

The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia

Report by: Christopher Pidcock- 2007 Churchill Fellow

To attend 'cello master-classes and intensive workshops in Germany

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Dated 24/12/08

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Introduction

In this report I will discuss my project as a 2007 Churchill fellow, which I undertook in Germany and other parts of Europe in 2008. My fellowship enabled me to work with renowned cello professors of the German cello tradition. Germany has a long tradition of producing very fine players and teachers that continues to flourish, and attract artists from all around. I now feel it is imperative for any serious cellist to experience the German cello tradition through master classes, private lessons, concerts or music festivals as an important step in building their career.

Below are some observations and conclusions relating to my research, which has greatly complemented my studies in Australia.

I would like to give my sincere thanks to the Churchill Trust for supporting me in this project and I look forward to a long lasting relationship with them in striving to discover and support excellence in Australia. I would also like to thank my cello mentor, Christian Wojtowicz for his guidance and Professor Peter Bruns for giving me so much of his time to help me refine my art during the fellowship.

Executive Summary

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Project Description

To attend master-classes and intensive workshops for cello in Germany.

Highlights

- Performance of the Elgar Cello Concerto with the Neuen Sinfonieorchester Berlin
(http://www.landesmusikakademie-berlin.de/dok_archiv/dok_13.html)
- Lessons with Prof. Peter Bruns (international soloist, Dresden Piano Trio, Prof. of Cello at the Mendelsohn Hochschule Musik Leipzig, former principal cello of the Staatskapelle Dresden)

- Acceptance into the Kronberg Cello Akademie, and having master-classes with Dutch cellist Anner Bylsma (international soloist and teacher, Baroque specialist)
- Observing and having lessons with Gavriel Lipkind (international soloist) in Utrecht, The Netherlands.
- Attending concerts in Salzburg, Berlin, Kronberg, Lausanne, and Leipzig.

Lessons and Conclusions

The German cello tradition is disciplined and very thorough in its approach to young students. This reputation is clearly exemplified by the number of emerging young artists (many in their teens) from around the world that come to Germany.

I was able to study with three professors who are now famous for teaching young students. The summer period in Germany is very exciting for a musician as it is full of festivals and many concerts, and several of their orchestra's tour then. I find it amusing that during the so called 'holiday period', musicians chose to make even more music as a holiday activity! This just goes to show how deeply felt their connection is with the arts, and how important it is to keep it alive even in the party season!

I would love to see Australians attending more concerts and operas during the summer period; not just seeing the summer as a time for sport and the beach, but also as a time for live music performance.

I am enthusiastic for schools and music festivals in Australia to make time for master-classes and invite special artists to teach students in a large room or concert hall in front of the public. The master class is often more exciting than a private lesson and more people learn from observing.

I am also committed to giving concert tours with a focus on regional communities in Australia who might otherwise miss out on regular classical music performance and education. Often I have found these are the most satisfying audiences to play for because it means so much to them.

Programme Summary/Itinerary

July 27th - August 1st, 2008; Leipzig, Germany

Professor Peter Bruns – Euro Arts Festival, Mendelssohn Leipzig Conservatory

1st - 15th August, 2008; Radolfzell, Germany

Professor Uzi Wiesel- Radolfzell Summer Akademie
Wolfgang Schnabl- Master cello maker, Bubenreuth

15th - 20th August, 2008; Salzburg, Austria

Alexander Kniazev- Russian soloist, Mozarteum
Vienna Philharmonic- Salzburg Festival

20th - 24th August, 2008; Dresden, Germany

Professor Peter Bruns- Staatskapelle Dresden
Peter Wispelwey- Dutch soloist, Dresden Frauenkirche

24th August - 27th September, 2008; Berlin; Hamburg, Germany

Professor Peter Bruns- Wilhelmshagen, Berlin
Professor Jens Peter Maintz- Hamburg Master classes
Landes Musik Akademie –Berlin
Berlin Philharmonic- Philharmonie

27th – 30th September, 2008; Munich, Leipzig Germany

Munich Philharmonic Orchestra- Munich concert house
Professor Peter Bruns- Leipzig Gewandhaus

30 September - 6th October, 2008; Kronberg, Germany

Anner Byslma- Kronberg Akademie

6th – 11th October, 2008; Utrecht, Netherlands

Gavriel Lipkind- Utrecht Conservatory of Music

11th -14th October, 2008; Gstaad, Switzerland

Maestro Alberto Lissi and Jeremy Menuhin- Menuhin Akademie

14th -18th October, 2008; Essen, Germany

Professor Christopher Richter- Essen Hochschuler

Description of Programme

Below is a list of the activities I undertook during my fellowship in greater detail. This includes giving concerts, attending master classes and workshops with master musicians, also concert attendance and observations of music lessons and rehearsals. There was not a dull moment in my fellowship and it was happily a very sunny German summer.

