

## Trip to the music festival in Albi via Saint Nectaire By Ernie and Olivia



**Wednesday, June 29, 2011.** We rented a gray Renault Clio (diesel) from Europcar at the Gare de Lyon.

Getting out of Paris was not trivial – we ended up by mistake at Orly but gendarmes parked by the side of the road told us of a way to get to the autoroute south, A10, called the Aquitaine, which later joined with A71: that avoided backtracking!

We drove to Saint Nectaire in Auvergne. Stayed at l’Hotel de la Paix, which seemed to be run by and be a hang out for Dutch. For dinner we had their special Auvergne truffade with a nice rose.



We saw the “Fontaines Petrifiantes de Saint Nectaire,” (5 €) where they create interesting 3-dimensional works of art using the flow from natural underground hot carbonated water. Nearby are thermal baths.



Photo: OD



Photo: OD



Photo: OD

**Thursday, June 30.** Before leaving Saint Nectaire we visited La Maison de Fromage (5,50 . €) and heard an interesting talk on how their cheeses are made, saw some of the process, got to taste the two cheeses they had in their cave. While waiting for La Maison de Fromage to open we walked up to their church and also wandered around the old cemetery. We could hear the cows and their bells on the hills above the cemetery.

After the cheese is produced on farms or in factories, it is brought to the Maison de Fromage that has a cave under it. The cheeses sit on racks covered with straw for weeks and months depending on the type of cheese. The caves have a constant temperature and controlled humidity that is specific to Saint Nectaire.



After this visit we then started out to drive to Albi. Just before leaving the A76 autoroute we needed to refuel the car, for the first time. Ernie by mistake put gasoline in the diesel car. He told me, "I saw green hoses and gas pumps (diesel is green in the US isn't it?) and the nozzle went in just fine (in the US the diesel nozzles

are smaller diameter so it is impossible to put regular gas into a diesel car — right?). Well it seems I filled the tank of this lovely diesel car with ordinary gas! And, of course after a few kilometers it objected and stalled and we pulled the car off to the side of the road, the 2-lane N88, thankful it was not the autoroute."

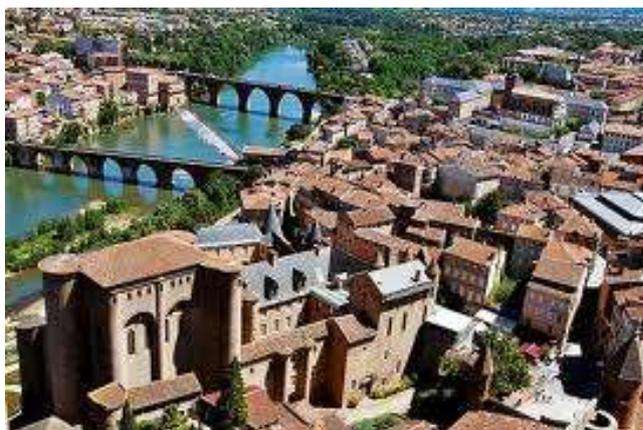


Thank heaven for cell phones, we called Europcar for help. (We didn't know yet what the problem was). After an hour and a half wait (Olivia was glad she had a hat — it was hot) we were towed to the Renault dealer in Rodez. We rode in the tow truck.

We learned at the garage that in France the nozzle diameters are just the opposite from the US, i.e. the ordinary gas nozzle is smaller diameter so in Europe you can't put diesel in your gasoline fueled car, whereas in the US you can't put gasoline in your diesel fueled car. And diesel in France

has a yellow or white nozzle. The car was put back in service in only an hour but it made us arrive in Albi later than we had planned.

We checked into Hotel Chiffre, a 3-star and quite comfortable hotel (74 € plus another 9 € parking.) We missed the 6 pm concert (for which we had tickets), wasted a bunch of time because people at the Hotel de Chiffre couldn't seem to figure out where concert venues were, although later we saw that they were clearly indicated on the local tourism map. The problem was that the Tons Voisins festival brochure and web page didn't list addresses. Also the hotel would lock up our car after 11 pm. So we used a taxi to get to the 9 pm concert, which was in a church in Rayssac, a suburb of Albi, unlike the other concerts which we could walk to from our hotel. We wandered around Rayssac and couldn't find anyplace to have a bite to eat and couldn't even find water until a nice guy, also waiting for the concert, took pity on us and got a bottle of water out of his car and gave it to us. On the way back we asked the taxi driver if he knew of a place that was still open and he took us to a nice restaurant where we had a good meal and then walked back to our hotel well after midnight.



