

The Fourth Liviu Borlan International Choir Festival in Baia Mare, Romania, September 2014

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Another memorable festival took place in the wonderful Maramures region, where three other similar festivals have been located too. This area is known for its ethnographic and ethno-musicological traditions; here wooden churches rise towards the sky and the Merry Cemetery in Săpânța, with its amusing inscriptions, amazes the world with its good humor. The festival and the contest took place in Baia Mare, the cultural center of the region, between 12th and 14th September 2014. This region is renowned for its beautiful landscapes and amazing traditional music, well preserved, with archetypal meanings full of energy and beauty, like a gemstone buried deep in the ground.

Liviu Borlan graduated from Sigismund Toduță's composition class (Professor of composition at the Music Academy in Cluj-Napoca, who completed his PHD in music at the College of Santa Cecilia, Rome); he was well known in Baia Mare, where he worked as a teacher and conductor and continued to compose. As inspiration, the works of Liviu Borlan rely either on folklore or religious music and classic poetry.

In memory of this composer, the *Association Prietenii Armoniei* (Friends of Harmony), Executive Director Alexandru Nicolici (a

man with a golden heart that moves mountains) representing Armonia Choir, organized this event which includes a choral competition now in its fourth year. Armonia is an elite choir conducted by the inspired conductor and Festival Director Mihaela Bob Zăiceanu Ph.D. All the choirs taking part must include one of Liviu Borlan's pieces in their competition repertoire.

Prior to the competition, a technical meeting of the jury took place and made a slight change in the method of evaluation: each artistic component (intonation, accuracy of the vocal scores, artistic impression etc.) was to be noted individually with a score from 1 to 100, to ensure utmost accuracy. After this technical meeting, the jury held a press conference to which the conductors of the participating choirs were invited together with the Press. The conference was chaired by Viorica Parja, who also presented the competition.



Armonia Choir (Romania), cond. Mihaela Bob-Zaiceanu

Traditionally, the ceremony was opened by the host choir, Armonia, who presented works from Romanian folklore.

On the evening of September 13th, after the closing ceremony, simultaneous concerts were held in the city churches as follows:

1. Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, choir Vox Caelestis, Budapest – Hungary, conductor Valéria Szebellédi and

Cantores Amicitiae, Iasi – Romania, conductor Nicholas Gîscă.

2. Church of St. Mary, choirs Erkel Ferenc, Budapest – Hungary, conductor Zsófia CSER and Odmev, Kamnik – Slovenia, conductor Ana Smrtnik.
3. Church of St. Peter and Paul, choirs Vivace, Mezótúr – Hungary, conductor Magdolna Csizi and Voces – Oradea, conductor Arnold Schneider.
4. St. Anthony of Padua Church, choirs Tempus, Baldone – Latvia, conductor Baiba Urka and Madrigálkórus, Szekszárd – Hungary, conductor Valér Jobbágy.

In addition, a book was presented, a collection of songs (set for instruments only) signed by Liviu Borlan. The book was edited by teachers Lotica Vaida and Vaida Simion.

Participating choirs received the following honors and awards:

Liviu Borlan Trophy, which is awarded for the best interpretation of a piece by Liviu Borlan, was won by *Cantores Amicitiae Choir* of Iasi, conducted by Professor Nicolae Gîscă. **First place**, with the highest score given by the jury, was won by *Cantores Amicitiae Choir*, Iași, who gave a very high quality interpretation. **Second place** went to *Ferenc Erkel Choir*, Budapest, Hungary, conductor, Zsofia CSER. **Third place** went to *Madrigal Choir*, Szekszard, Hungary, conductor Valer Jobbágy. **Maramures Chamber of Commerce and Industry Award** went to *Vox Caelestis Choir*, Budapest, Hungary, conductor, Valeria Szebellédi. The Media Award and the Rotary Club Baia Mare Award went to *Odmev Choir*, Kamnik, Slovenia, conductor Ana Smrtnik. **The Maramures County Center for Preservation and Promotion of traditions Award** was won by *Choir Voces*, Oradea, Romania. **The Popularity Award** went to *Tempus Choir*, Baldone, Latvia, conductor Baiba Urka. **The Friendship Award**, awarded by the Association “Prietenii Armoniei” went to *Vivace Choir*,

Mezotur, Hungary, conductor Magdolna Csizi. This choir was also awarded the **CreduArt Award** for its performance of Liviu Borlan's song 'To the shrine of the ancient faith'.

The members of the jury were representatives of the leading Music Academies in Bucharest, Cluj and Iasi (Romania) and the Music School in Budapest, Bratislava, Moldova and Baia Mare: Voicu Enăchescu, president of the National Association of Choral Music in Romania and conductor of Prelude choir, president of the jury; Milan Kolena, University of Musical Art Bratislava, Slovakia; Éva Kollár, Faculty of Choral Conducting of the Music Academy, Budapest, Hungary; Elena Marian representative of the Choral Association from Moldova; Grigore Cudalbu, National University of Music, Bucharest; Ioan Pop – Gheorghe Dima Music Academy Cluj-Napoca; George Dumitriu, University of Arts George Enescu, Iasi; Maria Pocol – Arts Highschool Baia Mare. Artistic Director and international observer: Andrea Angelini, Italy.

We were privileged to take part in an event of great artistic value and we are sure that future festivals will bring, as we have seen in previous years, an added artistic and interpretative value. It is remarkable that in Romania choral music attracts the world's attention through the magic atmosphere of this wonderful festival.

A special mention and thank you to the *Prietenii Armoniei* Association and *Armonia Choir*, to Alexandru Nicolici and to Mihaela Bob Zăiceanu and to other passionate members of the choir. Thanks to them this festival was a success, a high class demonstration of contemporary amateur choral music worldwide.