Late July 2008

Euro Arts Festival in Leipzig- four lessons with Professor Peter Bruns.
Solo recital in Robert and Clara Shumann's living room.
Invitation performance in the Final Gala concert.
Received Diploma certificate for participation in the festival

August 2008

Radolfzell Summer Academy- Classes commenced with Professor Uzi Wiesel.
Five lessons and two performances in Final concert in the ChristusKirche.

Day in Basel, to visit the Conservatorium and the Foundation Beyeler Art Gallery.

Cello workshop in Bubenrueth, with famous cello maker Wolfgang Shnabl.

We worked on my cello's sound development and projection possibilities. Several adjustments were made to my instrument to improve its sound, appearance, playability and to suit the change of climate.

Four days to attend concerts at the famous Salzburg Festival.
Observing workshops at the Mozarteum, Salzburg's most important music conservatorium.

Concert attendance in Salzburg included the Vienna Philharmonic in opera and recital performance, a famous Russian piano trio, and a recital given by pianist Andreas Schiff and baritone Thomas Quasthof.

Travel to Dresden for two lessons with Prof Bruns.
In these lessons a particular focus was made on daily cello exercises.
These methodologies for mastering of the instrument come from violinist Otakar Ševčík and cellists Louis V Feuillard and Julias Klengel, all cello and violin professors who taught in German conservatoriums and who mentored many successful students.

A concert attendance in Dresden included a performance by the Basel Chamber Orchestra and cellist Peter Wispelwey in the newly restored FrauKirche in the Old City.

September 2008

Arrival in Berlin for intensive workshop with Prof Bruns in former East Berlin.

Attendance and observance at the cello master course in Hamburg with cello Professor Jens Peter Maintz, who is currently Professor of cello at the Universität der Künste, Berlin.

Concert attendance: Performance of Schumann Concerto by Peter Bruns in the Leipzig Gewandhaus, Berlin Philharmonic, Beethoven's 9th Symphony - outdoor concert outside the opera house on Unter den Linden given by the Berlin Staatsoper Orchestra, Berlin AlteAkademie Orchestra, and performance by local professors at the A-Trainee Jazz club.

A six day master-course with Peter Bruns, organised by the Landesmusikakademie. After being accepted into the class to receive four lessons and to rehearse the Elgar Cello Concerto with the New Berlin Symphony Orchestra, I was further invited to perform the first two movements of the concerto with the orchestra in the final concert. Concluding my performance I was asked to give a short speech to the audience about my visit to Germany and career aspirations (half in German and half in English!)

Visit to Munich for festivals and concert attendance.

Final lessons with Prof. Bruns in Leipzig.

October 2008

Travel to Kronberg for the Cello Master classes. Auditioned and accepted into class of Anner Bylsma. Lessons focusing on the J.S Bach cello suites, attention to bow pressures, ornamentation, phrasing and the Anna Magdalena Bach's (JS Bach's second wife) manuscript of the work.

Travel to Utrecht, Holland for intensive lessons and master classes with Gavriel Lipkind at the Music University. Mr Lipkind, an international soloist, is an Israeli cellist now living in Frankfurt.

Travel to Gstadt, Switzerland; performance and lesson with Maestro Lissi and Jeremy Menuhin at the Yehudi Menuhin Academy.

Travel to Essen Germany for lesson with Professor Christopher Richter at the Hochschule of Essen.

Discussion of Programme

Firstly I would like to give a brief description of what a master-class actually is.

A master class is a lesson given to students of a particular discipline by an expert of that discipline - usually music, but also painting, drama, or any of the arts.

The difference between a normal class and a master class is typically the setup. In a master class, all the students (and often observers) watch and listen as the master takes one student at a time. The student (typically intermediate or advanced, depending on the status of the master) usually performs a single piece which they have prepared, and the master will give them advice on how to play it, often including anecdotes about the composer, demonstrations of how to play certain passages, and admonitions of common technical errors. The student is then usually expected to play the piece again, in light of the master's comments, and the student may be asked to play a passage repeatedly to attain perfection. The value of the master class setup is that all students can benefit from the master's comments on each piece. Aspiring classical musicians, and their teachers, typically consider master classes to be one of the most effective means of musical development, along with competitions, examinations, and practice. Many concert performers have given master classes, including such greats as Franz Liszt, Yehudi Menuhin, Isaac Stern, and Vladimir Horowitz. Often, a touring performer will give a master class the day before, or the day of, their performance in a particular city. Giving a master class before a concert provides both artistic stimulation for the performer and a means of obtaining a larger audience.¹

From the outset of my fellowship it became quite clear just how beneficial a master class environment can be for the growth of a young artist. Germany, being a central part of Europe in more ways than one, has established an international reputation for its summer master-class festivals for young musicians to participate in, receive tuition, and to experience concert exposure of the highest level.

