

BBM Youth Support, Award for Music

Germany, Austria and the UK
June 24 – August 5, 2019

Report from Justin Julian, violist

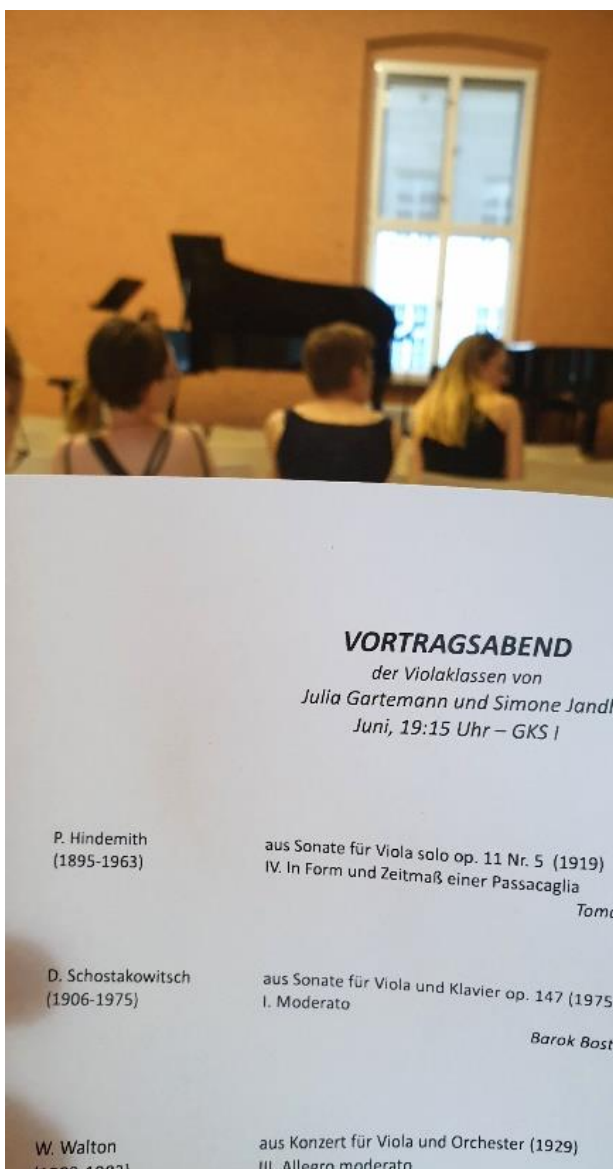
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24/6/19

After 30 hours flying and barely two hours of sleep, I arrived in leafy, warm and welcoming Berlin. After checking into my apartment and having a gloriously long shower, I went out for a walk amongst the heritage Soviet architecture. I visited a 5-storey vintage clothing store nearby and browsed their amazing selection. Around 6pm, I went for a walk down Simon-Dach-Straße, famous for its pubs and shops. I was amazed at how many people were out in the sun enjoying food and beer on a Monday night! I went to do some grocery shopping, then returned home and settled down with some beer, and cheese and crackers. I fell asleep at 8pm on the couch.

Pictured: The historic buildings surrounding me in Friedrichshain, Berlin.



25/6/19

I started the day with a few hours' practise, and went to get lunch at an amazing shop nearby that doubles as a bagel cafe and English language bookshop. After a little more practise, I caught the train to visit Hochschule für Musik "Hanns Eisler" for my lesson with Simone Jandl. I started with Bach, and we focused on bringing out the natural shape through carefully planned rhythmic freedom and emphatic phrasing. In the first movement of the Walton Concerto, she helped me find a more fluid, less clarity-focused left-hand technique to bring out warmth and expression. In both works, she encouraged me to 'zoom out' and focus more on the bigger picture as an important final step before performing. After the lesson, I headed down the corridor to watch the legendary Tabea Zimmermann teach her students. She was so warm, humorous and open, and expected a lot of her students but so nice about it. There was none of the exclusivity and aloofness you might expect from the absolute highest echelon of musician. With both of the students whose lessons I saw, she diagnosed technical flaws and set studies and exercises to fix them, as well as focusing in depth on musicality and sound. Next I went upstairs to one of the small concert halls, where students of Simone Jandl and Julia Gartemann were performing solo and with piano in an end of semester concert. The standard was very high, with some exceptional students in both Bachelors and Masters degrees. Simone invited me to dinner and drinks at the house of one of her students afterwards with all the performers, all lovely people. What a welcome to Berlin!

Pictured: the concert program from the Viola Class Concert.



26/6/19

Today began with more practise, and Tabea Zimmermann wrote to me to let me know that she had moved her teaching to her place, due to the 38-degree weather and lack of air conditioning at Hanns Eisler. After a quick bakery lunch, I watched 6 hours of teaching at her apartment. Each of the three students I saw had very intense two-hour lessons. The standard of playing was exceptionally high; the one Masters student I saw was already an established professional string quartet player. Tabea was full of inventive solutions, such as practising in tempo with open strings between every note to improve intonation and left finger dexterity, or playing scales in the style of a composer to develop an appropriate sound and technique. With each of her students, she expected them to be able to express their musical ideas through singing, speaking, clapping, conducting and dancing as well as playing – very holistic. Tabea expected the reasoning behind every musical choice was clear and the composer's intentions honoured by one's interpretation. It was quite clear that this was teaching and music-making at an extremely elevated level. I was so inspired by Tabea Zimmermann's teaching. Just two days in, I had already achieved one of my goals for the trip; knowing where I would like to continue my studies after Sydney.

Pictured: Wall plaque outside the teaching room of Tabea Zimmermann.



