

Pittsburgh Youth Symphony Orchestra

Commemorative Booklet



Original Artwork by Robert Edwards



Florence Youth Orchestra Festival

PITTSBURGH YOUTH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

ITALY TOUR 2011

STAFF



Lawrence Loh
Music Director



Craig Johnson,
Executive Director



Georgina Gutiérrez
Tour Manager



Eve Goodman
Personnel Manager
Librarian



Susan Hayden
Companion Manager



Kyle Alexander
Stage Manager



Jane Vranish
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Orchestra Personnel

Violin I

Drew Percy
Inori Sakai
Olivia Ren
Kevin Skolnick
Julia Poetaim
Abi Hoyt
Elsa Lagerquist
Nick Brown
Arjun Kar
Caroline Stephenson
Hannah Che
Claire Niederberger
Lily Chen
Tara Lee
Leila Hilal
Elaine Sung
Ben Brodie

Violin II

Jad Hilal
Emma Anselmo
Amy Xie
Jimmy Yuan
Kemper Edwards
Joey Zou
Christina Deal
Benjamin Che
Amy Zhang
Christopher Jasiewicz
Yonatan Quemado
Brian D'Orazio
Abigail McLaughlin
Patricia Chen
Yudi Chen
Christopher Weis
Berty Ruan
Alexander Pape
Pooja Tripathi

Violin/Piano

Michael Tsang

Viola

Grace Stokan
Olivia Hilal
Grace Callahan
Angela-Maureen Nagem
Michael Kotcher
Vicky Li
Alexander Constantino
Natalie Somerville

Cello

Eleanor Lee
Salem Hilal
Loleta Lee
Madeline Docimo
Tim Lewis
Lucas Song
Samantha Westrick
Mana Aliabadi
Zachary Flaus
Joy Hou
Benjamin Spilsbury
Amanda Vosburgh
Sergei Adelman
Chelsea Medic

Bass

Ahmer'e Blackman
Samuel Harris
James McCullough
Ava Lintz
Matthew Pfeuffer

Flute

Lauren Abel
Dustin Cramer
Rebecca Silverstein
Audrey Whartenby

Oboe

Mark Debski
Andrew Dotterer
Jeremy Hois
Spencer Kun

Clarinet

Joe Grippi
Julie Hollis
Zihan Su
Daniel Hilty

Bassoon

Emily Bishop
Mark Lefever
Joseph Merchant
Adam Sniezek

Horn

Brooke Boehmer
Eileen Kane
Sarah Knapp
Kristen Miller
Daniel Salera
Rachel Silverstein

Trumpet

Jim Trofimov
Jon Xu
Marisa Youngs

Trombone

Gavin Virag
Matthew Kingsbury
John Fitzmaurice

Tuba

Jake Zawadski

Percussion

Michael Caruso
Josh Dick
Hanna Kim
MaryAlice Ryan
Jason Yoder

Harp

Hannah Piston
Dana Schneider

CHAPERONES

Lisa Anselmo
Jeanne Boehmer
Lawrence Callahan
Regina Callahan
Hong Chen
Robert Edwards
Maryann Grippi

Xiaoqing He
Richard Jasiewicz
Lisa Merchant
Xiaoping Mo
Brenda Schneider
Melissa Silmore

TOUR MEDICAL STAFF

Dr. Angelo Constantino and Dr. Laurie Roba

TOUR ESCORTS



Axel Castigli



Sylvia Ruberto



Riccardo Ippoliti

COMPANIONS

Lou Bartolomucci
Douglas & Kathy Bishop
Nance Lee Cochran
Jessica Deal
Eduardo & Irene Feller
Christine Gale
Jerry & Cathy Gindele
Logan Gindele Ness
Jingnan Hou
Shenji Hou
Robert & Margaretha Kanters

Helen Kim
Marina Lupinacci
Robert & Kathy Piston
Michael Piston
Rebecca Piston
Steven Piston
Julie Prioleu
Antoinette Tuma
Elisabeth Weis

