

Call for Scores: Second IFCM International Competition for Choral Composition

A year or so has passed since the '1st IFCM Composition Competition for Choral Music' was held, and the announcement of the next contest seems a good opportunity to assess the impact of the original event. During the aftermath of the first competition, two separate currents of thought percolated to the surface of jury members' minds: the extraordinary variety of compositional language employed, coupled as this was to a heightened emotional response to the text, perfect fidelity to the words, a calculated means of expression, and keen aural imagination evinced as sheer delight in the choral sound – in some works at least; and the deep-seated flaws in many a piece submitted, choral 'essays' that evinced either a total lack of understanding or any first-hand experience of tessitura and vocal range, inhabited a mawkish sound-world, demonstrated an inability to score effectively, proffered some quite maladroit voice-leading, and – surprisingly often – a plethora of harmonic 'infidelities' within an avowedly tonal but weak musical structure. One hates to be blunt, but the truth will out.

With this in mind, the present call for scores addresses these points in no uncertain terms, but in a wholly positive way. There is no theme to the competition; composers can choose whatever texts they wish, be these in the public domain or not (in the latter case copyright must be cleared of course); up to eight-part writing (from SATB to SSAATTBB) is allowed, and – pertinently – the jury welcomes 'hand-written scores, submitted in pen or pencil', which should be scanned and sent as electronic files. The jury hopes to be taken up on this challenge, and that eBay will experience a system collapse when hundreds of keyboards with their midi-software are put up

for bid. You get the point. An Call for Scores Second IFCM International Competition for Choral Composition overreliance on notation programs, coupled with the ability to input music directly at a computer interface, has, we fear, weaned budding composers away from a simple sheet of paper and an HB pencil. Pressing such an implement into the page is an entirely different haptic experience and will result in radically different music. We have nothing against Finale or Sibelius or Score, they are all amazing tools of the trade, but this is what they remain... something to be used after the fact, as soon as a piece has been composed.

The jury will not be looking for the most innovative choral work of all time, nor will it hunt out a piece containing only 'never-before-heard sounds'; what it certainly will seek to do is to award a First Prize and some discretionary Special Prizes to a piece that uses a musical language which would be recognizable in a subsequent work by the same composer – a compositional thumbprint as it were –, demonstrates within a declared harmonic context an overt plausibility, meets the criterion of 'singability' given limited rehearsal time, and, just to reiterate, has been subjected to a fine toothcomb where ranges, tessitura, and voice leading are concerned.

Finally, some old advice, but true nonetheless, write what you hear and hear what you write. Train your mind, your ear, and your mind's ear to do this. And as the piano lid is raised, dwell for a moment on the adage: 'Abandon Hope all ye who enter here'. We wish everyone who is considering making such a submission the best of good fortune, and hope that these thoughts will at least be mulled over

Graham Lack

President of the Jury

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