

The Stuart R. Givens Memorial Fellowship

Fellowship Experience Proposal

Ashley Donaldson

Over the summer of 2009, the London Symphony Orchestra will be playing host to a multitude of world-class conductors. Michael Tilson Thomas- principal conductor of the San Francisco Symphony, Daniel Harding- principal guest conductor of the LSO, and Bernard Haitink- principal conductor of the Chicago Symphony will be sharing the LSO with Davis and its Principal Conductor, Valery Gergiev. In the world of classical music, these men are the cream of the crop. With the help of the Givens Fellowship, I would stay in London from May 22 (this would give me two days to settle in before the first performance) to July 22. During this time, I will attend all London Symphony concerts, open rehearsals, master classes, and workshops as well as arrange meetings with and observing the aforementioned conductors. American Tilson Thomas, Dutchman Haitink, Russian Gergiev, and Englishmen Harding and Davis, through their individual styles, will each surely produce their own unique sounds even though they are all working with the same ensemble. How they go about doing so will be an interesting observation of which to take note.

With the goal of becoming a professional orchestral conductor, spending a summer immersed in the heart of the classical music world will be beyond beneficial to me. By observing multiple world-renowned conductors working with the same world-class ensemble, I will be better able to formulate my own personal style.

One concert will include Brahms' Third Symphony, which I recently had the opportunity to play with the Bowling Green Philharmonia. Another will feature Stravinsky's Firebird Suite, which the Philharmonia played earlier this year. Although I did not perform at this particular

performance, I did sit in on several rehearsals and audition for the orchestra with excerpts from this piece. While listening to the London Symphony play these two major works, I will be able to associate my personal performing experience with the rehearsal and performance techniques utilized by the conductor in a professional setting.

There are several additional events planned at the LSO's home concert hall in which area schoolchildren will be invited to participate. As a music education major, watching the interaction between young musicians working with professionals will also be interesting to witness. As the classical music rapidly diminishes in popularity among school-age people, it is important to reach out to their generation so they realize that "old" or "classical" is not necessarily a bad or boring thing.

As I have learned from previous experience, the London Symphony Orchestra is very good about responding to inquiries and being sure that all emails are forwarded to the right department or individual. I see no doubt about organizing a meeting with each maestro. Perhaps my enthusiasm and curiosity will stick in their heads and allow me to take a step towards my goal of following in their footsteps and becoming an orchestral conductor. I have found an agency from which I would be able to rent an apartment (cheapest housing) in a safe and easily accessible location. A transportation pass can be purchased at Tube station in the city.

It should be clear by this point that music is my life's passion. Seeing how the leaders of my chosen field go about keeping classical music entertaining and fresh in the eyes of today's society would be priceless. Through observing the process it takes each of 5 different conductors to form the final product, I will learn both how to work with a high-level group and ways to incorporate what I see and hear into my own personal technique. I would be honored to receive the help of the Givens Memorial Fellowship to aide me in my quest.

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Personal Statement

Ashley Donaldson

“This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before.” These are the words of composer and conductor, Leonard Bernstein. Maestro Bernstein would have been proud to know that the orchestra of which he was once principal conductor, the New York Philharmonic, followed through with his words decades later. In February of 2008, the orchestra, in a diplomatic attempt to get the country to abandon its nuclear weapons, visited North Korea. In a world that has turned to violence as its main means of solving problems, we must emphasize the importance of music as a mediator. It is, after all, the “international language of mankind,” as Longfellow put it. Classical music is one of the most important dialects of this language, and it is my goal to see it continue to flourish- even in today’s fast-paced society.

For as long as I can remember, both music and art have shared the highest pedestal in my world. It was not until the end of my high school experience that I forced myself to decide which path to take as college swiftly approached. I spent the majority of the year preparing a portfolio to go to art school. I worked with a local professor for 7 months honing my skills, eventually enabling me to be accepted to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. I was ready to plunge myself into the world of studio art until 2 months before graduation when my mind was changed instantly. I attended a New York Philharmonic concert under the baton of Sir Colin Davis, 81-year-old president of the London Symphony Orchestra. During the entirety of the concert, I was utterly enthralled in watching him. I left the concert on Cloud 9 knowing that I wanted to become a conductor.

After graduation, I read on the LSO's website that Sir Colin would be conducting a concert that I wished to attend in London in December. Arrangements to meet him after the New York concert had fallen through at the last minute, so this was my second chance. I crossed my fingers and sent an email to the symphony's public relations department explaining how Davis had inspired me to pursue a music career. They forwarded it to his personal assistant who printed it out to give him the next day. She informed me that he would be happy to meet me. I arranged the trip on my own, booking tickets for 3 concerts with Sir Colin. It just so happened that the open rehearsal was for the concert I most wanted to see. It was incredibly interesting to watch Davis tweak the finest of details and see and hear them come through at the evening performance. Observing the rehearsal process and witnessing the final outcome of the concert is a rewarding experience and one of the best ways to learn how to function on the podium.

With the help of the Stuart R. Givens Memorial Fellowship, I would be able to observe several world-renowned conductors work with the London Symphony Orchestra. Through observation, I will be able to see what techniques are most effective with a group of such a high level of expertise. Being able to watching the living leaders of my future field at their best will provide me with knowledge to last a lifetime.

At current exchange rates (\$1 = £1.44), these are the approximated costs of the trip:

round-trip plane ticket costs:	\$800
10 weeks rent of a furnished one-room flat:	\$3,500
Approximate cost of London transit passes:	\$250
concert tickets:	\$200
Food, additional daily costs, and emergency fund :	\$1250
Total:	\$6000