

The Norman Luboff Tour of 1974

January 20, 1974

All of you are right!

Riding a bus for 25 hours straight is extremely foolish when compared to a three-hour plane flight. Besides, I didn't read in the paper or hear on TV of any plane crashes this weekend.

It was tiring, and uneventful. Other than a change of buses at Medford because of brake trouble.

I listened to two old ladies discussing the problems of people on a fixed income...this in loud voices for several hours. I tried to find a place for my legs and a comfortable spot for my head. Didn't happen, I fear. I read "Day of the Jackel." It's a pretty good suspense mystery. Then I could only wish for "arrival time" to arrive.

I decided to go on into Los Angeles rather than get off at Glendale. The Glendale depot was closed and I didn't see a phone booth. Needed a phone to call a taxi.

Furthermore, it's raining! If it wasn't for the palm trees I would think I was at home.

I took a taxi from LA depot to the motel. More expensive than I thought, but worth it, for I had no idea what city bus to take...even if it was "10 cents a ride day" on city buses.

The motel is not bad at all. It's an older, but modern place on La Brea Avenue. My guess is that it is only a few blocks from the church where rehearsals are to be held. My first act upon checking in was to shave and get cleaned up! I felt grubby!

Just next door, no more than 50 feet walking distance is a "Copper Penny" restaurant. I had a club sandwich and walked back to the motel. Talked with a couple at the desk who told me there was a married couple registered whose reservations were made by Uta Martin (tour manager). They had not arrived yet. I guess I wait 'til tomorrow to meet my colleagues.

All in all, I guess everything has been pretty routine and to anyone else pretty boring. Right now, what I feel most is sleepy.

January 22, 1974

Two days have passed and I feel like I'm rather into a routine.

I got up Monday about 7:00 a.m. That may be hard for some of my friends to believe. I thought that rehearsals began at 9 a.m., so wanted to get an early start.

I ate breakfast at the Copper Penny and started the search for Hollywood Congregational Church. It wasn't hard to find. It was only four or five blocks from my motel. Just up La Brea and across the street on Hollywood Blvd. It's kind of a Spanish style church, probably built in the 40's.

I arrived on the scene at about 8:30. I expected to find someone around. It was all locked up. I walked around the block and then stood and waited. Still no people. I was beginning to wonder if I was in the right town.

Finally a young guy showed up who was a member of the choir. Turns out he is from Portland. We had about an hour to kill. Rehearsals start at 10:00 a.m.! So we went back to the "Copper Penny" for coffee.

About the choir...

There are 26 members in the choir. Most of the women have been on tour before. Almost all the men are new. The guy who sits next to me (Raymond Keast) is about 50 and has toured with Luboff six years. He's excellent. He's a low bass. The fellow on my right is a fine baritone. People in the group are from all over the country.

And they are good! I can tell you for sure I'm in fast company musically. I honestly did not think the group would be this good. They read so well and sing so accurately.

We are two days into rehearsals and have not read through all the music yet. And that's not because he spends a lot of time on each number. I don't know if I can handle it. There is just too much to learn. The music is in Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Latin, and German! Well, OK, and in English.

I'm overwhelmed with the amount of music and the difficulty of some numbers.

There are some easy ones, and a few I know already, but not many.

I am getting acquainted with some of the people. At dinner last night I joined the married couple (Gene and Carol Yeargin) and a friend of theirs (June Laine). All three are from North Carolina. I had coffee and talked with them.

Tonight I joined four others for a walk down Hollywood Blvd. and then down to Sunset to a Chinese restaurant for dinner. All down Hollywood you find these squares on the sidewalk with the names of movie stars. Don't know why I remembered this one, but I saw Jane Powell's sidewalk square.

It's really kind of "cool" to be in a place you've heard of all your life but never seen!

Weather has been excellent. Sunny and warm. Expected to be about 72 degrees tomorrow.

January 23, 1974

Observations thus far...

Three days and we're not through everything once, yet.

And today...French. I thought my Italian pronunciation was bad!

This is a hard bunch of people to get to know. Do I look unfriendly? The new people are nice. The old ones are terribly cliquish and seem to resent us new ones. Maybe it's just my imagination.

Today I felt considerably more comfortable vocally. That blasted canker sore on my tongue finally quite bothering me and my voice sounded less foggy. Hope things continue to improve.

Boy...no one tells you, you sound good! The compliments are few and far between. Seldom directed at an individual. Based on my own evaluation, I think I'm doing pretty well...except for the languages (French and Italian). Had a brief chat with Norman today. Small talk, but friendly at least!

Rehearsals are interesting in several ways...

