

WACCA 2006: A Panorama of the Life of Choir Conductors in the World and its Institutions

Alejandro Daniel Garavano, IFCM Board member

Argentina was the site of a significant choral event. The **World Assembly of the Choir Conductors' Associations (WACCA)** was developed under the organization of the Argentinean Association of Choir Conductors (ADICORA in Spanish) and with the sponsorship of the International Federation for Choral Music (IFCM), with two specific and well-defined parts.

On the following days, Monday the 21st, Tuesday the 22nd, and Wednesday the 23rd of August, representatives from the National Organization of Choir Conductors and related parties from Germany, Brazil, Sweden, Cuba, Canada, England, Hungary, Uruguay, France, Puerto Rico, Estonia, Colombia, Spain (Catalonia), Panama, Belgium, Croatia, Ecuador, Israel, Venezuela and Mexico, along with organizations like the: "A Coeur Joie International," French Institute for Choral Arts (IFAC) from France, AAMCANT and OFADAC from Argentina, met for three days in Buenos Aires, working fully with the members of the Executive Board, more than thirty associates of ADICORA, and other participants from Uruguay and Brazil.

Starting on Thursday the 24th of August, the vast majority of international maestros visited the ADICORA delegations to give lectures, advanced courses, master classes and choral interpretation workshops, in which participated more than a total of 1,200 singers, choir conductors, students and music teachers from at least 52 Argentinean cities

The Assembly began on Monday the 21st at 12:00pm, with an act in the Hall of the Margarita Xirgu del Casal de Catalunya Theatre in Buenos Aires, with the opening accreditation and discussion given by IFCM Secretary General Jean-Claude Wilkens and ADICORA President Marcelo Valva. Then an excellent performance was given by the National Choir of the Blind conducted by Master Alberto Manzanelli

The welcoming and conceptual framework was given by Marcel Valva (ADIOCORA) who said; *"...A choir is not only a group of people dedicated to singing but also a domain where feelings predominate, sometimes more, sometimes less, such as: friendship, solidarity, respect for others, tolerance, and habits of order, discipline and consistency.*

It is the choir director who has the responsibility to coordinate and manage these aspects, along with others that are unique to each one of their small universes that do not have anything to do with the field but rather with the insertion of the choir and its director into the community.

Indeed, the relations with his/her colleagues and public authorities, the professional and legal aspects of his/her work, the defense of his/her source of works, and the work to dignify his/her profession are questions that each director has to difficultly resolve on his/her own. And it is then that the gregarious feeling leads us to create, or integrate, the colligate bodies that help solve the problems that link the choir and director with society and state.

But to be healthy, these associations should reflect the same qualities that give encouragement to a choir group: tolerance, responsibility, contemplation, knowledge, consistency, dedication, collaboration, understanding, and above all, the supreme value of solidarity. This solidarity doesn't only manifest itself through concrete actions. It is our obligation as leaders to make each colleague feel that there exists an organization that accompanies him/her during each moment of happiness and frustration.

Invited maestros, officials, and colleagues, the response to this assembly, the number of delegates and the diversity of countries that you belong to is astonishing. It moves and honors us. It has vividly awoken our interest to understand what problems are present in each one of your countries..."

The interesting reports from the delegates were recorded and registered by the Secretary and will serve as a support for future work by the IFCM Choral Conductors' Commission. It is impossible to completely reproduce these reports, of which I will try to extract some relevant or representative points of varied situations that are experienced in the world. I apologize to the people whose reports are not cited in this report.

Other reports are presented separately, in a summarized form, with attention to the varied subjects that were discussed, such as: "Working Conditions," "Professional Studies," "Types of Associations," and "Fields of Cooperation between Associations of Choir Conductors and other Organizations."