TOUR REPERTOIRE

BERNSTEIN

Candide Overture

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

English Folk Song Suite
First Movement

TCHAIKOVSKY

Nutcracker, Pas De Deux

ROSSINI

William Tell Overture,

DVORAK

New World Symphony
Second & Fourth Movements

BARBER

School for Scandal Overture

BERLIOZ

Symphonie Fantastique
Second & Fourth Movements

RESPIGHI

Pines of Rome - Fourth Movement

COPLAND

Hoe Down

VERDI

Va Pensiero

SOUSA

Stars and Stripes



Tour Synopsis

Our PYSO tour companions departed on June 27, while the orchestra members, staff, and chaperones departed Pittsburgh on June 28. Some travelers connected through New York City while others connected through Atlanta. Many of the companions took advantage of their one day in Milan to see Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper.



June 29

Our first hotel in Salice was quite nice except for the lack of wireless internet connection, which was a recurring theme throughout the trip. Mr. Loh cancelled rehearsal on the first day, as the orchestra was well prepared from the rehearsals in Pittsburgh, and we wanted to give the students time to relax and adjust to the time change. Many people enjoyed the first afternoon at the hotel outdoor pool. The food was very good in Salice, with generous buffets that had much variety for breakfast and dinner.

JUNE 30

Our first concert was in the town square (piazza) of Zavattarello, a small hilltop town in the Pavia region. Everyone toured the medieval castle prior to the dress rehearsal and concert. Most of the towns people turned out (we were introduced by the mayor) and it was very well received. The musicians adjusted to the new acoustics in spite of the irregular configuration in a limited space. When the orchestra played Verdi's "Va Pensiero" as one of the three encores, the audience (of about 285) sang along, some with excellent voices. I was told that some of them had their hand on their heart and tears in their eyes!



JULY 1

The next morning we checked out of the hotel and undertook a day trip to Venice, quite far from Salice. After a ferry boat ride (there are no cars in Venice) local tour guides led us through the narrow streets and over bridges that crossed the many canals, ending with a tour through the famous cathedral. It was a very long day and we returned to our second hotel in Montecatini for check-in and a late dinner.

JULY 2

The next day was free in the morning before departing for San Gimignano in Tuscany. This is one of the best preserved examples of a medieval town. The students had plenty of time to explore, with a leisurely lunch (pizza was a favorite choice) and the chance to buy post cards and souvenirs. We are observing that many PYSO members are developing a great fondness for gelato!



The second concert was performed in the large town square that had excellent acoustics. Approximately 500 people attended (others were passing through the square) and the orchestra sounded even better than the concert in Zavattarello. During “Va Pensiero” not only was there singing, but three couples were dancing in the square. After the three encores, the audience demanded more, and Mr. Loh repeated the last portion of Copland’s Hoe Down for a fourth encore!

JULY 3

The morning and afternoon were free time in Montecatini. Many people took the funicolare (incline) to Montecatini Alto to enjoy the sweeping views and take in a leisurely lunch. Others were shopping in the town or spending time at the hotel outdoor pool. After dinner in the hotel, the orchestra walked to the Terme Tettuccio for our third concert. This venue is a spacious spa with marble floors and columns surrounding various pools and fountains. The largest central “room” served as our performance space and had even better acoustics than San Gimignano. At the conclusion of the concert, after our fourth encore, several gentlemen rushed forward for Mr. Loh’s autograph, one of them actually hugging him and thanking him for such a fine performance!



