

# Reflection on my YOUNG Program Experience

*Brydon Sundgren, Civil Engineer and Project Manager, New Zealand*

It all started in the leadup to Christmas 2022. A chance scrolling of Facebook led me to a post from the New Zealand Choral Federation. This post advertised applications for the YOUNG Program at the World Symposium on Choral Music 2023 (WSCM). A chance to travel to Turkey, to hear some of the world's premier choirs, to learn and work behind-the-scenes of this global event – it sounded like a dream opportunity to apply for! I quickly sent off my application.

Fast forward to the end of January, an email landed in my inbox informing me that my application had been successful. What a surprise – I'd be off to Istanbul in mid-April! I spent the next couple of months dreaming and sorting logistics for my trip.

On the morning of Thursday April 13, I boarded the first of three flights to get me from New Zealand to Istanbul. Nearly 36 hours later I checked into my room, my home for the following 2.5 weeks. I remember feeling both excited and a little apprehensive for what those next few weeks would hold.

After a long sleep, the next morning I met all the others on the YOUNG Program. Everyone was very welcoming. Over breakfast we started to learn names, where each other was from and what had motivated us to apply for the YOUNG Program. That morning, we made the first of many walks from our hotel, across Taksim Square, to the impressive AKM (Atatürk Kültür Merkezi / Atatürk Cultural Centre) where the majority of WSCM was to be held.



## YOUNGs in Opera Hall of the Atatürk Cultural Center

Our first weekend in Istanbul was spent in workshops. We met key members of the Turkish organising team and began learning and immersing ourselves within WSCM. Icebreakers helped us to quickly build connections.

In small teams, we were tasked to come up with an Arts Event. We then had to workshop bringing this to reality – developing timelines, budgets, communication plans, funding, liaising with artists etc. This was an immersive experience showing what organising a cultural event entails.

Being shown around AKM was a highlight of that first weekend, particularly when we got to sing on the stage of the Opera Hall and try out the hall's acoustics.

At the end of the first weekend, each of the YOUNG Participants (YOUNGs) was assigned to an 'Office' which we

would assist through to the end of WSCM. We were assigned across a wide range of roles, looking after communications, production, ticketing, VIPs, festival expo, information desks and logistics.

I was assigned to the Music Office. Under the amazing Pelin Küçükerdoğan (Music Officer for WSCM), we were tasked with organising and communicating with all the presenters and choirs attending WSCM. We also helped with some of the logistics for the Reading Sessions and Beyoğlu concerts.



From left to right: Sizwe Mondlane, Ruben Timmer, Reece Windjack, Pelin Küçükerdoğan, Monika Grigaitytė and Brydon Sundgren

Once WSCM started, the Music Office was involved with welcoming and assisting the festival's presenters, as well as checking that all sessions were able to proceed without any major logistical challenges.

As well as volunteering throughout WSCM, some other noteworthy

memories for me included:

- The welcoming atmosphere, felt from the very first concert through to after the final gala concert;
- Being brought to tears by Vancouver Youth Choir's Gala Concert performance;
- Hearing choirs from all around the globe. The symposium truly showcased the diversity of collective singing soundscapes that exist around the world.

Looking back, it was a real privilege to have been involved with an event of this magnitude and prestige. From the Turkish hospitality to the diversity of music and sound, the new ideas I'd heard to the new friends and people I'd connected with, being involved the YOUNG program has been a truly inspirational and once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

It is not often that younger people are given such opportunities to attend these global events and understand their inner workings. I think the YOUNG programme is an important opportunity for bringing through the next generations, those that will be promoting collective singing and the arts around the globe for years to come.

For those involved with organising events, my challenge to you is to think about how you can include the involvement and voice of us younger generations. Several workshops and speakers at WSCM touched on "who's not in the room." What voices are not currently represented in collective singing? One challenge going forward is how, collectively, we can be more inclusive of those who are missing or underrepresented.

Thank you to my fellow YOUNGs – Jaime, Kwankaew, Monika, Sizwe, Sofía, Urša, Reece, Anne and Viktória – for making this such a special experience. I can't wait to share more experiences with you in future years when music allows us to all connect again. Thank you also to IFCM and the WSCM 2023 organising committee, who facilitated this program and allowed

us to be part of such an incredible event.



**Brydon Sundgren** is a Civil Engineer and Project Manager based in Hamilton, New Zealand. He currently sings in the Hamilton Civic Choir, under the direction of Elise Bradley, and has been involved in choral singing since childhood. Brydon can also play the piano and cello and has completed an AMusTCL. Outside of music, Brydon enjoys spending time with his wife, hiking, organising events, playing boardgames, baking and being involved with his local church.