

In and Outside the Box: a Choir of 300 Million Bees

Isabelle Métrope, Managing Editor, ICB

There is much buzzing about in the choral world. In one place, ideas abound for a quick return to in-person rehearsals within public health guidelines, while in others, virtual competitions are organized so as not to cut short international gatherings. In other places, Plans B, C and F are established so that especially – especially! – a festival that has been planned with passion for four years will not have to be cancelled. And for some time now, in fact more and more frequently, the environmental aspect of choral work is considered, refined and acted upon. Not unlike certain little buzzing role models...

Like the *Apis mellifera* (honey bee), choral singing is present on every continent except for Antarctica (at least to my knowledge. If the researchers at the Dumont D'Urville Station want to form a choir, we will dedicate an article in the next ICB to their endeavour. Just so you know...)

An estimate based on several statistics from choral federations leads us to believe that there are at least 300 million choristers on planet Earth. That represents about 4 percent of the global population, and it is no doubt an underestimate. What a hive! But what is the link with honey bees, you ask? Read on...

Honey bees – wild and domestic – perform about 80 percent of all pollination worldwide. Grains are primarily pollinated by the wind, but fruits, nuts and vegetables are pollinated by bees. Seventy out of the top 100 human food crops – which supply about 90 percent of the world's nutrition – are pollinated by bees. [Source: Greenpeace.org]



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Honey bees are essential. And yet, in the past few decades various environmental protection organizations have observed and warned us of the sharp decline in the number of bees in the world. This decrease is presumably due to the most dangerous animal for the planet: Man. Let us use this state of emergency to observe these small creatures.

They are excellent architects: a hive is the ultimate in space-saving construction. Bees calculate their itinerary from flower to flower in the most economical manner possible in order to avoid useless trips. They work non-stop and ensure not only their own survival but ours as well. They are ever so small but... each one is an important piece of the puzzle. They are very efficient: with their indispensable role in pollination, Greenpeace tells us that **a third of the food we eat is available thanks to the work of bees.**

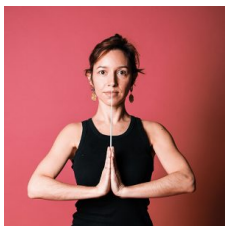
*The perfect combination between bees and choral singing? The Singing Hoosiers from Indiana University:
<http://bit.ly/Indiana-bee>*

When we think about our planet, at the damage to the environment that Man has provoked in the last centuries, and we choose to sort our garbage, to take our bike instead of the car to rehearsal, or to say that from now on, our communal choir meals will be made up of local products only, and eaten on real dishes that each one will bring, we may indeed feel we are just one solitary bee in a very large hive. But don't forget that we are 300 million chorister-bees in the world and that with our music, we touch many more people...

One drop in the ocean? Yes, but a drop of clean water!

It does not mean we will never set foot on an airplane ever again. Nor does it mean that we believe that all the choral bees in the world will have the means to install solar panels on their roofs, to abandon their cars for bikes and to buy only clothing made by ethical brands. As with everything, it is the small steps that count. No goal is achieved in one fell swoop, not a marathon, not the mastery of a foreign language and not the return to a clean planet. Let us find pleasure in taking these small steps and in the buzzing about of our musical community. And let us help our hardworking little role models by planting lavender, hawthorn, sage or angelica.

Translated from French by Patricia Abbott



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