

## Humanizing values of the choral singing

Petre-Marcel VÂRLAN<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *The study presents the group singing (choral singing) through a few functions that have contributed to the human enlightenment and the formation of the present civilisation: the mystical, ethical and moral functions, the development of emotionality and affection, its role in the perpetuation of species, the work process management, the religious community and historical memory function, the educational and motivational-volitional function and the community identity and political-propagandistic function. The presentation is supported by examples which prove the important role in the development of man as an individual and of the human society, from micro-community to the global level known by today's socio-economic and cultural life.*

Key-words: *proto human, proto musical, choral singing, social function*

### 1. Introduction

The tendency towards grouping of the living organisms is their common attribute, manifesting itself both for plants, animals or the proto-human and human communities. If in case of the plants, the grouping is done due to the distribution of seeds on the soil surface or deep within it (by stolons), which can take place only on a relatively determined area – excepting for the seeds carried by streams or winds far from the mother plant – which increases the resistance of the respective plants against the action of aggressive (either atmospheric or biological) factors of the environment, in case of the animal and proto human populations the main role in forming the groups was based on the descendent relationship and only after that – in order of importance – the need to cooperate for feeding, housing, personal protection, etc.

Born in the animal group – an aspect which is worthy of attention even from a creationist perspective – the proto-human concept appeared, we can say, when the first *cultural* gesture was made, turning the natural into cultural in accordance with the spiritual development of the new being. The nature/ the natural represents a quality of the environment which we usually idealize, as being the origins of *the*

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<sup>1</sup> Transilvania University of Braşov, [petre\\_varlan@yahoo.com](mailto:petre_varlan@yahoo.com)

*golden age* of mankind. If this were *the Paradise the Bible* mentions about, then the identity *nature-origins of mankind* would seem to be perfect. But if the nature and the natural had been what followed the expulsion from Paradise – which could also mean making the clear distinction between animal and human being – then the proto-human would have been obliged to turn the hostile environment in which it came to live to tame it – in the proper sense of the word – to make it friendly to himself and to be convenient not only to survival as a human being, but also suitable for its ampler and more sophisticated spiritual needs (unfortunately, Man has not only developed in terms of spiritual gains. But he also developed proportionally, therefore becoming more intelligent – according to the more sophisticated challenges he had to face – the Man has also recorded failures: some proto-human members who began their humanizing process used the rational side of this capacity (intelligence) at the expense of compassion and empathy, of the affection and high-minded emotionality to satisfy his basic needs, like the personal security and pleasure, which led to the exacerbation of some atavistic flows, of brutish nature, like individualism, selfishness, aggressivity, lack of compassion, ingratitude).

To the ancient poet Quintus Horatius Flaccus, the cultural meant cultivating the spirit, while to the philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero, it was divided into *cultura agrorum* – the agricultural culture, the ancestral *culture* term was initially connected to – and *cultura animi* (Bâtlan 1993, 19).

## 2. Functions of the choral singing

### 2.1. The development of emotionality and affection. The role of singing in the perpetuation of species

There was a particular experience developed, specific to hominisation: emotionality and affection. A more intense and ampler affection has developed, meant to generate attachment feelings towards a larger variety of values, shown and amplified across the ages: group (of various natures: family-related, social, national, occupational, philosophical-ideological, religious, moral-ethical), biological/ social male/ female partner, tools, present, past or anticipated goods. This was the source of *homo estheticus* who appeared only a few millenniums ago and caused the birth of *arta*, which is an *exclusively* human phenomenon as "there is not a counterpart phenomenon in case of animals" (Bâtlan 1993, 259).

Some of these signs were caused by the sexual instincts, the aim of the perpetuation of species made people resort to proto-artistic acts of signalling the sexual desire: ritualic dances and specific individual and especially group intonations.

We outline the fact that in the proto musical stage, the group singing is in fact a slightly melodised scanning, of strong individual character, which turns into "a group" scanning due to the fact that more members of the community join the syncretic invoking act.

