

PontAnima ≈ Soul Bridge



Over the fifteen years of its existence, **Pontanima Interreligious Choir** has emerged as one of the most important actors in the field of inter-religious peacemaking in BiH, linking exceptional artistry with a powerful vision of a future where religions act as points of contact and not division; where diversity is cultivated as a source of healing, hope and celebration. In April 1998 the choir received **Peace Award** from Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, in March 2004, a **Common Ground Award** from Search for

Common Ground. Two years later, the **City of Sarajevo** honored the choir for its contribution to the arts, building a culture of peace and promoting the cultural heritage of BiH, in April 2011 the choir will receive Pax Christi Award for 2011. In June 2006, Pontanima celebrated 10th anniversary of its work, and in June 2011 Pontanima will celebrate 15th anniversary.

The simple but revolutionary ideal lived out by the choir is that members of all cultural and religious groups can come together, despite histories of conflict, and share in one another's most beautiful traditions. For the singers and the audiences that experience its compelling witness, Pontanima **heals wounds and builds relationships** through life-giving music. It **challenges listeners** from the region and around the world to examine their own deepest sources of identity and to recognize the common ground they share with others.

Pontanima's music is a **celebration of the beautiful artistic diversity** that has resulted through the differing spiritual influences in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Although many are only aware of the recent wars that manipulated religious identity as a tool to fuel conflict, the region has a centuries-old tradition of religious co-existence and cooperation, as Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Muslims and Jews have contributed to the fabric of BiH. In the face of widespread hopelessness and even shame about BiH identity, the importance of Pontanima's work cannot be overstressed: it fosters **pride in a unique Bosnian identity** that is based on the richness of diversity.



Pontanima has faced many challenges. In the beginning, some of the choir members found it horrifying to sing the songs of their enemies. Singers were criticized by friends who thought they were betraying their own people or religion. Some religious leaders continue to oppose what they see as syncretism. Nevertheless, the group has grown and flourished beyond expectation. Now it is increasingly recognized as a **innovative peacemaking project**, a shining **ambassador of BiH** and a **major contributor to the cultural life** of Sarajevo and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Pontanima has **performed more than 350 times** throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina and while touring in Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, Italy, Austria, Germany, France and the United States. The choir is often called upon to sing at important events but also pursues its own priorities, singing for interreligious gatherings and cooperating with artists and groups that share its goals all over the region. With the frequency of performances and the diversity of its singers, Pontanima is a powerful witness and reminder of hope that springs from the

PontAníma ≈ Soul Bridge

core of Abrahamic spirituality. Pontanima made 5 CDs; 2 documentaries have been made about it; all major world TV stations and radios existing in the world have aired programs about PONTANIMA. Pontanima also invites and stimulates composers to write and arrange a spiritual music from different religions. Some 20 compositions were written for Pontanima and performed by Pontanima. Most famous composition is Missa Bosniensis of Andrija Pavlič performed 2009 by Pontanima and Philharmonics from Sarajevo.