

Willkommen in Salzburg, Österreich!

“Just give it a thought? Consider this as me planting the seed of the idea in your head, if you will”.

The Decision to Apply

It took me a year to finally decide to take Dr. Spears'¹ advice to apply to the University of Miami Frost School of Music at Salzburg program, which involved a residency in Salzburg, Austria, from July 13th-August 13th 2015. This program gives both undergraduates and graduates the opportunity to meet with fellow voice and piano students from various parts of the world to study both their respective major instruments and the German language in Salzburg, Austria, the birthplace of Mozart.

I had originally concluded that I would certainly not be accepted to a program in a foreign country, let alone accumulate the funds necessary to travel. When I began the application process, I decided to do so on a whim, out of curiosity. The process included an application where I gave general information, including level of study, voice type, and performance experience along with an application fee.

I was also prompted to state whether I would be interested in being considered for scholarships. Luckily, I was awarded a \$500 scholarship initially and, through persistence, I was offered another \$250 scholarship as a result of accepted musicians' cancelling their decision to participate. I was also asked to include a letter of recommendation and a performance résumé. The

¹ Dr. Samuel Spears, Assistant Professor of Music

department of music's requirement of collecting artifacts for a sophomore portfolio aided me in putting together a performance résumé.

In addition to the application paperwork, I was required to send a recorded audition of a minimum of one opera or oratorio aria and a minimum of three contrasting art songs in two or more languages. Fortunately, Fairmont State University's department of music records every performance and allows students to access the recordings through a server. This allowed me to use past performances as audition material especially since I had been battling a bout of laryngitis at the time.

Family Reaction

Upon being accepted into the program, I was faced with the decision of whether or not I was going to fully commit to the program. I began to discuss my options with my family, who were proud but apprehensive about the program. Not only am I an only child, I had also never left the U.S., before, let alone for more than two weeks at a time. My father was initially concerned for my safety while my mother was concerned about funding. As a result of spreading the word about my endeavor, a number of family friends approached my parents, informing them of their own travels. A few of them had also been to Salzburg, Austria, and this helped my family to see the benefits of European travel. I could not be more thankful for the friends, family, and community members who were supportive of this project.

Vocal Transition

Just before the summer of the program, I had begun to notice a number of changes in my voice. Because I read music well, I was asked to sing alto from a young age. This experience led me to believe that my voice was more comfortable in its lower range. I had sung alto in choir my

entire life with the exception of two years in high school when I was asked to sing tenor. Near the beginning of 2015, however, the lower range of notes that I had held near to me began slipping away, soon to be replaced with a higher range that came to me much more easily. I began to transition to soprano at the age of twenty-one. This involved a variety of new discoveries, victories, and challenges. This vocal transition was one factor in prompting me to participate in the UM at Salzburg program because it would give me an opportunity to work with voice instructors who could give feedback and repertoire suggestions for a changing voice such as mine.

Travel

After months of preparation (and fundraising!), the day had finally come that I left home. I became incredibly apprehensive the morning of my flight. I had only been on an airplane once before, and I was nervous to leave home on my own and spend a month in a foreign country with only a slight understanding of the language. I began asking myself, “Am I capable of traveling to Europe on my own?” “Am I prepared?” I cannot help but wonder how different my life would be today if I had decided not to take that leap. What would have happened if I turned back at the last second? Would my current musical background be similar? It is difficult to say, but I know for sure that my life has been thoroughly enriched by this opportunity.

A small group of family and friends came along to see me off at the airport, but we ended up spending more time together that day than we had originally anticipated. A feather was discovered in the plane’s engine, delaying the flight for four hours because there was no mechanic on duty at the time. I missed my connecting flight to Washington, D.C. as a result and was luckily placed on a later flight to Munich, Germany that left me with just enough time to meet with the group in the Munich International Airport. I am more than thankful that a vast majority of Germans have a working knowledge of English because in order to meet up with the group (that was

conveniently placed on the opposite side of the airport), I needed to navigate the entire airport on my own. I made it to the rendezvous spot with just moments to spare, and we traveled by bus together to our new home in Salzburg, Austria!

