

**BBM Youth Support Awardee Report**

**Wilbur Whitta**

**BBM Youth Support Award for Music 2015**

My BBM Youth Support Award journey began in June 2016. I flew, with my partner Kate Whitton, to London, where we met up with fellow Youth Support Awardee Evan Harris. These were my travel companions for the majority of my trip.

In London, I set out to access and familiarise myself with potential postgraduate institutions. These were the Royal College of Music, the Royal Academy of Music and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. A few days into our stay in London I received a private lesson from esteemed English jazz pianist and composer, Nikki Iles. Nikki teaches at both the Royal Academy of Music and the Guildhall School. Besides being a fantastic lesson musically, it was also a very informative session for considering further study in the UK.

A musical highlight of my time in London was seeing Israeli jazz pianist Shai Maestro perform at Ronnie Scott's jazz club. Here I met and connected with a London-born jazz drummer who is now based in New York, Douglas Marriner. After the show Evan and I stayed for the jam session, where we got our first taste of the London jazz scene.

My time in the UK was inspiring for more than direct musical experiences. Visits to the towns of Bath and Oxford, as well as seeing Stone Henge and taking in as much of London's architecture of possible, all gave me exciting and insightful glimpses into British culture and history.

Outside of the UK, Europe is a fantastic place to be over the summer for surrounding oneself in jazz music. Evan and I took the opportunity to fly to Denmark for the Copenhagen Jazz Festival. Here we saw incredible music, and networked, meeting musicians from around the world. We were also reunited with an old colleague from Sydney, bassist James Heazlewood-Dale. James happened to be performing at the festival during the days we were visiting. James has been based in Boston for the past three years.

I found Copenhagen to be a fascinating city and extremely enjoyed my time there. The highlight from the jazz festival was attending a jam session at Copenhagen's famed jazz venue Jazzhus Monmatre. Here, I not only witnessed some of my musical heroes performing in an informal setting, but Evan and I performed ourselves, in front of these musicians.

The next stop on our trip was Amsterdam, where Evan and I participated in a short course at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam, with fellow Sydney musician Yutaro Okuda. We received instrumental and ensemble lessons from some fantastic and respected local teachers, and networked with the 100 other musicians attending the course from all around the world. While in Amsterdam I arranged and then attended private lessons from guitarist Renier Baas, and pianist Daan Herweg.



To top off our experiences of coincidentally running into our friends from the Sydney jazz scene, on our first night in Amsterdam we visited a local jam session where we bumped into Sydney saxophonist Chris O’dea. On our last day in Amsterdam, Yutaro and I travelled to Rotterdam for the North Sea Jazz Festival. The festival itself was very over-crowded, which made for an overwhelming experience. However, all of the music was exceptional.

After Amsterdam, I made my way through Belgium, France and southern Italy to Sienna, Italy, where Evan and I would be attending another course. Staying with us, and also attending the course was Sydney trombonist Tim Coggins.

The Siena jazz course was two weeks long, and featured tuition from world class Italian and American jazz musicians. Particularly exciting for me was the opportunity to learn from New York based pianist Aaron Parks, who was the subject of my Honours thesis at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. In Siena I made countless new connections. Many people I met were based in Italy, but I also became close to musicians from Germany, England, Israel and The Netherlands.

One of my favourite memories from the course was watching an outdoor faculty concert, performed in front of a large church. Halfway through the concert it began to thunder. Somehow, this did not detract from the performance, but only added to the ambience. It was a surreal experience. The Siena jazz course was a highlight of the trip.





After Siena, I made my way back to England with Kate. We travelled on a self-funded venture through Austria, Germany and the Czech Republic. I continued to make jazz a focus of each place we visited. In Munich at a local jam session I was reunited with some friends who I had made in Siena. My favourite memory from this part of my trip was mountain biking in the Austrian Alps, in the town of Innsbruck.

I made the most of my return to London. On the first day back in London I organised a private lesson with English composer Kenneth Hesketh. Kenneth is a lecturer in composition at the Royal College of Music, so it was enlightening to talk to him about the composition program at the college. Musically, the lesson was inspiring and informative, and left me with new perspectives on how to bring expression and reinvention into my compositions.

Both of the teachers I studied with in London, Kenneth and Nikki, were extremely supportive and encouraging. They urged me to keep in touch, and encouraged me to return to audition for postgraduate study. They each offered to help me as much as they could in preparation for these auditions. I am very thankful for their time.

In London I was also able to connect with an Australian colleague of mine, Sean Malikides. Sean is an artist/engineer now based in London. Sean and I collaborate on musically responsive generative graphics. That is, we work to produce an interactive visual display, which is governed by music. We are aiming to be able to present an exhibition of our own in the near future, which we were able discuss in person in London.

On the final night of my travels, I visited London's "Vortex" jazz club. Nikki Iles recommended this club to me, saying it was the best place to see jazz music current to the London music scene. It was an awe-inspiring night of music, and a great finale to my time abroad.

I thoroughly enjoyed my entire time overseas. The trip is a highlight of my life to date, and will influence the future direction of my career.

I would like to pass on a few recommendations for future awardees, to make their trip run as smoothly as possible.

Firstly, if an awardee is intending to audition for postgraduate study, I recommend lining up their time in the UK with the audition dates for their chosen institutions. This may seem obvious, but is easier said than done. The majority of London institutions hold their auditions quite soon after the Youth Support awards are announced. I would advise planning for auditions as early as possible, and being strongly aware of all applications deadlines.

Secondly, I urge awardees to contact people with whom they would like to study well in advance of their travel. I was fortunate to learn from a number of amazing musicians and teachers. However, there were many musicians who I contacted about lessons, whose time was already given over to other priorities while I was visiting. I advise being particularly wary of exam periods at Universities, if the chosen mentor is a university lecturer. This caused me trouble during my stay in London, as many University lecturers were too busy to see me during exam time.

Finally, I recommend self-funding further exploration of Europe. By travelling to the UK, an awardee is in a position where it is easy to access much of Europe. Evan and I visited Europe primarily to attend courses and festivals. However, I also travelled through parts of Europe for the life experience, which is invaluable and irreplaceable. Though this may not seem directly related to music, I have profound memories from this part of my travels. Through experiencing the history, art and architecture of various cultures I was greatly inspired. My only regret with this aspect of my trip is that I did not explore the UK outside of England. I would highly encourage future awardees to visit all countries in the UK if possible.

I am extremely grateful to have been chosen for a BBM Youth Support Award for Music. The award enabled me to study under the guidance of an array of world-class musicians, and through my travels I formed many friendships and connections that I have no doubt will last years into the future. I will be returning to London in December 2016 to audition for Masters programs at the Royal Academy of Music, The Birmingham Conservatoire and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. I believe the opportunities offered by the BBM Scholarship will positively influence my future musical endeavours.

