



# The development of choral singing in leisure activities of adults using the example of the Bělotín week of singing from 1992 to 2016

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## Summary

The article deals with the issue of the development of choir singing as a leisure activity of adults using the example of the Bělotín singing week in the years 1992–2016. The text mentions choir singing as one of the possibilities of spending free time and is devoted to the development and positive benefit of this event.



Free time means time when we can make use of freely and independently.

For example, it has educational, cultural, health, relaxing, social and preventive functions. They have a beneficial effect on self-actualization, knowledge of self, discovering and developing skills, improving personality, developing talent, creating and strengthening interpersonal relationships. Leisure activities can balance work duties and have a positive influence on our psyche and physical health. The choice is individual and depends on many factors, such as preferences, social environment, sense of belonging, creativity, education or age. Every developed society should offer various types of leisure activities not only to children and adolescents but also to adults. Singing in a choir is one of many possibilities for how to spend leisure time creatively, socially interesting and regardless to age. There are a lot of choirs with different specializations and qualities for children, youth, and adults in the world and in our country. The present form of choral singing creates a significant musical line

and participates in learning about national cultures in the European or world context. It continues logically and naturally after rich traditions of organized collective singing, which had their origin in ancient cultures, of choirs of burghers, craftsmen, teachers and students. From the middle of the 19th century, but especially from the beginning of the twentieth century, the today's types of choirs started to be found.

We can say that the Czech Republic can boast many quality choirs and has a long tradition of choir singing thanks to significant composers and choirmasters. Education at Czech schools is good for choir singing (school choirs, music education) and the support of many institutions (municipal authorities, civic centres, grants, sponsoring) helps to developing choir singing.

Singing weeks have been organized every year for several decades in Europe. Individuals, as well as choirs, can take part in rehearsals which are often at one place for about one week. The singers are led by experienced choirmasters and at the end of the week they perform at



a concert. Rehearsals take place every day from the morning to the evening and the stay is enriched with an accompanying program, such as walking trips in the nearby surroundings, dancing, and lectures or discussions on various topics related to music.

One such week in the Czech Republic is the Bělotín singing week (Czech abbreviation is BTZ), which has been held regularly in August in the town of Hranice since 1992. The initiator of the idea to found BTZ was the Mayor of Bělotín Mgr. Eduard Kavala, who is also a singer and enthusiastic promoter of choral singing. His participation at a singing week in Graz in Austria (Steirische Singwoche), in the summer of 1991, was the main inspiration for him to organize a similar meeting of singers in our country. We (together with Eduard Kavala and three other singers) were invited there by our Austrian friends in the euphoric time just after the opening of the frontiers between Czechoslovakia and Western Europe. We were excited by the whole stay, which took place in a renovated chateau, San Martin Schloss, above the town of Graz. The spacious chateau was used for educational and entertaining purposes, with the part of the chateau being a girls' school. We were working for a precisely a minute and singing *prima vista* ("from the sheet") and without the intonation support of a piano (the choirmaster used only the pitchfork he was always holding in a hand). I remembered when Eda unexpectedly said in the car on the way home, that he would organize a similar week in Bělotín. He had been the Mayor of Bělotín since 1990. He then gained further experiences in Graz and at other similar events in Germany (Hinterschmiding, Regensburg) in the following years.



The first year of the Bělotín singing week was organized in 1992 with the participation of forty singers and three choirmasters (Lubomír Mátl, Lumír Pivovarský, Milan Chromík) according to the Austrian model. BTZ was not held in Bělotín but in the

neighbouring town of Hranice, where better possibilities for accommodation, rehearsals and concerts were offered. The civic center (department) in Bělotín and Alena Jestřabská as its head helped with the organization. As a result of the cooperation of choirmasters and organizers the BTZ songbook was created and printed, which included choral classics and cantatas, and adaptations of folk and popular songs. The participants were surprised that the organization of the whole week was at a very good level and that the choirmasters were professionals. The accompanying program (according to the inspirations from Austria and Germany) consisted of trips to surrounding areas (the spa in Teplice and aragonite caves). Participants were also interested in discussions about new methods of teaching music. The final concert was held in the church "Stětí sv. Jana Křtitele" in Hranice. The following year (1993), choirmasters Milan Uherek, Lumír Pivovarský, Milan Chromík, Tomas Novotný and Jaroslav Kyzlink were invited. Thanks to more intensive publicity, more than 80 singers took part in the singing week.