JULY 4

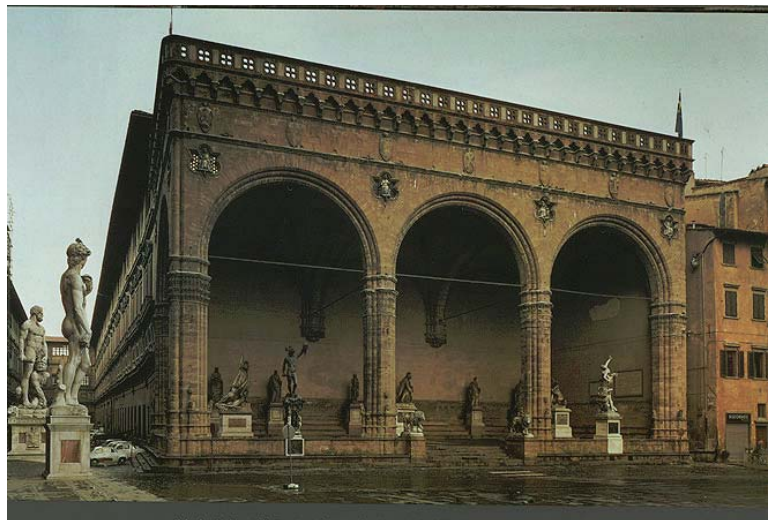


The morning was free, allowing for rest, practicing, or shopping. After lunch, we visited Pisa to see the famous leaning tower. From there, all participants were able to choose between visiting the town of Lucca – the birthplace of Puccini - or going to the beach to swim in the Mediterranean Sea. That evening, we had our own 4th of July celebration with hot dogs (the Italian version) on the veranda and then a pool party. Our special dessert treat was fresh apricots.



JULY 5

On July 5th we departed for Florence for a guided walking tour of the city, followed by free time, dinner, and our fourth and final concert of this trip. Highlights of the tour were seeing the magnificent Duomo (Santa Maria de Fiore), and crossing the Ponte Vecchio. Our performance took place in the expansive Piazza della Signoria (that included a replica of Michaelangelo's David, in the original location) which is the Festival's main concert venue, with the Orchestra set up on the "loggia" that was surrounded by large marble statues. After the first few bars of Bernstein's Candide Overture, it was obvious that the Orchestra was in top form. An estimated 2,500 people heard the performance, some of them sitting on the piazza, most standing, plus some - including our tour companions - sitting in the small sidewalk restaurants that bordered the far end of the square. PYSO's performance that kicked off the 2011 festival season was a triumphant success. The reaction of the crowd was overwhelming, demanding that PYSO give encores that included William Tell Overture, Finale from Pines of Rome, Stars and Stripes Forever, and Va Pensiero. Following the concert, the Orchestra posed for a group photo on the steps of the loggia.



JULY 6



We departed for Rome in the morning, stopping for lunch at one of the many “AutoGrilles” along the highway. After a very brief look at some sites in Rome, from the bus, we checked into our hotel which was deluxe compared to the “old world charm” of the hotel in Montecatini. Many students made a quick dash to the outdoor pool before the group dinner in the evening.

JULY 7

Most students took advantage of the optional trip to go inside the Coliseum, departing the hotel very early in the morning to beat the long lines. The full group then undertook a guided walking tour of Rome with stops at the Spanish Steps, Trevi Fountain, Piazza di Navona, and the Pantheon. Then it was on to the Vatican Museum and the Sistine Chapel, St. Peter’s Square and St. Peter’s Basilica – the largest church in the world. It was an exhausting day, but all agreed that it was worth it.



JULY 8

This will be our final day in Italy, with a sightseeing trip to Pompeii. We have an awards ceremony planned after a special dinner. Then it’s packing and off to bed before going to the airport in the morning.

It has been an extraordinary trip. All of us will be returning home with very special memories of our Italian adventure.

Pittsburgh Youth Symphony to perform in Italy

Friday, June 24, 2011

By Jane Vranish, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The Pittsburgh Youth Symphony Orchestra leaves Tuesday for a 12-day trip to the land of pasta and Puccini for a series of four concerts in Milan, San Gimignano, Montecatini and Florence.

"The reason we chose Italy is, first of all, because of the musical and cultural history and significance," said executive director Craig Johnson. "But also, we want variety in our touring, and it seemed like it was a logical place to go."

Before Mr. Johnson's tenure, the orchestra had made only two overseas tours, to Scotland and Switzerland, since its inception in 1946. Under his leadership, the orchestra has visited central Europe, including Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany and Hungary, in 2005 and China in 2008.