KOTA was presented by Éva Rozgonyi. She described the professional development of choir conductors in **Hungary**. Eve Halsey attended in representation of the Association of **British** Choral Conductors (ABCD), a few days before their annual convention celebrating 20 years of existence! She described the working conditions of the conductors in her country. Roger Perea from **Panama** came in representation of Electra Castillo, the Director of the Polyphonic Choir of that country. Hans Lundgren, President of the **Swedish** Association of Choir Conductors, presented a clear panorama of Nordic music. Culminating on Tuesday, Naomi Faran from **Israel** presented a pacifist and international position, which was very much appreciated.

Vilson Gavaldão de Oliveira, President of ABRC (**Brazil**) explained; *"The Brazilian Association of Choir Conductors was founded in August 1999 and its basic goal is to promote the development of choral art in all of its dimensions, principally through the artistic and musical development of those that are the binding force and catalysts of the process, the builders of opinions and education in the choral environment - the conductors. For the majority of the choir members, the practice environment may be the only learning experience in the vocal and musical area that they will ever receive in their lives. The ABRC understands that the choir conductor's role is predominantly to achieve the cultural development of the country, and work so that the actions of the members are continually more efficient. The ABRC is an eminent cultural and educational organization, without union or class emphasis, in accordance with its declared statutes."*

Master César Santos Tejada said, with respect to **Ecuador**; *"This is a theme that was discussed during the America Cantat III Festival in April of 2000, and it was the source for the article published in the International Choral Bulletin, Volume XX, Number 4 in July 2001. Comparing the conditions between that movement and the current situation we find significant advances and worrisome stagnation. The most visible progress is in the income level of the conductors, as we can now talk about a 400% increase in this value. On the other hand, there exists a serious shortage of professional training for conductors, as a permanent choir directing course at a good level has not been established at the conservatories or universities. A direct consequence of this reality is the absence of an advanced degree that guarantees the social recognition as a professional. For this reason, conductors' status and work conditions are affected..."*

Alejandro Guillermo of ACORDELUR (**Uruguay**) expounded; *"In the second half of the 20th century, there were three important federations in different regions of the country...Then in the 1970s, like in the majority of Latin-American countries, democratic life was interrupted, which had an influence on choral music. During these dark years it was very difficult to meet, and many choir conductors and singers had to emigrate to live overseas. Since 1980, there has been an attempt to return to normalcy but they have been unable to recuperate what they had once achieved...95% of choir conductors of Uruguay are self-taught. Another problem is has not been possible to develop a sustained choral activity within the education system. ACORDELUR was created in the mid '80s not only as an*

association of conductors but also of singers. The most important activities we developed were the annual COREARTE festivals, with the last one in 2003. Now we are in a type of “deadlock”...”

Luis Olivieri of **Puerto Rico** told us; “A sentimental note arose when I saw the bust of Pablo Casals there on the left, and it brought me memories of his presence in Puerto Rico from 1958 to 1974. It is an honor to be in this room and remember how much he did for choral music in Puerto Rico...The first choir in Puerto Rico was a sailor’s choir that arrived in the Santa María with Christopher Columbus (laughter). When they saw Puerto Rico and the beauty of the island they were unable to sing anything less than “Salve Regina.” This was the first choral piece sung in Puerto Rico on November 29th, 1493. Since then until 1930, choral music was basically sung in the main churches and cathedrals. In 1930, the universities took over choral singing, which initiated modern choral life in Puerto Rico. In 1960, the National Conservatory was founded. In 1978, another important push was given to the music of the country when the Puerto Rican Society of Choral Conductors was created, and in 2000, when the name was changed to the Puerto Rico Choral Association...”

Immediately Aarne Saluveer of **Estonia** commented; “...Maybe our choral activity isn’t as old as the one Olivieri told us about, but we probably have songs much older than those that Veljo Tormis has translated into modern language. Choral conducting is very important because it guides the person in two aspects, the music and the words. And it is as important that the music unifies people just as we are working united here...In Estonia, choral music has twice guided social processes that carried us to independence, basically because choral music is about organization...In Estonia, the first association was founded in 1869. Today it is very difficult to live as a choral director; the student readies him/herself and then has to see how to make a living from the profession. In Estonia since 1990, three choirs have been created for television, and they demonstrate a fun and happy vision of singing choirs.

