



# TENSO

*The European network for professional chamber choirs*

## **Tenso Young Composers Award 2017 for Jug Marković**

### **jury report**

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*.

In 2017, Tenso decided to organize an "extra" edition of Tenso Young Composers Workshop, connected to the 2017 *Spotlight on Central Europe* which was part of the long-term project *Tenso 14-18 : from poetry to music*. Rather than opening a new call for composers, we decided to work with four composers that had participated in earlier workshops. Two composers – Jug Marcović and David Veber – had been part of workshops in Ljubljana in April 2017; the other two – Maria Rostovtseva and Sofia Borges – participated in workshops in 2016, in Amsterdam and Marseille respectively.

The seventh edition of the workshop took place during Tenso Days Nova Gorica in September 2017, where the composers worked with the singers of Latvijas Radio Koris and coaches Leo Samama and James Wood. The Slovenian composer Uroš Rojko and French singer Laurent Slaars acted as additional jury members.

Tenso would especially like to thank the singers of the choir – not only for producing very good performances of the pieces within limited time, but also for interacting intensively with the composers with questions and well-reasoned comments, which will undoubtedly contribute to their development in vocal writing.

The composers were asked to set music to poems from the period 1914-1918. They chose very different types of texts, from Pessoa's protest against war (here used in an English translation) to the erotic, at the time subversive sonnet of Estonian poetess Marie Under. As in earlier workshops, the jury concluded that most composers have difficulty matching their musical ideas to the texts, both in shape and in meaning. For future workshops, this will be even more a point of attention for the coaches to work on.

The work of **Sofia Borges** (Portugal, 1979) demonstrates a clear sense of form, starting with small fragments developing into a larger shape, and has good energy. The combination of singing and speaking – which can so often amount to little more than a cliché – works really well here, as does the micro-polyphony. But the real musical expression only starts halfway through the piece. Even when it was at its most intriguing, the music did not match the strength of the text of Pessoa, and it feels like the whole is less than the sum of its parts.

The jury was impressed by many facets of the music of **Jug Marković** (Serbia, 1987) which shows a remarkable sense of rhythm and colour using overtones and (sometimes cinematic) effects, creating a wonderful atmosphere of war. Again, the jury felt that the form of the piece is sometimes not really connected to the text; the impression of a ritual which is essential to the beginning of the piece is not played out to the end, and the second part seems to be a flattened, linear reflection on the first part.

The piece of **Maria Rostovtseva** (Estonia, 1988) was the most traditional, but perhaps also the most original of the workshop pieces. The organic sound, interesting harmonies, and beautiful colours could not disguise that the piece as a whole felt unfinished. In the little melodies that Rostovtseva created, she shows that she is developing a genuinely musical language of her own – the jury has big hopes for her talent and hopes to hear more of her in future.

**David Veber** (Slovenia, 1988) shows that he knows how to write vocal music: from all four composers, he managed best to convey the elusive sense of the poem he chose. The Latvijas Radio Koris clearly liked singing it, while the listeners were sincerely moved. Avoiding risks, he chose a simple form which only came really alive when – halfway – the polyphonic phrases set in. The jury advises him to be more daring and take more risks. The spark is there, and the jury hopes to see in the near future how Veber will have profited from this workshop.

All music brought to the workshop was extremely interesting and on average of a very high quality. The jury members found things to like – and dislike – in the work of all four candidates, and a long and lively discussion did not yield an easy, unanimous decision. In the end, the vote of the choir (Latvijas Radio Koris) was crucial in granting the award.

The prize commission was awarded to Jug Marković. The jury felt that not only did he show that he can write well and precisely for singers; they were also favourably impressed by the self-critique he had shown in the first session, and how he used this to his benefit. They are confident that he will again learn from this workshop experience. They advise him to choose and then limit his musical ideas carefully, and deal with them in a more substantial manner, trusting his sound musical instincts.

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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 by a Tenso choir in a European city