

History of the Dresdner Kreuzchor

The Choir is a part of the Holy Cross College of Dresden and consists of 66 boys, 10 to 19 years of age. Its Cantor is the well known Conductor Rudolph Mauersberger. The boys are divided in the so called Alumni—numbering 32—similar to the Sixtine Choir of the St. Peter's Church in Rome—and 34 Kurrendani.

The first recorded origins of the Kreuz Choir can be traced back to the year 1200, when the boys attached to the Chapel of the Holy Cross Church had to render services of many kinds during the daily ceremonials of the Roman-Catholic rites. They also sang whenever any occasion of the priest's functions required them to do so. In later times the pupils enjoyed certain stipends mostly of food and clothing. In addition it was a custom of kind and wealthy citizens, who were known as being favorably disposed towards the artistic striving of its members. The historical resources of later times are meager and do not provide sufficient material for studying the development and its effects upon the musical life of the first three centuries.

The increasing importance of the Holy Cross Church and its Choir elevated it to the position of musical height in Dresden. The demands upon the Choir after its services at the altars of churches and other institutions finally tended to the disadvantage of the organization. The increasing number of such duties gradually encroached upon the schooling and the education of the boys was thereupon being more and more neglected. Even the fact that all the boys lived together and were under constant control and supervision could not avoid a slow but sure lowering of the educational standards.

The Reformation brought with it many changes in Dresden. The Holy Cross Church and the Kreuz Choir were already highly cherished before this religious evolution and therefore official circles took an interest in the developments and further advantage of the Choir. Following the Reformation the Holy Cross School and its Choir followed the educational and intellectual tendencies of the humanism. By their active participations prominent parties succeeded in elevating the general scope of the school and in due course persons who stood in the foreground of political and religious movement became interested in the school and its advancement. Ph. Melancton came himself to see and hear the Choir and to help in their endeavors, thus proving by practical efforts his desire to help the singers attain the best possible musical expression.

The conductors of the Choir who led it to a high artistic achievement in the first five centuries of its existence and most of whom wrote compositions for the Choir are: Sebaldus Baumann (1540-1553), Johann Selner (1553-1560), Caspar Fueger (1585-1586), Samuel Rueling (1612-1615), Christoph Neander (1615-1625), Michael Lohr (1625-1654), J. Z. Grundig (1713-1720).

From 1715 to 1815 the Choir sang with the famous Dresden Opera under the baton of Antonio Lotti and others. The Choir became acquainted with the Italian opera style. I. A. Hiller was a member of the Choir. Hiller was the father of the so called "Singspiele" which represent the first steps to the summit of the German classic "Lied".

Men like Joh. Seb. Bach, Friedmann Bach, Frederic the Great, Napoleon I, Rousseau, Mozart and Goethe attended the concerts of the Kreuz Choir.

Richard Wagner, a pupil of the Cross College himself wrote choral compositions in "Rienzi" and "Parsival" to be sung by the Kreuz Choir.

But never has the Choir achieved a higher standard of perfection than today, as thousands of critics, not only by German experts, but also those of foreign countries like Sweden and the Netherlands give ample proof.