

PARIS/LONDON IN THE SUMMER TALLAHASSEE COMMUNITY CHORUS

by
Ruth Pryor

Our last day trip was to Mont-St.-Michel. Mont-St.-Michel is on the Normandy coast, about a four-hour bus ride from Paris, but it is a pretty unique place. It is a high rock, once standing off-shore surrounded by water. Now, it is surrounded by mud, although work is being done apparently to excavate the mud and return the water. The abbey church is at the very top of the rock. The other abbey buildings are just below it, and the town winds around and down from the abbey to the sea. When it was a real working abbey, I suppose, it was a real working town. Today, it's a Disney-esque tourist attraction. Nevertheless, once you've seen all that Paris has to offer, Mont-St.-Michel is definitely worth a day's trip.

We concluded our summer vacation with a week in southern France on a Rhone river cruise, but that's a story for another time. I'll conclude my Paris saga with a few tips for tourists. Paris is big and sprawling, so public transit is often the best choice. The Paris metro is old and few of the stations are equipped with elevators or escalators. Changing trains requires lots of long walks and ascending and descending of steps. But buses, if slower, are frequent and you get to see some of the city above-ground, rather than the tunnels beneath.

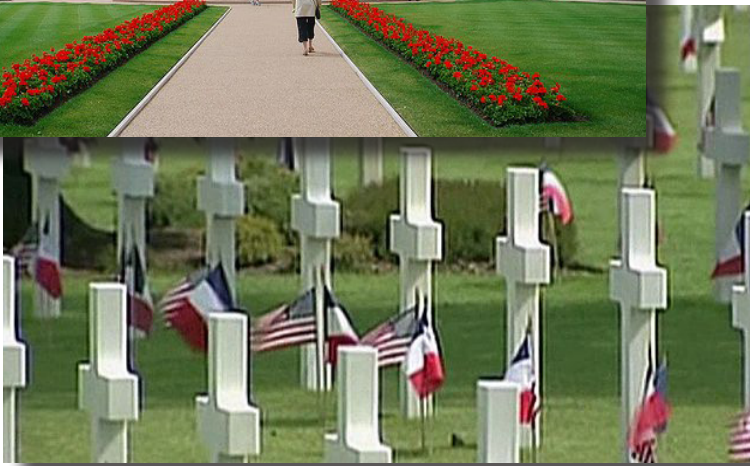
As on our past visits, we found Paris to be a very English-friendly city, quite in contrast to its reputation. It helped occasionally that I could speak a bit of French, but it definitely was not essential, and generally, they understood my English much better than they understood my French (French with a Tidewater Virginia accent!). Even many cabbies and metro employees have some basic ability in English, and the French national railroad



friendship and forms a great bond between the travelers. Overall, it was a wonderful experience! The ten U.S. Choirs that participated were:

Athens First United Methodist Church, Athens, GA,
Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church, Basking Ridge, NJ,
Choral Artst Society of Frederick, Frederick, MD
Heritage Signature Chorale, Washington, DC, Lindsey
Wilson College Singers,
Columbia, KY, Plymouth Congregational Church
Choir, Fort Collins, CO,
Tallahassee Community Chorus, Tallahassee, FL,
VIVACE! Choral Program
Puyallup, Washington, Williamette Master Chorus,
Salem, Oregon, and Winston-
Salem Youth Chorus, Winston-Salem, NC

After viewing the beach at Normandy, the chorus members went to Caen. Today, Caen is the second-largest city in Normandy with over 400,000 residents. The Caen Memorial is the Center for History and Peace. It is a popular place to learn more about 20th century conflicts. We also layed a wreath and sang at the American Cemetery on Normandy Beach.

