

Presenting Some Good Czech Choirs

By Marek Valášek, choral conductor and teacher

Kühn Children's Choir



© *Lubomir Mandys*

The choir is also known as the Czech Philharmonic Children's Choir and was founded in 1932 by opera singer and radio director Jan Kühn. Since then it has been one of the most important Czech choral ensembles. Since 1947 the choir has regularly performed at the Prague Spring international music festival and in 1952 entered into institutional union with the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra. The choir won first prize at a number of international choir competitions (for instance, First International Choir Olympics in Paris in 1956, the International Choir Competition in Neerpelt 1968, Tolosa in 2008, Arezzo in 2010, the International Radio Competition in Wuppertal 2007). The choir also attracted the attention of composers and gradually initiated the creation of several hundred choral compositions, which it also premiered.



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The extent of its repertoire is impressive. It includes works of all periods and styles with a strong emphasis on sacred music. For its interpretive quality the choir is invited to collaborate regularly with the National Theatre in Prague and foreign opera houses and symphonic orchestras. The choir has sung under leading conductors as Vaclav Talich, Rafael Kubelik, Karel Ancerl, Jiri Belohlavek, Seiji Ozawa, Serge Baudo, Eliyahu Inbal, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Vladimir Fedosejev, and Gennady Rozhdestvensky. Kühn Children's Choir has also received invitations to a number of international festivals and concert tours and has performed at prestigious international venues (Musikverein in Vienna, Tchaikovsky Hall in Moscow, Bunka Kaikan in Tokyo, Teatro alla Scala in Milan, Carnegie Hall in New York).



*Kühn Children's Choir
performance in Jesenice
Rakovnik, Central Bohemian
Region of the Czech
Republic © Lubomir Mandys*

Since 1967 the artistic director has been **Jiri Chvala** (*1933), professor of conducting at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. The choir is the oldest Czech choir school: currently it operates in several departments with a total number of 550 children and young people.

www.childrenschoir.cz



*Kühn Children's Choir
performance in Jesenice
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The Český Krumlov Children's Choir

Český Krumlov entered the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1992. Our Music School has had a tradition of music education since 1780. The Children's Choir was established in 1995 and now comprises more than 250 singers aged from four to eighteen years in four different sections: three preparatory choirs Diblicí, Lentilky and Brumlicí, and the main choir Medvidata with the oldest group Krumbrumchor. During its existence, the choir has organized more than 450 public performances and over 1200 children have been part of it. The repertory covers a wide range of folk songs and concert pieces from the Renaissance to contemporary pieces with emphasis on twentieth-century Czech composers (Bohuslav Martinů, Zdeněk Lukáš, Petr Eben, Miroslav Raichl, Ilja Hurník et cet.), as well as spirituals and arrangements of popular music.

The choir has achieved numerous successes at festivals and competitions: the gold medal at national choir festivals Zahrada písní Prague 2008 and Porta Musicae Nový Jičín 2004 and 2008, first prize at the international competition in Neerpelt 2006, second prize in Llangollen 2009 and third prize in Cantonigros 2011. It has toured Germany, Italy, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia and Slovakia (2004, 2006, 2008). The Medvidata Children Choir has already co-organized six Vltavské Cantare Children's Choir festivals. The choir has recorded five CDs, and cooperated with the publisher Panton.

Lukáš Holec has been the choirmaster from the beginning; the piano accompaniment is at present provided by Olga Reichlová.

www.zus-ceskykrumlov.cz/okna_sbory/sbory.html



Český Krumlov Children's Choir at an advent performance with Lukáš Holec ©2007 Lubor Mrázek

The Foerster Female Chamber Choir

Foerstrovo Komorní Pěvecké sdružení was founded in 1975 in Prague and soon became one of the leading Czech choirs. It has won many prizes at leading international choral competitions: Arezzo; Cork; Debrecen; Klaipeda; Vienna 2006; Venice 2008 (winner of its category and winner of the Grand Prix); Tours 2011 (third prize); Rimini 2012 (winner of the Grand Prix) and has collaborated frequently with leading Czech artists on

prestigious occasions.

