

Musica Sacra Nova, the 12th International Composers Competition

By Richard Mailänder, choral conductor and teacher

The composer Paweł Łukaszewski, currently a professor of composition at the Chopin Conservatory in Warsaw, first conceived the idea of a composer's competition while he was a student at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory. He was eventually able to realize the competition in connection with the *Gaude Mater Festival* in Czestochowa, one of the most important cultural festivals in Poland. Due to its great success there, the competition was expanded internationally in 2005. For some years now, the Archbishopric of Cologne, Germany, has participated in this competition, as well as in the *Gaude Mater Festival* and the Musica Sacra Association Warsaw. The 'Freundeskreis der Abtei Brauweiler', Germany, has taken part for the past two years.



The Trinity College refectory

So what kind of competition is this? It is directed to young composers up to the age of 35, who enjoy and are interested in writing a *cappella* choral works with a Latin text. These composers find the competition to be a forum for writing artistically and technically demanding works. Young composers find not only the possibility of winning a cash prize attractive but also of having their works performed in several countries (at least this applies to the first-prize winner). The premiere is held alternately in Czestochowa, Poland or Cologne-Brauweiler, Germany, with additional performances in Gdansk and Vilnius, and in Cambridge by the Trinity College Choir. Furthermore, one of these concerts is recorded for radio broadcasting; in recent years, this was done by the WDR in Cologne. Also of interest to composers, the work's premiere is sung by internationally renowned choirs like the Polish Chamber Choir (Gdańsk, Poland), the Jauna Muzika Vilnius Municipal Choir (Lithuania) or, this year, the Kamerchor Riga (Latvia).

In addition, the prize-winning works of this competition have been published since 2015 by Schott Musikverlag Mainz in its 'Distinguished Choral Music' series.



Stephen Layton and Vaclovas Augustinas, members of the jury

Composers as well as choir directors are represented in the jury. The 2016 international jury consisted of the following individuals:

- Andrea Angelini – Italy
- Vaclovas Augustinas – Lithuania
- Marian Borkowski, Jan Lukaszewski – Poland
- Stephen Layton – England
- Jaakko Mäntyjärvi – Finland
- Don Vincenzo de Gregorio – Italy



Marian Borkowski, composer and one of the members of the jury

This was the first year that Don Vincenzo De Gregorio, Director of the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music, took part on the jury. In 2017 the jury will meet at that Institute in Rome; its involvement further accentuates the degree of international co-operation in this competition.

In 2016, Trinity College invited the jury to meet in Cambridge. As always, there were lively discussions on the composers' musical ideas, the technical realization of those ideas and, of course especially significant from a choir leader's point of view, the difficulty of the works. There is no doubt that the prize-winning works are not easy to perform.

A well-trained amateur choir, sometimes even a professional one, is required to perform them. Nonetheless, it seems important for composers working at such an artistic level to keep actual practice in mind so that the gap between real choirs' performance abilities and an avant-garde composition does not become too wide. It can be clearly seen that most of the composers who send their works to the organization are familiar with the requirements of writing music for choirs, a familiarity which some composers, even those at the university level, often lack. It is important to support and promote these young composers so they do not lose courage but continue writing with great enthusiasm for choirs, who in turn will take pleasure in performing their works.

At the same time, this is a competition in which young composers can look into theological texts with Christian content. It is remarkable that some composers choose very special, individual texts while others use standards like *Miserere*, *Stabat mater*, *Dies irae*, *Kyrie*, *Sanctus*, *Agnus Dei*, *Pater Noster*, *Ave Maria* or a psalm. On the other hand, the works also show that not all composers are really familiar with the Latin language.

This year's prize winners are:

1. Szymon Godziemba-Trytek (Poland) for *Beatus Vir*
2. Aleksandra Chmielewska (Poland) for *Veni Emmanuel*
3. Francisco José Carbonell Matarredona (Spain/USA) for *O Magnum Mysterium*

A total of 30 composers from 8 countries took part in the competition in 2016. Unfortunately, 10 more works arrived after the jury met, so in fact there were 40 total entrants.

The competition will take place again in 2017. For further information please see the competition's web site: www.musicasacranova.com

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