

Postcards from Spain: Tolosa  
Sunday, November 4, 2007

*On the road from Tolosa to Barañain*

Well, I've got good news. We did it! The Rose Ensemble took first place in our division at the competition yesterday! I am immensely proud of this incredible achievement for so many reasons. One is because the group worked diligently on preparing for this competition. When we left the green room to go perform we looked at each other and said "we are ready." It was a wonderful moment. We were the last on the program and having to wait and wait for well over two hours was simply exhausting. Our adrenaline was pumping for so long and we just wanted to go out and sing. But that's what competitions are like; so different from performing a concert.

Walking down the aisle of the church as they announced our name, the audience cheered. We just couldn't believe how warm everyone was to us. We sang an extremely varied program of a Renaissance motet, two pieces of Slavic chant, a 19th-century German *Kyrie*, David Moore's arrangement of *I Been in the Storm* (featuring our own Mark Dietrich as the bass soloist) and our commissioned gem, Sergey Khvoshchinskiy's *Bogoroditse Devo Raduysia*. Mark really hit it out of the ball park (the audience was forbidden to applaud between pieces, but after we finished *I Been in the Storm* people started to applaud), but the defining moment was our final piece. I think we had never sung that piece with such feeling and sheer power. People stood and cheered when we were finished. I don't remember much more; I think I was just so taken by the whole experience that I only recall walking into the foyer and having a crowd of people around me. Wow. So exhilarating.

Of course, we knew we did well but we were forbidden to hear any of the other groups we were competing against, so we had no idea what to expect. A lot of people said that we had swept our category, but language like that always makes me nervous so I chose to be cautious for the rest of the day and focus on the competition we would take part in later that afternoon.

The final decision was announced late last night. It was in a huge arena where thousands of people had assembled. There were Basque dancers and musicians and the mayor gave a special reception for the directors of the choirs. It was all so incredible. The winners were announced over a loud speaker with accompanying results projected on a huge wall. 3rd place: a group from the UK; second place: a group from Slovenia. By this time my heart was pounding so fast that I could hardly breathe. When they announced The Rose Ensemble of the USA as the winners, people were just screaming. It was all so unbelievable. We all hugged and kissed - the group was so proud - I just can't tell you the feeling. After we left the arena, the entire city was alive with the afterglow of this choral festival, and everywhere we went people stopped to congratulate us.

Oh, before I forget I should also mention that we placed second in our division for secular music! We were all a little surprised by this award, as this category is obviously not what we are known for. Personally speaking, I can safely say that the group rehearsed hard on this repertoire. And we sang quite well. We did have a slight pitch bobble on one of the pieces, which made us think that we had fumbled the competition. But according to several audience members I spoke to, the rest of the pieces were incredibly strong. The judges must have agreed, because the score cards I just reviewed show us only one point behind the first place winners (Slovenia).

So that's the story. 1st place winners in the sacred music category for professional ensembles. 2nd place winners in the secular music category for professional ensembles. I'm happy to say that we already received invitations to two festivals: one in France next summer and one in Brazil next September. The organizers in Tolosa said that more will be coming in. I spoke with the winners from last year's competition and they report having over 100 European concerts this year. Hold on to your hats, everyone.

Congrats to all my colleagues in The Rose Ensemble. And many, many thanks to all of you for your support and encouragement. We are all proud to have represented the US in this competition and to have performed several other concerts throughout Spain. After tonight's concert we'll have a free day and then we'll hit the road for Madrid at 3:00am (!) on Tuesday. We'll see many of you when we get back.

Fond regards to all -  
Jordan