

Hungary April 2013



The singers in Eger Basilica, April 2013

I can't possibly eat at that time of night; that's my bedtime! That was my first reaction when I saw the schedule of events for our visit to Hungary. Why Hungary? I had the impression it was more East than West, with a dark history which did not sound too appealing.

As we gathered at St Botolph's car park, I wondered how Andrew managed to show no angst at the prospect of leading us on this latest expedition, while I had been feeling nervous for days. The first casualties of the trip were Glynis and David who couldn't come after David injured his eye, and later, Lis, who totally lost her voice and had to be content with watching us perform. Small consolation, but at least she was able to sing at the first of the tour concerts.



The tour benefited from the committee's decision to use a professional tour company, which ensured we had excellent venues and large audiences for all our concerts.

On our first morning, a three hour coach tour of Buda and Pest, with an English speaking guide, took us to some impressive places, including the citadel high up, overlooking the Danube, where we had eaten the night before. Many parts of Budapest have been rebuilt and there are some beautiful churches and historic buildings but, sadly, we also learnt how the Hungarians had suffered greatly throughout their history and that life is still tough for many

people living in poorly maintained blocks of flats. Later, a visit to an antique shop, looking at some Russian memorabilia, sparked a passionate speech from the owner, whose experience under Russian rule filled her with hatred for all those who had oppressed her country. Pacifist tendencies started to drain away, as I realised the necessity of a strong defence force and our advantage of living on an island.



As I dislike bathing in water shared by the public, I reluctantly joined the bathers at the supposedly health-giving thermal baths. To my surprise, I quite enjoyed dipping in the pools and sweating in the saunas, despite having to brave the cold outside, wearing just a swimming costume and towel.



Our joint concert with a Hungarian choir was in the intimate setting of Nador Hall. First on were the local choristers, who gave a beautifully blended performance, much appreciated by the audience. Next it was our turn and Andrew's light hearted introductions were tentatively translated by a member of the Hungarian choir. It was hard to tell if they were just being polite, but judging by the smiles, we were also well received, particularly our attempts at singing in Hungarian. The evening was concluded with a friendly gathering of both choirs, where we were urged to mix with our hosts, who fortunately could speak some English.

In contrast, our performance in St Stephen's Basilica felt rather tense; it was a vast and daunting space, with the echo and strange acoustic causing some difficulty. However, it was an honour to sing in such a magnificent church and we were grateful for a large audience, despite the cold.



The long trip to Eger, where it was disappointingly too wet and cold to wander round the town before our final concert,



was where we gave our best performance. Andrew had been interviewed for radio and television and TV cameras filmed our first piece. It was an emotional and uplifting occasion and our positively radiant conductor made it all feel worthwhile.

We are all really grateful to those who put so much effort into making the trip such a success and a huge 'Köszönöm' to Andrew; where would we be without him? We look forward to hearing the recordings so that we can relive those moments where, we hope, we were making beautiful music.