

World Youth Choir Alumni Session 2023 – Session Summary

Joana Costa, WYC Session manager

The World Youth Choir (WYC) is an international ensemble of some of the best young choral singers from all over the world. A non-profit programme created in 1989, it has since gathered more than 1,000 singers from 70 countries in almost 40 sessions. □

The project is powered by the World Youth Choir Foundation, the legal body behind the project, with the support of three patrons: Jeunesses Musicales International, the International Federation for Choral Music, and the European Choral Association.

The World Youth Choir Alumni Session 2023 was the first to be held in four years, following the 2019 session in France and Portugal. It is an important step for the choir to be back after the interruption due to COVID.

*“It was the being together again after COVID ... the joy and enthusiasm, and just the sheer pleasure they felt after the silence of the last four years [that made it] a fantastic experience on many levels,” said **Ki Adams**, President of the Board of the World Youth Choir Foundation.*

***Graeme Climie**, alumni singer (2019 and 2023 sessions) from Canada, added, “After all of the pain and tears of canceled projects, hopeless dreams, and years of begging the universe for any opportunity to see each other again, I will spend the rest of my life being thankful for those incredible days where we suspended life itself to delight in each other’s company, incredible abilities, and endless optimism to build*

a better world through music."

For this session, the choir was composed of 40 alumni singers – all of whom had taken part in a WYC session from 2016 to 2019 – from 26 different countries. The choir gathered for a short rehearsal session and international tour in Croatia, Slovenia, and Hungary from 3-12 June 2023.□

Various organizations have collaborated to make the 2023 session possible. These partners include Jeunesses Musicales Croatia, the Ministry of Culture and Media of Croatia, Javni sklad RS za kulturne dejavnosti (JSKD, the Public fund of the Republic of Slovenia for cultural activities), Jeunesses Musicales Hungary, Veszprém-Balaton 2023 and the European Music Council.

The choir performed under the artistic direction of Zoltán Pad in his native Hungary and under guest conductor Sebastjan Vhrovnik (Slovenia) in Groznjan (Croatia) and Ljubljana (Slovenia).

Zoltán Pad is an internationally renowned conductor. Since 2014, he has been the chief conductor of the Hungarian Radio Choir. He conducted the World Youth Choir in its 2017 session. He is frequently invited to conduct master courses and regularly works with youth choirs. He is a recurring adjudicator at international choral and conductor competitions.

Sebastjan Vhrovnik is an Associate Professor of Choral Conducting at the Ljubljana Academy of Music. He is currently the conductor of the Ljubljana Academy of Music Chamber Choir, the Ljubljana Music Society Mixed Choir and permanent guest conductor of the *Zbor Slovenske filharmonije* (Slovenian Philharmonic Choir).



Zoltán Pad (Hungary) and Sebastjan Vrhovnik (Slovenia)

Groznjan (Croatia)

The World Youth Choir Alumni Session 2023 started in Croatia, with the group arriving in Groznjan on 3 June. After four long years of interruption, the group was finally reunited. Hugs, laughter and tears of joy filled the air as the singers embraced the opportunity to connect and be together in person once again. Even though most of the singers already knew each other from previous sessions, there was also space to meet new faces! The first day ended with some ice-breaking games so the singers could connect with each other and share their expectations about the session.

The intense rehearsal session started immediately on the second day, where the choir got the chance to work on the repertoire with Zoltán Pad and Sebastjan Vrhovnik. Following three days of rigorous rehearsals, the choir performed their first concert at the Church of Sts Vitus, Modest and Crescentia in Groznjan on 6 June.

Jovana Flipovi, alumni singer (2017, 2018 and 2023 sessions) from Serbia, described the project as “a place where people from different parts of the world, different cultures, different nationalities come to one place and unite into one singing soul and pair of lungs. That is the most amazing way to realize that we all belong and, even though each of us is individually unique, together we are one. World Youth Choir is an experience that every singer in the world should get to live.”



