

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

Report by - Mark Gaydon - 2000 Churchill Fellow

The Dame Roma Mitchell Churchill Fellowship
to pursue excellence in the field of Bassoon performance
at the Indiana University School of Music USA

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INTRODUCTION

Description of Study Project

The 2000 Dame Roma Mitchell Churchill Fellowship to pursue excellence in the field of Bassoon Performance

Aims

- to further my skills and experience as a Bassoonist

- to attend Masterclasses, lessons and coachings at the Indiana University School of Music in Bloomington USA

- to pursue and complete the Artist Diploma course of study at IU.

- to discover the latest advancements in musical interpretation in the USA

- to learn from leading musicians in the USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Description of Study Project

To study Bassoon performance with Prof Kim Walker at the Indiana University School of Music in Bloomington Indiana USA. In doing so, to gain knowledge and experience in all facets of orchestral, solo and chamber music playing as preparation for the rigours of the performing arts industry in Australia.

Highlights of Study Project

- receiving bassoon lessons with leading bassoonist Prof Kim Walker (international Bassoon soloist and recording artist)
- receiving chamber music coachings from Prof Eli Eban (former Principal Clarinet - Israel Philharmonic Orchestra)
- receiving Baroque Bassoon lessons with Prof Michael McCraw
- being able to regularly attend masterclasses given by leading figures in world music including Janos Starker, Kurt Masur, Menahem Pressler, Martina Arroyo, Joseph Silverstein, Georgy Sybok, James Campbell and David Effron

I plan to disseminate the knowledge I have gained directly through my role as a private music teacher and also through performances that I give in Australia. This study period has greatly expanded my understanding of music performance issues such as stylistic interpretation and performance psychology. I will implement these “new tools” by passing them directly to my own students and to my colleagues in music.

PROGRAMME

To study Bassoon performance with Prof Kim Walker at the Indiana University School of Music in Bloomington Indiana USA. In doing so, to gain knowledge and experience in all facets of orchestral, solo and chamber music playing as preparation for the rigours of the performing arts industry in Australia.

The entire period of my project was spent in Bloomington Indiana USA as I believe that it was essential that I study with just one Bassoon teacher during this time in my development. This gave me the opportunity to absorb as much of Prof Walkers vast knowledge as possible.

MAIN BODY

The essence of my time at Indiana university in Bloomington was to prepare and present numerous solo recitals as well as to receive extensive orchestral and chamber music coachings. These included full orchestral workshops, small sectional coachings and coachings for specific chamber music combinations. At all times, highly distinguished Professors of Music with extensive knowledge and practical experience were available to provide advice and assistance.

The art of playing in an orchestra is of great importance in Bloomington and this showed in the large amount of time reserved for rehearsing orchestral concerts at the IU School of Music. Each of the 5 student orchestras rehearse for two hours, four days a week with resident conducting staff or guest conductors. This culminates in 4 concerts a semester for each orchestra.

Chamber music coachings follow a less defined semesterly structure and depend on the individual students desire to improve. I was fortunate to play in several groups with excellent work ethics and we rehearsed very regularly and gave several concert performance each semester.

Before I left Australia in January, I had definite goals and aims for the proposed study period -

- to further my skills and experience as a Bassoonist

- to attend Masterclasses, lessons and coachings at the Indiana University School of Music in Bloomington USA
- to pursue and complete the Artist Diploma course of study at IU.
- to discover the latest advancements in musical interpretation in the USA
- to learn from leading musicians in the USA

I feel that in every way I achieved these goals.

In preparation for my solo recitals, I received a weekly lesson with Prof Walker. As an international Bassoon soloist and former Principal bassoonist with the London Symphony Orchestra she was able to provide great insights into musical interpretation and performance related issues. Baroque and modern music are her particular areas of expertise.

Our lessons focused on a combination of musical interpretation and more directly bassoon related issues such technique, circular breathing, reed making and posture while playing. I now feel like I have a much broader base of knowledge in all of these areas.

Apart from her skill as a performer, Prof Walker is also a leading educator in the field of music. Her example as a teacher left a very positive impression on me and I feel that I have become a better teacher through my exposure to her. Her teaching style is energetic and creative and at all times she encourages her students to develop their own ideas and thought processes. In particular what impresses me is her ability to get the best results out of each individual student regardless of their personality or level of playing.

During my time in Bloomington there were many highlights. My exposure to great artists through masterclasses and orchestra workshops was particularly rewarding.

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CONCLUSIONS

I plan to disseminate the knowledge I have gained directly through my role as a private music teacher and also through performances that I give in Australia. This study period has greatly expanded my understanding of music performance issues such as stylistic interpretation and performance psychology. I will implement these “new tools” by passing them directly to my own students and to my colleagues in music.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are several ways that I will strive to improve the standard of musical performance in Australia. The most important aspect of this will be the way I teach and encourage young musicians.

It is essential that all students of music, regardless of age, be taught the most important lesson which is to enjoy music. Both as listeners and as performers or composers. As older students this concept should be developed into a more far reaching philosophy where music is recognised as a way of expressing emotions and feelings.

There are several other improvements that should be made in Australia to improve standards of performance and music teaching-

- more primary school students must be introduced to music at a young age and given the opportunity to learn an instrument or sing
- in primary and secondary schools more emphasis must be given to making music fun and interesting

- give school students the chance to learn jazz, blues and rock music and improvise - this will instil a greater sense of the creative processes involved with music
- there must be more youth and professional orchestra outside the capital cities to give students in rural Australia the chance to hear and play music