

# WHO CAN SAIL WITHOUT WIND? THE CHALLENGE OF THE EUROPA CANTAT FESTIVAL TELEVISION

*Impressions gathered by Rossana Paliaga, Journalist and musicologist, Italy*



“Who can sail without wind?” asks a very well known Swedish folk song. Similarly we could hardly imagine a Europa Cantat Festival without participants. This year, we learned that we could join the events in person or virtually. The host of this year’s edition of the festival in Ljubljana (17-22 July 2021), the Javni Sklad RS za kulturne dejavnosti, worked very hard together with the European Choral Association to change and adapt the educational and concert plan many times in order to respect the restrictions due to COVID. Gatherings, travel and open singing, which are irreplaceable elements of this event, became impossible or too difficult to achieve. Exceptional circumstances need exceptional solutions and so a huge part of the programme reached the audience through the first ever EC television project. This is the story of this challenge, told by some members of the choral TV crew.



Nine hours of daily (mostly live) programming with technically challenging live webcasts



From left to right: Burak Onur Erdem, Jean-Claude Wilkens and Jan Schumacher

## **JEAN CLAUDE WILKENS – The Idea**

When it became clear that workshops had to be cancelled because of the pandemic and that the wish to keep the festival alive was unanimous, the ECA music commission and the team started to look at what could be “kept” in Ljubljana or

transferred to an online format, in order to connect with as many people as possible in keeping with the international flavour of the festival.

There was a generous list of concerts by guest groups and Slovenian choirs but also Zoom sessions with two-thirds of the PULSE programme as well as open singing and discovery workshops. My proposal to create the ECTV was an obvious one: we needed to put everything into a readable matrix, with the creation of a daily ritual. In addition, this TV grid could include all types of additions from Ljubljana such as reporting and interviews, somewhat giving the viewer a sense of belonging and being there.

The partnership with the school for radio and TV was the starting point of the real story. The result exceeded all expectations.



## ALJAŽ BASTIČ – Live from the Studio

A festival televised online needs careful planning and involves many people, much equipment and great coordination. It is quite similar to an ordinary television broadcast – you need precise timing, check all the recordings technically and find a good team who will be able to work for longer periods of time. Of course, there can be a mix – you could do a semi-professional live-stream of an event (four professional cameras, live mixing, good sound, light ...), which still involves a lot of planning (and money), but that still wouldn't be a broadcast. With ECTV, we combined the two – nine hours of daily (mostly live) programming with technically

challenging live webcasts.

There is a lot of background knowledge you need to be able to run a televised festival. You also need a lot of technical support – facilities as well as equipment. There were many, many challenges in creating a festival TV. Mixing live shows and online lectures was just one of them.



**ALFRED JÜRGENS – The Educational Program**

The reading sessions and PULSE lectures were planned long before the festival by the festival music commission. I imagine this was a big job. For the six reading sessions, where music publishers showcase some of their music on offer, you obviously need to present a broad variety. I think this worked out pretty well; we had interesting presentations from Catalonia, Lebanon and the Levant region, from Italy, Canada, Germany and Slovenia.

For the PULSE lectures, the task was even more challenging: three lectures a day adding up to 18 lectures throughout the whole festival. We wanted to present a variety of topics (from Slovenian folk music to barbershop, neuroscience and online tools for remote music-making) and to give a stage to presenters from different countries, with a balanced representation of gender and age, and to highlight the “hot topics” of today’s choral scene. Then we had to come up with a schedule that made sense. Huge credit is due to the festival music commission and to Joži Vovk as the head of ECTV who all did a fabulous job in organizing all of this in advance. Our job, in comparison, was quite small.

The most challenging thing for us was that there was no

flexibility in terms of timing, because in a continuous TV broadcast there is no room for change: if your slot is 57'45 minutes long it needs to go on for 57'45 minutes. This was especially tricky with interactive sessions, where we had room for the audience to get involved and ask questions. We had to learn to be flexible, and to maintain good communication with the presenters and the production team, which is much larger than in a "traditional" webinar. It was not an easy task, given no one of us had ever done this before, but it was a really exciting one and great fun as well! I hope I'll get a call to be part of the next EUROPA CANTAT TV!



**ALBERTO PALACIN FERNANDEZ –  
Preliminary & Daily Work**

I got involved in the TV team in June, when I attended some of the very first meetings of the project, together with the core team. Due to my lack of time during the weeks prior to the festival, ECA-EC Project Manager & colleague Alfred Jürgens started collaborating with the EC Music Office for some preparation work.