First, there is no talking. You listen to Norman! Even if it's about the music you ask him, not the guy next to you. The time is precious. Five-minute breaks every hour and no more. You don't loiter and visit over coffee.

There is ample opportunity for wise cracks and comments or slips of tongue, etc. No one does it! At least not during rehearsal time.

The place is alive with interest in the music and in performing it well. And it does sound good. Once again, I'm impressed with the musicianship of these people.

I do hear him saying things over and over that I've said to my groups. That's not to say he repeats himself. He doesn't like to do that.

You rehearse with pencil in hand and you mark it quickly!

I wish Living Light could take on a more professional attitude like this because I'm still convinced that the caliber of musician in Living Light is on the average, very near these people. Paul, Dave, and others could handle the situation very well and all members of Living Light are sensitive enough musicians to perform well on most of this music. All in all, I still think I have some very talented people to work with in that group and feel very proud of that privilege.

Back to the original thought...

A more professional attitude concerning use of rehearsal time would enable Living Light to accomplish even more I think...and without destroying the camaraderie.

The Laundry is piling up. Looks like I'm going to have to take the plunge. Wash some clothes!

January 24, 1974

Today was the best day yet from the standpoint of sound.

I worked last night on the music for about an hour and a half. There are actually 60 pieces...some are quite long. We have gone over 47 of them. I sorted them out and found that I felt comfortable with all but six. That included one Rossini number in Italian and a Faure song (Madrigal) of some mighty tough intervals.

Furthermore, Luboff actually seemed pleased with this afternoon's sound.

I must admit, I hear very little to quarrel with. The basses are not blending particularly well all the time. There is one extremely dark voice and one very bright baritone, but nothing unconquerable. I think I tend toward the bright side, especially in the higher and middle register. I'd sure like to conduct this bunch!

No question about it. I'm about to run out of underwear. Gotta wash clothes for the first time. There is a laundromat here at the motel. Have to run down to Safeway (a block away) and buy some detergent. This should be an interesting experiment.

Had dinner with the Yeargin's again this evening. They may be the only married couple in the group. They're from near Lizard Lick, North Carolina. Yep, that's the name of the town...actually a town near their hometown! Carol is a fine soprano. His first name is Gene. He's a marvelous tenor.

Hey, I was offered a solo today. Norman asked me if I wanted to do the square dance call in "Skip to My Lou."

Watched TV tonight for the first time since I've been here. Right now "Country Music USA" is on. Just as dumb this week as last...

Sleeping is a little difficult. Traffic noise is real bad. My room is so close to the street I feel like I would get my foot run over if I let it stick out of the bed.

January 25, 1974

Hey, you'll never believe this, but I saw my first movie star today...Harriet Nelson. Yup!

I had gone to Safeway to get some washing powder and bleach. There she was...waiting in line in front of me. I would never have noticed, but the girl at the check stand commented to another employee and so I took a good look as I walked by her in the parking lot as she loaded her groceries in her car...sure 'nuff...Harriet Nelson.

Today, Norman let us quit at 4 p.m. I think he was tired of it all. Said we had reached a "point of diminishing returns." He has been incredibly cheerful the past couple of days. Only once or twice has he taken a cross turn. Fortunately I've escaped his wrath to this point. Got a small hint of it Tuesday when I was singing bass instead of a 2nd tenor part he wanted. My assignment is bass on four-part music, baritone on eight-part and the middle part anytime the men are in three parts...which means there are a few occasions where I sing second tenor. It's never anything high, fortunately, but it does mean I have to do some jumping around once in a while. And mark my music and pay attention!

We have to have at least three songs memorized by El Paso next Sunday. "Happy Wanderer," "Skip to My Lou," and "Perpetuum Mobile, all encore pieces. Later, the whole second half...about 20 numbers must be memorized.

Tonight is party night at Uta Martin's house. (Uta is the "long-time" manager of the choir and has sung with Norman for several years.) This should be an interesting experience.

The music...

Wide variety. From one number which uses a rattle device and coke bottles tuned to certain pitches and an assortment of sounds from the choir, including a few sung tones. Then there is "Colorado Trail," a men's number that I have in performed with my ensemble at Kelso High School.

From 16th century Viadana and Hassler through Monteverdi (no Bach and no Mozart), Mendelssohn, Schubert, Brahms, and other assorted pieces from the Romantic era. Then it goes to Copland, Barber, and some contemporary Scandinavians. We have a good program with plenty of variety and something to please every taste...if a person likes choral music at all. We, of course, have many Luboff arrangements. Such pieces as "Tender Love," "Birch Tree," "Valencianita," "Bye and Bye," "The Lord's Prayer," "Show Me the Way," "When the Saints," "Band of Angels," "Life is Now," "Fools Rush In," "Blue Rondo a la Turk," "He See It All," and "Live, Laugh, and Love.

