

2016/17

BBM Youth Support Award for Ballet
Report



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Thanks to the BBM Youth Support Award for Ballet I was able to plan 3 months in the UK and Europe. The experiences I had due to the award enabled me to develop both as a dancer and personally. I learnt a lot about auditioning and my art during the time overseas. I'm looking forward to sharing my experiences with other young Australian dancers who will soon be in my position.

Before leaving Australia I trawled through all of the audition notices and sent my audition package to a huge number of companies, some who replied with a straight out no, some who didn't reply and a couple of 'come along to the audition' emails. All up I had just 2 auditions and a possible company class organised before I left Australia.

It was pretty disheartening to receive rejections before I even left Australia. However I was determined to gain life and dance experience more than just go on an audition tour. I did keep applying for auditions while I was away and gained a place in a number after I had left.

United Kingdom

As I graduated in Australia in early December, and had done very little dancing since then, I had to get back into 'dance mode' before auditioning. After New Year in Paris, I went to London to do some classes at Pineapple Studios. I was lucky enough to work with Emma Northmore, Roland Price and Ian Knowles for classical ballet and Tory Trotter for contemporary ballet. Each one of these teachers had such a wealth of knowledge that they were able to share. Thanks to the Youth Support Award I was able to book a private lesson with Emma. She was tremendous, helping me refine my audition package and pointing out some of the differences in ballet styles. My time with her really gave my confidence a boost.



Pineapple Studios, Covent Garden

Over the next 3 months there was no real itinerary – I was applying for auditions all over Europe and the UK, and going where these took me. This meant I was able to keep coming back to the UK for auditions, company classes and classes at Pineapple Studios.

When I was in London I usually stayed in Airbnbs and cheap hotels in the Earl's Court area. Although it was a little more expensive than further out it was a more convenient, just a short underground ride to Pineapple Studios at Covent Garden.

Earl's Court was also within walking distance to other classes and auditions I did in London. The English National Ballet is in Kensington, just near the Royal Albert Hall. I was fortunate enough to take classes with the company for two days. One of the highlights of this was being in the same class as Tamara Rojo, the Artistic Director and lead Principal Dancer of ENB. I also auditioned for The London Ballet Company, based at the Chelsea Theatre, Chelsea.



With Tamara Rojo at ENB



Entrance to the ENB facility

Over my trips to London I also caught up with 2 of my previous class mates who are now working in the industry in the UK.

I was excited to be able to spend two days with the Scottish Ballet in Glasgow. The company was high on my list of dream companies, so to audition for them, spend time in their studios and work with the dancers was an amazing experience. I got to learn some of their repertoire, including classical and some of *Emergence* by Crystal Pite. Ms Pite is one of the world's leading female choreographers, so it was a privilege to learn even a small part of her work. After class I was able to watch rehearsals of their upcoming works. The facilities at the Tramway, the home of the Scottish Ballet, were incredible. I also met a fellow Australian Ballet School graduate who is now a member of the company. I had been in contact with him before I left Australia, so it was really good to meet him in person.



Outside the Scottish Ballet

Another great experience in the UK was auditioning for Ballet Cymru in Wales. Ballet Cymru have the tag 'a ballet company who like to do things a bit differently' so it's great to see how they push boundaries, for example the current production includes circus skills. I loved the vibe and it is a company that continues to be on my wish list for the future. During the audition we workshopped material for the company with the choreographer (coincidentally an Australian) which was a wonderful opportunity. Most of the people auditioning for Ballet Cymru knew each other, as they were from the same schools in the UK. Some of us exchanged details and kept in touch afterwards. I had the chance to speak with the Company Director, Darius James, after the audition. He was very impressed with my technique and encouraged me to keep in touch.

A funny experience I had in Cardiff was when I was ordering a meal. The waitress was very flustered when she heard me speak – she asked if I was from Australia because I sounded "just like *Home and Away*".

Europe

Thanks to the award I was able to move beyond the UK and travel throughout Europe. I auditioned in several countries including Germany (Berlin, Leipzig, Nuremberg and Bautzen), the Czech Republic (Ceske Budejovice and Pilsen), Spain (at the Grand Audition in Barcelona) and Switzerland (Neuhausen am Rheinfall).

Some of the auditions were huge. My first audition, for Staatsballett Berlin, had 400 dancers auditioning, chosen from over 1300 applicants. I had to be there by 9am to register but didn't end up doing the audition class until almost 12 noon. It was very nerve wracking to be waiting with so many people I didn't know (my friends were in an earlier class). Many of the dancers were in their mid-twenties and had previous audition and company experience. It made me realise how fortunate I was to even get to the audition, but also how underprepared I was for the reality of auditioning. I didn't get a call back, but it was slightly comforting to know that most others didn't either as there were only a couple of positions available.



