



# FROM LEARNING TO PRACTICE

what does it take to create choral music ?

Tenso Professionals Meeting Berlin 8-9 April 2014

## Wednesday 9 April 2014, Mendelssohn Remise, Berlin

The 2014 Tenso Professionals Meeting focused on the education of singers, conductors, and composers of choral music.

Short presentations were given by:

- Eugene Birman (US/LV), composer, participant Tenso Young Composers Workshop
- Zesses Seglias (GR), composer, participant Rautavaara Chamber Choir Composition Workshop
- Jenni Reineke (DE), singer, participant Tenso Europe Chamber Choir
- Florence Guignolet (FR), artistic director of the CRR / département supérieur pour jeunes chanteurs
- Rachel Greaves (UK), General Secretary at the Association of British Choral Directors
- Jörg-Peter Weigle (DE), rector of Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler, initiator der Deutsche Chordirigentenpreis

The conference was moderated by Andrea Thilo.

Although the main topic was the education of young artists, the lively discussion quickly led to a wider subject: how to make choral music more attractive, for young artists, audiences and others. The day ended with group sessions that formulated practical goals; steps to take for artists, ensembles, and music academies, and other recommendations.

(1) Define the **skills required for ensemble singing**, and use these as a starting point for discussing the curricula (for singing, composing, conducting) with music academies. Skills should include, on top of regular vocal and performance skills :

- superb sight reading skills including score reading
- knowledge and understanding of the standard repertoire
- ensemble skills – adaptability, listening, tuning, etc

*(first draft of summing up of skills can be found on the website)*

(2) **Ambassadorships** to promote choral music

- Singers: identify possible role models who combine careers as ensemble singers and soloist. Each Tenso ensemble should identify 2 singers; goal 5 singers per country.
- Conductors: stimulate Tenso conductors to take on ambassadorship. Ask them: which tools do they need? How can we give them practical support in fulfilling the ambassadorship?
- Involve singers and staff of choirs
- Composers and compositions of the highest quality - invest in those.
- Identify and convince a board member of national composers unions to stimulate choral composing
- Involve the young and upcoming professionals via social media, invitations to conferences and other activities: let them speak to a younger generation. Involve them in decision making: how do you hand over the candle to the next generation and what would you need from us to take that step?

(3) Improve the **image of professional choral music** (including our own self-esteem) - how to present an image to the outer world that reflects what choral music is all about ?

ensembles:

- let ensembles give showcases for amateur choirs / singers: show speed and intensity of work, quality of the repertoire, techniques for vocal /physical preparation
- ask singers to tell their story: how did they get into such excellent choirs: what did it take, what additional training did it require, etc
- wherever possible, speak about musicians instead of singers

### Tenso Network Europe :

- ask ambassadors to give testimonials and publish these
- create channels to let people listen to high quality repertoire: Vimeo/Youtube clips, a Tenso Spotify playlist, etc
- the Tenso website could become a broader channel, including a showcase (or links to a showcase) demonstrating a good choral sound
- offer a canon of choral masterpieces, recorded by Tenso choirs, representing the continuous and blossoming innovation of choral music.

### **(4) Practical steps** - what can ensembles do?

- for young professional artists: invite them to participate, attend rehearsals, tickets for concerts, create residencies for young artists (conductors, singers, composers); organize reading sessions for students' compositions; involve your own singers as mentors; take risks (may require convincing artistic staff first);
- for young composers: set good examples; organize competitions and workshops for young composers to work with top-notch composers
- in general: be more social and share ! Many composers and singers do not know what is happening in choral music
- for music academies: 'infiltrate' music academies, change the focus from solo singing to ensemble singing (also from economical perspective)
- increase visibility of professional choirs in music academies; get involved in the organization of choirs in music academies (follow the example of orchestras); bring great choral music to the academies
- choirs should contact music academies and ask: we need singers that can do this and this: can you help with that?
- involve a larger audience / young people; get involved with activities at primary schools/ encourage and participate in 'maitrise' schools where music making is integral part of the curriculum
- singalong concerts
- in own organisation: make sure to involve singers and artistic staff

### **Practical steps** - what can Tenso Network Europe do?

- make partnerships happen (from commissioning to expertise exchange among music academies)
- investigate the contributing factors to success stories: national realities, look for niches
- for example: make short overview in English about the département supérieur pour jeunes chanteurs / Le Jeune Choeur de Paris that can be presented as discussion piece in other academies
- share the information via reports, website, personal visits

### **Further ideas and issues that were mentioned**

- Organise audition training for young singers.
- Make use of the relation text/music as an entrance to (contemporary) choral music: why this text, how is it used in the music, etc
- Many singers (amateur) do not go to concerts themselves: "it is like angling, people do it, but they never go out and watch it."
- How to open up the research part of composing to a wider audience, so that they can follow a composer's road from idea to composition?
- How to find our way back to the original function of music in day-to-day life (as part of ritual, commemoration, celebration, etc)
- Singers are very precious, singers need to be loved. Then they will sing a lot better. This is also - and perhaps even more - true for the professionals.