

Journey to Spain, 2015



Traveling with a choral group should not be experienced in any other way but through singing. Thirty Rogue Valley Chorale members, with guests, traveled together to Spain for 12 days in late June on such a tour. Travelers ranged in age from 23 to 80, united by the common passion for a Capella singing in the great cathedrals of Europe. Performances were in Barcelona, Madrid, and Toledo. Voices rang out in rich, clear tones in the high ceilings of the cathedrals, filling our listeners with joy.

The world-famous, unfinished Gaudi Cathedral Sagrada Familia, (Church of the Holy Family) in Barcelona was an exceptional location in which to perform, and drew an audience comprised of tourists. Conductor Laurie Anne Hunter expressed teary eye of joy after the group sang with beauty and grace before a throng of tourists in the sound box of the grand cathedral.

In Madrid the troupe was enchanted by seeing the 16th Century, 3,418 roomed Royal Palace and the Prado Museum containing the artwork of the genius

Renaissance artists El Greco, Velasquez and Goya. Traveling by bus from city to city, we left Madrid, passing through La Mancha (highlands) of Cervantes' Don Quixote fame, with the windmills (soldiers in Quixote's mind) still intact, but not operational.

Notable among the group include two young tenors. One is Irish born Eoghan McDowell, an Ashland High School graduate who sang a duet with retired elementary music teacher Eric Smith, *I'm just a Poor Wayfaring Stranger*. The second is soloist Colin Campbell, a Math/Vocal Performance graduate from SOU who now heads to Boston Conservatory to pursue his Masters in Vocal Performance. He sang solo *Circumdederunt Me* with a small group during the tour. One singer, group coordinator Beth Gibson, met up with her missionary daughter and son-in-law along the way near Seville, who joined the group for a few days. Our tour director was energetic 71-year-old Cristina Vives, a Barcelona-born Catalan, who was dynamic in presenting her country. She learned English by living with a London couple as a young child.

Some of the Chorale troupe began 42 years ago, and have gone on all seven Europe tours starting in 1993. One family, consisting of parents Louis and Patricia and daughter Susan Franks, began singing with the Chorale in 2012 after singing opera and contemporary music for 20 years in the California Bay Area. Most of the group have backgrounds as music teachers, choir directors, professional singers and vocal students with coaches. All were energized by performing before appreciative Spanish audiences.

Flamenco music (dance, guitar, song) began in the Andalucia region of Southern Spain, an area visited by

our group. The music is bitter and sad, portraying the angry gypsies who have been forced to abandon their Islamic faith and accept Catholicism, which was the only permitted religion. Now there is freedom of religion in Spain. Flamenco music is popular worldwide today.

Bull fighting and soccer are two other passions of the Spaniard. Some famous Matadors command huge sums during bull fights. When we visited Barcelona, we noted that the soccer team had captured the spirit of the city. Everyone knew the Barcelona soccer song, and sang it somewhat like a national anthem. For an English translation of this song go to <http://youtu.be/dnghhn7f8U0> .

The Chorale troupe felt more like a large family, some pushing wheel chairs for the less mobile and looking out for each other. Twelve days together drew us close while we shared the wonders of Spain. We all learned to pack light and organized from an AAA presentation. One member of our group had his wallet lifted from his side pocket while being distracted in line, waiting to purchase a beverage. Spain has been slow to recover from the 2009 Global Recession and suffers with 27% unemployment, as well as a plethora of pickpockets.

Our last performance in Toledo at the 15th Century Cathedral Saint John of the Kings met with an excited audience who demanded an encore. The final song, *Ride on King Jesus*, featured soloist Michelle Cipollone, and brought the house down. This final performance ended the experience of singing in some of Spain's most sacred sites as American ambassadors, while we learned some of its history and culture along the way.

The tour to Spain by the Rogue Valley Chorale was special, shared as a harmonious group whose company was as enjoyable as the sights we saw in this distant old-world land.

Don Bolles, Chorale tenor