

Monday, June 15, 2009, Legnano, Italy

Ciao tutti!

Well, it's been an interesting trip so far. Sorry that it's taken me this long to send some word to you but things have been a little nutty here (if you've read any of my past European tour blogs you'll know why). Before anything, I should probably give you some basic information to bring you up to speed on this festival.

The Rose Ensemble is performing in and around Milan at the international choral festival called "La Fabbrica del Canto." This is actually the same festival at which we performed last summer and we're happy to have been invited back (not a common thing, so it's a feather in our cap). There are nine other groups performing here (choirs and small ensembles from Germany, England, Cuba, Latvia, Norway, Bulgaria, Belarus, Japan and Brazil) and over the last couple of days we've been able to catch a few tunes from each (they are all really good).

I, Linda Kachelmeier and Ginna Watson actually arrived in Legnano two days earlier (Legnano is a small city near Milan where the festival is headquartered) in order to work with Isacco Colombo, a wonderful early wind instrument player who will be playing with us on some of the concerts here, and also on our new St. Francis of Assisi recording which we'll make later this summer. Things went fine with our arrival and the ensuing rehearsals but I can't say the same for the rest of the group. They were due to arrive on Friday but their flight was delayed out of Minneapolis (due to weather), causing them to miss their flight and get stranded in glorious New Jersey for a day. As a result, they didn't arrive in Milan until Saturday morning (the day of our first concert).

It would have been fine if the concert had started on time, but this is Italy after all (nothing here is even remotely on time) and we soon learned that the concert was actually a showcase of *all* the choirs. We were scheduled 9<sup>th</sup> on the program (urgh) so we didn't actually start singing until about 11:15pm. The church was stiflingly hot and seemed like all the oxygen had long been sucked out by the time we got on stage. In spite of our great fatigue, we sang well and the audience clearly enjoyed our performance. By the time all the choirs got packed up and we were brought back to our hotel, I recall that I rolled into bed about 2:30am.

Sunday featured a morning rehearsal (groggy but productive) and then we were off to Milan for a version of the same "concert marathon" but this time featuring secular

music. Unfortunately, even though we were transported from our hotel at 3:00pm, due to the fact that we were scheduled LAST on the program, we didn't get to perform until 11:30pm. Again, we sang well, but I wondered how much better we would have sounded just a tad less tired. I was also impressed by my colleagues' cheerful disposition over the last couple of days. (I think I was crabbier than anyone.)

The venue in which we performed this evening is actually a deconsecrated church of a former monastery called *Monastero Santa Maria della Misericordia* (Our Lady of Mercy) in Missaglia, which is about an hour outside of Legnano. This cute little town is nestled in the foothills of the Alps and the drive in was quite lovely. There was still about a 90 minutes of sun left and the pink-orange glow in the clouds cast a gorgeous light on the green hills and on the little buildings all painted those wonderful Italian hues of yellow, pink, tan and beige. The driver got a little lost but by this time we were used to things like that (I suppose I shouldn't say more than this here).

We sang a full-length concert featuring a first half from our collection of Czech, Polish and Russian music (much of which was actually influenced greatly by Italian polyphonic styles) and a second half of music dedicated to Saint Francis (San Francesco). The programs said something different, however, as the festival printed our secular program (Hawaiian and American) for the audience. If we had known, I suppose we could have adjusted and performed some of this music but we didn't have any of the instruments with us and we were all looking forward to performing with Isacco for the first time (he played *cornamusa* (early Italian bagpipes) pipe and tabor, recorder and shawm. ) The group is having a blast playing with him and I can't wait for everyone in the States to hear this cool new addition to our "merry band." I addressed the audience (in Italian), welcoming them and explaining the two parts of the program, and was rewarded with thunderous applause. Don't get all excited, though, as the people here applaud if you even think in Italian let alone attempt the language. That said, Isacco said they



understood every word and that my accent was much better than the Germans or the Japanese (um, you can judge for yourself how good that really is). Others commented that they had never heard Americans sing so flawlessly in Latin. In fact, I met a well-known Gregorian chant scholar at the concert who said the same thing. Wow!

I must say that this was indeed one of our better performances, but when you find yourself in the fantastic acoustics of a 16<sup>th</sup>-century monastery chapel, there is a certain obligation you feel to sing well. While the women were singing “Alme Presul,” a 14<sup>th</sup>-century Bohemian chant, I was offstage and actually wandered a bit down the stone hallway into the glorious courtyard. It was an absolutely gorgeous, warm night and the organizers had placed votive candles all along the short wall that hugged the perimeter

of the arched walkway. Two huge trees stood in the middle, under which a lovely reception of salami and *prosecco* had been set up. I stood there for about a minute, all alone, looking at the flickering candles and listening to the women chanting as it echoed within the cloistered



walls. I wondered how many thousands of religious folk had walked here while listening to the various offices being chanted. It's one of those moments I wished to share with someone but one I won't forget. Here's a picture of all of us (post-concert) under one of the archways featuring a fresco of our beloved San Francesco.



Our evening ended in a rather strange way, which I will only briefly be able to explain here. Words actually escape me at this point but perhaps others in the group will venture to write about our meeting with the Count of Missaglia, who invited us to come to his “castle” in the middle of town to view the 13<sup>th</sup>-century chapel situated on his property. This gorgeous little chapel ended up being built on 2000 year-old Roman ruins, which we were soon to learn was only the beginning of a rather lengthy tour of his virtual museum of a villa. Think everything from a collection of weapons that would rival that of any army general, to coins from 22 AD (Tim and Carrie got to hold one), to Nazi flags, to 17<sup>th</sup>-century paintings and furniture. Oh yeah, I mustn’t forget about the columns from a 7<sup>th</sup>-century BC Pagan temple shown here.



We arrived back at the hotel at 3:00am. Ahem.

The weather here has been pretty hot but after all that cold Minnesota weather in early June, most of us have welcomed the Italian sun as a long-lost friend. Speaking of friends, I should mention that our dear friends Paola and Clara from the Italian group “Hasta Madrigalis” came to see us the other night (these are the Italians we met in Burgundy last year). My French lovelies Anliz and Tristan are also here now and I’ve been attempting to connect with them, but because we aren’t staying at the same hotel it’s been difficult. They will be coming to our concert this evening, which is right

outside of Legnano, and there is a rumour of an after-concert party at our hotel. And, of course, Voces8 from England is here and we've been having a nice time with them as our schedule has allowed (the bus rides have been utilized for socializing).

Speaking of schedule, I should apologize here once again for the delay in sending some word of our activities. Our days here are truly busy. When we're getting back from gigs at 3:00am and we have morning rehearsals to sneak in before lunch, I barely have enough time to eat, have a quick business meeting and walk back to the hotel (a good 45-minutes) before I have to get ready for the evening's concert. I'll try to do a better job of staying in touch. Please send money. It's 25 Euros for 4 hours of internet connection.

Ciao -

Jordan