

# Oakland Youth Orchestra captures hearts on Italy tour

Text and photos by Barbara Stack Domenico

From June 25 to July 8 an entourage of 70 high school musicians in the Oakland Youth Orchestra performed and toured in Northern Italy. They gave six concerts, all well attended and well received by audience and press. Orchestra members toured the historical and cultural sites of Rome and the Vatican, Assisi, Florence, Montecatini, Pisa, Lucca, Florence, Bologna, Mantova, Cremona, Crama, Venice, and Verona.

Piedmont musicians were Pam Bajada, Sunny Chan, Adelaide Cheng, Leonard Cheng, Vanessa Huang, Ian Jones, Malinda Lee, Jesse Miller and Albert Roh.

## COMMENTARY

My experience of the tour, as well as all the reports I have heard from students and parents, suggest that the tour was a great success.

First, we brought everyone back healthy and happy.

Second, with the exception of a couple of small thefts and one damaged instrument, we moved a lot of gear to and from Italy, and in and out of six concert sites with no real problems.

Third, we gave 70 kids a chance to succeed at a big adventure – to keep themselves and their colleagues well and strong enough to carry off the logistics and the art of performing on tour, while following a relentless and exhausting (though fascinating and irresistible) tourist agenda.

Fourth, we extended the opportunity and the adventure to the 14 students who received scholarship aid.

Fifth, we have nearly succeeded in raising the funds which made this all possible. (A donated piano is for sale at Piedmont Piano to benefit OYO.)

## PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

June 30, Montepulciano: Piazza Grande

July 1, Montecatini: Terme Tettuccio

July 2, Pistoia: Piazza del Duomo

July 5, Carpi: Piazzale Re Astolfo

July 6, Brassanoro: Church of Santa Maria

July 6, Crema: Teatro San

## PACKING UP

At Berkeley's Crowden School on Saturday night, June 23, the truck sent by our tour company arrived a few minutes early and found us almost ready with: 4 timpani in crates from our last tour, Piedmont High's bass drum in new crate made by Willie Carle, a xylophone, various percussion instruments, 2 harps, 4 basses, 11 celli, a tuba, and music suitcases – 29 pieces in all.

## JUNE 25 (MONDAY): LEAVE S.F.

We were met at the airport by ACIS employee Mike Koonce, director of Select Tour division. He helped us get Lufthansa to accept all the small instruments and board and plane. One kid's mother had grabbed the wrong passport, but was able to return to Berkeley, fetch the right one, and save our tour.

## JUNE 26, TUESDAY: ROME

We arrived in Rome on Tuesday, and were met by our tour managers, Anna Siepert and Simon Stone. They loaded us onto the busses for our trip to our Rome hotel, Pisana Palace, and then asked me to recreate the roommate list we had so carefully crafted

a walking tour with guide to St. Peter's Basilica.

Free time at the Forum, Colosseum and Pantheon. One student was separated from her passport pouch, worn outside her outfit, which contained a considerable amount of cash. Anna arranged with the American Embassy to have a new passport issued the next day.

Another student became separated from her small group but caught sight of another group and had just joined them when they came to the attention of the Italian police stationed at the Colosseum. She wound up in their custody, detained for the spurious violation of a so-called minimum age 18 limit for independently roaming teenagers. Luckily, 21-year-old Kristen Arendt and Nathan Tighe came to the rescue. This larger group traveled together during the rest of the afternoon.

Dinner: Pizza & salad outside.

## JUNE 28, THURSDAY

Morning: Visit the Vatican Museums & Sistine Chapel. Lunch in Vatican Café where we saw the Ruggles family. An afternoon rehearsal at the hotel. Violinist Jackie Kamrath, on tour with the Campolindo High School Chorus, and about to sing for the Pope, joined us from across town.

Had dinner out by the bus: asparagus pasta and spinach & zucchini.

## JUNE 29 DEPART ROME

Visit Assisi and the St. Francis Cathedral. Monks chanting Vespers at the Abbey of St. Antimo.

Dinner at a beautiful country place: penne pasta, tomato sauce, chicken, potatoes and torte. Chianciano Hotel check-in.

## JUNE 30, SATURDAY:

CHIANCIANO TO MONTEPULCIANO

## Program I

Overture to Candide, Leonard Bernstein

Adagio for Strings, Samuel Barber

Four Dance Episodes from Rodeo, Aaron Copland

—Intermission—

Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Ludwig van Beethoven

—Encores—

Intermezzo, from Manon Lescaut, Giacomo Puccini

Stars and Stripes Forever, John Philip Sousa

## Program II

Rodeo by Copland

Romeo and Juliet Fantasy-Overture, Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

—Intermission—

Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Ludwig van Beethoven

—Encores—

Overture to Candide, Bernstein

Stars and Stripes Forever, Sousa

and had not brought copies. The bus list and chaperone list constrained choices and hinted at our original intentions.

Going forward, we would remake the list for each hotel in accordance with its unique set of triple and quad rooms.

