

Mediterranean Conference

Voices

Fifth IFCM Multicultural & Ethnic Choral Conference, Girona,
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Mare Nostrum (our sea) – this is what the Mediterranean Sea has been called for centuries. This Roman term has always expressed people's fondness for the beautiful, colourful, unusual area full of contrasts. "For three quarters of the globe, the Mediterranean Sea is similarly the uniting element and the centre of World History." (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 87, Dover Publications Inc., 1956.) The unique position surrounding three continents: Europe, Africa and Asia (Middle East), the mild climate and luxuriant land around it, have made the Mediterranean Sea a cradle of different civilizations, a meeting point of rich cultures and an important route for trade and cultural exchange between the peoples of the region. The cultural and musical traditions of this geographical area are crucial to understanding the origins and development of many cultural phenomena and it was no wonder that this very specific region was chosen as the venue for the fifth IFCM Multicultural & Ethnic Conference. Once its original musical and scientific concept was established, the event received excellent financial support from the European Union Culture Programme and also from the Department of Culture of the Government of Catalonia (Generalitat de Catalunya) thanks to the efforts of the European Choral Association – Europa Cantat

(a founding member of IFCM), from Moviment Coral Català (the 'umbrella' choral organization of Catalonia, a host of the Conference) and the Mediterranean Office for Choral Singing.

The Conference programme was planned to embrace as many musical cultures as possible. With 22 countries from three continents, three major religious groups (Christians, Muslims and Jews) and their branches, and with the huge economic and political differences and immense cultural diversity in the region, it was quite a challenge to establish the structure of this unique event. The result however was quite amazing: in the four days of the event, the participants and official guests were able to attend nine concerts, seven plenary sessions, three sessions under the title 'Discovering Mediterranean repertoire,' and three Documentary screening sessions (prepared by Dolf Rabus, Director of Musica Sacra International Festival and member of the MVC Artistic Committee).

The concert programme of the event presented the diversity of singing practices and traditions in this unusual region. At the beginning there was a magic sound 'painting', *The Voice of the Bells*, by the composer Llorenç Barber – splendid and miraculous music performed by all the church bells in Girona. It brought a sparkling sense of festivity and joy to the participants in the event, citizens and tourists alike. Under the title 'Balcony to the Sea', the first evening concert started with wonderful performances from two choirs from Girona: Cor de Cambra de la Deputacio de Girona (conductor Pablo Larazz) and Claudefaula Youth Choir (conductor Quim Bonal) – a welcome gift from the host city followed by Fayha Choir (conductor Barkev Taslakian) from Lebanon – a choir that performed throughout the Conference. Uniting Muslim and Christian singers, this choir is significant not only for its specific repertoire and high quality of singing, but also for its spiritual and human concept. Coming from a country where choirs did not exist until just a few years ago, Fayha is not

just a choir: it is a message to the nations, to different ethnic and religious groups – a message for peace and mutual understanding. The conductor Barkev Taslakian has managed to do something that generations of diplomats and politicians still can not achieve.



*Fayha Choir singers
(Lebanon) among the
participants at the
Conference*

A pinnacle of the concert programme and a big surprise was Cor Jove Nacional de Catalunya – the brand new National Youth Choir of Catalonia established just few weeks ago. Its ‘parents’ Moviment Coral Català and De Corals Joves de Catalunya (the Catalan Youth Choral Federation) announced: “The Cor Jove Nacional de Catalunya has a dual aim: to offer young choir singers and singing students the chance to work on a pedagogic project in a high level choral music environment and with the best conductors in Europe. The second objective is to give our country a new and useful tool that will help to improve the situation and the prestige of choirs and choral singing amongst young people and adults, and also to all the choirs of Catalonia”. Two world-class conductors have been selected to work with the choir: Vytautas Miskinis (Lithuania) and Xavier Puig (Catalonia, Spain). They had prepared an exciting and high-quality music programme for the choir’s

first concert consisting of pieces by Vytautas Miskinis himself for the first part of the concert and a selection of traditional Catalan pieces influenced by Arabian music and arranged by different composers for the second part.

Several more choirs and groups presented their national traditions within the Mediterranean Voices Conference: the amazing Moroccan group, Els mediadors de Deu (conductor Abdelaziz Benabdeljalil), the Israelite Samaritan Choir (conductor Benyamin Tsedaka) from Israel, La Nova Euterpe Vocal Ensemble (conductor Jaume Ayats) from Catalonia and Cant d'Estil group (Valencia) from Spain, Gruppo Spontaneo Trallalero from Liguria (Italy), and Novi Sad Chamber Choir from Serbia (conductor Bogdan Djakovich).

A selection of singers provided the opportunity to approach the unique vocal traditions of Spain: Antonio Campos and Juan Antonio Suarez as 'Cano' – a duo from Andalusia, Mateu Matas 'Xuri' from Mallorca, Josep Antoni Aparicio 'Apa' and Josemi Sanchez from Valencia. An emotional concert was followed by a spontaneous singing contest at the end of this concert marathon.

The musicological part of the Mediterranean Voices Conference consisted of seven Plenary Sessions hosted by the Department of Education and Psychology with the University of Girona. The themes 'Monodic Traditions in Sacred Chant' presented by Youssef Tannous (Lebanon), Juan Carlos Asensio (Spain) and Fethi Zhgonda (Tunisia) and 'Multipart Singing in Sacred and Secular Tradition' by Ignazio Macchiarella (Italy) were followed by 'Singing in the Islands' (Ignazio Macchiarella, Jaume Escandell, Francesc Vicens and Jordi Alsina), 'Singing for Saying, Improvised Chant' (Josemi Sanchez and Jaume Ayats), 'Ressons de l'al-Andalus' (Xavier Puig and Fethi Zghonda), 'Singing for Praying' (Abdelaziz Benabdejalil and Bogdan Djakovic) and Iberian voices (Jaume Ayats). All the subjects were well prepared and confirmed a high academic

level.



*Fethi Zhgonda (Tunisia) –
lecturer*

'Discovering Mediterranean Repertoire' sessions led the participants through different styles of music – from pieces by the Catalan masters Carles Gumi and Lluís Guzmán (presented by Xavier Boulies and Montserrat Cadevall – President of Federació Catalana d'Entitats Corals) to the new arrangements of old unknown Catalan folk songs (president Xell Montserrat) by composers from different Mediterranean countries: Carlo Pavese (Italy), Edward Torikian (Lebanon) and Thomas Louziotis (Greece) – an original idea of Secretariat de Corals Infantils de Catalunya. In the final session the composers also presented some of their newest pieces and the Fayha Choir performed live music by Edward Torikian and Barkev Taslakian – conductor of the choir.

The conference acted as a window on a variety of traditions and modern trends, as well as on the specific influences and reflections in the vocal cultures of the countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. Muchas gracias, Catalunya, Moviment

Coral Català, President Marti Ferrer i Bosch and your team, for the warm hospitality, excellent management and fantastic spirit of the event. We hope this will not be the last Voices Conference in this spectacular area. So, see you soon, people of Mare Nostrum...



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