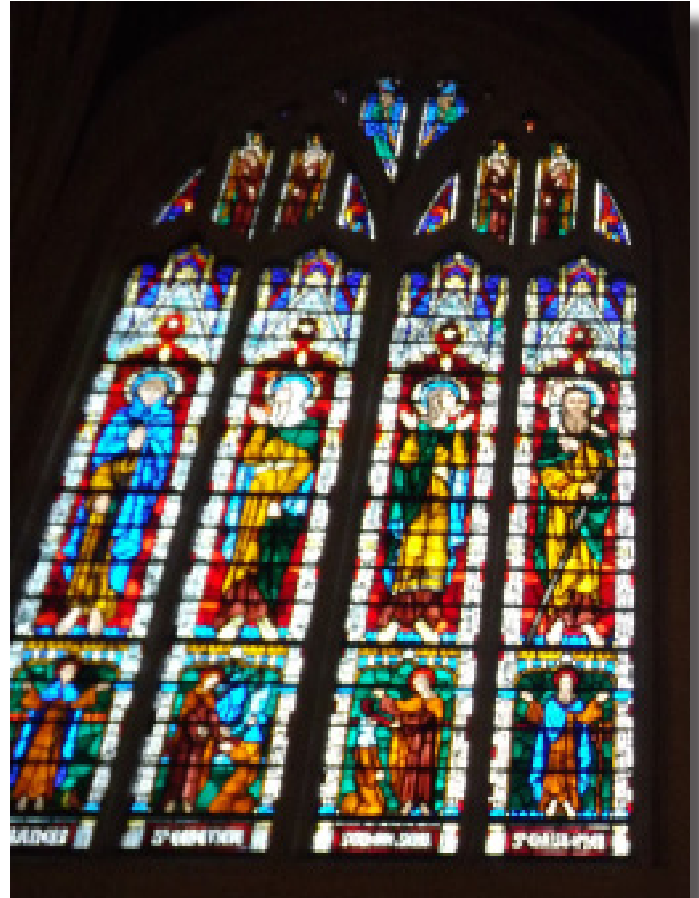


Friday, July 5th, all chorus members began rehearsing at the American Church in Paris (ACP). In 1857, a sanctuary was established in a new church building on rue de Berri. The first American minister was a Presbyterian. Since the end of WWII, the American community became diverse, and the number of English-speaking people of other nationalities has significantly increased.



This beautiful church became our rehearsal location. All choral groups rehearsed 3 hours in the afternoon and 3 hours in the evening every day. Scenic tours were scheduled around rehearsals. The inside chancel of the church is hand-carved Hungarian oak, except for the church's organ, which is relatively new. It was handcrafted at the Beckerath factory in Hamburg, Germany. There are a total of 3,328 pipes. The metal pipes are made of an alloy of tin and lead, and the wooden pipes are crafted from mahogany and oak. The organ weighs 18 tons and is supported by a steel frame secured to the wall with metal bolts. The beginning rehearsals are mandatory for blending each individual voice with sectional chorus members. Dr. Thomas spends a considerable amount of time listening to three singers at a time to obtain the balance that is necessary. He will rotate the chorus until he is satisfied with the sectional voices. The chorus is then formed as a Concert Choir, and not as an individual choral group. You will hear new voices on each side of you, and it may not be a familiar voice from TCC. It is a great way to meet new choristers. This new assignment will be the individual's position for the entire Concert.

The windows are monumental and historical. The three stained glass windows in the nave of the church were installed in 1901. Two of the windows are Tiffany windows from the New York Studio of Louis Tiffany. These windows are classified as national monuments by the French Government and are the only Tiffany windows found in any church in France.



The third window in the back of the church depicts the seals of the Reformed Churches of Europe: France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Bohemia, Hungary, Holland, Ireland, Scotland, and England & Wales. The designs on the third window was taken from colored lithographs representing the insignia of each of the Protestant movements. It should be noted that at the very top is the Jewish menorah, across from the Bible, joined by the dove, or Holy Spirit.

There are over 18 windows that represent, the Reformers, the Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Passion of Christ, Redemption, Resurrection, French-American Alliance War Memorial, Evangelists and the Saints. There were

many famous people who attended services at ACP. Among these distinguished people were: Woodrow Wilson during the World War I Conference, Ulysses S. Grant, Teddy Roosevelt, and Dwight D. Eisenhower. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. preached from the pulpit on 24 October 1965. The ACP celebrated the Commemoration Service in memory of the victims of September 11, 2001.

You couldn't possibly visit Paris without seeing the Eiffel Tower.



You can see its top from all over Paris. The tower rises 984 ft. At the end of the 19th century, it was twice as high as the Washington Monument, and at that time, it was the tallest structure in the world. It is now surpassed by the Chrysler Building in New York. The tower is 1,050 feet in height.

It weighs about 10,000 tons. Approximately 50 tons of paint are added to the Tower every 7 years to protect it from rust.

