

Fall in Paris Journal

Monday, September 20 – renting a cello

Last week I finally got up the nerve to call Mme. Marie-Paule Milone, the cello teacher who David Eby referred me to who lives and teaches in Paris. She is a performing artist whom David met while he was studying in Bloomington. She was a teaching assistant at the time with someone she names with great pride; he was probably a hot shot. But I don't know any famous teachers.

She made an appointment for the following Wednesday for my first lesson. She gave me the name of a store that rents cellos that is open on Saturdays.

We didn't go there because it is way on the outskirts of Paris and we were worried about carrying it back to our apartment on public transportation. So Ernie browsed the Internet and found a place in Paris that said they would deliver cellos and other instruments in Paris. We figured out where rue de Liège was and we traveled there by metro to find it, but it was not open.

So Monday morning we went there directly and knocked at the door. The man who answered the door, let us in and once he understood what we wanted, he explained that he had no cellos available right now. This was a string shop, a Luthier (a maker of stringed instruments.) He suggested that we go a few blocks up to rue de Rome where there are many, many music shops. He said rue de Rome is known as the music street. He pointed to his left and smiled encouragingly. We frequently get directions from people pointing and saying “là bas.” It has become a joke to us because it is such a vague direction. It's essentially, “over there.”

So we followed his direction of “là bas” and low and behold, we first found rue de Madrid, the rue de Constantinople, and continuing the circle finally found rue de Rome. This little intersection is called Place de Europe. The metro station plumb in the middle is called Rome. As he said, the entire street is dedicated to musical instruments. It was so much fun. There were at least 2-3 blocks of shops dealing with musical instruments on rue de Rome.

There were stores specializing in brass instruments, flutes, guitars, and strings. An archetier is a specialist in making bows for stringed instruments. I came across three that advertised themselves as archetier.



We passed three shops with bass viols in them. One must have had 10 basses standing in the main room, with a loft containing more, some suspended from the ceiling and a back room with a man bent over a workbench concentrating on some task.





It was fascinating. It reminded me a little of the shops in the Harry Potter movies.

Because it was Monday, many of the shops were closed. Of the three string shops we found open, two were out of cellos to rent. There was a lot of business going on with people coming in and out and lines of people waiting to be served. They are called violoncelles in French. Fortunately, the third shop had one available, a new, French-made cello, which is fine.

This was a dusty shop with lots of back rooms. The clerk asked if I was a beginner and we answered no. He then excused himself and went into a back room and came out with a brand new cello and unzipped it to show me. It is very pretty and I took it.

We had to carry it home on the Metro. The clerk gave me a few instructions. He said to be particularly aware of overhead structures – doorways, awnings, and ceilings in escalators. He showed me my reflection in the glass of the door. I was flabbergasted when I saw that the top towers at least a foot over my head. It didn't feel that way so I have to be very aware when I have it on my back.

We took a picture of me with it strapped on my back.



A few days ago I saw a young girl, about the age I was when I first started playing the cello in the third grade, with a cello strapped on her back walking merrily along with her mother. I figured if she can do, so can I! After that I became aware of how many musical instruments are being carried on buses and metros.

Next was the task to get the new cello home and tune it. In anticipation of taking lessons, I had brought my tuner, rosin, music glasses and pin holder for the floor from home. I didn't bring my music stand because it is made of metal and was too heavy to carry on the plane. So we bought one. I signed a contract and since he was out of extra copies and had no photocopy machine, he said he would mail the contract to me. In it will be a password so I can have an account on their web page.

It makes sense to have a music street. There is so much music everyday in this city that there must be thousands of musicians, each with at least one instrument to care for, and students. All of those students need instruments and music, accessories and repairs and upgrades. So there is a lively industry serving this community of musicians.

The city of Paris just acquired one more.