



# Endorsements

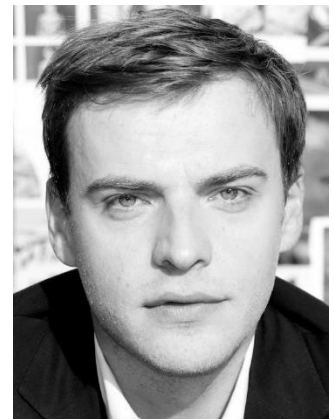


*"It was one of the most rewarding musical experiences I have ever had. The professional caliber of the festival is on an extremely high level... The Faculty and Orchestra are extremely proficient and the students, who are chosen competitively, are all eager to learn and work hard. Several of the students had never sung with an orchestra before working with me this summer and it was a fantastic and unique experience for them. I cannot recommend Varna International highly enough and I look forward to returning."*

**Maestro Gregory Buchalter**  
**Assistant Conductor of the Metropolitan Opera**  
**Artistic Director of Opera Fairbanks**  
**Conductor of Opera Camerata of Washington**  
**VIMA Faculty 2018**

*"I had the great pleasure of being a part of the music staff at the Varna International Music Academy in 2018. This programme offers singers a great opportunity to get real stage experience. The production period resembles in many aspects the reality of a professional engagement; it helps the participants to acquire the skills and stamina to operate successfully in the very competitive opera industry. The programme is well structured and it provides a great opportunity to grow and consolidate the skills."*

**Marek Ruszczyński**  
**Opera Coach, JPYA Program, Royal Opera House, Covent Garden**  
**VIMA Faculty 2018**



*"Nicole and I had the pleasure of attending two performances organized by Varna International in 2018, one in Varna and one in Sofia. Kalin and Sharon Tchonev, the organization's founders, have worked tirelessly to bring Americans and Bulgarians together through the magic of culture. In doing so, they have brought hundreds of talented young Americans to Bulgaria over the years to work and perform with talented Bulgarians and students from all over the world, bridging the Transatlantic divide with music, friendship, understanding, and truly great performances. They are also talented educators: I myself learned much from their staging of Kurt Weill's "Street Scene" in Varna this year, a work that is rarely performed, and which offers fascinating insights into American culture and society in the post-war period. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to support the Tchonevs' work, and I look forward to many more wonderful seasons!"*

**Ambassador Eric Rubin**  
**US Ambassador to Bulgaria**  
**VIMA 2018**

*“From stepping in to sing the bass solos in the Beethoven Mass in C, to performing before the U.S. Ambassador and other dignitaries in the Bulgarian premiere of Street Scene, through the closing of an exquisite La Rondine, my time was exciting, rejuvenating, and fulfilling. I was able to perform with wonderfully talented and dedicated colleagues, some of whom are working at the highest levels in the opera world, others fellow faculty members, and still others young students just getting their feet wet...”*

**Dr. Scott LaGraff**  
**Professor of Music/Assistant Dean**  
**Stephen F. Austin University**  
**VIMA Faculty 2018**

*“With a faculty from the Metropolitan Opera, the Royal Opera – Covent Garden in London, and major American universities, I saw young artists from around the world come together as their lives were enriched by rising to perform at previously-unattainable levels. Many of them shared with me that they grew and learned more in a single month than they ever had in a year at home. To experience that together in the breath-taking beauty of Varna was more than one could reasonably expect...”*

**Dale Morehouse**  
**Associate Professor of Voice and Opera**  
**University of Missouri-Kansas**  
**VIMA Faculty 2018**

*“I had a marvelous experience! The training that the young ones get is fantastic, and the networking afforded to me was extremely useful and helpful. Everyone was so generous with their time for me and my questions. The Cherno More Hotel was luxurious, and Varna was such a beautiful location, and the food was wonderful. If I could manage it, I'd come back every summer...”*

