

June 19, 2009, Legnano, Italy

Ciao everyone –

It's another beautiful but hot day here in Legnano. The wisteria has started blooming and the hedges of jasmine are so fragrant (especially at night). There are red and blue hydrangeas everywhere (they're HUGE) and in spite of the heat, everyone you see rarely actually looks hot (except for us, the Brits, the Norwegians and the Bulgarians; obviously the Cubans are doing fine). People here look good even when they're going to the grocery store and there are more shops for shoes, purses and suits than one can imagine. Clothing is pretty darn pricey here, but the simple things seem to be cheaper. For example, a really great latte costs a mere 1.2 Euros (an espresso is only 85 cents) and you can get a decent bottle of *prosecco* at the grocery store for about 3 Euros. Even the gelato is reasonably priced at about 1.5 Euros for a good-sized cup; a huge slice of pizza is only 2 Euros. Speaking of gelato, we have all discovered the BEST gelato we've ever had. It's made in small batches by the sweetest woman at a tiny little place called Maison du Chocolate. She specializes in different kinds of chocolate gelato but each day has other flavors like mint, melon, raspberry, white chocolate and a killer pistachio. We've all decided that we're going there tomorrow not only to eat gelato but to sing for her. I didn't eat any gelato yesterday but I went there with Mark and Linda after rehearsal and I practiced my Italian with the proprietress.

Last night was another "choral marathon" with all five choirs singing sacred programs at the stunning Church of the Redeemer. As usual, the church was HOT, there was no oxygen, most of the other choirs went over their allotted times, we were LAST on the program, and ended up entering the stage at about 11:30pm. I wasn't surprised, of course, but just once we were hoping to do one of these programs a little fresh. That said, I got smart and grabbed everyone and took them outside the church to get some fresh air about 15 minutes before we went on. We were sad to miss part of the Norwegian's program but we needed to be together and just breathe. It helped a lot, I think, and we gave a very high-energy program. The crowd cheered as we were announced and we hit the ground running with the impressive 12-part Magnificat by the Polish Renaissance composer Mikolaj Zielenski. All of our selections went well but I must say that the women's chanting of "Alme Presul" was a complete standout. They have mastered this piece and chant together so well that their sheer unison singing is as impressive as any well-tuned chord. I'm really proud of them for working so hard on this piece.

Voces8 (from England) sounded great as usual, in spite of Dingle (their bass) being under the weather. And the Cuban choir really rocked the house. They sing from their heart on every piece and I just love watching them perform. The Bulgarians also sounded nice (they were first on the program and were very fresh) and their choral sound was lovely but I must say I prefer when they let loose on the folk style.

Speaking of folk music, tonight is another choral marathon but this time it's secular music (strangely set in a gorgeous church here in town). We are THIRD on the program (YAYAYAYAYAYAY) and we had a great rehearsal this afternoon. We'll do some Hawaiian and American music, with me and Mark on the ukuleles and Mark also on the 12-string. Ginna will trade in her vielle for her fiddle and the men have decided to perform barefoot. Should be fun.

My dear friend Ellen just flew in from Berlin this morning and I'm looking forward to spending my free time with her over the next couple of days. She'll be coming with us to our concerts and we'll sneak away for meals together. It's strange to hear her German accent!

Ciao –

Jordan