**Friday, July 1.** Albi is a very nice city, and the living al fresco is great. There is a lovely fountain in the city center. The Cathedral Sainte-Cécile rivals the Notre Dame in grandeur. Last year the cathedral was named by UNESCO as a World Heritage site. The vaulted ceiling was painted the most intense blue I have every seen in a 12<sup>th</sup> century building. It turns out that what made Albi important in medieval times is that it is the source of woad. Woad is a plant that gets ground up and then fermented to create a blue paint that was the only source of that color in the medieval world until Indigo. They used it copiously in the Cathedral and it has a stunning effect.

We visited the new Toulouse-Lautrec Museum, a very modern and beautifully displayed large collection inside the 13<sup>th</sup> century Palais de la Berbie next to the Cathedral. We also enjoyed the covered market. Entrance to the cathedral was free and we paid extra (3 €) to see the unique and beautiful choir (grand chœur) and also le trésor. The treasure is relics of saints and also the robes worn by the priests on different occasions. Entrance to the museum was 5,50 €



photo OD, choir detail



photo OD, cathedral from town



photo OD, ticket line Cour d'honneur

On Friday we heard 2 concerts and on Saturday July 2, three concerts. The Friday and Saturday evening concerts were outside in the Cour d'honneur of the Palais de la Berbie.. ***Concert descriptions and more photos beginning on page 4.***

On Friday we had a late lunch (Olivia—menu, Ernie assiette de fruits de Mer) at the lovely “Les Berges D’Alby” outside near the Tarn river.

**Saturday, July 2.** We watched children playing in the fountain and visited a lovely municipal garden.

The next day, Sunday July 3, we left Albi and drove to the Atlantic Ocean via Montpellier, Arcachon, La Rochelle and then back to our apartment in Paris.



## The Music Festival Tons Voisins Rencontres Internationales de Musique de Chambre

The theme was Liszt l'Européen. (Liszt, the European, on the cover of the festival program) or L'Europe de Liszt (The Europe of



photo OD

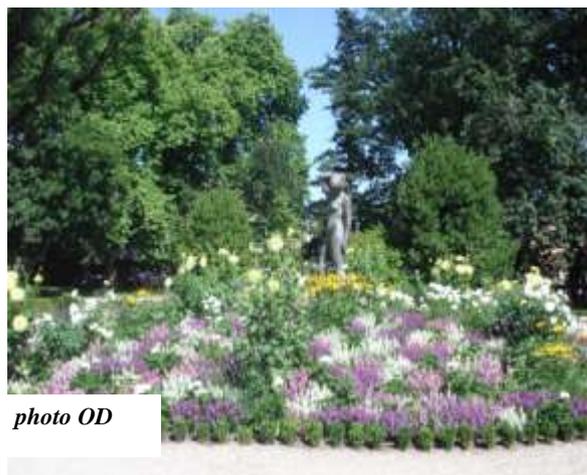


photo OD

Liszt, on their web page). Following are concert details on the 6 concerts we heard taken directly from the program. (There were a total of 11 concerts during those 3 days)

### Jeudi 30 juin, Les heures romantiques de Paris :

**21h à l'église St-Jean-Baptiste de Rayssac d'Albi, « Nuits d'été » :** Marie-Joséphé Jude (piano), Anne Le Bozec (piano), Cyrille Dubois (ténor), Olivier Charlier (violon), Denis Pascal (piano) et Gérard Caussé (alto)

*Le Spectre de la rose, La marche des pèlerins de Berlioz, « Musiques sur l'eau » (L'effeuillement, Chant du soir, L'âme des choses, Les flambeaux) de Dubois, Grand duo concertant pour violon et piano S.128, trois Sonnets de Pétrarque de Liszt et la Symphonie fantastique de Liszt/Berlioz.*

Unfortunately we were too tired (from the breakdown on the autoroute and too hungry and missed the last piece which was probably spectacular).

### Vendredi 1 juillet, Querelle des romantiques :

**16h30 à l'Athnor, « Musique de l'avenir » :** Gérard Caussé (alto), Isabelle Pourkat (piano), Denis Pascal (piano), Philippe Müller (violoncelle), Eric Lacrouts (violon) et Marie-Paule Milone (violoncelle) interpréteront *Chorals (piano à quatre mains) de Bach/Kurtag, Sonate en ut mineur pour alto et piano de Mendelssohn, Romance oubliée de Liszt, La nuit transfigurée (extrait) de Schoenberg/Steuermann et la 3ème Sonate en la majeur pour violoncelle et piano de Beethoven.*

The first two pictures, taken from the web, show the





*photos OD. Left: the tenor sang pieces by Dubois and Liszt. Right: Denis Pascal and Olivier Charlier (violon)*

entrance and interior seating of the Athanor auditorium. The second two pictures, taken by Olivia show the stage and bows taken by the musicians after the piece by Schoenberg.





