

**The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Of Australia**

Report by - Irit Silver - 2009 Churchill Fellow

To broaden my experience in orchestral leadership and study transitions from student to professional.

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## **Introduction**

This report relates to travel and study I undertook from January 2010 until May 2010. I travelled to Germany and based myself in Berlin, regarded as one of the most culturally rich cities in the world with more orchestras in this one city than the entirety of Australia. My fellowship involved meeting with musicians from Germany and around the world, including professionals and students. I also attended concerts and had private tuition. My aim from this period of time was to experience the European tradition of classical music and to explore ways in which students are able to make the transition to professional. How I went about this and where I achieved more than I could ever have imagined is discussed later in this report.

I wish to thank the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for the generosity they have shown me as well as all current and future Fellowship holders. The Fellowship is such an invaluable vehicle for people of all vocations to gain knowledge and enrich Australia in so many ways. I would also like to thank in particular Alexander Bader and Wenzel Fuchs who were so generous with their time, my colleagues at Queensland Symphony Orchestra for being supportive of my endeavours and my friends and family for their tireless support.

## **Executive Summary**

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### **Project Description**

To broaden my experience in orchestral leadership and study transitions from student to professional.

### **Highlights**

- Attending weekly concerts of the major Berlin symphony and opera orchestras and having access to world-class performances of visiting artists in Berlin such as the Vienna Philharmonic.
- Observing these orchestras work with renowned conductors
- Attending lessons with Johannes Peitz, Professor at Hannover Hochschule and teacher of the French clarinet system.
- Attending regular lessons with Alexander Bader and Wenzel Fuchs of the Berlin Philharmonic.
- Meeting professional and student players from all over the globe to talk about their experiences.

### **Conclusion**

I gained first hand experience in the way German, and in fact European orchestras function, as well as an appreciation of the importance of music education and the effect it has on the overall milieu and health of symphony orchestras. I have also become attuned to the variety of styles of performance and playing that are prevalent in Europe and the accessibility students have to them.

In observing concerts and receiving private tuition I have gained access to some of the most well regarded musicians of our time. It brought home to me how leadership is crucial to the overall outcome of performances and that to become a better leader, one has to be secure in ones own abilities and communicate this to your colleagues and audiences.

The way in which I intend to disseminate the information I gathered whilst in Germany will be through my work with Queensland Symphony Orchestra (including regional outreach programs) and more involvement at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music with teaching and mentoring.

## **PROGRAMME SUMMARY**

19/1 – 16/2. Studied in Berlin with Wenzel Fuchs and Alexander Bader of the Berlin Philharmonic. Attended numerous concerts whilst based in Berlin.

17/2 – 24/2. Worked in the Trondheim Symphony Orchestra as Sabine Meyer and Rainer Wehle became unavailable for study.

24/2 – 3/3. Attended lessons with Johannes Peitz and discussed with students the experiences they had as aspiring orchestral musicians.

I chose to spend the majority of my time in Berlin as culturally I think it is one of the most exciting and inspiring places to be. This one city has more orchestras than the entirety of Australia. Apart from music there are great innovations being made in all art forms, with a vast community of students and artists of some description. For me the Berlin Philharmonic is one of the great orchestras that perform in the world-renowned Philharmonie concert hall.

### **Concerts Attended**

Sax meets Clarinet, Berlin Philharmonic clarinet section with Clair-Obscur Saxophone quartet, works by Schumann, Glasunow, Eisler and Bernstein.

Artemis Quartet, works by Beethoven

Vienna Philharmonic with Lorin Maazel. Works by Beethoven, Debussy and Ravel.

Rundfunk Sinfonieorchester Berlin. Rafael Fruehbeck de Burgos and Rudolf Buchbinder, works by Beethoven and Stravinsky

Berlin Staatsoper – Marriage of Figaro by Mozart

Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin conducted by Jiri Belohlavek. Works by Bartok, Beethoven and Strauss.