The promise in Estonia is that each child should have a choir director and that the right to sing is a Human Right. The singing choir in every country is a cultural national treasure.”

Carole Fernández represented Digna Guerra and gave an explanation about choral singing in **Cuba**; “Choir singing in Cuba dates back to the beginnings of 16th century. It wasn’t until 1931, with the foundation of The Havana Choral Society, that choral music gained strength. With the triumph of the Revolution, there was an upturn of choirs as a fundamental element to rescue the Cuban norms and values. It is very important to emphasize the role that culture occupies in the Cuban state, with salaries earmarked for professionals in the arts in general, and given the prominent position choirs occupy. Currently, a program from the Cuban Institute of Music for the development of choirs, lead by prominent conductors, musicians, and composers, is responsible for attending to the choirs from different providences, as well as advising the movements of fans of choirs and children’s choirs.”

Branko Stark from **Croatia** said; “The Croatian people are very skillful at singing four-voice a cappella, and they generally do it very well. There is an abundant repertoire of folkloric music with traditional instruments, and a strong tradition of religious singing from the 9th century. These songs and singing style are still very much alive...We are in the process of creating a National Association of Choir Conductors, but it will take several years as there is not enough support from the State. Another negative fact, is the backward movement of music education in the schools where choir singing or music classes have been reduced to one hour a week...It is not possible to study to become a choir director, and singers’ training has been reduced. The professional choirs take the best singers from the amateur ones, but they lack any formal academic education...”

The choral movement in **Colombia** was described by Marietta Sáchica Forero. She described five experiences specific to choral activities with different financial support: the National

Choir Plan of the Culture Ministry, the Andean Youth Choir, Music in the Temples, Children's Choirs, and Regional Experiences. A description and the main impact of these experiences were presented.

Gerardo Rábago Palafox from **México** said; *“The students that have the aspiration to become choir conductors in the Mexican capital are faced with an impossibility, as the musical institutions of higher education do not include this field in their curricula. Due to this, they are obliged to study and take courses privately or study in another country. Practicing conductors rely on their own accumulated experience and individual achievements. As a consequence of this individual and isolated preparation, professional musicians with a lot of merit face a dismantled choral life in relation to their colleagues...Faced with this situation, we consider it imperative to establish a national choir federation, whose objectives are broadly explained in an essential document, that according to plans, will be given legal status in this year's last quarter...”*

During the WACCA, we enjoyed the beautiful gala concerts, and the public completely filled the San Juan Bautista Church. On Monday, the National Youth Choir, conducted by Néstor Zadoff, and the “Prohibita Musica” male choir, conducted by Pablo Banchi, performed. Tuesday night's concert had as its main characters two casts directed by Honorary Members of the Advisory Board of ADICORA: The San Juan Feminine Choir led by Roberto Saccente, celebrating fifty uninterrupted consecutive years, and the State Choir of Buenos Aires, under the masterful direction of Carlos López Puccio

Due to the lack of available time, a detailed debate of the aforementioned topics was not possible and it was decided to make a commitment to call a Second Assembly in order to define in depth, the vital points that make up the activities of choir conductors. In this respect, a vote was taken on a final declaration –published in the previous volume of the International Choral Bulletin –that reflects the spirit of cooperation and of continuing in the immediate future the work done during these days in Buenos Aires.

It is necessary to give special thanks to the members of the ADICORA Steering Committee that coordinated the workshops; the translators Bernardo Moroder (Tandil) and his assistant Vivian Tabbush (Buenos Aires); the Assembly Secretary Andrea Maiztegui (La Plata) and her assistant Tristán Malbrán (Cordoba); and Florencia Garavano, who was always available to collaborate.

