

The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust
Report by Marshall McGuire, 2004 Churchill Fellow

The Mr and Mrs Gerald Frank New Churchill Fellowship

To study baroque harp in San Francisco; Programming and performance styles of contemporary music ensembles in New York

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Signed: Marshall McGuire
Dated: January 27 2005

Final Report by 2004 Churchill Fellow Marshall McGuire

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Introduction

I travelled to San Francisco for lessons on baroque triple harp with Cheryl Ann Fulton, the leading exponent of historical harps in the USA. Additionally, I attended concerts of old and new music, as well as giving a seminar to the graduate composition class at Stanford University

In New York, the focus was more clearly on new music, involving attendance at over a dozen concerts in various venues, and meetings with colleagues old and new working in this vibrant creative area.

Executive Summary

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Fellowship objective

To study baroque harp in San Francisco; to explore programming and performance styles of contemporary music ensembles in New York

Fellowship highlights

Lessons on baroque harp with Cheryl Ann Fulton
Composer/harpist seminar at Stanford University
George Crumb 70th birthday concert Zankel Hall
American Composers Orchestra concert Zankel Hall
World premiere performance of Charles Wuorinen/Salman Rushdie opera 'Haroun & the Sea of Stories'
All the new music I heard
All my colleagues who were so generous with their time

Findings/Outcomes for consideration:

- to maintain a close network of connections internationally in the new music world
- to look beyond the 'classical music' world for collaborations
- to encourage more Q&A sessions between audience and performers at new music concerts
- to encourage better use of volunteers
- to boost fundraising efforts, especially activating board members
- to further explore 'composer portrait' concerts as viable models in Australia
- to properly brand a performing organisation
- to utilise a broad range of performing arts venues
- to encourage more interaction between like minded organisations world wide
- to recognise that audiences for new music are limited, and to focus on quality performances for interested audiences
- to pursue opportunities for the writing of new music for old instruments

Dissemination of findings

Already, interest in my trip has been expressed through readers of my monthly column on www.artshub.com.au, Australia's national arts news and information website. Another column is due in February reflecting further on my trip and its outcomes. I have started to incorporate ideas and lessons learnt from my trip in performances on baroque harp with Pinchgut Opera's performances of Monteverdi's Orfeo [November 2004] and in my plans for programming for The Seymour Group and Ludovico's Band in 2006. New works by American composers have been incorporated in early planning for The Seymour Group's 2006 concert series.

Program

San Francisco

12 October - 21 October 2004

Harp lessons Cheryl Ann Fulton - Inspirational guidance in technique, repertoire, style, tunings, and an overview of contemporary performers on historical harps.

Meeting with composer Roy Wheldon, who writes new compositions for baroque instruments.

Meeting with Jeffrey Miller, one of the artistic directors of *Composers Inc*, celebrating its 20th anniversary

Seminar at Stanford University Palo Alto, for graduate composition class.
Covered contemporary harp technique and Australian harp repertoire

Attended *Composers Inc* 20th anniversary concert @ The Green Room,
Veterans Building 401 Van Ness Avenue

Attended *Philharmonia Baroque* concert, guest director Elizabeth Wallfisch @ Herbst Theatre
401 Van Ness Avenue

Attended open rehearsal *San Francisco Symphony Orchestra*.
John Adams *Naive and Sentimental Music* Alan Gilbert conductor

New York

21 October - 22 November 2004

Attended *Juilliard New Music Ensemble* concert, a collaboration between Juilliard School and the Royal Academy of Music London. Six new student compositions. Joel Sachs and Simon Bainbridge, conductors

Attended *Bangarra Dance Theatre* at Brooklyn Academy of Music *Bush* Harvey Theater Brooklyn

Attended 10 hour piano marathon @ Faust Harrison pianos W 58th Street
Pianists included Jed Distler, Anthony de Mare, Lisa Moore, Kathy Supové and others

Attended *Work & Process* concert Guggenheim Museum - new compositions from young composers
Kenji Bunch-Kevin Puts-Daniel Kellogg-Mason Bates
Young Concert Artists Trust.

