

# **Choir Singing for Young at Heart. Between Music Education and Artistry?**

Damien Sagrillo

## ***Abstract***

### **Deutsch**

Der folgende Artikel beleuchtet die Situation des Chorgesangs in Luxemburg zu Beginn des zweiten Jahrzehnts im 21. Jahrhundert. Im Vergleich mit anderen Laienmusikgesellschaften beschreibt er den Impact (d.h. Stärke der von einer Werbemaßnahme ausgehenden Wirkung) bzw. den Nicht-Impact, den die musikalische Bildung auf die Rekrutierung neuer Mitglieder hat. Anhand verschiedener Statistiken und ausgewählter Beispiele wird aufgezeigt, inwieweit das Phänomen Singen, nicht nur im Zusammenhang mit Chorgesang, eine Angelegenheit älterer Menschen geworden ist.

### **Français**

L'article suivant décrit la situation du chant choral au Luxembourg au début de la deuxième décennie du 21<sup>e</sup> siècle. En comparant avec d'autres ensembles de musique amateurs il explique l'impact ou le non-impact qu'exerce l'éducation musicale sur le recrutement de nouveaux membres. Il dévoile à l'aide d'investigations statistiques et en donnant quelques exemples, comment le phénomène chant est devenu, non seulement en ce qui concerne les chorales, une affaire pour personnes âgées.

### **English**

The following article describes the situation of choir singing in Luxembourg at the beginning of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In comparison with other community music ensembles, it explains the impact or non-impact of music education on the recruitment of new members. It shows, with the help of statistical investigations and in giving some examples, how the phenomenon of singing has become, not only concerning choirs, a matter of older people.

## Introduction

“Singing resembles to a freeing from bondage. Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to be silent.”<sup>1</sup> This quote of Victor Hugo leads me to the conviction that “freeing from bondage” could mean a freeing from age for older people, and more generally, participating in music means being freed from sorrow and grief allowing for some blithe moments, not only for seniors, but for everyone.

As a musician I’m deeply convinced that music and age have always formed a symbiosis. Not only now, but also history shows that both categories go hand in hand. – I remember a recent concert of the *Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra* in Luxembourg, where George Prêtre, then almost 82 years old, conducted the 3<sup>rd</sup> Symphony of Brahms and the *Firebird* of Stravinsky from memory. There are further famous examples: while Rossini coined the term *Péchés de veillesse* (Sins of Old Age) for a collection of about 150 small vocal and piano works that he composed between 1857 - 1868, at a time when he was between 65 and 76 years old, there exist many examples of older musicians and composers having completed their greatest masterworks or having been in the focus of interest at an old age: Haydn, for example, composed his two oratorios – *The Creation* and *the Seasons* – and arranged more than 400 folksongs at the age of about seventy years and even more. Verdi was almost 80 years old when he completed his last opera *Falstaff* and Arthur Rubinstein was almost 90 years old when he gave his last concert, much acclaimed in London in 1976.<sup>2</sup> His musicality, interpretation and clarity of sound impressed the critics. Two years before his death, at the age of 84, Vladimir Horowitz gave a concert in the famous *Wiener Musikverein*.<sup>3</sup> His vitality and wit were without precedent.

---

<sup>1</sup> Original text: „Chanter, cela ressemble à se délivrer. Ce qu’on ne peut dire et ce qu’on ne peut taire, la musique l’exprime”; Victor Hugo, *William Shakespeare, première partie, livre II. Les genies IV*, 1864, <[http://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/William\\_Shakespeare\\_%28Victor\\_Hugo%29/II/4](http://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare_%28Victor_Hugo%29/II/4)> (3/2013).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Arthur Rubinstein, *Last Recording in New York*, in April 1976, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kynh4Joh1-c>> (3/2013).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Vladimir Horowitz, *Chopin - Mazurka in b minor Opus. 33 No. 4*, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8PJsjO1u5w>> (3/2013).



