

DOURO, THE THIRD CRUISE IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF LISZT

(23-28 OCTOBER 2023)

Luckily, Franz (Liszt) had travelled (by boat) from Cadiz to Lisbon on a long trip through the south of France, Spain and Portugal (1845-6, aged 34). So when, in February 2022, a terrible war broke out in Eastern Europe between Russia and Ukraine, it was decided in June to accept the proposal from Madame Hiegel, head of groups at Croisieurope Paris, to go to the Douro at the end of October 2023. After many ups and downs, 114 people met up in Porto on 23 October to embark together on the Miguel Torga, a splendid 5-anchor boat.

Day 1 (23/10) PORTO

The group met up at the restaurant in Guimarães at around 1.30pm. 114 passengers, 12 English speakers, 6 artists, 1 lecturer, 1 coordinator, music fans from France, Switzerland (including a 15-year-old girl!), Great Britain, the United States, Morocco and... India. The afternoon was devoted to a visit to Guimarães, the birthplace of Henriques, the first King of Portugal (1128), and home to the Paço dos Duques de Bragança, an astonishing 15th-century palace and temporary residence of the President of the Portuguese Republic. Then, after winding our way to the quays of the Douro (well done coach drivers!) we boarded the Miguel Torga, with 29 crew members, including the purser, Nelson, and the host, Ricardo, who were welcoming, friendly and proved to be very professional as the cruise progressed. In the evening, Porto by night, the Eiffel bridges and, above all, the magnificent azulejo-adorned station, certainly one of the most beautiful in Europe, with its typical 1900s style.

Day 2 (24/10) PORTO- REGUA

In the morning, we set off by coach in the rain to visit the Stock Exchange and its extraordinary Moorish salon, the baroque Sao Francisco church (300 kg of gold!) and the Real Companhia Velha wine cellars, one of the most famous in Porto (tasting 3 different glasses of port, hard to choose!). In the afternoon, as the boat passed through the first lock (Crestuma, 14m), we listened quietly to Christian Lorandin's lecture about F. Liszt's extraordinary journey, from Lyon to Marseille, then to the south of France, Spain, Portugal, Spain again, and finally France, accompanied by one or two Boisselot pianos (see map and text of the lecture on our website). Just in time to climb 36 metres into a second lock, at Carrapatelo. Finally, Nicolas Stavy, Suzana Bartal, Geneviève Laurenceau, Guillaume Martigné and Delphine Haidan display all their talent in a magnificent evening concert (the programmes are appended to our website, along with some photos and videos).

Day 3 (25/10) REGUA-FOLGOSA-BARCA D'ALVA

The morning begins with a delicious "crête de coq" (cock's peak) in a local pastry shop, followed by a visit to the magnificent Vila Real & Manoir de Mateus, a private palace preserved in its splendid 18th-century state. Splendid ceilings, remarkable furniture, museum objects and, all around, a magnificent park and beautifully landscaped gardens. Between the Valeira (32m) and Pocinho (22m) locks, the ship's choir (around forty singers) rehearsed under the energetic direction of Gabriella Boda. Before dinner, the artists gave us a second concert, even more splendid than the first, which aroused great enthusiasm, and after dinner we were treated to a performance by three dancers demonstrating flamenco and other Spanish dances.

Day 4 (26/10) BARCA d'ALVA-SALAMANCA-SENHORA da RIBEIRA

Breakfast at 6.00 am, departure at 7.00 am, we cross into Spain, a 2-hour bus journey that the choristers take advantage of to rehearse in the bends, but all goes well, the group arrives in Salamanca, a very beautiful city where we quickly see the Piazza Major, the University and the Cathedral. It's a mecca for tourists, there are lots of guides and foreigners in the city, and everyone promises to come back one day, but the excursion was worth it! We got back on the boat, started to sail down the Douro and passed the Pocinho lock again. The artists gave us another splendid concert of duets before dinner, and after dinner we had a "members' evening" with Olga Claire and Jean-Pierre Boivin (poetry readings) and Bernard Wilbert (a talk on the illnesses of Ludwig V. Beethoven).

Day 5 (27/10) SENHORA DA RIBEIRA-FERRADOSA-LEVERINHO

Today's excursion takes us along the wine route, through the very steep Douro valley, where we can admire the skilful techniques of local viticulture. Of course, a tasting and sale follows, and many leave with a few extra bottles. After lunch, we pass through two locks again, Bagaúste-Regua (27m) and Carrapatelo (36m), while the choir and artists rehearse. At 6.00 p.m., the grand final concert begins, with the choir, directed and accompanied on the piano by Gabriella Boda, performing 5 songs, both Portuguese and Spanish, followed by another magnificent performance by the trios of our artists. This is followed by an aperitif, during which we announce the next cruise (September 2025, with Suzana Bartal), then the "gala dinner", with everyone in their best clothes, a delicious menu and an excellent atmosphere. And, in the evening, there was a wonderful surprise: a Portuguese folklore group, about thirty people, singers, dancers, seniors, adults and even children aged 3-4, a moving show that delighted us all.

Day 6 (28/10) LEVERINHO-PORTO

Last day: first you have to put your suitcases and luggage away, leave them in the corridors, have breakfast, and get on one of the three coaches without making a mistake. Goodbye to the boat. As it was raining, the tour of Porto took place on the buses, before lunch in the restaurant. Finally, it was time to part, with around thirty passengers staying on in Portugal, others leaving immediately for the airport, and finally the majority being given a little time to do some shopping in town.

At 11.15pm, the group landed at Orly and said their goodbyes in the pouring rain. Everyone was happy to have had an exceptional time, with splendid scenery, fascinating visits, magnificent concerts and, above all, the chance to meet new people and make friends. Our third cruise, after the Danube and the Rhine, and already the desire to meet up again for the fourth (the Seine 2025), "In the footsteps of Liszt" again... !