Rehearsal in Groznjan © Jovana Kuzmanović

Ljubljana (Slovenia)

The choir travelled to Slovenia by bus and the rehearsal session continued. During the time in Slovenia, the singers had an All-Stars Evening, which stood out as one of the highlights of the session. The singers prepared something special to showcase to the entire group, and it was truly incredible to witness the immense effort people put into this moment. They collaborated with their colleagues to present

something representing their own country or simply something immensely enjoyable that brought laughter to everyone. Outside of rehearsal, the singers also had the chance to explore Ljubljana Castle and the city. ☐☐

The choir performed at Julij Betetto Hall, University of Ljubljana Academy of Music, on 9 June. The premiere of the commissioned piece “The Bells”, composed by Nana Forte, was one of the highlights of the program. Nana Forte was present in the audience, which added an extra layer of significance to the performance. Furthermore, Matej Kastelic, composer of the piece “Otche Nash”, and Samo Vovk, composer of the piece “Ta na Solbici” also attended the concert.

“The World Youth Choir is truly the most amazing and miraculous thing that I’ve ever seen and experienced. I’ll never stop being grateful that I met you, sang with you, was accepted, and loved by all of you. We gave those of us that fell down the strength to get up and feel at home again, we reforged our bonds to last, and we showed in our own ways how much we care about each other, and how much we love this project. It is a treasure whose richness and profound impact can’t be measured or contained, no matter how much we try to put our feelings and thoughts into words.” **Elias Johansson**, alumni singer (2017, 2018, 2019 and 2023 sessions) from Sweden.



WYC is excellency but also lots of fun © Jovana Kuzmanović

Budapest and Veszprém (Hungary)

The choir travelled then to Hungary and performed at the Grand Hall of the Liszt Academy, in Budapest. What a concert! What a venue! The World Youth Choir's concert in Budapest served as the grand finale of two significant conferences held from 6-10 June. The first was the third edition of the Bach 2 Future conference, organized by Papageno. The second was the European Forum on Music 2023, a collaborative effort between the European Music Council, the Hungarian Music Council and Papageno.

You can find more details of the World Youth Choir's performance in Budapest on the "Eyes and Ears on Budapest" blog, featured on the Papageno website at <https://papageno.hu>.



Budapest Concert 5 © 4K Media Studio

Next stop: Veszprém!

During the time in Veszprém, the choir had the opportunity to visit and swim in Lake Balaton, which is the largest lake in Central Europe and one of the region's foremost tourist destinations.

The choir performed its last concert at Saint Michael's Cathedral in Veszprém on 11 June. The astonishing acoustics and vibrant audience made the choir's last concert more than special. As the singers stood on the stage, basking in the applause and cheers of the audience, tears of joy and gratitude welled up in their eyes. It was a beautiful moment of realization that they had accomplished something truly extraordinary together. We could feel the bond formed among the singers during their time together. From the initial days of introductions and ice-breakers to the rehearsals and shared meals, they had forged deep connections and lifelong friendships. They laughed, cried, and supported each other

through the highs and lows of the journey.

Though the session had come to an end, the impact of the music and the connections forged will endure, leaving an indelible mark on the singers' hearts and the hearts of all who had the privilege to witness the World Youth Choir 2023 Alumni Session's inspiring performances.

Alberto Fernández, an alumni singer (2019 and 2023 sessions) from Spain put it best when he said, "The World Youth Choir is the most important musical and personal experience I have had in my life. WYC left a deep footprint in my heart and gave me the necessary energy to come back home with a deep desire on being a choir teacher and devote my work on reaching out and making more people to sing, conduct and compose. My career and my life was deeply transformed by this project."

Stay tuned from upcoming audition information for the **2024 World Youth Choir Session**.

Edited by Karen Bradberry, Australia



Joana da Costa is the manager of the World Youth Choir and the main point of contact for singers, organisers and the general public in regard to operational matters of the World Youth Choir session. Besides managing the World Youth Choir session, Joana is a freelance cultural manager, focussed on supporting the growth and development of cultural organisations through project management, events organisation, grant writing and social media management. Joana participated in the YEMP (Young Event

Management Program) 2021, organized by the European Choral Association connected to the Europa Cantat Festival, in Ljubljana, Slovenia. She has been the Project Manager of Lisbon Choral Conducting Masterclass and worked as Operations Manager in World Choral EXPO 2022, Lisbon. She is a member of the Youth Committee of the European Choral Association. Joana is also a singer and vocal teacher. manager@worldyouthchoir.org

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