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McNary choir, band kids tour Europe

By DEREK WILEY
Of the Keizertimes

McNary choir director Joshua Rist was walking through Paris with a small group of high school students when they came across a medieval-style cathedral.

Open to the public, Rist and the students decided to walk in and give an impromptu performance of *Loais iste* by Anton Bruckner.

"We had a song ready to sing so I just conducted these seven kids," Rist said. "You could just see them experience with their own voices

these incredible acoustics. It was special for those kids."

Rist was in Europe as part of an Oregon Ambassadors of Music trip. Sponsored by Voyagers International, 347 high school choir and band students and 45 staff from across Oregon spent two weeks, July 3-18, traveling and performing in England, France, Italy, Switzerland, Austria and Germany. They spent three nights in Paris and London.

The McNary contingent included Rist, his wife Jessica, band director Jennifer Bell and nine students from the choir

and band.

"People need to get out of their hometown for a little while," Rist said. "Choir offers a unique opportunity to travel in a meaningful way where it's not just scraping the surface of cultures through tourism but if you're singing their music, if you're singing in their spaces, if you're sharing musical culture with other people. My empathy and my picture of the world grows much richer and more beautiful and I'm hoping I can offer that to them (McNary students), too."

The choir performed five

different times throughout Europe, including in the town center of Crans-Montana, Switzerland.

"People in Switzerland, they loved us," said Ethan Schra, an incoming junior at McNary who went on the trip. "The chapels we got to sing in were amazing. Singing in a chapel in Europe is way different. It feels different, too. You could hear the songs echo and bounce."

Schra's favorite was St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice.

Rist agreed.

"The sound just keeps

ringing beyond you," he said. "It's a really empowering feeling as a singer. As a choir nerd, that's where it's at. Music was just meant for these kinds of halls. It expands yourself when you're in a place like that, your capacity to experience beauty, especially because you're making music in the places, you're not just a tourist. You're interacting with these spaces in a really profound way."

Oregon State choir director Steven Zielke directed the choir on the trip while Todd Zimbelman of West Salem conducted the band. The choir sang classical pieces as well as multi-cultural with high energy and American folk songs and spirituals. The band played

classical marches as well as medleys from the *Wizard of Oz* and *America the Beautiful*. They finished each performance with *The Stars and Stripes Forever*. The band and choir combined for performances in Switzerland and Germany.

The group also explored the Swiss Alps, which was another of Schra's favorites, toured the Eiffel Tower, various museums and saw *Les Misérables* at the West End Theatre in London.

The trip gave Schra a new appreciation for music.

"I thought it was absolutely stunning," he said. "It was a life-changing trip. The sites, the sounds, the smells, seeing something new."



Submitted
McNary band director Jennifer Bell and choir teacher Joshua Rist led a group of students in a tour across Europe, which included exploring the Matterhorn in the Swiss Alps.

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