

2009 - A tour of the Netherlands, Austria and Italy

From Holland in the north to Rome in the south, for two weeks at the beginning of May 2009 the Pacific Spirit Choir performed in four European countries and toured a host of fascinating cities.

Soesterberg, a small Dutch town southeast of Amsterdam, was the (now traditional) jumping off point for the tour and the site of our first concert performed with enthusiastic local choral groups. After visiting a variety of beautiful nearby cities like Utrecht, Amersfoort and the coastal community of Spakenberg in small groups, we traveled south toward Metz to scenic Scy-Chazelles, (home of Robert Schumann, father of the EU) where we sang and gave encores for our first French audience. The following day we visited historic Strasbourg which was the site of an informal concert in its magnificent Cathedral, in our red (vests) and blacks. From France we moved on to Bregenz in Austria which lies at the foot of Lake Constance. Many of us went up the funicular to a panoramic mountain top for sightseeing (and dining) as a wonderful adjunct to giving two concerts in different churches – each with astonishingly good acoustics.

South from Austria lies Italy and our next destination must be a highlight for any European trip: Venice. The island city remains a uniquely powerful symbol of Renaissance culture and magnificence. The canals and the local boat-buses (vaporetti) provide transportation to the jewel of the Adriatic and the rich array of museums and churches are a reminder to all of the power and enduring culture of northern Italy. After a day and a half of sightseeing we buckled down to work and performed in the Venetian suburb of Mira. From Venice we traveled southwest to Volterra in Tuscany where we were enchanted by the spell of the local Etruscan Museum, and were able to visit Florence, Sienna, and other sites. Our concert in Volterra was a resounding success, and we enjoyed seeing posters around town advertising our presence.

Finally, we arrived in Rome, and while some made a beeline to the Vatican and the Sistine Chapel, all were astonished to find that our hotel was in an enormous building half of which contained an active monastery! With a day of sightseeing available, we scattered to the seven hills and met to perform in central Rome at the San Bartolomeo and Alessandro Church. The final evening at dinner was spent in a wonderful impromptu review by members of the company including creative readings, haikus recounting an uproarious characterization of our daily progress, and the general singing by the company of our favourites from our now memorized repertoire. It was a warm and bittersweet evening as we all felt the end of tour was upon us. But happily, we were invited to the quarters of two of our choristers who, for no good reason at all, had a sumptuous room that was large enough to encompass the entire group! General singing and farewells to departing colleagues in the exceptional space brought closure to the final day on tour.

Rosemary Murchison