

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST
OF AUSTRALIA

Report by - GRACE KIM - 2004 Churchill Fellow

The Mr and Mrs Gerald Frank New Churchill Fellowship to undertake intensive study in Piano Performance with Professor Aquiles Delle Vigne.

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Signed Grace Kim

Dated 14 March 2005

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Firstly, I would like to thank Mr and Mrs New for their generous sponsorship. This project involved many hours of lessons, practice and performance around Europe, as well as learning first hand the various aspects of being a concert artist.

I would also like to thank Professor Aquiles Delle Vigne for his never ending belief in me.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Name GRACE KIM
Project Intensive study in Piano Performance with Aquiles Delle Vigne
Main Study Venue Rotterdam Conservatorium, Holland
Teacher Professor Aquiles Delle Vigne
Masterclasses Jean Claude Vanden Eynden, Brussels
Mikhail Voskressensky, Moscow

SOLO PUBLIC PERFORMANCES

2005

23 January 4pm

De Harmonie, Rotterdam

16 January 3.30 pm

Bornse Synagogue, Holland

2004

19-22 December

'Bellini' International Piano Competition, Sicily

11 December 8.00pm

Baarn, Holland

10 December 8.15pm

Bethanienklooster, Amsterdam

8 December 2.15pm

Borne, Holland

1 December 12.45pm

De Doelen, Rotterdam

25 November 1.30pm

Kinderconcert, Theatre Mosaique, Wijchen

22-24 November

Het Reizend Muziek Gezelschap - '1e Kammermuziekfestival tussen Maas en Waal'

Leur, Holland

28 October 12.45pm

Leiden, Holland

CHAMBER MUSIC PERFORMANCES

Piano Trio - Liza Ferschman, violin and Teije Hylkema, cello

Piano/Cello - Teije Hylkema, Ronald Thomas.

Piano/Violin - Lianne Vandenberg

CONCERTS ATTENDED

Venues – De Doelen, Het Concertgebouw, De Vredenburg, The London Festival Hall, Wigmore Hall, The Pianola Museum.

Piano Recitals – Arcadia Volodos, Nelson Freire.

Orchestral Concerts – The Netherlands Radio Chamber, Radio Symphony, and Radio Philharmonic Orchestras, London Philharmonic Orchestra.

String Quartet – The Romeo Quartet

LESSONS

The lessons began in September 2004 at the Rotterdam Conservatorium. Professor Delle Vigne's lessons are open to all students so I had to quickly get used to having a small audience in my lessons. It was difficult at first to disregard this and the inherent need to perform to an audience, rather than focusing just on the lesson itself.

We worked on repertoire chosen for upcoming concerts leading up to the Bellini International Competition in Sicily.

Program included works by Prokofiev, Ravel, Mozart, Chopin, Beethoven, Scarlatti, Stravinsky, and Bach.

PROGRAMMING

Programming of recitals and competitions are slightly different:

Recitals (usually c.90 mins, 45 mins on each side of an interval) are programmed to best represent the performer, his/her philosophy or temperament. Occasionally I was requested to perform certain pieces by the concert organizer but usually programming was left to the pianist's discretion.

I normally like to have a 'feature piece' (a main work to highlight) and then choose pieces that compliment this; a bit like a menu where you want to feature the Main Course. The most successful formula I have found is to begin with a short piece/s to settle the audience, then gradually work up to the optimum time where everyone is well settled and receptive. I find that this is usually the second half of the first bracket. Interval helps to 'cleanse the palette' and the audience then return refreshed and ready for more.

Here is an example of a recital program.

Scarlatti – 2 Sonatas
Mendelssohn – Variations serieuses
Prokofiev – Sonata No.2

Interval

Mozart – Sonata K280
Ravel – Gaspard de la nuit

Competition programming is less flexible. Firstly there are requirements to be met, such as set works, duration of each round, and works from certain musical periods. I aim to choose pieces that I know and can play best within the confines of regulations. The pieces must show all aspects of pianism, stamina and control. Accuracy is highly desired!

Regulations vary from one competition to another so it's sometimes difficult to program successfully.

