater Polonia* performed by the united voices of Gaia Philharmonic Choir from Tokyo, Academic University of Gdańsk and Mundus Cantat choir. Later on, the artists performed *Cantate Domino* conducted by

its composter – Ko Matsushita. Composing this beautiful piece, Matsushita dedicated it to Japan, which suffered greatly from the Tsunami in 2011. The choirs singing *Cantate Domino* at the Opening Gala Concert dedicated it to Ukraine and Venezuela, who recently commenced their struggle for freedom and respect for human rights. The final piece of the concert was the ethereal *Te Deum* by Marc Antoine Charpentier. The choirs performed it accompanied by the Polish Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra from Sopot and soloists from the local music academy.

Following tradition, a colorful Parade of Choirs walked through the most popular Polish promenade – Heroes of Monte Cassino Street. A singing procession attracted the attention of numerous tourists who came to Sopot. The parade finished with a concert in a Concert Bowl, where all the participants performed.

Festival auditions were held in Star of the Sea Church in the center of the city. Choirs competed in three music categories: sacred music; secular music; gospel, jazz and spirituals and three age categories: children's and youth choirs, academic choirs and adult choirs.

There was also a special audition in a special category – 'a bird song'. The songs referring to birds and nature in general were then recorded and published on a CD sponsored by the Polish Birds Association, which was also the sponsor of this category.

This year's participants showed an exceptionally high level of artistry and the jury had a tremendous problem to decide the best of the best. The jury, composed of international experts – Anna Fiebig (Poland), Jae-Joon Lee (South Korea), Milan Kolena (Slovakia), Andrea Angelini (Italy), Waldemar Górski (Poland) and the head of the jury, Marcin Tomczak (Poland) – chose the five best choirs to compete for the Grand Prix award: Gaia Philharmonic Choir (Tokyo, Japan), Gloria

Children’s Choir (Zhytomyr, Ukraine), Risbergska Liceum Vocal Ensemble (Örebro, Sweden), Prima Vista Youth Choir (Kirovohrad, Ukraine) and Supra Vocalis Ensemble (Gdańsk, Poland).

Gaia Philharmonic Choir from Tokyo, conducted by Ko Matsushita

On May 24th, after the Final Concert, everything was clear. However, before we learned who would be the overall winner of Tenth International Choir Festival Mundus Cantat, the participants had a chance to relax over Spanish love songs. Tuna Universitaria Derecho de Córdoba made the audience feel as though it was a romantic evening in Andalusia. These special guests performed popular serenades from Southern Spain and invited the audience to dance along. During the next part of the Final Concert Gala, Sopot deputy mayor thanked the organizers for ten years of great work and handed an award and statuette to the festival director, Joanna Stankowska. There was another surprise prepared specially for the director – everyone could watch on a display an emotional Musical Postcard with greetings and congratulations from choirs who came to Sopot during these ten years. Finally, after the official part was done, we learned who was going to be the best choir of the jubilee festival. After much discussion by the jury, the Grand Prix and a Statuette of the Sopot Seagull went to Gaia Philharmonic Choir from Tokyo. Several awards were also given to Ukrainian choirs – Prima Vista and Gloria. Supra Vocalis Ensemble from Poland became the laureate of the sacred music category, and the children’s choir from Zhytomyr

was the best in the birdsong category.

After the results were announced, the audience had the pleasure of hearing all the winning choirs. The performance of XCor Vocal Band was the real icing on the cake. Charismatic Venezuelan, an a cappella group, seized everyone’s attention and literally went crazy that night. The Brazilian choir taught the Japanese winners how to dance salsa, while boys from a Russian children’s choir spontaneously exchanged their flags with Ukrainian girls. The Final Gala Concert turned into a real fiesta. When everyone thought it was the end, Mundus Cantat and Cantilena choirs entered the stage and sang this year’s most popular hit – “Happy”. Leader of XCor group, Alejandro Level, became a much better version of Pharell Williams. After all this excitement, all the choirs took part in a farewell party at the Pick&Roll Club in Sopot. Now this is how we celebrate Mundus Cantat festival!

The Eleventh International Choir Festival Mundus Cantat will be held on May 20-25, 2015. You can’t miss it! Come and feel the atmosphere of a huge singing family!

Info: www.munduscantat.pl

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