

Interview with Guido Bissig – Co-Conductor of the concert «The peacemakers» in Lucerne: Music joins people



Guido Bissig: Head of Music & Performing Arts, Institut Montana Zugerberg ; Conductor of Cäcilienverein Triengen

Silvia Vogel Wiederkehr: Dear Guido. You are conductor of two choirs, the Cäcilienverein Triengen and the School choir from Institut Montana Zug. With those two choirs, you will be part of the concert “The Peacemakers” from Jenkins in Lucerne. We especially enjoy having a younger generation within the project with the School choir of Zug. How are the rehearsals going?

Guido Bissig: Dear Silvia! Thank you very much for inviting me to this interview. The whole project „The Peacemakers” is very exciting for the singers of both choirs. Of course, there are different challenges to be faced on many levels. On one hand there are texts in different languages, which is very unusual. On the other hand there are very untypical dissonances to be rehearsed. Those give even experienced choir singers a lot to practice. The most important thing though is that singing together should be joyful and that the choirs can take steps forward in each rehearsal.

Svw: More than 40 nations are represented in the school choir of the international school Montana in Zug. What do you think, does the engagement in this project foster a sense for peace within the children and youth?

Guido Bissig: It's a nice coincidence that last year Institut Montana did hold an exhibition of extraordinary photographs showing 35 key-people of human rights movement. (s. figures) Eddie Adams (1933-2004), famous photographer and Pulitzer-Price-Winner, captured those images. The Robert-F.-Kennedy-Foundation put them together for an exhibition, inviting to reflect about peace and justice. Those portraits are touching and gave impulse for project workings and discussions with our students. One year later now, „The Peacemakers“, our musical project, perfectly continues with this topic.



Figures: photograph-exhibition „Speak Truth to Power », Mensa Institut Montana Zugerberg

Svw: Let's talk about the music: what approach do you have to the work "The Peacemakers"? What impresses or touches you about the music? Where are the challenges?

Guido Bissig: The more one goes into a musical work, the deeper one dives into the composition, and new interesting details reveal themselves. Of course, this is also the case with Karl Jenkins. For example, one can find elaborately inserted fragments of the famous „Reverie“ of Robert Schumann in the part of Martin Luther King junior's „He had a dream“. Or one immediately discovers the harmonic chord framework of Pachelbel in the part of the first set “Blessed are the peacemakers”. Such parallels to classical music of course are especially interesting and inspiring to discuss in music lessons at Institut Montana. There are lots of Aha-moments among the students then. A very big challenge at the moment are the modern, highly dissonant sounds. Those need a lot of rehearsal time and patience, and also intense engagement with the work.

Svw: We experience a moment of big concern in the world right now. The UN declares that a quarter of the world's population is affected by armed conflict. We hear a lot of news about violence and displacement, thus, far from peace. What can culture, especially music, contribute to peacemaking?

Guido Bissig: Generally speaking I am sure that music can support peace. Because music joins people on an emotional and cultural level. Music can help to reduce prejudices. I see music as a “power” or a “bridge”, which can build understanding and tolerance between people and help getting over conflicts and tensions.

Svw: Thank you for this dialogue.

Guido Bissig: Thank you as well. Also for the chance to participate in this moving project «The Peacemakers». All of us are very much looking forward to the public performance on Tuesday September 21 2023 in the «Jesuitenkirche» in Lucerne.