The people...

It gets better. People are starting to relax. Still I don't know everyone, even on a first name basis. Of the guys around me, the fellow on my right is about 32, just out of college, had been in the service for some time. He talks a better line than he sings, but he is no slouch as a musician. His name is John.

Jim Pickens is on my left. He lives in New York. He sings in the Metropolitan Lab (or whatever they call their prospective opera singers. He is good. He sings with a ringy, bright tone, but is very accurate. Jim is one of three blacks in the group.

The oldest guy is from New York. Raymond Keast is his name. I think is well over 50. He has a very deep bass voice and a dark tone. He is a nice guy. He does the narration on a song called "Saul." Raymond appears to be well off. He has property in Maine, some in L. A., and some in New York. I gather that he inherited his money and property. Some way or another he doesn't have to make a living with a "regular" job. He sings professionally in New York. He's sung with Norman for several tours. He was a singer with Robert Shaw when they performed (what was it "The St. Matthew Passion" by Bach or one such major work) in Moscow and got a standing ovation that went on and on for a very long time.

The women are a funny mixture. One is very "rotund." One is very short. (Uta Martin, the manager).

There are no blond sopranos in the group. (I was told before leaving home to beware of blond sopranos.) Two of the women are black. Uta is Asian. At this point, the only people I've gotten to know reasonably well are Gene and Carol Yeargin.

January 27, 1974

Washed clothes for the first time. Easy!

I went to Uta's house for a party. She lives in Woodland Hills. Nice place, but not at all a mansion.

Not all Luboff people attended, but I suppose most were there. There were also people from past tours who were there as well as a bus driver from past years.

Plenty of booze, but no pressure to drink.

It was an uneventful evening. Had lasagna for dinner. Mostly it was a chance to get better acquainted. The only interesting tidbit was an exchange between a singer by the name of Tom with Norman. Tom may have had a drink too many, but apparently carried "fun" a little far and said something that Norman found offensive about one of his arrangements we are singing. My observation was that the relationship between the two men "was not at all strengthened."

I made arrangements with Yeargins, June, and Neil Breeden (I remembered his last name) to rent a car and drive down to Knott's Berry Farm for the afternoon. It was enjoyable. We then drove over to Long Beach and up the Coast Road. Had dinner at a little steak place and the drove up Sunset Strip and other such streets.

We decided that prostitution must be legal here because in a ten block area we saw place after place with blatant advertising...including a spot called "The Bordello" and that just a block or so down the street from our motel.

Today (Sunday) we drove up to Beverly Hills. This was just a short distance from the motel and saw some fantastic homes. We had no map of who lived where but these have to be some of the nicest in the world.

The weather yesterday (Saturday) was overcast and a few drops of rain fell. It was also cool, about 50. Today it's beautiful again, probably up to 70, sunny just as it's been every day other than the day I arrived in Hollywood.

Universal Studios is fairly close by so we, Yeargins, Neil and I went to Universal. Interesting, but a slight "ripoff" at \$4.25! *A 2024 note: What? A ripoff at \$4.25!!*)

It's back to work tomorrow morning. I have a hunch it may be a rough week. Norman may start getting rather picky. Furthermore...and the roughest part for me...a lousy airplane trip next Saturday...to El Paso.

June 30, 1974

It seems hard to believe that a week and a half has passed already.

My guess is that we have been over each song maybe an average of two and one-half times...some more than others. My experience with school and church groups makes me very nervous about that little amount of rehearsal on so many numbers. It's worked with Living Light, so maybe this group will pull them off in El Paso on Sunday.

We hit a couple of "down" days on Monday and Tuesday of this week. Norman gave us yesterday afternoon off...or at least the last two hours off. Said we were vocally not up to par.

My impression was that his conducting wasn't up to par either and he was having trouble staying enthused. Which brings up the whole problem of who reflects who in a director/choir relationship. I still think it's very much a two-way street. Maybe he has learned to just not fight it.

We have seldom had intonation problems, but Monday afternoon was difficult. People just seemed to get careless. In a way it was good to hear because it verified my theories on intonation and, to some extent, sound has on the psychology of rehearsing a group...with ups and downs of preparation for a concert.

I got a solo today, I think! A crazy little eight bar solo in one of Luboff's "Much Ado About Nothings"...a kind of encore piece for the first half of the concert. Don't know how often we will sing it, if ever, but if we do I can boast "was soloist with the Norman Luboff choir!"

