

Globetrotting with the Glee Club



Whether formally as in Baden (above) or informally in a restaurant in Rijeka (below), the glee club made music wherever it went.



If you plan a trip to Yugoslavia, there is a foolproof way of making yourself as popular there as plum brandy. Sing!

That's what the Caltech glee club discovered during its three-week tour last June and July.

For years the glee club director, Olaf Frodsham, and his singers have planned and dreamed of a European concert tour. This summer they made it—thanks to major contributions from the alumni association, the Institute itself, the Caltech women's Service League, the sale of memberships in a support group, and efforts of the singers themselves who raised money through concerts and album sales.

Why Yugoslavia? Well, the group wanted to visit Eastern Europe to see what it was like; and their booking organization, the Institute of European Studies, supposedly had strong contacts in Yugoslavia. As it turned out, IES had the erroneous impression that the glee club was more interested in touring than singing, and booked them for only five formal concerts—a limitation they got around by doing "instant" concerts during their stopovers. All of that, however, was still ahead when in the early morning hours of Sunday, June 18, a group of 32 students 4 alumni (Reuben Moulton, '57; B. Kent Russell, '62; Oliver Seeley, '61; and Arnold Jones, '61), Frodsham, and accompanist John Jensen of the Occidental College music staff took off for Europe.

Two of the glee club's formal performances were sacred concerts, one in Vienna, another in Zagreb. Their Vienna appearance was in the Church of the Holy Trinity, where Beethoven's funeral service was held; and they rehearsed for it in a former palace room where he wrote many of his compositions.

The church was packed, and for the first time the group enjoyed the superb acoustics of one of Europe's great old churches. One surprise was that the organ was in a rear loft, and it took about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a second for its notes to reach the singers in front. But after some preliminary confusion, the singers found that the resonance of the old building more than made up for the necessity to shift auditory gears.

The actual Yugoslav tour started with the second sacred concert—in old St. Catherine's church in Zagreb. The audience completely filled the baroque church. In fact, the priest dragged in rough planks and made temporary seats behind the altar. The group had been told not to expect applause in Yugoslav churches, but at the end of the first number the priest himself led the clapping.

Wherever they gave a concert in Yugoslavia, they were in the care of the local *dumkultur* (the head of the town's cultural activities). He, or usually she, had charge of everything—setting the location, putting up the posters, getting out the pre-concert publicity. They arrived in Sarajevo in the midst of such festivity that at first they thought the *dumkultur* must have outdone himself. But it



One way to earn an extra letter is to get a Yugoslavian poster-maker to do your publicity.

turned out to be an important national holiday. The Croats were celebrating the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in 1914 and the beginning of pan-Slavism, as well as a 14th-century anniversary of defeating the Turks. The glee club sang in Red Army Hall, and the concert was broadcast over the national radio network.

But Sarajevo was one of the crests of the roller coaster ride. In Belgrade they found that no publicity had been put out, except for a few posters on the concert hall. They arrived, found six people in the audience, and literally flipped a coin to decide whether or not to cancel the engagement. However, their woman tour guide had well-developed mother-hen instincts. She clucked a few times and then disappeared, returning in half an hour with about a hundred young people she had scratched up from some unknown source.

Dubrovnik, the resort town on the Dalmatian coast, was the scene of one of their best concerts—held in the square of the medieval part of town. And there was a reminder of home in the audience: Lance Davis, professor of economics.

Although they had originally been promised a concert in Venice, IES had scheduled it for the day after they were to fly home. But a concert in Frankfurt was substituted, and it turned out to be a fitting climax. Held in a park-like outdoor restaurant called the Palmengarten that was jammed with beer-drinking families and jolly old ladies, the glee club offered a program of every German song they had ever learned. According to Frodsham, they never sang better, and evidently no audience ever wept more joyfully. The sentimental Germans couldn't get enough of the Caltech glee club, and as they filed out of the Palmengarten, people were still standing, applauding, and reaching out to touch them. The impresario, after thrusting a bouquet of red roses into Frodsham's arms, took him aside and offered to personally take charge of bookings for a future German concert tour.

Everyone agrees that it will probably take several years to finance another European tour. But the enthusiasm of the 32 students, 4 alumni, 1 director, and an accompanist may lead them to underwrite another trip themselves, as quickly as possible.



A flight of stairs in the town square was an improvised platform for the concert in Dubrovnik.