

Saturday, November 3, 2012

## Palermo and the local Pasticceria September 20, 2012

Seven-Thirty a.m. before work and the place is hopping. Five policemen are here, a few suits, working guys, students and a some construction fellows. Palermo is a big working city. This is “Bar Lincoln”, date 1974 stated in paint over the samovar. This is a place for locals. One steps up to a kiosk to buy a tag which is handed to the barista or baker. The kiosk and bar staff is outrageously busy and understandably a bit impatient with my non-speaker tourist order. Genuinely, at the end of transactions, “Buon Giorno” is still the order of the Italian morning, delivered with service and consideration. A fifty something fellow joins me at one of only two tables in the stand-up house. Many working guys here who stand and pound their espresso while chatting. The case of baked goods is vast, yesterday’s bagel-type baked thing was stuffed with cheese and spinach, loaded.

A new wave of guys just poured in, perhaps dependent on bus or train. “Bar Lincoln” is just across from the round-about across from the transit center for train and “autobus”. In large cities when on foot, walking-about does not get you anywhere. The transit centers are my area to base. Small hotels catering to travelers are found in such areas. the transportation connections are good (by definition), and the train station can be found on any map or by asking directions. “Treni Stazioni” with a questioning look and a map finger point will usually get a response of “si, si, si”, or the “no,no,no”.



Saturday, November 3, 2012

Madame Butterfly floated last evening in performance at “Teatro Massimo”. This is opera season and an eight day run of six performances was in the second night. Only my second opera ever, the last being a September in Vienna, I was mesmerized by the sublimity of the theatre, orchestra, lighting and voices. The theater itself is an artwork, inside and out. A gilded interior of painted wood decorated with angel heads and floral patterns, the main floor is arranged with rows of red velvet arm chairs. The horseshoe shaped layout faced the stage and orchestra pit with nine tiers of “boxes”, or private compartments. I lost count while attempting to enumerate the scale. The ceiling fresco covered the entire space, broken by gilded section breaks, the image portrayed nudes floating on clouds playing instruments. Gigantic crimson and sea blue fabrics floated between panels and draped the nudes. Hilarious little winged cherubs cavorted under and over the drapery, their little butts and legs peeking from hidden corners.