**Dr. Thomas E. Miller**  
**The College Singers, The Master Arts Chorale**  
**Victor Valley College, California**  
**VIMA Faculty 2018**

*“The Opera Academy was truly extraordinary. For the program to present 3 fully staged operas with orchestra, and a masterworks concert in only 4 weeks is remarkable. The productions were all very well performed, costumed, directed, sung, conducted, and the sets were great. What truly amazed me at the academy were the various levels of experience in the program: undergrads, graduate students, professionals, semi-professionals, and professors. Everyone was able to grow and learn together and learn from each other...”*

**Lydia Bechtel, opera singer (Soprano)**  
**Participated in the role of Lisette in Puccini's La Rondine, Summer 2018**

*“I had a marvelous experience! The training that the young ones get is fantastic, and the networking afforded to me was extremely useful and helpful. Everyone was so generous with their time for me and my questions. The Cherno More Hotel was luxurious, and Varna was such a beautiful location, and the food was wonderful. If I could manage it, I'd come back every summer...”*

**Dr. Stacey Stofferahn, opera singer (Soprano)**

**Participated as Magda in Puccini's La Rondine and Soprano Soloist for Bach's Mass in C Major,  
VIMA 2018**

*“I went to this program and I got to sing two full operatic roles at an opera house with their full-time orchestra, chorus, director, conductor, props, costumes, sets, make-up artists and wonderful teachers/coaches. I gained experience as if I had a fest contract in an opera house! It was significantly cheaper than I would spend at a similar program in the states or in Europe because of its unique location in Eastern Europe. I would definitely recommend this program!”*

**Evan Dunn, opera singer (Bass)**

**Participated in the roles of Grandpa Moss in The Tender Land &  
Don Giovanni in Don Giovanni, Summer 2017**

*“I would like to thank all of the teachers, coaches, and admin at Varna International who made this trip something to remember ... I got a lot out of this experience that I hoped for and even more that I didn't expect. Most important of which, is a bevy of new friends (whom I adore) as well as a fresh sense of confidence and new direction. I'm excited to see what comes next and I look forward to, someday, having another chance to perform Donna Anna.”*

**Laura Scandizzo, opera singer (soprano)**

**Participated in the role of Donna Anna in Don Giovanni, Summer 2017**

*“I could go on and on about this amazing program. The faculty and staff are absolutely wonderful and go above and beyond to help you achieve amazing things. There is so much warmth and support from beginning to end. I gained so much in several ways of my development and nothing could have catapulted me forward as this program did. The tools I gained from such an intensive and thorough program have truly changed my life and my ability as a whole. Thank you, Varna, for all of the magic you brought to my life and expanding the horizons of what I do. I have really treasured my time in Bulgaria and have truly fallen in love with the beauty it has to offer. I look forward to returning several times in the future. This is a one-of-a-kind program and is certainly worth the investment of participating. I would give it 100 stars if I could. “THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING VARNA INTERNATIONAL!!!”*

**Deyvion Norris, opera singer (Tenor)**

**Participated in the role of Goro in in Madama Butterfly, Summer 2016**

*“Everyone was very hospitable and sweet! I enjoyed the people, the walks, and the food. I had a great time! The coaches were amazing, and it was great fun to put on a performance there! I learned so much!”*

**Romana Romanki Saintil, opera singer (soprano)**

**Participated in the Opera Academy Chorus in Madama Butterfly, Summer 2016**

*"I cannot speak highly enough of the Varna International Music Academy. Nearly all of my professional activity today is indebted to the valuable experience and training Varna International has provided. As a conductor at a small liberal arts college, I quickly learned that opportunities to study and perform the great choral and orchestral repertoire were few and far between.*