Last night Neil, Don, June, and another southern girl from N. Carolina, Cindy, and I went to a Merv Griffin Show at the Holywood Palace Theater, just down the street and up a block from us. Neil had called and made arrangements for us to get good seats. We sat in the middle 4th row. The show was very good. It plays on February 7th, they said. Had Sandler and Young, Alan and Marilyn Bergman, who wrote "What Are You Doing the Rest of Your Life" and "The Way We Were," a comedy team...just great...and Andy Williams' nephews. Enjoyed the show thoroughly and was real interested in the set, technical details, etc. Merv seemed stiff at first but soon loosened up considerably.

We're supposed to be in Nashville, Tenn. On Feb 7th. Hope we get a chance to see the show.

Naturally, seeing the show on the 7th assumes the safe flight from here to El Paso on Saturday!!

I'm having lunch with Don Hartwell tomorrow. *(Don is from Longview, now living in the LA area.)*

February 4, 1974

With a plane ride and two concerts in El Paso out of the way, it really looks like the tour has begun. In view of my well-publicized fear of flying, I'm amazed, actually, that we made it to El Paso.

The plane ride...

At one point I had decided that I would not tell anyone I did not like to fly, but circumstances and a big mouth soon changed that. The circumstances had to do with having to explain to people why I took a bus from Kelso to Hollywood instead of doing the smart thing...flying. The big mouth is unexplainable. As it worked out everybody in the choir knew how I felt by the time we boarded the Continental 727 for El Paso. I got my usual words of comfort like "Well, if its my time to go, I'll go..." etc. Really, there were other scared people, none as honest as I am!

Well, there were some bumpy moments. Even some veteran flyers admitted that, especially just before we landed. Enough of all this! We landed and I am now tension free!

Our stay in El Paso was at the Hotel del Pasa Norte, an old hotel right downtown. Really quite comfortable and probably at one point considered elegant. I shared a room with Jim Pickens, the New York guy...from San Francisco, originally. He turns out to be a graduate of Oberlin Conservatory.

Concerts...

Our concerts Sunday were held in a beautiful new hall with acoustics unbelievably poor. Even with a shell, it was difficult to hear. Our shell from Wenger had arrived, but our risers had not. This messed up our standing arrangement. The hall held around 500, but crowds were less than 300 for both the afternoon and the evening concerts. We were very well received and the review in today's paper was flattering. The performance was extremely lacking...particularly in the afternoon (in my opinion). It showed signs of hope in the evening.

I was happy to note that Norman also gets screwed up in his introduction of numbers, and in fact, actually seemed nervous!

I told him yesterday afternoon at dinner time that I thought it was definitely physically harder for the singers than for the conductor. My feel went to sleep and my legs still ache from those performances.

We're off now to Lubbock, Texas where we will spend the night.

We left Lubbock this morning at 8 p.m. It's now 10:30 and I've seen nothing but North Texas sagebrush and low hills with occasional beautiful rock formations. The weather is beautiful. El Paso's paper noted that out of the last 4,395 days, the sun had failed to shine on only 15 days.

We are close to the New Mexico border and I guess there is a possibility we will stop at Carlsbad Caves for a short while! *(Note 2024: Hwy. 180 goes through a corner of N. Mexico and passes Carlsbad Caverns. We apparently traveled by Greyhound bus through this area on our way to Lubbock.)*

We stayed in Lubbock, Tx Monday night. I wasn't particularly impressed with Lubbock, but then one shouldn't judge such a thing on a one night stay. It's still very flat country and I guess most of Texas is this way.

I tried to call Lary Marsh that evening but no answer. He lives in Odessa, which is south of Lubbock about 100 miles.

I had a real nice dinner...kind of splurged on a steak because people said Texas steaks were great. It was.

Tuesday was a long day in the bus. Over 500 miles from Lubbock to Ft. Smith, Arkansas. We stopped in Oklahoma City for about a half-hour.

When we arrived in Ft. Smith, we also arrived in the Ozark Mountains. Really, this is beautiful country. It's now cloudy and cold. It even snowed a few flakes last night, but you could tell this would be gorgeous scenery in the spring, summer, and fall...especially fall.

Note from 2024: According to the itinerary, we stayed in Ft. Smith at the Sands Motel. Then travelled the next day to Harrison, Arkansas.

Our drive from Ft. Smith to Harrison was fairly short, but we had to be there before noon to check in our motel. It was a beautiful new Holiday Inn. We had to get over to the high school for a 1:30 concert.