27/6/19

With my two busiest days in Berlin completed, I could now relax a bit more (or practise a bit more). I went to bowmaker and dealer Matthias Wohlleber to try about 10 viola bows. I took one home to use for my practise the rest of the day. In the evening I made my way to the Konzerthaus Berlin to watch a trio recital featuring the eminent French viola soloist Antoine Tamestit, with soprano Christiane Karg and pianist Malcolm Martineau. It was an intimate setting, in the small hall at the Konzerthaus, and the repertoire followed the theme of intimacy closely. The performance began with delicate, dissonant Kancheli and luscious French-influenced Loeffler, then two songs by Hugo Wolf, foreshadowing in style the Schubert of the second half. After interval I was particularly moved by Tamestit's Arpeggione Sonata, which he played with polished expression and thought throughout. The trio played a Brahms song as an encore after rapturous applause. As Tamestit was one of Tabea Zimmermann's early students, I could appreciate his playing with new insight after the past two days. A good example is her attention to the start, middle and end of every note in terms of bow speed. I could see this detailed shaping with the bow in his playing, and hear the extra layer of expression it created!

Pictured: Tamestit, Karg and Martineau take a bow at the end of their concert in the Konzerthaus Berlin.

28/7/19

In the morning, I practised for several hours using the bow I was borrowing. I returned it after lunch. On my way back home, I made a detour to visit Dussmann Kulturkaufhaus, a huge music store. It had a whole floor dedicated to classical CDs, an extensive sheet music collection and a lovely selection of stationery and books. Very dangerous!



29/7/19

This morning I made some good progress learning the difficult contemporary program for Britten-Pears next week. Later I made my way to the outer west of Berlin to visit an abandoned spy station in Teufelsberg. It was a 30-minute walk through the forest to get there, involving a hike to the top of a hill where I could see all of the city. The spy station itself was fascinating, a decaying facade covered in graffiti with people drinking beer, playing music and dancing in typical Berlin fashion. I spent about two hours exploring the buildings and surrounding forest, and met some Australians living in Berlin. Afterwards I took the long forest walk to Waldbühne where the Berlin Philharmonic were performing. On my way, I gave directions in German to some lost concert-goers, a big confidence boost for my almost non-existent speaking skills. After arriving, I waited in full sun in the Roman-style arena for over an hour for the concert to start, feeling like the heat would be a bit more bearable if I had some company. The concert started with music from Prokofiev's Lieutenant Kijé Suite, played with



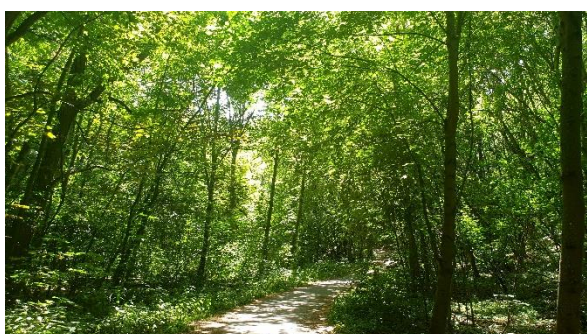
much bravado and warmth in spite of the dry open-air acoustic. In Ravel's Shéhérazade, they showed a beautiful palette of colours and huge dynamic range to match the lovely sound of soprano soloist Marianne Crebassa. After a short interval, the concert finished with a moving performance of six selections from Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet ballet. They played with such fervour that I experienced an uncharacteristic physical reaction, goosebumps!

Pictured: In the sun at Teufelsberg (above) and Berlin Philharmonic at the Waldbühne (below).

30/6/19

Today it was 38 degrees again, which kept me inside most of the day! I cleaned, packed, practised and, while it was still cool, went for a long walk along the streets and reflected on my week in Berlin. I had much to think about in how I approached my practise and performance, particularly as a result of watching Tabea Zimmermann's class.

Pictured: Walking trail in the Grunewald, the Hochschule für Musik "Hanns Eisler" and the views at Teufelsberg.





1/7/19

It was surprisingly easy to get out of bed at 4:15am to make my 7am flight, because the sun was already up! After arriving, I dragged my suitcase onto several packed trains and buses in order to visit two London violin shops to try bows. I borrowed three to test longer term. I made it to Kings Cross with plenty of time before the coach to Aldeburgh, and spent it getting to know some of the fellow Britten-Pears participants. The journey took three and a half hours, slowed down by the bad traffic out of London. I enjoyed watching the English countryside out the window during the latter half of the journey. After arriving, meeting the program staff and getting settled in, we all went to the fish and chip shop and then sat on the beach to attempt to get through some very carb-heavy food. It was a lovely group of people, hailing from as far as Brazil and as near as London. I expected a good sleep after dragging my suitcase all day up and down London Underground stairs. All the rooms were named after

Benjamin Britten opera characters (mine was Herring, after Albert Herring).

Pictured: Carved wooden signage and cabinets full of violins inside one of the violin shops I visited in London (above) and the view sitting on the beach at Aldeburgh (below)



2/7/19

Today started with communal kitchen breakfast, a coach to Snape Maltings and a meet and greet session with the staff and tutors. Snape Maltings turned out to be a huge arts precinct set in a repurposed Victorian factory with very picturesque countryside views. We learned that Oliver Knussen, one the composers whose music we were performing, ran the course for over 20 years and passed away last year. Many of the tutors and staff were still really affected by it. In the morning we ran through two of the most challenging pieces on the program, Knussen's *Coursing* and Harrison Birtwistle's *Carmen Arcadiae Mechanicae Perpetuum* with the full ensemble. The first slow run through was messy as expected, but it started to pull together very quickly! After lunch in the Concert Hall Café, we met our tutor, cellist Zoë Martlew, for a strings-only rehearsal. She coached us with great exuberance on Earle Brown's String Quartet and the Knussen, trying to capture the very detailed articulations and dynamics. The Quartet is a graphic score; gestural drawings and notations on A3 sized pages, along with detailed instructions on how to read it. Very innovative for 1965! Zoë worked through section by section, discussing with us how to

interpret the musical ideas and resolve any ambiguities. It was already very clear that this course was more about the process of learning, preparing and understanding music rather than necessarily the results!