*In 2006, I took part as a Conducting Fellow in Varna International's summer workshop, preparing and performing the Verdi Requiem. The amount of podium time afforded to each Conducting Fellow and Associate is second to none, and the benefits were immediate. Not only was my technique refined under the excellent tutelage of Larry Wyatt and Dian Tchobanov, but remarkable professional opportunities emerged upon my return home. I was hired the very next year by our local symphony orchestra as Chorus Master for their production of the Verdi. My experience with the Varna Academy was so positive that I returned to Bulgaria as a Conducting Fellow in 2007 for their orchestral program, preparing a number of great orchestral works, and conducting portions of the Brahms Symphony No. 3 in performance. I returned again in 2010, this time bringing some of my choir students to perform the Mozart Requiem and for me to conduct a portion of his Sinfonia Concertante. Preparations for that trip directly led to my conducting the Mozart Requiem with our local symphony orchestra, which in turn opened the doors for many other professional opportunities, including serving as Chorus Master for our local opera company, and founding and directing the Randolph College Chamber Orchestra. In 2015, I brought choral and instrumental students to perform Haydn's Creation, while I had the honor of serving as Assistant Conductor for the Varna International Opera Academy, performing Puccini's Suor Angelica and Gianni Schicchi.*

*Although I could not have imagined the professional opportunities that have arisen from my experience with Varna International, it is the personal touch and genuine friendship offered by Kalin and Sharon Tchonev that I have valued above all else. As I frequently tell colleagues, students, and parents, one cannot have better people to work with in creating a beautiful, meaningful, and professionally relevant international music experience. I look forward to my next engagement with Varna International as I plan to bring students to the Academy in 2018!"*

**Randall Speer, D.M.A.**  
**Professor of Music**  
**Randolph College**  
**VIMA Faculty 2016**

*"I had the pleasure to teach and perform at the 2016 Varna International Opera Academy. Of all the European summer programs, Varna is truly the hidden jewel for young American singers. Participants have the opportunity to rehearse and perform at State Opera Stara Zagora in Bulgaria alongside professional singers. The staff and artists at the opera house are incredibly kind and generous. The amount of orchestra rehearsal time given to participants is unprecedented. The vocal coaches and teachers are world-class. If you are looking for a summer program that will provide performance experiences with orchestra, you have found it. Look no further!"*

**Jeffrey Jones**  
**Associate Professor of Music**  
**Coordinator of Vocal Studies**  
**Coastal Carolina University**  
**VIMA Faculty 2016**

*“It was my honor to be asked to sing the roles of Sharpless and Bonze in the 2016 Varna International Opera Academy’s production of “Madama Butterfly” with the Stara Zagora State Opera. In addition, I sang in opera excerpts from “La Boheme”, “Fidelio” and “Die Fledermaus”.*

*I found the entire experience surpassed my expectations. Rehearsals, coachings, private lessons and all aspects of the performances on and off stage were of the highest professional quality and standards. Participants were treated as professional singers, and were given a chance to work side by side with Bulgarian professional opera soloists. Rehearsals were detailed and intense and prepared everyone for the performances. Nowhere else can a singer experience a chance to work with one of the best conductors in the business, with a full professional orchestra and opera chorus, in a professional opera house with full sets and costumes, except for the Opera Academy of Varna International. Participants received individual coachings from experienced coaches from the United States and from Europe, as well as private voice lessons with international opera stars. I for one benefitted greatly from my lessons with Darina Takova. The entire process from first arrival to the final curtain was well organized by the administration. Accommodation and meals provided were “five star” and the management team took time to make everyone feel welcome and valued for their musical contribution.*

*As a “seasoned veteran” in the music business I can highly recommend this program to singers of all ages and experience. Whether you are a main soloist, sing a small role, understudy a role, or sing in the chorus, you will come away with a fulfilment unlike any other. You will have been part of a centuries old musical tradition called opera, and there is no better way to achieve this musical nirvana than to be part of Varna International Opera Academy 2017. See you there!”*

