

Physicians Singers of Zagreb – *Medici Cantores Zagrabenses*

In 1968, Dr Viktor Boić, specialist in internal medicine and hematology and the Head of the Department for Internal Diseases at the *Holy Ghost* Hospital in Zagreb, and a few other members of the Croatian Medical Association established a male choir. Coming from a distinguished Croatian family of musicians, and a noted cellist himself, he had long cherished the ambition to bring together the physicians who “liked singing and could sing well”. Great support in the realization of this project he found in Dr Josip Zergollern, who was at that time the Head of the Orthopedic Department at the *Holy Ghost* Hospital. In 1970, the two of them asked a famous cellist, music pedagogue and composer, Rudolf Matz, who was a professor at the Zagreb Academy of Music, to help them find the conductor for the Choir. After a few days, professor Matz called them back and said that he was willing to conduct the Choir himself in order to “set them on their feet”.

Soon afterwards, professor Matz wrote his first composition for the Choir – *Carmen Medicorum*. He dedicated it to Dr Viktor Boić, “a zealous promoter of music among his fellow doctors”. This led to the foundation of the Croatian Medical Music Society in May 1971. The first president of both the Music Society and the Choir, called Physicians Singers of Zagreb, was Dr Josip Zergollern. A trained singer himself – soloist with very pleasant bass – he contributed immensely to the quality of the Choir. One of the principles of the Music Section was that the activity of the Choir had to remain exclusively on an amateur basis. The Choir's repertoire included pieces of classical polyphony, pieces composed by physicians, folk songs arranged for a male choir, and pieces from the world cultural heritage.

The Physicians Singers of Zagreb had their first public appearance in June 1971. The composition *Carmen Medicorum* was accepted as the physician anthem at the Congress of Physicians, which took place in October of the same year. In 1992, it was accepted as the official anthem of Zagreb Medical School (1).

Due to his poor health and old age, professor Matz resigned from his post as the conductor of the choir in 1974. He recommended his young col-

league Dr Mijo Bergovec, cardiologist and professor of internal medicine, to become his successor. Dr Bergovec accepted the honor and has led the Choir ever since.

In 1984, after his health deteriorated, Dr Zergollern withdrew from the presidential post and was succeeded by Dr Milan Ferković, Head of the Neurologic Department at the *Holy Ghost* hospital in Zagreb. Dr Ferković has remained the president of the Music Society to this very day.

During the years, the Physicians Singers of Zagreb have held more than 300 concerts under the leadership of Dr Bergovec. The Choir has given numerous concerts in the country and abroad (Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Slovenia, Germany, Hungary). Last year, the Choir had two concerts abroad, one in Geneva in May, and one in Budapest in December. A pianist and organist, Hvalimira Bledšnajder always accompanies the Choir. Some eminent Croatian opera singers and musicians have been star guests of the Choir. On several occasions, the Choir performed together with different orchestras, such as the Orchestra of Croatian Music Institute, Hamburg Doctors' Symphony Orchestra, Zagreb, Radio-television Tambura Orchestra and Berliner Ärzte Orchester.

The Choir released a double CD in 1998. The first CD, *Čujem poziv Višnjega (I Hear the Voice of the Almighty)*, contains spiritual compositions, and the second CD, *U svečani taj čas (At this Festive Moment)*, contains folk songs, pieces composed by physicians composers, and other Croatian popular songs.

At the end of this brief history, it will not be presumptuous to say that the Physicians Singers of Zagreb have added a new, noble and precious quality to the Croatian Medical Association, and have made their modest contribution to the cultural life of Zagreb and Croatia.

Milan Ferković and Mijo Bergovec

1. Bošnjak D. *Facultas Medica Zagrebiensis Annos LXXV A.D. MCMXCII*. *Croat Med J* 1993;34:95.