Pictured: A page from the Earle Brown Quartet showing dense notation and freedom from specific pitch and rhythm. He instructs the performers to play the musical 'cells' (enclosed in dotted lines) in any order at complete liberty.

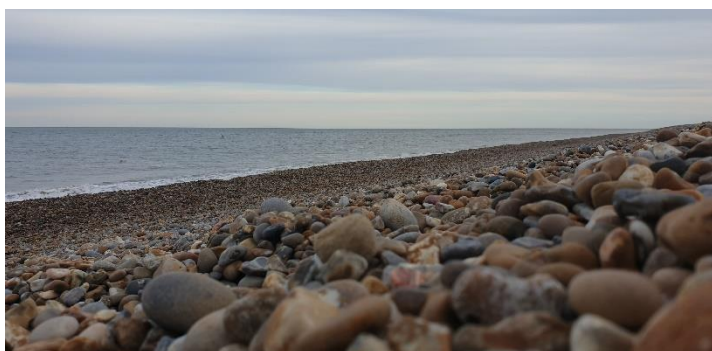


3/7/19

We started today with another string sectional with Zoë, continuing the work we started yesterday on Knussen and Brown. Lots of singing melodies and speaking rhythms were incorporated into the rehearsal process. It helped us to internalise the music in a way that playing doesn't. After lunch and a walk along the edge of the Alde River, we rehearsed with the full ensemble. Our conductor Duncan Ward took us through

the Knussen again, and we captured a bit more detail with each attempt! In the Birtwistle we worked on capturing more 'funk' in the rhythm in spite of its difficulty and jarring harmonies. After this, we had our first read through of freshly written music for the ensemble from the composers on the course. They wrote very different pieces, and it was fascinating to see their personalities reflected in their music, from eccentric and extroverted to thoughtful and quiet.

Pictured: The reeds and marshes along the edge of the Alde River, just a five-minute walk from the rehearsal studio.



4/7/19

On our third sectional, we made it to the end of the Brown Quartet, working with a stopwatch to check we were taking the required amount of time for each section, and working without it to find a natural pace and be responsive, communicative and intuitive. We did some more work on the Knussen, still very slowly. After lunch we read through *Lichtbogen* by Saariaho, without the live electronics specified in the score. It

was still a fantastic exercise in extended techniques and sound. The sound-world of the piece is very different to anything else, all high frequencies, rustles and whispers. Zoë demonstrated some of the extreme techniques required, explaining the composer's intentions and how best to capture them. I realised that there was a much broader range of sounds possible on my instrument than I thought! Afterwards, we had our second read through of newly written music. There wasn't too much new material compared to yesterday, but a lot of changes had been made in response to the wealth of feedback everyone provided. I felt a little overwhelmed at the prospect of performing everything in a week, so I went for a 10km walk northwards along the beach. It was so different to Australian beaches, not much sand, but pebbles forming waves approaching the tide line.

Pictured: The very pebbly beach at Aldeburgh.



5/7/19

Today was our day off... so I spent a few hours in the morning practising, and after lunch a group of us performers went for a walk along the beach to neighbouring town Thorpeness (while the composers spent the day working on their pieces)! We found a lovely lake with swans and ducks, and the architecture here was particularly beautiful, with lots of very old English cottages. After this, we went back to the beach, and several people in our group went for a swim.

At 21 degrees, it was way too cold for someone with my Australian internal thermometer to even consider swimming! Instead I buried one of the singers in beach pebbles instead.

Pictured: Twelve of us musicians at the beach!



6/7/19

Our transition from being conducted by Duncan to working with Jessica Cottis began today. We started the day with a brief sectional on the Knussen. Some of it was starting to work at tempo! We spent the late morning and early afternoon rehearsing with Duncan while Jessica observed. Next we read through more new material from the composers. This time was very different from the last - they all had prepared much more involved and active music. Some of it was incredibly difficult, and time was limited so the session was very stressful for all involved. I went home exhausted! Jessica stepped in to conduct some of the pieces in this session. Her style of direction was refreshingly different - she conducted without a baton, yet was still very clear, and rehearsed very efficiently, yet left space for imagination and queries. Jessica approached me after the rehearsal and we talked briefly - it was nice to no longer be the only Australian here!

Pictured: Entrance to the Britten-Pears Building where our rehearsals were held.



7/7/19

Today's schedule was a repeat of yesterday, albeit without Duncan. In our string sectional we finished off the Knussen and played through most of the whole Brown quartet. It was surprisingly difficult to transition between different sections intuitively without a gap. After lunch we began work on Takemitsu's *Rain Coming*, exploring the unique sound-world and drawing different colours out of the ensemble. Jessica asked us to be silent for a few seconds just to listen to the ambience of the room and focus our ears. It made a huge difference to the sound when we returned to playing! This afternoon's new composition session involved a huge pile of

material to read through, but also a lot more time to work on it. The workshopping process was much more structured too, allowing us to focus on the newest notes and think of suggestions of improvement more effectively. We had reached the halfway point in any course where the intensity of the experience starts to catch up with you, and there was a sense of general exhaustion and need for a little rest.

