

ST. NEOT TO SOAVE LOVENY SING IN ITALY !!

Singing in Italy in June !! How fabulous to sing in a country where most words end in a vowel (or a vocal as the Italians would say) making music of the language itself. The people too are so open and friendly - yes a wonderful five days.

But back to the beginning : It all started when a Director of Music from Paris , on holiday in Cornwall, heard Loveny singing in Padstow. Impressed with the quality and variety of the programme he immediately contacted his friend Professor Rinaldi in Italy, who was putting together a Festival of Music in Soave, near Verona. From that 'phone call came an invitation for us to attend the European Choral Festival.

Which just goes to show, you never know who is listening, and you should always present the best singing you can !!

So it was that a party of 50, complete with sun cream, shorts, and HUGE smiles, set off for Bristol Airport on Thursday 25th June. Most of the choristers were wearing blue polo shirts with the Loveny motif on the left breast, and this, of course, gave us a "team" feeling. Spirits were high, and we were ready to sing at the drop of a hat. (As it happened nobody had a hat to drop , but nevermind)

Our flight was late taking off, and so we came into Venice about an hour behind schedule, but a brand-new luxury coach awaited us and, pointing out that both he and the coach were at our disposal for the duration of the trip, our driver (who was excellent in every way) soon had us unloading at a very nice hotel on the edge of Soave where, as arranged, a light snack was awaiting us. Well Italians don't do anything in half measures :- what we thought was the whole meal turned out to be just the starter or anti-pesto,(see how this trip was educational too) . More food followed, and of course the local wine flowed !! It just didn't seem like 2am honestly !!

Friday brought us cloudless blue skies, and after a liesurely breakfast, in small groups of four or five, we ventured into the quite beautiful walled city of Soave. Crossing the trout-filled river and the open plaza, one then enters the "old" city through a medieval gate and fortified tower. The "old" part of the City all being inside huge castellated walls, all roads lead uphill to the castle, and the views from there were just stunning. Of course, being Brits, we did the climb to the castle at noon, in blistering sunshine. How does it go ? Only mad dogs and.....

All the locals were in the shade chatting and drinking !! So we felt obliged to join them in an ice cream or two. It's all so laid back ! Why can't we be more like this at home ??

Late in the afternoon we were taken by coach to a huge restaurant where we met, and then dined with the other choirs who were there for the Festival : Lulea Chamber Choir (Sweden), Limerick Coral Union (S.Ireland) Ars Musica (Austria) and the City of Soave Choir (Professor Rinaldi's own choir) Two hours or so of eating, drinking, hand gestures, and puzzled expressions followed as languages clashed. Except the Irish, of course, we could almost understand them !!

Then to Duomo di San Bonifacio (we THINK this translates as Cathedral, If not it's certainly a huge church) where each choir would provide a 20 minute performance and as a finale would combine to sing "Signore delle Chime" which we had learned in the weeks leading up to the visit. So another late night - but what wonderful sounds, in such a magnificent building.!!

Saturday dawned bright, clear, and **HOT** for our morning in Verona - Juliette's balcony, Roman Coliseum, mummers in the main square, what a beautiful City !
Of course we had to share it with hundreds of other tourists, but even so it just didn't feel crowded. Maybe just too much to see in the time available, but lets not be picky here !

Back to the coach and off to Lake Garda, where lunch had been organised for us in a restaurant with views over the lake. Nearby, on the lake's edge, is the medieval gem of Sermione, and from there we took a boat trip along the lake, then back to the town itself for an hour or so walking it's narrow, and very pretty, little streets. Time to try one of the many ice cream flavours. I thought Kelly's were good, but this is just a different experience altogether. Ice cream heaven !!

Now for the serious stuff. Back to Soave for that evening's concert in the Duomo di Soave. A truly beautiful building, with spectacular accoustics, as you might expect.
The same musical format as yesterday, starting quite late in the evening, and then up the hill to the Courtyard of the Captain, where all the choirs were entertained to food, wine, and of course more singing followed, but this time of a more relaxed nature.

Sunday had us firstly attending an official reception by the Mayor of Soave. We then travelled to Breganze where, in the main square, we were met by the Mayor (a very attractive young woman, who in her spare time is a Barrister) and all the town's church bells were ringing. Gosh what a welcome - it really made us feel quite important.

What then occurred was quite memorable on so many levels. We were split into small groups, and each group was introduced to a local family, and whisked off

to the family home to enjoy a typical Italian lunch . What wonderful hospitality. I wonder if that could have been arranged home here ??

Sunday afternoon saw us taken to the quite charming little town of Bassano del Grappa, which even schoolboy Italian will translate as the place where wine is produced, barrelled and bottled. We entered the town over a completely covered -in wooden bridge, which was literally full of local people promenading in their Sunday finery. The views up the river to the mountains beyond were quite stunning. Oh we are **SO GLAD** we came on this trip !!

Sunday evening, and our final concert. The Lulea Chamber Choir were performing (in fact their young soloist was in full flight) when the heavens opened, lightning flashed, thunder rolled, and THE DUOMO DI BREGANZE WAS SUDDENLY TWO INCHES DEEP IN RAINWATER !!. It appears that the church was lower than the square outside, and as water tends to run downhill, the beautiful marble floor was quickly flooded. It was all over almost as quickly as it started, but meantime some lights fused as did our piano !! Did it stop the performance ?? No , of course not, we sang a few pieces "a capella", and it appeared to go down a storm. (Get it ??)

It just made the whole evening more memorable in our view. It should be added that whilst the choir were standing up on the chancel steps, keeping our feet dry, our dear Dorothy, (dressed for the occasion) had to wade down the aisle to the front , and waggle her toes in two inches of water as she conducted ! But like the trooper she is the smile never left her face. (I THINK it was a smile)

Monday came, everything back to normal. Blue skies, smiley faces. We fly home this evening BUT we have all day in Venice !! It's not necessary to say it was wonderful, and made even more memorable when we were singing in St Marks Square when two VERY attractive young policewomen decided to arrest us for busking/ begging. However, they clapped our performance and quickly headed off towards the Rialto Bridge.

But one more unusual venture to relate - on the Easy Jet flight home the captain invited us all up to the front of the plane for an impromptu concert. Not the easiest of locations, we were a bit squeezed up, as you can imagine, and though we asked him to turn off the engine noise for a few minutes the captain didn't think that was a good idea. Anyway we received a round of applause and we were told that we are now all members of the "mile high club ", that is making loud noises in a confined space at more than a mile high !!

Yes, a wonderful few days singing and carousing in a beautiful country with lovely people (and some of ours weren't too bad either). Thank to those who organised it, especially Dave Williams who took most of the flak but never lost his cool. Also Jack Roberts who maintained the flow of emails to and from Italy, sorting out all the little misunderstandings which a foreign language can provoke.

Finally- well done to all those who were able to make the trip. We all had special thoughts for David Jones, who should have been there. I expect he looked down on it all with his benevolent smile.