

Leipzig, 06.06.2025

Small Accents, Big Impact **Young ensembles become even more intense and better** **– in the "a cappella Masterclass" with Stephen Connolly**

It's always exciting to experience the participating ensembles of the International "a cappella" Competition in the "a cappella Masterclass": Here, after the competition singing is over, the associated tension has eased somewhat, and everyone has gotten to know each other a bit, the groups work with Stephen Connolly – a longtime member of the King's Singers and now traveling on a mission to pass on a cappella knowledge and experience – on selected pieces from their repertoire. In the process, the audience can get to know the ensembles and their respective voices and personalities even more closely, follow very precisely the process of a "rehearsal" in the best sense and the work of refining one's own technique, presentation, and intentions, and is sometimes actively involved in the feedback process by Stephen Connolly. The ensembles themselves should, of course, also receive a great deal of input, observe, experiment, and learn from each other. The big things often come from the small – often it's initially small adjustments that need to be made, but the impact is usually significant. An experienced practitioner and coach like Stephen knows this, and he finds the right way to approach each ensemble and point out these adjustments, regardless of how much experience the ensembles have, where they come from, or how much courage might be needed here or there. His humor, his vivid language, his feel for the material, and ultimately also a fine, precise ear help immensely. Thus, he loosens up the extremely young but vocally very talented Georgian group The Bookmarks a bit and elicits even more dynamic play from their sonorous arrangements. The barbershop number by the Halle group Mehr als 4 gains the necessary sharper, lighter sound appropriate to the barbershop style during their masterclass time, and a ballad-like song by the British group The Menagerie Club gains more impact through a few clever breath and pause placements, to name just a few examples. Stephen gets the groups not only to sharpen their awareness of themselves and their craft, but above all to explore and push their own boundaries: Can't it be even more pianissimo? Can't there be a bit more "steel," meaning a more metallic sound in the chord?

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Can't there be even more dynamics, even when you think at first listen that everything is already right? In the end, it's always about increasing the impact for or on the listeners – and really the most important theme of all: building a connection with the audience. Eye contact, the appropriate audience-facing formation, stepping forward when presenting a solo part, and the almost proverbial "wedges" from Connolly's toolkit (different viewing and singing angles that each ensemble member has, so that you address the entire audience): with these you specifically engage your audience, reach them "personally" – and ultimately the talented young groups, whom you experience almost on equal footing in the masterclass, receive even more applause, cheering, and respect for their respective a cappella artistry. As has become customary, in the afternoon after the masterclass, you can experience the groups once more in the "a cappella Showcase," completely free and liberated in a joint concert – and perhaps directly hear and see here and there how they've become even better.

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

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

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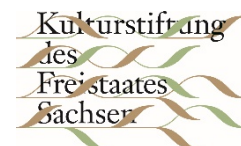
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