

Thursday, June 23, 2009
on the road from Brescia, Italy

Ciao everyone –

Kris and I are sitting in the bus after a long day and I thought I would write a little about the last couple of days. The bus is fairly quiet except for the most unusual soundtrack our bus driver is supplying. So far today we've heard Bryan Adams, Barry Manilow, the Beach Boys, Lionel Richie and that all-star hit from the 80s, "We are the World." Seems like a complete clash of cultures after having just performed in the most gorgeous old monastery chapel (more on that in a bit).

You may recall that The Rose Ensemble was given two free days (June 21-22) and most everyone made the most of them. You already know about my adventures with my German friend, Ellen, but here's a rundown of several others in the group: Tim, Kim, Linda and Matt went to see our friends in Asti (they say that they sat around at the most gorgeous country home and loved every minute of it); Kris and Ginna went to Venice and I hear they had a lovely time, finding a cute little 12-room hotel run by a young couple with two kids and a grey kitten; Kathy went to Switzerland for a day; Roy and his wife Amy walked the Cinque Terra; and Carrie went to the beach at Lago Maggiore. Not bad, I'd say. Hopefully, some of them will post photos and/or share stories...

Today, however, we were back to work. We shared the concert bill with our new friends in the Bulgarian women's chamber choir from Sophia. We all piled in the bus (yes, ALL of us) at 5:00pm (for a 9pm concert) and drove west toward Venice to the lovely town of Brescia. Because of the small, narrow medieval streets leading to our performance venue, the chapel of the St. Christopher Monastery, the bus parked a considerable distance away and we had to walk. We were a bit piled down with our outfits and gear, but we managed (it wasn't nearly as hot today, which was good). On our way up the steep stairs to the chapel we discovered that the festival mascot (the huge red treble clef) which is placed outside of all the concert venues, had somehow fallen down the stairs. Good thing the festival is almost over!

To say the chapel was merely beautiful simply wouldn't do it justice. The frescos on the walls and ceiling (although in disrepair) were truly impressive and added such elegance to this gorgeous room. Our dressing room (the sacristy) had some of the worst mildew I had ever seen, so several of us threw on our concert outfits as fast as we could and spent the rest of the evening either watching the Bulgarians perform or sitting outside in the courtyard (we could still hear them singing just fine). Oh yeah – I forgot to mention that because of our early departure, we weren't able to eat dinner at the cafeteria in Legnano, so we were supplied with what everyone here calls a "packet lunch." Throughout the festival, this has been the same thing and has become quite

dreaded, I must say. It's two hard (and mostly stale) white rolls with super-greasy slices of either ham or salami (no butter or cheese), along with a piece of fruit. Mmmmmmm.

Anyway...the Bulgarians sounded really great and we went on stage just after 10:00pm (which we were all joking about, saying how nice it was to sing at such a reasonable hour, in comparison to the other shows we did earlier in the festival). We did short versions of our Slavic and San Francis programs, but with a special surprise we had been preparing all week. Mark (our international relations expert), who has been doing an excellent job of socializing with the Bulgarians, decided it would be fun to teach them the chorus and last verse of our final number, "Laudar Vollio." You should have seen the audience when all the Bulgarian women joined us on stage! And the piece sounded just great. I was a little skeptical in the rehearsal, wondering if we would be together with so many people singing, but it turned out really well and the crowd just loved it. And then for a special last number, The Rose Ensemble and the Bulgarian choir sang a very special Orthodox piece called "Mnogaya Leta," which basically asks God to bless the Bulgarian people. We are told that *everyone* in Bulgaria knows this piece, so we were happy to learn it and sing it with the fab Bulgarian women. The cool thing about this piece is that it begins with a massive bass solo than rises higher and higher until a final high note, which is when the full choir enters. Mark rehearsed for hours with the Bulgarians, learning the Church Slavonic text and sang this solo with such passion. Having all the voices singing together was really special for us and the audience.

Back at the hotel at 1:30am.

Ciao -

Jordan