

Classical:NEXT is changing

Isabelle Métrope, *International Choral Magazine* Managing Editor, France/Germany

Classical:NEXT has been active for 10 years. The last meeting before the pandemic took place in the Dutch city of Rotterdam, but included almost no choral music. In May, 2022, it took place a new setting, in Hannover – and this time we were there! Below is a report and a look ahead at the potential for this networking platform.

The exhibition hall is swarming with people – we have almost forgotten what it feels like to be in a crowd – but after repeated cancellations caused by the pandemic, Classical:NEXT is back, now in the large B2B business centre of the music industry in Hannover. Hannover, the UNESCO City of Music, centre for the German Festival of choirs “Chor.co,” as well as for many distinguished ensembles, feels like the perfect setting, almost made for us. And indeed, at the end of May, more than 900 delegates from 50 countries made their way to Lower Saxony’s capital city to enjoy lectures, reunions, presentations and small group meetings for particular fields and specialisms.

There was an exciting variety of topics on offer: from “Tuning in to today’s listeners” which examined modern listening habits (very few people now listen to a CD from beginning to end, most just choose something from their playlist); to a meeting of orchestras from all over the world; and the very first gathering of choirs at Classical:NEXT, presented by Sonya Greiner, General Secretary of the European Choral Association and Nina Ruckhaber, a freelance choral administrator and expert in both the German Vocal Pop and choir scenes. The subjects explored included issues of

sustainability, the sharing of information, and, as the main focus of the gathering, “The Benefits of Singing”. This is an international project which highlighted the status of singing pre-pandemic, and, now, as far as possible, is helping to rebuild that status. Those present at the convention included representatives of the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany and Italy, but unfortunately there were very few representatives of professional choirs which too often have few or no links with amateur choirs. This is a situation we would like to improve, and we hope that this gathering will provide the impetus for change.



Expo at Classical:NEXT 2022 © Eric van Nieuwland

It was pleasing to see that the regular participants at Classical:NEXT – various CD labels, composers, music information centres and professional ensembles – are all moving more towards vocal music. Personally, I was a little disappointed that the word “Classical” didn’t inspire a concert of vocal music, particularly in a town such as Hannover, whose Music College, boys’ choir, girls’ choir, and

numerous other top ranking choirs (Norddeutscher Figuralchor; Collegium Vokale Hannover; Junges Vokalensemble Hannover) all perform internationally and are widely recognised. But perhaps it is also up to those in the choir world to present themselves more energetically at important conventions such as this one. In 2023, Classical:NEXT will be taking a break in order to draft and develop a sustainable and forward looking plan for the future.

For Classical:NEXT has the potential to become an important meeting point for everyone involved in the choir scene: professional choirs, semi- or non-professional ensembles, and festivals, where organisers will enjoy networking and finding stimulating sessions to attend. Various areas of the hall were set aside specifically for small group meetings and presentations. My last session of the fair was called "Epic failures: horrible bosses." An entertaining hour discussing the do's and don'ts of team management (apologies: coaching) with hilarious horror stories and tools for good practice. We were not asked to sing together, but we know from the IFCM (as well as the European Choral Association, À Cœur Joie and many others) that nothing beats singing cheerful rounds to get a meeting off to a happy and productive start. In this spirit: Mango, Mango, Mango...

Links

- The Benefits of Singing : <https://europeanchoralassociation.org/benefitsofsinging>
- Classical:NEXT : <https://www.classicalnext.com>



Classical:NEXT Award Show © Eric van Nieuwland

Former staff member at IFCM, María Catalina Prieto, receives the Classical:NEXT Innovation Award on behalf of the Philharmonic Orchestra of Medellín.

María Catalina Prieto, formerly member of the IFCM Youth Committee, coordinator for the ICB translations in Spanish and a singer in the World Youth Choir, was present at this year's Classical:NEXT. She is Executive Director of the Philharmonic Orchestra in Medellín (Columbia). This orchestra is not state funded, but is an NGO. Having won two Latin Grammys in the last couple of years, the orchestra has now been honoured with an Innovation Award for its outstanding leadership and outreach work. This was against competition from 20 other innovative projects in all musical spheres and from all over the world. Congratulations!

Translated by Caroline Maxwell, UK