1889 World Exhibition – The Eiffel Tower was built for the World Exhibition in 1889, held in celebration of the French Revolution in 1789. It is named

after Gustave Eiffel, whose company built the Eiffel Tower. The Tower is so popular that millions of people climb the Eiffel Tower every year and it has had over 250 million visitors since its opening. Chorus members enjoyed the Tower so much during the day that they returned at night to see Paris from the top of the Tower with all of the glittery lights of Paris shining brightly. In the 90's, I had the privilege of watching the Tour de la France bicyclists from the top of the Tower. Amazing!

All of the choristers moved quickly to see as much as possible in between rehearsals. Some of the attractions that were the favorites were: Notre-Dame Cathedral.



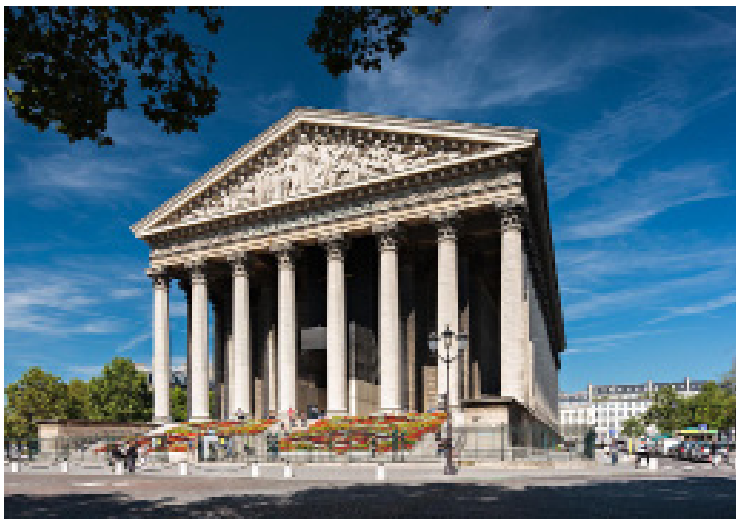
This beautiful Gothic Cathedral dominates the Seine and the Ile-de-la-Cite as well as the history of Paris. It was on this spot where the majestic cathedral now stands that the Romans had built a temple to Jupiter, which was followed by a Christian basilica and then the Romanesque Church (the Cathedral of St. Etienne, in 528). Maurice de Sully, bishop of Paris, decided to build a new cathedral for Paris, and he dedicated it to the Virgin Mary. Construction started in 1163, it was not completed until 180 years later in 1345. Built in an age of illiteracy, the cathedral retells the stories of the Bible in its portals, paintings, and stained glass. In 1768, geographers decided that all distances in France would be measured from Notre-Dame. Seventy-six years later, when Paris was liberated during World War II, General de Gaulle rushed to the cathedral after his return, to pray in thanksgiving.

Notre Dame Cathedral is still the center of France. Paris historique tours: Champs Elysees, Place de la Concorde, Luxembourg Palace and Gardens, Latin Quarter, Place de la Bastille, Invalides Hospital, & Montmartre. Versailles (optional). I had been on many of the tours, so I selected other sightseeing locations and shopping areas as I walked along the Seine, intrigued with the artists' painting.

Sunday, July 7th: The Paris Choral Festival Finale Concert is scheduled for 9:00 PM. We had time to rest before boarding the coach. Our concert attire was left on the coach since we would not return to the hotel before the concert. Our dressing rooms were in the catacombs below the cathedral. It was cold, dark, and the smell of mold was very noticeable.



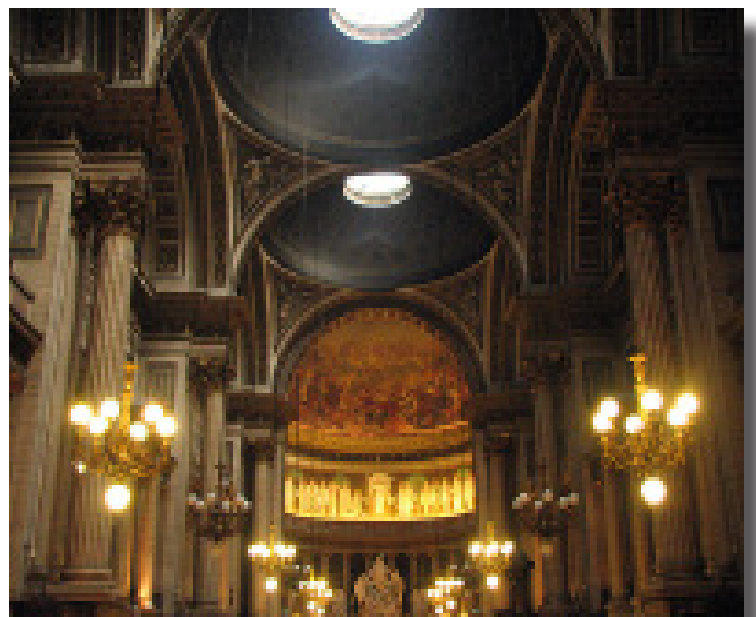
The Eglise La Madeleine was truly one of the most beautiful churches I have ever seen.



