

Judith Clark Memorial Fellowship Report

Bradley Wood

I arrived in London on the morning of November 28th and checked-in to my hotel that was almost equidistant to each of the schools where I was auditioning. I had a few days before my first consultation lesson and I used this time to re-familiarise myself with London and the tube lines. During this time I also visited The Royal Academy, Royal College and Guildhall School for Music and Drama so I could get a feel for the atmosphere at each school.

It was important to me that I had somewhere to practise during my time in London and I quickly found out that this was going to be more expensive than I anticipated. Before I left New Zealand I had asked my contacts at the Royal Overseas League (ROSL) if I could use The Princess Alexandra Hall, located at their Central London Headquarters, to practise in and was met with an enthusiastic yes by the head of the Arts division. However, when it came to organising the specific dates and times that I wanted to use the hall, the new person I was organising it with was slow to respond and not entirely helpful. In the end I only rehearsed at ROSL a few times and was forced to search for paid practise rooms around the city. I found a few places that were decent and even had Grand Pianos. One of them was Schott Music Shop just off of Piccadilly Circus and the other was called The Music Rooms. Throughout the whole trip I was able to get a good amount of practise done in these venues but this was one area where I wished I had been slightly more organised.

My first consultation lesson was arranged last minute as the teacher, Tatiana Sarkissova from the Royal Academy, had only responded to me once I was in London. She was very busy and only had time to hear me play one piece and give a few brief comments. She said that I played well and that after my audition I should contact her again to let her know how it went. I was very encouraged by this lesson, despite its brevity. Before my lesson with her she invited me into her studio to hear the end of her previous students lesson. This was a great experience to see how overseas professors teach.

My second consultation lesson was with Lucy Parham from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. This lesson was arranged with the help of Stephen De Pledge who had helped me prepare for my auditions. Stephen and Lucy studied with the same teacher in London and have been friends for years. Of all the lessons I had during my time in London this lesson was tied for 1st. I played some Beethoven and Debussy and her comments were incredibly helpful and insightful. She had been working on the Debussy for her last concert and was so knowledgeable about the small, intricate details of the works. We also had a great rapport personally and I came away from the lesson confident that she was a definite option to study with should my audition be successful.

My last consultation lesson before my auditions started was with Charles Owen, also from Guildhall. While I found his suggestions helpful I didn't feel the same personal connection that I have with my N.Z. teachers. His specialty is Baroque and Classical music, while I am more interested in Romantic music. Still, he was positive and enthusiastic about my chances of getting into Guildhall.

My first audition was at the Royal Academy of Music on December 6th. The audition consisted of two rounds and an academic interview. The first round went fine but it was a very intimidating experience. It was held in the 450-seat Duke's Hall at the Academy and

the judging panel was sitting at the very back of the hall while I was on stage. I wasn't expecting this and it took me a while to get used to the acoustics of the large venue. They asked for the 1st Movement of my Beethoven sonata (Op.10, No.3) and one of Debussy's *Images*. They stopped me halfway through the Debussy and let me know that they were running late but that they would like to hear me in the second round where we they would get a chance to hear me for longer and then ask me some questions. The second round went really well. They asked me to play some Rachmaninoff and I felt that I couldn't have played it better. The interview went smoothly and I found the judges to be friendly and not at all intimidating. They asked a few questions about the Rachmaninoff, then about my life outside music and finally, what I wanted to accomplish with music. Afterwards I had a brief interview with an academic advisor about the course that I was wanting to pursue and was then free to leave.

One of the least ideal parts of the trip was that the Royal Northern College of Music changed my audition date relatively last minute meaning I had auditions three days in-a-row. I left my Royal Academy audition and immediately had to catch a train to Manchester where my audition was scheduled for the next morning.

My audition at the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) was also in two rounds. The first round included a quick-study piece that we were given 10 minutes to look at in the warm-up room. I didn't find the piece too difficult and felt confident going into the audition. The two judges, a man and a woman, let me choose the first piece (Debussy) before asking for Beethoven and finally the quick-study piece. They were enthusiastic about the Debussy and Beethoven and were even more pleased with the quick-study piece informing me that they had heard that particular piece so much recently and that I gave "one of the strongest performances." I thought I played quite well but I wasn't expecting that sort of comment from an audition and went into the second round full of confidence. The second round was with different judges and included a sight-reading test. The playing section went fine but I felt like the interview was a little strained. Perhaps this was all in my head as I still felt confident about how the whole audition process had gone. That night I caught the train back to London for my audition the next morning.

Guildhall's audition process is different from all of the other schools. There is only one round and they let you play snippets of music for roughly 25 minutes and then give a brief interview. Of all my auditions this was the one which I played the best in. I think that the longer playing time allowed me to relax into the situation. After I finished playing the judges were enthusiastic with one of them telling me that it was really nice to hear me play.

I had a few days break where I was able to rest after three very stressful and tiring days.

My last two consultation lessons were with teachers from the Royal College of Music. My first was with Peter Jablonski, a pianist who I admire and it went well. He had great musical ideas that improved my playing but his technical ideas were different from what I am used too.

My lesson with Norma Fisher was tied for 1st place with Lucy Parham. Not only did she have incredible musical ideas from her many years of experience but was able to instantly identify any problem I was having with technique and help correct it. She told me at the end of the lesson that she would be thrilled to teach me and that I shouldn't worry about the audition as she couldn't imagine that I wouldn't get in.

My last audition was at the Royal College and was again in two rounds. The first asked for an Etude, sight-reading test and a short interview. The second round was with the head of keyboard and a professor who informed me that Norma Fisher had been in contact and had let them know that she enjoyed working with me. I was happy and relieved that my auditions had all gone well and could do nothing but wait for the results.

I arrived back in New Zealand on the 18th of December and by the 23rd had heard back from all of the schools. I was offered a place at all of the schools at which I auditioned and three of the offers included small scholarships. After hard deliberation I have decided to study with Norma Fisher at the Royal College of Music starting in September this year.

I would like to thank the Judith Clark Charitable Trust for their support. The success of this audition trip was made possible by their generosity. New Zealand is lucky to have organisations like this that are willing to support young musicians in their attempts to realise their professional and artistic goals. I will never forget the help that this trust has provided me.