

WEDNESDAY 25TH JULY

What a start to the tour..... spending 10 hours in terminal 5 due to technical problems with the plane. Everyone in good spirits though and making use of the vouchers given out by BA for Starbucks and other outlets. The singers decided to practise their skills in the infamous “choir tour human pyramid”



Our poor hosts in Virginia Beach will have to meet us at about 5am their time, as we will now be flying about about 8.15pm instead of 2.30pm!

THURSDAY 26TH JULY

Having arrived in Virginia Beach at 4.15am US time, everyone went to their host families for well deserved rest. Our hosts were so welcoming to us when we arrived, despite the 6 hour delay and loss of a night's sleep. We meet up today to share a concert with our hosts the Virginia Children's Chorus.

FRIDAY 27TH JUL.Y

We had a great concert last night with Virginia Children's Chorus at St Lukes Church to a very appreciative audience. Both choirs received a rapturous standing ovation.

Southend singers performed extremely well after substantial sleep deprivation due to the extremely long travelling time the previous day. They still had the energy to hit the shops yesterday morning!

The Virginia Children's Chorus provided us with a great pre-concert supper which everyone tucked into. After the concert everyone departed with host families for a well earned sleep!

Early morning Friday for a pick up by the coach to go to Sandbridge Beach where the temperatures are due to go through the 100 mark! Storms are forecast for later on. The dolphins were swimming up the coast not far from where we are all staying.



We had a great time at the beach today, even though it was reported to be over 100 degrees. The waves were great for the choir, most of whom braved the waters. Our host choir provided wonderful lunch again for everyone, and after the beach there was some time for souvenir shopping. This evening the storms started with very heavy rain and dramatic lightning and thunder.

This has been a wonderful start to the tour, with a great welcome and hospitality from the Virginia Children's Chorus. Local musician, John Dixon, who used to live in Southend, and

was a former member of the Southend Boys' Choir with Roger was the person responsible for putting us in touch with this wonderful choir. Carol, Grace, Suzie and all the host families, thank you so much for the Southend Boys' and Girls' Choirs.

SATURDAY 28TH JULY

We said farewell to our lovely Virginia Beach hosts, and boarded the coach for Washington DC. The roads were very busy, traffic was almost as bad as the A13 Sadler's Farm! As we approached Washington we saw the Pentagon, the White House and the Washington Memorial as we drove into the city. The Kennedy Centre for Performing Arts is an iconic building and welcomed us into the Hall of Nations with its flags and red carpet. Before the rehearsal the singers were treated to a visit to the Roof Terrace with magnificent views of the city.



The Millennium Stage in the Centre was full for our performance, with several hundred people in the audience and a large number of people standing through the foyer. A huge screen above the stage relayed the concert, complete with close up shots of all the performers.



After the performance and a few photos outside the Centre, we made our way to meet our next hosts, The World Children's Choir, who gave us a very warm welcome. The choir was involved in a performance of "Iolanthe" this evening, so the singers were treated to Act 2 of their performance before departing with their hosts.

SUNDAY 29TH JULY

Today we had a whistlestop tour of Washington, where we visited Arlington cemetery, the US Marine Memorial, Vietnam Memorial, Lincoln Memorial, Memorials to Korean war, WW2 and Martin Luther King. We all walked through these in the warm sunshine, stopping to take photos of each memorial. The coach then took us to the Whitehouse where we had the chance for photos before visiting the Whitehouse Shop. After a visit to Union Station to buy refreshments we returned to St Peter's Church for a rehearsal with World Children's Choir. This was a Sunday afternoon concert, and was a delightfully informal event, with each choir teaching the other a new song to perform to the audience. After a potluck supper for everyone there, both choirs joined in some African drumming and dancing within a Drum Circle. This was great fun for everyone and a wonderful end to a very enjoyable day. As in Virginia Beach, the World Children's Choir have welcomed us so warmly, and were a delight to perform with under their director Sondra Harnes.

MONDAY 30TH JULY

Today we said goodbye to the World Children's Choir, who had provided us with very warm hospitality for 2 nights. We drove back into Washington to the Capitol. After some time spent in the beautiful Botanical Gardens, we joined the "line" to enter the Capitol building. We had a most interesting and informative tour of parts of the Capitol, including the Rotunda, the Hall of Statues, and tested out the whispering gallery and went to George Washington's crypt. We saw a memorial to 9/11, a copy of the Magna Carta presented by the British Government in 1976. After this we departed for Philadelphia to meet our new hosts, the Philadelphia Boys' Choir. Everyone was duly met by families of this fine choir, and went home to make new friends with this set of host families. Tomorrow we have sightseeing in Philadelphia and then a joint concert.

TUESDAY 31ST JULY

Everyone met up today in high spirits, having had a good evening with their hosts. Again we have been treated to wonderful hospitality by the Philadelphia Boys' Choir. After a quick trip to Walmart for some supplies, we arrived in the city ready to visit the Liberty Bell and the Independence Hall. After spending time in the city we moved on to the King of Prussia Mall, one of the largest shopping malls in the country. Most people appreciated the chance for some retail therapy, and boarded the coach with a selection of goods from the huge range of shops in the mall. Whilst travelling from different destinations we have enjoyed the fantastic scenery of the city, with its spectacular skyline. We moved on to our concert venue with the Philadelphia Boys' Choir, the Church of Christ the Redeemer in Bryn Mawr. We were honoured to be sharing a concert opportunity with this wonderful choir who performed the first part of the programme with their boys' and men's Chorale Choir. The concert ended with a joint impromptu performance of Vaughan Williams arrangement of The Old Hundred, which the audience enjoyed joining with. Once again the singers really enjoyed the warm hospitality offered to them through their hostings, and shared a meal before the concert.