It is built in the Neo-Classical style and after the fall of Napoleon, the restored King Louis XVIII, decided that the building should be used as a church, dedicated to Mary Magdalene. After many debates and changes of plans, the building was finally consecrated as a catholic church in 1842.



In this magnificent cathedral many prominent people's funeral masses took place. Such famous composers such as Frederic Chopin (1849) and Gabriel Faure (1924).





At the front of the Church Eglise La Madeleine is the Angel Altar depicting St Mary Magdalene being lifted by angels which evokes the tradition concerning ecstasy, which she entered in her daily prayer, while in seclusion.



All ten of the Choral Groups in rehearsal in front of the Altar, directed by Dr. Thomas



Anthony Bernarducci (PhD Student in choral conducting, working with Dr. Thomas) and Dr. Andre' J. Thomas

This summer Tallahassee Community Chorus spent an exciting week in Paris preparing for a very rewarding concert. The experience was a testament to the universal power music has on the soul, and how it can speak to us all through it's own unique language. The chorus of almost 200 singers came from many different places across America. They were all prepared by their own musical directors and met for the first time in Paris. There are few other circumstances I can think of where 200 strangers can meet in a foreign country and be instantly united to a common cause. Dr. Thomas created an inspiring experience for the singers fostering a sense of community throughout the concert preparation. We were all so excited the day of the concert to have a full cathedral of concert goers ready to hear the music of Faure, Bernstein and our own Dr. Thomas. Music transcended that day and peoples hearts were touched regardless of nationality or language. We closed with a piece by Dr. Thomas which embodied the essence of the trip,



The Festival chorus sang the “Requiem” by Gabriel Faure. The Chichester Psalms by Leonard Bernstein were sung in Hebrew. Two original selections by Andre Thomas were also performed. “Someday is Today” and “Beautiful City”. The French community loved the Requiem and the cathedral was full during the dress rehearsal and the night of the concert.

Canterbury/London

We continued our adventure on Monday, July 8th as we boarded the coach and transferred to Calais for Folkstone via one-way Eurotunnel Le Shuttle. It was a strange feeling to be seated in the coach and surrounded by water in the shuttle. The arrival time to Folkstone is only 32 minutes. We arrived in Canterbury and took a tour of the Cathedral. Canterbury Cathedral is visible from miles around, and is the most important center of pilgrimage in Northern Europe. The first Cathedral to occupy the site was begun in AD 597 by St. Augustine. After several fires, the Cathedral today consists of 11th, 12th, 14th and 15th century architecture.



We continued on to our next destination, London and checked into the Hotel Lancaster Gate. London became an important Roman city when it was established 1,250 years ago. It was resettled by the Saxons in the fifth century, after the end of the Roman occupation. London has been scourged by the plague (1665) and was almost entirely destroyed by the Great Fire (1666). World War II's "Blitzkrieg" tore up the city considerably. She stands today as a monument to perseverance, culture, excitement, history, and greatness.

A guided tour of London included the residential and shopping districts of Kensington and Knightsbridge. We went past Westminster Abbey, where most English Kings and Queens have been crowned since 1066, and where many are buried. We continued down Whitehall and Trafalgar Square with Nelson's Column, past Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament to Buckingham Palace, where we saw the "Changing of the Guard." Then we continued along Fleet Street to St. Paul's Cathedral and the 900-year old Tower of London. We dined at the Sherlock Holmes Pub.

On Wednesday, July 10th, we were scheduled for an excursion to Windsor for a tour of Windsor Castle, which was built 900 years ago by William the Conqueror to guard the Western approach to London. Today, it is England's largest castle and also the largest inhabited stronghold in the world. Highlights of the visit will be St. George's Chapel and the State Apartments. Unfortunately, since July is the peak tourist season and the children are on vacation, the lines were too long and we had to make a change in our agenda and get the tickets for the State Apartments in lieu of the Castle.