With friends at the Staatsballett Berlin audition

The Cinevox Junior Company in Switzerland is a company to help transition from training to professional life. An Australian friend, a member of the company, encouraged me to apply for the audition. I was excited when I was accepted to audition, especially when I found out it included class with the company. It is a more contemporary company but part of the audition was still very classical. We also did a contemporary section, with a different style to what I have been trained in. I hadn't done contemporary for while by then, so I was very sore the next day! It was a good audition and really nice to catch up with my friend as I hadn't seen her for about six years.



At Cinevox Junior Company

Overall it was really interesting to experience the different styles of ballet, auditions and classes outside of Australia. There are real differences between ballet styles in Australia and Europe, but the differences within Europe was also noticeable. Some of the auditions were purely classical auditions, such as for the Leipzig Ballet. Others were quite contemporary, for example the Ballet of the South Bohemian Theatre in Ceske Budejovice. I took classes in dance schools in Munich and Berlin, as well as company class with the Royal Ballet of Flanders (in Antwerp), all of which had their own unique style.

The great thing about attending classes and auditions in so many different places is that I have absorbed some of the styles and begun to find my own voice in dance.

The Australian connections were useful when organising classes with the Royal Ballet of Flanders. I initially contacted Juliet Burnett (ex Australian Ballet who is now dancing in Antwerp) to find how to go about organising to join class. She was able to help me and also put in contact with another young Australian who showed me around and helped me out.

The most interesting audition

I was surprised to get an audition for the SETanztheater in Nuremberg as they asked for improvisation and acting skills, neither of which I had training in. It turned out to be the most interesting and enjoyable audition I did all trip. Out of the hundreds to apply only about 16 of us gained an audition, and I was the only 'ballet' person. The others were hip hop, jazz, contemporary, popping and break dancers. While I did feel a bit intimidated at first, the audition had a more relaxed feel than any of the others I had done. That doesn't mean it was easy. As well as barre, we did contemporary, facial expression work and improvisation work with partners. I was pushed way outside of everything that was familiar to me! While I didn't get the contract, the biggest thing I took out of the audition was how important it is to get outside of your comfort zone – it actually ends up being enjoyable and personally rewarding.

It wasn't all about auditions

After listening to previous award recipients at the presentation, one of the things I learnt was the importance of broadening horizons and seizing opportunities. I took that to heart and knew I had to experience more than just the auditions.

Visiting the Palais Garnier, the home of the Paris Opera Ballet, has been a dream of mine since I was about 8 years old. As I was in Europe I couldn't pass up the opportunity. It was everything I had dreamed of and more. I was in the building where the Paris Opera Ballet performs and it was just incredible! The auditorium is just a small part of the building, and the rest of the building really showed how in the past the custom was to go to the theatre to be seen more than to see the show. Unfortunately I didn't get the chance to see the Paris Opera Ballet because they weren't performing while I was there, but it was a dream come true to visit their home.



Palais Garnier



Outside the Palais Garnier



Palais Garnier Auditorium

I did get to see other productions while I was in the UK and Europe. I can't believe how cheap tickets can be over there.

I went to the Royal Ballet's production of Balanchine's *Jewels* in London. Marianela Nunez was one of the Principal's that night and she was amazing. I love her dancing, especially after I saw her rehearsing and performing *Swan Lake* in Australia. Watching her on stage at the Royal Opera House was wonderful.



At Jewels



Marianela Nunez onstage

Other shows I saw in London included *Book of Mormon*, *Kinky Boots* and *The Phantom of the Opera*. *Phantom* meant so much more after visiting the Palais Garnier as I could really picture the setting.

In Europe I got to see my friend perform one of the lead roles at the Cinevox Junior Company's production of *Made in Switzerland*. Not only was it great to see her perform but it gave me a real feel of the company.

After doing class with the Royal Ballet of Flanders in Antwerp, where I stood next to Principal dancer Wim Vanlessen (and chatted to him!), I had to go to their production of *Spartacus*. The first night I watched Wim and Natalia de Froberville perform. I enjoyed it so much I went back the next night and saw one of my favourite male dancers, Ivan Vasiliev, perform the lead. The music was beautiful which added to the whole experience.



At Spartacus



Ivan Vasiliev onstage

Another huge fan girl moment I had was at the Czech National Ballet, Prague. After buying a last minute ticket to their production of *Chvění* (Tremble) I was blown away when the famous choreographer Jiří Kylián came on stage at the beginning of the show. Not only was seeing him incredible, it was a fantastic production.



