

Inspired by Wendish Composer, KorlaAwgustKocor

by Shelley A Spencer

I write this article while listening to the Oratorios of Wendish composer, KorlaAwgustKocor (1822-1904).

His deeply impassioned music with its expressive lyrical melodies inspires me greatly as a composer, so much so, that I composed a sacred work for brass band called "A Wendish Prayer" and submitted it to an international composing competition and won 3rd prize.

My work was a reflection on the prayer said by the Wends before they left Germany for Australia: "God grant that we, protected from all danger, reach the shores of our hope."

My composition was premiered in Brisbane in 2019 under famous Scottish band conductor, Russell Gray. (I was also awarded 2nd prize for my technical test-piece for band "Saul"; 1st prize went to a music professor in Melbourne.)

In January, the Sorb newspaper *SerbskeNowiny* published a feature story on my compositions and interest in Sorb music. The article relates the story of my first composition, a tone-poem for brass band called "Diaspora", which depicts, in music, the Wendish emigration to Australia and the Barossa Valley, written after my composing professor, Dr Anthony Ritchie, (New Zealand's most prolific classical composer) suggested I look to my Wendish heritage to find my compositional voice.

As I researched Wendish music, I discovered Kocor, who formed a collaboration with poet HandrijZejler (1804-1872), and set many of his poems to music. Together, they endeavoured to promote Sorb culture through music and poetry, particularly around the time of the great Revolution in 1848 (after which many of our ancestors came to Australia).



Handrij Zejler

Zejler wrote the words to the Sorb National Anthem, "Beautiful Lusatia", and Kocor set it to music, choosing, very unusually, a minor key, creating a very slow, melancholic and impassioned anthem. The Anthem was then first performed at the first Sorb singing festival in 1845 in Bautzen, a tradition started by Kocor himself to promote the Sorb culture.



KorlaAwgustKocor

Kocor then composed the first of his Oratorios, "The Sorb Wedding (SorbischeHochzeit)" in 1847, and then followed a cycle of Oratorios on the seasons, based on 4 of Zejler's epic poems. "Spring" is probably the most beloved Oratorio, even today, with many lyrical, passionate melodies, my favourite being "Sweet Youth" (Slódkamlódosć).

Kocor also composed many lively folksongs from the poems of Zejler, including my favourite, "W jadnejRuceHanku".

I'm aware of the sacrifice our Wendish ancestors made to start a new life in Australia, and the words of their Anthem remind me not to squander the opportunities afforded me:

"Oh, may from thy womb appear,
People that the world holds dear,
Worthy of eternal memory!"

[Editor: Shelley is a member of our Wend/Sorb Society of SA. Congratulations go to her for her successful composition.

A CD of the Spring oratorio by Kocor is available (see page 4).

Other CDs of Kocor music are available from the Domowina(www.domowina-verlag.de).]