

Our Voice for our Planet: Singing for the Earth over the Ocean

Virginia Bono, conductor, Argentina, and Martin Winkler, conductor, Germany

From solitary work into the community

While we may be surrounded by singers, it is well known that the role of the musical director in amateur choirs is a rather solitary one. From selecting repertoire pieces and planning for the group's musical growth to the research and decision-making involved in organising rehearsals and performing, these are just some of the examples of tasks that every musical director carries out. Faced with the impossibility of face-to-face rehearsals due to the pandemic in 2020, many of these duties were affected and the usual list of priorities changed. Uncertainty, misinformation, not knowing how or where to continue hampered attempts to plan and prepare in the usual way.

Against this backdrop, forums and meeting spaces sprang up everywhere for musical directors looking for and sharing information about technology, strategies for virtual rehearsals, ideas for on-going support and group sustainability. Starting out on social media networks, thanks to great organisational efforts, groups were quickly created for round-table – or rather square-window – discussions and meetings. From the figure of the solitary conductor, we turned to the community. In Latin America, we call it “tertulia”, in Germany “Stammtisch” and there are many other names for it around the world. In these spaces, that feeling of community grew meaning. Support, solidarity, reflection and a great resilient spirit, love and responsibility as leaders of our

choirs formed the basis of our meetings and discussions. Creativity was also key, and several collaborative ideas emerged from our conversations.

The hidden potential of the Choral Repertoire

A text sung is a text strengthened by the most universal of languages: music. That is why choral works that deal with themes of social interest are a powerful vehicle for communication and consciousness. Violence, diversity, human rights, the value of indigenous communities around the world, the environment and the harmony of nature are just some of these important themes that take on another dimension when they form part of a concert programme.

One standout example of this is the piece *Kasar mie la gaji* by composer Alberto Grau, which was performed by his choir Schola Cantorum de Venezuela at the II World Symposium on Choral Music in Sweden in 1990. Through this composition, Grau took his grave concerns about the environment and transferred them to the choral set. The piece is now performed by many choirs across in Latin America and around the world in mixed-voice and single-voice arrangements.

We are the voices for our planet

We are the first generation that knows exactly what we are doing. We are also the last generation that can set ourselves on the right path to save our planet. Half a century ago when the “Club of Rome” presented *The Limits of Growth*, little could we imagine the gloomy prognosis they were painting. More recently, the coronavirus pandemic has demonstrated in a dramatic fashion how crucial it is to have space and that we need to be aware of the habitats of both humans and animals in order to lower the risk of a future zoonosis. We must create new consciousness to stop nature from being plundered and our natural resources from being wasted.

Through the “Our Voice for our Planet” project, we aim to

bring choirs together who wanted to be actively involved in saving our planet. This idea has been developed in both Germany and Argentina at the same time to inspire choirs throughout our world about this important topic. In doing so, teams of musical directors and their choirs have signed up who are interested in incorporating pieces dealing with this topic into their repertoire to perform at future concerts, choir meets and festivals. We have also asked composers from diverse cultural backgrounds to create new pieces around the theme *Protecting the Earth*. This way we hope to be able to present interesting pieces for new programmes involving as many choirs as possible.

For children's and youth choirs there are likewise fourteen brand new climate songs composed by Reinhard Horn. These songs will be performed next spring in various locations by the *Earth Choir Kids* project in collaboration with Greenpeace and the *Deutschen Chorjugend*, a choral organisation with more than 3000 choirs across Germany. Brazilian Carla Maffioletti, who currently works in the Netherlands, has recently brought out her opera "Paradijsvogel" (Bird of Paradise) which deal with the destruction of the rainforests in Brazil. The *a cappella* choruses and reduced instrumental ensemble will soon be ready to perform. Italian composer Battista Pradal has also composed a short inaugural anthem, "Our Voice for our Planet". This is available to download, arranged for all choirs – together with our logo – from our website of the same name. Under the Music tab (Musik/Komponisten) on our website, we have a list of compositions, and we also have a News tab where you can find out the latest about the project and other noteworthy activities. We are pleased to count on the support of several festivals, including the Harmonie Festival which will run from 18-21 May 2023 in Lindenhof, Germany.

After just a few short weeks, we already have over 80 choirs, ensembles and soloists from more than 20 European countries included as supporters on our "Wir sind dabei" (We're in)

list. If you would like to be included, please email us at info@our-voice-for-our-planet.com.

Let us be the voice for our planet, spread our ideas and help to achieve our vision of a better world through the universal language of music.

<https://our-voice-for-our-planet.com>



VIRGINIA BONO is a conductor and teaches choral conducting. She is Musical Director of the Estudio Coral Meridies, the Children's Choir and the Girls' Choir based at the Choral Institute in Santa Fe province. She teaches conducting at "Tactus – Grupo de estudio de Dirección Coral" (Tactus – Study group for choral conducting). She has been a guest conductor, a jury member for choral competitions and she teaches on courses, workshops and masterclasses in her native Argentina as well as other countries in Latin America and Europe. She works together with composers and publishers to promote and spread choral music from Argentina and Latin America. She is a member of Adicora (Argentinian Association of Conductors), Voces de Latinoamérica (Voices of Latin America) and ChoralSpace. Email: virginiabono@hotmail.com



For more than 40 years **MARTIN WINKLER** has been a conductor, high-school teacher, singing teacher, Director of the Dreieich Music School, workshop leader, jury member, guest conductor and festival leader. He is a successful musical director of several ambitious amateur choirs (for example, the 80 Men of HARMONIE Lindenholzhausen) and chamber choirs as well as a guest conductor of professional choirs (the Latvian and Cuban State Choirs, among others). He also sings Bass in solo vocal ensembles. As well as demanding *a cappella* programmes, he also conducts a stylistically-wide repertoire including

Monteverdi's "Vespers of the Blessed Virgin", numerous Handel oratorios, Bach's "Mass in B minor" and Mendelssohn's "Hymn of Praise" as well as numerous premieres. He is passionate about discovering and re-discovering pieces, for example Puccini, Romberg, Herzogenberg and Pradall. Rounding up his artistic biography, he has also been involved with TV, radio and CD production as well as receiving several national and international advertising awards. Email: winkler.dirigent@gmail.com

Translated from Spanish and German by Claire Storey, UK



ECO-THEMED CHORAL COMPOSITION CONTEST

CONCURSODVOCESDELATINOAMERICA@GMAIL.COM



"Voces de Latinoamérica" is an organisation composed of choral directors from 20 Latin American countries that came out of a discussion group in 2020.

In 2021, they will sponsor a composition contest for choral pieces that address environmental issues, both the protection of nature and life in harmony with it, in conjunction with the "América Latina Canta Unida" festival. The winning pieces will be a part of the repertoire of the festival and will be performed by hundreds of choirs across the continent. The compositions, for mixed SATB or SAB choirs and of medium difficulty, should be between two and four minutes long. The call for submissions is open to native or resident Latin American composers and has two specific goals: to stimulate choral compositions on ecological topics, and to incentivise

choirs to include these works in their concert repertoires, thereby participating in a robust movement to raise awareness about the issues and the urgent need to provide solutions and social commitment.

Latin American countries have few public policies related to ecology, and other issues can feel more urgent to governments. The possibility of economic support from the people for major ecological companies is also low due to the high rate of poverty. However, our planet needs all of us now, and choirs can raise our voices, high and loud, and with our songs reach the hearts of singers, audiences, and nurture ecological values in new generations.

We can all be the voice of our planet. The time is now.

Translated from Spanish by Taylor Ffitch, USA



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