

Hearts in Harmony in Trondheim



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Coeurs en Choeurs – Hearts in Harmony, has taken place for the second time, in Trondheim (Norway), organised by NOBU (The Norwegian Youth Choir Federation) and under the patronage of Europa Cantat, two years after the concert which took place at the Palais des Congrès in Paris, on 6th May 2006; presented in issue 3/06 of ECmagazine by Thierry Thiébaud, organiser of that important event.

With a desire to unite in equal numbers choirs of disabled people and able-bodied people, and with two basic principles in mind: the belief that being disabled should never prevent one from showing one's character, and the wise observation of César Geoffroy, founder of À Coeur Joie, "when voices join together in song, hearts are able to understand each other"; these principles have helped to underpin and inspire this second celebration on 14th and 15th June last, organised by Ingeborg Brun, whom I wish to congratulate for her rigorous work and for her friendliness and approachability.

The objective of the Trondheim project was to help people in a choir setting to know and experience the inclusion of children with hearing difficulties. The Educational seminar was addressed to music teachers, musical therapists, conductors and primary school teachers, all interested in working to-

wards integration through the means of musical communication. The first part was directed by Ellen M. Lundereng and Turid R.Skei, both teachers at the Nyborg primary school, and both conductors of Kor Laene. These two teachers have much experience with children who have hearing difficulties. Kor Laene, the children's choir formed from pupils at the Nyborg school in Trondheim, is made up of 90 children from 6 to 13 years old. This choir has used sign language as a visual part of its music for many years. In this choir there are some children with reduced hearing ability and the use of sign language has also been useful for the rest of the choir, most of all in learning song texts. This choir has organised workshops, festivals and concerts for children's choirs.

The two workshops worked on the experiences of the organisers of working with children who have hearing difficulties. A number of practical exercises were used. After each workshop an open forum was started, including the 15 participants in the seminar. Ellen and Turid explained in detail the Kor Laene project, and also that of their school and how the issues of integration and inclusion and have been experienced.

From my point of view, I found one particular moment most relevant: after having taken part in the seminar sessions, I got to see how several children with hearing difficulties from the school caused the whole teaching team to revisit its working method in order to ensure that all children would live an integrated and communicatively rounded experience. I also believe that the learning of songs with sign language on the part of all children, as was seen in the practical exercises, helped the hearing children by stimulating their attention, and helping to reflect and internalise the music. It also galvanised the willpower of all the school and the parents, all the driving force behind the Kor Laene, to make the child with hearing difficulty to feel like any other children, where each could live out their experiences and express their personality and abilities in the most transparent, natural and happy way possible.

On Sunday morning there was a short practical workshop, open to participants in the seminar, where the smallest children in the choir learned different Norwegian songs, singing and using sign language. These children were also present at the afternoon concert. On Sunday afternoon there was a large concert at the most important venue in Trondheim – Olavshallen – where a large audience was present. The Kor Laene was there, along with boys and girls from other choirs such as the Gebärdenchor SignSongs, of Leipzig.

Also taking part were Lars Lillo Stenberg, who is one of the best-known singer songwriters in Norway, and Eureka, a small theatre group. It was a concert that had been prepared with a lot of care and sensitivity. The boys and girls moved across the stage, creating different groups, some-

times singing all together, then in smaller groups, then some solo. They were well placed, with small choreographic and visual elements, and accompanied by a group of musicians with guitars, trumpets, piano and percussion. The Leipzig choir sang only through sign language, following some recorded pop songs. It really was marvelous to see choirs and their members interpreting and expressing music with gestures, which most of them could not hear, at least as we do. That concert showed how much the choir works and how consistent it is.

Among the guests were Michel Giraud, (the idea for the Hearts in Harmony came from his meeting with the president of Handivoix), his wife Simone, Kjetil Aamann (of NOBU and Board member of Europa Cantat), Thierry Thiébaud (Vice-President of Europa Cantat), Victoria Liedbergius (Europa Cantat Youth Committee) and all the governing board of NOBU. I was also there, representing both Europa Cantat and SCIC (the Secretariat of Children's and Youth Choirs in Catalonia).

To finish, a group of young girls from the Kor Laene came to find me, to bring me up to the stage and present me with flowers as a symbol of 'passing on the relay' to SCIC which will organize one of the next editions of Hearts-in-Harmony in 2010 in Barcelona (following a Hearts-in-Harmony event in Hungary in autumn 2009). I also had the opportunity to thank them for their welcome, congratulate them for their festival, and invite everyone to Barcelona on behalf of SCIC.

Montserrat Gual
Europa Cantat Board Member