

Saturday, June 20, on the bus from Turate, Italy
Hi everyone –

Well, the concert last night went well. Even though it was a secular program the festival held it in a VERY reverberant church. I should also mention that we were scheduled second-to-the-last (not third, as I had previously written) but given the fact that the Cubans went last and ROCKED the place, we were happy with our spot. One could say that our set was much simpler than all the other choirs. While Voces8 sang elaborate arrangements of jazz tunes (very well, of course) and the Norwegians and Bulgarians sang all sorts of atmospheric arrangements of folksongs, The Rose Ensemble sang several pieces from our Hawaiian and American shows. I'm glad we did this because I believe the raw and organic nature of this repertoire speaks for itself. The audience clearly enjoyed our performance and although the festival organizers probably had hoped for a bit more flash from us, I think our program balanced well the rest of the evening.

Back at the hotel, a very large party started in the lobby once all the groups arrived back from the concert. I don't think I've ever seen so much dancing. The Cubans set up a little stereo and started tearing up the floor (they are all incredible dancers) and taught a large collection of Bulgarians, Americans and one Norwegian several moves. This went on for quite some time and just as things seemingly couldn't get steamier, the Bulgarian women popped in a CD of traditional music and started doing all sorts of cool line dances. So intricate and beautiful but they looked HARD. And so much energy. Mark said it best at about 3:00am: "There's a reason why you never see an overweight Bulgarian." (I must say that I definitely worked off a day's worth of risotto dancing with those gals...)

Today was a simply gorgeous day in Legnano. It had rained most of the night but the clouds cleared in the morning and the humidity dropped way down. Ellen (my friend from Germany who is visiting me for a couple days) and I had lunch with everyone else at the good ol' cafeteria, Il Giardino (where the lunch ladies are becoming increasingly impressed by my Italian vocabulary of food items), and then we decided to head to the community swimming pool. It was packed but still fun. On the way home, I was happy to discover what looked like an abandoned villa. The yard in front was completely overgrown and the entrance was gated and locked, but I was happy to stumble upon this place. I've decided that I'm going to buy it! Do you approve?

Tonight The Rose Ensemble gave a concert at a little theatre in the town of Turate, which is about 45 minutes outside of Legnano. The acoustics in the room were much better suited for spoken word and we spent most of our rehearsal time just trying to find a decent place on stage. We soon learned that the space was simply dead and that there was nothing we could do but sing pretty and hope that the audience could hear. The hall was packed solid and it turns out that many people there have been following us from concert to concert during the festival. That feels so good and I must say that there was a delightful warmth from the crowd tonight. They sang (rather loudly) on "Jesus the Light of the World," and I have to say that I think we sounded pretty darn good tonight. This was the kind of space that forced you to sing well and be ultra-mindful of tuning. As a result I believe we had some great musical moments in spite of the room's acoustics. A lovely post-concert reception (the best we've seen here) was prepared for us and we were presented with an absolutely lovely picture commemorating our visit to the town.

The frame alone is a work of art and we were informed that the artwork on the picture is an original (the artist was there and was noticeably proud).

Federico, our guide (we call him Fede) has been doing a great job taking care of us over the past few days. He's very young and I don't think he knew what he was getting himself into, but he's been helpful, and has been doing an excellent job of selling CDs after concerts and doing some light translating. Fede is a kid who looks right at you when he talks to you is always ready to offer a big smile.

We arrived home to a hotel lobby full of Cubans, Bulgarians and Norwegians and there were cheers when we walked in the door, but I simply can't stay up again tonight. I have SO much work to catch up on (the office is probably ready to kill me for the delay in returning several emails) and I'm just plain tired. The Rose Ensemble has an official day off tomorrow (our first since we arrived) and several are going to Asti to see our friends from the Italian choir, Hasta Madrigalis, who we met in France last summer. Ellen and I will stay in Legnano and revise our plan to take over the world.

-Jordan