

Time away in Italy inspires students

Summer 2007 marked the beginning of an exciting study abroad program offered by the College of Music at Centro Studi Carlo della Giacoma in Todi, Italy. The program, which was led by faculty members Caroline Hartig, associate professor of clarinet, and Deborah Moriarty, professor of piano, grew from contacts Hartig had with the founder of the institute, the late Rita Zaffarami, the granddaughter of the renowned clarinetist and composer, Carlo della Giacoma.

That first year, Hartig and Moriarty traveled to Italy with 17 MSU clarinet and piano students, who performed in daily master classes and studied masterworks for clarinet and piano. The students presented recitals, received coaching, played chamber music, and studied privately with their professors. In June of 2008, the program in Todi was headed by Moriarty, who made the trip with 10 of her piano students. The program included solo piano, piano four-hands, and two pianos, and was expanded to feature solo student and faculty concerts as part of Festa del Rinascimento in nearby Acquasparta.

The following account, written by Claire Glenn, a piano performance undergraduate, offers a first-hand account of her study abroad experience...

As a piano student, the study abroad opportunity at the Centro Studi Carlo della Giacoma interested me, but I worried about the location. I had heard that tourists and university students bombarded Italy in the summer, transforming the “old world” into a “Disney World.”

But the more I thought about a music-centered study abroad, it became more appealing. Suddenly, I found myself on a plane to meet Professor Moriarty

and the other students in Rome. We met our driver at the airport, and were soon driving through Umbria, the “green heart of Italy,” where we passed vineyards, olive groves, and stucco cottages with terracotta roofs. After two hours of driving, the van wound up a hill to Todi, the tiny town perched on top.

Far from the artificial tourist hot spot I had imagined, Todi is a town not known by many – even Italians. Narrow

streets, enclosed by high stonewalls with flowering window boxes on the houses, zigzagged their way through the village. Daily life in Todi charmed me. The locals never seemed too busy to stop at Café Serrani for a cappuccino, stroll around the square, or take an afternoon nap.

Studying in Todi refreshed my practice and study of music. Because there were only four practice rooms, the 10 of us had to ration the time we spent in them. Yet we all discovered that with less practice time, we became more successful. As practice time became more valuable, we became more productive. The remote location also freed me from my usual distractions. Life in Todi gave me time to analyze my music away from the piano. I played through the music mentally, read through the scores, and got tons of feedback during master class performances.

The frequent master classes had given me a lot of feedback, which allowed me to improve so much faster. I really benefited from the comments of so many experienced and talented students, but I also learned to trust my own judgment. Because I had to form my own opinions, I became better at really listening to the music, instead of just hearing it.

On our last day in Todi, Professor Moriarty took us out to Café Serrani to talk about what we had experienced. As we enjoyed our last cappuccinos, we all agreed that quaint, remote Todi had forced us to relax, slow down, and experience music in a new way. Being able to study music in Italy this summer was magical (but definitely not like Disney World).