We were bussed into Rome for a walking tour (to keep us awake): Spanish Steps and Trevi Fountain, where most of us tossed a coin or 2 or 3. (I was busy making change.)

Dinner (risotto, lasagna, French fries), then Piazza Navona and our first gelato.

## JUNE 27, WEDNESDAY

Bus Tour of Circus Maximus, and



Photo by Jay Levine

Conductor Scott Parkman conducting the Oakland Youth Orchestra during its tour of Italy in a July 1 concert at the Terme Tettuccio in the city of Montecatini.

A free morning in Chianciano and string rehearsal in hotel. Bus trip to Montepulciano for 5:30 p.m. rehearsal at the concert venue. Performed Concert I at 9 p.m. at the Piazza Grande in Montepulciano, a benefit for UNICEF. There was a presentation by city officials, and an audience of about 300.

We learn that the Fresno Youth Philharmonic had performed here the night before. OYO members Maya Barrera and Jeff Hanson have friends in the Fresno orchestra through the All-State Honor Orchestra, and are inspired to connect with them.

It was hot and the plaza was at the top of a hill, offering fantastic views from little alleyways. Scott showed us a wine vendor with a labyrinthian cellar with enormous wine casks and spaces with strange acoustics. Had dinner at a club where everyone became a member. Ham sandwiches, bruchetta, tomato penne, salad, free sodas, blackberry tart. The concert was attended by lots of OYO families in our tour group: Barbara, Stephen, & Christopher Ho, Kee Ree & Yeong-Yle Roh, Anne Rainwater's grandmother Betty Gulino, Mali Tseng, Ron Grafton, Yunnice Lee. Also by Laney & John Nelson, Rick & Karen Fenchel, Magda & Marta Borzuchowski, and Gari, Jackie, & Rachel Ruggles. It was fun to see BYO pals Rachel & Marta running around the plaza.

#### JULY 1, SUNDAY: MONTECATINI

We depart at 10 a.m. on two busses back to Montecatini, a 3-hour ride. Upon arrival, we check in at the Hotel Royal Palace. Some brief rain in the

afternoon, then free time so everyone could take the funicular up to the old city.

Dinner at hotels. The group from Bus 1 was served turkey and pork in a large buffet. Bus 2's dinner featured risotto, beans, potatoes, rabbit, and peach ice cream.

Warmup at 7 p.m., and Concert II at 9 p.m. at the beautiful Terme Tettuccio Spa. Many tourists were in town. They heard us warming up and when the gate opened we saw a tidal wave of people rushing in – actually running – for seats. The Germans especially loved the Beethoven. An audience of about 500-600, many standing in rear.

"It was a really good concert," said cellist Ian Jones, a Piedmont High senior. "We played really well and received a nice reception from the people."

"The acoustics at the spa at the Terme Tettuccio were wonderful. All our concerts were outside during the trip," he said.

After the concert, ACIS personnel reveal to Maya and Jeff that the Fresno Youth Philharmonic is staying at a hotel near ours. They beg to go for a visit and chaperone Travis Davison volunteers to accompany them on the short walk. Members of both orchestras were delighted at the unexpected visit but they only got a half hour together because of midnight curfew. Jeff and Maya returned aglow.

#### NEXT WEEK

Leaning Tower of Pisa; Concerts in Carpi, Brassanoro and Crema, and a tour of the home of Stradivarius.

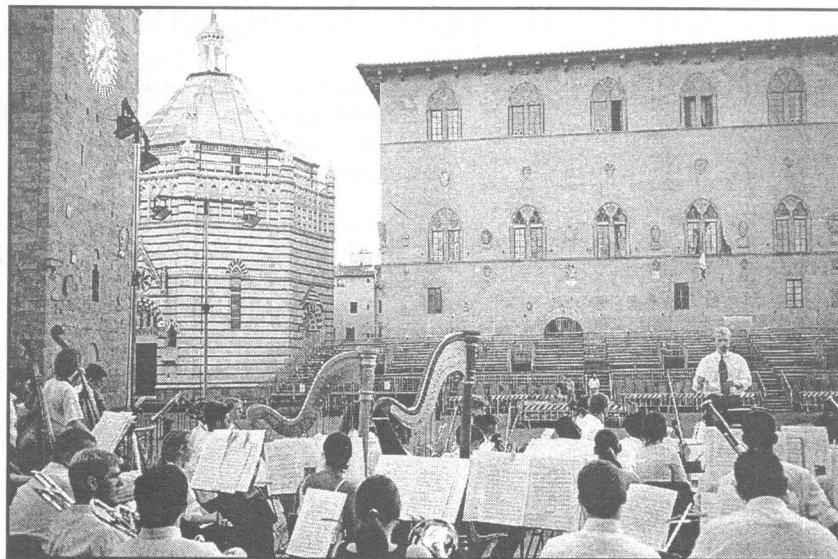


Photo by Barbara Stack

Oakland Youth Orchestra's Scott Parkman rehearses the orchestra on July 2 in preparation for an evening concert at the Piazza del Duomo in Postojna.