**Norman E. Brown, opera singer (baritone)  
CANADA**

**A.R.C.T., L.T.C.L, B.Mus, B.Sc. M.Sc. MBA, LLB**

**Participated in the roles of Sharpless and Bonze, in Madama Butterfly, Summer 2016**

*“My experience with Varna International Opera Academy in the summer of 2016 exceeded my expectations from a summer program. I performed in Madama Butterfly before but I had no video and so I decided to come and sing in Stara Zagora, Bulgaria. The whole organization was very good from the transfer from the Sofia Airport to a very nice hotel where all the participants were staying. The rehearsals were intense as in any other production. The theater has become my second home for a month. The opera coaches' level was very high! Starting from the wonderful pianist Ariadna Zagrea- Chiba up to our stage director, Dale Morehouse, whose traditional view of Madama Butterfly has helped everyone to understand in depth the notes of Puccini. Along with artists of the Stara Zagora Opera Chorus, dressed in beautiful Japanese costumes and guided by the magic hand of the Maestro Tchobanov, we got to sing two very respectable performances. One of the top moments of the month was a Masterclass of Bulgarian soprano Darina Takova – a great artist, who was engaged by Varna International to give us private voice lessons. I met some fabulous people and close friendships that will surely endure the test of time. A perfect summer doing lots of music together and learning and improving a lot.*

**Libuse Santorisova, opera singer (soprano)  
Czech Republic and Italy**

**Participated in the role of Cio Cio San in Madama Butterfly, Summer 2016**



*"I really enjoyed my time in Stara Zagora at the Varna Opera Academy. Everyone - from the faculty, the administration, the professional musicians, the opera house staff, and the Bulgarian people - were warm, welcoming, and made for a great learning environment. It was such a supportive experience and the teachers and coaches really cared about your growth and success. This program is unique in that it is full of opportunities for both developing young artists who are still in school and also for advanced singers making the shift into professional work. I would highly recommend the Varna Opera Academy for anyone who wants to visit gorgeous Bulgaria and gain a bounty of operatic experience."*

**Kelly Birch**  
**Doctor of Musical Arts-University of Missouri, Kansas City**  
**Participated in the role of Suzuki in Madama Butterfly, Summer 2016**

*"Varna International is an inspiring program for young artists, which gives them complex opportunity to develop their performing skills and professional experience on stage. I believe that the most important thing for a young opera singer is to start meeting the challenges of our job on stage, in the real environment and the program of Varna International provides this in all forms. From coaching with experienced vocal coaches and pianists, through rehearsing a real opera production, ending with concerts and performances. They work both on separate pieces from various operas and entire roles and have the perfect amount of time and space to adapt every new knowledge into their everyday work, which follows after the end of the program. The environment is friendly and supportive, the possibility to work in a real opera house is inspiring and I believe that all of this gives great chance to every participant in the festival. Varna International is perfectly organized and provides everything a young artist could possibly need. I have experienced great joy working with everybody both faculty members, and participants."*

**Darina Takova, Soprano**  
**Darina Takova Foundation**  
**Bulgaria**  
**VIMA 2016**

*I would like to express a big thank you to Varna International as well as to all the faculty and to the Stara Zagora Opera house musicians and staff. I enjoyed studying in this academy and learned a lot about not only opera conducting but also the opera production in a real European opera house. My interest and enthusiasm for opera were greatly strengthened as a result of studying here, and what I have learned with you is now a treasure of my musician life. Working as the Assistant Conductor for Maestro Tchobanov and all musical staff was an eye-opening experience in so many levels. The Stara Zagora Orchestra and Chorus has very special European performance traditions that is almost mythical and which I have never seen in the American opera theaters. Being able to work with them really opened my ears to the European opera tradition that exists nowhere else in the US or in my native country of Japan. Their freedom in expression, style and tradition will definitely stay with me and have impact on my future music-making."*

**Yuya Miyazaki**  
**Doctoral conducting student, University of North Texas**  
**Conductor, Dallas Asian American Youth Orchestra's Symphony Orchestra**  
**Director and conductor, Texas Academy of Mathematics and Science's student orchestra**  
**Participated as Associate Conductor in Madame Butterfly, Summer 2016**

