



NAS TOUR - 2017 ICELAND/COPENHAGEN

IN RETALIATION FOR VIKING RAIDS OF THE 8TH-11TH CENTURIES, A BAND OF INTREPID NEW AMSTERDAM SINGERS DESCENDED ON ICELAND IN JULY. HEREWITH A CHRONICLE OF THAT INCURSION, INVOLVING 33 OFFICIAL SINGERS AND 15 IMPORTANT PERSONAGES – FROM CONDUCTOR TO ESSENTIAL SUPPORTERS (LOVINGLY KNOWN AS “GROUPIES”).

Written by Bob Palmer

Photos by Rick Hibberd and David Recca

FRIDAY JUNE 30

The main body of the attack force arrived in Iceland around 6:30 am. Breakfast at the Viking museum was followed by a visit to the merciful and healing waters of the Blue Lagoon. Black and white facial mud-packs vied for pride of place as the ugliest introduction to Iceland, but all was forgiven as muscles relaxed and peace descended. Then on to Reykjavik (smoky bay), the fastest-growing city in Europe. A bus tour of the city included the Hallgrímskirkja Church, based on the hexagonal shape of crystalized lava, of which we were to see many examples.

SATURDAY JULY 1 - THE GOLDEN CIRCLE/SKÁLHOLT CONCERT

Iceland is ringed by waterfalls, the result of glacial run-off plunging over former coastlines. Gullfoss, the double waterfall, is one of the most striking.

Our first concert took place that afternoon at Skálholt Cathedral, a white church situated in green meadows, with magnificent mountains in the background. A church has been on this site for 700 years. Brilliant sunshine belied the traditional Icelandic forecast of clouds, rain, sun, clouds, rain. Our enthusiastic audience was particularly appreciative at our attempts to sing in Icelandic.



SUNDAY JULY 2 - THINGVELLIR AND REYKJAVIK CONCERT

Thingvellir National Park is the site of Althing, the old National Parliament, founded in 930 AD. It sits astride a rift marking the ongoing separation of the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates. Icelanders met there yearly in mid-summer to hear the laws read by the Law Reader atop the Law Rock, to conduct trade and (we were told) foster match-making and other important activities. By way of exterior decorating, they diverted a river to make a pleasant waterfall and provide water for the gathering.

Thingvellir National Park also has an impressive geothermal plant with pipes branching out and carrying hot water and steam to various areas.

Sunday ended with our second concert -- at Domkyrkjan, the Cathedral in Reykjavik. Clara put together an outstanding program of sacred pieces, poetry settings, and folk songs and spirituals – including two songs in Icelandic (yes!) and the always crowd pleasing, house-bringing-down spirituals “Steal Away” and “Ride the Chariot.”

MONDAY JULY 3 - THE SOUTH SHORE

One of the most scenic trips in Iceland runs East along the South shore. Waterfalls are everywhere, as the water flows over the old coast line. The highly photogenic Seljanlandsfoss is a large waterfall you can walk behind (but not without getting wet).

The flat land along the coast is the breadbasket of Iceland. While vegetables do require hot houses, the flat land supports farming, with bales of hay scattered everywhere and herds of sheep very much in evidence.

Lunch was at Skógafoss – a 197-foot (500 step) waterfall fed by the Eyjafjallajökull glacier, home to the volcano that erupted in 2010, disrupting air traffic across the Atlantic.

Lupine was in bloom, and the lavender plants were everywhere. Originally imported to control soil erosion, it seems to be taking over the island, even the most inhospitable places.

We caught views of the Mýrdalsjökull glacier, completely covering Katla, a large volcano that last erupted in 1918, and is now overdue. Sub-glacial eruptions can unleash tremendous floods, with temporary flows exceeding those of the Mississippi river! Our last stop was Dyrhólaey, the black pebble beach with fascinating lava formations (inspiring the aforementioned Hallgrímskirkja Church).

TUESDAY JULY 4 - WHALES AND VIKINGS



Whale watching involved getting encased with bright yellow coveralls and then searching the horizon for signs of the big mammals. We were told we saw 4 different kinds – maybe. But the dolphins were great hosts for the trip, and we marveled at their synchronized swim performance. And those of us on the right side of the boat saw a magnificent display of a humpback whale repeatedly breaching.

Evening saw our Farewell Viking Dinner. Dinner (including tastes of dried fish and fermented shark) was accompanied by a woman beating a skin drum and singing Icelandic songs. But best of all, our own David Recca and Nina Reiniger were formally certified as Viking King and Valkyrie.

THURSDAY JULY 6 – SATURDAY JULY 8 - COPENHAGEN

Two days and three nights in Copenhagen were a great end to our trip, with a whirl of activities, including tours of the city, photo-ops for innumerable beautiful photographs, a Farewell Dinner, and our final concert. Those who remember her will be glad to know that the Little Mermaid is still there - despite a history of two decapitations and one arm amputation!



The Farewell Dinner at Tivoli Gardens featured our traditional serenade by the Groupies, based on Copland's "Simple Gifts." The gift here was one of Gail Duncan's finest librettos – encapsulating the trip, with strict attention to meter and rhyme. Lyrics available on request.

The concert, at St. Ansgar Cathedral, was, fittingly, the musical highlight of the tour. Our host choir, Tritonus, opened the concert with songs by Pärt, Geillo and others, including a remarkable piece for saxophone and chorus by their new conductor, Jacob Høgsbro. After the concert, our hosts feted us in the church garden. They are a group very similar to NAS in age range, amateur status and musical interests. We hope they will come to New York.

As we flew back to JFK via Iceland, we had one last look at the Mýrdalsjökull Glacier, unusually cloud-free, with Katla sleeping quietly beneath.

We arrived home tired but happy; thankful for good fellowship, Clara's superb musical direction, and the hard work of our tour leaders Donna and Nina, which made it all possible.

