

VII Paparats Kvetka

International Student Choir Forum, Minsk, Belarus, 2-6 May 2012

Andrea Angelini, ICB Managing Editor and Choral Conductor

I had been dreaming of a trip to Belarus since I was a boy when, during the summer holidays, I saw entire classes of schoolchildren with their teachers and guides coming to stay in Rimini. The then recent Chernobyl disaster had created human solidarity and many associations to allow these unfortunate children to spend a few weeks by the sea to breathe the iodine-rich air. I was always struck by the seriousness and dignity of these guests and their kindness and culture, but the project to visit Belarus, had always remained in a drawer ...

And so I was delighted when last winter I received an official invitation to take part in the important and special choral festival named in the title. It is 'special' because it is organized directly by the Belarusian State University and it is intended for choirs, preferably student choirs, with singers aged from 18 to 35 years. The core organizer of the festival was Katsiaryna Saladukha with her wonderful team of young people.



*Katsiaryna
Saladukha, the
brain of the
Forum!*

The first aspect that will strike a person on arrival in Minsk is the absolute cleanliness of the streets and of the sidewalks which, together with the sense of personal safety that one breathes, makes the Belarusian capital a place where one can indeed spend a pleasant few days. The city also enjoys a varied musical life, maybe not as flashy as in London or New York, but certainly interesting.



*The beautiful staff of the
Student Choir Forum
'Paparats Kvetka'!*

The Minsk Choir Forum includes a choral competition, spread over two days (sacred and secular repertoires), some master-classes and concerts. The choirs came from Russia, Poland, Sweden, Latvia and Belarus. The most original aspect of the event is the fact that a 'forum' is not exactly a contest. Of course there was a pool of experts including Anatoly Kisilev (Russia), Inessa Bodyako (Belarus), Romualdas Grazinis (Lithuania) and Saul Zaks (Denmark) and me, but the main purpose of this jury was not to award marks but to take note of the strengths and weaknesses of each choir; then, during the highlight of the festival, a 'round table' discussion took place, where all aspects were calmly discussed in a constructive and mutually beneficial atmosphere, and the jury was able to give advice to the choirs' directors.



Informal picture of the experts panel. LTR: Romualdas Grazinis (Lithuania), Saul Zaks (Denmark), Inessa Bodyako (Belarus), Andrea Angelini (Italy) and Anatoly Kisilev (Russia)



Inessa Bodyako among her singers

Of course we did get the announcements by the experts, on the basis of the opinions voiced in the discussions, of the names of the best choir (Radost Girls' Choir from Moscow) and the best conductor (the Russian Alexei Umnov). Other certificates of merit were awarded for choice of repertoire and for the preservation of the Belarusian choral music tradition.



Alexey Umnov and the Male Choir of the Karelian State Pedagogical Academy

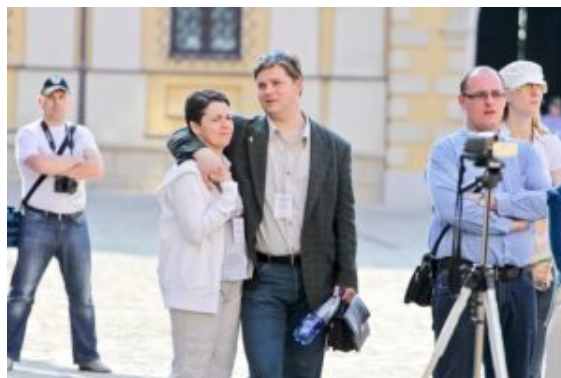
The competitive concert with secular repertoire was held in

the courtyard of the magnificent, recently restored Nesvizh castle, a hundred miles southwest of Minsk. This place is famous because in 1562 the first book in the Belarusian language was printed there.



Concert in the castle courtyard

The day before, all the choirs presented their sacred repertoire in Minsk Catholic cathedral, dedicated to the Most Holy Virgin Mary. The festival opening ceremony took the shape of a commemorative concert given by the National Capella of the Belarusian State University directed by Alexander Minenkov and Olga Minenkova.



Alexander Minenkov and Olga Minenkova, conductors of

*the National Choir Capella
of the Belarusian State
University*

Of course, if you plan to participate in the forum next year, be prepared to taste the local vodka, of which the Belarusians are very proud! The famous 'Kristall' distillery was almost in front of my hotel and its intense scents, seeping through the air conditioning, can truly stun you!! Jokes apart, the third glass of vodka offered to me during the final party was politely declined for obvious reasons. It has been fascinating, however, to see how, around me, our Russian and Belarusians colleagues could still remain almost perfectly sober even after many toasts in honour of someone or something!



*Evening concert at the
disco*



The youngest guest at the

party?

The grand finale consisted of the awards ceremony for the participating choirs and a superb gala concert, during which the pieces studied in the masterclasses were performed by the students.



The final awards ceremony

The only discordant note: the weather! As a good Italian, I had been prepared to find, in Belarus, freezing temperatures even at the beginning of May, but instead a pleasant sun forced me to “reinvent” my clothing on the spot



Good spirits before the concert...

For info on the 'Paparats Kvetka' please visit
http://www.chorum.bsu.by/eng/_index.html

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