

### Wednesday 28th July

The group arrived safely in San Diego on Monday evening, or rather middle of the night to us. We have all been made so welcome by the folk of Foothills United Methodist Church in La Mesa. These lovely people cannot do enough for the choir, and everyone is having a great time with their hosts. The Church has organised everything superbly, and helped us all to get over the long flight and the jet-lag.

Tuesday was spent seeing some of San Diego, including the Gaslamp Quarter, the Old Town and some retail therapy in a shopping centre before travelling to our concert in Christ Lutheran Church.

This was our first concert. We had a wonderful welcome there, had dinner at the Church and shared the concert programme with a highly entertaining and excellent barbershop choir La Jolla Chapter. Our older boys joined with the choir in a barbershop number, which they clearly enjoyed, and our girls shared the stage with the Church's new Musical Directly Paula Mowbray. It was great start to the tour and the choir had a standing ovation. We met with the audience after the concert, and found a couple who will be in Southend in 2 weeks time, and who actually have a relative in the Southend Boys' Choir!

### Wednesday

"We're all going to the zoo today, zoo today...." and so the song goes. Most choir members chose to visit the famous San Diego Zoo today, and clearly had a wonderful time not only seeing the array of wild life there, by also enjoying the rides on the cable car and tour bus which travels around the vast site. Those not at the zoo enjoyed a relaxing day at Coronado Island, taking in the sunshine on the beach. We all had supper at the Church tonight, and greatly enjoyed talking to the host families and their friends. Again they have all done so much for our tour. We look forward to our concert at the Church tomorrow night.

### Thursday 29th July

Today we had an excellent morning on the beach at La Jolla. We joined with a large number of young people from local Churches who spend every Thursday at the beach in group activities. The choir members swam, surfed, played in the water, or just relaxed on the grass area and beach and enjoyed some free time together.



Tonight's concert at Foothills United Methodist Church was well attended, and a special occasion for the choir to say thank you for the hospitality the Church has offered. The concert was also to raise funds for an orphanage in Mexico, which the Church supports. We had a standing ovation, and the evening was a great end to this part of the tour. Everyone will be very sad to leave tomorrow, but LA beckons



### Saturday 31st July

We arrived in LA yesterday (Friday). We took in Sunset Boulevard, Hollywood Boulevard, the Walk of Fame and a chance to see the Chinese Theatre with the footprints and handprints of the stars.



The hotel is comfortable and the singers are enjoying the chance to be with each other for a few days. This morning we visited the famous Rodeo Drive where there was a chance to see some of the famous shops and then spent the afternoon on Santa Monica Beach. Some hardy souls braved the cold water and played in the waves whilst others relaxed on the beach, or spent time on the Santa Monica Pier.



This was a free day for the group, and after dinner many of the singers took an evening swim in the pool. Tomorrow we have 2 concerts, one as part of the morning service in St John's Cathedral, and then we travel to Santa Barbara to sing in an afternoon concert.

LA is an amazing city with much to do and many great sights to see. There is so much to do in a short space of time.

### **Sunday 1st August**

Today was not perhaps the best day in the tour. After a free day yesterday in LA, today we had our 2 performances.

Unfortunately, the coach company failed to send a coach this morning to take us all to St John's Cathedral where we were due to sing the Eucharist service at 10.30. 8 taxis and 1 mini bus later we finally all arrived at the Cathedral with 10 minutes to spare.

The music was very much appreciated by the congregation, and we had a very warm welcome from the Cathedral. Things are improving we thought, as the coach was waiting to take us to Santa Barbara for a concert in the afternoon. However, what should have been a two hour journey maximum took nearly 4 hours due to brush fires close to the Freeway.

We arrived with 19 minutes to spare. The small but appreciative audience enjoyed the concert, and the coach took us down to the beach front to see some of the town, which is clearly a lovely seaside town.

The route back to the hotel took in some spectacular coastal views over the ocean as the sun was setting behind on the hills. A late night swim for those who wished finished another day in LA.

