We have been enjoying life in the 19th Arrondissement at the invitation of the Mairie de Paris for more than a week now. What a difference from the upscale 4th, where we exit the port to do most of our errands, and the arrondissement that we think of as "our neighborhood" with rue Saint-Antoine and Place des Vosges just a few blocks away from our barge.

Being Paris, at least 5 of the 10 days that we have been here for the DBA Rally have been rainy days, so this weekend when the sun came out, so did everyone else. We have never seen a more animated area. In the 4th we have tourists with maps and puzzled looks, but here there are mostly locals. It is a working class neighborhood on its way up, with more young families and fewer problems than when we were here for the last barge rally in 2007.

We rode Vélib bikes around the basin last Saturday evening and we were amazed at all of the activity going on; the joint was jumping. There were wall to wall picnics along the quays, some groups were students or friends from work getting together to share a night off, and others were young families from the apartments that surround the basin. People were playing pétanque, little kids ran around the playgrounds and crowds were over flowing the trendy bars, like the Bar Ourcq on quai de la Loire. It was quite a scene, and when we settled down on our back deck for dinner, we had front row seats for people watching. With the two movie theaters on opposite sides of the water linked by a "floating bridge", a 38 meter barges that offers concerts, operas or just a drink overlooking the water, electric boats that you can rent in order to putter around the basin or off road bike paths that will take you along the Canal de l'Ourcq almost all the way to Meaux, plus the Parc de la Villette and the Paris Plage, summer at the Bassin de la Villette offers more things to do than you can shake a stick at.

While still enjoying the atmosphere of this neighborhood from our deck at 11:30 that night, we heard a woman singing traditional French songs, and the sound of her voice was coming closer and closer. A trip boat was exiting the lock and we realized that the woman was singing from their front deck. Her voice was lovely and floated out onto the night air. There weren't more than 10 people on board counting the crew, and those that had bought a 15 euro ticket had enjoyed a private cruise along the Canal Saint-Martin with street scenes of Paris rolling by at a snails pace on a warm Saturday night. This is a new cruise that Canauxrama just started. They leave the Arsenal at 9pm and get to La Villette at 11:30. It seems like it might be a lovely way to spend an evening in Paris.