

A personal perspective on an INTERKULTUR Choir Competition and Festival, and a call to participation in the American International Choral festival (AICF) in St. Louis, Reno, and the World Choir Games Cincinnati 2012

As a member of the music advisory committee for WCG Cincinnati 2012, I was invited to attend Concorso Corale Internazionale in Riva del Garda, Italy. I was curious about the competition, judging, types and quality of participating choirs, the conduct of the participants, and the general spirit of the event.

All the choirs delivered respectable performances covering a wide range of competence and artistry. The best choirs were most excellent rivaling the finest university choruses in the United States. Each choir took its craft seriously and behaved with utmost decorum. Two choruses stood out among the rest: Denmark's Radio Pigekoret from Copenhagen, the Audience Prize Winner, was lovely to ear and eye as creative staging enhanced their musical performance. Grand Prize Winner Akustika Chamber Singers, from Pretoria, South Africa, was breathtaking in artistry and technical proficiency, especially with their rousing finale, "Karimanatu kuicha" by Ko Matsushita.

The competition, which spanned four days culminated in a celebratory Grand Prize Competition at which all participants were presented with diplomas, and the winner of each category announced. Choirs enthusiastically cheered for one another in supportive revelry before a very large audience. There was no negative behavior, and no grumbings about judges' decisions, just sharing of choral singing with mutual understanding. Indeed, support for one another was gleeful.

Sometimes, my experiences with competitions have not always felt this positive here in the United States, whether at my children's baseball tournaments, show choir contests, marching band competitions, or the many choral competitions I've participated in throughout my career. What, I wondered, made the positive difference in this INTERKULTUR Choir Competition? I may never know all the reasons, but here are a few I think are highly likely: the Musica Mundi Evaluation System, the philosophy that participation itself is the highest honor, the higher goal of helping choirs improve rather than providing only a numerical scoring with brief comments for their performance, the transparency of the judging, direct jury feedback for directors, and expert advice from jurors to choirs.

I believe the INTERKULTUR philosophy of adjudication is fair, compassionate, and common sense. Jurors not only give scores, but hold lively intellectual debate to fairly determine the best results. All judge's scores are revealed in a transparent system. Moreover, each director is given ample opportunity to meet with judges to discuss opinions and learn from their expertise. The aim of INTERKULTUR is to provide pedagogical guidance for all choirs involved, above and beyond the competition results of bronze, silver, and gold. This style of judging and coaching provides a positive environment for sharing music. The international participants from around the globe provide the opportunity to hear some of the best choirs in the world. This rich, cultural and artistic environment of an INTERKULTUR competition demands respect for the art of choral music, and for all the singers who make up the diverse choral ensembles that perform.

If you are a director who finds competition stimulating opportunity for growth, I urge you to register and participate in INTERKULTUR competitions in St. Louis, Reno and World Choir Games, Cincinnati 2012. If you are a director reticent to compete due to negative past experience, consider this a fresh opportunity for civil and positive reinforcement. I am proud to support World Choir Games Cincinnati 2012, and encourage my colleagues to celebrate choral music with singers around the world in a competition that seeks to promote artistry as it honors choirs of every level.

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