Finishing with words from the speaker Tulio Florentino, also responsible for the Choral Music List in Spanish; *“We said on the radio that it had been such a long time in Argentina since we have had the simultaneous presence of so many personalities that were so relevant in the international choral world, especially at the conductors' level, and that we didn't know how much time would pass before this would happen again, and if ADICOR hadn't been there, and if its current Conductors Commission hadn't worked with such insistence all these years, then certainly it would not have been possible to create something of this magnitude. Unfortunately, we were not able to be at the supplemental activities, but I have confidence, given the presence of important international maestros that came to impart on us their experience and knowledge, that they were an excellent opportunity for people from many venues.*

In summary, we have lived a very special week in Argentinean choral life, and I hope that everyone: conductors, members, organizers, and even those of use in the humble position of press agents, were able to take advantage of these intense experiences so that we may enrich ourselves and the level of our choral singing reaches an even higher level.”

Conductors' Working Conditions – Examples from Three Countries

I. Venezuela

María Adela Alvarado, Caracas, Venezuela – Fundación Schola Cantorum (madeal@cantv.net)

In Venezuela, unemployment is at 20%. In addition to this high figure, there are many part-time workers and many others are only employed in menial jobs. Because of these facts we can say that being a choral conductor is very fortunate as there is employment for practically everyone.

In general, all salaries are low; the minimum wage is not sufficient to cover the basic needs of a family. The choral director is not exempt from this situation; he or she is not well paid either.

Choral music activities have been developed by many institutions in Venezuela and offer the following possible venues for employment:

- Educational: colleges, universities
- Private enterprises: banks, companies, industries, factories, clinics
- Public institutions: ministries, libraries, services
- Private foundations, music school, theatres, clubs

In Venezuela, no specific legislation exists concerning choral directors or artists. The laws concerning workers' protection are the same for everyone including choral conductors who are covered by the institutions for which they work.

This special situation is worth mentioning with regard to the working conditions for choral conductors. Venezuela is home to a large choral music movement; its cultural life values choral music, and the country believes that it is necessary to have choral activities in companies, educational institutions, etc. Requests for the creation of choirs within the country's institutions or for choral events within the framework of other important events are frequent. This situation helps the choral conductor in requesting decent infrastructures and working conditions.

II. France

Florent Stroesser (Institut Français d'Art Choral or IFAC, florent.stroesser@free.fr)

Choirs in France have many characteristics that are defined by:

- Status : amateur, professional, semi-professional choirs, etc.
- Public: children, teenager, college/university, adults, retired people ...
- Activity-based: associations or federations, music schools, schools, homes for the elderly ...
- Artistic and musical levels: choirs open to everyone or for auditioned singers
- Type of musical repertoire
- Goal-oriented: some choirs emphasize the social dimension and others the educational one; some are only dedicated to the production of concerts.

As a result, the function, status and conditions for a choir conductor are very diverse and different. Choir conducting in France is recognized as a viable music profession. It requires a big variety of competencies and the ability to adapt to many different situations.

To be accurate, one should speak of many types of training for choral conductors. Since the end of 2004, the IFAC, in collaboration with other partners, has been engaged in discussions and educational research.

The conditions of the choral conductors (amateurs and professionals) have changed considerably in the last twenty years. Prior to the 1980s, the conductor of a French amateur choir was usually a passionate volunteer, although he or she considered music their

profession. Conductors often emerged from a choir in which they had sung because of their ability to lead a group and their musical competence. Conductors learned on the job or in workshops organized by their choral federation which became the driving force for choral music improvement. The only professional chorus conductors were those that directed the opera chorus and of the chorus of Radio France.

Today, French amateur choirs are primarily conducted by people whose profession is related to music. More conductors are now paid because they have received training in choral conducting. Choral conducting is at present recognized as a profession in France. Numerous professional vocal groups have emerged, often they are project-oriented, and singers and conductors are able to live from their art.

This important development finds its roots in the passionate work of choral federations and educational movements. Since the end of World War II, generations have succeeded in bringing choral singing to a quality level which a rather sceptic society eventually recognized, thereby allowing the emergence of several highly competent choir conductors, who served as catalysts of the later development.