### **Berlin Philharmonic**

Andras Schiff conductor and soloist, works by Mozart Haydn and Bach

Sir Simon Rattle with Mitsuko Uchida and Barbara Hannigan, works by Ligeti, Beethoven and Sibelius

Ton Koopman conduct works by Bach and Haydn

Bernhard Haitink with Frank Peter Zimmerman, perform works by Brahms and Bartok

Jiri Belohlavek and Pierre-Laurent Aimard, works by Janacek, Schoenberg and Brahms

## **MAIN BODY**

### **Musical Culture in Europe**

The essential aim of my time in Germany was to become a more rounded orchestral and solo musician and above all, person. The latter is particularly very important since to perform and understand music emotionally, you need to have experienced a rich musical life and use these encounters to convey your meaning and understanding of the music to your audience. So to become a more rounded musician, I worked on my craft by receiving guidance and tutelage from various clarinet players, trying to grasp the concepts they espoused, and to become a more rounded person I tried to experience artistic life as much as possible by going to a variety of museums, galleries and concerts. I feel that a well-formed appreciation of history and culture provides an insight into the epoch that music was composed in and aids in interpretation and understanding. I took up opportunities that arose to travel to other countries as I spent more than 4 months in Europe, including having the chance to work with an orchestra in Trondheim, Norway.

### **Education**

Secondly, I hoped to discover how students and aspiring musicians found the undertaking of study in Germany as the tradition of classical music is very strong with the most esteemed professors and orchestras in the world. This I hoped would show the strengths and weaknesses these institutions have and whether the ways they functioned could be implemented in Australia. I found that students in general have comparably similar chances to Australian students of winning a job. There are many more orchestras in Germany than in Australia, nevertheless the numbers attending auditions are, in a lot of cases, the same. As discussed later in this report, German institutions provide more opportunity in terms of orchestral experience.

### **Concerts, Performing**

In order to discover how the great orchestras play such a pivotal role in European culture I went to many concerts as listed earlier in this report. The concerts I attended were perhaps the most inspiring part of my Fellowship, and I found these to be the most advantageous for my unearthing of skills to be a better leader and clarinet player.

With the Berlin Philharmonic I experienced exhilaration as a concertgoer. The vitality and animation this orchestra displays every time they go on stage was thrilling. I think the most advantageous position they have is that the space they perform in is absolutely world class. The intimacy you feel in the ca.1800 seat Philharmonie is unparalleled considering it is approximately the same size as most Australian concert halls. I think this is the major problem orchestras face with the emphasis on grandeur rather than functionality, which makes playing in concert halls very difficult and tends to alienate audiences as they see and hear the orchestra only from a great distance. The performers in the Philharmonie have the opportunity to sit close to each other on

stage which leads to better communication and is what I believe to be the most important part of playing in orchestras. When watching the Berlin Philharmonic play, you notice the amount of contact every player has with the conductor, concertmaster and their respective section leaders and the way the whole group moves almost as a single entity. The stage and in fact concert hall is circular with the audience practically sitting on the stage platform, where you get the best perspective of the orchestra. The podium place seats give you the perception of being almost in the orchestra, the chance to see such conductors as Sir Simon Rattle and Bernhard Haitink and the way they communicate with the musicians.

The Artemis Quartet, performing in the Kammermusik hall in the Philharmonie complex, gave one of the most inspirational concerts I attended in my time in Germany. I have never been to a concert where I was so enthralled that the time seemed to fly by. There was a hundred per cent commitment to the music and so much risk taken that there were little imperfections but it was always the music that took centre stage. They played so well together and seemed to know intimately what the other was doing without overstated movement. It was refreshing for me to see a concert that didn't involve the clarinet as I could step away from the technical aspect and enjoy the purity of performance. I really took away from this concert that as much as we strive to play perfectly, in the end the emphasis has to be on the music, and the players should go to where the music takes them emotionally. I really think we tend to forget about this as performers and as a result performances can come across as being bland.

Unfortunately my time I had scheduled with Sabine Meyer and Rainer Wehle was cancelled, but the opportunity to travel to Norway to play with the Trondheim Symphony Orchestra came up which was a welcome inclusion. Here I had the chance to work with Krystof Penderecki, composer and conductor, and Radovan Vlatkovic as horn soloist. Penderecki and Vlatkovic are big names in the music world and are of the calibre of performers we don't often get in Brisbane. Sarah Warner Vik is an Australian bassoonist who has lived and played in Norway for almost 15 years, and I met her originally when she worked with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra 2 years ago. It was interesting to talk to her about the differences we both found between the two countries. The thing I found most intriguing was that the Trondheim Symphony Orchestra, and in fact all European orchestras, have a large variety of cultures in their ensembles and the ways in which this is advantageous to them are numerous. Australia prides itself on being a largely multi-cultural society, but our orchestras will never be as culturally diverse as others due to sheer geography. By having diversity you encourage different ideas and thoughts, in particular to do with sound, and can challenge people in their ideas. This works in particular with classical music as Europe is the birthplace of this art form and people have readily available access to great orchestras, performers and audiences from around the globe.

