

Singing Across Ireland

By Mark Steighner

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It is the music — the international language — sweetly sung in cathedrals and played in 17th-century halls that our 35 student musicians and 12 adult chaperones will remember most from our wonderful ACFEA tour.

Our first performance, on Palm Sunday, was at St. Carthage's Cathedral in Lismore, an impressive cathedral begun in the 12th century. For many students, this was the first time they were able to hear their music performed in the kind of acoustic environment for which it was written. In

lake, where early in the morning swans gracefully trace the shoreline, reminding me of Yeats' *The Wild Swans of Coole*. There is the ruin of an ancient

abbey, in addition to the extravagant food and accommodations, the place

has a restful sense of stillness and peace.

During dinner, the students stood in the dining room and entertained the guests with their music.

Our students met the Kilorglin Youth Choir with whom ACFEA had arranged a joint concert. Within minutes, the students from both countries were laughing. The evening was truly memorable, with an appreciative audience of well over two hundred parents, local school administration and town residents. The evening concluded with a combined performance of Bruckner's *Locus Iste*, and a choir and audience number, an arrangement of an ancient Celtic chant. The students experienced the ability of people of very different backgrounds and cultures to make music together, to communicate in a very deep way and to instantly share the ability to bring beauty to others, hopefully a lesson our students will long remember and treasure.

In Cashel, students toured the ruins of a 5th-century cathedral and sang in the space where the sounds of voices have been heard for millennia. The stu-

(Continued on Page 2)



the old, drafty stone cathedral, the music became a real, living thing for them, and not simply an exercise in singing correct pitches and rhythms.

The hotel ACFEA reserved for our group for the next two evenings in Killarney is on the shores of a beautiful

A Dream Becomes Reality:

A tour participant's perspective

By JoAnn B. Selby
Jonathan Griffith Singers

As a child growing up in an Italian neighborhood in San Francisco, I was comfortable with my warm, extroverted neighbors and fascinated with their music and culture.

Their frequent talk of revisiting 'the old country' enticed me to dream of some day making such a visit myself.

Recently, I received an invitation to participate in an ACFEA tour of the Italian Riviera and I eagerly accepted. My excitement grew during rehearsals under the gifted direction of our maestro Jonathan Griffith. Since I had not participated in a choral tour, I relied on the expertise and skill of ACFEA for information and guidance.

As our coach transported us from Milan to San Remo (where ACFEA arranged for us to stay), we were surrounded by fields of sunflowers and terraced gardens, which gave way to the



majestic blue of the Mediterranean Sea — I knew I had finally arrived in Italy! Our days were punctuated with rehearsals, shopping and leisurely strolls through the historic streets. We also took side tours to such fabulous places as Monaco, Cannes and Nice.

We traveled to the quaint medieval principality of Seborga where we met the Prince and generous townspeople prepared a wonderful dinner for the entire choir. Our first performance took place in the town's 16th-century church. The excitement around the performance was heightened due to the works themselves (Paul Winter's *Missa Gaia*, and a variety of American music classics).

Our second performance was held in the mountainside village of Peillon, France, where we enjoyed an exquisite, gourmet feast of local cuisine. I still recall the sultry heat hanging in the evening air as we sang in the courtyard in front of the Basilica to a standing-room-only audience. We were greatly moved by the jubilant response of the



concert-goers who demanded an encore of the rhythmic *Missa Gaia* chorus, as they danced in the aisles to prolong the evening's musical feast.

Back in Italy, we pleased the local audience in the San Remo Amphitheater with our last performance. What a celebration! The Mayor presented Maestro Griffith with an award as fireworks went off in the background in tribute to the summer music festival. These concerts arranged by ACFEA could not have been more thrilling or appropriate to our repertoire and my initial positive impression of ACFEA sustained itself throughout our amazing tour.

Before we left, we shared a traditional eight-course meal in tiny Dolceaqua, where we spontaneously performed for the restaurant's applauding and cheering patrons. Clearly, the joy of music is an international common bond

that unites us all. I returned home from this life-changing experience a new person, someone who experienced and enjoyed Italian culture firsthand and fulfilled a childhood dream by visiting 'the old country.' 🎵

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(Continued from Page 1)

dents were now using every opportunity to sing, their music capturing shared moments in each place.

After touring the famous Waterford crystal factory, the students performed in The Large Room, a beautiful 17th-century building. The splendid acoustics helped to inspire the students as they performed in a room that once hosted the likes of Handel and his contemporaries.

In Dublin, we paid a visit to St.

Patrick's Cathedral, perhaps the most beautiful and famous cathedral in Ireland. Performing *a cappella*, the choir filled St. Patrick's with the sounds of Palestrina, Victoria, Bach and others. The music seemed to hang in the air for seconds. For many students, this performance was their favorite. I, too, remember the sweet upwelling of their voices in the hushed cathedral.

The study of music and arts in school

is often divorced from its original setting and intent. Madrigals are sung in a concert instead of around the dinner table, and the great arching melodies of renaissance choral music echo not in the stone caverns of a cathedral but against the walls of a music room. I hope that our future ACFEA tours will once again enable our students to hear and experience their musical heritage and feel the power and satisfaction of sharing their music with others. 🎵