

In mid-January this year, I boarded my first international flight to London, something that would have been impossible without the support of a BBM Youth Support Scholarship. Throughout the two months that passed, I learnt from some of the best teachers in the United Kingdom, sometimes having three lessons in one day. Learning from so many teachers has been an eye-opening experience. I heard many different ideas and as expected, some of these conflicted with each other at times. Rather than having a detrimental effect on my learning, this served to broaden my creative thinking, making me realise that if I could support my creative choices soundly, then there was no need to be hesitant in experimenting with new musical ideas.

My first ever flight to an overseas location began with a connecting flight from Sydney to Melbourne. The flight went smoothly and I landed in sunny but chilly London on time. I expected it to be a lot colder than it was. However, it initially felt like I was walking through the refrigerated section in Woolworths. The weather eventually did change though, and became a little less bearable - so I was glad for the thermals I had brought with me.

My first lesson took place the day after I arrived in London with Professor Richard Deakin from the Royal Academy of Music. This very first lesson was a turning point for me in my development, and really established one of the focal points for many of my subsequent lessons on the rest of my trip. Prior to travelling, I had become uncomfortable with my bow (right) arm. This lesson taught me that I needed to feel and think of the movements of my arms from the butterfly muscles in my back. This immediately changed the way I moved and over the course of the trip, I was able to use my bow with greater fluidity.

After taking a tour of London on a hop on-hop off bus, and the Tower of London, I undertook about a week of lessons in London at the Royal College of Music, the Royal Academy of Music and the London Guildhall of Music and Drama.

On the first Monday I had my second lesson – this one with Alexander Janiczek. This lesson took place in the studio of a London-based Luthier, and here I experimented more with the playful character in Mozart and found more freedom musically, as I moved away from a tunnel-visioned physical focus on the instrument. This physical freedom allowed for more mental freedom and was something that was reinforced in later lessons.

A lesson on the Strauss Violin Sonata and the Sibelius Violin Concerto on the Monday afternoon with Andrew Watkinson (Endellion String Quartet) taught me how to be more confident with my sound as I learnt to connect my fingers with the string in the bow hand. It was great to work on a Sonata with somebody who was so experienced with Chamber Music.

In lessons at the Royal College of Music, I gained an insight into the varying interpretations used in performing Mozart. While this was a little confusing at first, I was later able to reflect and take ideas away to try in Mozart's Concerto No.5. I also worked on developing more flexibility in my right hand during this time. In addition, I learnt to be more relaxed in the way I presented myself while performing, allowing for movement of the head and neck. This enabled a more relaxed approach to playing and freed up both my left and right hands further. In my lesson with Head of Strings, Mark Messenger, I worked on fuelling musicality with technique, rather than just using technique for technique's sake. With both Mark Messenger

and Jan Repko, I worked further on my vibrato in order to enhance my musical ideas. Ani Schnarch worked with me on making my sound more fluid so that it would sing more and also on how my bow division would help that. Madeleine Mitchell also worked on the timing of the Strauss and how I should emphasise certain notes to create greater fluidity. One of my final lessons at the Royal College of Music was with Radu Blidar, who directed my studies towards the Urtext of Mozart's A Major Concerto and to Leopold Mozart in order to gain a more stylistic understanding of the work and to create a more historically understood performance.

While at the Royal College of Music, I spent most of my breaks sitting in the café at the Royal Albert Hall which is across the road from the College, drinking English Breakfast Tea and using their free Wi-Fi to stay in contact with my friends and family at home, or walking around South Kensington, admiring the old buildings and the Imperial College of Science and Technology.

At the Royal Academy of Music, I had lessons with Maureen Smith, Sophie Langdon, Diana Cummings and Richard Deakin. Maureen Smith used 'power lines' as a helpful analogy to help me create more connection in the phrasing of the second movement of the Strauss sonata. On my return to London in early February, she also worked with some orchestral excerpts with me. Sophie Langdon referred to Ivan Galamian as she worked on my bow hand, saying that the bump in the wrist should always be higher than the joints in the fingers. She also helped create more freedom in my vibrato, instructing me to lose the support of my wrist on the side of the violin in higher positions. My lesson with Diana Cummings was more focused on holistic issues of playing, and addressed aspects of posture in particular. I spent much of that lesson feeling my toes and imagining that each vertebra in my spine was balanced on top of each other up to the neck and head. I also learnt to direct from the upper arm as though a balloon was inflating underneath it. This was a very useful approach as it promoted relaxation and breathing – something that is very helpful for me, as excessive tension had been a problem which I had wanted to work on. This instruction served to create, quite literally, a more balanced approach to playing the violin.