The prehistoric sounds Chris Scarre mentions are of less interest in the study *Painting by Resonance* (Scarre 1989) for us in this context. What is more important is the type of the respective proto musical performance, we can certainly state that used to be syncretic and the melodised performance was a group one, as proven by the group singing within some populations situated on lower developmental stages of civilisation. One of the examples is the tribe *Maasai* of Tanzania, where young women of the tribe are singing in group (Franklinclayfilms 2013).

The first moment of the performance, the singing is *responsorial*, as a dialogue between a soloist and the rest of the group. In the second part, the young women perform monodically as a group, while the young men perform the specific dance, consisting in jumps. A third moment consists in singing again the responsorial singing, the group being displayed in a circle, while two young women, in the middle of the circle jump. The poliphonic rudiments which appear involuntarily are the result of the lack of timing of the female participants' performance.

Dating back from the Iron Age, the mural prehistoric painting which shows the three *carnyx* blowers (*apud* Onkelinx 2012) makes us suppose that there were also vocal singers groups.

## 2.2. The work process management

Another role within the social cohesion function and the community solidarization of collective singing was the work process management. In this case, singing is spontaneous, as shown by the recent situations in the existence of mankind. The black slaves' songs on the plantations in the South of the United States are notorious, the first collection of work songs being published in 1867 by William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware and Lucy McKim Garrison (Dixon 1987). The song was initiated by a soloist, followed by the group of workers either as a chorus or in a responsorial manner by the group of workers joint together *ad-hoc* in a chorus.

The Romanian folklore also knows the group singing as a planning function of the work process, frequent both in case of the agricultural field works of the peasants and on the occasion of the women's meetings (young or old women, also spinsters and lads) at evening sittings of village women or occasional works – the song during the occasional work around the spindle, the song on the occasion of treading the hemp bundles (Oprea and Agapie 1983, 184-185), where – to enjoy

working together and spend the time in an agreeable way – the group singing was frequent. The opera genre also provides some examples: *Corul țiganilor – The Gypsy people's Chorus* (G. Verdi, the opera *Il Trovatore*), is such an example, a musical moment in which the noises suggest the hammer striking the anvil, rhythmically, which represents the rhythmic background of a typical work song which synchronises not only the musical performance but also the financial aspects.

The Romanian folklore proves again in case of some group singings, associated in some cases with the ceremonial walking: the song of the wheat crown at reaping time, ritualic wedding and funeral songs, some carols, the ceremonial recruitment song (Oprea and Agapie 1983, 101), – which could be considered a modern form of the preparation of the hunters' group –, which "in their clear and authentic way of being [...] are performed in a group and, if necessary, only during some ritualic-ceremonial destinations" (Oprea and Agapie 1983, 101). The song of the religious procession can also be mentioned here, like the one of R. Wagner in the opera *Tannhäuser (Pilgerchor – Corul pelerinilor/ The Pilgrims' Chorus)*, which coordinates the pilgrims' walking in even steps, in rare tempo, adequate to collectedness and praying. The folklore also testifies the type of musical syntax of the group singing: monodic (in unison), monodic in dialogue (antiphonic), in alternance of the unisonic monody with the rudimentary (eterophonic) polyphony moments and harmonical to isorythmical (homophonic) (Oprea and Agapie 1983, 157).

### 2.3. The religious community function and the historical memory function

A landmark of the ancient religious group song is the Tibetan singing type. In the ancient religious song in the west of Tibet, *Shi Chung Jomo*, there is a soloist voice and the chorus, together with the drums, which opens the performance, by a rare beat at the beginning, which is then accelerated (Kaufman 1962, 2). In other songs, the voices associated with the group imitate the sound made by the long Tibetan horns used at prayers (Kaufman 1962, 2). These vocal ritualic Tibetan singings, of male group, are unisonic vocalic modulations on pitches in the extremely bass vocal register, which can also increase in the medium register. The voices resonate gutturally and cavernous, reminding of the monastery like Japanese singing, proving "the Tibetan singing Vairayana and the Japanese one Shingon as sub branches of the same Buddhist approach" (Smith 1967). At some other times, the prayers' enounces, scanned in a melodised way, create a special poliphony, in a sprachgesang relatively modern in the western music, rediscovered by it only in the XXth century.