Fellow Participants

Upon leaving home on my own, I was initially apprehensive at the thought of meeting new people. I was under the assumption that most of the students would come to Salzburg together in large groups from a small number of schools, and it would be difficult to find my place. This could not have been further from the truth. Although the vast majority of participants were from large cities in the U.S., there were also two participants from China and one from Belgium. In addition, there were students who left for Europe on their own, much like me. Nearly all of the participants came from diverse musical backgrounds from large cities and universities including University of Miami, Cleveland Institute of Music, California State Long Beach, and Chapman University. Despite the vast differences in musical and cultural backgrounds, an atmosphere of mutual support quickly emerged, where each person motivated everyone else to always put forth their best effort.

In Austria

There was little time for rest once we arrived in Salzburg! We arrived on July 13th and were required to sing one German Lied for the full faculty on July 15th. This was arranged so that the faculty will have a way to determine studio assignments. The director of the program had told us lightheartedly as we arrived that we “will certainly feel as though we’ve improved from the initial audition” because they were aware of jet lag and its potential consequences.

In addition to the initial audition, we were given two full tours of the city during our first week in Austria. The first tour was a more practical one that served to help us better orient

ourselves with the city. The second tour was a historical tour full of sight-seeing. The tours showed us the overall atmosphere of Salzburg instantly. I fell in love with the city immediately, as I was met with plenty of music and culture around every corner. Salzburg could best be described as an “active small town.” The city had a very slow paced lifestyle when compared to large U.S. cities and was incredibly clean. It was amazing to see how much pride the Austrians took in ensuring that their home remained beautiful!

German Classes and Voice Lessons

Once the initial audition was finished, we began our regular course work for the week that continued throughout the entire month. The majority of this work was a full semester course in German and voice lessons, where both served as 3 credit hour course credits. We studied as part of Salzburg College at a middle school where the top floor had been converted into a music department. We stayed in a hostel during our residency, and the school we attended was a mile away, and all of us opted to walk to class every day instead of taking a bus. The sights on the way to the school, which included a farm complete with flamingos, the Alps, and a large field with a perfect view of Hohensalzburg Castle were breathtaking!

The German class met Monday through Friday for an hour and fifteen minutes and included both a midterm and final exam. Most classes were heavily discussion based where fifty percent of the discussion was in English while the other half was in German. There was also a large amount of discussion with a partner or small group which served to sharpen our speaking skills. The units we discussed during the course were very practical as well. Examples of units included introducing oneself, buying food at a market, and discussing hobbies. This practice served us well when making our way around the city. There was also a restaurant that we had received vouchers for

lunch every weekday where we found ourselves steadily conversing with the wait staff in German more and more.

From the beginning of the program, we were all eager to attempt to speak with locals in German whenever possible. Most Austrians in the city were very appreciative that their language was being spoken and were patient with us. This was a real incentive for practicing German, and I always felt very accomplished anytime I was able to carry a full conversation with a local in only German! The beginning German course I took set me up for much success when learning a new language.

For the voice lessons, I received two per week for an hour each on Mondays and Wednesdays. My studio teacher is currently part of the vocal faculty at Cleveland Institute of Music. He worked with me on repertoire that would later become a part of my senior recital at Fairmont State University, along with a brand new German Lied (that was performed two weeks later at the midterm concert!) and helped me rethink my own vocal technique at times! There were three concerts throughout the term—a midterm concert where everyone was required to sing one German lied, a final concert that was split between two evenings because the song choices were open, and a concert that featured winners of a competition where auditions were held at the beginning of the term. This competition winner's concert was held at the Mirabell Gardens, a venue where Mozart once performed.

I also received one voice coaching a week on Thursdays. These coachings were taught by two different collaborative pianists, a faculty member of Crane School of Music and a member of the Dallas opera. These sessions focused on things not related solely to vocal technique such as performance preparation, characterization, interpretation, and diction. These lessons and coachings also gave me an insight into what other universities' music programs are like and how

they are run. I was also fortunate enough to receive a short lesson with the director of the UM at Salzburg program, a mezzo-soprano at University of Miami's vocal department.

