



The Romanian Radio Children's Choir at the 2025 EJCF Festival edition in Basel

Report of Cristina Mihăilă, member of the choir

Introduction

In May 2025, the Romanian Radio Children's Choir had the unique opportunity to participate in the **European Festival of Youth Choirs (EJCF)** in Basel, Switzerland. Known as one of the most prestigious choral festivals in Europe, EJCF 2025 brought together young singers from across the globe, creating a space where music became a universal language transcending borders, cultures, and even spoken words.

This report reflects on the experiences of the Romanian Radio Children's Choir during the festival. From breathtaking concerts to transformative exchanges with choirs from distant countries, the journey was defined not only by music but also by connection, joy, and shared humanity.

1. The Arrival in Basel and First Impressions

Basel, with its charming blend of history and modernity, set the stage for what would be a life-changing week. The city welcomed choirs from all over Europe, and beyond—each choir carrying with them their traditions, their languages, and their own particular sound. For the Romanian Radio Children's Choir, stepping into this international environment was both humbling and exhilarating. The atmosphere was charged with excitement. From the very beginning, it was clear that EJCF was not just about singing concerts—it was about **meeting people, exchanging cultures, and forming bonds** through music. The choir quickly realized that the festival was going to be more than a performance; it was going to be a shared adventure.

2. The Opening Night – A Different Dimension

The opening concert of EJCF 2025 was, quite simply, unforgettable. Conducted by **Masis Gözbek**, a visionary musician from Turkey known for his innovative approaches to choral performance, the evening pushed the boundaries of what a festival concert could be.

From the moment the first note was sung, there was a palpable sense of magic in the air. Masis Gözbek transformed the event into an immersive experience where the audience was not merely watching but participating in a collective musical moment. Light, sound, and silence intertwined with the voices of the young choirs, creating something almost spiritual.

One of the most breathtaking highlights came when the combined choirs sang “Dona nobis pacem.” The lights of the concert hall were switched off, and the singers lifted small flashes into the darkness. The result was like standing under a sky full of stars, with music illuminating the night from within. The choreography, simple yet deeply symbolic, turned the performance into something cosmic—voices rising like constellations, carrying a universal prayer for peace. For many choristers, this was not only a musical highlight but also an emotional one, a moment of unity they will never forget.

For many in the Romanian Radio Children's Choir, this opening concert became a defining memory. It wasn't just about the technical excellence of the music—it was about feeling part of something larger, something transcendent. The phrase “from another dimension” was used by more than one chorister when describing it.

3. Living with Host Families – A Home Away from Home

One of the most remarkable aspects of the EJCF experience was staying with **host families in Basel**. For many choristers, this was the first time they lived outside their own families, in a completely new environment, surrounded by another culture and lifestyle.

What initially felt unfamiliar quickly became heartwarming. The Swiss families welcomed the Romanian singers with warmth and generosity, opening not just their homes but also their hearts. Meals shared at family tables, conversations about everyday life, and the experience of being part of someone else's routine provided insights that no rehearsal or concert could teach.

The choir members learned what it means to adapt, to respect different habits, and to build bonds beyond cultural differences. Some formed deep attachments, not wanting to leave at the end of the festival. For the Romanian Radio Children's Choir, the host family experience was more than accommodation—it was a true cultural exchange and an invaluable lesson in openness, kindness, and connection.

4. Our Guides – Markus and Hanspeter

No account of the EJCF experience would be complete without mentioning **Markus and Hanspeter**, the two guides who accompanied the Romanian Radio Children's Choir throughout the festival. They were more than organizers or helpers—they became friends, mentors, and part of the family.

With patience, humor, and genuine warmth, Markus and Hanspeter guided the choir through Basel's busy streets, its concert halls, and its social gatherings. They were always present—making sure everything went smoothly, but also ensuring that the Romanian singers felt at home in a new city.