III. Canada

Patricia Abbott, Executive Director, Association of Canadian Choral Conductors (accc@ca.inter.net)

The working conditions of choral conductors in Canada are as varied as our population is diverse. Sixteen years ago, ACCC attempted to do a survey of its members to find out what choral conductors were earning and what types of social benefits they received for their work. The results ranged anywhere from 0 to approximately 50,000 Canadian dollars a year. The survey did show, however, that conductors who worked for educational institutions (elementary and high schools, colleges, universities) generally fared the best in terms of salaries and social benefits, although their jobs consisted of conducting and teaching. Salaries of church choir conductors varied depending on the size and location (urban or rural) of the congregation and on the number of other duties involved (playing the organ, conducting several choirs within the church, administrative work). Salaries for conductors of community choirs (independent organizations not linked to a church or educational institution) varied the most, with remuneration linked to such factors as the experience and reputation of the conductor, the size and location of the choir and its place within the community, the number of concerts performed in a year, and the amount of administration work was involved.

In 2006, we know that working conditions and salary ranges remain basically the same. We also know that ACCC members conduct an average of 2.3 and 99 choristers each, and that only a handful of choral conductors can earn their living solely from choral conducting. The vast majority conduct several choirs in addition to teaching, performing as a singer or instrumentalist and/or doing administrative work.

Several years ago, the Royal Canadian College of Organists (RCCO) developed a grid on which to base salary expectations (based on training, number of hours worked, years of experience) and we often refer our members to it as the skills required and workload are very similar. This grid can be consulted by visiting the RCCO website at: www.rcco.ca

Networks and Fields of Cooperation between Choirs, Directors' Associations and other Organizations

I. Ricardo Denegri, President of AAMCANT, the Argentinean Association of Choral Music “America Cantat” and OFADAC – The Argentinean Confederation of Choral Activities, (aamcantlp@ciudad.com.ar)

The most important and compelling task before the founders of any organization, without consideration of monetary gain, would be the definition of its field of activity. This definition would support a purpose determined by: advancement, cohesiveness, professionalism, education, etc.; and these would be a magnet for those attracted to such purpose.

Actually, no institution can dedicate itself exclusively to one social objective. All will develop varying activities, generally labeled **complementary**—those peripheral activities that were never clearly defined upon the inception and founding of an organization. The specificity of the course of action is what will permit the complimentary union of distinctly different yet symbiotic fields of activity. An example of this would be pairing organizations of equal and varying levels (federations, sections, etc).

Promoting a significant network of complementation between various choral associations, galvanizing and supporting collective strengths with the objective of improving the choral vocation is something choral professionals need to engage.

II. Dolf Rabus, Director of the International Chamber Choir Competition and the Musica Sacra Festival Marktoberdorf (drabus@ifcm.net)

The training and professional development of a conductor depend on his or her ability, experience, type of choir and position. If a country has no choral conductors' organization, the training and further education of a choral conductor has to be offered by the national choir federation or vice versa.

A Conductor needs:

Help for the conductor to be offered by:

Conductor needs	Conductor him(her)self	Publisher	Conductor's Association	Nat. Music council	Musica	IFCM
1 <i>Good singers</i>	X					
2 <i>Voice training and pedagogy</i>	X		X			
3 <i>New compositions/ repertoire</i>	X	X	X		X	
4 <i>Good publishers</i>		X		X	X	
5 <i>Copyright help</i>			X	X		
6 <i>Texts and translations</i>	X	X			X	
7 <i>Preview of music scores</i>		X			X	
8 <i>Sound files/Recordings</i>					X	(X)
9 <i>Contact with other conductors</i>	X		X			X
10 <i>Information on styles</i>			X		X	
11 <i>Information on other countries</i>			X	X		X
12 <i>Information on new trends</i>			X			X
13 <i>Information on travel possibilities</i>			X	X		X
14 <i>Conducting seminars</i>			X			X
15 <i>Further education/training</i>			X			X

Because of these needs, strong national and international cooperation is necessary.

It is important that national choral conductor's organizations become active members in Musica International to share the music of their respective country and also to give their conductors the possibility of using the great resources collected in MUSICA (145,000 records with up to 100 fields, scanned scores of the music, sound files, texts, translations).

