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Center for International Education

Spring 2008

EXPERIENCING THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

Music an emotional mode of communication for McMahan in Slovenia

by Mindy McMahan, CIE Administrative Assistant

In January, mezzo-soprano and CIE staff member Mindy McMahan did a concert tour in London, England, with Angelynne Hinson, her singing partner in the local ensemble known as Sirens' Song. Ms. McMahan also visited friends in Šempeter, Slovenia.

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McMahan, center, while abroad with Sirens' Song partner, Angelynne Hinson

I awoke to singing that I had never heard before. Looking out the window, I saw a huge black and white bird with a metallic violet sheen. His tail feathers were at least 10" long. He was the Slovenian magpie, bouncing from branch to branch, swaying up and down. I was visiting my American soprano friend in Slovenia, where she and her husband had been teaching for the last three years. She has been teaching music and performing in a church choir.

When she brought me to choir practice, I was immediately welcomed and shown how to pronounce the words in Slovenian. The music was wonderful and not like anything I had ever sung before. After choir rehearsal, we were invited downstairs to the wine cellar of the choir director's house to sample his newly made prosciutto and homemade bread. The room was long with a low ceiling and one large table filling the length of it. The atmosphere was convivial and one of *joie de vivre*. People broke into song while eating, crooning harmonically rich folk ballads – tunes I had never heard before.

After basking in this sound for some time, my friend and I were asked to sing. We chose a duet version of "Shenandoah." I will never forget the beaming faces, including the choir director's whose cheeks were covered in tears. It was then that I was reminded that, when you travel to foreign places, you don't always need words to communicate.

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