The Festival set up a stage in the courtyard (Cour d'honneur) of the Palais de la Berbie (now also the new Toulouse-Lautrec museum). They moved in a Steinway piano and set up dramatic lighting so the concert could be videotaped. They moved in the harp and the two cymballums and during the concerts rearranged the stage several times. The photo on the right, by OD, shows the harp being tuned. Note: printed program didn't show additional pieces and musicians that were added.

**21h à la Cour d'honneur du Palais de la Berbie, « Altenburg » :** Alexandre Gattet (hautbois), Julien Hardy (basson), Agathe Fourneau (clarinette), Sandrine Tilly (flûte, cor), Eric Lacrouts (violon), Simon Milone (violon), Cécile Grassi (alto), Lucie Mercat (violoncelle), Laurène Durantel (contrebasse), Mathieur Lamboley (piano), Pierre Bleuse (direction), Olivier Charlier (violon), Philippe Müller (violoncelle), Marie-Paule Milone (mezzo-soprano), Alain Meunier (violoncelle), Florence Sitruk (harpe), Gérard Caussé (alto), Marie-Christine Barrault (récitante) et Hortense Cartier Bresson (piano) joueront *Le chant du cygne* (extraits) de Schubert/Liszt/Drillon, *Lugubre gondole et trois Lieder* de Liszt, *Trio des Esprits op.70 n°1* de Beethoven, *Siegfried Idyll et Prélude et Mort d'Isolde* de Wagner.

The music in the festival was top notch and I was amazed at how much music my cello teacher, Marie-Paule Milone, played. She also sings mezzo soprano and sang an aria from Wagner's Tristan and Isolde. She was fabulous and her voice soared over the orchestra behind her. Imagine world class classical music played in a medieval courtyard among sweet soft breezes of a summer night in the south of France. It was magical. I get chills remembering her voice.

### Samedi 2 juillet, L'épopée tzigane :



photo: OD

The stage is setup in the courtyard of a home. The cyprus tree sets the scale for the photos.

**11h à l'Hôtel de Gorsse, « Des bohémiens et de leur musique » :** Eric Lacrouts (violon), Laurène Durantel (contrebasse), Philippe Graffin (piano), Tristan Pfaff (piano), Cyril Dupuy (cymbalum), Ludovit Kovac (cymbalum), Mathieu Lamboley (piano), Marie-Paule Milone (violoncelle) joueront *Marche de Rakoczy et 2ème Rhapsodie* de Liszt, *Tzigane* de Ravel, *Grand duo concertant* de Bottesini, *Bagatelle* de Scialtescu, *Ruralia Hungaria* de Dohnanyi.



The two photos were taken by Olivia. Three memorable events from this 11 am concert were Laurène Durantel virtuoso playing the contrebasse, the two cymbalists playing the Hungarian rhapsody #2, and Marie-Paule and Denis Pascal playing the Marche de Rakocy.



*Cyril Dupuy, Cymbaliste*

*Laurène Durantel, Contrabasse (incredible virtuosity on this huge instrument).*



We heard two more wonderful concerts on that Saturday.

**15h à l'Athantor, « Mémoires » :** Marie-Paule Milone (violoncelle), Denis Pascal (piano), Hortense Cartier Bresson (piano), Philippe Graffin (violon) et Florence Sitruk (harpe) joueront *Impressions d'enfance* d'Enesco, *Elégie op.143* et *Fantaisie pour harpe et violon op.146* de Saint-Saëns, le *Ros-signol* de Liszt/Alabieff, *Rhapsodie hongroise 5 et 19* et Liszt et *trois pièces pour violoncelle et piano* de Popper.

photo OD





**21h à la Cour d'honneur du Palais de la Ber-**

**bie, « Les héritiers » :** Paul Lay (piano), Denis Pascal (piano), Florence Sitruk (harpe), Philippe Graf-  
fin (violon), Eric Lacrouts (violon), Gérard Caussé (alto), Cyril Dupuy (cymbalum), Ludovit Kovac  
(cymbalum), Marie-Paule Milone (violoncelle) et Hortense Cartier Bresson (piano) joueront *Duo pour*  
*violin et violoncelle et Magyar Nepdalok duo violoncelle et cymbalum* de Kodaly, *Improvisation* de  
Bartok, *Concerto pour harpe et quintette à cordes* de Parish Alvar, *Quintette op.1 pour piano et*  
*cordes* de Dohnanyi.

**The stars and organizers of this wonderful festival:  
Denis Pascal and Marie-Paule Milone.**