It is also very beneficial to observe other talented students playing and being taught. It is crucial to observe these lessons and see how the teacher reacts to certain things in their playing. This can influence effective methods of teaching in my own studio.

The master-class with Symphony Orchestra in Berlin was highly innovative and was the highlight of the trip. The orchestra rehearsed five different cello concertos with seven young artists over four days. On the last day a concert was given to a hall full of secondary school students showcasing some of the music made during the week.

The opportunity was given to rehearse, perform and discuss technical issues and difficulties one might encounter in putting a cello concerto together with a symphony orchestra.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Master_class

Often orchestras these days are pressed for rehearsal time due to the amount of repertoire they must get through for a concert, and a soloist is lucky to have more than two rehearsals with the orchestra before the concert or recording session. Due to time constraints it is not always possible to cover the subtleties of performance in the interaction between soloist and orchestra.

The difference between this and a normal rehearsal with orchestra was that I was able to converse with the cello master (who attended each rehearsal) afterwards and discuss any issues that were not mentioned and how to fix them for the next rehearsal.

Interestingly he would say that some areas in the music needed to be clearer in articulation or in sound projection because the orchestra couldn't always follow, and other times his advice would be to tell the conductor what I wanted in the music and to 'stick to my guns'. I have come away from this experience having also learnt how to be more effective with the rehearsal time given.

It was exciting, not only for me but also for the orchestra and conductor, to play the Elgar Cello Concerto; a quintessential English piece of music that was mostly a revelation to this German ensemble!

Conclusions

Through lessons, master classes and workshops from internationally sought after pedagogues I have developed my skills in solo, chamber and orchestral cello playing. The insights I have gained into the music profession during my Fellowship will help me enormously when coming to my next important audition or concert.

I intend to disseminate the information gained during my Fellowship through the musical communities I am currently attached to. This will include performing through outreach concert programs, a regional concert tour, performing with groups such as the Revelations Ensemble and the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra, and at the Australian String Academy, in addition to many new exciting concert projects.

I plan to discuss with schools and concert halls the development of a master class series with international soloists and respected local pedagogues/performers to teach young talented artists. These master classes will be open for public viewing. Also, in my own teaching studio I plan to share with my students the daily exercises that I picked up that were specifically German. I will use them with each student as way of 'finding your voice' each day with the cello.

Recommendations

1. I would like all music enthusiasts in this country to think of the Australian summer as a time for live music performance and not just a time for sport and the beach.
2. A master class for soloists with an orchestra is a great idea, and I think we should try this approach in Australia. The participants receive invaluable expert advice which they would otherwise have to learn on their own through multiple performance experiences, which are already quite sparse for young artists in this country.
3. We should do more master classes in our teaching studios and music institutions. We must always invite international soloists who are playing with our orchestras or performing in our concert halls to give master classes during their tours. Music teachers should also organize to give master classes to their own students because this will motivate students to attain a higher standard within their class.
4. Outreach performance to nursing homes, schools, prisons, and rural areas can create new audiences and new supporters of the arts. Music can also impact people's lives through healing.
5. I would encourage Australian string teachers to adopt effective exercises for their students to gain greater dexterity and control over their instrument. Successful methodologies from German Professors of the 19th and 20th centuries have been published individually and can be purchased at specialised music shops. It is important to note that daily exercises do not always have noticeable results in the first weeks/months of application; however it is important to keep them up and never think of them as boring. It takes time and discipline to develop all the muscles and reflexes required for a fluid technique.

Photos

Below are three photographs of some the highlights in my Churchill Fellowship. The 1st photo is with Anner Bylsma at the Kronberg Akademie, the 2nd photo is with and Professor Peter Bruns in Berlin, and the 3rd photo is me playing with Daniel Inbal conducting the Neue Sinfonieorchester Berlin.

with Anner Bylsma at the Kronberg Akademie



with Professor Peter Bruns in Berlin



playing with Daniel Inbal conducting the Neue Sinfonieorchester Berlin.