VERDI  
*Falstaff*. 80 years



ROSSINI  
*Péchés de veillesse*:  
65-76 years



HAYDN  
*The Creation*: 69 years;  
Arrangement of more than 400  
folksongs: until 72 years



RUBINSTEIN  
Last Recording in New York:  
89 years

HOROWITZ  
Concert in Vienna:  
82 years



Figure 1 – Old Musicians

## Singing at old age

My topic in this article is singing in one's later years, and it begins with the question: Who sings today here in Luxembourg? The answer is: mostly older people and with some exceptions, like the interregional Robert-Schuman-Choir, adolescents and young adults from 16 to 26. People with a certain level in vocal skills prefer so-called vocal ensembles, and usually they are young or middle aged. This situation was different some decades ago. Of course, I have no empirical proof, but some unequivocal indications. I dare to assert that the economic, social and societal reversal of the last century had a considerable influence on the cultural taste of the population, not only in this country, but globally. Schubert, the first epigone of German romanticism in music, died at the age of only 31 years. He composed dozens of songs for male voice choir. Music history of Luxembourg has to offer Laurent Menager (1835 – 1902). He wrote 68 songs for equal voices, and these compositions were surely performed by younger singers. Menager founded his first choir at the age of 22 together with a fellow teacher of the city district "Pfaffenthal" in the lower city of Luxembourg. He was also the founder of the church choir in his native neighborhood. Today, the majority of young teachers no longer sing with their pupils, maybe out of fear or simply out of disinterest in something, they never came in contact with during their own school and university years. Dan Levitin points out that an adolescent today has the possibility of hearing more music within a month than a human being was able to listen to during his whole life three hundred years ago.<sup>4</sup> I would not go as far and assume that going back only a few decades would be sufficient, in 2013. These factors may be a reason why younger people changed their approach to music from an active and social involvement to a more passive and individual one. Today's seventy- to eighty-year-old people grew up with singing and musical activities in school, at home, in inspiring company with other devotees, in church or in wind bands. In his article about singing with seniors Michael Schmutte describes what importance singing had for today's elders in their early lives.<sup>5</sup> The importance of singing about a hundred years ago can be understood just in glancing at the table of contents of song collections. Girls came together for singing just for impressing boys. Singing was one possibility, perhaps the most significant pastime during leisure hours, within the family circle and after work. Farmers and workers sang during work to overcome monotony and soldiers before the battle to summon courage. In this context we also have to mention the abusive use of music and singing by the Nazis as a kind of drug for the whole country during the Second World War.<sup>6</sup> All in all, singing had its place in all areas of life in a positive, as well as in a negative sense.

<sup>4</sup> quoted by: *Musik im mp3-Format: neue Hörgewohnheiten* <<http://www.drs.ch/www/de/drs/79259.musik-im-mp3-format-neue-hoergewohnheiten.html>> (8/2011).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Michael Schmutte, „Singen mit alten Menschen in Chorarbeit und Musiktherapie“, in: *Musik bis ins hohe Alter*, edited by Hans-Herrmann Wickel and Rosemarie Tüpker, Books on Demand, Norderstedt 2009, p. 27–31.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Schmutte, p. 29; translation: „Singen als Droge für ein ganzes Volk“.

This leads me to folksongs and their collection that, in German speaking regions, goes back on Johann Gottfried Herder. His statement was: Folksongs should be collected; otherwise there will be the risk that they fall into oblivion forever.<sup>7</sup>

The movie picture *Songcatcher* from 2000, which deals with folksong collection in the Appalachian Mountains between 1910 and 1917 offers a realistic impression of song collecting<sup>8</sup>. Here we see the young and the elderly jointly as song informants for an academic folksong-collector. In a recent folksong collection edited by Helmut Brenner in 2007, we learn that, in our time, the knowledge of songs has become a matter for seniors, the average age of 18 informants between 61 and 86 years old being 73 years.<sup>9</sup> Can we generalize from this that singing has become an activity for the older generation? Surely not exclusively, but knowing and practicing traditional folksongs seems to have disappeared from the everyday reality of most people before retirement age.

1	1921
2	1922
3	1924
4	1925
5	1927
6	1928
7	1930
8	1931
9	1931
10	1935
11	1935
12	1937
13	1937
14	1939
15	1941
16	1943
17	1944
18	1946

**Table 1 – Mean Age of Song Informants (Brenner 2007)**

<sup>7</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, „Von Aehnlichkeit der mittlern englischen und deutschen Dichtkunst, nebst Verschiednem, das daraus folget“, *Deutsches Museum* 1777, 2. Band, Elfte Stück, November, p. 421–435, online reproduction according to the first edition, <[http://www.unidue.de/lyriktheorie/texte/1777\\_herder.html](http://www.unidue.de/lyriktheorie/texte/1777_herder.html)> (11/2011), p. 424.

