

Final Reflection on My 2017 Summer Enrichment Experience at Midwest Young Artists Chicago Chamber Music Workshop

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This summer, I attended the Midwest Young Artists (MYA) Chicago Chamber Music Workshop, where I was placed in the top string quartet and participated in many rehearsals, a music theory course, scale classes, and a couple master classes.

Rehearsals with My Chamber Group

As MYA is primarily a chamber music workshop, most of our time during the day was spent in the rehearsal room. My chamber group rehearsed from 10 a.m. to noon, and again during the afternoon. For the first week, our main chamber music coach was Mr. Robert Bassill, a violinist on the faculty at MYA. He was at almost all of our rehearsals and really helped us improve our pieces. That first week, my string quartet learned the first two movements of the eighth string quartet of Dmitri Shostakovich, and the first movement of Beethoven's *C Minor String Quartet, Opus 18 No. 4*. I played first violin for the Beethoven piece, and the other violinist played first violin for the Shostakovich composition.

During the second week, we learned the third movement of the Shostakovich composition and the fourth movement of the Beethoven piece. We were coached by three different people that week: Robert Bassill, Martin Nocedal, and Gene Purdue. All of our coaches commented on our quartet's ability to work well together and listen to each other while playing. In particular, Mr. Purdue often congratulated us on our intonation on very difficult music.

I thoroughly enjoyed working with every person in my string quartet. It's my hope that we will keep in touch and play again sometime in the future.

Music Theory/Scale Class

Almost every morning, MYA students attended a music theory and scale class before their first rehearsal. A different member of the MYA faculty taught the scale class each day. We learned the Galamian scale method for acceleration and practiced different scales with the sole purpose of working on a specific bow stroke or rhythm.

I was placed in the advanced theory class at MYA, and we worked on identifying intervals, scale degrees, and the four types of triads: major, minor, augmented, and diminished. The theory class at MYA was definitely easier than the one I was enrolled in at the Lamont Summer Music Academy, which I also attended this summer.

Ravinia Concert

I got the opportunity to attend a Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO) concert at Ravinia while at MYA. The symphony accompanied Violinist Joshua Bell on Max Bruch's *Scottish*

Fantasy and played excerpts from Sergei Prokofiev's ballet, *Romeo and Juliet*. It was an amazing concert! Every person in the orchestra is a virtuoso musician, and it was incredible to watch the string section play, because all their bows went in the same direction—all the time! That is not something you see very often in a youth or college orchestra. At intermission, my father took me backstage where we met one of his friends from the CSO, and he took us to meet Joshua Bell! When he came to talk to me, I was speechless! I took a picture with him and got his autograph.

Performances

While at MYA, I participated in a total of four performances; in only 12 days, that's quite a few concerts!

On Tuesdays, all four chamber groups performed at the Chicago Botanic Gardens. It was a beautiful place to play and walk around afterwards. Each Saturday, there was a chamber music soirée at which all the chamber groups showcased what they had been working on during the past week. The first Saturday, my quartet played the first and second movements of the Shostakovich composition, and, on the final Saturday, we played all three movements of that piece and the fourth movement of the Beethoven arrangement.

In addition to these formal performances, after a day full of rehearsals, we would come together and listen to what each group had worked on in a performance class. These performances were held daily, unless a master class was scheduled. Playing in these performance classes taught me what it feels like to be slightly unprepared. We played for each other on the very first day that we arrived at MYA, and it was a bit nerve-wracking. Each day, it got easier, but my quartet still had our fair share of problems during our first few performances. However, these performance classes were good practice for what could happen during an actual performance. The classes taught us how to make a smooth recovery from mistakes and get through the music.

Master Classes

As an MYA student, I got the chance to perform in a chamber music master class with Lincoln Trio Members Desiree Ruhstrat and David Cunliffe. My string quartet played well for both classes, and Ms. Ruhstrat and Mr. Cunliffe gave us some helpful tips on how to make our pieces even better. We played the first and second movements of the Shostakovich composition for Ms. Ruhstrat, and she helped us bring out melodic lines and add more character to the music. Mr. Cunliffe heard the third movement of the Shostakovich piece, and he worked with us on increasing the tempo and making it sound as creepy as possible, as it's a dance of the dead. In the middle of the second week, the chamber groups played for members of the Steans Institute at Ravinia, highly qualified, college-level musicians from the most elite music conservatories in the country who travel to Chicago to study with CSO members and other amazing faculty. They aided us in highlighting important phrases in the music and in listening to each other more.

Lessons

One day during the first week, I had a lesson with Ms. Kirby Kay, a violinist on the MYA faculty. During the second week, I had a lesson with Violist Kyle Armbrust, who is energetic

and worked with me on relaxing while playing. A lot of Mr. Armbrust's points have already influenced my playing, and I will continue to work on being less tense while playing.

Fun with Cards!

When we were not in rehearsals, performance classes, or practicing, MYA students played cards. As I was only with my string quartet during rehearsals, playing cards with the rest of the MYA musicians gave me the opportunity to meet everyone and get to know them a bit. We would play cards during our lunch break and any other free time we had. Almost everyone I met at MYA was truly happy to be there and enjoyed spending time with other talented musicians. I think that most of the people I met while at MYA will keep in touch and maybe even meet again in the future.

Conclusion

I thoroughly enjoyed the two weeks I spent at the Midwest Young Artists Chicago Chamber Music Workshop. I met some amazing musicians and had the opportunity to study with a variety of coaches. It was especially nice to be able to perform with other young musicians of superior ability. While at MYA, I was introduced to music by Shostakovich, a modern composer whose music is very different than that of Beethoven, Mozart, and Bach. And the MYA string quartet I was in really enjoyed playing together.

After having daily string quartet rehearsals and frequent performances at MYA, I hope to play chamber music this year in Carbondale, because I really enjoyed playing in a small group. During the two weeks I spent at MYA, I became a better musician and learned new rehearsal tactics. Also, I found that casual performances help one to feel more comfortable about upcoming concerts. Moreover, since I've been home, I have made a better effort to practice both violin and piano, and have even used practice methods that I learned during the MYA scale class.

I am so glad that, with the support of the Garwin Family Foundation, I had the chance to attend the Midwest Young Artists Chicago Chamber Music Workshop.