Masterclasses

In addition to voice lessons and coachings, there were also masterclasses held nearly every afternoon. During these masterclasses, a group of participants would perform and work with an expert on technique while the rest of us served as spectators. The topics covered during each masterclasses depended on the guest of the day. Some of topics included diction, Spanish repertoire, and performance. There was also a masterclass that focused on carrying on an interview in a secondary language. A number of the sessions were based on a specific composer such as Mozart or Strauss. Every participant was given the opportunity to perform on the masterclass they thought would benefit them the most.

Domplatz

While my mornings and afternoons were filled with classes and performances, the evenings and weekends were dedicated to sight-seeing. One sight we passed nearly every day was the Domplatz, the name given to the area where St. Rupert's Cathedral is located. A day after his birth, Mozart was baptized in this cathedral. Not only were we fortunate enough to tour the inside of this gorgeous cathedral complete with Mozart's baptismal basin and five working organs, we also attended a performance of Mozart's Requiem Mass in the same cathedral where he was baptized. Many of the cathedrals in Salzburg featured areas where you could pay a small donation and light a candle in the cathedral, a donation I willingly gave every time I had the opportunity.

Birthday in Salzburg

Less than a week into our stay in Salzburg, I celebrated my twenty-second birthday. Not only was there a celebration during the German class that day (complete with cake!), a group of us spent the evening hiking up the mountain to reach Hohensalzburg Castle, which provided us with a spectacular view of the city! I ended my birthday in Salzburg with dinner in Europe's oldest known restaurant, a restaurant where Charlemagne once dined.

Salzkammergut

Our first week in Salzburg ended with a weekend trip to Salzburg's Lake District, the Salzkammergut. The morning began with a tour of Mondsee, a city bustling with shops and cafes and a tour of Skt. Gilgen, a town where Mozart's sister had once resided. We also had the opportunity to swim in the lakes of both Skt. Gilgen and Skt. Wolfgang. We ended our tour in Hallstatt, a tiny lake town well known for its homes and businesses that are built directly into the mountain, as they had begun to run out of space. A group of us had also enjoyed the trip to the Lake District so much that we made a return trip during a weekend set aside for independent travel.

Salzburg Festival

We were also in Salzburg during the Salzburg Festival, a festival dedicated to classical music and its performance. As we attended the opening ceremony (while locked in combat with one of the only rainstorms we experienced during our stay), we were fortunate enough to witness an unforgettable traditional dance that featured dancers of all ages performing traditional dances with candles and a full section dedicated to the fifty year anniversary of *The Sound of Music* in the city where it was filmed.

Jedermann

The opening performance of the Salzburg Festival every year is a play titled “Jedermann.” Not only is this play the festival’s first performance every year, it is also shown consistently throughout nearly the entire length of the festival. Another one of the only rainstorms we experienced during our stay was during an outdoor performance we attended of “Jedermann,” which was quickly moved into the Festspielhaus, the city’s opera house we later received a tour of, due to the weather. Once the curtains were raised after the house was opened to the public, the set and actors appeared on the stage as if they had not been moved at all. It was a perfectly seamless transition.

Vienna Philharmonic

Another unforgettable performance I attended was a concert performed by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. The first half of the concert was Bohuslav Martinů’s *Les Fresques de Piero della Fresca*. It was amazing to see such a polished and well known orchestra! The second half featured a choir complete with soloists for Anton Bruckner’s Mass in f minor. There was also an evening that featured soloist Christian Gerhaher and collaborative pianist Gerold Huber in a show titled Liederabend. This “evening of song” featured art songs composed by Gustav Mahler. It was an honor to witness this caliber of storytelling excellence!

Barber of Seville for Youth

In the same space where a masterclass with Christa Ludwig had been held only days earlier, we attended a performance of Rossini’s *Barber of Seville* for youth. As this was a version of the opera that was geared toward a younger audience, there were a number of characters interacting

with the children before the performance began. Upon our arrival, we were greeted with interestingly decorated and colorful stage props such as an overly large pair of scissors, a sign with plenty of lights with the name “FIGARO,” moustaches and beards that were hung from string across the sides of the stage, and a giant birdcage with a swing in the middle in the very center of the stage (where the lead female impressively sang an entire aria while swinging over twenty feet in the air!). The conductor of the orchestra was also sporting a powdered wig!