Choral Conductor's Associations are the ideal partners for national and international associations.

IFCM Statutes Article III - Purposes:

The purposes of the I.F.C.M. shall be:

- To strengthen cooperation between national and international organizations and individuals interested in all aspects of choral music.
- To encourage the formation of choral organizations in countries and regions where none exists.
- To foster and promote international exchange programs for choirs, conductors, composers, and students of choral music.
- To promote, coordinate, and encourage choral festivals, seminars, competitions, and meetings organized by its members.
- To facilitate the dissemination of choral repertoire, research, recordings, and other appropriate materials.
- To encourage the inclusion of choral music in general education and to promote the exchange of information on pedagogy and training.

The organization shall operate on a non-profit basis.

The main force for cooperation is the commissions. The Conductors Commission and its Chairman Daniel Garavano could assist with offering conductors training and professional development opportunities. However other IFCM projects, especially the World Symposia on Choral Music (2005 in Kyoto, Japan; 2008 in Copenhagen, Denmark) and projects in cooperation with IFCM, like America Cantat (April 2007 in Cuba) as well as MUSICA INTERNATIONAL situated in Strasbourg, France (www.musicanet.org) can also assist with offering opportunities for conductors to improve their conducting skills and to access quality choral music repertoire.

Studies and Training for Choral Conductors

I. Spain

Montserrat Rios Hevia (Catalonia; montserrat.rios@urv.cat))

To begin to speak on this topic, I believe it is fundamental to answer the question; who is the choral conductor? The answer seems simple; it is a person that directs choirs. However, here is where another question arises: what type of choir? Now I find myself with two words that create a difficult barrier to establish, professional choirs and non-professional choirs (amateurs). In the singing choir universe we find mixtures of these two elements with responsibilities toward each type, as much for the conductor as for the choir singer. From amateur choirs whose only objective is to enjoy singing without any type of professional “responsibility”, to professional choirs who need to constantly illustrate their music-making knowledge, often times with works of art that are very difficult to interpret and that have passed through many amateur choirs with professional commitments.

What type of preparation should a choral conductor have?

In the first place, he/she should have a solid musical training, based fundamentally in musical language, harmony, and the techniques of singing and conducting. These elements will permit the study and understanding of a repertoire of choir works from diverse time periods and styles. The director has to “understand” the piece in order to make it work with the choir. This work, along with the correct choice of a repertoire, will determine the progress that a choir achieves.

Once the technical problems are resolved, the real work of interpretation begins: the search for the music and magic that exists in each piece.

He/she has to add a personality to this musical training, attributes for human contact, that will permit him/her to communicate and connect with a person, and even more complicated, with a group of people. He/she should be able to transmit enthusiasm and passion to the choir.

In addition, one expects that the choral conductor will know how to relate with the representatives from those institutions that he/she will be normally be connected with, which does not always turn out to be easy!

II. Argentina

Ricardo Javier Mansilla (Mendoza, rjmansilla@lanet.com.ar)

When we analyze choir activity and development, their level, repertoire, sound, and interpretation, we arrive at an almost obvious conclusion, the result of a choir is in direct relation to the capacity of the conductor. When I refer to the capacity, I am alluding to a series of characteristics and factors that characterizes the personality of the person that takes on the direction of the choir. This person, with his/her singular personality, culture and formation, will appropriately convert the individual plans of the group into a holism. Within the holism, where making music is a very complicated and refined game, they will intervene on an infinite amount of aspects that will gradually become joined until they approach an excellence of art; a place with emotions, esthetics, pleasure and spirit.

From the moment the choir decides to transform their product into an artistic expression, the task requires a very capable conductor. How the road is marked, what the guidelines will be, how the reefs are navigated, and in what manner the wills and affections are ordered will depend on his/her good judgment, taste, and adequate resources. The individual that occupies the conductor’s role has before him/herself a great responsibility. He/she is a guide as well as a servant. He/she is a teacher whose purpose is to develop the potential of the people he directs and arrange a work of art. He/she is a common person who should be gifted with

certain qualities while at the same time is a person faced with a difficult task. It is dependent on her/him to manage to articulate multiple variables to arrive at unique result. He/she will have to put into action years of study, where they have purified their knowledge, ability to gently guide a group, patience to wait for the result, sensibility, and passion to comprehend an idea, and then transform it into harmonious music.

