

## **Posta Prioritaria**

### Postcards from Trieste & Pula via Ed Schultz

#### NYC, Friday, June 29, '01 - Weather warm, clear skies for clear sailing.

Off to fabled Trieste and exotic Istria (“Illyria” to Shakespeare, and Yugoslavia to Tito -- both merely imaginary destinations) with -- according to The New York Times -- “the best amateur chorus,” The New Amsterdam Singers. This being the ninth tour in their 33 years, all should work as harmoniously as they sing. Can’t wait!

#### Milano Airport, Saturday, June 30, '01- Weather hot and cloudless - Italian!

Well, last minute airline changes Friday night split the group into two. Most flew from JFK to here to meet what were to become known as “The Newark Ten.” Oh, yes, and it was Rome we were supposed to meet at, but what’s an adventure without surprise? Ooops! Now it seems there’s only room for ten of us on the flight from Milano to Trieste. Ah, well. Who could complain about a five hour bus tour of Northern Italy?

#### Trieste, Sunday, July 1, '01 - Weather the same, but warmer.

All 44 of us (10 Sopranos, 8 Altos, 6 Tenors, 8 Bassos, Conductor Clara Longstreth, and 11 “Groupies”) together at last. Till now, the vocalizing was not so harmonious, but this afternoon’s rehearsal for the first concert tonight was a melodic swirl of Tchaikovsky, Martin, Monteverdi, and songs from the Czech, Sephardic, Polish, Istrian, and American folk traditions -- a lovely, lively, and eclectic musical menu.

Trieste (tree-est-ay to Italians who pronounce all syllables) is a unique “border town” on Italy’s northeastern Adriatic coast near the Slovenian border. A mélange of Austrian (once a ruler here) and Italian architecture and culture. Hint: specify Italian or Triesten when ordering cappuccino.

#### Aquileia & Udine, Monday, 2, July, '01 (European style) - Hot and Sunny still.

Last night’s opening concert in Trieste a huge hit! Daniela, our Italian Tour Escort, had to fetch the Singers back into the church for a second encore!

Aquileia is a village northwest of Trieste whose ancient church boasts mosaics of early Christian symbols on the soccer field-sized floor of the main church, and others still being unearthed in adjoining catacombs.

Udine (oo-din-ay) is a more modern town with lots of shops. But today like each day so far in Italy most shops are tightly closed and every one with a Special Promotional (sale) sign! Torture!

At tonight’s concert a short way from Udine, NAS is appearing with a local choral group. Daniela slyly hints of something special afterward. More adventure!

#### Trieste, Monday, 2 July, '01 -- Night, Late, Tired & Happy.

Joint concert another success, including the apres-concert party -- an abbondanza of local wine (in bottles sans labels, or with labels that had little to do with the contents) along with cheese and pizza and fruit! Also abundant: the camaraderie between the choruses who spoke little of each other’s language but “dueled” with robust renditions of

nationalistic favorites. Italian charm won the evening when our hosts presented us with a homemade birthday cake (delizioso!) for our nation's upcoming 225th birthday -- a replica of the Stars and Stripes!

Slovenia to Croatia! Tuesday, 3, July, '01 -- Hot with Cold Sweat!

A tense delay at the Slovenian border sent a cold war chill through the bus. Armed police checked passport photos against the reality of our faces. I mean, who looks like their passport photos?! But Croatia welcomed us -- whatever we looked like -- with open arms, eager to feed its newly reborn tourism industry.

But feeding 44 hungry Americans all at the same time in the quaint village of Motovun challenged both native eagerness and our too tight schedule. Still, with its ancient cobblestone streets, awesome overview of the verdant countryside and easily available fruit grappas, Motovun was an authentic introduction to the beauty, culture, tempo, and cuisine of the renewing nation. (Cuisine note: where Italian is sauce, Istrian is gravy.)

Pula, Wednesday, 4, July, '01- Weather? Guess.

What sits upon a hill right in the center of Pula but a Roman amphitheatre! Slightly smaller but as ravished by time and the clumsy hand of man as the coliseums of Rome and Verona. Our very knowledgeable and enthusiastic local guide regaled us with the gory details of the killing games put on here to keep the reigning Roman ruler popular. Parallels to today's violent entertainments were not difficult to draw. Rome departed and the amphitheatre's stones were "borrowed" to build less dramatic edifices elsewhere. But Pula is fighting back the poaching and neglect to restore its unique historic attraction and give its past a future.

Porec, Wednesday, 4, July, '01 - Pouring -- sunshine -- everywhere!