## **Playing Techniques**

In my endeavours to further my musical competence I studied primarily with Alexander Bader and Wenzel Fuchs in Berlin and had a short period of study with Johannes Peitz in Hannover.

Alexander Bader of the Berlin Philharmonic was my principal teacher throughout my time in Germany. With Alexander we went through varying repertoire, including orchestral excerpts and concertos. When I first had the idea to study in Germany the aspect of playing I was most interested in was the agility, ease and fluidity German players have over the whole range of the instrument. We talked about many concepts and ideas and I found Alexander to be most concise in the way he described techniques to use. The technical aspects that Alexander gave me to experiment with were to pay particular attention to the way I used my air, embouchure and fingers and in general to be much more attentive to every note. He really opened my eyes to how much detail needs to go into playing and made me realise I tended to be a bit neglectful with things such as starting notes when I wanted them and my general lack of control in the upper register. To try and overcome these inconsistencies in my playing we would often work for long periods of time on just one musical phrase and experimenting with the previously mentioned technicalities of playing. This did have the negative effect that I would feel that we would never discuss musically what the pieces were about and I would leave every lesson feeling quite demoralised. But with the benefit of hindsight I could in my personal practice sessions reassess and work out ways in which I could incorporate these very fine points into my interpretations.

I had between Alexander and Wenzel Fuchs, Principal clarinet of the Berlin Philharmonic, a very good balance of teaching and playing styles. Where Alexander was concerned with the very fine points of playing, Wenzel, who struck me as more of a natural player, was all about extremities and is a very vivacious player. He pushed me to always take risks and this I think has helped me to become a more confident player. This is something that is very important, when you see these great musicians play they have 100% self-belief that everything will work all the time, regardless of whether it does or not. In Australia, musicians in general tend to err on the side of caution with great emphasis put on playing note perfect. The most resonating point that struck a chord with me in my lessons and concerts that I attended, is that risk is a most important device and has the ability to make a performance all the more special. Having the confidence to do this is crucial and I feel that my time in Europe has helped to bring out this side in me.

## **Organisational Structures**

At this point in my fellowship I left Berlin to experience more of the institutional side of Germany rather than the performance. I did this by having lessons with the professors, attending classes and meeting with students. In Hannover, I had lessons with Johannes Peitz who is one of the few professors that are renowned for teaching French system clarinet rather than German system. Germany for clarinet players is very limited in opportunities unless you play German system. Most teachers are willing to teach French clarinet, although if you stayed permanently

with a teacher it would be expected you would make the change. This is slowly becoming less the case as universities are experiencing more and more international students attending and German orchestras are having difficulty in filling positions and are hoping to cast the net further by including other systems of playing. With Johannes, I found quite an old school approach to playing that didn't suit me well. He described in particular ways of breathing which I don't think work well for women. He had some interesting musical ideas, in particular knowing the harmony of the accompaniment and using this as a tool for musical interpretation. It was beneficial for me to be exposed to ways of learning that weren't necessarily to my taste as this helped me to cement my own ideas, convictions and interpretations.

In talking to young aspiring musicians I met, both from Australia and international countries, I learnt some of the harsh realities of studying in Europe. It tends to work quite the opposite to what happens in Australia, with professors selecting students they wish to teach before the auditions at universities have even happened. If you have not been selected for the class for which you are auditioning, you need not bother apply. This makes for a fairly tough situation for international students hoping to study, as you need to have set up lessons before the rounds of auditions for universities happen and often teachers have already chosen the people years before anyway. Despite all this once you have been selected, you are granted basically free education and will be nurtured by your professor. For the professor, esteem comes generally by your students doing well in their careers.

