

"The Spirit of Europa Cantat"

How to motivate choirs to participate in activities of EC?

EC was organised in Namur (Belgium) twice.

Passau (1961) – Nevers (1964) – Namur (1967) – Graz (1970) – Autun (1973) – Leicestershire (1976) – Luzern (1979) – Namur (1982) – Strasbourg (1985) – Pécs (1988) – Vitoria Gasteiz (1991) – Herning (1994) – Linz (1997) – Nevers (2000) – Barcelona (2003) – Mainz (2006) – Utrecht (2009) – Torino (2012)

VFJK organised several international singing weeks in Brugge and Gent. This was often the first contact we had with choirs from abroad.

We organised several international conductor's courses with conductors who led a workshop in one or more Europa Cantat singing weeks: Paul Brandvik, Laszlo Heltay, Frieder Bernius, John Rutter, Danolov Stenlund, ...

For years we have also organised choir weekends for the youth with conductors from abroad and from our own country: Peter Hunt, Michael Gohl (open singing EC Junior Nevers, EC Torino, Les Chorales), Basilio Astulez (EC Torino and EC Junior Bergen), Luc Anthonis, Marleen Annemans (study tour EC junior Namur, EC Junior Nevers, Torino), Dieter Staelens.

Our previous president Gilbert Martens and Monique Lesenne visited the choirs during their rehearsals and told the choir members about those singing weeks very enthusiastically. The opportunity to perform with and meet choirs from another country was a very inspiring element.

After Gilbert Martens died Monique Lesenne continued to do this for many years, so there were always Flemish people participating in the big EC events every three years, as well as in the annual international singing weeks (also organised by other partners).

How did Monique and Gilbert convince us (me)?

They compared the EC festival with going to Neerpelt (a little town in Belgium where the European Vocal Festival for Youth -and Children's' choirs takes place every two years) because my first choir was a mixed youth choir.

Many singers of those days are still a member of my choir now and went to several singing weeks as an adult as well.

My own experience of participation with my entire choir or with even a part of the choir members started in EC Vitoria (half of my choir was ill but that never stopped us from going to other singing weeks). We also were in Herning, Barcelona and Mainz. The latest EC's in Utrecht and Torino were more difficult for the members of my choir because many of them have little children. But we hope to participate again in Pécs.

EC Junior

Ec Junior was organised in Namur (Belgium) in 2002.

EC Junior Kaposvar (1996) / Wolffenbüttel (1999) / **Namur (2002)** / Vic (2005) / Nevers (2008) / Pärnu (2011) / Bergen (2014)

The same strategy is used to convince the choirs: visiting them and explaining what they can expect. We also explain what possibilities there are to get subsidies, who will help them, etc.

I participated in Nevers with only 15 youngsters and in Pärnu with 20 children and 30 youngsters. For ECJ in Pärnu I invited the parents of the new choir members to a meeting and the 15 children who participated in Nevers told enthusiastically about their own experience and convinced them to give their children the opportunity to experience such a wonderful week as well.

I did the same in September 2013 and now 29 children and 40 youngsters of my choir are going to EC Junior in Bergen (Norway).

For EC Junior in Nevers we rehearsed a common Flemish repertoire with three youth choirs who participated in Europa Cantat Junior. By going together we felt stronger. Singing a common Flemish repertoire has also given us the opportunity to give concerts together before going to the EC week and to save money for the trip. In Belgium there was even a new youth choir, Artemis from Maaseik, that was founded to go to Nevers and Pärnu.

Recently a Flemish mixed youth choir (Waelrant from Borgerhout) went to the singing week in Briançon (France 2012). After this positive experience they went to "Les Choralies" (France 2013) and now they are convinced to go to Pécs!

This is how I convinced a new youth choir and their parents to participate in Bergen (2013). I visited the choir and the parents and started with a little song 'Mango, mango' (those who were in Torino or Les Choralies know this by heart). In EC Junior Bergen three Flemish choirs will participate: Sjaloom children's choir, Sjaloom youth choir and youth choir Cantamico, together about 90 young singers.

Finance:

1. Parents pay but we also ask the children and youngsters to contribute a small part themselves by doing little jobs.
2. We also save money by singing concerts, again with a common repertoire for all choirs.
3. We apply for subsidies from the Flemish community (with the support of Koor & Stem) and from our local Town Council.