Since the first two years, the annual meeting of singers in Hranice has successfully established itself and become known as an important choir event. Many ideas of the organization were validated, while others disappeared. For example, originally the main conductors of BTZ rehearsed only part of their chosen their choir compositions and then selected a singer who was also a conductor to continue rehearsing and perform these compositions at the final concert, a practice which has been rarely been applied in recent years.

Year after year, BTZ was attracting more and more new enthusiasts. Singers, who were not only from the Czech Republic but also from Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Holland, Italy, Switzerland, USA and Slovakia, started to visit Hranice. Their number increased to a hundred and fifty in the following years. Nobody expected that





the youth chamber choir, which was focused on the interpretation of amusingly-arranged popular compositions, would be assembled by former members of the children choir. The idea was validated and a youth choir is formed regularly every year. This example illustrates how spontaneous chamber groups can be established within the choir. One of the main features of singing week is the sociological aspect, including the relationships not only between the singers but also between singers and individual conductors. Throughout the years, a partially-closed company has been established, which changes every year because any person can join it. Experienced choir singers, some educated soloists (for example teachers from art schools) as well as absolute beginners of different ages can meet there. This fact can cause difficulties with the intonation, rhythm, balancing of voices, or the final sound. Experience shows that having beginners next to experienced singers develops their vocal skills surprisingly quickly and their enthusiasm and drive lead to relatively rapid progress. The advantage of the singing week is also the assurance of the singer's attendance because they are accommodated close to the rehearsal room (in comparison to the standard system when the singers usually commute once a week to the rehearsal). Forming a group of people with the same interest and regular meetings for a certain time has the effect that many singers not only maintain friendly relationships during BTZ, but that they stay in touch with each other afterwards via social networks, phone and even visit each other. The participation of foreign singers and choirmasters is a great opportunity to improve language skills, exchange knowledge and experience not only from music but also from other spheres. A number of singers, who are also choirmasters, take part in BTZ. They gain great experience with the methodology of conducting and organizing a choir, singing, techniques of conducting and interpretation,

and they extend their repertoire which can be used in the dramaturgy of their choirs. They collect new contacts, arrange reciprocal concerts, and discuss current topics and ideas for their work in their free time. These choirmasters transfer their experiences and exchange musical material amongst them, so friendly relationships are made not only between individuals, but also among the choirs.

The choirmaster is an artist, a pedagogue and a psychologist who passes their idea of the interpretation of the composition to the group of people through the charisma of their personality, an ability to stimulate members of the choir, and they also influence the atmosphere of rehearsals. Their responsibility is so high, because they should teach the choir the selected compositions to a good concert level, within a relatively short time and with a limited number of rehearsals. There is little time left for detailed practice of singing and technical problems. The choirmaster should also be tolerant of minor problems in interpretation and hope that more serious ones don't appear during the concert. For these reasons, the choirmaster should principally be responsible for the selection of attractive and readable compositions. Both traditional and experimental compositions, compositions with a spiritual or philosophical context, interesting and untraditional editing of folk songs and so-called popular, spiritual or gospel songs are all offered. In this way, singers have an opportunity to meet a variety of repertoires, different styles and genres of choir singing. When choosing compositions for BTZ, the choirmaster must always keep in mind that he will be working with a large, mixed choir (120–150 members), so some compositions which are timbre and have monumental sound are predetermined, and others are eliminated for the reason of stylishness. It is the choirmaster's decision whether they select an experimental or avant-garde composition that uses non-traditional notation, or aleatory

and difficult intonation contrasts that can cause an inexperienced singer problems. It is generally known that compositions which are spiritual, inward and emotional as well as compositions which are „sensuous“, temperamental, and rhythmical attract singers. During the selection of the repertoire (each choirmaster has 10–12 minutes of time at the final concert, which is about 4–5 compositions) the choirmaster should also respect the fact that the singers want to enjoy singing and should avoid uninteresting compositions that would have extremely unrealistic demands and require drilling. The choirmaster should think about learning techniques and prepare scores in detail, and should also take into account the quality of the choir, including the limits of singers. A comparison of the choirmaster's work to the work of their colleagues can also be beneficial and inspirational. Although there is a friendly and collegial atmosphere among the choirmasters, healthy competition can also be seen. Five choirmasters have been participating in BTZ during the last few years.

