



~Choralies 2012~

International Francophone Choir Festival in Edmonton

Project Presentation

Choralies internationales 2012, planned for July of 2012 in Edmonton, will be a musical and cultural event of international calibre. With more than a 1000 choristers coming from France, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, the Congo, Martinique, South America, the US, Quebec and from across Canada, this festival will be one of the largest cultural gatherings in the history of Western Canada. These major international festivals are almost always held in Europe and very rarely in Canada. In 2012, it will be Edmonton's turn to host the world. The festival's theme "*Toi, moi, tout un monde!* [You, Me, Quite a World!]," based on the piece of the same name by Edmonton composer France Levasseur-Ouimet, aptly states the very inclusive, multicultural nature of this event.

Project History

Recent tours to Quebec by Chorale Saint-Jean (2005 and 2008) piqued the interest of Quebecers to find out more about the Francophone culture (*la francophonie*) in Western Canada. Chorale Saint-Jean (CSJ) was one of only two Canadian ensembles from outside Quebec invited to participate in the gala concert celebrating the 400th anniversary of Québec City on July 18, 2008, before 10,000 Quebec music enthusiasts. Laurier Fagnan, Director of Chorale Saint-Jean, was the only non-Quebec conductor asked to direct the grand choir of 1,400 voices gathered for this event, which generated greater visibility for our choir and our community. The grand choral suite, *Elles s'appelaient Marie*, composed by chorister and U of A professor France Levasseur-Ouimet, was performed several times, including once during one of the official concerts for the 400th anniversary. This suite of sixteen pieces, with its narrative and visual components, tells the story of the migration of Quebecers to Western Canada in the early 20th Century to establish Francophone communities. These concerts and this exceptional original music charmed the choirs, directors and spectators who came from every corner of the French-speaking world. The review of the 1400-voice concert that appeared in Québec City's main journal *Le Soleil* the day following the gala concert stated that "*the best piece of the evening was assuredly Mon clair de lune by France Levasseur-Ouimet conducted by the Franc-Albertan Laurier Fagnan.*"

During this event, several French and Québécois choir directors mentioned their desire to come to Edmonton for a festival in the near future to continue further develop musical collaborations with Chorale Saint-Jean. The *Alliance des chorales du Québec* (ACQ), of

which CSJ is the only member outside Quebec, immediately began entertaining the idea of helping to organize a major international choir festival in Edmonton to create closer ties between Canadian and Francophone choirs from around the world. The director of Chorale Saint-Jean, Laurier Fagnan, along with the President and CEO of the ACQ, met with representatives from *À cœur joie international*, the organization behind the *Choralies*, in France to confirm their interest to hold the festival in Edmonton and this interest was very palpable. This incredible dream is now becoming a reality and Chorale Saint-Jean and its institution, Campus Saint-Jean will work in close partnership with the Québec Choral Federation in the next eighteen months toward its realization.

Project Details

The *Choralies internationales 2012* will be held in Edmonton from July 7th to 15th 2012. It will include several components:

1) Massed-choir singing in which the 1000-1500 singers from around the world will prepare a common repertoire of 15 pieces to sing in the final gala concert at the Winspear Centre for Music on July 15th. Each participating country/province will contribute one piece to this repertoire with the balance being drawn from Alberta composers, notably France Levasseur-Ouimet and Allan Bevan. The rehearsals for this portion of the festival will take place during the mornings on the campus of the University of Alberta throughout the week.

2) Each afternoon the large group will subdivide into approximately ten smaller groups, each working with a master conductor to prepare a large-scale piece for concerts at the end of the week. A variety of conductors will be chosen to lead these sessions, with approximately 1/3 each coming from abroad, Québec and Western Canada. One of the pieces prepared will be the Alberta masterpiece *Elles s'appelaient Marie* mentioned above, which will be featured at the final concert. These workshops/rehearsals will also take place on the U of A campus as well as some downtown churches

3) Several concerts will take place each evening featuring many of the invited choirs from around the world. These will be held in several locations downtown, notably McDougall United Church, All Saints' Cathedral, First Presbyterian, as well as, we hope, City Hall. We also intend to have an outdoor stage downtown that would feature choral singing during the noon hour, perhaps as part of the Street Performers' Festival.

The invited main chorus will be *Les petits chanteurs de Saint-Marc*, the ensemble that was featured in the multiple award-winning film *Les choristes* (The Chorus). Arguably the most famous choir in the world at present, their participation alone will bring the notoriety of the festival to a new level and Alberta audiences will delight in their performances. They have accepted to do a tour of Alberta at the end of the festival.

Opening and closing gala concerts will be held in the beautiful Winspear Centre for Music. These performances will represent the largest choral concerts that have been held to date in this world-class concert hall.

Objectives of Choralies 2012

- Gather together various Francophone peoples and cultures from around the world and celebrate our cultures that are all distinct yet share several points in common. As it is so eloquently put in one of our theme songs: "...Que l'on vienne des États-Unis qu'on soit Cajun ou bien Breton... nous partageons un seul pays, c'est cette langue que nous aimons. [...Whether we come from the United States, regardless of whether we're Cajun or Breton... we share the same country, it is this language that we love]."
- Present and highlight Franco-Albertan music and culture on the international scene. The two theme songs for the festival (*Toi, moi, tout un monde; Je te retrouve*) were written by France Levasseur-Ouimet and their only recordings are CDs by Chorale Saint-Jean. The *Grande suite pour chœur Elles s'appelaient Marie* will be sung by choristers from all over the French-speaking world. It is a collaboration by two Albertans (France Levasseur-Ouimet and Allan Bevan), which highlights the history of our cultural heritage.
- Enhance the cultural ties between Quebec and Western Canada. Given that the Alliance des chorales Du Québec initiated this project and they are the ones who wished to see it organized here and bring many of their members to the event, we have an opportunity to develop a sense of national cultural solidarity.
- Promote "community singing" where 1000+ choristers will come together for at least 2 hours each afternoon to sing a common repertoire. This repertoire will be selected from the typical pieces of the countries invited as well as several pieces from Alberta and Québec composers. This is always a very powerful and moving experience.
- Gather together Francophone choirs from Western Canada. There are many of us, but the last collaboration dates back to 1973 – this event could mark the beginning of a new alliance of Francophone choirs in Western Canada.
- Highlight the University of Alberta, as well as its Campus Saint-Jean, as a great international post-secondary institution, one of only a handful boasting a doctoral degree in choral conducting. Most of the workshops will be held on the U of A campus.
- Share the unique repertoire of each choir as well as share concerts with the other ensembles of the world (2-3 choirs per concert and 3 concerts per day).
- Celebrate the 75th anniversary of Chorale Saint-Jean (1937-2012), the largest Francophone choir in Western Canada as well as the rich history of Campus Saint-Jean.
- Present a very positive perspective of Alberta, a province rich in culture and natural beauty, with a vibrant Francophone community.
- Provide great publicity for the City of Edmonton. Most of the evening concerts will be held in downtown churches and the opening and closing concerts will be held at the Winspear Centre for Music. To date, photos of this hall alone have been instrumental in selling the concept of the *Choralies* abroad and all the choirs are looking forward to singing in this beautiful space.
- Draw a Quebec and international clientele to Alberta. We will include a tourism component in the Rockies as part of our programming.