

# Leading Voices – Get ready for the future

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Leading Voices, European Days for Vocal and Choral Leaders, taking place in Utrecht from 27<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2022, is a new European platform for professionals in the choral field to meet peers, learn from colleagues and get inspired by artistic concepts and choirs. The event, which is open to Europeans and non-Europeans alike, is an initiative by the European Choral Association and might become a new regular event to be held every three years. Time to learn more about this exciting new event.



Accent

Five day event for choral professionals



Sanna Salminen, Finland  
© Meritta Pyykkönen

Since 2009, the Europa Cantat festivals have included various different programmes for conductors. This programme was originally created for conductors that travelled with their choirs to the festival. Over time, the programme became a separate event within the Europa Cantat festival, attracting more and more visitors. As a result of this, and inspired by other events, the European Choral Association (ECA) felt a need to establish a new European Platform for professionals in the world of group singing. In spring 2019 a decision was taken to develop this idea further with ECA member ZIMIHC, based in Utrecht, the Netherlands.

When designing Leading Voices, the main aim was to create an event that had both a practical and forward looking approach. The event would focus on co-creation and on learning by doing and combine traditional formats with innovative ones, to energise people and challenge them to experiment in a safe environment.

On the other hand, most professionals in the field of group singing have more than one role. Most conductors also manage a group, have artistic responsibility, teach music, train singers and take care of the wellbeing of their group of singers. Therefore the event needed to offer sessions that

touch on all these different 'hats' that most choral professionals wear. At the same time, Leading Voices wanted to offer networking opportunities to all those with connections to group singing professionally, whether that be as conductors/vocal leaders, composers/arrangers, music educators, managers or students.



I Fagiolini, United Kingdom © Matthew-Brodie

## **The future of group singing**

The context for group singing is ever changing, not only because of the pandemic, but also for many other reasons such as evolving demographics, digitalisation, climate change and increasing migration. How can choral professionals reach out to those who are not familiar with the tradition of choral music, and vice versa? How do we involve the audience in the story of choral music? How can the experiences of citizens become a source of inspiration? How is choral music used to

communicate that which truly moves us or those important messages we wish to tell? How can choral music help build or strengthen a community? How can we ensure that choral music stays relevant from an artistic point of view? Leading Voices will not answer all of these questions but strives to inspire, enrich and strengthen the possibilities of group singing, bringing choral professionals together from all over Europe and beyond and offering a platform to exchange, learn and connect.



Hannah Lea Dykast,  
Switzerland  
© Beka Bitterli  
Fotografie

## **Five themes: from unleashing teaching potential to developing artistic skills**

Leading Voices is designed by conductors, music teachers, composers and managers. The members of the Music Commission know by experience what it is to be vocal and choral leaders day-to-day. They know you have to deal with both artistic and practical matters, with pedagogical issues and group dynamics, with both arranging and finances. Therefore they have chosen five themes related to the different aspects of the work of a

choral professional and selected session leaders to match these.

For example, Majella Hollywood will talk about creating a fanbase for a choir and managing professional singers. Sanna Salminen will talk about shifting from leadership to an overall pedagogical approach as a conductor, while Adrian Peacock will provide insight into managing recording sessions. Hannah Lea Dykast will outline how to develop a more mindful approach to the day-to-day work of a choral professional, while Merzi Rajala and Jan Schumacher will focus on how to lead “open singing”. And, of course, Leading Voices will offer more conventional sessions in conducting technique as well.

Whether it’s in a classroom or with a choir of professional singers, whether you sing classical music, children’s songs, pop music or vocal jazz, and whether you’re very experienced or just getting started – at Leading Voices you will find sessions to match your experience, ambitions and preferences.



Jim Daus Hjernøe,  
Denmark

### **Five formats: learning by doing & co-creation**

The Music Commission also designed five different formats, running from traditional learning through workshops and lectures to dedicated sessions for exchanging and talking with

each other, and sessions that focus on experimentation and start with a blank canvas. These formats are named LEARN, LET'S MEET, LIVE, LAB and LITERATURE.

In LEARN you will find workshops and lectures by many different session leaders. LET'S MEET offers informal timeslots dedicated to, for example, music educators or composers/arrangers and round table events to share opinions and contribute to discussions. We'll focus here on LAB and LIVE as the two more innovative formats in the event.

In LIVE the event offers a total of seven concerts. For these concerts, the Music Commission didn't only select high calibre choirs and ensembles but also strived to present artists that inspire in different ways, not only artistically. Kamer Youth Choir will show what is possible with young, talented, amateur singers, conducted by young conductors. Accent, a group of six pop & vocal jazz singers from all around the globe connected first through social media, met live three years later for the first time and are now highly acclaimed for both creating music online and their live performances. The vocal ensemble I Fagiolini that is internationally renowned for its genuinely innovative productions will also be present.



Josep Vila i Casanas, Spain

A LAB provides a space where participants and session leaders are given the opportunity to work together starting with a blank canvas. Experimenting and co-creation are at the core of each LAB. At the end the outcomes will be shared. This can be a talk, a presentation or a performance. Anything goes, including sharing failures or not being able to show any concrete result.

For some LABs a duo of session leaders has been selected. Some of them, like Cara Tasher and Santi Serratos, will meet for the first time live at Leading Voices. Other LABs will be led by only one session leader like Basilio Astulez, Josep Vila i Casañas or Jim Daus Hjernøe.



Kamēr Youth Choir, Latvia

### What's next

The European Choral Association is hoping to develop Leading Voices into one of its main events that happens every three years in Europe. But from this first edition, the organisers mostly hope that, after an inspiring day at Leading Voices,

you will sit down on one of the beautiful terraces of Utrecht to discuss what you've learned with your colleagues and how this will influence your own future. In the evening you will be able to visit a concert or two, and at the end of the day you can have a drink with new friends from all around the globe. And then you'll know: you would not have wanted to miss this for the world!

*Edited by Bethany Farr, UK*



Merzi Rajala, Finland