<sup>8</sup> The collection was published in 1917; cf. Olive Dame Campbell and Cecil J. Sharp, *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*, G.P. Putman's Sons, New York, London 1917.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Helmut Brenner, *Damit sie nicht verloren gehen. Singtraditionen in der Veitsch*, Lichtenstern, Graz, Saarbrücken, Veitsch, 2007.

Choir singing in Luxembourg has a more than 150-year-old tradition. In 1848 King-Grand-Duke William II installed a new and more liberal constitution in Luxembourg. It established freedom of speech and assembly. As a result of these new freedoms, choral societies and wind bands grew like mushrooms from the ground in almost every region of the country. Initially, choirs accepted only men, and after the Second World War women were also accepted. Some chorale societies decided however to continue as male-voice choirs. Later, during the 1980s, the situation changed dramatically. Mixed choirs increasingly complained about a lack of men within their ranks.

Concerning music education, a law governing the regulation (“harmonization”) of music education was adopted in 1998 in order to standardize curricula and teaching careers, which until that time, in a small country like Luxembourg, varied from school to school and from region to region. The preamble of this law stipulates three basic aims:<sup>10</sup>

1. To develop musical taste and interest in children and give them the possibility to participate in musical life,
2. To provide a specialized education to prepare for higher studies abroad and
3. To give adults the possibility to improve their musical knowledge.

From this last objective arises a range of challenges for music schools that, until today, still not have been transferred to the special needs of adults or even to seniors: my personal experience with adults and seniors as learners of an instrument or in singing is that faults cannot be corrected, but the teacher only can try to reduce negative effects.

In the context of choir singing this means that voice formation with seniors is possible only to a limited extent. Tenors are more flexible than basses and often also younger. On the other hand, I note in the weekly rehearsals with my men’s choir, goodwill, along with discipline, power of concentration and the determination to give the best. Songs that had been rehearsed and performed years or even decades ago can easily be revived and programmed for a future concert. However, a choirmaster must accept that, with advanced age of his singers, plasticity and learnability concerning the acquisition of new repertoire diminishes perceptibly, and that there are medicinal and physiological changes of the voice, which result in a loss of elasticity.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Legilux, *Harmonisation de l’enseignement musical (Harmonization of music education)*, <<http://www.legilux.public.lu/leg/a/archives/1998/0035/1998A04911.html>> (3/2013).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Theo Hartogh, „Singen mit Senioren“, in: *Forum Kirchenmusik* 2009, 61/1, p. 5.

A survey that I organized in 2008 among 97 community musicians in my circle of acquaintances revealed some interesting details, despite the fact that it was non-representative. Questions asked were about their age, their musical training and their involvement in community ensembles like choirs or wind bands.<sup>12</sup> It revealed the following results: while choir members are on average 65 years old (women 63, men 71), members of wind bands average about thirty years younger (women 29 and men 40). Women over fifty are an exception in wind bands, but not in choirs. These statistics, however, require some comments.

Choir or Wind Band (WB)			
		♀	♂
Choir	67	63	71
WB	36	29	40

**Table 2 – Mean Age of Musicians and Singers in Community Ensembles**

1. The age statistics have considerably changed since 1986. While the average age of band members was with 31 years only four years lower than in 2008, the age of choir singers was with 55 years twelve years lower.<sup>13</sup>
2. It seems that only wind bands benefit from music school alumni, but not choirs. Today's instrumentalists have a solid education behind them. The principle applies: the younger the singers and musicians are, the better they are trained. New choral singers join, if at all, after their professional life a choral society, i.e. after the age of 60.
3. Wind bands are intergenerational clubs, where it can occur that a 14-year-old adolescent and a 75-year-old senior are sitting together, playing the same part. In contrast, amateur choirs bring together two generations at most.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Damien Sagrillo, „Das Laienmusikwesen in Luxemburg“, in: *Arts et Lettres*, 1 2009, p. 94.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Armand Logelin-Simon, „Il y a plusieurs fois 25 ans“, in: *Galerie. Revue culturelle et pédagogique* 2011, 29/1, p. 158; cf. below: the statistics of age of “my” men's voice choir “Chorale Municipale de Schifflange”.

