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Miller Arts Scholars  
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## 4th Year Grant Outcome Report

### **Intent**

My award took a different direction over the past year. I had initially applied for a grant to fully fund a fourth year recital. As my time at UVA was coming to an end, I wanted to celebrate that end by performing selections of pieces I had studied over the past few years in my lessons as well as diving into jazz standards and developing some new skills like singing and playing at the same time. At the end of the fall semester, I realized that I wanted to commit to continuing to study music and hopefully play full time someday after UVA. I debated continuing with the recital or repurposing the grant over winter break, but ultimately decided the funds would be better suited towards helping me finally invest in a quality instrument and bow.

### **Faculty Mentor**

My faculty mentor is Professor Pete Spaar from the Music Department. He has been my private bass professor for all four years at UVA. He has always been a huge support to me in my music and also in life in general. He has been my mentor in more ways than one, and I am so grateful that he agreed to guide me through all of the twists and turns of the past year.

### **Overview**

The first thing I did on the journey was continue my bass lessons over the summer. I had 10 weekly lessons with Prof Spaar as planned. In those lessons, I worked on polishing Sonata in G minor by Henry Eccles, which I had first learned over the course of my second year at UVA. I also began to learn Elegy No. 1 by Giovanni Bottesini and Minuet I and II from Cello Suite No. 1 by J.S Bach. I also devoted time to listening to jazz standards and practicing singing while playing. By the end of the fall, with the music mostly learned and needing to polish, I still needed to book the space and hire an accompanist. Around that time, I decided that it would be best to switch paths for future considerations as well as some personal health complications I was dealing with at the time. I still wanted to perform something for myself and to preserve some of the original intent of the grant proposal, so I ended up performing two movements from the Eccles Sonata as a Teat Time recital.

Starting essentially from square one, I then talked with Prof Spaar about bass shops he recommended I check out. Based on his experiences and connections, we came up with the following list,

- ❖ Wolfe Instruments, LLC : The Plains, VA.
- ❖ Bob's House of Basses! : Bowie, MD
- ❖ Shank's Strings : Elizabethtown, PA
- ❖ Gollihur Music : South Harrison Township, NJ
- ❖ David Gage String Instruments : New York, NY
- ❖ Kolstein Music : Baldwin, NY and New York, NY
- ❖ Cincinnati Bass Cellar : Cincinnati, OH
- ❖ Lemur Music : San Clemente, CA

I knew that I did not have the time or funds to visit every shop on this list, so I decided to first plan just one trip to New York City, as I have friends there with whom I could stay overnight for free. I had hoped to visit both Kolstein's and David Gage, but David Gage's shop was

unfortunately not open on the weekend that I was visiting. I made an appointment at Kolstein's for a bass and bow consultation on April 1st. I figured that I had time to visit another shop closer to home, e.g. Virginia, Maryland, or Pennsylvania without staying the night before the end of April if I wanted to, but if I fell in love with a bow at Kolstein's, I would use the budget for that. Unsurprisingly, that is what ended up happening.

I looked at the basses first. When I got to the shop, they took me back out of the main showroom to the "Bass Lounge." It was a room filled with basses. They make basses in house but also sell basses from around the world. They did not have every bass listed online in their inventory available in the showroom (nothing in the 6 figures), but they still had a collection with basses from as far back as the 19th century and worth up to about \$60,000 available to play. They essentially showed me around, pulled out some basses that were closer to my price range, brought me a number of bows, and then gave me privacy and time to play anything I wanted in the room. I had made the appointment for an hour, but stayed playing for closer to two hours then stayed another hour after that talking through my actual purchase.



I started by playing the basses they had pulled out for me, then any bass in the room with sloped shoulders, playing a select few others that I knew would not fit me well, but I was intrigued to hear what they sounded like, e.g. one crafted in Paris in 1860. I am definitely on the small side compared to the average bass player, so I was looking for basses that allowed me full range of motion along the whole fingerboard and had relatively thin necks as thicker necks can cause me to overextend my left hand which causes pain with extended use, i.e. any concert week. While there are some models and replicas, almost every bass is different, so I got to feel varied combinations of those

structural parameters while also listening to the sound quality of every instrument. For each test, I started with scales and arpeggios. I then moved to a subtle lyrical part of the first movement of the Eccles Sonata that is primarily in thumb position (higher up on the fingerboard to see how the shoulder positioning felt). Then I played an excerpt from Beethoven's 9th symphony that is very loud and 'gritty' and gets down some of the lowest notes that can be played on the instrument to hear just how loud each instrument could get and especially to hear how it resonated down low, an important consideration for orchestral playing. I wasn't planning on buying any basses yet, just getting a feel for what felt best to play and what price range was realistic for the sound I'm looking for.

As for bows, I was going into this knowing that there was a possibility of me going home with a bow. After I had gone through all of the basses I wanted to try, I tried out every bow on my favorite (in Italian bass from the 70's, gorgeous, neck fit my hand perfectly! Way out of my price range...) To test these, I played some of the same repertoire as before, but I mostly focused on scales with different articulations to focus on my right hand. Like basses, almost every bow is different. I ended up finding a few with a shape that fit my hand well, then tried them out again to see what weight felt best to me tend to like heavier bows.

I did end up falling in love with a bow that came with a pleasant surprise. When I went back out to talk about purchasing it, head instrument maker, restorer, and appraiser, Barrie Kolstein, came out to talk to me. Apparently, the bow I had chosen was marked down because of an imperfection in the wood, a small chip that he pointed out to me. He said they were still selling it because there was no damage to the structural integrity of the bow, and that it was actually worth almost four times as much because it had been a donation from a musician who played for the Metropolitan Opera. They ended up sending me an official appraisal for the full value of the bow even though I got it for about \$1,500 after taxes. I still plan to drive to visit other shops over the summer, but decided that the grant would be best applied to that investment.

### Budget

Travel expenses (train tickets and meals): \$500

Bow: \$1500

Miscellaneous (summer lessons, small gift for accompanist, and music purchases): \$500

