

## **Douala, capital of choral training: Three years of musical excellence with Conductors Beyond Borders**

Douala, Cameroon – Between June 2021 and December 2024, Cameroon's economic capital hosted a music training programme of rare intensity: Conductors Beyond Borders workshops, an ambitious educational initiative that has left a lasting mark on the Cameroonian choral landscape, led by two major figures in choral conducting, Thierry Thiébaud (President of A Cœur Joie International), Patrice Ewougouo, President of the Cameroonian Federation for Choral Music (Fédération Camerounaise de Musique Chorale A Cœur Joie, FECAMUCH-ACJ).

Far from being a one-off course, this training programme lasted more than three years, with a regularity and rigour worthy of the great music schools. The programme, which was both theoretical and practical, covered the fundamental pillars of choral conducting, including voice classification, vocal training and choir conducting, music theory and harmony. This educational foundation was enriched by the study of an eclectic repertoire, combining traditional Cameroonian works and pieces from the Western classical repertoire, thus promoting a dual openness: cultural and stylistic.

The success of this training programme largely depends on the quality of the teaching staff. Thierry Thiébaud, choir director and international trainer, contributed his methodological expertise and European vision of choral music. Working alongside him was Patrice Ewougouo, a Cameroonian musician and choir director, President of FECAMUCH-ACJ and also a trainee. The latter was able to take over from trainer Thierry Thiébaud between sessions, organising refresher courses to keep the momentum going. Their complementary skills created a learning environment that was rigorous, supportive and deeply inspiring.

For the trainees, this training represented much more than just technical learning. It was a transformative experience, revealing vocations, consolidating skills, and above all, opening up new perspectives in a field that is still relatively underdeveloped in Cameroon.

It is a great joy to have been able to benefit from such comprehensive training in a field that I am passionate about, choir conducting. Not only has it allowed me to progress, but it has also fuelled my desire to continue improving and to open myself up to other musical disciplines. The highlight of these three years of training was the performance of Gioachino Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle*, a demanding work from the sacred repertoire, at a closing concert held at the French Institute in Douala.

Beyond the skills acquired, this training programme has sown the seeds for a choral revival in Cameroon. By training a new generation of choir directors, it is helping to structure an artistic sector that is still developing, while promoting local musical heritage.

Special thanks go to Thierry Thiébaud and Patrice Ewoungouo, whose unwavering commitment has helped nurture talent, pass on knowledge and preserve musical cultural values among Cameroon's youth.

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