

Concert at UNESCO July 29, 2011

Several weeks ago Barbara Stickler invited us to a special concert on Liszt (it is the year of Liszt in France) at UNESCO. She works there part time and has been wanting to show us the building and the art it houses.

The UNESCO building is very near the Segur stop on Metro Line 1. We walked a block in the direction of the Eiffel Tower and found it because of lots of people milling around and standing in line. On the wall outside the compound there were photos of World heritage Sites identified by UNESCO. We recently visited one of the new sites identified last year – the Cathedral Sainte-Cécile in Albi.

Barbara showed up shortly after we did and took us into the building to point out the famous works of art located in the building. There is a huge unsigned Picasso that covers a wall. The story is that he painted it in panels and when it was assembled he didn't like the effect so he refused to sign it.

There are statues by Giacometti, Henry Moore, mobiles by Calder and a Greek artist. There is a Japanese Peace Garden with a fountain and stones, all kinds of very special pieces. We were able to see the room where the Miro paintings are.

She told us not to worry about the large crowd since the hall is quite big enough to accommodate everyone. She led us to the balcony on the side of the bass section. Here is a photo of the stage.

The introductions were all in English and there was a lot of praise for the effort to bring together young musicians from different countries to “speak the language of music” and thereby promote understanding and peace.



The woman who did the introduction was from Hungary as was Tomas Vasaly and they talked with enthusiasm about the music Franz Liszt wrote. The second to last piece was a dance by Kodaly, a Hungarian composer and the last two were Hungarian Rhapsodies by Brahms, a German. They wanted us to hear the Hungarian dances as written by a real Hungarian, and the “interpretation” of Hungarian dances written by a non-Hungarian composer.

The concert was to be performed by the Zoltan Kodaly World Youth Orchestra, an international school in Hungary for instrumental performers at the high school level. Barbara was concerned about the quality of it. She needn't have been. The students were well selected and were quite professional. They were conducted by Tomas Vasaly as he played the piano with fire and versatility in Liszt's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra no 2. They introduced him as a “legend.” He was a wonderful pianist.

The pieces chosen to be performed were wonderful showpieces for parts of the orchestra. There were a couple of opportunities for the oboe to shine and a great, long piece for the clarinetist. There were four horns who played often. In the first piece there was a duet between the pianist and the first cellist, a young slender girl with curly hair flowing down her back. I was impressed at the discipline of the orchestra stopping completely together, and giving the conductor what he asked for. He exaggerated aspects of the Hungarian Rhapsodies but seemed to be having fun with it and give the orchestra a chance to show the different dynamics they could produce. In the Rhapsodies, the percussion section had a chance to shine with triangles, tympany, snare drum, bells and cybals generously played.



One of the hallmarks of a bad orchestra is tinny sounding violin section. This violin section was not tinny at all. Barbara confirmed that the hall is a little “dead” so from our vantage point, I couldn’t hear if the violin section “shimmered.”

The audience jumped up and gave a standing ovation, something we have not seen in any other of the 50 odd concerts we have attended in Paris. The group deserved it.

After the concert, we ran into several of the performers and thanked them. Barbara took us outside for a good photo opportunity to catch the Eiffel tower in the evening sky and a geodesic dome. The quartet of horn players were also taking pictures so I got a photo of them in front of the beautiful skyline. We praised them, too. We had no idea which language they spoke.



We walked a couple of blocks to a two block area full of all kinds of restaurants. We ended up in a Lebanese restaurant that Barbara had never tried. It was a luscious meal – starters of smashed eggplant, something like Ttaziiki, call stuffed eggplants followed by mixed lamb and chicken kabobs. Ernie had salmon kabobs and we drank a red wine from Lebanon.