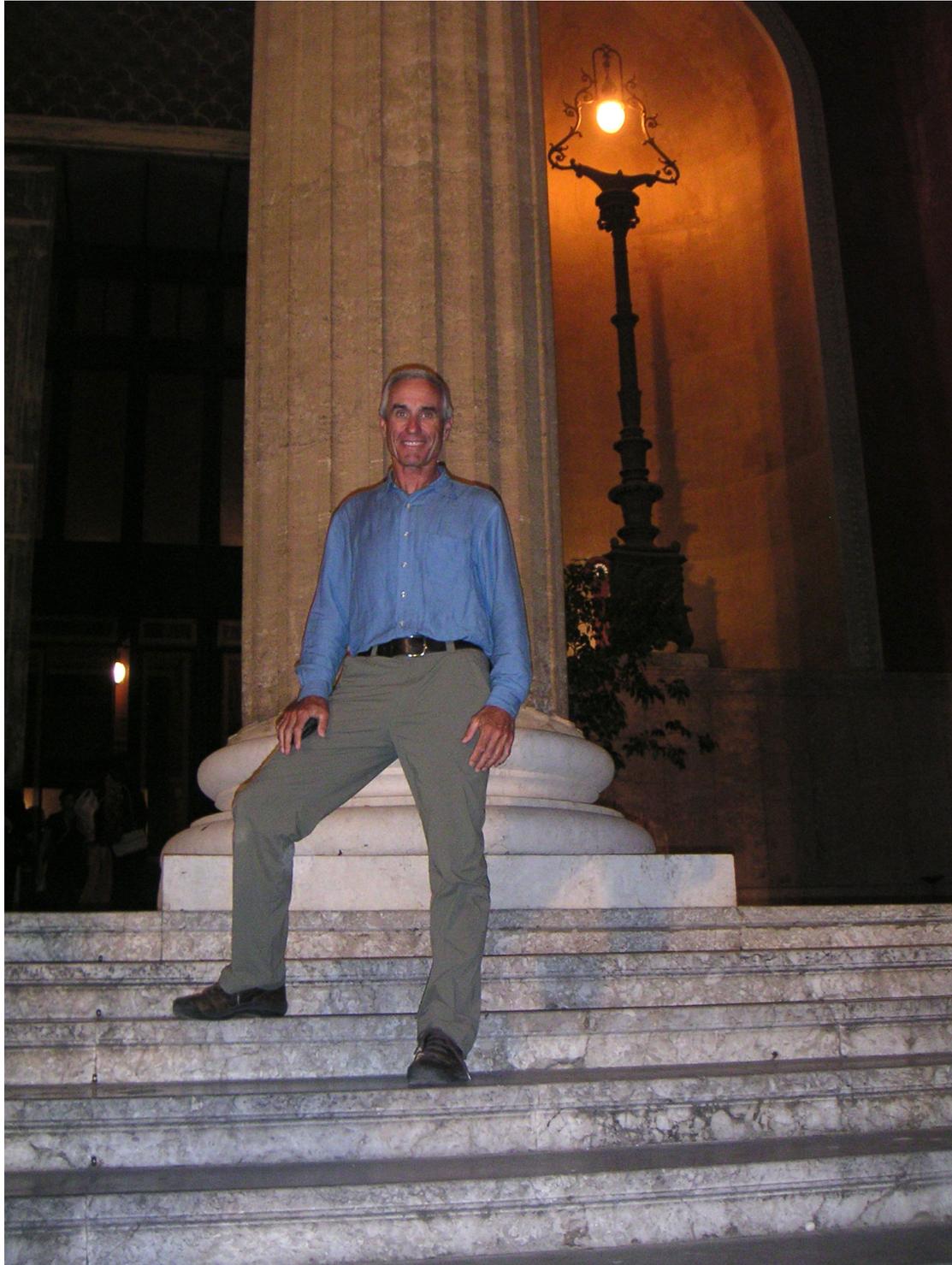


Described by a compartment mate as the third largest opera house in Europe, the place was full, air stuffy and warm. The maestro was compelled to remove his jacket during intermezzo in the second act. Turning to the applauding crowd he bowed gracefully, as if asking our indulgence. Fans were fluttering throughout the performance.

Madame Butterfly was discovered serendipity. My previous hotel in Trapani is now owner of my power supply needed for computer recharge. With the last remaining

Saturday, November 3, 2012

charge left in the battery I researched to find the Apple store in Palermo. Fortunately a young fellow with English skills was working at the time and able to provide a map, exact location of the store and bus to take. Wow, things are looking up. Next day the mission began. Within an hour I had tested and purchased the device, with a European style electrical plug. Thus began a most interesting Palermo day.



Saturday, November 3, 2012

My Palermo wander started with hotel map in hand, toward direction of the waterfront, always the most interesting. Spying giant cranes in the distance, peering from above the five floor apartment buildings, I sauntered on slowly. Crossing the tracks I entered the area where no tourists venture. Long stares from the children, glances and a few stares from adults.



Saturday, November 3, 2012

Looking for a cultural point of interest, should I go up that mountain to the old building perched atop, over this way or that? The brown cultural interest sign identified the Museum of Naval Archeology somewhere close, decision made. Wandering unknowingly closer, a local hanging laundry stared long, "museo" I said and gestured with a shrug, she pointed toward an increasingly isolated and semi-industrial looking dead-end road. Stepping over a draped anchor chain a fellow beckoned with, "looking for hotel", no replied I in English, Naval Museum. His broad grin confirmed by whereabouts as he stepped inside to fetch the keys. We walked briefly as he asked my place of origin and gently inquired why I was there, "sailor" brought another smile and sense of comradeship.

Pietro unlocked the door to the ancient Spanish shipyard, sixteenth century stone arches "bricked-in", enclosing the space that now is his maritime museum. My guide's pride is apparent as he cheerfully describes in "Ital-english" (a dialect similar to Spanglish) the naval history of Palermo. His description of King Ferdinand of Spain constructing the original shipyard, visits by Portuguese and Horatio Nelson of England are told with a reverence for the courage of sailors, without nationalistic pride.

I am the only visitor and there is no hurry. He permits me to walk about with my knapsack among the objects, unconcerned by fear of thievery. We talk about galleons, warships, cannon, submarines and historical pictures. Pietro is pleased to hear my questions and enjoyed going to the "next level" on topics maritime.

Remarking upon a two-man wood sloop with raised sails, Pietro informed me the boat was his own, which he raced during he 1956 Olympics. Eventually we got around to the Americas Cup race in San Francisco, where Luna Rossa from Italy is the challenger of record, a distinguished status that sets the Cup challenge in motion. His pride that two crew are from Palermo causes a glow as we recount the races together last month.



Saturday, November 3, 2012

Closing my visit, Pietro shows me the special museum book which he authored, and offered “for you, special price”. So much fun ~ upon my immediate ‘yes’ he began to shower me with other books, maps, DVD set and unique publications.

My train is speeding along the eastern Sicilian coast, through tunnels that open to seaside azure. Construction is horrendous in this land of rock, ravines and mountains. Overall the style, like so many subjects Italian, is to preserve aesthetics and create beauty. Road design thus does not “cut and fill”, but tends to “tunnel and bridge”. High concrete bridges with long legged pillars spanning fertile valleys terminate in a tunnel. Outside Segestria one particular long and winding causeway crossed an agricultural area, for no apparent reason other than preserve the landscape and native property.

Words and pictures do not describe the picturesque beauty of Sicily. Each turn along the coast offers view of a stone village, cliff dropping to the sea of clear blue water. To the right, high peaks rise in the distance. Fertile ground supports gardens of flowers, vegetables and vines surrounding the homes.

The locals stack boulders offshore fifty meters to clear beach and create sand. Waves break on the outer rocks permitting the fines to accumulate, eventually forming a sandy beach on the gravel.



Saturday, November 3, 2012

Resting now comfortably aboard the Sireromar passenger ferry headed for the Island of Lipari. Having left Palermo this morning at nine, travel was by Treni Italia, on the milk run up the coast. Writing and map reading while looking out the window, the long peninsula of Mazollo was identifiable by sight from the window.

The boat just begins now to pull from port. Connection from train to ferry included waiting twenty minutes for the public bus, but that is running Italian time, so myself and other travelers hopped a taxi for the five kilometer trip to the port. Another fabulous connection with a boat in forty-five minutes, enough time to buy a ticket and fetch some Euro from the ATM, and wander toward the disembark.

Tug boats at quay and "Guardia de Finanze" vessels sit idle and the fast ferry pulls past. Just getting ready to turbo up, the gorgeous little city of Mazzolo passes, walled citadel tufts the hill, with a duomo and old city just below the walls. Spray hops in the air as the boat lifts and vibrates to cruising speed.

