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## Fall 2009, UNH Choirs shine in prestigious european competition

Center for International Education

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# International Educator

[current issue](#)
[archive](#)
[Search](#)

Center for International Education

Fall 2009

## UNH choirs shine in prestigious European competition

*Professor William Kempster traveled to the Czech Republic with members of the UNH Concert Choir and UNH Chamber Singers to participate in a prestigious European competition.*



*Kempster with UNH Chamber Singers in the Czech Republic.*

Along with Antonín Dvořák, Bohuslav Martinů is the most revered composer in his native land, now known as the Czech Republic. Little wonder, therefore, that a competition bearing the composer's name draws the best choirs in the country, as well as from abroad, to the town of Pardubice for the International Bohuslav Martinů Festival and Choir Competition. This year in June, at the sixth such staging of the competition, choirs from Finland, Serbia, Hungary, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Israel, Estonia, Belgium, Slovenia and the USA joined with numerous Czech choirs not only to compete against each other, but also to celebrate singing as a transcendent art form bringing people from all cultures together.

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[Additional Articles](#)

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On this occasion, the sole representative from the United States was the University of New Hampshire. The UNH Concert Choir, a group of 24 singers, and the 10-member UNH Chamber Singers each competed in two categories. All 33 15-minute performances given by the individual choirs at the competition were judged by a jury of seven of the most pre-eminent figures in choral music in Europe, and choirs were awarded either a Gold, Silver or Bronze "zone" for each complete performance, based on an overall averaged mark out of 30. Both UNH groups received one Gold and one Silver in their two respective categories.

In addition, we were awarded a Special Jury Prize for the best interpretation of a Czech work by a foreign choir for our performance of Dvořák's *Napadly písň v duši mo*. It is a tremendous honor to have this kind of recognition for our interpretation of a piece which – as we have learned this week – is so well-known here, and so very near and dear to Czech choristers.

The Concert Choir also placed first in Category G, making them eligible to compete for the *Grand-Prix* at the competition. Although there were seven categories at the competition, the Gold "zone" was not awarded in all of these, so just four choirs were asked to "sing-off" for the *Grand-Prix* prize of CZK50,000. Besides the UNH Concert Choir, those competing included two choirs from the Czech Republic and one from Serbia.

The winning choir was the renowned JITRO girls choir from Hradec Králové, Czech Republic, a group that has established itself as one of the world's great choral institutions over the past 20 years. Their performances at Pardubice were an inspiration to all, and were particularly appreciated by the members of the UNH group, who saw every one of their performances at the festival, as well as those of the younger – but also outstanding – 'feeder' group JIŘÍČKO.

After the competition was completed, all four of these choirs were invited to perform at a special concert in Polička, where Martinů made his home, and where his body is buried. Due to travel complications and the need for two of the choirs to get home, only JITRO and the UNH Concert Choir were able to perform at this prestigious concert, which was attended by a large audience, and presided over by the current mayor of Polička, a direct descendent of Martinů himself. To be on the same program as JITRO was perhaps the highlight of the trip for many of the UNH group.

The UNH groups also participated in a concert performance in Pardubice, and presented a full program at the renowned Cathedral of St. Barbara in Kutná Hora, near Prague, on their way back to that city after the completion of the festival and competition.

The tour was not all work for us. When not rehearsing we enjoyed the sights, sounds, smells and tastes, not only of Pardubice, a regional capital, but also of Prague itself, one of the great cities of the world. Overall, both musically and culturally, this was a trip of a lifetime for these students, and they represented themselves, their country and their university, not only with great distinction – as the competition results confirm – but also with pride, decorum and honor. Many friends were made and relationships for the future forged!



*Prof. William Kempster, right, and sophomore student David Jacobsen in the old town square at Pardubice, Czech Republic.*