The musical and cultural foundation of the conductor should be vast and deep, while at the same time, he/she should have the vocation and gift of interoperation, quality of conducting and communication, and the sensibility to be able to trap beauty with the delicacy to be able to transmit it.

The conductor puts into play his/her understanding: musical training rich with style, language, techniques and specific procedures. And his/her personality: the complete psychological structure of the individual, his/her characteristics and individual ways of thinking, being, feeling, and seeing the world, his/he attitudes and interests, with his/her personal history, culture, imagination, attributes and management ability.

Farewell from the Forest (Abschied vom Walde) **Working Conditions for Choral Conductors in Argentina**

Diego Lenger, ADICORA General Secretary

Our country is very large. In the different regions you find different working conditions for choir conductors; in spite of these differences one constant characteristic is that our profession is not recognized by the Federal Administration. In the nomenclature of the Federal State that regulates the contributions of hundreds of occupations and professions the category "Choir Conductor" does not exist. This makes it very difficult to get an appointment at a State Institution: usually this conductor, in spite of having gotten the position by tender, will later be listed as a librarian, electrician (these are, in fact, actual cases), administrative clerk or music teacher (of course there are those that have both positions in the same institution). It is a profession practiced by hundreds of persons that does not exist for the State apparatus. Apart from the practical problems that this hole generates, there is the question of whether this really is a profession or not. I have no doubts that this is a job like any other, without taking into account that it excites us, stimulates and amuses. This of course happens to many people who work as surgeons, gardeners, journalists or lawyers. People are usually happy when they manage to make a living from what they like to do. We should not be surprised that for others our profession is nothing peculiar - I would like it to be so. However, because of a prejudice deeply implanted in our society, most of the time when they hear that someone is a choir conductor they will ask: are you making a living from this or do you have another job? This question is also asked in different ways by colleagues - something not surprising: prejudices are usually rooted in something real; in this case, that for our labor legislation we do not exist. Which Argentinean conductor has not been accused of trying to make a living from something that is really a pleasure? As this is a gratifying job, it is understandable that it is difficult to convince others of the necessity to receive fair pay, vacations and so on.

It happens that there are choir conductors who work without pay; we see this all over the country and at all skill levels. There are many examples, including excellent choirs that no doubt have an influence on their environment. As it happens, usually it is an independent artistic endeavour, not financed by a public or private institution, where it is impossible or unthinkable that the conductor should receive anything: the members of the choir are not disposed to pay monthly fees from their pockets, the conductor is not willing to receive any payments from his singers; maybe all are friends and one happens to be a choir conductor; etc. There are many reasons, always valid, to carry on with these choirs. There are those who argue we should discourage the creation of more of this kind of choir because they lower the standard of our profession. This argument has some truth in it. But a reason, isolated at a theoretical level, is not as good when inserted in the Argentinean choral reality: if applied across the board this doctrine would require the closure of Estudio Coral, the Grupo Vocal de Difusión, the Grupo de Canto Coral. These choirs (and others) have been powerful mediums of dissemination for choral music and have functioned many times as unofficial schools for the training of conductors. What would be better for our profession?

There is another modality that exists in Argentinean choirs from long ago – one that has increased over the last few years: groups in which every singer pays a monthly sum to the conductor directly. This system is really a precarious labor source: the conductor has no contract, does not perceive pension benefits, any vacations, social insurance, etc., except if he bothers to issue receipts to his singers and pay his own social, etc. contributions directly. On the other hand this is a good earning proposition that allows conductors to practice their vocation with total autonomy: they recruit singers privately, through posters or advertising in their neighborhood or choral environment, they decide on a monthly sum they think just, they put together a program as they like. They give concerts when they feel like it, without

exigencies from an institution which asks for this or that for a salary. Of course, this system also permits charismatic individuals with a minimal command of guitar, piano or voice to assemble a private choir: no need to compete, no need for a qualification or demonstration of aptitudes. In this way many music teachers or retired choir singers find a legal livelihood. But is this kind of choir elevating our profession? Is there anything we can do? These are really enormous dilemmas...

