

The ADVENTURES IN EASTERN (communistic) Europe

When Continental Sound was founded in 1969/1970 you find in the foundation-statute mentioned: the working area would be **all of Europe!** Quite a vision!

In the years 1969, 1970 and 1971 the organization was set up from scratch for the Netherlands. In 1972 and 1973 for Western-Europe. In 1974 the first Continental Singers groups went to Eastern Europe: Poland. Churches and cathedrals turned out to be too small. A cathedral having 3.000 seats got 10.000 visitors. Thank God that on both sides of the stage were doors so that people could escape the pressure. In 1975 again Continentals and New Hope went to Poland. The next country where we could get a stronghold was Hungary. Continentals and Discipel visited many times Hungary. A Continental director (Julia Winterberg) got a special vision for Hungary. With our support and of the USA office she relocated to Hungary in 1986 (as a 'student'). The development of a Hungarian Continental group was very difficult thanks to the communistic state, but the Hungarian-male-macho attitude was equal difficult.... Julia was a woman.... Leen was appr. 4 X a year in Hungary to keep everything on track and confirm to the 'men', that Julia was okay, and we all stood with her in all agreements. The first Hungarian group started. The Hungarian secret service started to the hunt by order of the ministry of church affairs. This dangerous choir should be stopped immediately. This became known to Julia and Leen, within 24 hours the choir switched from a catholic church (where they had practice) to a reformed church and changed the name to a traditional church name: Jubilate. The pastor of this church was called, did he know the Continentals? 'No, he had only his church choir Jubilate....' Mat God still bless the wisdom and courage of this pastor. The Hungarian group needed equipment. So how to get it there? So Continental Sound created for one weekend a popgroup, doing one concert in Vienna. And being in Vienna, why not dropping a visit to Budapest? And so they went to the border. On board 2 sound-sets and 2 light-sets. But only 1 carnet. And that was a legal list with all the boxes (only of 1 set). At the border the bins had to be opened, yes... many boxes... the group gave the border inspectors some coca-cola, they got all the stamps on the papers. And could drive to Budapest. Here a local Continental got on the bus, brought the bus to a secret address, 1 sound and lightset were unloaded, they did a short sightseeing tour through Budapest in the bus went on, got the needed return stamps on the papers and drove back to Holland. Yeah, you had to be very inventive in those years. The USA office and Continental Sound paid together equipment and logistics of this operation.

Poland and Hungary were not so difficult to enter and to do concert-ministry. But for visiting USA Continentals the border got closed in 1989: All those thousands of visitors in 1988, it got too much to the surface. In the meantime the Hungarian group became a success. First in 1992 western Continental groups visited again Hungary.

Difficult nations were the DDR and Tsjecho-Slovakia. We irritated those governments when we passing by such a nation, we would stop at a church and do a 'short musical greeting'. (This was in secret prepared...). The musical greeting lasted till the church or pastor would get a phone call from the police of secret service, what was happening. The pastor apologised for the tourist... the groups went on the bus and disappeared. Those preparation were quite complex. You could not write about anything. You could not call. So only by personal visit things could be prepared. Leen had a cover up as travel agent. And through such visits we got some friends and with each friend we developed a secret language (talking about our families) on the phone. But we all had to remain very careful. But Leen got too many stamps in his passport so at borders it could finally lead to undressing, stripping of a car and such.

Sometimes a concert could be done in East-Berlin. The bus would drive to checkpoint Charley, on a day pass you could walk into East Berlin. Somebody would pick up the Continentals and walked together to a church where everything was prepared. All went well till one Continental wanted to bring his trumpet (Part of the instruction was: leave every instrument in the bus). So this possibility got closed. Next year we planned a special concert in south west DDR. A Choir from Tsjecho-Slovakia would be 'by accident' visiting that city and that church and doing a kind of rehearsal/musical greeting. The government knew about this choir coming from their communistic brother nation. The Continentals got booked as a travel-tourist group to a camping nearby. Hours too early the Continentals arrived at the DDR border, 'unfortunately' (we had plotted for this) the official guide was not there, but the border-guards gave permission to drive to the camping to set up tents. The guide would be send to that camping to organise the excursion. The youth group of the church put up tents, but the Continentals went straight to the church in the city, where the Tsjech youth choir just had started practise. Of course they welcomed the honour sharing a stage in musical brotherhood for peace. The Continentals did their section and left in half an hour, went on their bus and left the city to another border to West-Germany. When the secret police arrived in the church they could enjoy a full church with the Tsjech choir. Yes, there had been musical tourists, yes they could do a song or two, but this was their Tsjech concert with full legal permission, look here are the papers.... Hopefully the guide was not punished.

