

Rachel Mink

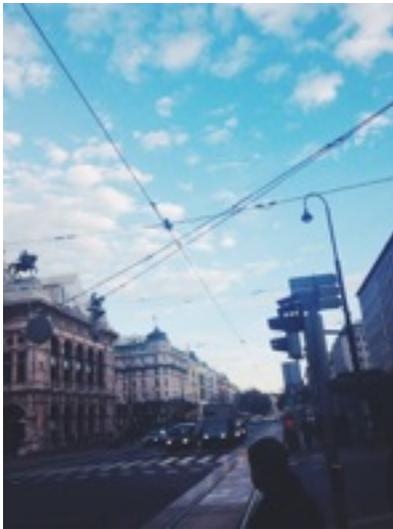
Arts Award 2015

Outcome Report

May 2015

*“Don’t only practice your art, but force your way into its secrets; art deserves that, for it and knowledge can raise man to the Divine.”*

Ludwig van Beethoven



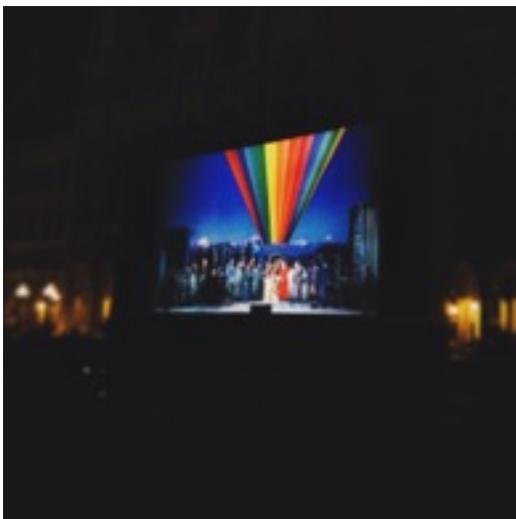
From August to December of 2014, I indeed forced my way into my art’s secrets. In May of 2014, I was awarded a grant to help fund a semester-long study in German song and language in Vienna, Austria through the IES Abroad Music program. I choose to spend four months in Vienna because it is home to an astounding number of composers (from Haydn to Mozart to Beethoven and Brahms), and maintains its heritage rich musical culture to this day. The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, The Musikverein, and the Wiener Staatsoper are just a few of the musical institutions that help make Vienna the “City of Music” – and made it the perfect place to engage in the study of performance and music history.

Professor Beasley agreed to be my faculty mentor for this project and we decided Vienna would be the best place for me to focus on music for four months. She has been my voice teacher at UVa for the past three years, and with her, I have made



significant vocal progress; I am light-years more advanced now than I was when I first came to UVa. I knew that I would return to her studio after my semester abroad, so we set a list of objectives:

- Improve my vocal technique, musical skills, stylistic interpretive abilities, and rehearsal techniques through intense practice and rigorous teaching
- Improve my performance practices through various performing opportunities throughout the semester, culminating with a 30+ minute recital, featuring a set of German lieder
- Acquire the practical skills of giving a recital, in preparation for a DMP my fourth year, including scheduling, organization, setting up and running recording equipment, writing a concert program, and preparing and presenting publicity
- Expand my repertoire, especially my German lieder repertoire
- Study the German language and gain at least a basic structural understanding of the language to improve my ability to understand the German music I sing in lessons
- Study the musical history of Vienna and use it to improve my own comprehension of the huge impact Vienna has on the music I sing today



- Understand the differences between the art and culture of Vienna and Austria as compared to the art and culture of the United States

The semester began with a three-week German intensive. It certainly was intense: class was three hours a day, five days a week with about two hours of homework each night.

The practice was incredibly helpful for the first few weeks of the semester in Vienna. Not only did the immersive study help me get around the grocery store (a surprisingly difficult task for a non-native!), but it helped my German pronunciation for the rest of the semester. In these first three weeks, I also began voice lessons with my new voice teacher, Elizabeth Bice. Elizabeth was, at first, very intimidating because her resume boasted some amazing institutions (AIMS, Munich Staatsoper, Moscow Conservatory). However, our first lesson was revelatory. She immediately focused on my breath support and connection, and we worked intensely for the first month on how to connect the voice to the breath. Even in the first week, I had a significant change in the resonance patterns of my voice, as I figured out how to better find my breath during long phrases.

The official semester started in the last week of September. I took German 101, Performance Workshop, Voice Lessons and coachings, and Composition. I had originally planned on taking a Baroque music history class, but instead, I chose to take this specific composition class with an internationally recognized composer, Gabriele Proy. I also interned with a multi-disciplinary non-profit called Salon Schräg, and helped plan events, manage promotions, and translate text. It turned out to be a fascinating semester in both academics and performance.



The Art Scholars Grant covered the cost of voice lessons for most of the semester. I ended up taking two lessons a week, which was one of the best decisions I've ever made. The

two hours a week of lessons helped me make progress, quickly and correctly, and it was incredibly helpful to see Elizabeth twice a week, as oppose to once. We focused heavily on technique, spending nearly half of each lesson warming up and vocalizing. The second half of lessons we'd spend working on repertoire, almost all in German, though we did spend some time on English and French art songs. The list of repertoire I studied is below, numbering 18 in total.