One of the most cherished memories was the cooking moment when they taught some members of the choir how to make **Spätzli**, a traditional Swiss dish. This simple gesture went beyond food—it was about sharing culture in the most authentic and personal way.

On the final day, parting from Markus and Hanspeter was deeply emotional. Many choristers cried, realizing how strong the bond had become in such a short time. Even after leaving Basel, the connection has remained alive through messages and memories. For the Romanian Radio Children's Choir, Markus and Hanspeter were not just guides—they were the heartbeat of our Basel adventure.

5. Meeting the Choir from Cameroon – Full of Life and Energy

One of the most impactful encounters at the festival came through the special guests from **Cameroon**. Their presence was electrifying—full of rhythm, movement, and joy. Where some choirs approached music with precision and restraint, the Cameroonian singers embodied music as life itself.

The Romanian choristers were immediately drawn to their energy. Every rehearsal, every shared meal, and every party became an opportunity to learn—not just musically, but culturally and emotionally. The Cameroonians had a way of making everyone feel welcome, and they reminded all the participants that music at its core is about expression, community, and joy.

6. Meeting Choirs from Around the World – A Tapestry of Traditions

While the Cameroonian choir left an unforgettable mark with their energy, the festival was also a unique chance to meet and learn from **many other choirs** from across Europe and beyond. Each ensemble brought something distinct: a particular way of shaping sound, a style of performance, or a glimpse into their country's cultural identity.

For the Romanian Radio Children's Choir, it was fascinating to hear **so many different repertoires**—from folk-inspired pieces rooted in local traditions, to avant-garde contemporary works, to classic masterpieces performed with extraordinary refinement. Every concert was like opening a new window to the world. Beyond the music itself, these encounters were opportunities to discover new customs, exchange stories, and experience firsthand the diversity that makes the global choral community so inspiring.

Listening to these choirs and singing alongside them was both humbling and motivating. It showed the Romanian choristers how vast and creative the choral world is, and how much there is to learn from others. Each choir became a teacher in its own way, offering lessons not only in music, but also in openness, respect, and cultural curiosity.

7. The Hymn of the Festival – “Biso Ya”

If there was one song that captured the essence of EJCF 2025, it was **“Biso Ya”**. Originally shared by the Cameroonian choir, this song quickly transcended its origins to become the **unofficial anthem of the festival**. The beauty of “Biso Ya” was not only in its melody or rhythm, but in the way it brought people together. Singers from different countries, speaking different languages, found themselves singing this song as a way of communicating beyond words. English might have been the official bridge language of the festival, but “Biso Ya” was the true connector.

Whether it was during rehearsals, on the tram rides across Basel, at spontaneous gatherings in the dormitories, or at the official social nights, “Biso Ya” would erupt like a spark, bringing everyone into the same heartbeat. For the Romanian Radio Children's Choir, it was a revelation: that one song could unify so many voices and souls.

Alongside “Biso Ya,” another festival favorite was **“Music is Everywhere.”** Together, these two songs became the soundtrack of EJCF 2025, embodying the spirit of joy and togetherness that defined the week.

8. The Exchange with KKB – A Lesson Beyond Music

Another highlight of the festival was the **exchange program with the Knabenkantorei Basel (KKB)**. This collaboration proved to be a profound learning experience.

Working side by side with KKB exposed the Romanian Radio Children's Choir to new ways of rehearsing, interpreting music, and even thinking about choral sound. The exchange was not only about perfecting harmonies but also about **understanding perspectives**. The Swiss singers brought precision, discipline, and a refined approach, while the Romanians contributed warmth, expressivity, and openness.

The exchange showed that music education happens best when it is a dialogue. Every rehearsal became a two-way street: the Romanians learned new vocal techniques and stylistic nuances, while also sharing their own traditions and approaches. It was a reminder that collaboration enriches everyone involved.