*“The experience with Varna International Opera Academy last semester was truly amazing for all of us. I can wholeheartedly recommend this program to any student interested in attending. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present a recital in Bulgaria. It was truly one of my highlights this summer.”*

**JoAnne Stephenson**  
**Associate Professor**  
**University of Central Florida**  
**VIMA 2015**

*I hope that you finished all the activities that you planned for this summer in Europe in good conditions and finally enjoy a very well rewarded holiday in Israel! I wish to thank all the team from Stara Zagora State Opera and to say THANK YOU very much for the remarkable conditions of work and living during the academy courses!!! I know very well how difficult is to organize such mammoth plan including traveling conditions for so many people from different countries! I was extremely happy and pleased about the well-chosen faculty, conductor, stage director, and good and sensitive soloists. Also, the very good lodging conditions in Hotel Vereya in the city of Stara Zagora, good food, very civilized, careful and considerate conditions of transportation and more than anything the very good care you extended to us. THANK YOU! This was probably the best opera production of my life! “*

**Ariadna Zagrean-Chiba**  
**Opera Coach**  
**Vienna, Austria**  
**Participated as Opera Coach, Summers of 2013 (Vienna) 2015 and 2016 (Bulgaria)**

*"I just wanted to thank you both for such a great experience with Varna International. You both work hard to provide a lovely combination of culture, music, and camaraderie, and you succeed beautifully! Your care and love for what you do, and the people who come, is so very evident. You are consummate artistic and cultural hosts, genuine people, and Eliav is evidence of your success as parents. I am so happy we had the chance to meet and work together! I look forward to meeting and working together once again."*

**Dr. Samuel Mungo**  
**Director of Opera Studies**  
**Texas State University**  
**VIMA 2015**

*“Bulgaria is beautiful, and all of the people I met and worked with there were so helpful, generous, and friendly. Even with our language barriers in the opera house we somehow managed, and they were so gracious about it.*

*The staff you hire is TOP NOTCH from top to bottom. I benefitted from their expertise and I know the students did. It is a wonderful and difficult learning curve for the students to work with people who demand such a high level of professionalism. It definitely made them (and me) want to bring their best to the performance.*

*The Bulgarian singers were wonderful to work with as well. They were, for the most part, very kind, patient, and helpful with the students, and offered to translate and help in many ways. They all acted professionally and with a sense of collegiality with both the faculty and the students."*

**Dr. Jennifer Luiken**  
**Professor of Voice**  
**Charleston Southern University**  
**Charleston, South Carolina**  
**VIMA 2015**

*"Our experience in Stara Zagora was once in a lifetime! From the rich history of the country to our experience working side-by-side with opera professionals was exciting."*

**Russell Franks**  
**Director of Opera Theatre**  
**Stetson University**  
**VIMA 2013**

*"The Varna Opera Academy experience was incredible. From a professional standpoint, each of our participating singers grew exponentially as artists during the three-week intensive training. The opportunity to interact with and receive coachings from the professional staff of the Stara Zagora Opera Company was particularly meaningful to them, as was the chance to perform fully-staged and costumed works with the resident opera orchestra (which played beautifully under the direction of Maestro Dian Tchobanov). They came away from the academy empowered by the experience and eager to move forward in their studies and careers.*

*As cultural visitors, each of us was entranced with Bulgaria. The beauty of the Black Sea; the lush countryside of the interior valleys; the many sites of historical interest and significance were so stimulating. We were particularly overwhelmed by the stunning Roman and Thracian ruins as well as the fine museums full of artifacts. The trip was thoughtfully planned and executed by Varna International, Inc. and was thoroughly enjoyed by all of us. Well worth the cost!"*

