

Ivan Josip Skender (Varaždin, b. 1981) enrolled in composition studies at the Academy of Music in Zagreb (in 1997) in the class of Željko Brkanović as the youngest composition student in the history of the Academy. In 1999, he also enrolled in conducting studies in the class of Vjekoslav Šutej. He later attended various seminars and classes in conducting (Klaus Arp, Bertrand de Billy, Zubin Mehta, etc.) and composition (Michael Jarell, Jozsef Soproni). From 2010 to 2012 he attended a two-year postgraduate course of orchestra conducting in Vienna with Uroš Lajovic. His compositions were performed in almost all European countries, the US, Canada, and Mexico. In 2011, he composed his most extensive work, the opera *Šuma Striborova/Stribor's Forest* that had its premiere at the Croatian National Theatre *Ivan pl. Zajc* in Rijeka as part of the Music Biennale Zagreb program. The opera had many performances in its first year. He was the first composer to represent Croatia at the MusMA Festival (Music Masters on Air, 2012). As a conductor, Ivan Josip Skender collaborated with many Croatian and foreign choirs and orchestras. Palma Academic Choir of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Zagreb won four state choir competitions under his leadership as well as many other awards. He was one of the founders and the first choir conductor of the Girls' Choir in Croatia. In his conducting career he is particularly dedicated to performances and premieres of contemporary Croatian authors, and in 2012 members of the Cantus ensemble elected him their permanent conductor. Since 2006 he has been employed as the choir conductor at the Croatian National Theatre Opera in Zagreb, and in 2009 he became Uroš Lajovic's assistant at the Academy of Music in Zagreb. He had his debut at the Vienna Musikverein in 2011, and in 2012 at the Croatian National Theatre Opera in Zagreb with the opera *Love Potion* by Gaetano Donizetti. That same year he directed the premiere of the *Shoemaker from Delft* by Blagoje Bersa, for which he received the award of the Society of University Teachers in Zagreb. He was the acting director of the Croatian National Theatre Opera in Zagreb from 2013 to 2014.

Cantus Ensemble started their activity in 2001 within the Music Biennale Zagreb and later continued developing as a high quality ensemble for contemporary music, giving performances of only the best of the best in the international context and the newest of the new. It is precisely because of that that the Cantus Ensemble managed to stay ahead and act as the most active participant on the new music scene (Croatian, regional and international). At the same time, the ensemble decided to expand its repertoire to encompass the beginning of the New Sound by Stravinsky and Hindemith, just so it could make up for some lost scores to its audience. The Cantus & Lisinski concert cycle which it has hosted since the 2006/2007 concert season has quickly turned into a lively venue for music lovers. In cooperation with the Dutch Foundation Gaudeamus, Gaudeamus Musik Week Festival, and the Croatian Music Youth, the ensemble held workshops for young conductors and composers at the International Cultural Centre in Grožnjan and participated in the project *Re: New Music* and *New Music: New Audience* in collaboration with the Animated Film and New Media Section of the Academy of Arts and the Music Showroom SC. The trip to Sweden in 2006 as part of the international project *Musical Links* and "the trip around the world" that took the Ensemble to Beijing and Toronto where they successfully presented around ten scores of music of Croatian composers of the 20th and 21st centuries paved the way for further international collaborations. In 2008, it was named the official ensemble of the ISCM. In the 2009/2010 concert season, the ensemble held a successful concert at the BEMUS Festival in Belgrade and for the first time held performances in the United Kingdom at the Sounds New Festival in Canterbury. The season 2010/2011 saw them performing at

the concert cycles of the Dôme des Invalides in Paris and at the Tonhalle in Düsseldorf, the Ensemblia Festival in Mönchengladbach, and as a guest ensemble of the Paul Klee Centre in Bern. In 2012, the Cantus Ensemble performed at one of the largest music festivals in the world – the NCPA May Music Festival. For their concert at the 58th Split Summer Festival, the Cantus Ensemble received the Slobodna Dalmacija's *Judita* award. After appearing at the Culturescapes Festival in Switzerland, and giving performances at the Days of Kogoj Festival in Slovenia, in 2014 the ensemble made a guest performance in Canada where it held concerts in Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Kitchener presenting the music by fourteen Croatian composers.