

Maurice Ohana Competition

Marseille, 18 september 2013

The Maurice Ohana Competition 2013 was dedicated to repertoire for chamber choir. Composers were invited to send in three different versions of one single musical concept: one for professional choir, one for semi-professional choir and one for amateur choir. An international jury consisting of Alexandros Markeas (president), Nicole Corti, Felix Ibarrondo, Carlo Pavese (on behalf of ECA/Europa Cantat), and Leo Samama (on behalf of Tenso Network Europe) made a selection of three out of 15 scores submitted in June 2013.

These three scores, by the composers **Henri-Claude Fantapi** (Tou Aiyaiou), **Tomas Barreiro Guijosa** (El canto de la guitarra) and **Vincent Manac'h** (Ulisse) were performed during a final session on Sept 18th in Marseille during the Tenso Days 2013 at the Auditorium of the Villa Mediterranée in Marseille by the Choeur Contemporain and l'Atelier vocal Concours Ohana (both directed by Daria Kucevalova) and the Latvijas Radiokoris (under Kaspars Putniņš).

After these finals, the jury decided to award only a second prize. The jury based its judgement both on the execution of the scores and the scores themselves. Due to technical problems in the preparation of the finals none of the three pieces were performed as they should have been: the Latvijas Radiokoris had not been able to prepare the professional version of the work by Barreiro, and the amateur and semi-professional choirs were both not able to present complete run-throughs of the scores.

The jury was disappointed by the overall level of the fifteen scores that were submitted for the competition. It is clear that most composers had quite some difficulties to meet the rules of this competition, and therefore did not find a way to make three different scores out of one musical concept: scaling down from professional to amateur singers or grading up from amateur to professional singers.

The best solution, without simplifying the versions for amateurs too much, was delivered by Vincent Manac'h. With imagination and technical skill he was able to convince the jury and the audience, especially with the versions for amateur choir and semi-professional choir. The version for the professional chamber choir was not quite up to the same level of imagination and lacked the necessary challenge.

The score by Henri-Claude Fantapi lacked harmonic and motivic imagination. The version for amateurs was too difficult, especially when the singers have to pick up the correct tones for their entrances. The score by the Mexican composer Tomas Barreiro Guijosa was rather unfulfilling for the amateur and semi-professional choirs, especially where the part for the guitar did not add much colour of drama to the musical expression. Although the professional version was not performed, the score shows that the differences of this version with the other two was not striking and the lack of harmonic consistency and direction was not adapted to the technical possibilities of highly professional singers.

The audience was also asked to vote. The votes of the audience were more or less in line with the jury's: the score of Vincent Manac'h received most votes, followed in voting order by the music of Fantapi and Barreiro.

Leo Samama 2013