



Last October we welcomed to our shores the German boys' choir from Bremen, 'Unser Lieben Frauen'. The choir was invited to Malta by the German Lutheran Chaplaincy, St. Andreas Gemeinde in Valletta, and co-hosted by Schola Cantorum Jubilate in Gozo, St. Mary's Basilica in Mosta, St. George's Collegiate Church in Qormi and St. Andrew's Scots Church in Valletta. The choir comprised of very young boys all the way up to adolescents, under the direction of Ulrich Kaiser. At first glance one could immediately notice the enthusiasm and discipline with which the choir conducted itself. Upon listening to the first vocal warm up it immediately held promise of exquisitely beautiful music to come.

As organist at St. Barbara's German Catholic

Chaplaincy in Valletta and friend of the Lutheran community, I was graciously approached by the Rev. Klaus Peter Edinger to help with the organisation of the choir tour to the Maltese islands. Whilst the choir's musical engagements totalled two services and three concerts, all of which were a great success, I shall comment on two of the concerts: the one at St. George's Collegiate Church in Qormi and the last one at St. Andrew's Scots Church in Valletta.

The entire choral renditions were a cappella, thus highlighting the choir's prowess, both corporately and for its soloists. The musical styles ranged between Renaissance, Baroque, Romantic and Modern by composers such as Heinrich Schütz, J.S. Bach and Felix Mendelssohn. Such a wide

gamut of styles created further scope to not only appreciate the varying epochal idioms, but also highlight the choir's finely nuanced musical palette at interpreting the repertoire with technical and stylistic precision.

Besides being directly involved in the organisation of the tour, I also had the privilege of contributing artistically to the two concerts in Qormi and Valletta by playing four solo organ pieces. Admittedly, this brought with it both a feeling of exhilaration and a weighty sense of responsibility due to a keen awareness of the choir's high standards. My pieces of choice were Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor, an organ march composed by myself, Mendelssohn's 'Allegro Vivace' from Sonata No.2 in C minor for organ and Sigfrid Karg Elert's 'Nun danket alle Gott'.

From a performer's perspective, quantitatively, both concerts in Qormi and Valletta were the same since the repertoire was essentially repeated with some minor changes. Qualitatively, however, the experiences were different. During my first concert in Qormi my focus was to see that my playing was technically accurate in a way that best portrayed the style of the piece being played. Particular attention was paid to the building's acoustics in ascertaining what speed the repertoire was to be played at, as well as the volume and the tones (stop registers) used. Essentially, emphasis was placed on the organic and technical aspects of the music to capitalise on artistic authenticity. This was done in view of complementing the choir's standards and emphasis on pedagogical approach. Apart from this I felt that a close liaison between Unser Lieben Frauen, myself

and church staff was important to ensure the most conducive environment for the choir to operate in.

The following concert in Valletta still called for the same standard as the previous one, however I felt that the dynamic and atmosphere were different. Following the hospitality and eye for detail shown to the choir in Qormi, the foundation had been laid for a more relaxed performance since both the choir and I mutually knew what to expect of each other. Instead of being overly concerned with the technical aspect of performing this time I felt I could flow more with the pieces I was playing and consequently also felt like I belonged more fully to the overall event. There was much joy to be had in this last concert because I could focus more on the spirit rather than the letter of the music, as it were.

Post-concert was also rather nice; one could observe the camaraderie between the choristers, with the organisers and some members of the audience. It was rather satisfying to have had some mutually positive exchanges between myself and some of the choristers based on the hospitality and performances given, and perhaps the odd quip with some of the more extrovert of choristers. All in all, there was an air of warmth and satisfaction after the choir had completed its tour, and maybe a tinge of sadness from my end which I resolve to channel into an ever-growing enthusiasm for music making and love of humanity.

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