

Leipzig, 9 May 2024

You have to hear it for yourself!
Great young a cappella groups with promising futures
also performed on day two of the Contest.

No sooner had the **a cappella** sounds of the previous evening faded than the festival community gathered once again in the packed Mendelssohn Auditorium of the Gewandhaus: the second day of the 14th **a cappella** Contest was upon us. This presented another opportunity to discover new vocal ensemble talents, this time almost entirely unamplified and, coincidentally, featuring groups solely from Germany.

calens vocalensemble stuttgart, only established in spring 2022, already boast significant choral experience, which was immediately apparent. The voices of the four male and four female singers are direct, their harmonic cohesion and counterpoint are excellent, and the octet's stage presence is highly professional. Their ensemble sound was particularly remarkable, from richly rolling bass to soaring soprano. The way the two echoing quartets matched in the double chorus of Heinrich Schütz's 'Jauchzet dem Herren, alle Welt' was extraordinary, as was the fact that they rarely stood in the traditional SATB lineup, enabling them to achieve a panoramic vocal mix. The expressive, broad chords of the complex, modern composition 'Long Long Ago' and their own arrangement of 'Oh Shenandoah' were enormously impressive. The audience's enthusiastic applause was a fitting conclusion to a stellar performance. A great start to the day.

With the six-piece female ensemble **Luminosa**, what was immediately obvious was not just that they performed in elegant black with a touch of glitter, much like calens before them, but also the joy and dedication with which they sang. They clearly relish making music together, and the challenging nature of their programme comprising four modern sacred pieces belied the singers' apparently playful nature. The compositions demanded – and received – a lot of shimmering, resounding high soprano notes, and Luminosa also made a lasting impression that received enthusiastic applause.

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The only (!) all-male ensemble in this year's competition, **Mehr als 4** from Halle, unfortunately had to cancel due to illness.

This left four ensembles to perform on the second day, too, which proved sufficient. **Vox Mandala** from Lübeck, normally comprising twelve female singers but competing in Leipzig in an eight-voice lineup, took to the stage next. Their outfits in shades of red, pink and purple matched their colourful programme that ranged from the lively rhythmic 'The Scotsman' to the poignant original composition 'Do as ik sung min eerste Leed' and the empowering 'What Happens When a Woman?' to a song in the traditional Bulgarian vocal music style (!).

Everything was performed very convincingly and with just the right amount of pop appeal. Their performance of 'Irgendwo auf der Welt' was also carried by a beautiful sound and spirit. All in all, they showed great presentation. Only one question remains: was the minimal microphone amplification in the first three songs really necessary?

Finally, the quartet **Vocalights** from Hamburg, dressed in shades of green and blue, presented another colourful a cappella palette that spanned from early music (Victoria) and Romanticism (Schumann) to folk songs ('Dat du min Leevsten büst'), early pop ('Mr Sandman') and modern jazz ('Postcards'). They even adapted the Wise Guys' song 'Sommer' for four female voices instead of the original five male singers. Occasional understandable nervousness and a few tonal uncertainties were evident, but pieces like 'Mr Sandman' and Schumann's 'Wassermann' showcased the potential of these four young singers and music teachers, underlining the necessity for them to continue.

We now look forward not only to the verdicts of the jury and audience but also to the upcoming **a cappella** Masterclass and the subsequent **a cappella** Showcase on Friday, particularly in light of the surprises and impressive developments witnessed during the Contest. This is precisely what the **a cappella** Contest is all about! Respect to all the ensembles that took part!

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Review



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24th Leipzig International Festival of Vocal Music **a cappella:**
3–11 May 2024

14th Leipzig International **a cappella** Contest:
8–11 May 2024

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