The social commitment of younger members to their club is generally significantly lower. Well-trained musicians often are members of several bands and additionally help out in other bands, if the repertoire corresponds to their aspirations and abilities. In contrast, choruses are more social clubs, and members without musical literacy can look back at a long experience as active singers. Most choristers have been members for many decades. The fluctuation of the membership is less important, and on a musical level, the preservation of the singing tradition has a very high priority. And that is exactly where the problem lies: potential young members are turning their backs on an outmoded repertoire and on fellow singers who could be their grand-parents.

Age	Tot #	♀	♂	Choir	♀	♂	WB	♀	♂
10-20	13	4	6				10	3	6
20-30	17	10	7				15	7	8
30-40	7	3	4				7	3	4
40-50	12	7	5	5	3	2	7	4	3
50-60	11	3	8	3	3		8		8
60-70	21	9	12	15	9	6	6		6
70-80	10	1	9	19	1	8			
80-90	6	2	4	6	2	4			

**Table 3 – Population of Choirs and Wind Bands According to Age Cohorts<sup>14</sup>**

Wise et al. prove that, after their retirement, older people continue to pursue those musical activities that stand in continuity with their former life.<sup>15</sup> Beyond purely musical reasons, like music making or singing, the authors emphasize also on the social dimension, and that is the wish of older choristers to belong to a community that is connoted with a certain reputation and mastery within a peer group.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The addition of sub-categories does not lead always to 97 (see above). This has two reasons: 1) For one person the gender was not entered. 2) Some musicians are, at the same time, member in choirs AND in wind bands.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Wise, G. / Hartmann, D.J. / Fischer, B.J., "Eploration of the relationship between choral singing and successful aging", in: *Psychological Reports* 1992, 70/1, pp. 1175, 1180–81.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Wise et al., pp. 1179, 1181.



Aging implicates the change or even the loss of specific competencies, whereas new competencies can emerge.<sup>17</sup> In this light, there is a need for educational concepts to be developed and more particularly, concerning choir singing, vocal training methods to be adapted for senior singers. During the last years, in Luxembourg, some short-lived attempts have been undertaken, but they have not always been sustainable enough to lead to the desired outcome. There is no question that aging is associated with a decrease of adaptability and a downfall of performance. Andreas Pätz states that some of the most preferred activities of elderly people is watching TV, listening to the radio and to music.<sup>18</sup> Today we must add surfing the internet as a further activity. But this leads inevitably to alienation within the four private walls. The need for individual activities goes hand in hand with giving these interests and hobbies a social context in mutual cooperation. Thus, choir singing for seniors after retirement would be an option to avoid this kind of isolation. But many people at this age are still very active and are not necessarily interested in joining a choir. Theo Hartogh subdivides the generation after retirement into younger seniors and older seniors.<sup>19</sup> In this perspective we must acknowledge that 60-year-old pensioners grew up with rock and pop music, and today's literature for male voice choir in Luxembourg is far away from that music style. The former indeed seems to be closer to older seniors.<sup>20</sup>

Undoubtedly music created in relationship with new technologies, like Rap, Hip-Hop, and Techno music is essentially reserved for a younger audience, whereas older people stay skeptical about these new music genres. But this remains to be proven by appropriate studies. Furthermore there seems to be a considerable gap between America and Central Europe.

---

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Cornelia Wienken, „Aktiv im Alter – Musik im Alter“, *Musikschulkongress '03*, 2003, <[www.musikschulen.de/medien/doks/mk03/referat\\_ag27.pdf](http://www.musikschulen.de/medien/doks/mk03/referat_ag27.pdf)> (7/2013), p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Andreas Pätz, *Die Bedeutung des Wohnumfeldes für die Freizeitgestaltung älterer Menschen*, Cuvillier, Göttingen 1995, p. 53.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Hartogh, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Hartogh, p. 4.