This turned out to be a bust! They seemed to have all the kids from grades 4-12 in the audience for the concert. With all the coughing...it seems that over 200 kids were out of school with the flu...it was noisy! It sounded like another 200 needed to be home! Add all that to kids' usual noisiness and it was bad!

Last night we had our first good concert. I felt like we sounded...for the first time in concert...really professional. I think Norman began to have some hope! Once again, I was impressed with the importance of the acoustics of a hall. This makes all the difference in the world when you do not use a PA system.

So far travel has been uneventful. They are very strict on departure times. We left Lubbock, Tx five minutes late because the restaurant was so slow about serving food. We got a ten-minute lecture on importance of leaving on time. "Leave the restaurant whether you have been served or not."

After yesterday's early-afternoon concert, I had something to eat and then found it necessary to wash clothes...again. I was completely out of shirts.

As I was loading the washer, in walks some of my Arkansas relatives. My Uncle Romy, Aunt Hazel, and my Aunt Kate. Kate's son Judon and his wife, Violet also. *(2024 note: They had come from the Pangburn, Arkansas area to visit with me. What a wonderful treat!)* I had a great visit with them in my motel room. Then we went down to the restaurant and talked some more while they had dinner. They're looking a tad bit older, but not much different from always. Seemed to be in good shape. Kate has lost some weight, and I think she still plans on having that operation on her hips. They all went to the evening concert. I'm not sure what they thought of it, but they seemed to be pleased.

Would like to have spent more time with them, but Nashville is a long way away and our next concert, Friday, is near there.

It's going to be a long trip today and I'm going to join most of the other people in going to sleep. We have a rule...first two hours are quiet on the bus!

Tuesday, February 12

I thought it best to take advantage of the long bus ride today to catch up on the story.

From Harrison, Arkansas to Nashville was uneventful...outside of passing through the Ozarks and down through country fairly close to "home." We stopped in Conway, Arkansas for rest stop and drove on toward Little Rock to pick up a freeway in to Nashville.

I cannot say much for Nashville...

Maybe I should pause and give some impression of the Ozarks. This is really very beautiful country. The Holiday Inn we stayed in at Harrison was the nicest yet.

Nashville was somewhat contrasty. We stayed in a nice place, The Tudor Inn...but it wasn't really clean. We arrived Thursday late and did nothing except play charades with a bunch of people until 1:30 a.m. Slept 'til 1:30 the next day. I sat around most of the afternoon and boarded the bus at five for a trip out to Murfreesboro, where we had dinner and then the concert. We were greeted, unintentionally, I'm sure, by the town policeman, who escorted us to an unimpressive looking corner restaurant where we had probably the best meal so far. Real southern cooking. I had catfish, green beans, black-eyed peas and to top it off, fudge pie!

Our concert was the best to this point and Norman even gave a little speech in praise of the group afterwards. On top of that he had bought some pies at the restaurant, so on the ride back to Nashville we had pie. For the first time in my life that I can remember, I had chess pie. It has to be even better than pecan. Someone better learn to make it up where I live!

Saturday, about half the choir went to the "Grand Ol' Opry." Now that was an experience. Neil Breeden, Jane Laine, John Shaffer and I took a taxi to an area near the "Opry" building called "Printer's Alley." We ate in a place called "The Brass Rail." Excellent service, food, and a nice atmosphere. This part of Nashville was crummy and since I saw no other that's my impression of the city!

First, the taxi ride over...

John is outspoken and got the cab driver going on various topics such as the availability of moonshine from taxi drivers. It is. I asked him how I could get to be a member of the Ku Klux Klan. He said for \$10 he would get me an application form.

After dinner we walked around. It was cold and had even snowed a tiny bit that day. We found ourselves a coffee shop to sit in until Opry time (9:30 p.m.) The only one open was a real dump. Should have known better, but I decided to try their chess pie. Neil ordered pecan. A greasy looking kid was the waiter and when he brought it, he said in Tennesseean, "Had trouble gettin' this pecan pie out of the pan and it don't look too good. Let me know if you don't like it." Neil didn't and neither did

I like my chess pie. On top of all that, a great big roach crawled right along the wall and over the juke box selector! Uh, huh! Nice place.

The Opry had long lines, both directions from the main entrance. We were told this was the last month the "Grand Ol' Opry" was to be held in the Ryman Auditorium...the old church building that served for so long.

That building really was a huge old church with a large balcony. I'm just guessing about the capacity, but am thinking that 2500 people could be seated there...on pews. We had reserved seats so did not have to stand in line long. A cop stood in the street yelling at people to stay on the sidewalk. It was a bit like herding cattle. The general atmosphere was dirty, carnival like and the building even smelled bad. Looked like a genuine fire-rap. A woman at the top of the stairs sat on a window ledge yelling directions "if your ticket has a section written on it, you go there, etc.

