

BOOK REVIEW

ANDRÁS KOVÁCS: *GYAKORLATI TANÁCSOK KARVEZETŐKNEK* (*PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR CHORUS MASTERS*) (ED. IMPRESS, TÂRGU MUREȘ, 2015)

András Kovács is a music teacher and chorus master. He published in 2015 at Impress Publishers of Târgu Mureș his work entitled *Gyakorlati tanácsok karvezetőknek* (*Practical Advice for Chorus Masters*), a book which reflects his experience of several decades as a chorus master.

The author was introduced to the practical matters of working with a choir by excellent masters such as Lóránt Szalman and István Nagy, then after graduating from the music pedagogy and chorus master specialty of the Gheorghe Dima Music Academy he served the arts for long decades as secondary school music teacher and the chorus master of the School of Arts of Târgu Mureș. From 2004 to 2010 he taught conducting at the Faculty of Music of the University of Arts of Târgu Mureș and even at present he conducts the *Nagy István Youth Mixed Choir* and the *Psalmus* choir of the Fortress Church of Târgu Mureș.

We find the motivation of the author for writing this book expressed in the foreword. As a university teacher he considered it necessary to share with his students all the experience and knowledge that he had acquired as a practicing chorus master during these last decades. He is interested primarily in dealing with practical matters: „As long as I taught conducting I tried to discuss mainly practical matters, I aimed to help my students with advice that was personalized and cut for a concrete situation and that could be useful to them, besides correcting their momentarily mistakes, also in their future activity as independent chorus masters.” As a selfless teacher he shares the methods he tried out and found useful and effective with his readers, his students whom he calls „my younger, less experienced colleagues”.

The book is divided into two well defined parts: a theoretical foundation and an annex of scores. The first part presents the voice structure of the various chorus types and the principles of choir organization, choir practice structure and repertoire selection. Since the author started his musical career as a singer, he puts great emphasis on musical note formation and creating a harmonious sound within the choir. He suggests very usable exercises and effective methods for this purpose. He emphasizes the scope of musical note formation: „Let us unify, let us clear away mistakes, but let us keep the natu-



ral sounding beauty of the singing human voice, let us seek for and enrich colourfulness.” In the case of amateur choirs it is absolutely necessary to teach musical theory and score reading, but only as a „shuffled” element, for the primary task is singing and learning songs to sing.

On the subject of teaching choral pieces the author emphasizes the importance of singing in one’s mother tongue. He suggests that Hungarian pieces written by Hungarian authors should be sung primarily, preferably those where the rhythm, stresses and intonation harmonize with the lyrics, in other words songs which have good prosody. He considers acceptable also to sing choral pieces of foreign origin in Hungarian if the translation is a prosodic one. In the author’s opinion one can make a true presentation of a piece only if one sings in one’s mother tongue. On the matter of teaching musical pieces to the choir the author draws attention upon meaningful construction of the musical phrase, good respiration management and articulated utterance of the words of the lyrics.

András Kovács calls conducting a sign language, a sign language that should be formed in a manner that all choir members understand it. Its foundation is correct beating, but it consists of much more. As the author formulates: „Our movements, besides conducting the singing of the choir should express also all the feelings and psychological effects that the choral piece has upon us and whose vocal expression we intend to have choir members express by their singing.” In this respect cues (*aviso*), conducting movements that direct the sequence of the voices in polyphonically structured pieces and the position of the hand, which signs both the dynamics and the clues for interpretation are very important.

The closing subsection of the theoretical part deals with successful interpretation of the choral pieces at the concert. Motivation to keep singing is always provided by a successful concert. This depends upon the extent at which the singers can concentrate, competent leading by the chorus master, his calmness and self-confident attitude, a well designed repertoire and proper preparation, learning and skilful interpretation of the pieces.

The second part of the book consists of an abundant annex of scores, which contains pieces suitable for every type of choir. In this collection there are 14 pieces for the little ones – chorals for children; 2 pieces for women’s choirs in two voices; 10 pieces for children’s or women’s choir in three voices; 4 pieces for mixed choirs in three voices; 1 piece for men’s choirs; 28 pieces for mixed choirs in four voices. On the selection of choral pieces András Kovács wrote as follows: „I selected mostly pieces from the work of well-known and popular Transylvanian authors, but unpublished pieces by younger, less known authors living today can also be found in the selection.” An absolute merit of the selection of scores is that it contains besides choral pieces by well-known composers from Hungary like Zoltán Kodály, Lajos Bárdos and Erzsébet Szőnyi also pieces by Transylvanian authors and especially well-known authors from Târgu Mureş like Miklós Chilf, Aladár Zoltán, Walter Hubesz, Mátyás Kozma, József Birtalan, Ede Terényi, Boldizsár Csíky. And there are also pieces from less known authors like Kálmán Fejér, József Hencz, Gyöngyvér Makkai, Éva Murár, Árpád Székely and András Kovács.

I am convinced that every student and conductor willing to learn will find this book useful, while in its rich repertoire of choral pieces every seeker will find a suitable chorus.

Translated from Hungarian by Danel Zsuzsa

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