The four CDs that the choir has recorded include only a part of its wide repertoire ranging from Renaissance polyphony to music of the twentieth century. FKPS pays special attention to contemporary music, through the works of many famous Czech composers including Zdeněk Lukáš, Vadim Petrov, Vladimír Sommer, which have been premièred by the choir. Since August 2009 the ensemble has been working under the leadership of Jaroslav Brych.

Jaroslav Brych (1964) studied conducting at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague under Václav Neumann. Josef Veselka introduced him to the choral art. He intensified his expert skills at H. Rilling's master courses in Stuttgart. Since the beginning of his career Jaroslav Brych has worked with leading orchestras as well as with important choirs, such as Charles University Choir Prague (1984-1997), Prague Philharmonic Choir (1996-2005) and Prague Chamber Choir (since 2006). At present he works as a pedagogue at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, Faculty of Pedagogics at Charles University and Conservatoire of Pardubice.

www.fkps.cz



The Foerster Female Chamber Choir

Pueri gaudentes

The choir was established in 1990 by Mrs. **Zdenka Souckova** to satisfy the growing interest in boys` choirs. Since 2010 **Libor Sladek** has worked with the choir. There are three levels of education for boys aged from six to ten years and a concert choir for boys and young men aged from ten to thirty years. The boys sing compositions for SATB. The boys in SA have their own repertoire as well as the men TB. There are about 180 members in the choir. Boys remain in the choir after their voices have broken, progressing after the necessary pause to the men`s choir.

The repertoire is very colourful; it contains different compositions for boy`s, men`s and even mixed choir voices. They sing religious and secular music, from Gregorian chant through medieval songs and polyphonic music to the works of contemporary composers.

The choir performs in the Czech Republic and throughout the world; it has visited Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany Greece, Italy, Israel, Japan, Lithuania, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Russia, Spain, and Sweden. Our boys perform on a regular basis at the Prague State Opera in operas including *Carmen* and *Turandot*, *Boris Godunov*, and the jazz opera *Bubu de Montparnasse*.

Some of the choir`s major successes include first place in Neerpelt 1996, first place "cum laude" in Neerpelt 2006, place in an international competition in Preveze (Greece) 2000, a place in an international competition in Lindenhofhausen (Germany) 2005. In 2006 the choir performed at the Prague Spring Festival. The choir has published five CDs and has made many recordings for Czech TV and radio.

www.pueri.cz

Vocal Ensemble Gentlemen Singers

This choir from Hradec Králové was established in 2003 and has become one of the most significant Czech music ensembles. The repertoire of the ensemble includes pieces ranging from Gregorian chant to arrangements of modern popular melodies, but the most important part of its repertoire is vocal compositions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Czech, Moravian and Slovak folk songs and contemporary compositions which were often arranged or even composed exclusively for the Gentlemen Singers.

The Vocal Ensemble Gentlemen Singers regularly appears at important festivals, and records music programmes for radio and television. Since its foundation in 2003 it has given more than four hundred concerts in four continents. In addition to its concert activity, the Gentlemen Singers together with the Hradec Králové Philharmonic Orchestra has, for five years, organized a concert series called Chamber Evenings with the Gentlemen Singers which presented top European ensembles and musicians, and also participates in the organization of Sborové slavnosti, the Czech Choir Festival which has become one of the leading choir festivals in the Czech Republic.

Among the recent accomplishments of the Gentlemen Singers are two first places both in the sacred and secular music categories for professional vocal ensembles at the Tolosa Choral Contest, Spain (2011) and first place in the popular music category at Busan Choral Festival & Competition, Republic of Korea (2010). Several music magazines have written positive reviews of six of the Ensemble's CDs, defining the Gentlemen Singers as a "vocal hope and the aqua viva for the Czech choir scene".

www.gentlemensingers.cz



*Vocal Ensemble Gentlemen
Singers ©Jan Hřebíček*

Bohemiachor

This mixed choir was founded in 1993 on the initiative of choirmaster Jan Staněk. Bohemiachor has about sixty members, mostly young people from all parts of the Czech Republic, who meet for four weekends during the year and one week in summer. Most singers are members, or even choirmasters, of various other choirs. During the rehearsal meetings, held in various towns and villages, we also give concerts, sometimes together with local choirs or orchestras. The fundamental concept is to work with various excellent choirmasters. So far, several dozen Czech and foreign choirmasters have accepted the invitation. The repertoire comprises compositions coming from various epochs, but recently we mostly focus on contemporary music.