Attended Joby Talbot concert, Merkin Recital Hall

Attended world premiere New York City Opera
Charles Wuorinen/ Salman Rushdie *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

Attended concert World Financial Center Winter Garden
One Ring Zero Songs by Paul Auster, Siri Hustvedt, Rick Moody

Attended concert at Miller Theater Columbia University
Composer Portrait Tania Leon

Attended concert Zankel Hall, Carnegie Hall
Margaret Leng Tan - *Tribute to George Crumb Makrococosmos I & II*

Attended concert American Composers Orchestra Zankel Hall @ Carnegie Hall
Works by Randall Woolf, Stephen Sondheim, Morton Feldman, Michael Daugherty

Attended performance, Da Capo Chamber Players, Merkin Concert Hall
New works for ensemble - Chinary Ung, Dai Fujikura, Robert Patterson

Attended performance The Kitchen - Kitchen House Blend
Works by Elliott Sharp, Joe McPhee, Geraldine Celerier

Meeting with James McGrath, video artist, possible collaboration

Meeting with Marilyn Nonken, pianist and co-Artistic Director, *Ensemble 21*

Meeting with June Han, harpist

Meeting with Lisa Moore, pianist, *Bang On a Can All-Stars*

Meeting with Andrew Byrne, composer, concert presenter

Meeting with Professor Amnon Wolman, computer music department CUNY Brooklyn

Meeting with George Steel, Artistic Director Miller Theater Columbia University

Meeting with Antony de Mare, pianist, contemporary repertoire

Meeting with Susan Lyons, Friends of NIDA USA

Met with Tania Leon, composer; Michael Daugherty, composer; Ida Kavafian, violinist; Terrence Wilson, pianist; Frances Richmond, ASCAP; Martin Bresnick, composer

Masterclass and composer seminar for graduate students
The Crane School of Music, State University of New York, Potsdam NY

Recital of Australian and other 20th century works for harp
The Crane School of Music, State University of New York, Potsdam NY

Boston

November 18-19 2004

Meeting with Anthony Fogg, Artistic Administrator, Boston Symphony Orchestra

Meeting with Kate Vincent, Artistic Director, Firebird Ensemble

*'imagining - enabling one to fashion some concept in the mind and let the spirit wander with it'....*From catalogue notes at the Frick Collection

Since taking on the reins at The Seymour Group late last year, I've been thinking of ways to increase activity and income outside the usual parameters imposed by annual government funding. And it seemed that a logical place to look would be the USA, where government funding is traditionally at a much lower level than we have here, and where sponsors and donors are the mainstay of any arts organisation, no matter how small or large. The Churchill Fellowship has provided me with an opportunity to look at some comparable ensembles in New York and San Francisco, and to get some ideas that might apply in the modern Australian funding paradigm.

In addition, I took the opportunity to have some lessons - for the first time in about 10 years! And how scary it was. A couple of years ago at the World Harp Congress in Geneva I met America's leading historical harpist Cheryl Ann Fulton. It was one of those meetings where we just clicked - and she invited me at some point to come to San Francisco to talk baroque harps. So the Churchill provided the opportunity for me to go back to school for a couple of days, and to be in a completely vulnerable position as a student. If nothing else, it gives me much greater respect for the issues that my students have when they come for a lesson.

The Italian and Spanish baroque harps were the first attempt at chromaticising the harp, previously an essentially diatonic instrument. The double harp or *arpa doppia* emerged in Italy in the early 17th century - double in this case referring both to the two parallel rows of strings, as well as to the fact that it was larger than its predecessors [as in double bass]. The triple harp emerged some 60-70 years later, expanding the capabilities of the instrument in terms of more notes, and greater sonority. It is these two instruments that I play, especially focusing on repertoire from composers such as Frescobaldi, Caccini, Monteverdi and Barbara Strozzi. Since I first started exploring these instruments, the early harp world has developed in size and expertise, although I fear I am still the only professional player of double and triple harps in Australia. In the three days I spent with Cheryl, we covered so many important issues, ranging from appropriate baroque tunings [an arcane and fascinating area of study and practice], scales and arpeggios, the importance of correct fingering, techniques for getting the most colour out of the instrument - my head was spinning.

Technical issues covered included fingering that covers the divide between modern harp playing and 'authentic' baroque fingering, relating especially to fingering for lute and other plucked string instruments. The difficulty I face as a musician performing on both modern and baroque harp is to adapt the principles of baroque fingering, with its emphasis on weak and strong notes, into a technique that sits side by side with my modern harp technique. Cheryl is quite sanguine about this necessity - she maintains that modern life requires we find a suitable compromise technique to incorporate this multi faceted approach to music making. In this regard, she has developed her 'Wave' technique, which involves an easy-to-remember physical gesture to facilitate this baroque technique. A relaxed arm, and buoyancy in the arms, is an essential component of this technique. She talks about the 'search for the puff' - the release of the hand and fingers after playing, in order to control the *quality* of the sound. In order to achieve optimum placement, Cheryl refers to her 'Harp Mantra': "The fingers flow on in the sequence in which they are going to play." This is, of course, the antithesis of correct modern harp technique, which involves all the fingers articulating into the hand. There is much more delicacy involved in the playing of triple and early harps, resulting in more control of the note, and subsequent colour of the musical phrase.

