

Leipzig, 08.06.2025

### **Can't Stop The A Cappella Feeling! The dazzling and one true finale of the 2025 "a cappella" festival in the closing concert**

A dreamlike festival anniversary – the 25th edition of "a cappella" Leipzig – comes to an end and reaches its climax on Saturday evening, June 7th, feeling (as so often) much faster than expected or perhaps wished for, in the traditional closing concert of the festival. Here, in the Great Hall of the Gewandhaus, the festival's hosts, **amarcord**, come together with a selection of ensembles that have made the 2025 festival a concert series brimming with warmth and harmony. The audience – a loyal, open, and anticipation-filled community – can look forward to artists from Germany, Slovenia, Georgia, England, and Finland (truly from all corners of Europe) – and to music that reaches even further. The proceedings are more rehearsed than ever, so that the concert, with skillfully paced moderation by the hosts, essential words of thanks and congratulations, and five musical contributions, comes to a crisp, organic, and truly entertaining three-hour runtime that nevertheless always allows space for listening, breathing, and letting things resonate. Anyone who has never been should experience it – there will soon be another (25?) festival editions! – and anyone who missed this year's concert can either listen to the recording on MDR Kultur on Friday or trace it here, captured in words:

The festival founders, directors, and visionaries **amarcord** want to build a bridge with their portion of the concert – a bridge across the (Atlantic) Ocean to America, which at least politically seems to be distancing itself somewhat from Europe and the rest of the world at present. Therefore, their program is conceived as an approach through musical and artistic means, in line with thoughts already expressed during the festival week that artists (perhaps now more than ever) should indeed raise their voices to make things happen. The six pieces of **amarcord**'s set all come from American composers of the 19th to 21st centuries, they share water as a common theme, and they move the nearly 2,000 listeners in the hall at least through their musically refined execution, the passion of the five singers, and likely also through their ideas. They perform a piece by George Chadwick ("Margarita"), one by Amy Beach, who is praised by **amarcord** as

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the sadly often-forgotten mother of American vocal music ("When the Last Sea is Sailed"), the yearning traditional song "Where the Old Ohio Flows," as well as the three-part cycle "Seascapes" by Steven Sametz, which particularly powerfully translates the wave movements of the sea into music. The audience is already thoroughly delighted at this point.

The second program segment is already a teaser for what will and hopefully will come to "a cappella" in the future. Specifically, the **Ingenium Ensemble** from Slovenia will be performing their own concert at the next festival in May 2026, so this evening serves as an appetizer. And a very tasty one at that. In fact, the sextet was already a prize winner at the "a cappella" competition in 2014 as runners-up and has since earned a high international reputation. Tonight's "a cappella" community can be convinced of this with several pieces from the group's Slovenian homeland, beginning with a pop song from the 1960s in which the planets dance. Besides charm and spirit, Ingenium scores with its fine balance between lead vocals and backing voices (all without microphones). Folk songs follow – one already performed in the 2014 competition, a medley with songs from different regions of the country, essentially a musical tour through Slovenia, as well as the well-known "Zrejlo je žito" in a captivating, almost mystical arrangement. Another popular Slovenian song (including beatboxing) concludes the elegantly moderated set by the Ingenium Ensemble, which delivers an excellent calling card and is rewarded with thunderous applause.

Next come the freshly crowned winners of this year's International "a cappella" Competition: the singers of **The Bookmarks** from Georgia, who average just 15 years of age. The seven-member ensemble brings songs from their repertoire to their program segment, once again showcasing all their qualities in ensemble singing (which is extraordinarily smooth even in the most difficult, angular passages) as well as in individual voices. The ever-changing, mobile formations and choreographies of the songs are new this evening and well thought out, as they make ideal use of the stage space to sing to all audience sections in turn. (At the closing concert, the "a cappella" community sits throughout the entire hall, surrounding the stage and performers, and the organ gallery has been the "heart seating area" for years.) Thus, the extremely young – and clearly extremely talented – ensemble once again extraordinarily

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connects with the audience; there is amazement, cheering, and whooping in the hall, then it's time for intermission to discuss animatedly and rehydrate those attentively listening throats.

After a warm round of thanks from the hosts to all those who, often over many years (or, in the case of their families and parents, from the very beginning), ensure that "a cappella" can be exactly what it is, the second part of the closing concert begins with pleasantly balanced microphone amplification for the Great Hall. **The Magnets** from Great Britain bring, as in their individual concert the previous evening, an energetic swing of pop hits in a cappella arrangements: songs like "Let Me Entertain You," "I Wanna Dance With Somebody," and "I Feel Good" speak for themselves in The Magnets' arrangements, and the British group also throws themselves into it with high kinetic energy, while audience participation succeeds effortlessly (the musical audience, entirely at "a cappella" level, even claps along on the 2 and 4 in the choruses without extra instruction – every musician's dream). The solo performance by beatboxer Jack "Hobbit" Hobbs practically sends the listeners into a frenzy, and the atmosphere is sky-high. And then there's still **Rajaton** to come.

The Finnish "a cappella" favorites with close connections to amarcord and the festival give their own compositions first in their program block, deservedly closing out the evening, performing them accordingly in their native language – and show once again that they simply belong to the best that the a cappella world has to offer. The mixture of their language, their musical sensibility, their naturalness, their extraordinary arrangements, and their magnificent sound refines, indeed gilds every song, regardless of which phase of their nearly 30-year career it comes from. But the Finns can also do "Swedish Folk Music" – ABBA's "Fernando" in a version with incredibly quirky, playfully executed dance choreographies – and show once more plenty of humor and vocal expertise in a Finnish children's song from the 1950s about ski-jumping rabbits and self-assured squirrels. The program ends with the Rajaton classic (number 1?), "Butterfly," in a reconciling, breathtaking, captivating, and inspiring way – and then, of course, with loud roaring.

But it's an anniversary – and so Rajaton sings "Can't Stop This Feeling" as an encore, and the audience begins to dance,

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accepting the invitation directly, gratefully, and without hesitation. At the same time, all the ensembles of the evening return to the stage – and so within moments, the entire hall, the entire festival dances together – and celebrates. Despite 25 editions of "a cappella" and almost as many closing concerts in this great and magnificent hall, this is a scene that has never happened before. But it couldn't have been more fitting. The festival, the closing concert, the moment, the a cappella cosmos – one single celebration. This and no other way (and with correspondingly unabating applause) can this anniversary edition end. And another reason to celebrate: There are only 11 months until the 26th "a cappella" edition!

25th International Festival for Vocal Music **a cappella** Leipzig:  
May 30 – June 7, 2025

15th International **a cappella** Competition Leipzig:  
June 4 – 7, 2025

26th International Festival for Vocal Music **a cappella** Leipzig:  
May 1 – 9, 2026

16th International **a cappella** Contest Leipzig:  
May 6 – 9, 2026

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