

## **Training courses on choral conducting Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) – 8-13 October 2013**

**Assignment report by Françoise BRUNIER and Thierry THIÉBAUT**

Organization : Federation A Cœur Joie Côte d'Ivoire  
A Cœur Joie International (ACJI)  
International Federation for Choral Music (IFCM)  
Project *Conductors Without Borders* (CWB)

### **Organization**

Founded in August 2009, the Federation A Cœur Joie Côte d'Ivoire organized its first training session in choral conducting in collaboration with ACJI in March 2010 with Thierry and Nicolas Thiébaud as instructors.

The troubling political events that deeply affected the country in 2011 also resulted in the postponement of future sessions.

It's only in October 2013 that a new session was organized in the frame of the National Higher Institute of Arts and Cultural Actions of Cocody, the Conservatory and the Music School of Cocody that provided classrooms with pianos and scoreboards.

Moreover the trainees were staying at a Methodist Center, a five minutes walking distance from the Institute.

The material organization was quite good, with badges for the trainees and an overall atmosphere very friendly. The organizational team members provided the instructors with assistance and attentiveness, ensuring that the session, as well as the stay, was agreeable. That included a day of relaxation at Grand-Bassam with the whole team.

### **Functioning**

The two instructors divided the trainees in two levels.

First level: 14 trainees with Thierry Thiébaud including choristers who want to become conductors, section leaders and choral conductors beginners.

Second level: 8 trainees who already have a very general musical background (music theory and harmony) without any previous training in choral conducting.

Let's note that, from the 37 choral conductors present at the first session in 2010, only 7 came back to the second session in 2013.

The two training sessions were scheduled every afternoon from 2 to 5 PM, followed by a one hour workshop on vocal culture for both choral trainees and choristers from 5 to 6 PM and a choral session with the choir in residence from 6 to 8 PM.

The choir in residence included between 30 and 40 singers. Regrettably some trainees didn't attend the choral session which purpose was to give a perfect field of application.

The repertoire carried out was quite important (13 pieces from musical canons to African harmonies, Renaissance music, songs, spirituals, gospel music). This variety allowed to address all facets of choral conducting practice: duple and triple rhythms, starts with anacrusis, rhythms 2 for 3, ... It also allowed to work on voice coaching and phrasing.

As it was the first training session, it was not possible for any of the trainees to conduct the final traineeship concert, which is however the whole point of this kind of session. The next session planned from June 2 to 9, 2014 should see some trainees at the conducting stand.

### **Main issues**

The voice sections were not balanced: 12 sopranos and 12 tenors overloaded 4 basses and 4 altos. This needs to improve in the future, as it's almost impossible to get a satisfying interpretation with such a numerical inequality.

The trainees need to make a special effort to arrive on time at each session, if not, every one is penalized.

The sight-reading session is generally weak. Some singers are still practicing the technique "sol-fa". It would be necessary to organize in-between sessions to work on the music theory and the harmonic sequences.

Africans sometimes have some difficulties to keep in tune the correct melodic line. However, they don't have any problem with the rhythm (unlike a lot of Europeans).

### **Perspective**

One of the ideas of this training session is to initiate a three years cycle with two annual sessions in order to get a diploma recognized by the national communities and also to prepare some choral conductors to become instructors if they have the aptitude to. This was the case in DR Congo.

We met with the Advisor at the Cultural Action of the French Embassy in Abidjan, Dominique Frelot. We presented him the general project and requested the support of his services, along with the Federation ACJ Côte d'Ivoire and ACJI. Our request was positively received. Mr. Frelot informed us that the budget 2014 of the Cultural Action of the Embassy would be decided in November and that it would be the perfect time for the Federation to provide a complete dossier.

The financial perspective to cover the travel of the instructors could be possible during the three years cycle (2014-2015-2016).

Besides this, the new French Ambassador in RCI, Georges Serre ([georges.serre@diplomatie.gouv.fr](mailto:georges.serre@diplomatie.gouv.fr)) was one of the main supporters when the Congolese Federation of Choral Music was created in DRC. With the recommendation of Jean Sébastien Masiala who knows him very well, he'll be disposed to help ACJ Côte d'Ivoire to develop.

A complete dossier needs to be built promptly.

Finally we met a priest of the Cathedral of Abidjan who is responsible for the coordination of the actions in the district. We presented him the Movement A Coeur Joie and asked his support to convince the catholic choirs of his sector to join us in our efforts. Again the dialogue was very constructive and open.

Thierry Thiébaud  
17 October 2013