

OYO's Hot Greek Odyssey

Oakland Youth Orchestra: Bliss in Shades of Blue

By Barbara Stack

Oakland Youth Orchestra departed for its first-ever tour of Greece, leaving on Tuesday, June 19, and returning 11 days later on June 30.

We arrived at SF International early enough to deal with all the instruments and early enough for one family to return to the east bay for a forgotten retainer. Everybody remembered to bring passports! We lost ten hours as we flew east via the northern route—the sun never set that night and many OYO members never slept a wink. In Frankfurt we transferred to a flight to Athens with no apparent problems. In Athens we found Aegean Air initially unwilling to take our instruments to Crete and our fierce Tour Managers also engaged them in several rounds of seat reassignments so that in the end we flew over in three batches. We all made it, but a bass arrived with its neck unglued and our tuba didn't arrive at all.

• Thursday, June 21

On Thursday OYO toured the Palace of Knossos, known for its famed labyrinth, and really enjoyed our first tastes of Greek food, beginning with breakfast. That evening we played our opening concert at St. Marcus Basilica in Heraklion to a standing-room only crowd and to standing ovations from the wonderful, warm Greeks! This despite some severe jet lag, a tuba delayed in Frankfurt (though safe in its case loaned by the SF Symphony) and two bassists sharing one instrument. Our wonderful tour company ACIS arranged for a rented tuba, but as it did not play in tune in any key known to human kind, it could not be used. The kids, some of whom nodded off during the warmup, under Michael Morgan's fabulous direction just pulled through all their fatigue and played fabulously. Bravi to all! At this concert composer Elinor Armer also appeared to hear the performance of her wonderful "Call of the West," and to share in the ovations and great joy that OYO had made it over nearly intact and in great form.



Michael Morgan conducts the Oakland Youth Orchestra in its final concert on its tour in Greece this summer with a performance at the Arhaeo Odion in Patra on June 28.

• Friday, June 22

On Friday night we gave our second concert to a smaller, but appreciative audience at the outdoor cinema Theatro Kipou in Chania, and again the kids did a great job, especially on the film music that Michael so wisely programmed. This, after another day of sightseeing, including lectures on the bus while we drove through beautiful Crete and a visit to the Arkadi Monastery and walking tours of Rethymnon and Chania. The orchestra was lifted by the arrival of rented bass and tuba, so that, for the first time, everyone was playing. There was a reception for us after the concert with wonderful food in the elegant park pavilion (with the beautiful bathrooms) and we could walk back to our hotel in the warm evening.

• Saturday, June 23

After more sunny sightseeing we boarded the huge overnight ferry for the mainland on Saturday evening. The following morning we traveled to Delphi and gave another fabulous concert, (news of it had reached Athens when we arrived the next day). We had now reunited with our tuba and the bass rental for the remaining concerts was a very nice instrument.

Michael Morgan had by chance encountered the Philadelphia Boys Choir, which somehow had lost their venue and asked to alternate sets with us. The boys were adorable, and wonderful performers, as well as an enthusiastic part of our audience. The two conductors discovered that we had a common piece of repertoire: the same arrangement of "The Sound of Music." They decided to perform it without a rehearsal and it was simply incredible — a great pleasure for both the musicians and the audience.

The OYO kids got to hear MM sing along. This was a really hot concert. The audience started small, but once the concert was underway the town square filled up way beyond the chairs to those seated on the ground and on surrounding walls. There were several standing ovations.

OYO's performance was fabulous, especially because they had spent the noontime in 105 to 110 temperatures climbing up the hill to the site of the Oracle at Delphi. The mayor of Delphi welcomed us and wants us to send him photos of the concert.