WEDNESDAY 1ST AUGUST

The day begins with a farewell to the Philadelphia Boys' Choir. Again we have had wonderful hostings and the singers have made good friends with their new families. In the safe hands of our driver, Montano, we arrived in New York and checked into our hotel, which is ideally positioned, just one block from the Empire State Building. We were treated to a wet welcome in the pouring rain, which seemed more like home. This is a city which never sleeps, and there is just so much going on day and night. We had a guided coach tour of parts of the city this afternoon, which took us into Central Park, Strawberry Fields, Dakota Building, the Cathedral of St John's the Divine, we drove through Harlem, the Financial District, Times Square, 5th Avenue, Broadway and much more, including apartments inhabited by the very rich and famous. After having dinner in a restaurant opposite the

hotel, where we were able to watch some of the Olympics on the TV screens, we returned to our hotel to settle in for the night. This is the first night the singers have all been together, and as they are sharing 4 to a room, we don't anticipate a huge amount of sleep tonight, particularly as this is the city which never sleeps!

THURSDAY 2nd AUGUST



Straight to St Paul's Chapel after a relatively late and relaxed breakfast. After some time looking at the exhibition of photos, poems, badges, teddy bears and other memorabilia from the events on and after 9/11 a much quieter than usual group of singers changed and

joined the other people in the chapel for prayers. There followed a programme of music suited to the location and theme of hope which is all around the chapel. A chance to get some lunch and do some shopping preceded a trip to the 9/11 Memorial at Ground Zero.



Two 30 foot waterfalls cascade into square pools and then into a central void. The pools are on the original footprints of the twin towers and are surrounded by construction sites as the city endeavours to rebuild and carry on. The impressive new Freedom Tower is nearing completion and work is progressing on the museum which is due to open later this year.

Our lovely coach driver, Donald, drove us through Greenwich Village on our way back to the hotel and even recommended a good place to eat. He wasn't wrong the biggest problem was making a decision!

FRIDAY 3RD AUGUST

Today we had an interesting trip on the Hudson River on the Circle Line Cruise. On the way out the boat took in the sights of Manhattan on our left and New Jersey on our right. We passed Ellis Island before reaching the Statue of Liberty, on the way back we had a great view of Lower Manhattan, The Freedom Tower, we saw Queen Mary II, Brooklyn Bridge, the various Piers, including the Pier where the Titanic was due to berth. We were also shown the position on the River where the plane landed 3 years ago. After some free time back at the hotel for lunch the coach took us on a lengthy journey out to Bohemia on Long Island, where we met up with the choir from Connetquot High School.



The school visited the UK in 2006 and joined with the Southend Girls' Choir in concert, so we were delighted to meet up with them once more. Our singers were delighted to experience an American High School, and we joined with their Women's/Girls' Choir for a concert in their large school auditorium. The concert lasted for about an hour and the school kindly provided pizzas and drinks for the singers. The choir returned in high spirits, having made some new friends at the concert.

SATURDAY 4TH AUGUST



Today was a free day to explore more of the city. We quickly realised that the fastest way is on foot! We started our day with a visit to the Empire State Building, which backs onto our hotel. Despite the slight haze over the city, everyone spent time taking photos of the amazing views over New York, seeing the areas we had visited both by coach and by boat from the observation platform. One amazing fact we have learnt this week is that the Empire State Building was built in just one year. After returning to ground level and a trip to the gift shop, we made a leisurely stroll to Times Square where we had lunch in a variety of different food outlets. There is something for everyone in New York. The afternoon was spent in retail therapy, whilst trudging from store to store to purchase clothes, souvenirs, gifts and anything else which can be squeezed into the already overflowing suitcases. After some free time at the hotel, we reassembled to walk to Cafe R for dinner. This cosmopolitan cafe/deli supplies freshly cooked food by request, and caters for all nationalities. We have negotiated a 20% discount, with the help of Donald, our coach driver, so nobody needs to go hungry. For a group of 43 people, all of whom could choose different food, this was the ideal choice.

SUNDAY 5TH AUGUST

The day started with breakfast, followed by some of the group visiting Bryant Park, a few blocks from our hotel. This lovely park had table tennis tables, chess, petit petanque, reading areas, cafe, cultural colourful dancers and there was plenty for everyone to enjoy right in the middle of the bustling city. Some of the other singers made a quick trip to the corner shop for some last minute purchases (Macy's). Then back to the hotel for lunch and drinks before boarding the coach. We had a stop off in Central Park, as our visit there at the start of the NY visit had been a short one due to the weather. The sun was shining and the crowds were out in their droves as we re-visited Strawberry Fields. We spent a little time at the "Imagine memorial" listening to, and joining in a host of songs of the past. We arrived at St Bartholomew's Church, the final performance venue of the tour.



There was time for some more retail therapy before the singers joined us in the Church for the 5pm Sunday service there, entitled "Come as you are" service. This is the 5th service of the day at St Bart's, and the Church offers a range of services every Sunday to suit all styles of worship. The choir played an important part in the Eucharist service, singing the preludes and anthems throughout. We sang there on our last trip to St Bart's, and were warmly welcomed back. After the service, the Church extended hospitality to the choir and congregation of homemade cookies and lemonade, which was very well received by everyone. Back to the hotel for dinner, which was another visit to Cafe R, (New York's best kept secret for eating out). Having been caught in a thunderstorm and torrential rain, the singers arrived at the cafe drenched! After dinner the customary tour awards and presentation ceremony took place, with an award for every person on the trip. Tonight is the final night in New York, and the singers have plans still for some more shopping in the morning, before we finally depart this exciting city. There are just so many designer bags to take home with us!!