### **Some examples of choir situations in Luxembourg**

In most community choirs in Luxembourg, male choristers, who leave their ensemble because of their age or health problems, most often cannot be replaced, because the next generation, men between the ages of 50 and 60 are not willing to integrate a community society and prefer to preserve their present taste of individual independence and self-realization. It has been proven that older choristers have less need of self-actualization compared to a “non-musical” reference group of the age. This means, they are more dependent persons with the common aim of subordination into a group functionality and under the direction of a choirmaster.<sup>21</sup> Recently, in a long-standing choir in the southwest of Luxembourg the few remaining men were asked to leave the ensemble that from then on would continue as a female choir, while a further tradition-rich ensemble in the close proximity of the City of Luxembourg decided to refrain from all activities and to close its doors. Back in 1989 a decision was made to found a large national male voice choir in order to commemorate the 150 anniversary of Luxembourg as an independent state. “Good” singers, at this time between 40 and 60, were given the opportunity to join a choir of about 100 men, the Luxembourg male choir “Lëtzebuenger Männerkouer 1989”. Today this choir still exists and has about 30 singers and a female conductor. The photograph proves that most choristers have already reached a ripe age.



**Figure 4 – “Lëtzebuenger Männerkouer 1989”<sup>22</sup>**

The high mean age of choirs, mainly male choirs, remains a problem for the future of this vocal genre, but it also remains a problem of cultural life in this country if choirs risk disappearing from the scene. To avoid this ultimate fate, some club officials came up with adaptation strategies such as trying to motivate experienced singers from other choirs to assist for the more important concerts or simply to join together. For example, in Luxembourg-City five male choirs decided to form a larger, survivable ensemble of about 30 members with also a female conductor.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Wise et al., p. 1182.

<sup>22</sup> Lëtzebuenger Männerkouer 1989, <<http://www.lmk1989.lu/portal/index.php>> (3/2012).



Figure 5 – “Chorales réunies Luxembourg”

Some ensembles try to keep their independence and to survive alone. I will present the situation of the male-voice choir “Chorale municipale de Schifflange” that I have been conducting since 1995. Since that time, I have seen 34 people coming, going and staying; I was confronted with the death of nine members and nine further members leaving the choir for one reason or another. On the other hand, ten new members joined the club. Only five singers have been constant members during this period of eighteen years. To avoid the collapse, my predecessor decided to recruit women to reinforce the tenor parts.<sup>23</sup> Hartogh describes exactly this compromise for German mixed choirs.<sup>24</sup> Today, in Schifflange we have two female tenors. When I arrived, the choir had 24 members with a mean age of 62 years. Meanwhile, 18 years later, the number of singers has gone back to 16, this in a dramatic way within the last five years, and the mean age has risen to 70 years. But, three years ago, it even was 73 years. The recent decline of the average age is attributable to the fact that some older members died or stopped their activity. In return, four new members, between 57 and 74 years old, joined the choir.

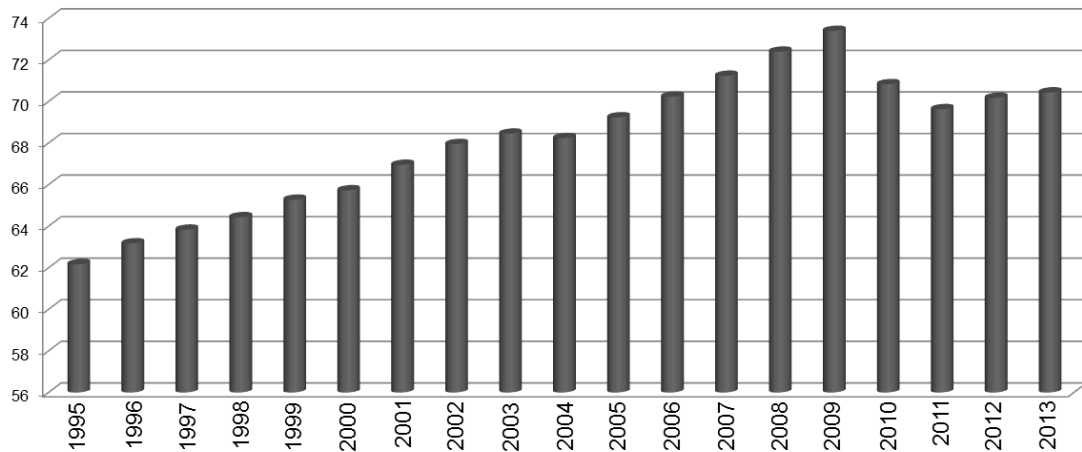
<sup>23</sup> represented in *italic* in table 4 below.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Hartogh, p. 2.