The show is broadcast live over WSM radio, not TV. The TV version is taped elsewhere. They do a series of fifteen-thirty minute segments by various sponsors. This is complete with commercials every three song or so. Kellogg's Corn Flakes, Trail Blazers dog food...some of the corniest ads I've ever heard.

The show went on and the audience was never really quiet. The stage was filled with performers tuning up...walking around all the time and yet it was organized so that there was never a break...except between segments.

Some of the old timers I saw were Roy Acuff, Hank Snow, and Grandpa Jones. Archie Campbell and Jeannie Pruitt were on, too. We left before it was over...at about 11:30.

Sunday, we drove back to Helena, Arkansas. Gave a well received concert that I felt was pretty good.

Yesterday, we drove to Columbus, Mississippi. We were to have rehearsed at the Ramada Inn where we stayed, but no place to meet. Had a short rehearsal before the concert at the hall..this to ut in two new numbers.

The Columbus concert was not our best, in my opinion, but I had a sore throat anyway. Feel much better today.

Some of the group went on our bus to a pancake house after the concert and had an interesting experience which proved we were in DIXIE. At the restaurant, Kelly Muller (black) and Tom Shaffere (white) and Jim Pickens (black) and Mari ? (white) sat as twosomes in a booth...thinking nothing about how it looked. Everyone else was served. Their order didn't appear until time to leave. They left without paying and without food!

As I thought about it, Kelly (who for a large part of the tour was my bus seatmate) and I laughed about the looks we got when we walked together down the street in El Paso. I told her it must be because I was so tall and she so short.

On to Florida...

We're on our way now to Gainesville, Florida. Another long trip. We are now in Alabama. We just

topped in Montgomery for lunch. Walked up the main drag which is on a slight grade. It has the governor's mansion at the top of the hill. You know...King George Wallace.

Most of the morning we travelled through some sorry looking country on a two lane road. In fact, since crossing the Mississippi (which was rather flooded looking or at least very high), I saw last year's cotton stalks. Cotton country. I saw the occasional nice house and many, many very poor shacks. The poverty of some people of the south seems quite obvious.

Since leaving Montgomery, the highway has been better and we are in rolling hills with pasture land and numerous farms. Some have plowed fields where I would guess they've grown either cotton or soybeans.

It really is quite pretty and the weather is just great. Not a cloud and outside temperature at around 60-65. Kind of reminds me of the area south of Woodland in appearance, except no high hills or mountains in the distance.

I think I'm really quite ready to bag it and come on home. If it were not for the travel and the different cities and states to see, I'd really feel that way.

It's 10:30 p.m. on Tuesday, the 12th. We have arrived finally in Gainesville, Florida. A long trip! Concert tomorrow in Mt. Meyers.

My impression of Florida is that it is beautiful...much like southern California. Weather, palm trees and general appearance of towns...more tourist attraction geared, I suppose.

This would be the place to live, but only during the winter. People who have lived here said it is terrible in summer. It's hot and humid...here and on much of the east coast. How about six months here and six months in Washington state?

Florida...

The first stop was in Gainesville, after a long haul from Columbus, Mississippi. Gainesville is till about 100 miles from our destination, Mt. Meyers, where we sang a concert on Wednesday at a place called Shell Point. The place was a beautiful resort. It's a retreat center owned by the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church. Our concert was given in a large six-sided church on these grounds. This was no ordinary run of the mill center, but a modern, rich spa with beautiful motel accommodations, coffee shop, pool and acres of grounds with walkways, little bridges, moorage areas for yachts. A lot of older people around!

The church where we sang was dead acoustically, but we managed to give a fairly good concert.

After the concert I met a man from Pittsburg, Pa. who is pastor of a large C&MA Church there. He was here on a retreat conference. I got an invitation for the Living Light to sing there should we ever take a trip!

On Thursday we drove to Tampa. Sang a concert in a high school auditorium that night. Standing ovation again. Nice live hall.

Friday we were back in the south, this time on the east coast to Hollywood, Fla., just north of Miami Beach.

Saw the Atlantic Ocean for the first time at eye-level. The beach was just like pictures...really beautiful, but crowded. This is vacation time for Florida and all motels, etc., are booked solid and the beaches are crowded. It seems strange to look at a beach and toward the ocean with the afternoon sun at your back!