Students and parents held multiple fundraisers over a three-year period to pay for the trip, although sponsors, including The Heinz Endowments, Dr. Owen Cantor, Equipment & Controls Africa, and the Richard P. Simmons and Buncher Family Foundation, lent their support.

Heading to Italy are 100 students, 28 companions, 15 chaperones and seven staff members. Their Italian adventure will begin in Milan with an outdoor concert in nearby Zavattarello. The 90-minute program, the same for each concert, will open with Leonard Bernstein's overture from "Candide" but will rely mostly on the classical tradition with selections from Dvorak's "New World" symphony and Respighi's "Pines of Rome," among others.

In between concerts, the students, ranging in age from 12 to 21, will also soak up the history in Venice, Siena, Pisa, Lucca and Rome.

Young Pittsburgh musicians get a slice of Italy

Tuesday, July 05, 2011

By Jane Vranish, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The Pittsburgh Youth Symphony Orchestra landed in Milan for the beginning of its two-week Italian tour but bypassed the gingerbread Gothic of the world's third-largest cathedral in the fashion metropolis. Instead they headed immediately for what might be termed some rest and relaxation just an hour south in the tiny hamlet of Salice-Terme, best noted for its sulfur springs and spa treatments.

There the orchestra students, 100 in all, had a chance to swim in the pool of the Hotel President Terme, getting a break from the high humidity, and leisurely walk around the village where many sampled their first gelato.

Already they were more than sampling the food, where even the rest stop on the highway was filled with fresh produce and dinner at the hotel was an abundant feast for the eyes as well as the stomach.

A delay with the instrument truck led to a postponement of rehearsal for the first concert in Zavattarello. And during dinner a rare thunderstorm, which caused some damage in Salice-Terme itself and produced a muddy river along the street in front of the Hotel President, brought immediate relief from the soaring temperatures.

Nonetheless the students did get their rented instruments, mostly large ones such as cellos, basses and harps, and began trying them on for size.

That meant making adjustments for the tone quality and responsiveness of the new instruments, even to the extent of changing strings.

Harpists Hannah Piston and Dana Schneider got instructions from their teachers to "tune, tune, tune" as much as five times a day and for an hour before the concerts due to the summer heat.

The diverse group was already bonding, although some of the orchestra members had built in support groups. Hannah, a ninth grader at Hermitage High School, had five family members in tow -- parents Robert and Margaretha, brothers Steven and Michael, sister Rebecca and French exchange student Julie Prioleu, who has been living with the family in Hermitage since last September.

"They always come to concerts and cheer for me, even if I play a wrong note," she jokes.

The Hilals have their own built-in support system. Four of them are with PYSO -- Jad, 16, and Leila, 15, on violin, Olivia, her twin, on viola and Salem, 18, on cello. It took them a year to figure out that they had a natural quartet (their parents are not musical) and they've played hundreds of concerts in the past few years (even Pittsburgh Symphony board president Richard Simmons' birthday, at his request).

After lunch the multi-talented group -- violist Grace Callahan, a freshman at Duquesne University, also sings and plays violin and piano and pianist Michael Tsang will also play second violin on the tour -- all set out for Zavattarello, winding along the road past tiny villages to play the first of four concert. Located on a mountain with a castle capping the peak, Zavattarello is a town of about 1,200 people (and apparently expecting a new addition any day).

The students first climbed to the top of the castle -- 30-plus rooms virtually stacked on each other, with contemporary art collections sprinkled along the way and a magnificent 360-degree view of the province of Pavia at the top.

After a dress rehearsal and a dinner co-hosted by Mayor Simone Tiglio at a pair of restaurants, it was time for the concert, which drew at least a third of the population to the intimate Piazza Luccino Dal Verme, dominated by the Farmer's Monument. a large, sturdy-looking farmer holding a basket.

The ambience played into the overall musical experience. It was like a scene out of "La Dolce Vita" - children running up and down the cobblestone street, the village priest greeting his parishioners, an older woman in black smoking a cigarette.

Angiolina Sensale, artistic director of the Ultrapadum Festival, began by saying, "This has been a dream for us to host them, a dream come true." Mayor Tiglio added, "It is the greatest thing that's hit town in a long time."