This continental groups had no books, LP's, Cassettes, instruments or equipment with them. Before entering the DDR everything had been loaded on a truck. After entering West-Germany again, the truck was there waiting.

During those years Leen La Rivière had been able to develop excellent contacts with the leaders of some churches-bodies. After several official rounds of negotiations with those states with the help of these church

leaders, OFFICIAL permit was given to do concert tours in the DDR and Tsjecho-Slovakia as only western Christian youth choir. Still a miracle. Before going such a group would get special instruction how to behave, what to say or not to say. The secret police would have somebody at each concert reporting. Afterwards the church leadership had to go to the ministry of church affairs... That was sometimes hard. God bless the courage and wisdom of those church leaders.

Romania was difficult. American Continentals have been there 2 times under Ceausescu dictatorship as one USA Senator and the Ambassador were great helps. But the effects on local churches became too much. Some pastors were threatened with death if they would allow the Continentals sing, and it may have caused the death of one pastor (if we put all data about his 'accident' together). To check on all of this Leen La Rivière and Julia Winterberg went by Hungarian car in early 1989 to Oradea, Romania. It became a very spooky travel. Our car was accompanied by the Securitate. Before and back the house of our contact person there were even 3 Securitate-cars with special mikes. The telephone was locked up in a closed as it was used as spy-mike, the radio was put on very loud... so we communicated. Decided was to stop sending Continentals as it had become too dangerous for locals and waiting for better times... What a joy now to have a Romanian Continental office, putting 8 groups a year out on the road...

In former Yugoslavia there have been concerts of Continentals and Discipel.

Why going to all those nations?

The effect of the visits of Continentals, New Hope, Discipel in the DDR, Poland, Hungary, Tsjecho-Slovakia was enormous. It stimulated acceptance of new forms, youth work, new ways of expression and local youth choirs started in churches as spin-offs. Where possible Leen left in those nations at musical leaders new songbooks, LP's (never cassettes, they were seen as very illegal).

Continentals visited 2 X Russia, one time over land from Finland to St Petersburg, one time to Moscow. The bad infrastructure made it impossible to come back with such a big group.

After the political changes in 1989-1990 it became Continental Sounds strategy to set up Continentals groups and offices in several nations in the East. And this has been successful in Slovakia, Hungary and Romania. Such a set up and start would take 4 years of preparations and development and special training. As result even CD's in Slovak, Hungarian and Romanian have been published.

Albania was visited 4 X, till civil war broke out, so we stopped touring there. The same happened by the wars in Yugoslavia. But soon Slovenia, Croatia and 2 X Macedonia were visited.

Regular visits have been since 1992 to the Baltic states and Kaliningrad. Since a few years Slovak, Hungarian, Romanian Continentals minister in Ukraine, Moldavia, Serbia.

Leen La Rivière helped as well to finance and the set up of the first Christian record company: Preludium, Budapest; and Rosa, Tsjech Rep.

Other help was given via the Christian Artists Seminar. We succeeded in getting each year (since 1984) delegations to the annual Seminar out of DDR, Poland, Hungary, Tsjecho-slovakia. We are still so thankful for the incredible help of the churchbodies of the Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran churches. Don't think too easy about these strategies, as the right persons had to be selected. Official invitations send, documents for the Dutch embassy, the ministry of foreign affairs, etc. Finally we had to pay the travel costs to/from the CA Seminar, their stay, study materials, legal costs and the preparation costs, per person that was ca. f.2500 Gulden (Euro 1100). Per Seminar we had app.40 persons. Was it worth the difficulties and the costs? Absolutely! It stimulated so much new approaches and ministries in the churches in Eastern Europe especially for the youth.

From 1974 the activities of Continental Sound/Christian Artists have been stimulating for activities of the civil society, arts groups, democratization, youth choirs, youth ministries, etc CA/CS have done great sacrifices in human resources, manpower, materials, knowledge, etc

It sounds so 'easy', doing a concert in Eastern Europe, but nobody there will pay the costs of the busses, costs of sound and light, meals, preparation, average is Euro 680 per day.

Culmination: In the period 1974 – 1981 all Eastern European activities cost *per year* 22.700,- Euro . Period 1981-1993 it was 68.000 Euro *per year*. 1994 – 2000 it has been 45.000 Euro *per year*. Due to the existence of Continental offices in several nations who can carry now most of the costs, since 1995 – 2005 it has been app. 30.000 Euro a year. Since 2006 the costs for activities in Eastern Europe are app. 25.000 a year. (costs of translations, production costs, lectures, publications, visits, materials, etc)

This has been possible thanks to the support of many, thanks to offerings on concerts, thanks to donations. Every body: thanks!