Pictured: Getting stuck into the newly-written music. Photo courtesy of the Britten-Pears Young Artists Programme.

8/7/19

I slept through half of today's free morning and didn't make it to the visit of Britten's childhood home that was organised for us. After lunch, we rehearsed Birtwistle's *Songs from the Holy Forest*, about the sound of a moth that got into the composer's piano. An interesting set of coincidences occurred... Jessica turned out to be a lepidopterist, and Oliver Knussen was also 'mad about moths' according to Zoë. The last rehearsal Oliver conducted before he died, almost a year ago to the date, was on this very piece, with Zoë and Claire (the vocal coach). Zoë recounted in the rehearsal a visit to his house right after he died, where she saw a huge moth that looked like his face. Now at his house the untrimmed grass is home to hundreds of caterpillars, soon to be moths. Another mark of how significant Oliver Knussen was to the course and everyone involved. We also gained fascinating insight into traditions of how to play music that exist independent of what is written on the page. Zoë and Claire both described Birtwistle bursting into a rehearsal of the piece and saying 'you're playing it all wrong!' then explaining he hadn't written it how he meant it to be played. For the strings, this involved ignoring printed dynamics and playing the entire first movement with an airy and soft edged sound, like the wings of a moth. None of this was in the score! After this, we worked through the composers' music. To our relief, most of the pieces seemed close to completion! It was challenging to pick up on all the subtle edits and play them convincingly. A slightly changed dynamic or tempo actually made a huge difference!



9/7/19

Today we began with a full run of Earle Brown with Zoë. We were expecting it to be a mess but it actually held together very well! Talking through the character of each section of the piece before helped a lot. Afterwards we worked in detail on Birtwistle's *Carmen*, picking apart the layers of rhythmic detail exchanged around the ensemble. I had the feeling that we would've sounded incredible as an ensemble if we'd just

had Jessica for the full program. In the afternoon rehearsal of Knussen, she dissected the piece in such detail that she could comment on the articulation of single notes in individual players' parts. Unfortunately, it was just two days from the concert, so we couldn't sustain such detailed work for long. We soon had to move on to the composer pieces which were mostly in their final stages of score preparation. The session was mostly spent actually rehearsing the pieces, under Jessica's eagle eyes. She had very imaginative ways of describing the character of each piece, for example 'parrots calling to each other in the northern Australian forest' which crystallised everyone's musical gestures into a cohesive whole.

Pictured: An abandoned boat I encountered on the shore at Aldeburgh.



10/7/19

I squeezed in some much-needed practise on Knussen this morning, which made it much more manageable in rehearsal. We ran through the whole piece at the end, and it went surprisingly well! It's amazing how what felt like hours of music flew past in 5 minutes. Some more imagery from Jessica helped; we were to play 'like the colony of garden

gnomes that people placed at the bottom of a lake in the UK's Lake District'. After a somewhat stressful rehearsal of both Birtwistle pieces in which we all felt just a bit underprepared, we worked on the composers' pieces. These were now in their final version and felt very polished. Despite being exhausted by the end of the rehearsal, I felt that (with a little more practise) tomorrow's concert would go well! Tutors and course participants all had dinner together at the Lighthouse restaurant in Aldeburgh. It was great food and even better company! We had become quite closely-knit, and I felt that like on music camps back home, many of these friendships would last a lifetime.

Pictured: Rehearsal all set to go in the Concert Hall at Snape Maltings.

11/7/19

The final day was here already! We jumped in the deep end with a run of the entire program in concert order. Knussen was just too technically challenging to manage first thing in the morning, and was a bit rough around the edges, to say the least. After a stressful rehearsal Jessica and the staff gave lovely thank you speeches, even though we should have been thanking them! At 4pm we performed the full program after a late lunch. It was quite a long concert - starting with a brass fanfare written the night before by composition tutor Mark Anthony Turnage. After that we performed *Coursing*, which was a bit of a rough ride to begin with but by the end sounded great. Next was an operatic scene also by Knussen, and chamber works for voice and violin by Kurtag, and voice and clarinet by Carter. We performed three of the finished student compositions before interval, which sounded good despite not much rehearsal time! After catching our breath, we played Birtwistle's *Songs from the Holy Forest* and Earle Brown's Quartet, introduced by a lovely speech from Zoë. Both went very well, which was a huge relief! We finished the concert with the other half of the composer pieces and Birtwistle's *Carmen*. There were only about fifty in the audience, mostly BPYAP staff and tutors, but everyone was incredibly enthusiastic and attentive during the whole concert. It's very rare to have complete silence in a concert hall immediately before and after performing a piece. There was wine waiting for us upstairs, and we gave thank you cards to the staff and tutors. It was a lovely night celebrating what we had collectively achieved and learned during the past ten days.



Pictured: With tutor Zoë Martlew (left), the five string players on the program (above), and all of the composers and performers on the course with conductor Jessica Cottis (below).



12/7/19

I spent my morning from 8 until 11:30am on the bus to London. It was sad to say goodbye to everyone at Britten-Pears. I had made several great friends, many lovely memories and gained so much musical experience. This was improved by the fact we had all been invited to perform in the Aldeburgh Festival next June! After getting to London I had to return one of the bows I was trying to the shop in Stoke Newington. This two-hour round trip left me just minutes from missing check-in for my flight to Frankfurt. The flight turned out to be delayed due to storms in Frankfurt, allowing me time to buy some lunch. Unfortunately, I missed my first train from Frankfurt airport to Mannheim by just five minutes. On the bright side, I was treated to a lovely sunset view on the later train. My second train to Baden-Baden was a little late. After a 30-minute bus ride to the city centre, I had a 1km walk to my AirBnB. The walk turned out to be extremely steep uphill, and took me 30 minutes. I had to walk backwards at times to drag my suitcase uphill. I finally arrived at 11:15pm and struggled for 15 minutes to unlock the safe that contained the room key. I finally fell exhausted into bed well after midnight.

