



TENSO

The European network for professional chamber choirs

Tenso Young Composers Award 2017 for Lillie Harris

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 sixth edition of the workshop, which was organized for the first time in 2010, initially chose five composers from more than 30 applicants from all over Europe. During two sessions in Amsterdam in November 2016, the workshop leaders worked with the young composers and heard their scores (short pieces or sketches) performed by Ensemble Aedes (FR). After evaluating the material they brought and the way they worked with the choir, three finalists were chosen to participate in the second round in Mechelen in May 2017: Sarah Lianne Lewis, Lillie Harris and Miguel Bastos.

The workshop that took place during Tenso Days Mechelen 2017 was coached by composer/conductor James Wood, composer Leo Samama, and chamber choir Helsingin kamarikuoro. 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 three composers selected for the second round chose their texts from the period 1914-1918, as part of Tenso's project *14-18 From Poetry to Music*. Their choice of texts was very varied: one chose an English translation of French poems by Albert Granier, one chose three short poems by German poet August Schramm, and one chose a short quote from American historian Barbara Tuchman: "for the time, it must be remembered, was on the far side of the gulf of 1914-18, when people permitted themselves simple and sentimental reactions and society was believed to be advancing in moral progress".

As in previous years, the workshop coaches concluded that there is still much to be learned for all three composers, especially with regard to vocal music. Similar problems keep recurring: technical issues, such as inconsistency in vowel changes and problems with the voice registers. The music that the participants brought to the workshop tended to be quite academic - which is fine in the framework of a workshop, where we encourage the participants to bring sketches and to try out different things. But, we do sometimes

miss the larger musical gesture and the feeling for the extra-musical content that comes with the choice of text. We want to urge these young composers to extend their musical voice and ideas to the larger story they want to tell in their music.

In *For the time...*, **Miguel Bastos** (PT, 1995) showed his capacity to build interesting harmonic structures, which sometimes lacked progress. As a whole, the piece was rather elusive and his choice of text (by historian Tuchman) perhaps reflected his academic approach to the music. The piece was worthwhile, but perhaps too long for the story that he wanted to tell.

Sarah Lianne Lewis (UK, 1994) chose English translations of wonderful French poems - which still made us wonder what would have been the result if she had chosen to work with the original. Her piece was appealing but also felt cluttered, with perhaps not enough contrasts to make it work the way she would have liked. Again, we saw that the music did sometimes not bear a real relation to the text: for instance, the key phrase "a glimmer of hope" was not realized musically, and therefore fell flat.

The sketches of **Lillie Harris** (UK, 1988), using three short German poems, brought the most muscle and power, using a variety of musical gestures and ideas. She made a very good effort to let her music respond to the text, even if it did not always come off. Tenso feels that, with future coaching, she will definitely have it in her to produce choral pieces that work both musically and textually.

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 coaches James Wood, Leo Samama, external expert Hanspeter Kyburz, and Helsingin kamarikuoro, decided to award the commission to the composer who best used her own musical stance to create choral music which is not only musically rewarding, but also gives the text the place it deserves.

It is with great pleasure that the commission has been awarded to Lillie Harris. We hope that this award will encourage her to further develop her skills as a composer – helped by the coaching offered by Tenso – and look forward to her new work.

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