Church bells rang out as the orchestra tuned, something they would do several times throughout the night. The orchestra, led by Lawrence Loh, had an excess of energy at the start in Bernstein's "Candide Overture" but settled down for Rossini's "William Tell Overture."

A murmur of recognition led to vigorous applause for the brass, who were particularly crisp in the cool night air.

The program was well-balanced to suit the various sections of the orchestra and ended with the continuous crescendo of Respighi's "The Pines of Rome."

The audience demanded a trio of encores, including Copland's "Hoe Down," retrofitted with an appropriate "Hey!" from the orchestra at the end. But the emotional highlight came when the group played Verdi's "Va Pensiero," where many of the audience sang along, including the castle tour director, Sara Rossi, and her mother, Graziella Ghillani, who is a professional opera singer.

"Stars and Stripes Forever" produced the desired effect, helped in part by Mr. Loh's masterful conducting of the orchestra as well as the rhythmic clapping of the audience.

Youth Symphony wows audiences on its Italian tour

Saturday, July 09, 2011

By Jane Vranish, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



Pittsburgh Youth Symphony Orchestra conductor Lawrence Loh gives his opening remarks at the start of the group's San Gimignano concert in the town's main square. – Photo by Jane Vranish.

SAN GIMIGNANO, Italy -- The Pittsburgh Youth Symphony Orchestra left the relative quiet of the Italian countryside in Salice-Terme for the watery splendor of Venice. It was a quick dip into the City of Canals -- a 40-minute boat ride to and from the Venetian sights and a zig-zag walking tour of the maze of back streets, ending in the famed St. Mark's Square.

But there was little time to waste and another four-hour bus ride awaited them to the middle of Tuscany and the spa town of Montecatini Terme, which would serve as home base for a trio of concerts.

The first was in San Gimignano, a 2,000-year old medieval town with stone towers that, from a distance, looked like the Manhattan skyline.

The students had free time to explore and shop, which they appreciated, before taking in a classic Italian dinner at Restaurant Locanda La Mandragola, where there was a view of the Tuscan valley from the back terrace.

The concert took place in the town's main square, with most of the winds and brass housed in the large arched entryway to the San Gimignano theater and the strings spread out into the square. Audience members sat in chairs, along the walls and up the steps of the church opposite the square.

The orchestra obviously took a leap of confidence from the start. Bernstein's "Candide" had a real urban thrust, and the first movement from Vaughn Williams' "English Folk Songs" had an almost jaunty feel.

Although some of the softer passages were lost to the people sitting farther away on the steps, the crowd didn't want to let the orchestra go at the end. Several couples waltzed to Verdi's "Va Pensiero" while others softly swayed. A number of

American tourists roundly responded to "Stars and Stripes Forever," resulting in a brief recapitulation of Copland's "Hoe-down."

Among the enthusiastic audience members were the Henne family -- John and Dara and children Jack, Luke, Mark and Clark, who are Fox Chapel neighbors of PYSO's four Hilals -- and their extended family.

The next day the orchestra caught its collective breath, relaxing at the hotel pool or taking the funicular, similar to Pittsburgh's incline, up the hill to the quaint town of Montecatini Alto.

There was history of another sort to be had at the evening concert, at Terme Tuccio Spa just across the street from the hotel. It was a huge marble temple seemingly built to honor the music that was being played. Breathtaking Doric marble columns and sumptuous murals in the galleries surrounded the orchestra.

It also provided the best environment yet, coming closest to a concert hall. The strings blended from top to bottom, with a more robust sound from the cellos and basses, and the French horns took on a clarion call.

That meant that smaller moments in Dvorak's "New World" symphony and Respighi's "Pines of Rome" took on a greater meaning. Conductor Lawrence Loh also changed the order of the program, switching the atmospheric textures of Berlioz' "Dance" and "March to the Scaffold" from "Symphonie Fantastique" with the more familiar Dvorak "New World" symphony. Once again the Verdi drew a hushed response from the crowd.

Some conducted along with conductor Loh, who increasingly engaged with the audience, and wept at the end.