Pictured: Alpine views from the end of my street in Baden-Baden.





13/7/19

I slept in, and skipped breakfast to spend the morning practising. At the end of my street, I discovered a stunning view of Baden-Baden and its mountainous surroundings. I felt a bit like I had woken up in Switzerland. Heading down to the town centre, I couldn't find somewhere for lunch that took card, and couldn't find an ATM, then got lost trying to find my way into the Kurhaus for my

audition. Luckily, I ran into another lost viola student who spoke German fluently and helped me find the way in. We both went upstairs and signed up to audition. I went into the audition only to discover there was still one candidate before me, after misunderstanding a German conversation with a staff member. When it was actually my turn, I played some Walton Concerto with the in-house pianist. We hadn't rehearsed, and I was stressed and hungry, so it was a bit of a disaster. I was very relieved that I had sent a video and been accepted as a participant in advance. Afterwards, Hartmut welcomed all fifteen violists into the hall to organise lesson times for the next day. He was teaching 9-5 on a Sunday with only one break! We all walked over to the Clara Schumann Musikschule nearby where lessons would be held the rest of the day. I watched him teach the first movement of the Bartok Concerto to two different students. He worked in much detail, with a strong concept of how each phrase should be shaped. After that I headed to the local supermarket and then home to make dinner.

Pictured: Vista over the town of Baden-Baden from Schloßstaffeln.



14/7/19

Today I woke up quite late, as I was exhausted from the past two days. From 11am-1pm I watched three lessons. Hartmut worked on the first movement of Hindemith's *Schwanendreher* with a very well-prepared violinist who he asked to perform in tonight's concert! With another student he worked on the 1st movement of Hoffmeister Concerto, amplifying the phrasing and working a wider range of colours into it. Before lunch he taught the second movement of the Walton Concerto, focusing on relaxed and open body physicality and how it affects sound and expression. I had a quick bakery lunch then returned to the Kurhaus to practise, only to discover we had to go to the Musikschule for practise rooms. I went through my warm up routine and some calm, slow practise on Walton before heading back to the Kurhaus where my masterclass would be held in the big hall, the Weinbrennersaal. At the start of my lesson I played through the whole of the Walton 1st movement. I was very nervous after yesterday, but on the whole it went much better! Hartmut worked on bringing out the phrasing and rhythmic interplay rather than individual notes. He also helped me find a sense of rhythmic freedom and dynamic variety to fit together better with the orchestral part. After my lesson, I watched two other students play, Martinů's Sonata and then Schubert's *Arpeggione Sonata*. These lessons were in German, but I understood more of it than I expected. After this, I went home for dinner, then returned to the Kurhaus to watch the evening Junge Meister Musizieren concert. Seven people performed, all at a very high standard, even though it was only day two!

Pictured: An advertisement for the Academy – we're even at the bus stop!



15/7/19

I started today with some practise, before watching lessons again from 11am-1pm. The first lesson was on Bartok Concerto, teasing out the expressive qualities of each phrase in the first movement. After that was York Bowen Sonata, where Hartmut helped create an 'English sound' and hints of the influence of Viennese music and Richard Strauss. After buying some groceries for lunch, I headed back to the Kurhaus for my lesson. I played Ligeti Sonata for Hartmut, and he

told me that he's never performed it, but many of his ideas for teaching it come from Garth Knox, who worked on it with Ligeti himself. In the first movement, Hartmut helped me create a more transparent sound world, and make each phrase more of a gesture than individual notes. He also worked on the connections between bow changes, or 'point zero' in a pendulum swing as he called it. In the second movement, he helped me differentiate more clearly between dynamic levels, and give each note a rounder shape, so that it had the 'swing' demanded. The third movement also requires 'swing'; in this case Hartmut showed me how lightly emphasising the first beat of each bar brought out the irregular rhythmic patterns. He also helped me to handle four-note chords in a way that didn't disturb the rhythm, and deal with some intonation issues. I left the lesson feeling like I had found a more authentic way of playing the Ligeti Sonata. After dinner, I watched the second Junge Meister concert. Everyone was shocked when a cellist who couldn't have been older than ten opened the concert with the Prelude from Bach's First Suite!

Pictured: Outside the Kurhaus Baden-Baden at sunset.

16/7/19

Yesterday, Hartmut asked me to choose a couple of movements of Ligeti to perform in one of the concerts. So today naturally was consumed almost entirely by practise. I focused on Ligeti, but also worked through Hartmut's suggestions for Walton. In the evening, I attended the third Junge Meister concert. I left before the end, but enjoyed some stunning performances - especially the two violists, who had improved considerably since their lessons.



