

# 2017 Tour to Tuscany

With a number of significant landmarks to celebrate, the choir took to the hills of Tuscany at Easter 2017 for the 10th of our biennial Easter trips around Britain and Continental Europe – this time appearing on tour for the first time under our new name and with our new musical director. Now appearing as the re-christened Charnwood Voices and under the baton of Nicholas Scott-Burt, the choir managed to conjure all that was best from our former life as Shepshed Singers, with three performances in as many days alongside a heavy-duty schedule of cultural visits and general merry-making launched early each day from a hotel base in the spa town of Montecatini Terme.



In a breath-catching, non-stop, whirlwind of music and travel around the historic region that inspired the Renaissance, the 45-strong choir won appreciation from the locals for our a cappella singing and trademark enthusiasm. The programmes were all sacred music by (mainly) European composers including Bruckner, Monteverdi, Palestrina, Durufle and Mendelssohn, spiced with English flavour ancient and (more) modern in the shape of Tallis and

Stanford. The American Samuel Barber was included as an honorary European, because his Agnus Dei was so obviously well-suited to the grandeur of the venues.



The concert series began with a short performance to the tourists of Florence at the mighty (and mightily-busy) “Duomo”, otherwise and more formally known as Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore. This magnificent building possessed the most challenging acoustic, but a tour highlight for singers and listeners alike was a spell-binding Bruckner Ave Maria that will live as long in the memory as it seemed likely to do in the rooftops of the building.

On to the ancient walled-city of Lucca the next day, after taking in Pisa and the Tower. A guided tour of the city (birthplace of Puccini), a quick rendition of Nessun Dorma at the feet of his statue, up and down a tower or two, and it was show-time again with a concert in the San Martino Cathedral that ticked every box in terms of performance, emotion and reception from a happy audience. Then it was late back, early start and off to do it again at Certaldo, this time via wine-tasting at Castello Verrazzano (aged barrels, white tablecloths, fabulous views, vintage wines and balsamics at exotic prices) as well as the medieval world’s version of a Manhattan skyline at San Gimignano.



There was somehow time left in the day after enjoying a standing ovation at the conclusion of the Certaldo concert to go up a funicular, get back down and dash off by coach to dine at an agriturismo restaurant in the hills – the farewell meal.



Tour PS: The pace was set at the start by a requirement to leave Leicestershire at 3am. It feels almost wimpish to note that at the end of the trip most of the party reached home by midnight... Many thanks to our tour organiser and sop soloist Jeni for a wonderful week.