9. Contemporary Resonance – The Power of “Mono”

One of the most surprising and captivating pieces introduced during the festival was **“Mono”**, a contemporary composition that immediately resonated with the youth. Unlike traditional choral works, “Mono” drew closer to the soundscape of today's generation. Its rhythm, harmonies, and textures mirrored the world young singers live in—dynamic, layered, and constantly evolving.

At first, the piece challenged the Romanian choristers. Its structure was unusual, and its demands pushed them outside their comfort zones. Yet, as they immersed themselves in it, “Mono” became a favorite. It spoke to them directly, not as an abstract work of art, but as music that reflected their time and identity.

The experience of performing “Mono” highlighted one of the great strengths of EJCF: its ability to bridge tradition with innovation, showing that choral music is not just about preserving the past but also about engaging with the present and future.

10. Parties, Social Nights, and the Spirit of Togetherness

Of course, EJCF 2025 was not only about formal concerts. The social side of the festival was just as important—and perhaps even more memorable. Every evening brought choirs together in informal gatherings. Whether in organized social nights or spontaneous dorm-room singalongs, music was always present. “Biso Ya” and “Music is Everywhere” became staples at these parties, echoing late into the night. For the Romanian Radio Children's Choir, these social moments were crucial. They allowed the singers to see beyond national labels and artistic roles, and to connect on a human level. Friendships were born, laughter was shared, and language barriers dissolved in the universal language of song.

11. Reflections on Growth and Transformation

By the end of the festival, the Romanian Radio Children's Choir was no longer the same ensemble that had arrived in Basel. Each chorister had grown—not only musically, but personally. They had learned new repertoire, discovered new ways of rehearsing, and been inspired by the artistic excellence of choirs from across the globe. They had also learned to live in new homes, adapt to different family routines, and appreciate the warmth of strangers who became like family. They had bonded with Markus and Hanspeter in ways that showed the importance of guidance, care, and shared laughter.

The festival reinforced the idea that music is not just about notes and rhythms—it is about telling stories, building bridges, and creating community.

12. Lasting Memories and Legacy

Looking back, EJCF 2025 will be remembered not just as a festival, but as a turning point. For the Romanian Radio Children's Choir, it became a source of identity and pride. The friendships formed with the Cameroonian choir, the lessons learned from KKB, the unforgettable moments of singing “Biso Ya” together, the deep bonds with host families, and the laughter with Markus and Hanspeter—all these have left a permanent mark. The choir returned to Romania carrying not only new musical skills but also the conviction that their voices are part of a global family of singers. The memory of Basel 2025 will continue to inspire their future endeavors, reminding them that music is, indeed, everywhere.

13. One Voice Among Many

The Romanian Radio Children's Choir has been my home for as long as I can remember. I grew up singing here, and after more than ten years together, I can honestly say this choir is my second family. What started as a simple love for singing became the center of my life, shaping the way I see the world and who I am today. Since the summer of 2022, I've also taken on the responsibility of being the choir's manager, because my passion pushed me to be more involved in everything that keeps our group alive and thriving.

Conclusion

The Romanian Radio Children's Choir's participation in the 2025 European Festival of Youth Choirs in Basel was a transformative experience. From the breathtaking opening night conducted by Masis Gözbek, to the joyful energy of the Cameroonian choir, to the unifying hymn of "Biso Ya," every moment was filled with discovery and connection. This festival was not just a celebration of youth choirs—it was a celebration of humanity itself. In a world often divided by borders and languages, EJCF 2025 showed what is possible when voices come together. For the Romanian Radio Children's Choir, the lesson was clear: through music, through the kindness of families and guides, we can truly understand one another.

About Cristina Mihăilă: I'm almost 20 now, and besides the choir, I study Business Informatics at The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, where I'll soon begin my second year. I also work as a financial consultant, which makes life quite busy, but no matter how full my days get, I always find time for our rehearsals three times a week. Being here, with my choir, grounds me and reminds me of the joy and innocence of childhood. Wherever I go, this choir is a part of me, and through it I continue to see the world with the eyes of a child in love with beauty and music.