Operas for youth are often done in Europe to increase interest in classical music and opera in children. I was initially apprehensive about the idea, mostly because I had never heard of such a thing and was unsure of what I was about to experience. I was instantly hooked within the first five minutes of the performance. These operas for youth are typically abridged versions of the opera that are usually performed by participants of Young Artist Programs. Another interesting characteristic is that these performances are performed in the native language of the country. Instead of hearing song and dialogue in Italian, this was performed entirely in German for the children to fully understand what was happening. This also meant that the performers were required to learn very well-known arias in a different language than its original.

What I enjoyed most about the abridged opera was its main focus—youth interaction. Children were frequently asked to raise their hands and answer questions related to the story. In addition, the baritone who played the part of Figaro not only sang an extensive aria in German, but did this while slowly squeezing his way through the aisles of seats where children sat in the first few rows! We were also invited to attend a question and answer section with the performers, many of whom were only a few years older than most of the participants of UM at Salzburg. Although I was initially unsure about the idea of an opera meant for children, I found it to be a very rewarding and entertaining experience!

Big Screen and Live Opera

Another way that Salzburg aimed to make opera appealing to the general public was through its big screen operas. Every night of the Salzburg Festival, an opera is shown on a large screen in the middle of the square with rows and rows of chairs for the public. These performance viewings were free of charge and were usually a showing of a past performance of operas done throughout previous Salzburg Festivals. I was personally able to view Handel's *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*, Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* and *Don Giovanni*, and Verdi's *La Traviata*. We also viewed a performance of Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* that had premiered at the Salzburg Festival only days before.

We attended one live opera performance during our stay in Salzburg, a rather modern opera titled *Die Eroberung von Mexico*. This opera premiered in 1992, and the 2015 performance we viewed at the Salzburg Festival employed an interesting plethora of symbolism to tackle the ideas of both gender roles and technology and their (mostly negative) effects on society as a whole.

Hellbrunn Palace

With the end of our sojourn in Salzburg rapidly approaching, we took a tour of Hellbrunn Palace, a large palace complete with trick fountains that were scattered throughout the gardens inside and outside that would spray without warning, startling anyone unfortunate to be in their path. This palace also featured a natural stone theater where the first opera north of the Alps was performed. The theater featured many natural stone crevices and natural staircases as well. Although it was quite the hike to reach, the stone theater was well worth the trip! Just before

leaving Hellbrunn Palace, we also stopped to briefly view the gazebo featured in *The Sound of Music* (which happened to be locked!).

Vienna

One of our final weekends in Austria was set aside for independent travel, leaving us with Friday, Saturday, and Sunday to travel wherever we could manage. There were groups who had chosen to visit places such as Prague, Amsterdam, and Munich. I joined a close-knit group of friends that I had made over the month in deciding to spend one more day swimming in the lakes of the Salzkammergut on Friday; my roommate and I spent the day in Vienna on Saturday, Austria's capital.

We traveled there by train and reached Vienna by late morning. Despite being the largest city in Austria with a population over 1.5 million, it was not crowded at all, likely due to the wide streets complete with bicycle lanes. After enjoying lunch in the city, we took a tour of the Vienna opera house, where we were shown backstage, stood in the orchestra pit, and toured rooms dedicated to a variety of opera composers for a discounted student fee! After touring the opera house, we made a trip to Schloss Schönbrunn, a famous castle known for its colorful gardens with towering hedges and sculptures.

Meeting Cecelia Bartoli

One of our final nights in Salzburg, two friends and I decided to spend time outside of the Festspielhaus during a performance of the opera *Norma* in hopes of getting the opportunity to speak with my greatest operatic inspiration, mezzo-soprano Cecelia Bartoli. John Osborn, the leading tenor of the opera, had previously spoken with us at a masterclass and informed us that Cecelia would be on her way and would love to speak with us.

