After a painfully early start, 4am meant that King’s Voices were on their way to Stansted Airport, Amsterdam-bound on Wednesday 16th March. On arrival in Amsterdam, we discovered a piano which Edward Reeve couldn’t resist having a play of. We debated whether we should do an impromptu concert there and then, but decided to carry on with our luggage to our hostel. Those of us who could brave the fact that we had only had about three hours sleep made the most of the beautiful weather after having arrived and dropped our luggage off at the ‘Stay Okay’ Hostel in Zeeburgerdijk, by going straight out into Amsterdam for some food, followed by some sightseeing and boat trip cruising. Our 8pm rehearsal that very same evening with the wonderful Edward Reeve was a struggle in terms of tiredness levels, but Ed’s enthusiasm got us through and all in all it was a very successful and enjoyable first day!

Thursday 17th March was our only full free day in Amsterdam, so we made the most of it and spent our day sightseeing in smaller groups. Some of us enjoyed sketching and exploring the beautiful architecture and structure of the canal-filled city, whilst others decided to culturally exploit the best museums Amsterdam has to offer, namely the Rijksmuseum, the Van Gogh Museum and the House of Anne Frank.

On Friday 18th March we had a very intensive day of rehearsals through the morning and into the afternoon, and then a number of us went to see Cimarosa’s ‘Il Matrimonio Segreto’ which was co-produced with by Dutch National and Opera Zuid, in collaboration with the Nationaal Jeugd Orkest. The orchestra happened to be conducted on this occasion by Benjamin Bayl, who is a past student of King’s College Cambridge. This production was fantastically engaging, even for us English tourists experiencing Italian opera with Dutch subtitles flashing along the top of the stage. Needless to say the energy the production created along with the Wikipedia synopsis we had read prior to seeing it got us through.

On Saturday 19th we met with local Amsterdam choir Cappella Nova, led by Jurjen Vis, for morning rehearsals. We then travelled to the English Reformed Church in Begijnhof, Amsterdam, for a concert there with Cappella Nova in the afternoon. This concert was recorded for a local radio station, and I believe our concert had been well publicised as we had a more than full audience, with a standing ovation at the end. It was lovely to be able to sing with Cappella Nova and we all gelled very well together as a group. The same evening after recovering from the excitement our first concert had created, a number of us went to see the World Premiere of the opera ‘Only the Sound Remains’ by Saariaho, at the Nationale Opera and Ballet of Amsterdam. This was a breathtaking venue, and a few of us were lucky enough to get the opportunity to go backstage and meet her after the performance which was such a privilege and a great way to end the day.

On Sunday morning the choir took an early train to Utrecht for the Palm Sunday Eucharist service in Holy Trinity Church, Utrecht. This was an incredibly intimate church and we struggled but just managed to fit, thank goodness! We were very grateful to be allowed the privilege of singing at this very important Easter service for the local congregation. There was a wonderful array of food and hot drinks after the service, which we enjoyed hugely before walking back into the main town centre to find our next location for our last concert of the tour. St Catherine’s Church was an incredible venue! The sound we produced in there was one that I would say to be comparable with King’s
Chapel, which is saying a lot. We received another standing ovation and even sang an encore at this concert.

Ben Parry has been amazing as always in bringing out the best in us and in our voices, especially with many of us harbouring end of term exhaustion and cold-like symptoms and we managed to produce three very high quality showcases of our vocal talent! Our best crowd pleasers were definitely ‘Steal Away’ and ‘Go Down, Moses’ from A Child of our Time by Tippett, and a mention must go to Colm, Nathan and Claudia for their beautiful solos in these pieces. ‘Ne irascaris’ by William Byrd was another piece which the whole choir came to love by the end of the tour, and it was incredible to perform this with Cappella Nova where Jurjen’s passion for this piece was clear to see. Furthermore a huge mention should go to Will for organising such a fantastic and very enjoyable tour! He has done a great job!

Tara Hill