There is no way for now that ADICORA could act as a trade union or professional association: our poll showed a great disparity in working conditions. There is great diversity in training, in wages and in accounting modalities. Some are employed with all the labor benefits; others are paid in an irregular way. There are those who conduct one or two choirs and live comfortably and others that conduct six choirs and cannot make ends meet. Most Argentinean choir conductors do not live from their conducting; for many it is only an additional income. There is no uniformity in the income: it changes not only from region to region but also within the same city; similar institutions (for example, the different faculties at Buenos Aires University) pay alarmingly disparaging sums. There is not much we can do nowadays: every attempt to fix a minimum wage will find insurmountable difficulties or result in injustices. The only thing we can do for now is to recommend our associates for a minimum to be honored. This will guarantee nothing: the tendency will always be related with the general economy and the need of the future conductor... Who will prohibit the choir conducting student to take a choir for 200 Argentinean pesos a month if with this money he can pay for his singing lessons?

It is difficult to embrace all the complex labor realities of the choir conductor in Argentina in such a short space. I know I raised many questions that have been left unanswered and it is possible that from this account our colleagues from other countries are left with more doubts than before, but this is what happens when we adventure into a forest. From the hill, the wood in the valley looks harmonious and calm with its tall trees and apparent silence. But when we enter this forest we see the shrubs, the roots and the twisted branches; the fungi, the flowers and the rotten fruits near the fresh ones; we hear the singing birds, the croak of the frogs and buzzing of the insects that feed one from the other. Well, the forest was not as quiet as we presumed from afar... But this is the real life and not as depicted in the postcard we take as a souvenir and is only a frozen image. I ask you to excuse me, then, for this brief visit to our jungle and for the confusion this may have caused you.

WACCA Final Declaration (August 2006)

On August 23rd, 2006, in the City of Buenos Aires, Argentine Republic, the representatives of the institutions present at the World Assembly of Choral Conductor Associations met by invitation of the Argentine National Association of Choral Conductors, ADICORA. This meeting took place under the patronage of the International Federation for Choral Music, as an activity of the IFCM Choral Conductors' Commission. As an outcome of three days of presentations and discussions the delegates agreed to sign the resulting document concerning the following matters:

- a. Given that the practice of choral singing is a universal phenomenon which involves millions of people around the world;
- b. Given that the combination of voluntary participation and teamwork within the artistic activity of choral singing has total validity today and brings benefits to society in general, free from ethnic, religious and ideological prejudice;
- c. Given that the diversity, content and origins of the repertoire sung by choirs around the world makes choral singing a powerful cultural tool in the search for social peace through a universal language of good will and understanding between nations, crossing language borders and frontiers;
- d. Given that the constitutions of organisations formed by choral conductors are of real importance, and the common goals of these Associations of Choral Directors make it possible to work together towards their ideals;
- e. Given that the great opportunity of holding this meeting of representatives of Choral Directors' Associations from different regions of the world is a definitive reason to remain in touch in a permanent consultation network under the auspices of the International Federation for Choral Music;
- f. Given that the relationship between Choral Directors' Associations and other similar organisations must be fluid and dynamic in the spirit of establishing effective exchange and cooperation leading towards a long-lasting common cultural policy:
- g. The representatives of Federations and Associations agree to make every effort to be in active dynamic contact under the auspices of the International Federation for Choral Music (IFCM) and its Choral Conductors Commission.
- h. They will also move ahead to promote the formation of an International Network to facilitate working together in specific fields in order to develop better working conditions, to coordinate professional development and to establish organisations especially for Choral Conductors all round the world.