We were the final group to have the chance to talk with her, and the first thing she said when we started talking was, “Oh! You sound like singers! Are you all singers?” A friend of mine asked her, upon noticing that she adjusted the language she spoke depending on who she was speaking with, if there was a language she did not feel comfortable speaking. Almost instantly, her reply was “German!” Her manager was determined to make sure she did not keep her taxi waiting, and although our time spent with her was short, it was an absolute honor!

Before she left, however, I was able to ask her if she had any advice for vocalists. Her reply came with three specific pieces of advice—“Learn music that speaks to you, always work on technique, and learn how to sing in a corset!” This quickly became the highlight of my entire experience.

Fairmont State University’s Contribution

As a result of participating in UM Frost School of Music’s Salzburg program, I was given the opportunity to study music in a beautiful, inspiring place, gain information about more opportunities for the future, learn the current standard for young student performers, and develop more confidence in my own abilities overall.

None of these amazing experiences would have been possible without the support of Fairmont State University. Thanks to FSU, I received more aid in gathering financial support and keeping up with deadlines than I could have ever hoped for. FSU’s department of music also has a number of procedures set in place that helped to prepare me very well for this opportunity, including music department recitals that closely resembled the performances we participated in in Salzburg, and studio lessons that prepared me very well for these performances. I did, however, wish that I had the opportunity to take an acting class at FSU, but scheduling conflicts interfered

with my ability to do so. A course in diction would have also been very helpful, but these could not be compared to the tremendous ways that I was prepared to take on this opportunity by Fairmont State University.

If I had the opportunity to speak with someone who was in my situation, deciding whether they would like to take a leap and study music in a foreign country, I would say that, as long as it is a feasible endeavor, they should absolutely take advantage of the chance! There are a few questions that should be answered to help make the decision—“Is this right for me?” “What do I currently have now, and what do I need to do to further prepare myself?” and “What will I gain by traveling?”

If the decision is made to travel, preparation is KEY! To begin, one should always make sure to stay aware of deadlines when it comes to applications and auditions. Awareness of possible time conflicts when applying to programs is necessary especially for long term programs. For auditions, all performances should be recorded and kept for future use, as many programs accept e-mailed pre-recorded audition material in the event that a live audition is not required. If a live audition is required, practice is essential! Once accepted by a program, there is a number of logical things that must be sorted out, such as flight purchases and scheduling, obtaining a passport, medical forms, wardrobe, and any other forms the organization may ask the applicant to provide.

Another important aspect of music program participation is fundraising. Having connections in the community can be a major aid when it comes to raising the funds necessary for travel and study. In order to have connections within the community, it is essential to be involved in as many performing ensembles throughout the community that are possible. This also doubles

as more performance opportunities and chances to study under a number of instructors to gain more musical insight. I was lucky to have connections through Christ Episcopal Church and Vocal Tapestry² in Fairmont. In addition to these organizations, I was also supported by the FSU music faculty³, the President⁴ and Provost⁵ of Fairmont State University, and the Honors Program⁶ and FSU Foundation on campus, all of which I am incredibly thankful for. It is also helpful to spread the word about your endeavor as much as possible and striking a balance between patience and persistence when fundraising is extremely important. Scholarships may also be available!

A drive and desire to push for goals and stay ahead of deadlines and preparation also extends to aspects of international travel such as getting a head start on learning the primary language of the country before traveling, to aid in things such as airport navigation.

As a result of my travels, I have gained many insights and new meanings that I have taken back home with me. This includes a total outlook change, as the world now appears in an absolutely different manner after seeing an unfamiliar section of the world. I also find myself in a completely different context and am incredibly thankful the supportive environment of Fairmont, West Virginia. Because I am now aware of how much is truly “out there,” not only have I gained a brand new world view in general, but I have also gained a newfound appreciation for my home upon returning that will always remain with me.

² Vocal Tapestry, a Fairmont community choir directed by Doug Bunner

³ Fairmont State University Department of Music faculty 2014-2015

⁴ Dr. Maria Rose, President, Fairmont State University

⁵ Dr. Christina Lavorata, Provost, Fairmont State University

⁶ Dr. J. Robert Baker, director, Fairmont State University Honors program