

International Chamber Choir Competition in Marktoberdorf 2022

Julia Wolf, Choir conductor, Germany

At the beginning of June 2022, the international choir scene met for the 17th time in the small town of Marktoberdorf in the Allgäu to compete from June 3rd to 7th as part of the International Chamber Choir Competition (ICCC). The aim of the competition is to bring together the best choirs in the world in one place and to enable an exchange among choirs, conductors, choral literature, styles and techniques.

A total of five choirs competed in category A (mixed choirs): University of Montana Chamber Chorale (USA), Malang Choral Art (Indonesia), Cape Town Youth Choir (South Africa), LandesJugendChor Saar (Germany), Megaron Chamber Choir (Slovenia.) In category B (Equal voices: women's/girls' choirs, men's choirs) there were two: Sonat Vox (Germany), and the women's choir of the Technical University of Ostrava (Czech Republic).

Following the ICCC, an international master class for choral conducting took place from June 8th to 12th this year, for the first time with a conducting competition, under the direction of Georg Grün and Ko Matsushita. The Calmus Ensemble supported the master class as section leaders and voice teachers. Nele Erastus from Estonia was awarded first prize in the conducting competition; Christoph Schäfer and Lena Herber were also prize winners.



Women choir of the Technical University Ostrava © Bertram Maria Keller / MODfestivals

In her welcome address, Claudia Roth, the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, described the ICCC as a “musical festival”: In fact, this competition, which participants and observers like to describe as a “family reunion”, is characterized by inimitable emotional closeness. Not only does the enchanting backdrop of the Allgäu contribute to this, but also the enormously high level of support from the residents of Marktoberdorf, who take the singers into their host families and listen intently to the competition rounds, as well as the large number of volunteers who support the competition professionally.

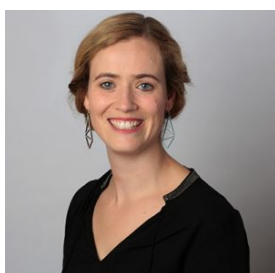
However, all the family romance this year could not hide the shadow that COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine had cast on the ICCC: the competition originally planned for 2021 had to be postponed by one year to 2022 due to the coronavirus, and the invited Festino Chamber Choir from Russia had to cancel its participation. The team of moderators, Monika Schubert and

Jeroen Schrijner, articulated their emotional dismay: as in other places, the ICCC in Marktoberdorf forms the nucleus of international choral relationships and thus shows in an inimitable way that art has the power to show that peaceful coexistence is possible. “It is up to politicians to make these encounters possible, to create and maintain the prerequisites for music not to be silenced as a means of understanding,” Claudia Roth also emphasized in her welcome address.

In addition, the effects of COVID-19 on the choir scene were reflected in the noticeably lower number of participating choirs compared to previous years, and ultimately also in the range of awards.

Overall, the international jury, chaired by Herbert Böck (Austria) and including Gary Graden (Sweden), Dr. Betsy Cook Weber (USA), Ko Matsushita (Japan), and Virginia Bono (Argentina) awarded First Prize in the level (excellent performance at an international level) of overall three possible performance levels to I Sonat Vox from Germany, conducted by Justus Merkel. In category A (mixed choirs), second prize was awarded to the Megaron Chamber Choir from Slovenia, conducted by Damijan Močnik, and third prize to Leon Starker and the Cape Town Youth Choir from South Africa.

In category B (equal voices), the women’s choir of the Technical University of Ostrava, conducted by Adam Sedlický, achieved third place in performance level II (very good performance at an international level).



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Julia Wolf studied music with a focus on ensemble direction and music theory as well as culture and media management at the music academies in Hanover and Hamburg. She leads the youth choir of the Hannover Girls' Choir (Prof. Gudrun Schröfel, Prof. Andreas Felber) and "Voice 'n Performance" at the Ricarda-Huch-School Hannover, partner choir of the Unesco City of Music Hannover. For many years she was involved at state level in the music council of Lower Saxony, as well as at state and federal levels in the executive committee of the Federal Association for Music Education (BMU). Email: wolf@juliawolf.eu

Translated by Claytor Parr, USA