### **Wednesday 4th August**

Well, here we are in San Francisco! The weather is cooler but still sunny and we had a tour on the coach yesterday around the city, stopping at the Golden Gate, seeing Bay Bridge and many other fantastic sights.

Our last day in LA was spent relaxing by the pool, and seeing more sights of the city, including some spectacular views of the city from Griffith Park Observatory, and a visit to La Brea Tar Pits.

A visit to the Farmers' Market in LA was also very welcome by the choir - many returned with several bags of shopping.

Last night when we arrived here we had a very warm welcome from the hosting choir Cantabile Youth Singers.

I think it will be very easy to fill our suitcases with souvenirs from this city, there is just so much to see. Today we have a joint rehearsal followed by a pool party.

**Thursday 5th August**



Photo above shows the group at Griffith Park Observatory in LA, with the famous Hollywood sign behind them.



The other photo is from Golden Gate in San Francisco and 2 singers picking lemons in a garden.

Our days in San Francisco have been very busy and we have seen so much. We have driven across the Golden Gate and have also travelled underneath it!

Yesterday we joined in a rehearsal with Cantabile Youth Singers before having a great time in the pool. This all took place in the house of a friend of the choir - the children enjoyed playing tennis, sunbathing by the pool and swimming before having a great BBQ and "potluck lunch" with our hosts.

Thank you Don for allowing us all in your wonderful house and gardens! After this we left on the coach for the city and took the ferry from San Francisco terminal to Sausalito Island.

We travelled underneath the great Golden Gate and spent time on the island looking at the shops and

many different small art galleries and studios. The sun shone and everyone was very happy! Each time they get back on the coach there are more shopping bags. Packing suitcases will be interesting this time!

Today we have performances in downtown San Francisco, at St Mary's and St Dominic's Cathedrals.

On Thursday 5th August we had 2 performances singing Mass in San Francisco. The first in the amazing building of St Mary's Cathedral. A small group of visitors and tourists stayed after Mass to hear the choir sing a short concert. After this it was a chance to spend time on the famous Pier 39. Lots more shopping opportunities here and also the time to see the Sea Lions at the end of Pier 39. Bush Man also started some interesting conversations on the coach! Later in the afternoon we performed in St Dominic's Church - a very different experience, but one which was very warmly received by a good sized audience, both for Mass and for the following concert. On arriving back with the hosts that night, several singers were taken out to dinner and to shopping malls for the evening.

**Friday 6th August** - we left early to get the ferry to Alcatraz. This was an amazing experience for everyone. A visit to the "theatre" to watch the short film about the history of the island was followed by a full tour with audio guide of the cell house. Everyone met at the dock after their tours of the island having greatly enjoyed every minute. The ferry took us back to the mainland and the final half hour at Pier 39 for those last minute souvenirs before the coach took us to a large mall for, yes - more shopping!



The evening concert at Campbell United Methodist Church was certainly a great highlight of the tour. The choir joined with Cantible Youth Singers, our hosts, for a wonderful final concert. The audience loved the choir's repertoire and we performed music from both sides of the Atlantic. Next year this choir will visit us in the UK and will stay with us in Southend for a few nights. A lot of friendships have been made and it will be an honour for us to repay this warm hospitality and to sing with them again as part of their UK tour. Every singer was given a "Memory Book" by their host families. Each book contains messages from the hosts, photos and space for us to complete the books when the choir visits us next year. This was a lovely gift for the singers, and it just shows the warmth and friendship shown to us on the tour.

**Saturday 7th August** - sadly we all return to the UK. The journey was not without its problems! Airports can be difficult places to negotiate, and it did not help that we were given conflicting pieces of advice regarding directions! However, we have all returned back to the UK safely, and were only missing one suitcase, which we are assured will be re'united' with its owner later tonight.

The tour has been a great success, both musically and socially. New friendships have been made within the choir, and also with hosting groups and families. Everyone has plenty of souvenirs from the trip, clothes, gifts, hundreds of photos and many, many wonderful memories.

Thank you to everyone who helped to make the trip a success - to all the adult chaperones, to all the hosting families and most of all to all the singers.