At my arrival in Ljubljana, Alfred and I started working on the implementation of the reading and PULSE sessions; later on our office grew to four members, with the support of YEMP (Young Event Management Programme) participants during the festival week. As a member of ECA-EC Youth Committee, I was also glad to see all my colleagues contributing to EC TV in many different ways!

In comparison to previous festivals, this time everything was more complex technically. In a regular "offline" festival, we would be dealing with issues like attendees and spaces management, as well as presenters' requirements; most of this work didn't completely disappear, but was transformed. Additionally, we had to deal with many new issues: communicating effectively with the presenters and Music Commission members in a context of very different formats for the sessions (Zoom webinars on live TV, webinars live from the TV Studio in Ljubljana, hybrid sessions), scheduling rehearsals and offering tech help, preparing and receiving presentation materials... But overall, the most important thing was to build an efficient and reliable communication bridge between the musicians/artists/ guests, and the TV technical team, led by Aljaž. As none of us had experience in TV production before, this of course implied a huge learning experience for our team. After the very first day of the festival, activities like presenting and hosting a live TV show, writing technical scripts, or communicating with a professional TV crew became our daily routine.

## **JOŽI VOVK – Inside JSKD**

After it became clear that we would have to give up almost 3,000 participants, and with them many excellent conductors, musicians and lecturers, we looked for ways to bring at least part of the rich content and the festival spirit to their homes. So we developed the idea of an interesting, dynamic and attention-grabbing TV programme. The night before the first broadcast, all I wanted and prayed for was to see the picture and hear the sound from our ECTV studio on screens at 8:45 in the morning. It was a great feeling, just like on the last TV broadcast!

I really liked the fact that people from different countries started working together immediately and we created an environment where we all knew our tasks and we all had the same goal. The days were very intense, the time pressure of minutes and seconds dictated by TV production needs often wore



us down and yet we started the mornings with renewed energy. We were all television “apprentices”, more or less unexperienced, and I think we all came out of this adventure richer for the new knowledge, great experience, many friendships and unforgettable memories. The word I feel when I think about this amazing time and team is just... gratitude. I am grateful to each and every ECTV team member and to all the great lecturers and conductors for being part of this great choir story and grateful for the opportunity to be part of it myself.



### **HENRIKE SCHAUERTE – The Spirit of the Festival**

The spirit of the Europa Cantat Festival means that singers, conductors, and choral friends from all over Europe and the world come together to exchange, enjoy, and perform choral music. People meet on the streets; they sing together and enjoy a lot of coincidental encounters through singing and choral music. This year’s Europa Cantat TV definitely could not recreate those very special moments physically, but through the Europa Cantat TV edition and live events in Ljubljana, we were able to build bridges for choral music, singers, and conductors to reconnect to all the beautiful memories that they had gained in former editions of the festival. As part of the team working in Ljubljana, I felt the spirit of the Europa Cantat Festival clearly and I believe that we were able to transfer this feeling through a very varied and engaging programme to our audience, making it

interactive and fun to participate from the comfort of one's home.



## SONJA GREINER – The Feedback

In Ljubljana's Cankarjev Dom Cultural Centre we had the festival "VIP lounge". At first, we had planned this to be, as usual, the welcoming and meeting point for our guests. Then we realized that the members of the Festival Music Commission and the Board of the European Choral Association had to watch the ECTV programme – they each signed up to evaluate some of the sessions – and some of our guests would also want to do this. Watching together in the Lounge would be more fun than alone in the hotel. A group of people usually gathered there and I sometimes joined them with my laptop to work from there and partly follow our TV programme. Soon they all brought their songbooks and joined Open Singing as a group – also a nicer experience than joining alone in front of the computer!

Watching the PULSE sessions and the TV breaks together was also great. You could immediately exchange your impressions, sometimes laugh together and get interesting background information.

ECTV was born out of the wish to have something to offer to all those who could not come to Ljubljana in person. The ability to make the wish come true with quality came about with tremendous luck as we ended up having a professional studio and a professional crew, and ECTV became the main focus of the event.

Will we repeat this? Many people have asked this. The answer is: probably not exactly the same way with 70 hours of live TV with such a professional setup and 40 people working



exclusively for it. Will this experiment have a legacy? Certainly! Maybe in a smaller dimension and with a reduced programme. Hopefully we would not need it for the same reason and the main target group will be different. It will not be for registered participants who could not come in the end, but for people who could not register to begin with. We can reach out with such a programme to new target groups, such as people who cannot afford to travel or who don't want to fly, or for those who don't know Europa Cantat yet and are curious. It will not be the central activity of our event which will hopefully once again gather people together physically in one place, but it may become one facet of offering a rich and diverse programme.



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*Edited by Patricia Abbott, Canada*



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