We drove a short ways up the coast to Boca Raton and sang an outdoor concert at a golf course-condominiums development. Someone had gone to a lot of trouble in preparing for this. The concert was free to the public. They had set up a portable stage, moved a large grand piano in for our use. Covered the stage with a tent-like awning with a tent in back of the stage for dressing rooms, including portable johns for our use. Plenty of clothes racks, mirrors, tables and chairs. Actually, a very comfortable arrangement except for one thing...the WIND!

It had turned cloudy and extremely windy and we wondered if our shell would stand up. The concert went on with portable chairs seating several hundred people out front near a fairway on the golf course. The setting was beautiful and had it not been for the wind things would have been great. Hair, music, everything blew and the tent flapped, the shell rattled and swayed. Some of us in the back row had to stand bracing the shell for fear it would topple over. It was, indeed, an interesting experience. Whoever arranged for it really put out a bundle of dough! Oh, well! This has to be one of the richest areas on earth!

My first impression of Florida was good. I really enjoyed the scenery, the water and the warm sunshine. We had had snow in Nashville just a few days before. But this part of Florida is very humid. Last night I felt like my bed had damp sheets. I would guess that in summer it would be suffocating.

After the outdoor concert we drove up to Orlando, just 15 minutes north of Disney World. We got in late and left early this morning for what may be one of our longest drives. We ended in South Carolina. No concert tonight, thank goodness.

Right now, we are on a not so smooth road in southern Georgia, about 10:30 a.m.

Some impressions of the trip so far...

First, the novelty is gone. I find myself irritated by some of the mannerisms and actions of some of our people. One of our guys is a colossal bore. An expert on any and all topics. He brags on how his voice is gaining in strength, when in reality (my view) it sticks out badly and is getting worse! But then I should not go on a tirade about such things because it doesn't do much good.

The biggest thing is realizing that most of what lies in store is just more of the same!

On the positive side...I know that Luboff has a great group of choral literature and technique. He is especially strong on the concept of line and textual stress, syllabic and melodic.

But I still feel there is a lack of blend. He mentions nothing about this other than a word or two concerning "having a section vibrato rather than individual." Nothing has been said about the unison and from where I stand there is much to be desired from this standpoint. Basses in particular need work here. We have one very round low bass voice, another slightly less heavy and then some quite bright sounds. I'm having a hard time realizing that he permits all this individualism.

A gap in the narrative...

Sorry about the long pause in the trip narrative...

I guess the sameness got to me and the details no longer seemed worthy of writing about.

I'm still in good shape vacally, physically, etc. I must say that I still have bouts with "let's get this thing over with" thinking. However about that time something happens...or we go somewhere new...and I realize what a great experience it really is and that the monotony of the routine is only a small bother in comparison to the good stuff.

The little tensions among some of the members of the group have eased up somewhat and I think we'll all be able to live together the rest of the tour. I hope its not premature to say that, but the group seems like a fairly stable bunch right now.

March 3, 1974

We're wending our way through the Maine backwoods, or so it would seem, right now. Concert most recently was last night. It was in Augusta, Maine. The night before in Bangor.

Todays trip is to Montreal via a two-lane highway through Maine's snow country and over some mountains with ski areas.

I notice a similarity to Washington's Cascades here except for lower hills and populated areas and fewer and smaller evergreens. Come to think of it, it's not so similar after all!

Bangor was an attractive city. Old, with the architecture of the 1800's in so much of the town. I had the best lobster dinner here! Stuffed baked lobster upside down in the shell. Also was impressed with the friendliness of the people in the stores. They even took out of state checks from some of our people. That's unheard of in California, I found.

I have the best of memories of Bangor for those reasons and for the fact that our concert went well and was well received. In addition, Uta asked me to join her, Norman, Gunilla, and Ray Keast, and Karen Anderson in a reception in honor of the group after the aprogram. I met some kind and charming people and enjoyed the event.

Maine is noted for rather severe winters with deep snow.You guess it...none...with temperatures in the 30's but not at all bitter.Howevber, it did begin to snow last night during our concert in Augusta and there is now white on the ground this morning. It seems to be getting deeper as we go further into the country.

The fir and pine trees are mixed with the white barked birch, poplar, aspen and elm and its very rural New England.We have passed small lakes with ice and snow covering the surface. The more I look at it, this could be a hairy trip on this to-lane road! But it is beautiful!

Augusta was a different story. We stayed in a large Holiday Inn. There must have been two or three High school basketball teams with cheerleaders, etc. Apparently a state tournament on. Kids were noisy all night long and the service in the restaurant was slow and food expensive.

