



PROUDLY CARRYING the American flag, Kansas Ambassadors of Music students seeing the Matterhorn in the Alps of Switzerland were (from left) Kelly Olson, with Josie, a Swiss dog, and Sarah Marcuson, and (back row) Lillie Benda, Atwood; Laci Ninemire, Norton; Susan and Makenzie Nelson; and Marci Metcalf.

— Photo by Susan Nelson

Singers tour Europe with music ambassadors

By MARY LOU OLSON

Four Oberlin students had the time of their life when they accompanied vocal teacher Susan Nelson and the Kansas Ambassadors of Music on a European tour last month.

The students — Marci Metcalf, Kelly Olson, Sarah Marcuson and Makenzie Nelson — were selected for the tour based on recommendations from their high school music teacher, Mrs. Nelson. This year's group was the largest in the 30-plus years of the ambassador program; it included a band, choir, orchestra and ballet dancers, plus sponsors, parents and even some grandparents.

Miss Metcalf, who was chosen by audition to play fifth-chair flute out of 28, and Miss Marcuson, who plays saxophone, were in the 150-piece band. It was directed by Victor Markovich, band director at Wichita State University. Their program included such audience pleasers as "Home on the Range," "Beale Street Blues" and "Selections from the Wizard of Oz." Most concerts were climaxed with John Philip Sousa's rousing "Stars and Stripes Forever."

"Going to Europe has been a dream of mine since I was a little girl watching Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen in their movies," said Miss Metcalf, "so when I was given the opportunity to go on this trip, I jumped on it."

"I love music, so being able to play and sightsee was a dream come true. My favorite country was definitely Switzerland. We stayed in Champery, a little town nestled in the Alps. The people were great and the scenery was amazing."

"The other countries were also outstanding. From seeing Westminster Abby in London to going to Dachau, a concentration camp in Germany, it was an unbelievable experience."

"It was a great honor to play with a band of this size and ability and to play music across these countries. I was once told that music is the international language, which is true, because even though there was a language barrier in France, Switzer-

land, Austria and Germany, at the end of a concert, we understood the smiles and the applause of the audience."

Miss Marcuson said the art she saw in Paris was the highlight of the trip for her.

"My favorite country was France," she said, "because I got to see the Mona Lisa and the Winged Victory in person. I also fulfilled one of my life goals, to walk up all 668 steps of the Eiffel Tower to the second platform. In Paris, we saw the Notre Dame Cathedral, which was amazing, Sacre Coeur, the highest point in Paris, the Arc De Triumph, and Napoleon's Tomb."

"My second favorite place was Switzerland, where we saw the Matterhorn and toured the Castle de Chillon. Villagers in Champery threw a going-away party for us and we learned how to polka."

Other attractions the group enjoyed included the Shakespeare Globe Theater, Harry Potter's Platform 9 3/4, Kensington Palace, Harrods Department Store and Big Ben in London. In Venice, they toured the glass factory and St. Mark's Cathedral, where the choir gave a performance.

"A sobering experience for the group," Miss Marcuson said, "was visiting Dachau, a concentration camp in Germany. It opened my eyes and made me grateful to be an American."

Other points of interest included Rothenburg, a walled village which has one of the biggest Christmas stores in the world, and the Museum of Cruel and Unusual Punishment, where the group learned that they even had a way of torturing bad musicians — with a shame flute.

"The Kansas Ambassadors of Music Europe trip was a wonderful experience," said Miss Olson. "It combined two things that I really love to do — sing and travel. I also met many new people and had the opportunity to enjoy new cultures and customs. In each country, we took time to do sightseeing and give at least one performance."

In London, they performed at Victoria Embankment Gardens and Wesley's Chapel, and also

Windsor Castle, Piccadilly Circus, Trafalgar Squares and Westminster Abby. The 171-member choir enjoyed singing in St. Oswald's Church in Austria and in the town square at Rothenburg.

"Most of the choir music was sacred songs, and being able to sing them in the historic churches was an experience I won't forget," said Miss Olson. "Our director, Steve Perry of Lee's Summit, Mo., was very expressive and helped us really get into the music."

The choir also performed at St. Severin, an old church not far from Notre Dame in Paris, and St. Mark's Basilica in Venice.

In all, the band and choir had 10 performances and sang to enthusiastic audiences, Mrs. Nelson said. The students spent 2 1/2 days at Wichita State University preparing for the musical portion of the tour.

"Music can be a wonderful tool to bring people together," she said, "even if their languages are different."

Choir selections were heavy on sacred numbers, including "Prayer of St. Francis," "Swingin' With the Saints" "Peace I Leave With You" and a gospel song, "He Never Failed Me Yet." "Trre Cantos Nativos Dos Indios Krao," a Brazilian number, included jungle sounds produced by choir members.

"I was very impressed with the choir experience," said Makenzie Nelson, "and observed that singers can make beautiful music with less talking and a good effort. I had lots of fun, especially in Switzerland. I liked the mountains, and we had more free time to hang out with friends and shop."

"All in all," Miss Marcuson said, "Europe was great, but I'm glad to be back home, even though I'd go back in a heart beat."

"I had a great time on the European trip," Miss Olson added. "I met a lot of new people and experienced new cultures."

"I would recommend this trip to anyone who has a passion for music and a heart for traveling," said Miss Metcalf.



DEMONSTRATING A 'HARRY POTTER MANEUVER' at King's Cross Station in London were Sarah Marcuson (above front) and Kelly Olson. Having some fun with a "living statue" in Windsor, England, was Miss Marcuson. The "statue" was an entertainer, who tipped his hat to collect money for his livelihood.

— Photos by Sarah Marcuson