The regulations of the 2004 Bellini International Competition are as follows:

Preliminary round (max. 20 mins)

- 1 Scarlatti Sonata of a brilliant character
- 1 Bach Prelude and Fugue from The Well-Tempered Clavier
- 1 Chopin Etude from Op.10 or 25
- 1 Etude by Liszt, Rachmaninoff, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, or Scriabin
- 1 Composition by Debussy or Ravel

Recital Round (max. 60 mins)

- 1 Sonata by Haydn, Mozart, Clementi, Schubert or Beethoven
- 1 important piece from the Romantic Period
- 1 important piece from the 20th century and contemporaries of Debussy

Concerto Final

One from the following list:

- Mozart - Concerto K466, 467, 488, 491, 495
- Tchaikovsky – Concerto No.1
- Chopin – Concerto No.1 or 2
- Liszt – Concerto No.1 or 2
- Schumann – Concerto in a minor
- Beethoven – Concerto No.3, 4,5

My selected repertoire for the competition:

Preliminary Round

- Bach – Prelude and Fugue in No.8 Bk1 eb minor
- Scarlatti – Sonata in E Major
- Chopin Etude Op.10 No.4
- Stravinsky – Etude No.4
- Ravel – Ondine from Gaspard de la nuit

Recital Round

- Beethoven – Sonata Op.10 No.3 in D Major
- Mendelssohn – Variations serieuses in d minor
- Prokofiev – Sonata No.2 in d minor

Concerto Final

- Chopin Concerto No.1 in e minor

PUBLIC PERFORMANCES

I was fortunate to be active in performing during my time in Europe. A few of them were self-organized but most were by invitation.

There are various kinds of concerts, and here are the ones I have performed in.

Solo Recital

In December, I organised a solo recital in Het Bethanienklooster in Amsterdam. I booked the hall, selected and made the program booklets. Katja Reichenfeld, a music critic and writer, wrote the program notes.

The audience's feedback was extremely positive, and I received offers of other engagements.

I was also invited to perform in a lunch hour concert in De Doelen in Rotterdam. I had invited the Australian Embassy who came along to see my performance. It was extremely well attended. It was very encouraging to receive a full standing ovation! Subsequently, I am invited by the Embassy to perform in the Lange Voorhout Palace in The Hague in June this year.

Children's Concert

I enjoyed playing in a children's concert in Wijchen. It was the culmination of the Chamber Music Festival I had participated and I performed both solo and works for violin and piano. The children especially enjoyed my pre-concert talk (with help of a Dutch translator).

House concerts

The tradition of House concerts lives on strongly in Holland. Some houses can host up to 50 people! Usually held in the evenings, it is well appreciated if the performer informs the audience verbally about the background of composers and works presented.

Interesting tidbits are always a winner. Atmosphere is intimate and relaxed. I had the opportunity to play in several house concerts in various parts of Holland and enjoyed them immensely.

After concerts, there usually is a 'meet and greet' time with the audience. It's an opportunity to show appreciation from both parties. This is the time to receive some feedback and perhaps future engagements!

MASTERCLASSES

I have had some opportunities to participate in masterclasses in solo and chamber music. I attended a chamber music festival held by Het Reizend Muziek Gezelschap where I worked with both student and professional musicians culminating in a public concert.

I have also participated in piano masterclasses held by Jean-Claude Vanden Eynden playing Chopin's Ballade No.2 and Bach's Prelude and Fugue in eb Bk.1 and with Mikhail Voskressensky playing Prokofiev's second sonata.

THE 2004 BELLINI INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION

19 – 22 December, Caltanissetta, Sicily.

I faced many challenges through the preparation process to actual participation in the competition.

Professor Delle Vigne suggested participating in this competition whilst in Europe to make the most opportunity of being in a place with a thriving competition circuit. After giving some thought to the repertoire (see Programming) we decided to go ahead with it. I only had 2 months to prepare for an international competition. My days consisted to practising, lessons and running through my program to my peers. I also used the opportunity to publicly perform some of the competition program.

