



TENSO

The European network for professional chamber choirs

Tenso Young Composers Award 2014 for Georgi Sztojanov

jury report

The Tenso Young Composers Workshop gives participants a chance to work closely with a professional chamber choir, so that they may enhance their knowledge of vocal techniques and the musical possibilities of *the choir as instrument*. The third edition of the workshop, which was organized for the first time in 2010, initially chose six composers from more than 60 applicants from all over Europe. During two sessions in Mechelen in May 2014, the workshop leaders worked with the young composers and heard their short pieces or sketches performed by DR Vokalensemblen. After evaluating the scores they brought and the way they worked with the choir, three finalists were chosen to participate in the second round in Copenhagen in November 2014: Francesca Le Lohé (UK), Nuno da Rocha (PT), and Georgi Sztojanov (BG/HU)

Tenso was very happy that the three composers selected for the second-round embraced its current 14-18 project. For their workshop scores they used lesser-known texts from World War I, ranging from soldiers shanties and short notes on postcard, to poems written by non-Europeans dragged from far-away British colonies into the European war.

The workshop was coached by composer/conductor James Wood, composer Leo Samama (in Mechelen) and composer Hans Koolmees (in Copenhagen), and the singers of DR Vokalensemblen. Tenso would especially like to thank the singers for giving such generous coaching to the composers with questions and well-reasoned comments. This will undoubtedly contribute to their development in vocal writing.

The three candidates participating in the second round of the workshop come from very different backgrounds, and are at very different stages in their development as composers, as shown in the diversity of the music they brought to the sessions.

Francesca Le Lohé (United Kingdom, 1990) is the youngest composer that was selected for the second round. In her work she shows great promise, but she still has to develop many compositional skills. Whereas the scores she brought to the first workshop in Mechelen were written in a simple style, the material she prepared for the second round was far more complex. The score sometimes lacked corporeal evidence - as one jury member phrased it - and ultimately, the power to convey the text to the singers and the audiences. The jury wants to encourage her to keep her sense of adventure, but to focus

on ways to orchestrate her musical ideas without losing expression, especially for vocal ensembles.

Nuno Da Rocha (Portugal, 1986) showed solid composing in evocative and expressive songs, but he often falls back on more traditional techniques. The jury very much liked his sense of shape and overall movement of a score. He clearly has a very good ear and sense of balance and form, and the musical ideas he chose - such as the drone - worked well with the text. The jury wants to encourage him to expand his conceptual world and to find new forms of expressiveness, paying perhaps less attention to its performability while giving more colour to the text in musical gestures.

Georgi Sztojanov (Bulgaria/ Hungary, 1985) brought very interesting experiments to the workshops. It is clear that he feels completely at ease with the natural flow of the language, and his settings of WWI postcard scribbles are poignant and effective. The jury would like to see him move away from the intense harmonic density he now often uses as an expressional tool, and advises him to rely more on his - clearly strong - sense for melody and rhythm, taking the text as point of departure. Also, being a singer himself, he sometimes caters too much to the needs and wishes of vocalists; while the jury cheers the fact that he gives the performers and the performability of his music prime position, they still want to encourage him to cross boundaries and not to be afraid to challenge the singers.

The workshop sessions result in commissioning one of the composers to write a new work, to be premiered by one of the members of the Tenso network in the next season. The jury, consisting of James Wood, Hans Koolmees and DR Vokalensemblat, decided to award the commission to the composer who showed the most progress in the workshop sessions, and who may profit most from the coaching and the ideas developed during the sessions. It is with great pleasure that the commission has been awarded to Georgi Sztojanov.

The award consists of

- a commission fee of € 1500 for a new piece for a cappella choir
- additional individual coaching by the workshop leaders
- an invitation to attend the premiere in a European city