- Mein Herr Marquis, *Strauss*
- Bester Jüngling, *Mozart*
- Let the Bright Seraphim, *Händel*
- Ländliches Lied, *Schumann*
- Geheimes, *Schubert*
- Lachen und Weinen, *Schubert*
- An die Nachtigall, *Schubert*
- Der Jüngling an der Quelle, *Schubert*
- Erlafsee, *Schubert*
- Wien, du Stadt meiner Träume, *Sieczyński*
- La lune blanche luit dans les bois, *Fauré*
- En Prière, *Fauré*
- Chanson d'Amour, *Fauré*
- Euphonium Dance, *Roe*
- Weil Auf Mir, *Ives*
- The World's Highway, *Ives*
- The Heavenly Banquet, *Barber*
- St. Ita's Vision, *Barber*



With Elizabeth, I learned music very quickly. She was a demanding teacher, but a great one. She demanded excellence in all things: vocal technique, proper pronunciation, and dramatic commitment. She taught me a lot about dedication and practice, and how both are necessary to make any progress. I practiced around two hours a day and because of the intense work we did during the semester, I experienced a huge vocal transformation—my voice, now, is much bigger consistently supported, two very important things to establish for a young singer!

The Performance Workshop Class was by far the hardest thing I did all semester because it forced me out of my comfort zone. At UVa, it's easy to only perform in front of your peers once a semester, but with the Performance Workshop class, I performed every week. It was incredible practice. I was also able to collaborate with other musicians. I sang a duet with another soprano; a jazz piece with a double bassist; and a Händel aria with a trumpeter. While I couldn't manage to squeeze in a solo recital, I did perform in four concerts throughout the semester. I was also able to be a concert manager for the semester, so I practiced some administration as well as performance!

The biggest surprise of the semester was my Composition class. I ended up composing around six pieces for soprano and piano and performing them at the Composition Concert. It was a thoroughly difficult but rewarding experience: I had never composed classically before this semester, but I loved every minute of it. I decided to set Sara Teasdale poetry to music, so each song was set to text by Sara Teasdale; my favorite piece by far was called, "Winter Stars." I wrote each piece with my own voice in mind, so each piece fit my voice perfectly. It was really fun to sing songs that fit so comfortably in my range. While it was terrifying to perform this music (it was so deeply personal), it was also seriously empowering.



With the grant from Arts Scholars, I was also able to attend countless live performances throughout the semester. The frequency and accessibility of performances in Vienna is simply astounding, and I was able to see some of my favorite artists perform.

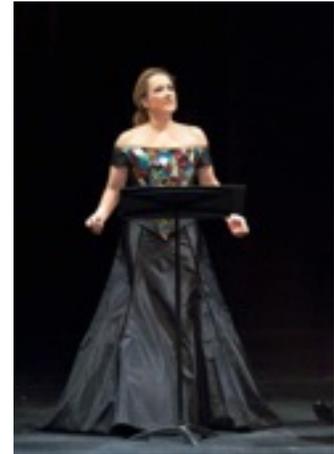
These include Juan Diego Florez at the Wiener Staatsoper as Nemorino *L'elisir D'amore*; Diana



Damrau in concert with Xavier de Maistre on harp (she performed seven encores!!); and Gustavo Dudamel conduct the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra playing *Scheherazade*. I saw an opera almost every week at the Wiener Staatsoper

(arguably the best opera

house in the world), including *La Traviata*, *L'elisir d'Amore*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Salome*, *Rusalka*, *Tosca*, *Der Fliegende Holländer*, and *La Boheme*. I also was able to see the Vienna Philharmonic perform, perhaps most notably Mahler's Fifth Symphony, conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas. In fact, I was able to experience all kinds of art, not just limited to classical music: I visited tons of museums,



jazz clubs, movie festivals, musical theaters, culinary exhibitions. The access to art—of any and every discipline—was inspiring for me, as a young artist. I found inspiration in everything; I was constantly stimulated. Vienna is a city that is simultaneously very traditional and also forward-thinking. Art is both old and new, and it creates a great environment in which there is equal emphasis on classical and contemporary art. There are very few cities in which this is still the case—and where people line up for standing room at the opera hours and hours before the doors open!

Because of this past semester of study, I am now absolutely sure that I will pursue classical voice training after graduation next year. With this grant, I was able to focus completely on making art, and that opportunity changed everything. I am so grateful for the amazing

experiences I was afforded through the Arts Scholars grant—the chance to study full time with an amazing teacher and attend countless performances and art exhibitions was the best thing that



could've ever happened to me. The study in Vienna prepared me, unknowingly, for a knock-out spring semester, in which I participated in a master class with Renee Fleming, sang a solo in the University Singers concert, and performed a Junior Recital with fellow UVa third-year, Anne-Marie Lloyd. I was also just approved for a Distinguished Major Recital in the Music Department next year! It's been a wild year, and I couldn't have done it without the Arts

Scholars grant. For that, I am truly grateful. One day, I hope to find myself back in the Vienna opera house—though this time, on the stage!

