

Robinson College Chapel Choir Tour Report 2007



Northern Italy was the destination of this summer's choir tour, as part of an international 'choir exchange' arranged with the choir and orchestra of Collegium Vocale di Crema under the Direction of Innocente Giampiero. The Italian choir and orchestra visited Cambridge and performed two concerts (at St Mary's Church Buckden and at Our Lady and the English Martyrs in Cambridge) and a service in Robinson Chapel, and we reciprocated by performing 3 official concerts (as well as several unofficial ones) in Lodi and Crema and a Mass in San Marco Basilica, Milan. Staying in Lodi, a relatively small but perfectly formed town, was a pleasure in itself due to the beautiful architecture, bustling streets and vibrant nightlife, all of which were enjoyed to the full by the choir.



Busking in the amphitheatre in Verona



As always though, despite the delicious ice creams and breads on offer, our main objective in Italy was to sing, as we did in concerts to packed audiences in San Francesco church in Lodi, San Benedetto church in Crema and at the Sunday morning Mass in San Marco Basilica in Milan. The double encore and standing ovation we received after the concert in Lodi (from the audience of over 600) was a moment that I know few who sung in the choir will ever forget. The reception we were given in Italy was so friendly and the incomprehensible number of 'Lodi cakes' thrust upon the choir, and the organ scholars in particular, in appreciation of our performances was one of the highlights of the trip.

Practice in the cloisters of San Francesco

Another firm favourite with the choir was the informal singing we managed to get up to as part of our Italian adventures. The largest audience gathered was probably in the amphitheatre in Verona where our impromptu rendition of 'Autumn Leaves' drew a sizeable crowd of tourists, bemused at this strange group of young English people singing in four part harmony. As the choir's resident culture vultures had conspired to fix the itinerary, the whole choir were treated to a series of visits to stunning churches and chapels (including a particularly ornate and extremely golden octagonal church in Lodi), with one of the undoubted high-points of the trip being the Duomo in Milan. Many of the choir took advantage of the opportunity to see Milan from above and admire the fine carving high above the vaults and gargoyles by walking up to the roof of the cathedral, though the less adventurous and energetic were no less impressed by the aura of tranquility and calm to be found inside the Cathedral. Aside from this, visits to Lake Garda, Verona and our new choral friends in Crema gave the whole choir a welcome break from the busy singing and rehearsal schedule.



The ornate organ of San Benedetto

All in all, the choir tour to Lodi, Crema and Milan was most successful – not only in bringing the choir closer together to perform perhaps its best of the whole year (including a spine-tingling execution of Walton's 'Drop Slow Tears'), but also in giving both the Robinson Chapel Choir and the Collegium Vocale di Crema a unique opportunity to present themselves to completely different audiences to those usually found at home. The opportunity of singing in the beautiful Italian churches and admiring the art and architecture as well as the music associated with the churches there was one that all choir members valued greatly and we were all very sorry to take our leave of our kind Italian hosts. The whole of Robinson Chapel Choir would like to extend their heartfelt thanks to all those who have so generously supported our tour.

Written by Bernard Travers