

Symphonic Holiday in Santa Vittoria, Italy

by Anthony Radogna

While winter was unleashing its full force over Australia this year, I escaped the country with my mother and swapped it for a full Mediterranean summer in Italy with the main purpose of spending time with my relatives.

Little did I know that only six months before departure, I would be extending my eight week trip to 10 weeks in order to accommodate 10 days of orchestral playing with an international symphony orchestra. I was so excited by the opportunity to take my passion for music off-shore, I hurried to obtain as much information as I could about this exciting venture.

It all started with a Facebook post I discovered on the International Double Reed Society page from an organisation called 'Da Capo Orchestra & Travel' that was publicising vacancies for Oboists



for their upcoming symphonic holiday in Santa Vittoria, a small antique town on a hilltop surrounded by mountain fields of grapevines and sunflowers in the upper region of central Italy.



This town in particular also has its own special history of music-making and teaching.

This event is essentially a music camp style of event that provides orchestral musicians from all walks of life with an opportunity to play at an advanced level while enjoying a holiday in a relaxing Mediterranean environment.

There were approximately 40-50 musicians who came from various parts of Italy, Germany, USA, The Netherlands, Turkey and Israel with me being the only one who came from Australia and thus (much to everyone's surprise) had to travel the furthest to be there.

We had several professionals from Italy as well as neighbouring countries form part of the orchestra and who were also our tutors during the week.

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Some orchestral musicians were conservatory students from various parts of Italy and Germany. Our conductor, David Sofer had come from Israel and did an amazing job at leading us and bringing out the very best in the orchestra through his

positive energy, focussed and very efficient rehearsals as well as his spontaneous humour.

The organiser of these symphonic holidays is Jonas Hees who is an absolutely amazing and down-to-earth man.

Apart from the fact that he speaks fluent German, Italian and English, he provided us with everything we

needed to ensure a smooth and worry-free week.

The program consisted of the Overture to the Marriage of Figaro by Mozart, the Beethoven Violin Concerto and Symphony no. 3 by Mendelssohn. Our soloist for the Beethoven was Hande Küden, a professional violinist from Turkey who was only recently appointed to the violin section of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra.

We were very warmly welcomed on day one by the staff at Hotel Farfense, a family run hotel and restaurant and were also given a tour of the town where all our essentials were within easy walking distance.

Each morning thereafter consisted of a full buffet breakfast at the restaurant at 8am, followed by a three hour rehearsal on the top floor of Palazzo Monti (an antique building in the town with stone interior walls and impressive reverb).



At rehearsal I also had to tune the musicians to A = 443Hz! I remember walking down the main paved street in the morning and hearing the sound of a violinist practising in one of the rehearsal rooms of the Palazzo Monti - what a pleasing way to start the day!

After lunch at the restaurant we had the option of taking a bus trip to one of the many nearby towns and wineries to unwind and after an early dinner in the evening back at the restaurant we would either have a sectional or full orchestra rehearsal.

The night then ended with a glass of wine out on the terrace of the restaurant while getting to sample some locally made produce.

Our dress rehearsal was held in the town's theatre (Teatro del Leone) where locals were invited to come and see a mock performance.

The real concert took place in a larger theatre in the nearby town of Offida in the Teatro Serpente Aureo – an exquisitely beautiful and very antique theatre with a somewhat renaissance feel to it, detailed hand-painted ceilings, crystal chandeliers and a curved box seat structure with about 60 box seats as high as five floors.



This experience is something I will never forget. It's one thing to perform in your own country but there is an underlying level of satisfaction from performing in another country that words cannot describe, amplified by the fact that Italy has such a powerful history of music, it is made obvious wherever you go.

On top of that, I had made several new international friends whom I now keep in touch with from time to time. A return trip is definitely

on the cards – I hope someone can join me next time!

The programming for next year is already up on their website so I encourage you all to check it out: <http://www.dacapo-travel.eu/>.

They run three symphonic holiday events each year with the current locations being Cefalù (Sicily), Santa Vittoria and Bardou (France). ■

All photographs used in this article are courtesy of Stephen Jerome Kohn.

