Learning Report

Learning Activity:
St John’s College Choir – 12th International Warsaw Choir Festival “Varsovia Cantat”
28th – 30th October

Background

In April 2016, we received an invitation from the competition’s organizing committee the Varsovia Cantat addressed to the St John’s College Choir to participate in the competition. After rounds of selection, we selected 13 members and formed a chamber choir to participate in the chamber choir category competition. Our rationale behind joining the competition is not only because of our shared passion towards music but also to expand our abilities and passion.

The Preparation Process

To prepare ourselves for an international level competition, our team of 13 began training from August when school and most of the internships would have come to an end, so that we may concentrate. We were very honored to have Mr. Lesly Chan, a previous member from St John’s College as well, now a professional music teacher at the Wah Yan College Kowloon to coach us for the competition. The intensity of our practices went up as the competition date approaches, from once a week in August, to twice a week in September and practice numbers even went up to 5 times a week two weeks before the date of departure. But we were still able to balance fun bonding and serious training during practices. At the same time, since August we have been organizing the Homecoming Concert, which have been held successfully on the 15th October, which was held for the purposes of fund raising and giving us a chance to perform and gather more experience before we head off to Warsaw.

The Competition

Upon arriving Warsaw, we were given confirmation that we were the only team in the competition that represented any Asian country or city, thus suddenly we became not only representatives from Hong Kong but Asia as well. There were 24 other competing teams which came from all parts of the world, from Poland, Switzerland, Russia, Croatia and various other countries. Music now becomes our common language as no common language was among us, even English as a global language was not as powerful. Other than the competition itself, we also enjoyed the privilege to sing in various churches for evening concerts, including in the famous St Cross Church with Chopin’s Heart in the city center. The audiences of these concerts were mostly the Polish public, they were very supportive towards our performance and especially showed interest towards the Chinese folk song (Bao Gui’s – The Carved Saddle) from our repertoire.
The results were announced during a gala concert that was held on the last day of the festival, and we were honored to have been awarded first place. In addition to the exciting session of announcing results, we also had the chance to listen to every choir which has participated in the competition. The performances did not only include special cultural songs from different countries, but we enjoyed performances by choirs from all age groups as well, from youth to elderly.

Gala Concert Recordings: [https://youtu.be/RGgpgoqnWyM](https://youtu.be/RGgpgoqnWyM)

**Afterthoughts**

The experience of competing in Warsaw was once in a life time and very fulfilling. Before the competition, we’ve set the goal of expanding our music capabilities by learning from experience and other teams. We feel that we have fulfilled our goal and gained in ways which exceeds our expectation. First, we became the representing team from Asia and won first place. Second, the Chinese songs within our repertoire received wide acclamation, and we had many teams asking for the score of the song afterwards. We feel that we have also achieved the goal of spreading the beauty of Chinese songs, which stands as an entirely different category from the usual Western sacred and more classical songs that would frequent in choir competition repertoires. Other than that, because the competition was held in Warsaw, we were able to get in touch with the Eastern European culture which seems to be less common, as most of these countries are highly religious. Even though we did not have much time for sightseeing, but from daily practices, such as meal contents or practices were already very different from Hong Kong. Therefore, throughout this trip not only were we able to broaden our music capabilities but also our cultural horizons.

Competition recordings: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eF3-0t4Lxro](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eF3-0t4Lxro)