Muscle memory plays a vital role in this new technique, which is challenging because of the infrequent nature of playing the instrument, compared to the time spent on modern harp. I took videos of this technique and refer to them when practising 'the puff' - it is of enormous assistance.

Tuning is an important part of playing baroque harps - choosing the right tuning for the right period of music is essential for creating the authentic sound. We agreed that the Valotti temperament is most useful when playing in ensemble - it is this tuning that Cheryl uses when playing with American Baroque. For 17th and 18th century music, and Welsh Airs, she chooses a Modified Mean Tone tuning, meaning that the interval G-D is tuned as a pure 5th always, C-G & F-C sometimes, and D-A occasionally. For Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, which I performed on my return to Sydney, she uses reentrant tuning, doubling the upper E flats for, in particular, the aria 'Possente Spirto'. This information was enormously useful for understanding the possibilities of my new baroque harp, especially when playing in ensemble with other continuo players. A useful source of information is Dandrieu's *Principes de l'Accompagnement du Clavecin* [Minkoff Reprint - Geneva - 1972]

We also discussed the use of various harps in various musical situations. For instance, like me, Cheryl uses her triple harp for most repertoire, including Italian 17th century music as well as Welsh airs, and even in music by Telemann. We also agreed that the use of carbon fibre strings was probably a necessity nowadays, bearing in mind the amount of travel that harpists are required to undertake, lessening the frequency of string breakages and wear-and-tear.

A new area I want to explore is composing for old instruments - already being done by composers such as Gavin Bryars and David Lang and Michael Gordon and Richard Mills, but a path until now rarely followed in Australia. Ian Shanahan, Andrew Ford and Raffaele Marcellino are composers who have written for baroque instruments in this country, although their works have received only limited performances. Much inspiration to be had, especially from San Francisco composer and viola da gamba player Roy Wheldon. Roy is a viola da gamba player who is also a composer, and this combination of interests led him to write new works for old instruments, utilising the unique characteristics of baroque instruments. I plan to focus the attention of my baroque group *Ludovico's Band* on this area of new music creation. I have already approached UK composer Gavin Bryars about this endeavour, and look forward to the results. The particular characteristics of old instruments - the colours of tone available, the quality of gut strings, the delicacy of tone, and, in the case of the harp, the chromatic possibilities - have obvious appeal to composers. Cheryl, with her varied performing career in early baroque music, as well as folk music and what could be called 'new age' music, has given me inspiration to pursue a blending of these styles in the pursuit of unique and distinctive musical compositions.

While in San Francisco I also took the opportunity to respond to an invitation to give a seminar to the graduate composition class at the prestigious Stanford University in Palo Alto CA. It's always a privilege to work with talented young people, and these young composers are some of the finest creative talent around. We talked about contemporary harp techniques, as well as more basic concepts relating to composing music for harp. Topics such as pedal placement, double harmonics, fingering of chords, extended techniques such as pedal crashes and the use of tools on the instrument, as well as issues of sonority relating to register and type of string were all covered in this session. It is important that all harpists try and dispel the notion that the instrument is an impossible instrument to write for - certainly, the technical aspects of the instrument can be bewildering, meaning that we have a responsibility to enlighten composers to the creative possibilities of the instrument. My advice to composers is always to write the music they wish to write - and if there are any insurmountable technical and musical barriers, we can then work around them with a fuller understanding of the limitations and potential of the harp. Only in this way can we maintain a rich vein of new compositions for the harp.

Additionally, I was able to attend the 20th anniversary concert of Composers Inc, a composer's collective performing their own works. 20 years is a long time to be around in contemporary music circles, and the performances and quality of music pointed to a strong core of talent in the Bay area. It strengthened my belief that by banding together and working together, new music has a greater chance of reaching a wider audience, and of creating a real future.

New York, and the focus was more on contemporary music. Of which there is a great deal. Of all sorts. There is an opportunity each night to catch a performance somewhere in town of a whole range of new music. One revelation was a performance at the World Financial Center Winter Garden of a band called One Ring Zero, playing a range of original songs by Paul Auster [*The New York Trilogy*], Rick Moody [*The Ice Storm*] and Siri Hustvedt [*What I Loved*], on instruments including the claviola and the Theremin, which has now become my next instrument of choice. The original works created by this unique band provide inspiration for future collaborations with writers and poets, and stimulate the idea of proposing music programs to Writers Festivals in Sydney and beyond.

New York City Opera presented the premiere of Charles Wuorinen's opera 'Haroun and the Sea of Stories', based on Salman Rushdie's novel. I have known Wuorinen's music for a long time, but this is the first time I have had the opportunity to hear his music first hand. In an opera depicting exotic tales, his music was brilliantly coloured and orchestrated, something which rather surprised me, as his reputation is for a rather dry and academic aesthetic. It encourages me to program some of his smaller scale works, and to explore further his writing for voice.

