

Paris Journal 2010

Sunday, February 7 - Museum and Concert at Val de Grace

This is the view of the Val de Grace dome from the south side of our apartment. [Actually the view is from the upper floor of our duplex, the 6th floor (entrance to the apartment is on the 5th floor) – this would be the 7th floor the way floors are counted in the US]. Today we went to the church to visit the museum and then attend an organ concert in the church.



The church was built in 1655 but has been the site of a church since medieval times. The dome, dating to 1655 is known as the oldest dome in Paris. It is on the site of the Val de Grace Military Hospital, which is the newer building in front of the dome in this picture, which was taken from Ernie's office.

The next picture is the buildings across the Blvd St. Jacques in the Val de Grace Place. I found the buildings to be quite graceful. Note the gold tips of the wrought iron fence around the Church Courtyard. The grounds are beautifully maintained.



The dome is quite ornate. This is a picture of the dome taken from the courtyard. The time is about 3:30 p.m. Sundown is about 5:20 p.m. It was not raining.



Then we went to the museum which had a few people going through. It is not, however, a tourist site. These were French people. I didn't hear anything but French spoken during this visit. Again, I found

myself interested in the structure of the building. Here is a corridor that leads to the church. On the right is the balustrade of the stairway to the second floor of the museum and into the church.



The museum is in what used to be the cloisters of the monastery that was originally built for the Val de Grace. The cloisters are a square of hallways around an exquisitely maintained garden maze. I tried to get pictures through the windows but there was too much reflection. There were four separate hedges clipped to a height of about 3 feet forming a maze with round bushes that looked like balls carefully placed in exactly the same place in each of the gardens. It had a restful effect.

On the walls of the cloisters that Ernie is looking at in the next picture are plaques listing the names of the medical personnel who died in service in each of the conflicts of France. There were lists of people who died of yellow fever in the tropics, of cholera in a different place with the name of the conflict. [there were also accounts of medical personnel who when their base was overrun by the enemy picked up a weapon and fought courageously.] France has been in a lot of conflicts so the lists went around the cloisters. The rectangles on the walls that are reflecting light are the plaques. They are carved on some sort of black stone that has been highly polished.



The next photo is a detail of decoration under the bust, which separates the plaques with lists of the casualties.

It turned out that the museum is of medical implements and histories of the development of medical and surgical techniques for treating the military in the field and in the hospital going back hundreds of years. It showed their various costumes and paintings of chiefs of surgery. The explanation pointed out the medals and insignias that indicated the person's position and stature.

It is now a teaching hospital. There were paintings of particular wars and the surgeons in the field hospitals. There were implements to amputate limbs, the development of chloroform for anesthetic, huge clamps for stopping bleeding from amputated limbs. We got a sense of what it was like to be a medical person in the fields with Napoleon's campaigns and campaigns in the desert and the tropics.

There were more modern implements such as barometric chambers, wet suits, space suits, radiation detectors. There was an entire gallery on the various methods of evacuating the injured from conflicts and a discussion of the semantics of calling it evacuation, not transport. There were boats and trucks of all ages outfitted with beds and ways to secure the patients in their beds.

Ernie and I were fascinated with gallery after gallery. Also posters promoting hygiene in the tropics and in the far east and cautioning against acquiring diseases from clandestine meetings with women showing

a doctor holding a hypodermic needle. It was not all serious and gory. Even Ernie, who doesn't usually like to read lots of signs in museums, took his time going through it. We must have spent nearly 2 hours browsing through it. Of course, some of the examples of ceramics and glassware used in this arena were spectacular and full of interesting images.

By this time it was getting close to the time of the concert so we wandered to the church through this huge lattice.



We selected seats in the front row and left coats to claim them and continued wandering. Here is a picture of the organ we would hear. It is described on their web page as an important organ that was melted down in some war and used for bullets. Afterward, the pipes were remade so the pipes are not the original ones.



This time I was able to overcome my own reluctance [to take pictures in churches] and took a photo of the interior of the church. This is the altar. The columns are spiral, cut out of marble with lots of ornament. There is a lot of gold leaf everywhere and the dark marble contrasting with the white stone makes a lovely display. The floor also was decorative with alternating dark and light marble. It was a little like the Pantheon I described in the January 23 entry.



I tried to get a photo of the interior of the famous dome but the light was wrong. I include it because it shows some of the decoration on the ceiling. The light shown in the lower left corner is the top of the altar.



The organ concert was impressive. The organist was Paul Coueffé from Lyon. He is quite well known.

The organist's assistant who introduced the concert in his speech referred to "the school" and pointed to his right. When we left we passed a building adjoining the courtyard that was a school of music. Apparently, Coueffé teaches there and composes music.

The concert was divided into 3 sections each preceded by a long explanation by the organist's assistant (he would help set up the stops before each piece and did page turning when needed). The first part consisted of pieces by baroque composers, most of them French – Charles Piroye, Louis Marchand, Gaspard Corrette, Mathias van den Gheyn. Following that were 3 chorals by Bach. And the rest of the concert was of more modern composers: Joseph Reveyron, Jean Bouvard, Jean Henry, Dynam-Victor Fumet and André Fleury. I particularly like Fumet's "Marche des chevaliers célestes" and Fleury's "Sortie sur un vieux Noël." The sound of this organ filling this beautiful church was magnificent. The concert was free and the entry to the museum was 5 Euros each. We felt we got a good deal. It was quite an afternoon and evening