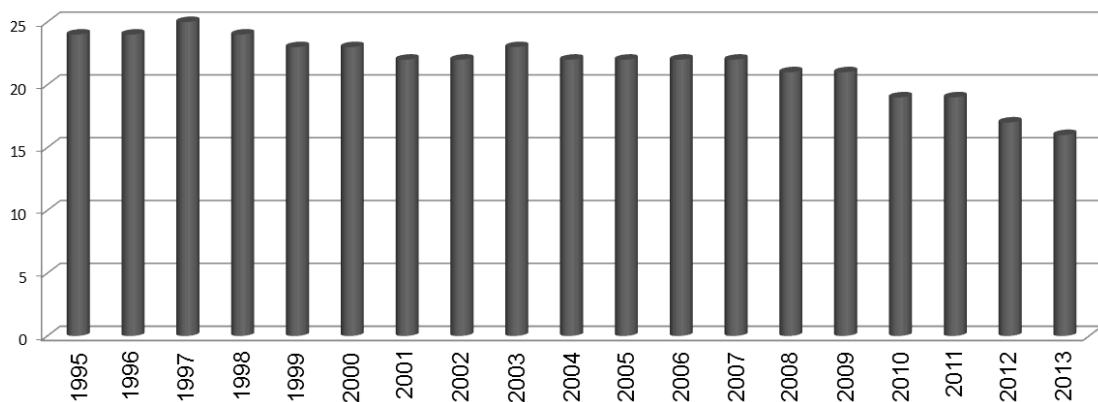
	Age																Age			
	1995	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10		11	12	2013
1	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	+			
2						42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	
3	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	
4	65	66	67	68	+															
5	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83					
6	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	+						
7	66	67	68																	
8	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	
9	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80				
10	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	
11	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	
12									66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	
13	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	
14	62	63	64																	
15				60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	
16																	74	75	76	
17	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	+				
18	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89					
19	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	+				
20																	73	74	75	76
21										54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	
22																	57	58	59	
23	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84				
24	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	+		
25	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	+	
26	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	
27			56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	
28	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75												
29	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72											
30	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	+										
31	56	57	58	59	60	61	+													
32									68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	
33																60	61	62	63	
34	49	50	51	52	53												65			
<b>Mean Age</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>70</b>	
<b>Number</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>16</b>	

**Table 4 – Member Statistics of the “Chorale municipale de Schifflange”, Luxembourg**

Only few amateur choirs opt for new paths and try to reach younger members by introducing a new repertoire. However, it is clear that choir singing – in Luxembourg and elsewhere – remains a cultural activity for everybody and for all ages and not only for seniors, and that the basic musical training for children in Luxembourg, the so-called solfège system does not encourage school pupils to sing in amateur choirs. This is due to an approach that is not adapted to today’s educational needs, and pupils are not introduced in a playful way to singing. The budding musician’s voice is not trained by adapted voice didactics and pedagogy, but singing is used for sight-reading exercises, and it is combined with music theory and this for school pupils from eight to twelve years. In this light, singing, connected to solfège, neglects every basic requirements of musicality. This acts as a deterrent on potential choir members and has, in this sense, an extremely negative impact on a prospective decision to become a chorister.



**Table 5 – Chart of Mean Age Progression, “Chorale municipale de Schifflange”, Luxembourg**



**Table 6 – Chart of Member Evolution, “Chorale municipale de Schifflange”, Luxembourg**

In the past, most amateur singers never received musical training. Notation expertise, the sense for melodic traits and for idiosyncratic musical mechanisms were assimilated in learning by doing.

### ***Young @ Heart***

The correlation between singing and age was illustrated by an excellent media exposure through the documentary *Young @ Heart*. *Young @ Heart* is an amateur choir of elderly singers in Massachusetts, USA. It was founded in 1982. The movie was released in 2008 and directed by Stephen Walker. The protagonists are seniors between 70 and 92 years. The youngest member is Bob Cilman, the choirmaster. He was born in 1953. The movie’s focus is on a seven-week rehearsal period for a concert and on interviews with several choir members, their personal backgrounds, their health problems and, concerning two choristers, their death. *“This film will probably end up*

*under the microscopes of gerontologists, who should glean considerable information about the learning abilities, energy and enthusiasm of a group of people not generally noted for these qualities.*<sup>25</sup>