It's been great, too, to meet a number of my colleagues who I've only previously been in email contact with - and new contacts, like the legendary Fred Sherry, cellist of the Lincoln Center Chamber Music Society, who does so much to promote young talented musicians and composers in this city. His authoritative hosting the Young Concert Artists Trust evening as part of the *Work & Process* concert at the Guggenheim Museum was a lesson in how to host such an evening. His quiet authority, his vast experience and good humoured questioning of the young composers was a perfect addition to an evening of fine chamber music, presented in a glamorous setting to a diverse audience.

Not to mention fellow harpists like June Han, who is the player composers go to when they have a new score. We exchanged scores - she gets my bundle of new Australian work, and I get an idea of what's going on in contemporary American harp music. It is encouraging to know that I have a counterpart in New York. Many harpists still have a reluctance to engage with contemporary music, and it is through the work of people like June that new music for our instrument has a future.

One of the great unexpected benefits of a fellowship like this is the luxury of having time to think - something that real life affords too little time. I was reminded of this again at an art exhibition, where a curator was talking about the Renaissance idea of 'imagining - enabling one to fashion some concept in the mind and let the spirit wander with it'. For this, I am grateful to the Churchill Trust for enabling an important time of imagining.

Meetings with eminent composers Tania Leon and Michael Daugherty were especially important in creating a dialogue with potential for future collaborations and exchanges of music and performers. Indeed, all my meetings and encounters were positive, with people always interested in my project and the potential for future meetings. All reacted positively to the news of the Churchill Trust, giving opportunities to people like me to go and have a period of intense, detailed and creative study.

A full list of concerts and meetings and people appears above, and needless to say the trip was enormously useful in allowing me contact with colleagues working in one of the world's most culturally diverse cities. There are a number of issues that struck me as pertinent to both cities:

- there is an enormous diversity of music style and performance
- there are enough venues to accommodate many styles of music, but no real coordination between them
- audience sizes seem to be pretty much the same in both cities
- performances are generally of a high to very high quality

A number of issues struck as being a particularly New York phenomenon:

- each concert was preceded or followed by a Q&A/chat session, which allowed the audience and musicians opportunities to engage in conversation about the works and performances
- support for single-composer concerts is high, with full houses consistently at Miller Theater performances
- volunteers are sought by most small organisations for assistance with things like mail outs, ushering, programs etc - something that can usefully be adopted here
- venue association is particularly important in New York - reflecting the uptown/downtown split in musical style, as well as being important in branding concerts for a particular audience in a town where competition for the entertainment market is fierce.
- Board membership is based on financial contribution - at the Miller Theater \$10,000 gets a seat at the table. While being somewhat envious of this situation, I think that small Australian performing arts companies can take inspiration from this level of commitment from the corporate world and private citizens, and encourage greater giving in sustaining a rich, varied and viable creative performing arts world.

Recommendations

This opportunity to travel and study and observe other professionals at work brought several things to my notice. In no particular order they are:

- the importance for performers such as myself [self employed, solo performing artists] to undertake regular periods of study in technique with expert teachers. This is always best done elsewhere, away from one's colleagues and regular environment.
- the importance of a series of networks for like minded performers, such as we have set up in the New Music Network in Sydney. Several performers in New York working in new music were envious of the idea of a regular dialogue with their colleagues.
- many composers and composer's agents were extremely interested in the prospect of performances in Australia - this was certainly one of my objectives in undertaking this study trip - to seek out new American music with an eye to 'matching' it with Australian music of similar quality and style. Already I have programmed two programs in The Seymour Group's 2006 series including works by Tania Leon, Mason Bates, Osvaldo Golijov, Michael Daugherty, Charles Wuorinen and Chinary Ung.

- fundraising is vital to maintaining any contemporary music ensemble or career in the US, and something which Australian small-to-medium sized companies need to embrace with more vigour and passion. I return from this trip determined to engage more with the community of passionate listeners and benefactors - someone pointed that there are two sorts of audience - our actual audience and our *potential* audience. I want to realise that potential.
- In a similar vein, I am interested in furthering the idea of increased public/private funding models - for instance, public funding bodies matching monies raised through the private sector offers incentive for small groups to fundraise in a more sustained and sophisticated manner, reducing the dependence on finite public subsidy. Organisations like ABaF [Australian Business and Arts Foundation] are already engaged in this vital area, and there is a need to further encourage small to medium sized organisations to look further afield, and to be more creative and active in seeking private support for their outstanding work.
- To encourage more exploration of new music for old instruments either through federal and state funding initiatives, or through private support.

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