

## Paris Journal 2010

Sunday, February 14 Musée d'Orsay



Today, February 14, Valentine's Day, we went to the Museum d'Orsay to hear a concert at 3 p.m. It was a sunny, wonderful Sunday so there were lots of people enjoying the museum with us. The Museum is converted from an empty train station. It faces the Seine from the left bank. It is the lighter building with the banner of Van Gogh's face hanging in front. This is the museum renovated to house the French government's collection of impressionist art.

Since most of my postings have photos taken by me, I seem to be a ghost so I asked Ernie to take a photo of me in front of the museum. Do I look warm enough? Today I was encouraged to come across at least 2 other women in Paris wearing a red coat, making a total of three of us. Most people are dressed in black or gray, or occasionally some shade of brown. There are coats in shades of purple, too, but muted.



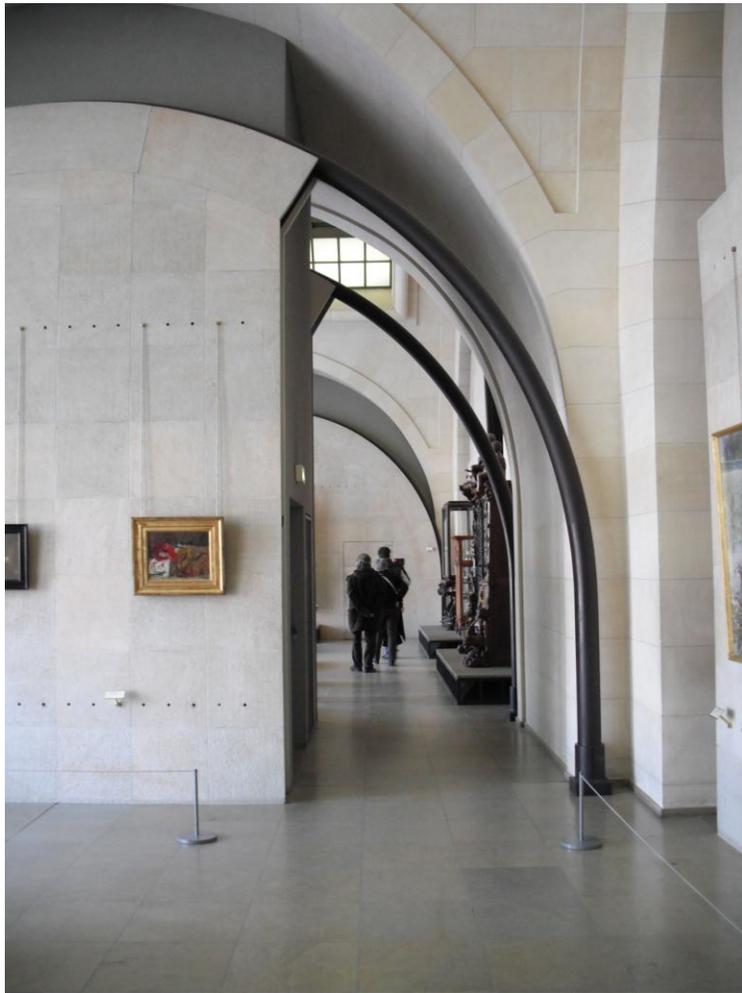
Since we had purchased our tickets to the concert at FNAC (a ticket selling service that has an entire multi-floored store selling music, posters, souvenirs, clothing and all kinds of things) we were able to skip the long line to get into the museum. We went directly to Entry C and went right in. There were so many visitors that the cloakroom was full so we had to carry our coats and gear. We also had to pass a security check like at the airport.

As has been the case in so many of our visits, the building was the most impressive part. It is clear that the Gare (train station) d'Orsay was an impressive building to begin with. Thank heaven they didn't tear it down. Buildings don't get built that way anymore. Here are a few feeble attempts to capture the grandeur of it.

This is taken from the entry looking into the first floor of the museum.



The following one is taken in one of the galleries in the sides. The galleries are on the right and left of the main hall within those pink stonewalls.



This was taken from a gallery looking into the main hall. The people give you a sense of the expanse of the buildings. The rosettes were in the original train station. They probably were cleaned to show their pink color.