Unfortunately towards the end of the first week, I fell ill with pneumonia and spent the first week of my time in Manchester confined to my room. This, however, gave me plenty of time to reflect on what I had learnt in London while I watched the snow fall on the Piccadilly Eye from the comfort of my hotel room.

In Manchester, I studied at the Royal Northern College of Music where I attended Masterclasses and received lessons with Steven Wilkie, Benedict Holland, Gina McCormack, Yossi Zivoni and Leland Chen.

My first lesson at the RNCM was with Benedict Holland, who very kindly showed me around the building. My lesson with Benedict was very helpful as he directed me on how to bring out the playful nuances in the Mozart Concerto. It was important not to forget the technical side of playing, but I still needed to find a balance between having fun whilst performing (and forgetting my technique), or giving a very technical performance that was devoid of musical expression.

That same afternoon, I attended an enjoyable lesson with Steven Wilkie who also helped me perform in a more relaxed manner. I was learning at this point to have more confidence in my technique and was thus able to bring across my musical ideas in a clearer way with greater ease.

My lesson with Gina McCormack occurred at 9.30pm at the RNCM (which is apparently normal in Europe!). Despite being rather sleepy, this lesson was a productive one, encouraging me to always think about my playing and visualise what shapes my bow arm would draw if attached to paper and pen. Given that I enjoy painting and drawing in my free time, this idea was very effective in assisting me to achieve more fluidity of motion whilst playing.

Leland Chen was great to work with on the Strauss Sonata as he has recorded it himself. This lesson was very musically liberating as he demonstrated how he would play it, making me unafraid to really project my musical intentions, which previously had still felt suppressed.

Yossi Zivoni gave me more ideas to experiment with when performing Mozart, having me practise without using vibrato and perhaps even extending this to perform without so much vibrato. This was an interesting perspective that I was willing to experiment with, particularly in regards to stylistic conventions relating to the performance of Mozart works.

When I returned to London, I had the opportunity to travel across to continental Europe, where I viewed many inspiring museums and visited many cities before returning to London where I attended a few more lessons at the London Guildhall and the Royal Academy of Music before heading back to Australia.

With Bartosz Woroch I continued working on the right arm, experimenting with bow speed and trusting the left hand more. My final lesson was with Jacqueline Ross. On top of my other repertoire, I was able to go through some of Bach's Sonata No.1 with her which was extremely helpful. In this lesson I learnt which chords to emphasise and to work more closely with the harmony when developing ideas for phrasing.

Sometimes learning comes from unexpected areas, in my case this came from my accommodation. There are issues with staying in a hotel room and being a musician whilst not actually being enrolled in a school. Firstly, you don't want to have your neighbours complain and stop you from playing entirely; and secondly, practice rooms aren't always available for those who aren't students at the university. However, dealing with these issues was beneficial in itself. Before my trip, warming up before lessons was an absolute necessity, and I always would feel nervous and unsure of myself when I was unable to warm up adequately before a lesson or performance. Due to my living circumstances in the United Kingdom, this was something I had to overcome quickly – I had to learn how to play to my best with very little time to practise. This taught me how to use my time more efficiently and before long, I had no qualms about taking out my violin and just playing. This, combined with the excellent teaching I received, contributed greatly to my developing a much more relaxed approach to performing.

During the five weeks I spent in the United Kingdom many teachers encouraged me to return to audition for postgraduate study and to attend music summer schools. These are things I

hope to be able to do and I am particularly interested in travelling to Europe in 2016 for these. Meanwhile, I carry on with my Masters of Music Performance at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and am making plans to travel to my hometown of Tamworth at the end of this year to perform at the Regional Conservatorium as well as Nursing Homes in the district.

I learnt much more than I anticipated on this trip: from how to express myself musically by using my technique for musicality's sake, to how many pairs of thermal underwear is really necessary to pack for a European Winter abroad. Thank you BBM for supporting me through an invaluable and rewarding experience!