**Dr. Kandie Smith**  
**Professor of Voice**  
**Florida School of the Arts**  
**VIMA 2013**

*"The Varna Conductor's Workshop provided a first-rate experience for me and my students as we traveled across Eastern Europe, including an incredible experience on the Black Sea in Bulgaria. I happily endorse Sharon and Kalin Tchonev and their excellent and caring tour organization that provided an inside connection to Europe including great concerts and wonderful cultural experiences."*

**Steven Zielke**  
**Director of Choral Studies**  
**Oregon State University**



*"A great trip! Wonderful people, a rich culture, a beautiful country, delightful food and wine, an education on language and economy. The musical experience was an exceptional learning opportunity to become familiar with a great work in depth, from both singing and conducting (being conducted). Lots of work, lots of fun and lots of value in bringing back some of the choral traditions of Bulgaria. It was a privilege to be able to participate."*

**Tina Clark**  
**Singer**  
**Columbia, South Carolina**

*"A visit to Bulgaria is a must for choral directors who aspire to learn as much world literature as possible. Even better than the music, though, is getting to know the Bulgarian people, their culture, and their fantastic cuisine. The musical instruction received in rehearsals is outstanding, and the opportunities to conduct in concert allow conductors the opportunity to put practice into reality. The Tchonevs do everything to ensure that guest conductors are receiving the best instruction and hospitality they have to offer. I am already planning a return trip and want to take my singers with me to experience this delightful workshop."*

**Dr. Bonnie Borshay Sneed**  
**Director of Choral Activities**  
**Associate Professor of Music**  
**Denison University, Granville, Ohio**

*"My experience in Bulgaria transcended all my expectations. Unlike other more competitive workshops, the Varna International Conducting program cultivates a supportive collaborative environment. As an emerging female conductor, I had the opportunity to work with some extremely talented and inspirational musicians who remain my mentors and dearest friends. With a full orchestra and chorus at the tip of my baton, the experience brought my passion to a whole new level. Words cannot begin to describe how impactful this experience was for me musically and personally."*

**Arianne Abela**  
**Class of 2008**  
**Smith College, Massachusetts**

*"I have attended both the winter and summer workshops of the Varna International Conductors' Workshop. The winter orchestral workshop gave me a unique opportunity, seldom available in the United States: the opportunity to work with a wonderful chamber orchestra on a variety of literature, to have significant podium time on all pieces, and really refine my conducting under the tutelage of a great conductor and teacher, Dian Tchobanov. The winter choral workshop was an equally wonderful opportunity to grow as a conductor while learning wonderful Bulgarian and Russian choral repertoire unfamiliar to me, working with the great teacher Professor Marin Chonev and Morski Zvutsi Choir. The summer choral-orchestral workshop provided the most unique opportunity, over a week to get to rehearse a well-prepared chorus and orchestra on all parts of a major choral-orchestral work while being critiqued and taught by an extremely knowledgeable and talented faculty (Maestros Wyatt, Tchobanov, and Tchonev)."*

*The faculty gives each conductor equal attention and podium time and helps each conductor take his or her conducting to the next level. Varna is a lovely city in a wonderful country with excellent musicians, which provides a great setting for such a wonderful workshop."*

**Matthew Caine**  
**Director of Music**  
**Tims Memorial Presbyterian Church, Florida**

*"The Varna International Conductors Workshops have been wonderful experience for me. Professors Tchonev, Wyatt, and Tchobanov were not only outstanding teachers; they also tailored their instruction to whatever level of experience each conductor brought to the podium. The score study sessions were extremely beneficial, opening new vistas into each work, and the extensive amount of podium time afforded each conductor allowed us to put in practice that which we learned. Both the orchestra and the choir were well-prepared so that we were free to work on musical nuance while refining our gestural technique. Finally, warmth and hospitality of the Bulgarian people and the rich historical significance found in the buildings and history of Bulgaria make this an unforgettable experience. I, for one, will go back!"*