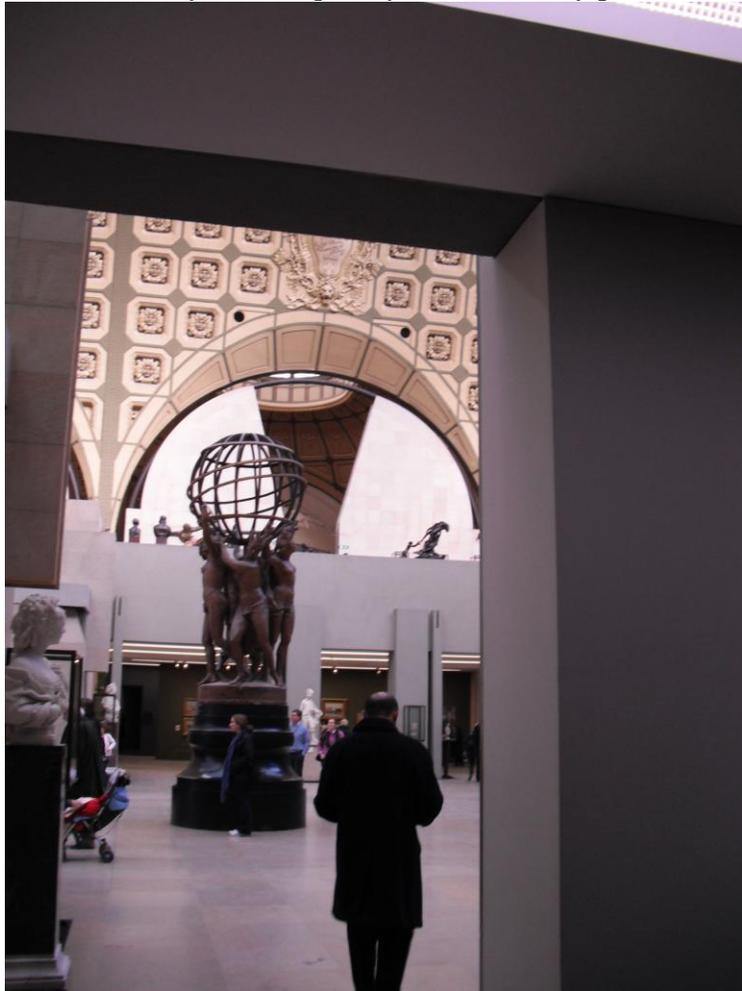
There are many impressive sculptures on the main floor in marble and in bronze. There was one hall I tried to photograph but it didn't come out clear of two white marble statues of mythical females, maybe muses or goddesses, I didn't notice. What was so lovely was they were set against a blue gray wall with stars on it. The color was graduated giving it the appearance of depth. It looked like twilight, so dramatic.

There is a gallery of Monet's lily pads and others of his garden, the Japanese bridge delicately spanning the lily pond. There was a large collection of others paintings of his.

Another gallery held an impressive number of Degas paintings and a few sculptures, another gallery of Renoir and the hallway leading to it. One of the large paintings was of a crowd of people sitting outdoors enjoying drinks and food. I could almost hear their glasses clinking and the murmur of many people talking.

Many, many famous Impressionist paintings are there. The self portrait of Van Gogh, his room in Arles and others are there though not as many as other painters.

There was quite a large crowd but they moved quickly and were very polite.



As we went into the lower level to look for the auditorium where the concert would be held, we came across a moquette of the building. Now here was something I could photograph. This shows the full front of the museum. To the right is a man looking into the side view, which will give you a scale of the moquette. The dark stripes above are steel beams with rivets, which are found throughout the museum. They are what held up the original structure. They are painted a dark green.



It was getting close to the time for the concert so we went down the stairs to stand in line. It was general seating so we wanted to get a front row seat. There were announcements that the concert would start and that children under 13 were free. We got in; got two seats in the front row and the people began to stream in. It is a small auditorium with seating for 200-300 people. The stage is of hardwood; the background is hard wood as is the floor and ceiling of the auditorium. The seats are leather or vinyl so there is nothing to absorb sound. There is a whole system of lighting so I imagine it is a venue also for theater.