The choir has achieved some remarkable results, for instance at Jihlava National Choral Festival or Praga Cantat International Choral Festival. In 1997, Bohemiachor won first prize at the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod, and in 2004, it was awarded silver medals at the Choir Olympics in Bremen. In 2007, Bohemiachor was invited to the prestigious Cork International Choral Festival in Ireland. All of these successful performances were the result of the hard work and enthusiasm of the founding choirmaster, Jan Staněk. In 2008, we were awarded first prize at Canti Veris Praga, under choirmaster Libor Sládek, who spent almost eighteen years with

the choir. In April 2012, Bohemiachor became the winner of both its categories at Slovakia Cantat in Bratislava and received the Grand Prix. The Jury also awarded the choirmaster **Michal Hájek** a special prize for Outstanding Choirmaster's Performance.

www.bohemiachor.cz



*Bohemiachor © Lenka
Bartonickova*

Musica Oeconomica Pragensis

The Musica Oeconomica Pragensis choir is one of the leisure-time activities of students and teachers of the University of Economics in Prague. It was founded in 2001 and originally led by Ota Friedl, who handed the leadership to **Martina** and **Kryštof Sprit** two years later. The choir fulfils the function of a school representative, but at the same time organizes its own events, and its members today (about forty singers) are students and graduates of the University of Economics and other Prague universities. The choir usually holds concerts in Prague, but the audience can hear it in concerts and festivals all around the country and abroad. The repertoire is wide, from Baroque music to contemporary music, not forgetting folk songs, spirituals and pop music. The choir collaborates with prominent soloists and instrumentalists (Jiřina Dvořáková – Marešová, Markéta Mazourová, Ondřej Socha to name only a few.)

Our successes: third place in Neerpelt 2002, first place *cum*

laude in Neerpelt 2004, first place at the Praga Cantat choir festival, Czech Republic 2004, first place at the FONS festival of sacred music, Žďár nad Sázavou, Czech Republic 2008, silver medal in two categories at the Trnavské zborové dni international choir competition, Slovakia 2008, second place (gold medal) at the Europe and its Songs international choir competition, Barcelona, Spain 2011, gold and silver medals at the Sing'n'Joy Vienna international choir competition, Austria 2012.

www.sbormop.cz



*Musica Oeconomica at
Universitas Cantat 2009 ©
Musica Oeconomica*

Piccolo Coro & Piccola Orchestra

These ensembles are a combination of a mixed chamber choir and a chamber string orchestra, which rehearse and perform under Marek Valášek. The ensemble is based in Prague and has thirty-three permanent members. Since its establishment in 1996, it has given hundreds of concerts both at home and abroad.

The ensemble interprets compositions regardless of time period or genre. The line-up can vary according to the needs of individual music projects, be it chamber works or spectacular oratorios from the Romantic period. Both the choir and the string orchestra also perform their own separate programs on a regular basis. Works of sacred music prevail; many of them

date from the twentieth century. The ensemble often premières contemporary Czech compositions or records them for the Czech Radio.

At the Youth Stage Festival 2004, the ensemble was given the Bohuslav Martinů Foundation Prize; at the International Festival of Advent and Christmas Music 2007 it won a major prize and received the Petr Eben Award. Piccolo Coro was the absolute winner of the International Choral Art Festival Jihlava 2011; at the prestigious choral competition in Spittal, Austria, the choir won first prize in the main category, third prize in the folklore category and the Special Jury Award for their interpretation of a contemporary composition.

The ensemble has recorded three CDs of sacred music – Marian music in Loreto (1998), Hear My Prayer (2000), Cantico delle Creature (2004) – and one with choral arrangements of Czech folk songs Hore Dolinami (2009).

www.piccola.cz



*Piccolo Coro & Piccola
Orchestra © Piccolo Coro &
Piccola Orchestra*

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