

Thursday, October 25, 2007
5:18am – Zarautz, Spain

It looks like I have slept all I can so I decided to take advantage of the jetlag and write you all a few lines. Hopefully, you'll find this update of some interest.

Our flight to Spain involved a few expected twists and turns, but I must say that this group is more or less ready for anything and we took it all in stride. Soon after we arrived at O'Hare, our Delta flight from Chicago-NYC (we would have then flown NYC-Madrid) got canceled due to a mechanical failure. Delta had the common sense to book us on another airline, so we actually ended up flying nonstop from Chicago to Madrid on Iberia Airlines.

It was hardly a glamorous flight, but we arrived in Madrid almost two hours earlier than planned, which proved to be time much-needed. Of course, as luck would have it, NONE of our luggage found us and it took a long time to process the paperwork. I wasn't the least bit surprised about the bags not finding us, I must say, but several folks weren't pleased (then again, who is ever pleased when their luggage is lost?). Anyway, we left Madrid with absolutely no luggage and at this point we still have no clue when it will find us. We are seriously hoping our bags will arrive before our concert tomorrow night.

The bus ride from Madrid to Zarautz was over 5 hours, so (needless to say), it was an exhausting trip for the group. But the scenery was incredible. And for those members of the ensemble familiar with the various town names, landscape and architecture of this region, so often described and depicted in the various medieval Spanish manuscripts (think the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* and the Compostela-related repertoire), it was a wonderful pleasure. As the geography became more mountainous and flocks of sheep began to appear on the Ireland-like slopes, I knew we were entering Basque country, which is where we definitely are right now. Zarautz is a Basque town through and through, is situated on the Atlantic coast and is quite the little tourist village. Basque is the commonly spoken language here (although everyone also speaks Spanish).

Our *penzion* is only 50 meters from the beach (although the building is situated such that one has no idea the water is even close) and one can tell that during the summer this place is hopping. Cafes and bars line the beautiful (and wide) walkway that hugs the coast, and most of these buildings feature a generous amount of what looks like upper apartment/housing space. It is "cold" here now (for the locals anyway; we're actually quite content) and the off-season has definitely arrived. Several people have mentioned to me that it's normally fairly pricey to be here in the summer, but with the dollar what it is, everything seems expensive. It's a lovely town: typically walk-able and filled with little bars and restaurants and shops. I, for one, am looking forward to doing some exploring between rehearsals. Our presenters have organized all our meals (at least the ones we'll be eating here in Zarautz) in the *penzion* restaurant, which is incredibly convenient, and I'm told that our rehearsal space is only a 15-minute walk away.

Last night's dinner was served family-style, with huge plates of penne and red sauce kicking off the meal. This was followed by chicken wrapped in cheese, deep fried, and served with generous portions of French fries. Chilled Rioja (what they called "only regular wine") was also featured, which I thought was pretty darn good.

There are, of course, some logistics to work out. *Siesta* is a real-live thing here (most everything closes from 1:00pm-4:00pm, breakfast isn't necessarily that important, typical lunch time is 2:00pm and most people start dinner around 10:00pm. We knew this of course (at least most of us did), but having to fit in 3 meals a day, enough rehearsal time, and travel time will take a lot of planning on my part. Some of the cities in which we're performing (Borja and Burgos, for example) are a good 3-hour drive away and I am trying to figure out how we will be able to fit in meal times, especially when our scheduled dinners won't happen until 11:00pm (after each evening concert), which will be often followed by a 3+ bus ride back to Zarautz.

Well, that's all my brain can handle right now. I'll try to give you updates as I am able.

Jordan