The Tibetan monks also get together chorally in *Gytütö Monks Tantric Choir*, which is a type of choral singing of high spiritual impact, with reference to Tantric practices, as shown by the name of the band (*Tibet Chants Music*).

The traditional Tibetan singing represents the historical way through which the old Tibet used to communicate in a complex manner by means of music. This used to be a way to convey narrations, stories which made up the thesaurus of past and present life of the Tibetan communities, a way to express political views and life messages (Burruss, 2013). It managed to keep along the millenniums the identity of the Tibetan spirituality and the unity of the Tibetan population against the various influences intensively present in the XX-XXI<sup>th</sup> century.

A successor of the magical ancestral singings, resulted from the magical incantation which Jules Combarieu considered "le prototype de l'art musical" (Combarieu 1942, 4), in the ritualic Christian music the practice of group, choral performance represents a defining element of the religious singing. At first, the group performance was monodic, the monks used to begin to sing the same melody, of the medieval *cantus planus*.

In the meantime, the two millenary and of a majority Christian cults – the Orthodox and the Catholic one – developed a complex group singing, both poliphonic and homophonic, musical syntaxes also present in the choral singing of the Protestant and Neo-protestant cults. The meaning of the choral religious singing is that of spiritual communion, of creating an absorbing and emanating spiritual unity, both during some festive moments, like the big religious celebrations, coronations as well as during the sadness moments in the funeral messes (*Missa Pro Defunctis*) or during the regular church service.

#### **2.4. The educational function**

The importance of the choral singing in education is indisputable and widely discussed over time, concern for this is illustrated, for example, in the illustration of psalm 150 (*Laudate Dominum*), a decorative panel of marble, at *cantoria*, a balcony for the dome's organ set up in 1438, situated at *Musée de l'Œuvre du Dôme* in Florence, Italy, showing children singing chorally and playing instruments (Piccardi). It is outlined again: not only does it educate the aesthetic musical taste, not only does it make the child familiar with the performance and musical technique in general and the vocal one in particular, but it also widens his knowledge and the profound study of the mother language and literature, but it also provides the highly important experience of the human solidarity in general and, complementary to it, the group one, the ethnic one and the strength of reaching the objectives when the individual forces are reunited.

## 2.5. The motivational-volitional function

We would add to the points mentioned above that the choral music and the activity of choral singing on the whole provides self esteem and capacity of individual expression, and a further generator of trust to the members of the ensemble. This explains the shared principle that it is easier to sing in a group than individually, which involves taking the full responsibility of performance. The choral activity favours the social interconnections, widening the social entourage, it creates and strengthens the friendship ties, solidarity, support and mutual aid, having a great role in keeping a good physical health and in the psychic therapy.

## 2.6. The identity community and political-propagandistic functions

The same centripetal force produced the religious group singing of European origins in the tumultuous history of humanity, having the role to identify and making common cause with the communities, but, to a larger extent, also that to differentiate and isolate them. Sometimes, people's weaknesses and basic passions have been exploited on belligerent purposes, dishonouring for mankind. But this does not bring any prejudice to the choral singing, which means communion, unity, not individualism and/or disunion.

The national anthems represent the mission to unify, many of them being composed as a march genre, which, once sang in a chorus by the majority of a country's citizens are not just an act celebrating the country in question and a renewal of the faith oath, and also the symbol of union to a national ideal. In fact, this is the exact aim of the soldierly choruses, also created in march genre. Besides the coordinator function of the movements of some human masses in forced movement (Bughici 1978, 175-176), the soldierly march strengthens the feeling of belonging to the military body (*Sus în deal la Regiment/Up in the Hill at the Regiment, Marșul vânătorilor de munte/The Mountain Hunters*), or it is inspiring, supporting the enthusiasm and courage necessary at fight (*Pui de lei/ Lion Babies* or *Treceți batalioane române Carpații/Romanian Battalions, Cross the Carpathians*). Some marches are impressive, festive, dedicated to the military or civil parades—some others are circus oriented or dedicated to official ceremonies, like the coronation one (*Zadok the Priest* by G. Fr. Haendel) or the matrimonial ceremonies. Some others, like the funeral marches, express the sadness and are developed against a calm tempo, without the glitter of the festive marches (*Imnul eroilor/The Heroes' Anthem* by Iuliu Roșca Dermidont). Some marches are real anthems of the guilds, like the well known *Jägerchor (The Hunters' Choir)* in the opera *Der Freischütz* by Carl Maria von Weber.