It was apparent that night that Verdi was an important part of Italy's fabric, not only in his music, but also in such Montecatini landmarks as the Verdi Cafe, the Viale Giuseppe Verdi and the Grand Hotel Plaza, where the composer often stayed.

Fourth of July the next day was celebrated in a quirky Italian style. The group had to choose between swimming in the Mediterranean at a private beach or touring the walled city of Lucca. But first they went to the iconic Leaning Tower of Pisa, where the students were as much an eyeful as the building itself as they enthusiastically posed for photo after photo. Push it over or hold it up?

There was a barbecue for the hungry travelers that evening, although hot dogs were encased in crusty Italian bread and "hamburgers" appeared to be breaded veal patties. Sides included french fries and apricots.

The next night was the final concert in Florence, part of the prestigious Florence Youth Festival. This concert had the most impressive setting in the Loggia dei Lanzi, with a collection of statues that included Cellini's famed "Perseus." But it was just a corner of the vast Piazza della Signoria, which could fit a couple of football fields within its confines.

The students had only a few hours to acquaint themselves with the City of Lilies in a walking tour, but the history of it all seemed to infuse their performance. They saved their best performance for last, playing for the largest crowd yet in a way far beyond their years.

In a program filled with finale pieces, there were several standing ovations, unusual because most of the crowd had to sit on the ground.

"Hoe-down" had a thigh-slapping cohesion, the best yet, but this savvy crowd, apparently a diverse assemblage of countries, truly appreciated the Dvorak.

Classical music lover Seymour Raize of Columbus, Ohio, was there with his granddaughters and called the concert "the highlight of my trip to Italy." Hundreds of audience members hung around to take photos of the group as they gathered for their own group photo.

One older Italian gentleman asked where the orchestra would play next. When he heard that this would be the last, he said, "It is Italy's loss."

Warmth of Italian audiences impresses The Pittsburgh Youth Symphony

Wednesday, July 13, 2011

By Jane Vranish, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



Members of the Pittsburgh Youth Symphony Orchestra tour group enjoying the sights at St. Peter's Square in Rome. – Photo by Kathy Piston

ROME, Italy -- The Pittsburgh Youth Symphony Orchestra staff debated whether to call the group's trip to Italy "The Potato Tour" (for the most frequent accompaniment to pasta), "The Gelato Tour" (the most common food) or "Hurry Up to Wait Tour" during the final banquet at the Hotel Tiberio in Rome.

Despite the late hours the staff put in juggling last-minute details, they were able to assemble their own version of the Academy Awards, from the "Forget Me Not" award to tuba player Jake Zawadski, who left cymbals behind at Pittsburgh International Airport, to the "Injury" award, won by cellist Amanda Vosburgh, who negotiated the entire trip with a knee-high boot on her leg.

By all accounts, the PYSO tour was a grand success, although that didn't mean it was easy to transport 150 people around the picturesque countryside. The three buses often had to thread a needle along winding mountain roads or perform virtuoso parking maneuvers at the narrow entryways to peach-colored hotels. Often, the group had to "hurry up to wait" at the Venetian water taxis or the Vatican museum just to keep the group together.

The trip started at a pianissimo level in the tiny spa town of Salice-Terme, so small that Google hasn't really found it yet. The first concert was about an hour away in Zavattarello, which had a shortage of restrooms, but a wealth of warmth. As bassoonist Joseph Merchant remarked, "I never played a concert and looked at a castle from my stand."

The students were able to observe Italy at its most authentic during those first few days.

"I like the traditional look of Italy," said oboist Mark Debski. "It's not Westernized yet."

"We try to imitate Italy, but it doesn't work," observed Rachel Silverstein. "You hear about it, but you don't understand until you get here."

The students also had to get used to the Italian diet. Yes, a combination of pasta and potatoes was almost a daily item, along with pressed ham, cheese and croissants for breakfast. Yet, like many others before them, the students also discovered the pleasurable effect of gelato, the Italian version of ice cream, and its many flavors (move over Baskin-Robbins).