**Raymond Sprague**  
**Director of Choral Activities**  
**Davidson College, North Carolina**

*"Never before have I felt such heartfelt love of music than during the week of rehearsals during the Varna Choral-Orchestral Conducting Workshop. The focus on musical interpretation and technique was of value not only to the participating conductors, but to the singers as well. I look forward to future opportunities as do my singers."*

**Dr. Douglas Renfro**  
**Director of Choral Activities**  
**Edison College, Florida**

*"The Bulgarian Choir, Morski Zvutsi, made us feel completely welcome, and the singers were so willing to be patient as we learned new conducting techniques to expand our baton vocabularies. The conducting staff of Maestros Chonev, Kolarov, and Wyatt was equally adept at working with conductors at various stages of development, and the conductors taking the workshop were all supportive of each other's efforts. I can't imagine a better way to develop professionally and musically and to visit a beautiful and intriguing country. Plus, the American singers who came along in my group were equally thrilled to have a marvelous singing as well as travel opportunity and holiday!"*

**Dr. Kathryn Bowers**  
**Director of Choral Activities**  
**Webster University, Missouri**

*"As a choral conductor who attended as an auditor, bringing choristers from my parish choir, the workshop both met and exceeded expectations: the geographical area, historical and beautiful; the people, warm and friendly; the organizers and guides, accessible and helpful; the Bulgarian choral, vocal, and instrumental musicians - inspirational; and the professors who instructed the conducting participants - exemplary of the serious music culture of the area and eager to share pedagogically with all involved."*

**English G. Morris, Jr.**  
**Director of Music**  
**St. Martin's Episcopal Church, South Carolina**

*"Wow, what a week! The workshop far exceeded my expectation. The friendships and the exchange of ideas and passions with dedicated musicians from across the world and the U.S. was an unparalleled experience. Making and perfecting music of the great masters is truly a unifying and uplifting force."*

**Mary Ellen Jordan**  
**Retired Music Instructor**  
**Camden, South Carolina**

*"I am glad to have been a part of the Conductors Workshop. It was a beneficial experience to have the time to study, rehearse, and to present such a monumental work as the Verdi Requiem. The professional level of the orchestra, choir, and soloists was impressive and added an additional dimension to the workshop. I knew that the workshop would be helpful to me as a conductor. However, my expectation was greatly exceeded by the experience of the week. I will convey to my colleagues in America the outstanding musical work that is being done in your city. Thank you for the invitation and the opportunity to be with you for the workshop. I hope that I will have the opportunity to return."*

**Prof. James Moore**  
**Director of Choral Studies**  
**East Texas Baptist University, Texas**

*"The Varna Conductor's Workshop was a great opportunity to work with a well-prepared orchestra and chorus, for both the conductors and the American singers who augmented the chorus. One aspect of the workshop that I liked very much is that the conductors got to try many sections of the Verdi Requiem before actual "performance assignments" were made. This made it imperative that we learn the entire work, and as a result I feel I am well-prepared to conduct the Verdi with my own choir next year. The atmosphere among the conductors and clinicians at the workshop was supportive and delightfully free of favoritism. Everyone received equal attention, whether they were beginners or advanced, and thus all the conductors improved their skills over the week of the workshop. I was very pleased with the friendliness of the Bulgarian people. It was also a comfort that the Golden Sands Resort Area was both beautiful and safe, with many interesting restaurants and shops to keep us busy outside of rehearsal times."*

**Dr. Benjamin Locke**  
**Director of Choral Studies**  
**Kenyon College, Ohio**

*“If you are looking for a professional level experience while you're a student, I couldn't recommend any program more than Varna International Music Academy. I took students to this program in 2015 and they were able to sing fully staged roles and receive lessons and coachings at a much lower price than most other European programs. Kalin Tchonev and Sharon Tchonev are fantastic people and have set up a wonderful program.”*

**Dr. Jason Vest**  
**Northern Kentucky University**