The mobilizing role of the choral singing was intensively used in the political-economical life in general, and in particular in the political-economical life of Romania between 1947-1989. During the years of economic and social modernisation of Romania, when a massive industrialization and urbanisation of the country took place, the head of the party in charge considered this mobilizing force beneficial. Starting with the opening of the daily programme of the national radio broadcasting and ending with the big building sites of the age (the railway narrow pass Bumbesti-Livezeni, Danube-Black Sea Canal, Transfăgărășan mountain road, civil and industrial building sites – the building sites of the hydro-electric and the thermo-electric plants, the big metallurgical, siderurgical and car building plants, etc) the patriotic choral music and the choral marches used to sound to refresh the listener's and chorister's both body and soul, to induce energy and boldness to the workers.

The Romanian choral music, a musical genre of community practice, was intensively used in The National Festival "Cântarea României", a festival whose mission was to educate the population in the vein of the political ideology of that age and increasing the unity and strength of the communities. Still, it was also an intense national connector, as the topics and the Romanian folkloric language cited or processed in the choral pieces strengthened the patriotic feeling and that of appraisal towards the values of the Romanian spirituality, perpetuating the knowledge and practice of the national folklore. The fact that the choral music was also a means of inspiring the levelling ideology was considered blamable after 1990, which made the whole choral and composition activity be neglected at institution and community level.

Still, one should admit the worth of the choral singing in strengthening the national feeling, in all the cultural-geographical and political areas where were problems of political-national nature. Romania, relatively recently rebuilt within the ethnical borders of the Romanian people (1918), feels an imperative need of the infusion of patriotic feeling and showing it, of bringing up the new members of the national community in the vein of appraising the country and the people. The phenomenon was natural and took place in the XIX<sup>th</sup> century which was for the whole central and eastern Europe the means of stating the aspirations of independence of the national communities. It is worth mentioning only the multitude of the choral associations and their bands in the Romanian historical provinces, Transylvania being on top, which – due to their activity – preserved and increased the national tumult and mobilized it to the achievement of The Great Union. In more recent ages, the same process of national recapture took place on the African continent, Festivalul Panafrican al Muzicii (Pan African Music Festival - Panafest) being the expression of the aspiration to unity and national affirmation of the countries on this continent.

The Romania after the 1990s, the emphasis of individualism at the expense of the community living, the artistic one included, created the prerequisites of the division of society, of weakening the cohesion and solidarity with noxious effects and dangerously unpredictable, at national and country level included. More than that, the tendency towards the consumerism of the preponderantly low-quality international music and towards subcultural genres like the low-quality oriented like song and the authority crisis the teachers in the Romanian school pass through – as a consequence of some aberrant form and content related decisions, by regulations more than debatable regarding the cultivation of the patriotic feelings and the teaching of musical education in schools – led to the massive omission of education in general, not only of the choral music, which provides a welcome Romanian linguistic support from educational point of view. We are facing, because of it, to a real disnationalisation of the Romanian youth, captive of the international language promoted by the IT devices (computer and mobile phone, tablet) and the consumerist musical culture the audio-video mass-media is full of. The decrease of knowing and using the mother tongue is obvious, being accompanied by the gaps in all round education, the high quality literary texts used by the national choral repertoire are missing from the horizon of knowledge of those who do not practise choral music. The acquisition of the foreign languages could have been counterbalanced by performing the national choral music, thus contributing to the knowledge and appraisal of the spiritual values of cult form of the Romanian music. In most of the cases, the student and adult choral groups are limited to religious and laic pieces, especially on the occasion of Christ' Birth and Christmas, the exceptions confirming what has already become a rule in this respect.

