

Professionals, PR and Practice

Review of the first year of the “Choral Management” further training course of the Deutsche Chorjugend

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Participants in the further training course “Choral Management” learn from highly experienced professionals

Input and Inspiration

Inspiring concerts, exciting workshops, passionate discussions – in mid-February everything seemed to be just like every year during this Fifth Vokalfest Chor@Berlin, organized by the Deutsche Chorverband (DCV). Almost: it was impossible to ignore the fact that the organizational staff of the festival was more numerous, but also much younger than usual: in addition to the proven DCV team and the Radialsystem (*a Berlin events manager; translator’s note*), fifteen young choral singers and conductors were in action who, over four days, worked very hard in every field – for the stage set-up, in artistic matters or entrance checking, as photographers for the blog and, of course, as jack of all trades.

These four tiring but exciting days in Germany’s capital were the conclusion of this one-year-long “Further Training in Choral Management” course for this extraordinary organizational team. During four intense week-ends, participants and teachers with practical experience had discussed subjects like marketing, public relations, fundraising and production of concerts and received a lot of input for their own work. Three of the modules had taken place in parallel to important choral events: The participants had

first-hand experience at the Ninth German Choral Competition 2014 in Weimar, and they got a whiff of how things worked during the concert series “Schlussakkord Romantik” organized by the DCV in Rhineland Palatinate; at Chor@Berlin they were able to be active themselves.

The participants put many ideas directly into practice

The course began with the seminar “Wir sind ganz Chor! Kulturmarke, Sozialgemeinschaft, Wirtschaftsfaktor” (We are a choir! A cultural brand, a social community, an economic factor). The seminar started with the participants developing a profile of their ensemble; they were assisted in this task by Moritz Puschke, Manager of the DCV, and Christian Langer, a business consultant. This was something completely new for some of the participants: “A really important and fundamental insight for me was how crucial it is to develop a choral brand and to establish it”, says twenty-five-year-old Kathrin Henschen, a student of musicology at the Humboldt University of Berlin and working in the secretariat of the Berliner Sing-Akademie (among other things). “The linchpin is a clear idea of a choir’s identity.”

Many participants implemented the competences acquired during this first week-end immediately: “After having understood the importance of differentiating oneself from other ensembles and of creating one’s own brand, I immediately got down to work with my own choir”, says Mirijam Oster, a graduate in cultural sciences and now studying singing, who conducts two choirs and organizes the choral conducting seminar of the Saarländische Chorverband. “Together with my ensemble Querbeat we are developing a new choral concept focusing on creativity and fun – and not on singing quality alone.”

Maria Lehmann, a graduate of musicology and music management studies in Berlin and Paris and now working for the project

management office of the DCV, says that her intensive work on the profile of her own choir has helped her significantly: "The necessary concentration led to amazing results in a very short time", says the twenty-six-year-old. "Also, in cooperation with the other participants and experienced teachers, practical solutions were found to problems that had been around for a long time."

After that first exhausting week-end which for some participants had also been a painful learning process, the second module was entirely devoted to dramaturgy and staging of concerts. Folkert Uhde, a cultural manager, who calls himself a "concert designer", went far back in time, in order to show in an impressive manner that classical music had not always been presented in the way we are used to today: the musicians on stage, and the public on rows of chairs in front of it. He encouraged the participants to try out new scenic concepts and to think of the concert experience as a whole: Why not distribute the singers all over the venue? Which effects are made possible by taking into account architecture and lightning? And who actually said that you cannot eat and drink during a concert?

Again, the participants received specific tips to apply at home with their own choirs: "Based on what we learned about concert dramaturgy, I have redesigned some of my concerts completely", says Hannah Ewald, aged twenty-seven. She conducts a children's choir, a mixed choir and a senior choir in Hamburg. "Above all, I have given a dramaturgical aspect to my programmes as far as space, form and music is concerned."

The general questions concerning concert dramaturgy were completed by a special insight into the specific features of pop and jazz: Nina Ruckhaber, choral manager of the Jazzchor Freiburg, gave clear examples for unusual concert performances and at the end answered many questions concerning her job; contact details were also exchanged. Hannah Ewald thinks: "The special benefit of this further training course is that one

can build a network which already now is of inestimable value for me." Mirijam Oster from Saarland makes a similar comment: "This further training broadens one's own horizon and shows what else is available outside one's field of vision. And, of course, it is always inspiring to meet interesting people and get to know their ideas."

Tips from the professionals of the radio choirs

The same week-end continued with the subject of public relations: the author of this article shared his experience as a journalist and public relations official by focusing on the importance of press releases and photographs because these are the basis of successful public relations. A practical approach was adopted here as well, which was welcomed by the participants: "The subject of press relations in particular, for instance as far as photos of the choir are concerned, was very useful for me; I was able to take with me some very good ideas and apply them immediately in my own choir", Maria Lehman says; she also sings in a number of choirs.

In the following module of the course the field of public relations was expanded to include marketing. The teachers invited were Sabine Germann and Rachel-Sophia Dries from the departments of public relations and marketing of the Rundfunkchor Berlin (Berlin Radio Choir). They provided exciting insights into the functioning of the professional top ensemble. Valuable ideas for the acquisition of sponsorship funds were given by Bettina Charlotte Hoffmann from Diakonie Kathastrophenhilfe (*a disaster relief organization; translator's note*) who, among other things, is responsible for fundraising and donator communication of "Brot für die Welt" (Bread for the World).

After these three intensive week-ends, it was with great enthusiasm that fifteen young choral managers tackled the

festival organization of Chor@Berlin. "Even if it was only for networking all over Germany, I can strongly recommend this programme", Maria Lehmann says. "You can get many new ideas and inspiration for your own choir, and you are stimulated to continue your own musical work."

Further information, dates and programmes:

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