

Post #2 – Jim Hild

We are into Day 3 of our ambassadorial mission. I began Day 2 with a run through Sandton with three other chorale members. It was challenging because it is hilly and at an altitude of 5800 feet above sea level. At 1:00 we had our first rehearsal of the day reviewing our "encore American songs". After three hours of practice, we had dinner at an Italian restaurant, salad, pasta and thin crusted pizza. Our second rehearsal was at 7:00 with the Gauteng Choristers of Sandton and "29:11" of Cape Town.

The rehearsal with the Gauteng Choristers and 29:11 was phenomenal and quite emotional. The sound which the Chorister's possess, especially the basses, is one that we have never heard. These men have rich, deep, powerful voices and they can "move". We practiced the South African songs and Beethoven's Ninth. Most of these men have never song this classical piece. The two men on either side of me knew the German and pronounced it extremely well.

Two songs which are quite moving are BAWO THIXO SOMANDLA (Father, O God, Omnipotent ...What have we done that we kill each other. I have an unceasing throb in my heart...May this cup pass from us) and USILETHELA UXOLO, the Nelson Mandela Protest Song (Mandela, bring us peace. You have been fighting for a lone time...Now we have received it. It is amazing to be part of this group who through their songs are sharing their history of pain, abuse, oppression and dehumanization with us.

This morning my buddies ran again. It is an excellent way to acquaint oneself with the city and its citizens. After breakfast we boarded our buses to go to the Nelson Mandela Museum. It chronicles the life of Mandela and tells the story of apartheid, the minority of white people, who oppressed, abused and killed both blacks and colored people essentially out of ignorance, fear and power. It was hard to walk through it because photo after photo depicted the dehumanization of the black and colored people. After 1 1/2 hours of reading, viewing and walking, my stomach was in knots. I was feeling nausea. I had to leave. It was so overwhelming. It is so profoundly sad.

As we left the Museum, I had a sense that when we would sing the South African songs tonight our voices and expressions would reflect the pleas and sighs of the black and colored people in South Africa. We were conducted by Osmo Vänskä, the director of the MN Orchestra. When we sang RURI and AHKALA, which we will sing accompanied by the orchestra, Osmo had a look of delight and surprise on his face. In fact, his demeanor was one of playfulness. We surprised him, and he in turn inspired us all the more.

By the end of Tuesday, I was exhausted: the jet lag caught up with me. I will write more later. Have a good day! Buona giornata!