## **2.7. Globalization and a new vision about humanity through choral singing**

Together with the whole world, the choral movement stepped into the era of globalisation in the XX<sup>th</sup> century, after the Second World War. Due to a new community concept, based on the generous ideas of communication and understanding, the cultural life has known larger and larger areas of performing the choral activity, in which the people on the whole globe to feel as being part from a big community, capable of empathy and mutual aid, of joy in all its aspects, by singing together included. Thus, in Europe The *European Federation of the Youth Choruses* (EFYC) was founded in Geneva, on 15th May 1960 (*Europa Cantat EFYC* 2015), which led the organisation of the first European choral reunion, in 1961, called *Europa Cantat*, a name taken over by EFYC itself since 1995, a musical network „in contact with more than 2,5 individuals in over 50 countries” (*European Choral Association Europa Cantat*, 2015). The model was followed by the choral associations of other continents: *America Cantat*, *Asia Cantat*, *Africa Cantat*. As far



as the level of the impact specific to the European choral phenomenon is concerned, it is worth mentioning that over 1 million choirists and choir conductors active members of the choral European movement and indirect 20 million (European Choral Association *Europa Cantat. La European Choral Association - Europa Cantat c'est...* 2014). The associations promote the artistic meetings as festivals and international choral reunions, which allow the planning of workshops and concertos. In 1994 *The European Chorus of Children* was founded, also under the patronage of EFYC, in which the choirists are under 26. Now, all over the world there are a large number of children's choir (*List of Children's Choirs*. 2014).

As a supracontinental organism, *The International Federation for Choral Music – IFCM*, 1982 (*IFCM* 2016) appeared, which gathers together the continental choral federations: *The American Choral Directors Association (ACDA)* (*American Choral Directors Association* 2016), *A Coeur Joie International* (France) (*A Coeur Joie* 2016), *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Chorverbände* (Europa) (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Chorverbände* 2016), *Asociación Interamericana de Directores de Coros* (Latin America) (*Asociación Interamericana de Directores de Coro* 2016), *Europa Cantat* (after 1960) – *Federation Européenne des Jeunes Chorales* (Europe), *Japan Choral Association* (Japan) (*A brief history of Japan Choral Association* 2016), *Nordisk Korforu* (Scandinavia) (*International Federation for Choral Music* 2016). Its activity consists in organising symposiums – focused on music and the choral activity – choral festivals, mastery courses, pedagogical seminars, managerial assistance and working committees on various aspects of the choral activity, issuing *The International Choral Bulletin (IFCM)* (*The IFCM International Choral Bulletin* 2015), the publication of the choral scores gathered in the volumes *Cantemus* and *Songbridge*, etc. The activity of *World Youth Choir* is also supervised by it (*World Youth Choir* 2015).

Since 1990 the choral music has been paid homage by setting a world day, celebrated in December, „an international choral event to extol the values of solidarity, peace and understanding” (*World Choral Day* 2015).

The development of the information technology (IT) has allowed the design of some major projects both in terms of concept and design as regarding the choral activity. One of them, really huge due to the globalising, cross-border is called *The Virtual Choir* (fig. 6), designed by the composer and conductor Eric Whitacre (Whitacre, 2014). With the help of this technology, the musician gathers together in big choral ensembles people all over the world who perform his music.

On one of these occasions, 185 choirists of 12 countries of the world gathered together in singing – via IT – which had been a unique human experience until the present technical and technological achievement. Expressing the feelings he felt during such a world choral singing, the composer stated: ”To me, singing together

and making music together is a fundamental human experience and I like the fact that technology can bring together people from all over the world, who are able to join this otherworldly experience” (Whitacre, 2014).

### 3. Conclusions

In the end, we should still remark that the group, choral singing itself is not enough without the development of mentality and conscious of some humanistic rules according to the present capacity of imagining and doing evil, under all its forms. ”If we remembered only as much singing, especially the choral singing has helped, especially at getting hearts together”, as Constantin Brăiloiu (Brăiloiu 1998, 250) said in 1935, the day before the second World War. Nevertheless, as it could be observed, the choral singing was not enough to prevent this big calamity, a disaster of the human conscience. The design of a new Mankind and of a New Earth means much more group, choral singing and endless, heartedly singing in general.

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