What are the differences and common points between traditional German / French / Luxembourgish male choirs and the *Young @ Heart* ensemble? The repertoire of *Young @ Heart* is typically American, i.e. classic rock and pop music with instruments and rhythm section. Only monophonic songs are practiced, and therefore an instrumental accompaniment, microphones and choreography adapted to the physical abilities of the members are needed.<sup>26</sup> A comparable repertoire would be completely unsuitable for traditional choirs in Luxembourg and the larger neighborhood. The aim of most amateur choirs in Luxembourg, in turn, is to perform four part compositions, preferably a cappella. While the *Young @ Heart* ensemble is exclusively a senior group, choirs in Luxembourg struggle for younger singers. On the other hand, illness and death are realities that the film deals with and that choir members in Luxembourg also have to accept in their daily exercise. In *Young @ Heart* this fatal reality is demonstrated in dramatic fashion. But, while the members of *Young @ Heart* enjoy high acceptance, surely due to a more attractive repertoire and their repeated Media presence, and perform before large and widespread audiences, traditional choirs in Luxembourg have to face the problem of being considered as relics of times long-past.

## ***In Conclusion***

Singing in a choir can be considered as a type of lifelong learning, i.e. an informal and voluntary acquisition of musical knowledge in a social environment of like-minded people and this usually for many years. Formal or non-formal music learning strategies have virtually no positive influence on the recruitment of new members. Finally, singing for older choir members means luck and challenge at the same time; luck, because one still has the possibility to participate regularly in rehearsals and concerts; and a challenge, because one has to find one's way around a social group despite possible health problems or physical complaints.

---

<sup>25</sup> User Review, *Seven weeks till opening night, the trials and triumphs of a chorus of over 70's*, <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1047007/>> (3/2013).

<sup>26</sup> The counterpart of *Young @ Heart* in Great Britain are the *Zimmers*.

## Literature

- Brenner, Helmut: *Damit sie nicht verloren gehen. Singtraditionen in der Veitsch*, Lichtenstern, Graz, Saarbrücken, Veitsch, 2007.
- Dame Campbell, Olive / Sharp, Cecil J.: *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*, G.P. Putman's Sons, New York, London 1917.
- Hartogh, Theo: „Singen mit Senioren“, in: *Forum Kirchenmusik* 2009, 61/1, p. 2–9.
- Herder, Johann Gottfried: „Von Aehnlichkeit der mittlern englischen und deutschen Dichtkunst, nebst Verschiednem, das daraus folget“, *Deutsches Museum* 1777, 2. Band, Elfte Stück, November, p. 421–435, online reproduction according to the first edition, <[http://www.unidue.de/lyriktheorie/texte/1777\\_herder.html](http://www.unidue.de/lyriktheorie/texte/1777_herder.html)> (11/2011).
- Legilux: *Harmonisation de l'enseignement musical (Harmonization of music education)* 1998, <<http://www.legilux.public.lu/leg/a/archives/1998/0035/1998A04911.html>> (3/2013).
- Logelin-Simon, Armand: „Il y a plusieurs fois 25 ans“, in: *Galerie. Revue culturelle et pédagogique* 2011, 29/1, p. 158.
- Pätz, Andreas: *Die Bedeutung des Wohnumfeldes für die Freizeitgestaltung älterer Menschen*, Cuvillier, Göttingen 1995.
- Sagrillo, Damien: „Das Laienmusikwesen in Luxemburg“, in: *Arts et Lettres* 2009, 1, p. 91–109.
- Schmutte, Michael: „Singen mit alten Menschen in Chorarbeit und Musiktherapie“, in: *Musik bis ins hohe Alter*, edited by Hans Hermann Wickel and Rosemarie Tüpker, Books on Demand, Norderstedt 2009, p. 27–31.
- Wienken, Cornelia: „Aktiv im Alter – Musik im Alter“, *Musikschulkongress '03*, 2003, <[www.musikschulen.de/medien/doks/mk03/referat\\_ag27.pdf](http://www.musikschulen.de/medien/doks/mk03/referat_ag27.pdf)> (7/2013).
- Wise, G. / Hartmann, D. J. / Fischer, B. J.: „Eploration of the relationship between choral singing and successful aging“, in: *Psychological Reports* 1992, 70/1, p. 1175–1183.