London Eye Ferris Wheel: In March 2000, the EDF Energy London Eye was built only to be used as a temporary celebration of the millennium. But it was too popular to take down and the Queen discovered it was bringing in a lot of British pounds. More than 3.5 million people visit it every year (about 3 times as many as visit Stonehenge). The Eye is much easier to get to. This attraction was one of the most visited by the chorus members, and everyone raved about it who had ridden the Eye. I decided to give it a try. Crawling through the sky like a cloud snail, looking down on the milk chocolate Thames, it was the best 18 pounds, 90 pence I had spent so far. I always loved ferris wheels. It took seven years to build the Eye and it takes about 30 min. to make a rotation at the speed of 0.6 miles/hr. Each capsule weighs 10 tons and the spindle, (the shaft that holds the wheel), is 23 metric (over 75 feet) tall. Together the spindle and the hub weigh 330 tons. It is 20 times heavier than Big Ben. Some of the landmarks can be seen from the highest viewpoint of the Eye.



Thursday, July 11 the chorus departed from Heathrow Airport in London for Tallahassee and other cities in Europe. I went to Frankfurt, Germany via Lufthansa Airlines to visit family in Neuhausen. The itinerary that my family arranged for my visit was historically and majestically situated in the middle of the Rhine-Neckar Triangle and at the periphery of the Swabian Alb. The Hohenzollern Castle rises majestically on the mountain peak with a panoramic view over the countryside.



The castle was the home of Georg Friedrich, Prince of Prussia, and Sophie Princess of Prussia. Numerous concerts, open-air cinema, exhibitions and one of Germany's most beautiful Christmas markets make the Castle into an attractive cultural event all year round. What a wonderful treat to visit this magnificent Castle.

My next surprise was a trip to Strasbourg, France. It is a city with 265,000 inhabitants whose historical centre nestles between the arms of the river Ill, a tributary of the Rhine. Embedded in the heart of the old city, is another famous Notre Dame Cathedral which is characterized by its single tower, whose spire reaches a height of 142 metres.



Inside the cathedral is the famous astronomical clock with its automated figures. Tourist boats offer trips through Petite France. There is nothing better than a boat tour to get to know the old town. All traffic through the navigation canal must pass the lock. It was relaxing to take the boat tour around the Centre of Stasbourg for an hour. The towers of all the principal churches in Strasbourg are silhouetted against the sky. In the foreground rises the most remarkable of all, St. Pierre-le-Vieux, with its two bell towers, one Catholic, the other Protestant. The next adventure took us to Ladenburg – one of the oldest cities of Germany. It is situated in the middle of the Rhine-Neckar Triangle, the old Roman town is completely preserved and is surrounded by the River Neckar and the Odenwald. Traces of its Roman past are intertwined with medieval charm and has given the town its character. While in Frankfurt, an interesting museum to visit is the Städel Museum established by the banker and businessman, Johann Städel in 1815. This museum holds the rank as Germany’s oldest museum foundation and houses one of the world’s most important art collections.



Next we went to the city of Bacharach to see the oldest house in Germany and the beautiful shops along the narrow streets.



The trip to Oberwesel was an eventful one. Inside the Liebfrauenkirche Church, the organist was practicing, and we were privileged to have an organ recital while we viewed interior of the church.

Our final destination was the Schönburg castle which has been watching the Rhine for more than a thousand years.



There are 22 comfortable rooms inside the castle that are tastefully furnished, lounge with open fireplace, prison tower, small library, Rhine terraces, beautiful castle garden, elegant rooms for conferences. The view overlooking the Rhine is indescribable. We were treated for lunch in this elegant setting. What a great honeymoon gift this would be for our children. As my visit was coming to an end, we decided to go to a town that was the royal seat of counts and princes of Nassau-Idstein from 1255-1721. In the 1800's, it became an Educational Centre of teaching, agriculture, architecture, and attracted many artisans and tanners. It became the centre of an important leather industry. A 14th century protestant Union Church is a real jewel.

Beautiful buildings surround the centre made up of eleven independent villages. It is convenient by rail, road and motorway. On my last day in Kelkheim, we decided to drive to the beautiful village of Oberursel. A Bach concert was going to be performed at St. Ursula at the Leibfrauenkirche with organ, violin, and violin-cello. It was a perfect way to end an inspirational journey through Paris/London/Germany and surrounding areas and receive the quality of the music of that region. This is a small village, but the church was filled to capacity.