At Chvění



Outside of the theatre, Prague

Besides going to productions I also took mini breaks while I was between auditions. I explored a lot of the towns where I was auditioning, taking time before or after the audition to walk around, do the free tours and generally soak up the culture.

At the beginning of the trip I went to a small town near Munich for a few days. I had never seen snow before, so the weather and landscape in Starnberg made it a novel experience. I spent several days wandering around in the snow taking photos – and shivering when I saw a man taking a dip in the ice covered lake.



Sunset at Lake Starnberg

At the end of the trip I had a couple of weeks before my next audition. I took the opportunity to visit my class mate in Stockholm before my Mum and I went to Finland. I was able to tick another thing off my bucket list when I saw the Northern Lights! At the end of the time in Finland I could definitely say I know what cold is - it was -16 degrees Celsius at one stage!



The Northern Lights



In front of the Northern Lights

The Outcome

By the time I was due to leave for home I had received responses from some of the companies I auditioned for.

- The London Ballet Company offered me a short term internship.
- The Director of Ballet Cymru offered me a scholarship to their Summer School and a place in their pre professional program later in 2017.
- Cinevox Junior Company accepted me into the 2017/2018 season, although there was no contract before I left Europe.

Despite these positive responses it wasn't all smooth sailing. There were a lot of rejections before I even got to the audition stage. One of the companies that I absolutely loved, and was one of my long term goals to join, didn't invite me to their audition. This really upset me and threw me for a few days. Even after getting to the audition stage I didn't always make it all the way through the audition - once I got cut before the first part of class finished. In other auditions that I thought went well, the companies didn't even let me know the outcome.

The whole audition process really makes you question your commitment to the art. But it did help me build resilience and confirmed that this is what I want to do.

One of the main lessons I learnt was to **NEVER GIVE UP.**

I applied for an audition for The Sorbisches National Ensemble in Bautzen, Germany. The audition was after my flight home, but I thought it was worth putting in just on the off chance I'd get it. I did get the audition, which meant a last minute change of flights. The first part of the class was conducted entirely in German which was a bit of a challenge! When I got to the interview stage I was offered an apprenticeship. I was so excited! Even better, I was contacted after I returned to Australia with the thrilling news that the position was actually going to be a full company member. Not only do I have a position in a company but I will also be able to perform folk dance, something I love almost as much as ballet. It might be a cliché, but this is definitely a dream come true!



The Sorbisches National Ensemble, Bautzen

I feel that the last three months in the UK and Europe have really helped me mature and gain confidence as a dancer and as a person. I think if the last audition had been earlier in the process the outcome could have been different.

I know without the BBM Youth Support Award for Ballet I would not have been able to spend as much time in the UK and Europe, so I would not have been able to see and experience as much as I did. I would have just gone over, attended some auditions and come home. Instead I was able to watch productions, take classes, experience the culture and broaden my horizons. Not only that but I achieved my main goal, to get a job in an overseas company.

I would like to thank everyone involved in the BBM Youth Support Awards for giving me the opportunity to make my dream come true.

Tips

- Get a flexible flight. This made it easier for me to attend the final audition.
- I had a Eurail pass which more than paid for itself. It allowed me to be flexible with my travel plans and see more of the countries than flying would have.
- Sometimes it is cheaper to fly between the UK and Europe rather than take the Eurostar – check before you book. I used Skyscanner and the Eurostar website to check and make bookings. Also sometimes the train stations don't have Eurostar tickets when the website does.
- I used both the bus and train between Wales, England and Scotland. I did find the train expensive, so if you plan on staying in the UK it might be worth getting one of the rail passes.
- I found Airbnb great if I was in one place for more than 2 nights, otherwise I used sites like Booking.com to help find cheap accommodation.
- Try to arrive into the town at least a day before the audition. This gives you time to explore, get the feel of the town and gives you extra time in case your transport plans fail (in one instance my train was delayed, I missed the only connection of the day and had to stay overnight in Paris).
- I was lucky enough that my mother was able to be with me a lot of the time, as she was able to work remotely. It was great to have the support, especially when the auditions got tough or things just got overwhelming. If you can, have a support person with you at least of the time, or at least stay in close contact with friends and family to keep you sane.
- Don't just apply for the big well-known companies – everyone applies for these, including more experienced dancers, so you will be just one of hundreds. I found the smaller companies were a better audition experience.
- Call on any connections you have, no matter how vague. Aussies are everywhere and can be a big help.
- Don't just focus on the auditions. Take the time to appreciate being over there, soak up the culture and every experience (good or bad) and enjoy the diversity that the world has to offer.