17/7/19

This morning, I had another lesson on the remaining three movements of Ligeti. In the extremely difficult fourth movement, Hartmut told me to play with a lighter bow stroke, using the wrist, and I suddenly found I could play it much faster! In the fifth movement, he talked mainly about how to treat the ends of the notes, and differentiating between styles of articulation on different notes. With the final chaconne, we worked on grading the extremely variant

dynamics using colour and contact point. Hartmut also helped me to better bring out the chromatic line that continues through the whole movement. After my lesson, I watched the next two students, playing Bach and then Biber. He focused on naturally weighted bow strokes imitating the Baroque bow, and understanding composers' stylistic choices through the lens of Baroque dance forms. With both students he amplified the character and expression without forcing contemporary playing methods into the interpretation. After this, I grabbed lunch from a nearby bakery, then spent some more time practising. After dinner I headed to the Kurhaus to watch the evening concert of academy students performing concerto movements with the Baden-Badener Philharmoniker. All the soloists played beautifully and most of them were already at an international solo career level!

Pictured: Another advertisement for our concerts in the town centre, featuring a picture of Hartmut Rohde teaching!



18/7/19

This morning I went over Hartmut's feedback on the Ligeti Sonata then worked on it slowly to prepare for my performance tonight. In the afternoon we all attended a short function at the Rathaus (Town Hall), consisting of performances, speeches and photo opportunities. Afterwards, I stayed back to chat with a group of viola players. It turned out one of the other students had performed with ACO! Next I went to the Musikschule to practise, before my lesson at 6pm. In the lesson I played through the two movements of Ligeti I was performing and discussed bows. I threw my mute away as instructed at the end of the 4th movement, and it disappeared into thin air! After 30 minutes of searching the hall on my hands and knees (not my usual pre-concert routine) I still couldn't find it, so I had to use my spare for the concert. The concert went well - I was expecting the elderly, conservative audience to hate the very aurally challenging Ligeti, but they very audibly enjoyed it! I was greeted at the end of the concert with several *sehr schön*'s. It was one of the violists' birthday today, so four of us shared a bottle of sparkling wine afterwards. Next we went to the nearest bar, where unsurprisingly enough all the bass players were partying with their teacher (who I discovered is an Australian). They had been out every night!

Pictured: Not much hair left on my bow by the end of the Ligeti Sonata!

19/7/19

After a late night, I slept in a little, then spent the morning practising. I headed down to the Kurhaus to watch five more afternoon lessons. Hartmut consistently worked in very precise detail, focusing on sound, phrasing and integrity of musical decisions. Only when there is a technical issue would he talk about technique, the rest of the time, the assumption was that the preparation and proficiency is already there. I felt by this point very confident that in Hartmut I have a good option for postgraduate study. After the lessons, I went home for dinner, then went to the Abschlusskonzert (final concert) of works with piano, in the Weinbrennersaal. There were several stunning performances, but the real highlight was the ensemble pieces at the end. The cellos performed a film score arrangement with their teacher. There was a surprise at the end, all 17 bass players somehow squeezed onto stage to play two short pieces. It was such a fun end to the day!

Pictured: 17 bass players on stage and ready to go...



20/7/19

My final day in Baden-Baden began with an early lesson. We worked on the Allemande and Courante from Bach's Sixth Suite. Details such as the speed of rolled chords, the articulation at the ends of the notes, different tempos, and tiny bits of rubato all helped shape my Bach to be more musically free and historically informed. After this I stayed to watch four other lessons, on Stamitz, Britten Lachrymae and Bartok Concerto. In the evening I attended the final concert, the second with soloists and the orchestra. After the concert we had the official closing function of the Academy, with beer, wine and pretzels for everyone. Here they awarded prizes to select participants, and I was both honoured and surprised to receive a Förderpreis (encouragement award) for my performance of the Ligeti Sonata! The joke was that it would pay for new hair for my bow, and a replacement mute.

Pictured: My bedroom window view in Salzburg (left), and Hartmut Rohde and the viola class of the course (right).



21/7/19

I spent most of today on the train to Salzburg. At Mannheim where I changed trains, I ran into an Australian cellist who I played with in a youth orchestra years ago, and very soon, four Australian musicians had gathered together. We had all been through Sydney Conservatorium at different times. Surprisingly everything went incredibly smoothly with travel - I even arrived in Salzburg on time. My sublet student apartment turned out to

be a very central room with a beautiful view of the Kapuzinerberg mountain. I had a kebab and an ice cream for dinner. After Baden-Baden, it was so nice to be able to find cheap food options and shops open on Sunday!

22/7/19

I arrived at Mozarteum University at 10am to register for the masterclass, only to discover that I was meant to be in Jean Sulem's class right now. Upstairs he was already teaching. We made a time for my first lesson tomorrow. I then watched the remainder of the day's lessons. The first lesson I watched happened to be on the last movement of the Ligeti Sonata! Jean Sulem worked in incredible detail on the contradictions between Ligeti's dynamics and his expression markings and how to capture both. He also clarified the rhythmic character and the returning chromatic line, and said it was inspired by electronic music, with a constant downwards glissando that skips octaves imperceptibly. Next up was an arrangement of Shostakovich's Cello Sonata played by a very proficient student. Jean worked with him in depth on sound and colour, and finding a feeling of interaction with the pianist. Both these students spoke French with Jean, but English during their lessons, luckily. I went home for lunch, then visited a nearby violin shop to buy a replacement mute and new rosin, and try some bows.

23/7/19

I had an early start before my 10am lesson today. With Jean I worked through the first two movements of Ligeti in incredible detail. We went through each phrase of the first, talking about sound, phrasing, vibrato and articulation. Jean had a very different concept of the movement to Hartmut, seeking a focused and dark sound rather than airy and light. He also spotted a wrong note printed in the music! He described how the second movement was written to be first performed by Garth Knox, who finds everything easy; so even though it's incredibly difficult, it has to sound relaxed. He also helped me find a sound and articulation that amplified its jazz influence. After this I watched three lessons, on the Clarke Sonata, Bach D major Viola da Gamba Sonata and Schumann's *Märchenbilder*. With each student he focused on colour, and analysis of the harmony as the basis for choices in sound. After dinner, I ran into the two French speaking violists outside Mozarteum. We ended up going to the 500-year-old Augustiner brewery for a beer! One was a student of Tabea Zimmermann in Berlin, and another completing his Masters with Jean Sulem at Paris Conservatoire. I discovered that somehow, Jean Sulem also lectures in engineering in Paris!



