

YOUTH ORCHESTRA OF THE AMERICAS · ORQUESTA DE JÓVENES  
DE LAS AMERICAS · ORCHESTRE DES JEUNESSES DES AMÉRIQUES ·  
ORQUESTRA JOVEM DAS AMÉRICAS

Mary-Elizabeth Brown (Canada) – Report of September Concert Orchestra program:

On Monday, September 8th 2008, I arrived in Rome to join 3 other musicians from Youth Orchestra of the Americas for what would be an amazing few days of music-



making, remembering and forging connections with other musicians from all over the world. After several delays and bumpy flight from London Heathrow, I was delighted to find Jorge Vidura Dasa Solano Nivar (Dominican Republic), Gloria Marcela Diaz Dits (Columbia) and Timothy LaCrosse

(USA) at the restaurant across from our Hotel. We had a great taste of Roman cuisine with our new-found friends and colleagues from as far as Japan, Italy, Hungary, Jordan, Palestine and the USA. (above from left: Jorge, Gloria, Mary-Elizabeth, Timothy)

The following morning, we started our first day together as an orchestra with a full compliment of rehearsals as we tackled a large program (Barber *Adagio for Stings*, Marquez's *Danzon No.2*, *Lament and Prayer* by Aaron Jay Kernis and Mozart's *Jupiter Symphony*) under the very capable guidance of the Assistant Conductor, Matthieu Mantanus. The day proved to be an adventure, with many languages being spoken (Arabic, Japanese, Italian, English, and Spanish amongst others), many different styles of playing, and many intricate parts to assemble. By the end of the day, it was starting to sound like an orchestra - a true testament to the ways in which music truly is an international language capable of building bridges across even the most difficult borders.

After 7 hours of hard work rehearsing, we returned to the hotel to eat, study and spend time with our new-found friends. Two of the Jordanian musicians - Nabih and Feras - from the East-West Divan Orchestra and I decided to set out on an adventure to find some good Roman food and to take in some of the night-time sights in Rome's old city. We stumbled upon the Spanish Steps (one of the Hollywood landmarks in Rome) and then continued on a search for the infamous Trevi Fountain. As the evening went on, we found ourselves discussing not only music, but the differences between our cultures and the ways in which we hoped that some day the current boundaries between East and West would be non-existent, or present in a more positive light than they are right now. In the end, we were successful in finding the fountain (tossing in our pennies whilst making wishes) and settled in for a fantastic dinner at an open-air restaurant in a nearby piazza. After a long day of work and play, we were all grateful to share a good meal and meander back to the hotel.



The rehearsals scheduled for the second day were not until the evening, so we all had the opportunity to explore some of Rome and see the sights. With so much history and culture, it is hard to fit it all into a few short hours! That said, we all seemed to be successful in our efforts,

discovering various historical and cultural landmarks. The evening's rehearsals took place in the Sala Santa Cecilia at the Auditorium Parco della Musica, a beautiful hall designed by Renzo Piano. We met Maestro Samuel Wong, who would conduct us in Mozart and Barber, and Maestro Aaron Jay Kernis who conducted his own work, *Lament and Prayer*. While the rehearsals went long into the evening, I think we all came away feeling as though we were ready for the following day's concert.



On Thursday (September 11), we got off to an early start with a morning dress rehearsal. We were joined by two other musicians - one Indian tabla drummer and a Hawaiian *ohe hano ihu* or "Bamboo Sax" player - who added a fusion element to Marquez's *Danzon No. 2*. The result was a very innovative and amazingly effective performance. We continued on through the rest of the repertoire for the concert, adding the finishing touches and taking care of the final details before having lunch together at the hall's restaurant. We then went our separate ways to rest, practice and take in a few last sights of the city before returning to the hall for the evening's concert.

The concert itself began with several speeches, a performance by a young Palestinian pianist named Mira Anton Abu Alzulof who played Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte*, Op. 30 No. 6 and a Piano Trio who played Mozart's *Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano*, K 548. The orchestra then began its contribution to the program, all of which was very well received by the large and enthusiastic audience. It was remarkable to see how so many people from so many different backgrounds with so many languages could come together in such a quick rehearsal period to play as unified orchestra. As we performed these amazing works, there was very broad spectrum of palpable emotions on stage - everything from the grief that we felt as we played Barber's *Adagio* after Maestro Wong's moving words about September 11th to the smiles and twinkling eyes on stage as we played Mozart's *Jupiter Symphony*. Those of us from YOA were reminiscent of our own concerts together as the whole orchestra started dancing at the end of Marquez's *Danzon No. 2*.

After the concert ended, we all ate a fantastic meal together and had the opportunity to say our farewells both to each other and to those who had started out the week as colleagues and had become fast friends. As I left for the airport early the next morning, I couldn't help but wonder what would happen if musicians and others came together with such commitment and passion in an effort to promote peace and harmony all the time.