As they set up and the stage crew came in and out, we could see backstage which seemed quite deep.

The whole concert was works by Camille Saint-Saëns. Initially the stage had a Steinway concert grand and two music stands. There three pieces before the intermission:

- Tarantelle for flute, clarinet and piano, op 6.
- Romance for flute and piano, op. 37
- Fantasie for violin and harp, op 124.

All the musicians were members of the l'Orchestre de Paris.

The tarantella was a wonderful light piece that sounded like bees and butterflies and birds flitting around. The audience was nearly half children under 13. I expected them to be fidgeting and talking but they were engrossed. The musicians seemed to be enjoying themselves and making eye contact frequently getting and giving cues.

When the second piece concluded, there was a break and we heard something heavy being rolled back stage. The wood panels slid open and two men rolled a harp onto the apron of the stage. It was a beautiful instrument. I kick myself for not getting a photo of it but the back of it was very lightwood and I was afraid it would reflect too much. Also, things happened pretty fast.

After it was set up, out came a beautiful young woman in a black pants outfit with midriff and back showing and décolletage. Her hair was auburn and she was stunning. The violinist paled in comparison. He was a man and an excellent musician but clearly was outshone by the harpist. Her skill was great and they both played with great emotion and the best musicianship.

Then came intermission. The harp was rolled away and a bunch of stagehands came out to set up for the Carnival of the Animals. Chairs and music stands were brought out and a man came to the front of the stage and opened it up and took out rolls and rolls of electric cord with connections and distributed it on the stage to each of the music stands. It was the power source for the lights over the music stands. Someone else came in with music and distributed it to the music stands. Another Steinway Grand Piano was rolled in and two other instruments that were covered but became a marimba and a xylophone. A stepladder was placed in one corner, a child's chair in the other corner and a rug and pillow in the center.

Here are the two Steinways back to back and a rolled up power cord in preparation for the performance.



The set is ready for the show to begin. The marimba and stepladder are on the side. See the rug and a small pillow in the middle of the stage and a stagehand surveying the set up. The final check revealed that there was no electricity to the lights. There were lots of worried looks and talking and motioning to the back of the auditorium then the fellow in charge of the electrical set up came back, went into the stage to check things. Finally the lights came on and they were ready for the show.



I didn't feel right photographing the musicians so I will have to describe what happened next. There were 10 musicians – one percussionist played the marimba and the xylophone, a bass player, the clarinetist and flutist from before, two pianists, a cellist, one violist and two violinists.

In the center was a woman who wrapped herself in a blanket and lay down while they played the overture. Then she pretended to wake up with lots of yawning and broad motions and began the narration. She wore big baggy pants in a harlequin pattern held up by suspenders and a black leotard. Her hair was tied up in little braids that stuck out and she wore a huge plume on one suspender. With very exaggerated facial expressions she told the story and talked first about a cock with a huge decoration. The plume went into her hair. She mimicked the cock and then the chickens that thought he was very attractive. They children ate it up! Then the music told the story of the chickens and the cock.

She is an actress from the French cinema and television and quite good. She narrated the story with broad gestures and play-acted all of the parts. I would call her performance in the style of Comédia del Arte. The step ladder was a prop that she climbed up on and spoke from various levels, she sat in the baby chair and told the story of the tortoise, changing her face to look like the beak of a tortoise and then making her way slowly across the stage just as the music began describing the movement of the tortoise.

The children were following along every step. Sometimes she would pose a rhetorical question and some child in the audience would respond, "Oui, Madam," very politely. The musicians were smiling and playing along with her. Someone had staged it because the violinists stood up and sat down when they played the braying donkey; the clarinetist and flutist had parts. The kuku part was very funny.

The entire production was charming and engaging and of course, the musicians, all from the Orchestra de Paris, were superb.

There were several curtain calls and the audience demanded an encore. So they replayed the ending piece. When the audience demanded more, the musicians all looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders and bowed again and again. Finally they left the audience wanting more.

Another great performance.