24/7/19

Today my lesson was in the late afternoon, so I spent my morning catching up on practise and a lot of emails. I watched the lesson before mine, on the first movement of Bloch's *Suite Hebraïque*. Jean focused a lot on rhythmic accuracy, dynamic contrast, and the liturgical character of the music. In my lesson we worked on the 3rd and 4th movements of Ligeti. The difficulty of the 3rd movement is its incredible ambiguity. Jean talked through all the

different contradictions, 'swing' but slowly, legato but articulated, sung but spoken. He then explained that if I sought the character of the harmony in all the unexpected ways it works out, the music will make sense. Jean asked me to play the fourth movement slowly, *grazioso*, with the character of a Baroque dance. He described how while it is written to push the performer to the limits technically, there's something very Classical about its character underneath the ferociousness. Afterwards I watched the second half of the concert that evening, to see the student of Tabea Zimmermann perform. He gave a fantastic performance of Enescu's *Konzertstück*. After that I went to dinner with the other French violist - traditional Salzburg cuisine, cheese noodles for me and beer soup for him.

Pictured: Outside the main entrance to Mozarteum University.



25/7/19

I had nothing on other than practise and emails to catch up on today. On the phone I realised how much I had become accustomed to minimising my accent and choosing my words carefully so that I could be understood. In the evening I met up with one of the violists I met on the Carl Flesch Academy for a beer. She was visiting her family in Salzburg for a couple of days!

Pictured: View over the river in Salzburg by dusk.



26/7/19

In my lesson today we finished the Ligeti Sonata. The penultimate movement brought out some tone production issues. By trying too hard to play loudly, I was pressing with the bow and actually producing a quieter sound with a less pure quality. We also worked on how best to articulate and shape the loud passages. Jean showed me how to find a transparent sound in the pianissimo passages by bowing half way between the bridge and fingers. In the final *Chaconne*, Jean focused on sound production. A more flexible wrist and more rounded shape to each note helped create a richer sound, and more planned articulation brought out the dance character. In the final quiet section, he helped me to create smoother transitions by encouraging me to think more about what happens between the notes. I stayed afterward to watch the next lesson, on Bach's *Fantasia Cromatica*, then headed home for lunch and practise.

Pictured: A bridge over the river on the way back from Augustiner brewery.



27/7/19

Today began with my final lesson, and first chance to play something other than Ligeti. I played Bach, and Jean didn't say a word until I'd reached the end of the third movement. We then worked backwards. In the third movement he talked about the Italianate style of the dance, and how to capture it, I needed to make the second beat part of the gesture of the first. He also helped me to find a more historically informed articulation, less clear and off the string than before. This involved the feeling of a fast but not long bow, by moving quickly at the start of each note in the wrist then slowing the bow down. In the second movement, the most significant change was in how I interpreted the harmony. Jean explained a more informed way of playing where I create tension in my sound on the dominant, and any dissonances, then release on the resolution. Similar to Hartmut, he also asked that I treat the melodic and ornamental lines very lightly, while still maintaining a good point of contact. In the first movement, Jean advised I take a slightly slower tempo, and explore a wider range of characters, especially when it goes into the minor. He also helped me manage the dynamic contrasts by thinking of them as just different sections in an orchestra. Not only that, he pulled out copies of two different manuscripts and spotted a

wrong note! After a long lesson, there was no time for lunch before the 1pm class concert. I performed the first two movements of Ligeti, and was surprised at how much Jean Sulem's advice had already influenced my playing. After some lovely farewell words from Jean, who was flying back to Paris that afternoon, a group of us went for lunch. After that, explored the beautiful Kapuzinerberg mountain for half an hour before it started raining. On the way back, I wandered through the riverside markets. After dinner, a few of us met up again to go to Augustiner brewery.

Pictured: With Jean Sulem after my final lesson, just before performing in the class concert.

28/7/19

I spent the morning packing. At 11am I had a treat waiting for me, Vienna Philharmonic at the Salzburg Großes Festspielhaus. This was a very high-profile concert with a formal dress code. Normally I don't like to wear a suit to concerts (unless I have to because I'm performing) but I made an exception for the occasion. The orchestra performed Mahler's Ninth with Herbert Blomstedt conducting, an incredibly moving 90 minutes. They have such a distinct sound, especially the string sections, and hearing them perform was a surreal experience where words fail. The orchestra made light work of this incredibly difficult symphony, and I could hear so much of the overall architecture because the individual parts didn't seem to be difficult for them. It was sublime and devastating, and I shed a tear or two! Later that day, I met up for dinner with two violinists I knew from Sydney who were in Salzburg for the following week of the Summer Academy. It felt like a luxury to speak with my normal accent!

Pictured: Vienna Philharmonic at the Salzburger Festspielhaus.



29/7/19

Today marked the end of the course component of my trip. Overwhelmed by everything I had learned, I spent my time in transit writing notes on the content of my lessons. Everything ran surprisingly on time and smoothly today between the train to Vienna, the flight to London, and the train from the airport.

30/7/19

After a late night, I slept in, then spent most of the day on the tube between bow shops. I went home with one bow to try, spent some time practising, and ate dinner in.