With auditions, people can generally only be invited to do auditions by the orchestra. Whether you get invited or not generally depends on who your teacher is. A teacher can also recommend to an orchestra that their student is not ready to do a certain audition. They also are quite ageist, the general understanding being that if you are over 35 you will no longer be invited to auditions if you have not had a job before. This I found to be quite shocking as I know of quite a few people who took up their instrument either later in life or studied a different profession before deciding that music was their true passion. What I learnt was that there is no perfect system for auditions and teaching. One has to be open to looking at how others do it and try to take the positives that one can find. I found that the way these procedures work in Europe would not translate well in the more democratic approach Australia has.

What I found to be the most effective way that Germany trains young musicians is through a kind of internship program called Praktikant. The idea is that you audition for the position of Praktikant. Again the auditions are run in the same way for jobs with invited applicants, and if successful you are given a stipend and you work in the orchestra. For example, a Praktikantin plays for generally one year in the orchestra and is given between 500 to 1000 euro a month and as most Praktikantin are still studying, they only work between 10 to 15 calls a month. Praktikant is a necessary first step before going on to win a job and is a great enhancer of orchestral experience.

The other training programs they have are called Academies. For example both the Berlin Philharmonic and Bayerischer Rundfunk run these. If successful you are contracted for 2 years, again doing fewer calls than the full time musicians and receiving a stipend, but with the academy you are also assigned a mentor/teacher from the orchestra who provides you with guidance and weekly lessons.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The differences between the arts in Australia and Germany are vast. A long history and tradition is somewhat less developed in Australia but this is by no means only problems that Australian orchestras face as in Australia, orchestras in Germany are going through some of their toughest times in terms of funding. Now is the time for orchestras to innovate through repertoire, accessibility and training. The Berlin Philharmonic, for example, has become multi media, with all their concerts broadcast on the Internet, and for a fee of 5 Euro you can watch the concert online.

The need to advance classical music into the 21<sup>st</sup> century is crucial as society becomes more technologically reliant, and we have to ask ourselves the question; how are we going to get people to come to our concerts in Australia when they can hear the Berlin Philharmonic in the comfort of their living room? This is a question I have no easy answer to, other than work harder to make the concert experience a more vital one.

The Queensland Symphony Orchestra is in a unique position; we have a lot of new members with almost half of the wind section having been appointed in the last year or so. Now is the time for us to develop as a section and as I hold a principal position in the orchestra, I feel I have the responsibility to continue to develop my skills as both a musician and leader. The expertise I received from my teachers in Germany will place me in a position to become both a stronger leader and also a more supportive colleague. Through the improvement of the QSO, students will be more willing to come to concerts and generally be more enthusiastic about orchestral music. This is the best way that the knowledge I have gained whilst on my fellowship can be disseminated - in music; the best way to learn is to listen.

In Germany, your regular concertgoer is very well educated in classical music with a vast knowledge of performers, conductors and repertoire. I heard people discussing interpretations in great depth, and attended concerts with young people who are not studying music but love attending concerts. Every concert I went to was in a full house. This is something we do not see in Australia. In general the attendees at our concerts are of an older generation and numbers are rapidly declining. I feel that education is crucial, not only for aspiring musicians, but also for the general public and in particular corporate leaders and politicians. We can create a culture of art through education starting at the youngest level and through this we can groom a generation of knowledgeable and culturally enlightened people, not just in music, but also in all the fine art forms. Perhaps classical music can be incorporated in other art forms that people are generally more exposed to than concerts, for example, exhibitions, plays and cinema.

The luxuries of world class performers, conductors and venues that Germany have access to would not be possible without substantial direction of public funds. Herein lies the real crux of the issues that Australian Orchestras face. The Arts are consistently under-funded and orchestras have been forced to become moneymaking ventures. Sadly this has started to be the case in Germany, renowned as the birthplace of classical music. More and more orchestras are facing closure in Germany due to lack of government support, a situation that has already occurred in Australia. It ends up becoming a vicious cycle where orchestras cannot afford to pay for the world-class performers that their audiences insist on, ticket sales and money spent on marketing

subsequently drop and therefore subscriptions and support wavers as the product is not of a standard that is marketable. There is a prevailing attitude in government that orchestras should be self sufficient and profit making and this will signal the beginning of the end for the arts of Western Heritage.