

WORKSHOP
CHORAL SOCIETIES AND NATIONALIST MOBILIZATION
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPE

17-19 February 2011

Royal Conservatoire – faculty of the Artesis University College, Antwerp (Belgium)

Theme

National movements in nineteenth-century Europe were carried to an important extent by convivial sociability and cultural interests. A good example is furnished by the rise and function of male choirs from ca. 1810 onwards. Starting from initial foundational centres such as Berlin and Zurich, they obtained rapid popularity, proliferated by inspiring new foundations in an increasing number of cities, then established contacts and federative structures by means of trans-local, regional or nationwide festivals. Most German-speaking cities had their *Gesangverein* or *Liedertafel* by 1840, and the formula developed in many other European countries as well. In some of them (e.g. Wales and Estonia) choirs and choral festivals became an important vehicle for the assertion of a separate national identity, carried by large demotic sections of the population.

In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, male choirs were a feature of public life from Spain to Ireland and Wales and from Estonia to Transylvania. It affected large as well as small countries, established states as well as emergent nationalities. These choirs emphasized, in their choice of repertoire, patriotically-minded songs, which came to be composed in great number for them; conversely, they participated in public festivals and commemorations to add a nationally-inspired lustre to them (e.g. the Schiller commemoration in Stuttgart 1839, and the large choral festivals of Estonia). They galvanized or mobilized the active male part of the population with national fervour at a period before mass media and transregional communication reached full development.

Before the workshop and in spite of its wide-spread popularity and socio-political importance, remarkably little attention had been given to this phenomenon by either cultural historians or musicologists. Among the important exceptions are:

- Deathridge, J., 'Germany: The "Special Path"', in: J. Samson (ed.), *The Late Romantic Era, From the Mid-19th Century to World War I (Man & Music)*, Englewood Cliffs, 1991, 50-73.
- Hopkins Porter, C., 'The New Public and the Reordering of the Musical Establishment: The Lower Rhine Music Festivals, 1818-67', in: *19th-Century Music*, 1980, 3 (3), 211-224.
- Klenke, D., *Der singende "deutsche Mann": Gesangvereine und deutsches Nationalbewußtsein von Napoleon bis Hitler*, Münster, 1998.
- Kuutma, K., 'Cultural Identity, Nationalism and Changes in Singing Traditions', in: *Folklore. Electronic Journal of Folklore*, 1996, 2, 124-141.
- Samson, J., 'Nations and Nationalism', in: J. Samson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, Cambridge, 2002.