The First Round went well, considering I hadn't practiced for 2 days prior as there were no practice rooms available until the day of the competition itself.

The second round was more demanding, as it was a Recital round. It requires you to be mentally focused and physically relaxed to keep the stamina.

The Recital round went extremely well and I was through to the Concerto Final. The final was being held at the Teatro Magherita (previous rounds were in the Lyceum hall) opened to the general public. It was to be the biggest musical event in Caltanissetta.

We were given a day off to prepare. I had a meeting with the conductor to discuss tempi and any areas that were tricky to get together.

There was one rehearsal provided with orchestra and that was on the day of the final. We only had this rehearsal time to try out the piano, which was different to the previous rounds.

There was no warm up room before the final performance.

I received Third Prize.

TRAVELLING

Clearly, there are many factors that contribute to the life of a concert pianist. There are certainly the obvious ones like good pedagogy, talent, luck, practice and performance. However, little is known that travelling plays a significant part. As it is so easy to travel from one country to another in Europe, it was a great opportunity to perform in various places. It was also an experience to learn to cope with the travelling conditions whilst maintaining physical and mental energy to produce an optimum performance

Fatigue from constant travelling became a part of performing life. I had to learn to perform without the luxury of a few days rest/preparation. I stopped relying on warm up facilities, as they were not always available (see Bellini International Competition).

Getting used to different sorts of weather is another factor. It was difficult to get used to sudden changes of climate, especially the cold winter! I had to defrost my fingers even before warming up. One may think this is being oversensitive but it does affect how I perform or practice to a certain degree.

AUDIENCES AROUND EUROPE

I have found some interesting differences in concert etiquette of audiences in various countries in Europe.

The audiences in Holland are enthusiastic in their quiet ways and always ready to stand on their feet to show their appreciation.

The English tend to reserve standing ovations to those who they feel really deserve one.

Sicilians on the other hand are generally restless talking among themselves, mobile phones on, some walking in and out during the performances. People are less concerned about the usual etiquette of concert behavior as we know it, but by no means less appreciative. At the conclusion of the performance they show their appreciation vocally, shouting out a hearty 'Brava!'

What they all have in common is the 'coughing' syndrome between movements of a piece.

CONCERT ATTENDANCE

One of the great advantages of being in Europe is having regular access to the world class concerts by musicians of the highest calibre. I attended concerts at Het Concertgebouw, De Doelen, De Vredenburg and in the Royal Festival Hall and Wigmore Hall in London. I have learnt so much from these live concerts by the great artists in various disciplines, not only in piano.

The solo piano recital held by Nelson Freire was the highlight of these concerts. He was presented at the Concertgebouw in the Master Pianists Series. Performing works by Schumann, Chopin and Villa Lobos, Freire transported everyone to another world. He led us with singing tone and warm, rich sounds with poetic thoughts and gestures. The whole performance was so poised and inspirational; without doubt one of the best live performances I have ever heard.

In Amsterdam, I discovered The Pianola Museum which houses the historical Pianolas and Pianola rolls dating back from the 19th century. I attended concerts featuring composers such as Mahler, Prokofiev, Gershwin as well as the legendary pianists like Paderewski, Rachmaninoff, Horowitz and pupils of Liszt. This was such a special place to discover the piano performances practices in earlier times.

CONCLUSION

The last six months have been a great adventure and experience. I have gained so much from my lessons with Professor Delle Vigne focusing on the various aspects of piano performance and working on the major works of the piano repertoire.

Through an international competition I have learnt to deal with unexpected conditions and to perform well under pressure. Various public performances have developed me into a flexible and intuitive musician, and watching the concerts of great musicians have infinitely inspired me.

I hope to continue growing with this valuable experience and use this as a springboard for further things to come. Through teaching and performance I hope to implement what I have learnt to the upcoming young musicians in Australia. I would also like to continue working in regional areas such as Shepparton, Victoria where I am the annual Artist in Residence. Working with both students and teachers, I conduct public masterclasses, lessons and discussions. This is an excellent opportunity to share what I have learnt from this project.

This experience will play a significant role in my contribution to the Australian culture.