Toured the beautiful seaside resort of Porec (por-ech) with another enthusiastic and knowledgeable local guide, including the UNESCO- registered Euphrasius' Basilica, site of delicate and intricate religious mosaics. Along streets of ancient stones we walked in the footsteps of long-ago Romans -- and ate contemporary gelato.

Then when our young guide asked, "Would you like to go to a family farm house for a typical Croatian meal?" who could say no?

Croatian Family Farmhouse Dinner, Wednesday, 4, July, '01.

Greeted with shots of potent grappa by teenagers in native costume made it clear we were in for a theme park style Croatian evening and not the "intimate" "family" event imagined. Close to 100 "family friends" sat down to a hearty dinner of noodles, meat and gravy, and were entertained by traditional dances performed by those costumed teenagers who clearly would've preferred to be anywhere else and wearing anything else. Have we been "had?" Perhaps, but we seemed to admire the entrepreneurial spirit of this family and enjoyed the food, drink, and evening's esprit. Or could it have been the grappa?

The Islands of Brijuni, Thursday, 5, July, '01 -. Weather? Yes, you guessed it.

The Brijuni (bree-yuni) archipelago in the Adriatic lured us with its Roman ruins and the remains of Marshall Tito's summer retreat. Would we learn the secret of how he

kept his fractious collection of nations together?

The beauty of the isle with its Byzantine Castrum from 2 B.C. and Roman villa sitting on a peaceful bay since the 1st Century A.D. (some of us moderns near-skinny dipped here), was evident. But not the secret to Tito's magic. Though, come to think of it, Tito could've learned a thing or two from John Duncan, NAS tourmeister who, sans whip or chair, kept us together and having a great time!

Pula, Friday, 6, July, '01 - No change of weather.

A day off! While some dipped in the Adriatic, yours truly and companion breakfasted at a local pizza parlor on "pancakes," actually delicate sweet crepes, and to discuss some of the differences in the two worlds we visited in the past week.

Italia -- even the rare poor meal greeted the eye and tastebud with pleasure. The abundance of zeros in the Lire caused some "sticker shock" at first (2200 to the dollar), but the cuisine earned every one of them.

Istria -- cuisine (let's be plain here -- the food) is a bit of a shock to diet conscious Americans -- heavier, greasier, meat & starch-focused and possibly the cause of the old wives' warning not to go swimming for an hour after eating. The Kuna, which sounds like it should be Hawaii's currency not Istria's, is not as weighty as Italia's (or its own food). One dollar bought 8.5 Kuna and 300 Kuna bought a fair meal. Ah, the pancakes have arrived! Be right back. Syrup, please.

Pula Pizza Parlor, Over cappuccino. Friday, 6, July '01.

Along with the delicious chocolate and marmalade crepes, the pizza parlor offered an insight into the new Croatian economy. This tiny restaurant is popular, the food good and reasonably priced, with service prompt and interested -- more than a few points higher on all counts than the hotel and other businesses we dealt with. The expected "can do" Western attitude was frequently absent, and in its place a puzzled "Is this something I have to do?" outlook. Even when encountering the "can do," it was often accompanied with a lack of "how to" ability.

Ain't it amazing what deep thinking a tasty crepe and some free time can prompt?

Pula, Friday, 6, July, '01 -- Early Evening.

Tonight the final concert and Gala End-of-Tour Banquet! The tension mounts -- not for the NAS concert, oh no. The buzz is about what concert selection will Gail Duncan parody and the Groupies be forced to "sing" at the banquet -- a dreaded tradition and sadistic highlight of every tour. What was that? No rehearsal?! Again?!

Pula & Trieste, Saturday, 7, July, '01 - Weather -- What Do You Think?

The Final Dinner last night was one of, if not the best meal of the tour -- crisp, fresh salad, risotto of seafood, fillet of white fish, and for dessert -- spumoni? Remember spumoni? Clara and Bevis had to leave early for their end-of-tour camping trip to Siberia. Yes, you read that correctly. To go where once no one wanted to be sent seemed a strange objective to those of us going on to Bologna, Venice, Rome, etc. But the Longstreths are our adventurous romantics and -- after the Groupie's performed Gail Duncan's version of "Deep

River” (“Deep Doo-Doo,” not available on any CD) -- we wished them well and sent them on their way.

After all, it is Clara’s call to romantic adventure that keeps NAS going and re-discovering itself in so many interesting places and so many interesting ways. What next and where do I sign?

Truly yours,  
Ed