31/7/19

Today played out quite similarly to yesterday, lots more bows after a delicious brunch. I had good intentions of going out to explore London in the evening but these were quelled by my exhaustion from the past five weeks. Tomorrow!

1/8/19

Finally a day off! I could be a tourist for the day. I got up relatively early and went for a walk past the Monument to the Great Fire, over London Bridge with a nice view of the Tower Bridge, and along the Thames on my way to the Tate Modern. This I explored for about two hours before going to the Borough Markets for a delicious lunch. I then headed to South Kensington to visit the Victoria and Albert Museum. The collection here was a bit overwhelming - sculpture, art and design from all over the world, spanning of 2000 years - so I only got through half of it. I met up with one of the pianists from the Britten-Pears Program for dinner at a student bar right next to Albert Hall. I lost track of time and only just made it to the BBC Proms concert that evening. Albert Hall was beautiful, and both the orchestra and soloists were fantastic. The first half was Britten's Piano Concerto, then the remainder of the concert was taken up by Mahler's Das Lied von der Erde. Unfortunately, I was seated next to a very noisy and distracted tour group of about 40 children, and couldn't focus my attention completely on the concert. I still enjoyed it nonetheless!

2/8/19

I spent the morning practising where I was staying in Snaresbrook. I made my way to my lesson with Florian Peelman nearby in Wanstead after lunch. I had a fantastic lesson - we worked for two and a half hours on the first movements of Walton and Bartok respectively. Much of the time was spent working on sound - finding intensity and volume without pressure and tension. Freeing up my lower body was another focus area in the lesson. Florian helped me with several exercises to find a natural swaying movement while playing. He pointed out that my body movement was largely dictated by technical difficulties I was approaching, and this affected my sound and ability to play sustained and smoothly in the bow. After my lesson, Florian introduced me to the people he was staying with, a household of instrument makers and restorers. We got chatting and I ended up staying for pizza and gin. A great final night in London!

3/7/19

My last day was somewhat hectic, starting with a 10am lesson with H  l  ne Cl  ment at her apartment, at the complete opposite end of London to where I was staying. I was running on minimal sleep but somehow played really well! Over two hours we covered the entire Bach Sixth Suite, working through each movement individually. The main focus area was bow technique. H  l  ne gave me some exercises to help me make a more open, confident sound - she noticed that I was unconsciously withholding arm weight from the string. She also helped me to be more aware of the quality of sound I produce the extremities of the bow. She encouraged me to enjoy intervals in the music as well as the overall structure, integrating more detail into a bigger picture. I also discovered that H  l  ne did her Masters with Tabea Zimmermann! I had just enough time to pack before my flight back to Sydney that evening. It was a surprisingly efficient and uneventful 24 hours. I arrived back in Sydney in a semi-delirious state at 5am on August 5 and watched the sun rise on my way home.

Pictured: Lots of bows (left two images) and inside the Royal Albert Hall for the BBC Proms concert I attended (right).



14/7/19

After nine days of intense practise and reflection on my learning, tonight was the most important event in my calendar since my return. I performed an hour-long unaccompanied recital of the Bach Sixth Suite and Ligeti Sonata that I worked on overseas. I spent close to ten minutes speaking to the audience about my trip and a little about the Bach, but mainly to explain the complexities of the Ligeti Sonata. Ordinarily this would have been a nerve-wracking experience, but something had changed since I left Sydney in late June. I felt much more confident on stage, backed

up by the wealth of knowledge I had gained and the huge variety of experiences I had enjoyed outside my familiar surrounds of Sydney. This was one of the few times in my life where during a solo performance I was able to switch off the internal voice and just be in the moment. This I felt was one of the biggest differences in my music-making since my trip, a new level of confidence and joy in performing, backed up by a new repertoire of inspired and informed ways of thinking about music in the practise room and rehearsal studio. The performance also marked the first time I'd ever been completely comfortable speaking on stage – previously, public speaking made me more nervous than playing. The idea of explaining a 25-minute modernistic viola marathon to an audience would have terrified me! This was also a result of meeting and befriending amazing new people from all over the world, many of whom I had nothing in common with other than music. It definitely made me into a more open and communicative person. It also occurred to me that I would probably never have an experience quite like this one again in my life. It's not often that you have the chance to cram so many transformative opportunities into just six weeks!

Pictured: The flyer for my recital on August 14.

The Unaccompanied Viola

About

In the Preface to his Sonate for Viola Solo, Györgi Ligeti describes the viola as possessing 'a unique ascerbity, compact, somewhat hoarse, with the aftertaste of wood, earth and tannic acid'.

While Ligeti explores the dark and eccentric nature of the viola, its capacity for sweetness, nostalgia and warmth is conveyed through a transcription of Bach's Sixth Cello Suite.

Join violist Justin Julian for a complete performance of Bach's Sixth Suite and Ligeti's Sonata for Viola Solo, rarely presented in its entirety in Australia.

Details

Wednesday 14 August,
7:00pm.

Recital Hall East,
Sydney Conservatorium of
Music.

Free entry, no bookings
required.

J.S.Bach

(1685-1750)

Suite No. 6 for solo viola
(violoncello) BWV 1012

- I. Prélude
- II. Allemande
- III. Courante
- IV. Sarabande
- V. Gavotte I & II
- VI. Gigue

Györgi Ligeti

(1923-2006)

Sonate for viola solo

- I. Hora lungă
- II. Loop
- III. Facsar
- IV. Prestissimo con sordino
- V. Lamento
- VI. Chaconne chromatique