The escalating size of the sights made their impressions. Venice, with its islands and bridges, made Madeline Docimo want to live there and the 2,000-year-old medieval walls of San Gimignano gave Ben Brodie a tangible history lesson.

In Rome, the staff expected only 30 students to get up at 6:30 a.m. to squeeze in an early tour of the Coliseum, but almost everyone made the trip. They then walked for 45 minutes to the Spanish Steps (where everyone seems to gather in Rome), followed by another sightseeing tour, this one 90 minutes long and taking in the Trevi Fountain and the Pantheon.

There was more: The Vatican Museum with the Sistine Chapel and St. Peter's Basilica, where some of the students took in a Mass that was being celebrated during their visit. Though tired, PYSO members dubbed the experience a highlight.

The last day was devoted to the ruins of Pompeii, a town of 20,000 that seemed caught in time. Even though it was buried in ash after the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD, the buildings were far more sophisticated than anyone in the group had imagined. The students related in their own way as Natalie Somerville and friends waged finger jousting battles, a variation on arm wrestling, in the middle of the Coliseum.

However, it was the audiences that may have had the most staying power in the students' memories. They seemed to be inspired by the crowds -- the passion of Zavatello, the medieval grandeur of San Gimignano, the classic splendor of Montecatini Terme Spa and the sweep of Florence, where the crowd virtually filled the vast square.

Some audience members stopped to ask about other performances. So in a way, it wasn't a surprise to parents Kathy and Douglas Bishop when a woman stepped out of the crowd at Rome's Coliseum, touched the PYSO logo on Mr. Bishop's official gold polo shirt that the orchestra wore for concerts, murmured "Grazie" and, just as suddenly, blended back into the crowd.

It was perhaps the biggest lesson of all to the students, that the Italian people hold classical music so near and dear to their hearts, and that the seemingly endless hours of practicing and rehearsing could mean so much to these people in a country so far away.

Former Post-Gazette critic Jane Vranish can be reached at jvranish1@comcast.net. She also blogs at pittsburghcrosscurrents.com.

What they said...

"Just want to thank you for organizing a fantastic trip. (My son) is still telling stories of peoples and events. He had the time of his life and actually loved the one city so much thinks of going back after college. (He) said things went so smoothly with little problem but there was some "drama" !!! We have reviewed 2,000 pictures!" – *parent*

"The Italy tour was incredible and I loved every moment of it - a truly great experience." - *percussionist*

"Thank you everyone for a great trip! I'll never forget the PYSO Italy tour of 2011! Go PYSO!" - *violinist*

"Many thanks to all for what you did throughout the Italy trip – Mr. Johnson, Mr. Loh, Eve, Georgina, chaperones, and others - for your wonderful organization and coordination making this a memorable experience for all who participated. We enjoyed so much just following along and getting to see all of the wonderful performances and especially experiencing the audience responses. It is hard to describe in words the audiences, the smiles and excitement over the Youth Symphony. Thanks again for taking such good care of the performers and providing them with a lifetime memory." - *parents*

"A real highlight was getting to know some of the fabulous musicians. They were amazing!" – *companion*

"I just wanted to thank you so much for everything on the tour. I know it was an incredible amount of work to keep everything organized and running smoothly, and I really appreciate your effort and dedication. Touring Italy with my friends and performing for such great audiences was something I'll never forget." – *cellist*

"Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to be a part of the PYSO Italy Tour. The tour was nothing short of amazing and I know I will never forget it. The tour for me was a dream come true and a cultivation of a lot of hard work. It is truly my honor to say that I was a member of PYSO and that I went on tour with them." - *bassist*

"Thank you for your wisdom, thoughtful approach and putting your soul while orchestrating professional life of young musicians at PYSO. We are all very thankful for the unforgettable tour to Italy." – *parent*

"We just wanted to thank you all for such a great trip. From what (our son) reports, he and everyone else had a truly wonderful time. The trip is something that they will remember for the rest of their lives. It takes a lot of planning and energy on the part of the adults to make that happen. And patience during the trip! Herding cats is never easy, and even less so when they all have instruments of all sizes and shapes." - *parents*