The power and energy of the number of singers who come to BTZ every year is absolutely fascinating and magical. The choirmaster can use dynamics in the most extreme vocal positions without having a feeling of sound liability that is so characteristic of amateur vocal choirs with a small or medium number of singers. Even for the singers, singing with such a number is quite unique. It also is not a problem to assemble a selective chamber group and to use gentle sound in parts of the compositions.

The children's atelier, which focuses on musical movement activity, was established in 1995, at the request of singers who have children that nobody could take care of during the singing week. During

its existence, it has built a strong position and has become a great contribution for children and parents, and visitors of the final concert. For singers who are teachers of music or conduct children's choirs, there is a very strong motivation to work with experienced colleagues in this atelier, which is traditionally at the highest level. Children are divided into two groups according to age, the number of which is about fifty. They are devoted to the practice of polyphonic songs, the dramatization of musical fairy tale dances and instrumental play. They rehearse every day from eight o'clock in the morning until the evening, with periods of relaxation in between, just as their parents do. Children often make a lot of friends, and usually stay in touch throughout the year, and in many cases friendship lasts to adulthood.

Choral singers, music community and interested institutions have become aware of BTZ. It has become an established cultural event with an international reach, which takes place every year at the same time in Hranice. It supports music holiday leisure activities, brings together choral singers not only from our country, but also from abroad, revives choir compositions which enrich singers and the audience of concerts. Throughout the whole week of singing, there is an unbelievable atmosphere formed through a sense of belonging, well-being, the sincere joy at being brought together, and especially singing. People with different education levels, ages, professions, social status or even health conditions all meet there. Entire families can also take part in BTZ. It is amazing that adults and children usually sing and play instruments even after rehearsals, for example in their rooms or at the parties. Music is everywhere and the singers of BTZ create a big music family.

## Résumé

Příspěvek se zabývá problematikou vývoje sborového zpěvu ve volnočasových aktivitách dospělých, a to na konkrétním příkladu Bělotínského týdne zpěvu v letech 1992–2016. Text



reflektuje sborový zpěv jako jednu z četných možností trávení volného času, věnuje se vývoji a pozitivnímu přínosu jmenované akce.

**Klíčová slova:** volný čas, dospělí, sborový zpěv, zpěv během víkendu, Bělotín.

**Keywords:** free time, leisure, adults, choral singing, singing week, Bělotín.

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## Koncert Dagmar Zelenkové a Václava Krahulíka v rámci 53. ročníku Hudebního festivalu Ludwiga van Beethovena v Teplicích

LENKA PŘIBYLOVÁ



Hudební festival Ludwiga van Beethovena v lázeňských severočeských Teplicích dlouhodobě náleží ke špičkovým událostem hudebního života v České republice. Obdobně jako v minulosti se rovněž v rámci 53. festivalového ročníku 2017 v časovém rozmezí od května až do závěrečných dnů měsíce června představili v Teplicích a dalších kulturních centrech Ústeckého kraje přední hudebníci z Čech i ze zahraničí. V letošním roce přijali pozvání též Dagmar Zelenková a Václav Krahulík, pedagogové působící na katedře hudební výchovy Pedagogické fakulty Univerzity Jana Evangelisty Purkyně v Ústí nad Labem. Sopranistka D. Zelenková se vedle své pedagogické práce intenzivně věnuje též koncertní činnosti u nás a velmi často rovněž na zahraničních koncertních pódii (Německo, Itálie, Slovensko, Španělsko, Švýcarsko). Václav

Krahulík je uznávaným klavíristou, jako sólista se představil zejména ve Francii, spolupracuje s řadou symfonických orchestrů. Je vyhledávaným komorním hráčem a jako dlouholetý korepetitor Ústeckého dětského pěveckého sboru navštívil spolu se sborem řadu států Evropy a USA.

D. Zelenková a V. Krahulík se v pondělí 19. června představili v rámci Beethovenova hudebního festivalu v Teplicích v koncertním sále Zahradního domu a publiku nabídli dramaturgicky velmi vyvážený program, kde se střídala interpretačně náročná pěvecká čísla přednesená za klavírní spolupráce s virtuózními skladbami určenými sólovému klavíru. Program zahájila díla programově nezastupitelného Ludwiga van Beethovena. D. Zelenková přednesla dvě arietty z opusového souboru č. 82, a to Dimmi, ben mio, che m'ami a T'intendo, si mio cor, jemně