

# Europa Cantat General Assembly in Sofia

*Where Theodora is at Home*

*Brigitte Siebenkittel*

*Vice-President of AMJ\**

It was a long held wish of long-time board member Theodora Pavlovitch, to host the EC general meeting in Sofia. And one could see how happy she was to greet us at the Hochhaus-Hotel Moskva, 15 minutes from the Sofia airport.

Afterwards the Bulgarian Union of Choirs hosted about 100 people from 20 countries at the opening reception.

In 2008 in San Sebastian, we heard Basque words and choral sounds at the greeting, which weren't understood by anyone except the locals. This time it was the Bulgarian language we were hearing, with its soft, vocally rich sounds, similar to Russian and Czech. We traveled by bus into the center of the city for the first evening concert, encountering Friday afternoon traffic jams. We heard the Academic Female Folklore Choir of the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts from the city of Plovdiv, Kostadin Buradjiev, dir. Unfortunately they didn't dance in their pretty costumes, but their voices made a powerful, unusual impression. It was amazing and a little disconcerting to hear how they could carry their chest voices up to the high register without visible strain. But in every piece, primarily folk songs from renowned composers, the choir showed their power, experience, and perfection. This was also the impression made from the Saturday concert: the very good

Youth Section of the Sofia Boys' Choir, Adriana Blagoeva, conductor; the wonderful legato of the St. Trinity Church Choir, Sofia, Elianka Mihaylova, conductor; and the wonderful, lively and radiant singing of the Sofia Chamber Choir Vassil Arnaudov, under the director of our hostess for the weekend, Theodora Pavlovitch! Many thanks, Theodora, it was a special experience to hear your choir!

The Saturday morning general session made two resolutions with importance for the future:

1. **Sante Fornasier** from Italy was elected as **President** of the federation as successor of Jeroen Schrijner whose mandate ended after a nine-year period on the Europa Cantat Board. The General Assembly elected a Board of 13 persons from 12 European Countries.



*Sante Fornasier,  
new elected  
President of EC*

The President will be supported in his work by three further Executive Board members:

- **Gábor Móczár** from Hungary as 1st Vice-President
  - **Fred Sjöberg** from Sweden who was confirmed as 2nd Vice-President / Chair of the Music Commission
  - **Jean Smeets** from Belgium as treasurer.
  - Further Board members are Séverine Delforge (Belgium), Montserrat Gual (Spain), Guido Helbling (Switzerland), Mihela Jagodic (Slovenia), Reijo Kekkonen (Finland), Jan Schumacher (Germany), Kaie Tanner (Estonia), Thierry Thiebaut (France), Daphne Wassink (The Netherlands)
2. The General Assembly also approved of the program of activities for the coming years and decided on a merger of the two major European choral organizations, Europa Cantat – European Federation of Young Choirs and AGEC (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Chorverbände) into European Choral Association – Europa Cantat.

The merger shall be prepared in 2010 and the organization shall be merged at the beginning of 2011. With the fusion the two organizations wish to bring together the knowledge and experience of two important European organizations, offer the choral world the best possible service, form one major European Choir Federation in Europe and strengthen the position of choral music within Europe.

On Saturday afternoon, there were stimulating workshops on singing as a blessing for body and soul, of the effect it has on health and about the beauty of *bel canto*.

We heard about singing with handicaps, about practical and healthy practices in vocal technique, and from Theodora Pavlovitch about 1200 years of music in Bulgaria. I asked some of the soloists she'd brought along if they could also sing in head voice, and they responded by singing a beautifully sung madrigal. The sopranos, whose voices were particularly multifaceted, told me they didn't know how they could sing with that loud, almost screeching chest voice – they learned it from their mothers, who learned it from their

mothers. For Theodora it was normal that her students could sing professionally in these different ways.

All this and more could be discussed with colleagues on both evenings in the pleasant, plush, bar on the 19<sup>th</sup> floor. All the participants surely experienced an interesting weekend with rich content – there, where Theodora is at home!

\* AMJ = Arbeitsgemeinschaft Musik in der Jugend (Music and Youth)

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