"The trip was just a wonderful and fabulous experience and the music terrific and well received... PYSO made Pittsburgh very proud. (We) are pleased at how the tour went and grateful we were able to go. We enjoyed it and the kids. (Our daughter) loved the tour; really enjoyed playing viola on this one; had great roommates and has new facebook friends. Thanks for all your work giving many people wonderful memories!" – *parent*

"In July I was fortunate to be in Florence and I was able to attend your concert. What a treat it was! My husband and I were very impressed by the quality of the concert and by your professionalism. It made us proud to be Americans! You are all great ambassadors as well as great musicians!" – Erla and David Goller – Sacramento, CA

PYSO Eyes on Italy...compiled by Jane Vranish

Elsa Lagerquist had rubber chicken on the plane and Christopher Jasiewicz couldn't sleep, but PYSO arrived with plenty of energy to take on Italy.

Berty Ruan was looking forward to "food, Italian pizza, pasta, swimming in the Mediterranean sea and the Leaning Tower of Pisa."

Yani Quemado prepared for Pompeii by going on "Escape from Pompeii," a ride at Busch Gardens.

"The pool was great" in Salice-Terme for Abigail McLaughlin because all the guys got out when she got in.

One of ten frisbee players in Zavattarello, Ahmer'e Blackman felt that each place he visited was "even more interesting." (Jason Yoder was the owner of the frisbee.)

"I'm trying to sample the food as quickly as I can -- bon appetit!" exclaimed Kemper Edwards.

"There are no traffic laws whatsoever and they all drive Smart cars," observed Brooke Boehmer. She added, "And the guys wear really short shorts."

The financially astute Rebecca Silverstein said, "I think figuring out how to pay is fun -- the euros are more practical."

"I was here a year ago and I'm still learning something new every day," noted Michael Kotcher. He had been to Italy before, adding that "I love all the outdoor markets."

Violist Natalie Somerville was back for a second tour. "I'm interested to see the different values. In China they valued work. As far as I can tell, in Italy it's food and fashion."

"It's cheaper than bread," marveled Madeline Docimo as she marveled at the fresh rest stop salad.

Benjamin Che celebrated his 17th birthday on July 2 and confessed to being "a big Sousa fan." So were the Italian audiences.

It turned out that Drew Percy, another veteran of the China tour, was still into coin collecting. But he's also taken up fishing in his spare time.

Amanda Vosburgh negotiated Italy in a walking cast. A veteran traveler, she joked that the Sistine Chapel was the biggest pickpocket area in Italy "because everyone's looking up at the ceiling."

"Great people, great food, great gelato," said flutist Dustin Cramer.

Gavin Virag felt that Italy reminded him of an Olive Garden restaurant. "It's so surreal that it's hard to believe."

Exclaimed Lauren Abel, "I loved the audiences -- the Italians get so into the music."

Violinist Amy Xie saw "so many beautiful things we wouldn't have dreamed of in Pittsburgh. It definitely makes what we do in terms of practicing worthwhile."

Eileen Kane observed that everything was "so quaint and personal. And I love the fashion -- people here have a greater sense of beauty."

So what if we ran late all the time. Alex Pape countered that "I love that it's laid back and that they care a lot about their history."

Audrey Whartenby focused on the architecture. “It’s just so completely different. We’re so modern.”

Charlie Loh and Logan Ness became great friends on the tour. Although Charlie isn’t an expert swimmer (“I try my best”), he enjoyed the Mediterranean Sea immensely. Logan liked the Leaning Tower of Pisa a lot, noting that “I didn’t know it leaned that much.” They were looking forward to Rome, Logan to the Coliseum and Charlie to “buying stuff.” And of course, the gelato.

Bassoonist Emily Bishop was only 14 when she went to China. “I know there are the same amount of people,” she said. “But there seems to be more room in Italy. China was jam-packed all the time.”

Eleanor Lee commented that the Italian tour was a lot different from China. “It was more relaxed,” she noted. “We got a lot of sun -- it was very therapeutic.”



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