Plus...the concert was held in a national guard armory under poor conditions. Apparently these people are taking the energy crisis seriously for the sponsors were not allowed to have the concert

in a beautiful new high school auditorium because of rules regarding lighting use. The concert was poor.

Foodwise, Bangor was a contrast to Augusta, too. Besides the fine lobster we ate at a truck stop restaurant near our motel and were treated to excellent food and lots of it, it was cheap, too.

I got up late on our concert day and had “Yankee Pot Roast” for breakfast! For dinner I had a huge ham steak with fresh peas and delicious homemade bread. My meal, with coffee, was only \$8.15. They were quick, too!

It’s funny how you become a real critic of eating places after six weeks of restaurant meals!

Looking back

Well, back in New York...

Like the song says, “It’s a hell of a town.” People and buildings and an atmosphere like no other I have felt. London comes the closest.

We arrived in town awfully tired and hardly wanting to go anywhere, but felt I would be missing a good chance if I didn’t. Five of us walked about ten blocks to the Lincoln Center and ended up (over my protest) buying standing room tickets to the Metropolitan Opera production of Otello. John Vickers was the tenor lead!

No time for dinner before the show. Standing room is assigned lower floor in back with a numbered spot behind a rail to lean on. Gwen Haynes, Allen W, and I stood for the first two acts and then just before the end of the second act, some people walked out...gave their two ticket stubs to Allen. He gave them to Gwen and me. We had \$17.50 seats on the aisle just a couple of rows from the orchestra for the rest of the opera. Allen joined us for the last act because there was an empty seat next to us. The old usher couldn’t quite figure out what was going on but his only comment was...”are you just now arriving?” I said “yes” and he walked on, shrugging his shoulders.

The set alone was worth the cost of our \$2.75 tickets. It looked like a beautiful painting framed in the rectangle of the stage opening. There were over 125 people on the stage in two of the scenes.

And the house itself...absolutely spectacular! There were six tiers of box seats and a balcony reaching the sky. You would need high powered binoculars to really see well from up there!

We finally had dinner at about midnight in a French “crepe” restaurant near Lincoln Center. Enjoyed it...this French “pancakes” filled with almost anything you might want. I had ham and creamed chicken. For dessert, it was chocolate sauce and ice cream on a hot crepe.

The Wellington Hotel was not much. A very small room on the 17th floor. It was clean, though.

Even further back

Prior to coming to New York we spent about a week back-tracking around North Carolina. We had several concerts...some good, others a little lacking. One oddity was to have a fine, maybe our best

concert one night and then on to Bluefield, West Virginia to give what was undoubtedly the dullest performance yet.

North Carolina itself was a pleasant surprise. We spent most of our time in the Greensboro to Raleigh area and found that the state is urban and industrialized...not at all "backwoods" as I half-way expected to find.

The scenery through Virginia on our way from Roanoke to Washington D. C. was particularly nice. We had travelled from Bluefield to Roanoke after the concert. Got up for our usual eight a.m. departure. This is mountainous country...not jagged, rough or heavily wooded as in the Cascades or Rockies, but rounder mountains with farms. It's really rural America, picture postcard style.

March 5

We have performed in everything from a circus tent setup (Boca Raton) to the National Center for the Arts in Ottawa, Canada.

In Montreal it was a fantastic beautiful hall seating 3,000 people. Almost the same in Ottawa. In Montreal the acoustics were excellent. Ottawa somewhat duller, but not bad. These were lovely halls, both even fancier than Portland's Civic Auditorium.

The dressing rooms were large and so well equipped. Made us all feel like real top tier professionals.

The Montreal concert was well received and perhaps deservedly so for we sang well. Ottawa was so-so and Norman was not particularly happy. We may see some sectional rehearsals soon!

I talked with him after the Ottawa concert. We talked about how draining it is on the director when rhythm is messed up. He suggested I might take a section to rehearse, but I told him while I was willing, I thought it might be difficult from a morale standpoint. Anyway, it was left hanging. I was at least impressed with his willingness to talk and the respect he showed for my judgment.

I started my solo in Montreal. I have an eight-bar solo in "Air Pollution"...one of the first half ending numbers we have been using. Even did it without music last night in Ottawa.

We sing tomorrow night in Kingston, New York. After the concert the company voted to go on to New York. We will have a full day Thursday for sightseeing before leaving Friday morning for Zanesville, Ohio.

I don't know yet what I will try to do or see, but do find I like the idea of having a chance to see a little of New York.

Note from 2024: I don't know whether there are letters or journal entries telling of the rest of the tour of 1974 or if I simply stopped writing about the trip. Unless I find more in the "archives," this may be the end of the story for 1974's tour with Norman Luboff's choir!