

Germany Tour 2017

The purpose of my trip to Germany was to search for a suitable teacher for me to continue my tertiary studies with after completing my Honours degree at Waikato University.

I arrived in Berlin just in time to experience the amazing celebration of New Year's Eve, where fireworks are turned into smoke from midnight to 5 in the morning. After dropping off most of my unnecessary luggage, I took a detour to visit one of my sisters for a few days in Ireland, where she lives, which was a great place to regain my energy after a 24 hour trip. After exploring the green-lands and old castles of Cork, I headed back to Berlin, to begin intensely preparing for my lessons to come. I lived in an apartment, that belonged to my father's cousin, and was placed right in the middle of Berlin, which was conveniently right next to the main train station. Travel was never an issue, as you could get anywhere in Berlin without traffic and within 20 minutes.

Some of the greatest experiences I had, outside of the lessons, involved biking around to discover what the environment was like, and even some busking in -2 degree snow! I was also fortunate enough to grab hold of a ticket to a concert performed by Sol Gabetta (cello) and Hélène Grimaud (piano) in the Berliner Philharmonie Concert hall. They played an incredible concert, with works like Debussy's Cello sonata, and Brahms's D major sonata, and a stunning 3 encores, which were 3 different movements of Prokofiev's Suite Populaire Espagnole.

Now I shall review my experiences with each teacher, and why I chose the teacher I chose, to potentially begin my masters degree with. The strategy I used to decide, was by seeing what differences they could help me portray in the contrasting works I took to them. The main pieces I had prepared were Bach's Allemande from Suite no.6, and Shostakovich's Cello Concerto 3rd movement (the cadenza). I wanted to see how much variety of colour and character that each of them could identify to me.

The first teacher I met up with was Peter Hörr, a professor at the Felix Mendelssohn University of Music and Theatre in Leipzig. I first met him at the International Akaroa Music festival at the beginning of 2016, where I had a number of lessons from him, which was

very inspiring and mind blowing at the time. After my first great impression with him, I decided to see him again. He lived in Weimar, so I went to stay at his house for one night. He gave me two lessons, which I found surprising, and quite different to my first encounter with him. I found his ideas of tempo in particular were quite strict at times, and very limiting to what I could do with the music. This approach was very similar in through both pieces I took to him, and so I wasn't as impressed with his teaching as I once was.

The second teacher I went to see was Jens Peter Maintz, whom I had only heard of by recommendation and watching a few of his public videos on youtube. He lives in Berlin, and I went to visit him at the Universität der Künste, where he teaches. I was instantly impressed with everything to say, and could only agree with his musical ideas. He told me that he loved my approaches to both the Bach and the Shostakovich, but knew exactly how to take me further along my path. He was very humble and gracious with his teaching, and was interested to hear what I had to say. He is the one teacher I have my eye on most of all, and I will be auditioning for him later in the year.

Next on the list was Wolfgang Schmidt, who was involved in the Wallace Cello Festival in 2016, where he gave master classes, concerts, and also judged the competition. The most valuable thing to get out of Schmidt was watching him demonstrate. His sound and ability to create whatever he wants whenever he wants is legendary, and so he was very inspiring. In terms of inspiring me with the reasoning of ideas, I wasn't as convinced as I was with Maintz, and although there were many things he said that I agreed with, some ideas did not feel so natural to me. He is a professor at both the Universität der Künste, as well as the Hochschule für Musik in Weimar. I will be auditioning for him as well in Weimar, as a back up and second option.

Finally, the last teacher I saw before returning home was Julian Steckel, a highly renowned soloist and a professor at the Rostock University for Music and Drama. He was a bit of a last minute choice and recommendation to visit, as the other teacher I had in mind to visit (Torleif Thedéen) never responded to any attempted contact. Julian was very energetic, and had great knowledge about sound production and the art of performance. Although I found many of his thought inspiring and useful, I once again wasn't drawn to his particular approach to the contrasting styles as I had in mind.

I received very important and valuable knowledge from each of the teachers I went to see, however the one the stuck out to me most of all, and inspired me to do the most with everything that I played was Jens Peter Maintz. I look forward to auditioning for a place in his class to potentially start my degree in September.