

Laura Alexander

Report for Ord Travel Fund (2018)

I had a fantastic time at the Academy of Ancient Music course in Brunico, Italy this summer. The tutors were fantastic, in particular Rachael Beesley who gave me individual baroque violin lessons. I loved playing chamber music with like-minded historically-informed performers; I led a Mozart quartet, played a concertante violin part in a Vivaldi concerto and a Leclair duo for two violins. I performed them at concerts through the course.

The students I played with were inspirational, both in terms of their aptitude for their instrument and their enthusiasm for early repertoire. I developed a huge amount from playing with them. The sheer diversity of countries they came from was also really interesting and culturally-enriching.

I also greatly benefited from other elements of the course that didn't involve playing: we had posture awareness sessions and source-studies classes. Both of these are invaluable long-term and I now feel I have the tools to develop them well.

Overall, it was an extremely beneficial and enjoyable time for my development into becoming a professional baroque violinist. I am hugely grateful to the Ord Travel Fund for making this possible.

Laura Alexander



15.8.18

## Ord Travel Fund Trip Report Trojan Nakade

Ravenna 21<sup>st</sup> - 29<sup>th</sup> July 2018

Thanks to the generous support of an Ord Travel Fund award from the Faculty of Music, Cambridge, I had the opportunity to audit a Riccardo Muti Italian Opera Academy conducting course and participate in a one-week Italian language course at Palazzo Malvisi, Ravenna, this summer. In terms of learning, I cannot overemphasize how worthwhile this experience turned out to be. Despite an abrupt text from British Airways the evening before my departure stating that my early morning flight to Bologna had been cancelled and that I would have to wait four full days for the next available flight, a brisk internet search concluded in me purchasing the very last seat on a flight to Venice the following morning and securing a full refund for the Bologna flight that I had planned to take. Pulling in to Ravenna train station a mere two hours later than originally scheduled, I was greeted by Alberta, my wonderful Palazzo Malvisi host, who coincidentally transpired to be the daughter of one of Luigi Nono's closest friends! Within an hour of arrival, I had collected my Auditor Pass and rehearsal booklet for the Italian Opera Academy conducting course and been seated in Teatro Alighieri auditorium with a small group of international conservatoire students to listen to Riccardo Muti introduce Verdi's *Macbeth* from the piano. What was to follow that evening, and over the course of the next seven days, must rank amongst the most inspirational experiences of my life.

The course itself was divided into répétiteur sessions and full orchestral rehearsals, with the chorus arriving later in the week. Alongside being taught the importance of dramatic analysis, and thus linguistic ability, for musical interpretation, we learnt much of the history of the Italian opera tradition, in an account handed down by its very protagonists. Witnessing first-hand the enormous armory and quality of sound that Muti could extract from Orchestra Giovanile Luigi Cherubini, in contrast to talented, but less experienced, participant conductors, served to highlight the life-long commitment to learning that is crucial to success in this career. One highlight of the week was the opportunity to observe Muti in concert, from on-stage seating, during a performance of Alfredo Catalani *Contemplation*, Pietro Mascagni *Intermezzo* from *Cavalleria Rusticana*, Ruggero Leoncavallo *Intermezzo* from *Pagliacci*, Giacomo Puccini *Intermezzo* by Manon Lescaut, Giuseppe Martucci *Notturmo* op. 70 n.1, Umberto Giordano *Intermezzo* from *Fedora* and Giuseppe Verdi *Ballabili* from *I Vespri Siciliani*, Act III. These lesser known works of the Italian symphonic tradition were a complete revelation to me and have spurred fresh interest into researching non-canon repertoire. Another particularly memorable instance was an impromptu performance of 'Tanti auguri a te' replete with candle-lit cake on the occasion of Riccardo Muti's 77<sup>th</sup> birthday. Needless to say, the maestro took the surprise with good humour and went on to reprimand the singers for their lack of legato, one of his key bugbears for the week.

The conducting course was taught largely in Italian with English spoken only during coaching sessions with two non-Italian-speaking students. It was an

enormous relief to discover that I could follow most what was being said, but the level of fluency in Italian of students from different countries has hammered home the importance of language study for this career. To this end, between Monday and Friday, my mornings were spent studying Italian at Palazzo Malvisi. From 9am to noon we concentrated on grammar and syntax, followed by one hour of conversation and communication. Throughout the week, I focused on solidifying the language skills I had achieved on the CULP B1 course last year and tying up some discrepancies of syllabus between the two centres. This set me up for the second leg of my trip where I was to audit both the Luciano Acocella Conducting Preparatory Course and Daniele Gatti Conducting Masterclass at Accademia Musicale Chigiana, Siena. Here, at Siena Iulia Language School, more intensive study at B2 level, with a greater emphasis on conversation, enabled me to improve my fluency over the following two weeks. With Italy's cheap train fares, I was determined to make the most of my free time and managed to squeeze in brief cultural side-trips to Bologna and Florence, with a few additional hours of relaxation at Colle Val D'Este. An intensive learning curve, this trip has been beneficial in helping me to prepare for both M.Mus Orchestral Conducting course conservatoire auditions and upcoming conducting projects at Cambridge in my final year. Thank you very much again for your support!