

Fifth Winter Choir Festival – Hong Kong, 2014

By Yong Chee Foon, Choral Conductor

The Fifth Winter Choral Festival took place from the 1st to 5th December 2014 in Hong Kong, the Pearl of the Orient. Located on the southern coast of China, the city is an enigma of modern skyscrapers and ancient traditions and home to some of the best youth choirs in Asia. Since the first festival in 2010, the Winter Choral Festival has seen the participation of more than 2,500 choristers from sixty choirs representing China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore. The organiser of the festival, Sourcewerkz Pte Ltd, is a Singapore choral events company headed by Festival Director, Ms Lim Ai Hooi, with the mission to Teach, Touch and Transform. The festival is co-organised with Rave Group and supported by the World Association of Chinese Youth Choirs.

The Winter Choral Festival is designed as a platform for choristers and conductors to enrich their musicianship, singing and performance skills through competition, masterclasses and workshops. Choirs will also have a chance to perform to an international audience at Hong Kong Disneyland through the Disney Performing Arts Programme. The festival commenced with the competitive part at the Tsuen Wan Town Hall with a distinguished panel of adjudicators composed of the Artistic Director, Dr Brady Allred (USA), and fellow adjudicators Professor Theodora Pavlovitch (Bulgaria) and Mr Johnny Ku (Taiwan). The most captivating performances in the competition were in the Folklore Category where choirs from Indonesia, Philippines and Singapore competed in traditional costume and dance to folk choral music from their region.

After the intense competition of the previous evening, the participating choirs looked forward to the highlight of the festival: the masterclasses and workshops led by the adjudicators. The morning masterclass session saw Dr Brady Allred working with the Karangturi Choir from Indonesia where he gave insights to the interpretation of the sacred pieces which they performed during the competition. Professor Theodora Pavlovitch introduced Bulgarian a cappella choral music to Dunman High School from Singapore while Mr Johnny Ku worked on rehearsal technique with Our Lady of Fatima University Choir from Philippines. The choirs enjoyed their ninety-minute sessions with the adjudicators and gained new musical knowledge from them.



B. Allred, T. Pavlovitch,
J. Ku & Lim Ai Hooi

In the evening, all the festival participants gathered in the Y Theatre at Youth Square for the highly anticipated joint workshop held by all the adjudicators and for the announcement of the competition results. Mr Johnny Ku began by introducing the various aboriginal tribes in Taiwan and showed us a geographical map of where they are located, as well as showing their unique costumes. He then proceeded to teach us how to sing a song of friendship called *A-Li-An* from the Paiwan tribe. The Paiwan tribe resides mostly in southern Taiwan and this friendship song is originally sung by children while playing. After learning how to sing the song, Mr Ku continued to teach the participants how to do the aboriginal dance that goes with the song. The adjudicators went on stage and locked hands to give a demonstration of the dance with guidance from

Mr Ku before the entire audience joined in the song and dance. The participants enjoyed the song and dance session and made many new friends through it.

Next, Professor Theodora Pavlovitch gave a short introduction to her native Bulgaria and introduced a contemporary sacred piece by Slovenian composer Ambrož Čopi. The participants relished the challenge of sight-singing the rhythmic *Gloria* and were able to perform the composition at the end of the session with thoughtful guidance from Professor Pavlovitch. The audience thanked Professor Pavlovitch by singing the newly-learnt piece with great enthusiasm and gusto.



The Artistic Director, Dr Brady Allred, next gave a short lecture on the nuances of singing Renaissance choral music by getting the participants to sing the opening section of Palestrina's *Sicut Cervus*. The participants were then treated to another song and dance session led by Dr Allred, this time with an Israeli folksong that was quickly picked up by the participants. The mass workshop ended with the entire theatre in song and dance.

Often, choirs participating in the same competition do not get a chance to listen to each other. The Friendship concert component allows choirs to make cultural exchanges and build friendship through singing for each other. Each participating choir sang two songs in this short concert and the participants thoroughly enjoyed listening to each other in this section of the festival programme.

The announcement of the results was next and the audience waited with great anticipation. After a short summary of the competition by Dr Allred, the results were announced. The

following choirs emerged as champions of their category:

- Ying Wa College Choir from Hong Kong conducted by Mr Boron Li (Equal Voices – Sixteen Years and Below)
- True Light Girls' College and Ying Wa College Mixed Choir from Hong Kong conducted by Ms Phoebe Yu (Mixed Voices – Sixteen Years and Below)
- Dunman High School Choir from Singapore conducted by Ms Jennifer Tham (Mixed Voices – Open Category)
- Karangturi Choir from Indonesia conducted by Mr Petrus Wahyu Eramoko (Folklore Category)



Karangturi Choir
(Indonesia)

After the announcement of results, there was great camaraderie as the participants went around congratulating each other with many photos and selfies taken. The adjudicators joined in the fun and soaked in the carnival-like atmosphere.

The next edition of the festival will be held from 29th November to 3rd December 2015. More details of the festival can be found at <http://www.ravegroup.sg/winterchoralfest>

Music Director of the Nanyang Technological University Choir in Singapore, **Yong Chee Foon** is also the current Vice-President of the Choral Directors' Association (Singapore) and the conductor of numerous award-winning youth choirs. His choirs have won many accolades at several international competitions across Europe and Asia. He is the Associate

Artistic Director of Sourcewerkz Pte Ltd, a Singaporean choral events company that organises choral festivals around the world. His stand for good music education for the younger generation has led him to conduct more than 2000 young people who have sung under his baton in the past decade. Email: cheefoon@gmail.com

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