

La Regione interviews Eros Bltraminelli

Mr. Beltraminelli, could you please give us a brief outline of the history of the choir, telling us when and how, and perhaps why such an important cultural entity came to be?

The choir was founded seventy years ago as a recreational choir for young people. I took over the choir forty years ago, and after a few years of contact with other choirs on the European scene, I tried the path of polyphony. It was basically a gamble. Here, compared with Anglo-Saxon and northern, eastern or central European countries, where the choral tradition is more important than the instrumental, it wouldn't have been possible with adults at an amateur level. It was however possible to try with children, since children all have the same starting point. They could start singing at the same age as learning to read and write. I think the gamble was a good one and that I won the bet.

For a choir director like yourself, what are your priorities today? What direction do you prefer to work towards? Excellence in performance or instilling the love of music in the young people?

Children love singing. Everyone is welcome to try our choir. Little by little the pieces get more difficult. So, in terms of performance, the pieces themselves select the talent, since it is no small thing to have a beautiful voice, a good ear and intelligence. Using one's voice properly means controlling one's breathing, which is no small feat; then rhythm and harmony are a pleasure for the senses and the mind. Those who make it to performance level receive both physical and intellectual satisfaction.

The choir's repertoire ranges from Gregorian chant to contemporary music – more than a thousand years of music history, with some gaps. The most significant parts of our repertoire are the monophony of the late first millennium, the great polyphony of the 1500s and the music of the 20th century. The choir must, out of necessity, not stray far from the *a cappella* repertoire. In the Tessin, where it is already difficult to find a hall with a piano, the choir rarely collaborates with instrumental ensembles.

How do you deal with the turnover of voices in a youth choir? How does a choir for young people change through the years?

The choir's preparatory work follows the school calendar. For those that enter the working world, or go on to higher education, it is almost inevitable to stop. Integrating the new voices is an important task, in part made more difficult because of our location. In an area with a population of 300,000, there probably wouldn't be any difficulty finding vocal talent. Bellinzona, however, is at the center of a region with a population of only 30,000.

Which of the choir's recordings are you particularly fond of?

Recording has always been hard work for the choristers and for me. So all of the CDs are remembered as hard work that happily brought forth fruit. Even so, I remember especially our second Gregorian chant CD, recorded in the 1990s, that received exceptionally positive reviews. In a German specialist magazine it was written that perhaps never before had there been a recording of Gregorian chant of such high quality.

Why have human beings sung since the beginning of time?

Perhaps we sing to conquer loneliness. Or perhaps to simply communicate feelings we want to share with others, using the sounds we make when breathing, which is the essence of life itself.