

Eurochoir 2018 – An International Companionship of Singers

Impressions of Ahmet Can Kızılcın

EuroChoir 2018 was my first experience in singing with a group of singers from different countries, different conductors, and first time participating in a festival such as Europa Cantat.

When I first arrived in Helsinki, I did not know what to expect or how to blend well with the experienced singers coming all across Europe. After a warm welcome by Sulasol, and a fruitful rehearsal; when Mikko (Sidoroff) told us that the Finnish audience will have tears in their eyes after performance of Stormskärs Maja, any concerns I had were gone and I thought to myself, I couldn't be in any other place than here.

The chosen repertoire of the conductors, Mikko and Maria (van Nieukerken), seemed challenging at first, as it was - however, the singers chosen for this project came well prepared and all that was left was for us, was to get to know each other and have fun while it lasted. Everyone in the project was really into making this work as best as it can, and almost everyone was open to social exchange that we managed to stay as one group in our free time. Free time, as in sacrificing from our resting time to sing some more! This, I believe, contributed positively towards our sound as a choir.

One thing I really liked was how cooperative the conductors were with each other. They both were quite different in their style of conducting and leading rehearsals: Mikko was more easy-going, while it was risky if the majority didn't come prepared, that was not the case and it empowered us to take the initiative and be more responsible for our parts, while Maria was more specific and precise into how she wanted us to sing. Both gave great care to the text and pronunciation, and were great guides overall, which improved our singing. In addition to this, doing yoga with Mikko certainly helped in rehearsals.

One of the most memorable moments for me, was during our concert in Temppeliaukio, the Rock Church. We sang a Danish piece called Sænk kun dit hoved du blomst, three times. As we were rehearsing it, I found it quite odd that we had to sing it three times, but during the concert, this intent revealed a beautiful thing. The song had such warm harmonies and text, that each time we sang it, it made itself more memorable and welcoming to the audience.

And on the last time, we spread out towards the audience, each of us singing directly to someone who came to listen to us. No folders, no scores, no conducting involved, there was nothing that came between the singer and the listener. As the song finished, tears flowed on both sides. An intimate, sincere connection was achieved between complete strangers, only through the power of singing.

I had quite the joy singing the pieces in the repertoire. Many I find to be my favourite for different reasons. Canticum Calamitatis Maritimae, Stormskärs Maja, Plenty Good Room, Beaufort Scale and Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho all have their special places in my heart, but for the reasons above, the Danish piece by Nielsen has the most special one.

We had two main concerts in Helsinki, one in the Helsinki Cathedral and the other in the Rock Church and extra ones near a swimming pool in which it was aired in a Finnish TV channel, and on the ship that took us to Tallinn, for Europa Cantat Festival which was a blast.

The Europa Cantat Festival was quite hectic, apart from our own concerts and rehearsals, going from ateliers in the morning and the afternoon to concerts in the evening, I never had a chance to rest. I do not find this to be an issue however, it was the most enjoyable two weeks I had to the fullest, for the year 2018! The only criticism I can give was the choice of accommodation. It was quite far away from the festival area. Thankfully, the public transportation was free for the festival participants and it did not become a big issue.

Apart from good singing all round everywhere, the most I gained from the festival were new friends and a chance to build a network with singers, conductors, composers, organisers and publishers alike.

In conclusion, Eurochoir 2018 provided a perfect medium for me to improve myself, to make new friends, build a network in the choral world, share intense emotional moments with people who love to sing and listen to good music.

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