

## Stuart R. Givens Memorial Fellowship Application

Tess Marjanovic

One of my first courses as a freshman in college was a musical survey of sub-Saharan Africa. I was dreading it; I had no knowledge of anything related to the continent. It was a fear of the unknown, but that was also why I selected the course in the first place. I came to college to learn. But, that trepidation was also a lack of understanding about how this material from a distant land could impact my relationship with music. I began the course with the mindset of, “What role does African music *really* have on my career as a music educator?” I think my preconceptions are common-- African music seems so different from the styles of music I felt I would be teaching and those that we learn about in most classes at BGSU. As we moved further into the semester however, I became more immersed in the rich history, culture, and music of sub-Saharan Africa. The distance that I had imagined as so broad grew smaller, and I developed a stronger relationship with the musical cultures, people, and world views of African music makers. I was especially interested in the unit on South African music, where the history of music in South Africa serves as an important political tool and is a vital aspect of everyday life. Not only was I learning about a new country and its people, I learned some uncomfortable truths about myself; that I carry bias about the African culture, both as a person and as an educator. This realization inspired me to open my mind more fully, and it sparked a keen desire to seek a shared humanity through the language of music.

I consider myself an average white female from Cleveland, Ohio. I was raised in a hard-working, middle class family that was very tight knit. My grandfather especially is a huge inspiration to me. He is a pioneer of macromolecular science; a leader in the field of spectroscopy and a Professor Emeritus of Case Western Reserve University. He was the first person in from his town of rural Nebraska to go to college. Through his own dedication and hard work, he broke barriers and changed the aspirations of other youth growing up in the area. He

inspired his family and community to be educated and to fuel their passions. To this day, as an 86-year-old, he still asserts, “If you love what you do, you’ll never work a day in your life.”

During my school aged years, my passion for learning grew with every step I would take. Teachers fueled these passions with thoughtful conversations, hands-on activities, and information that would leave me in awe. All of my educators have helped mold me into the person I am today-- and are the reason for my confidence, intellect, and openness with my peers. My education has helped me think abstractly, in ways I never thought I could, and has aided me in building independent ideas and opinions.

One educational experience during my high school years, however, truly changed my outlook on the world. In the summer of 2014, I traveled with the Cleveland Youth Wind Symphony on a European concert tour. For our first concert, the Wind Symphony performed alongside a wind ensemble from Luxemburg. A saxophonist from this ensemble sat right next to me. We could not communicate very well due to the language barrier. Before we played, we just smiled awkwardly at each other. But that all changed once the music began. Once band director, Dr. Ciepluch, gave the first downbeat of that combined piece, we communicated for the rest of that rehearsal, yet; not one word was ever spoken between us. As we were playing, the barriers between us seemed to melt away. This was the moment I realized the power of music! It is something that bridges cultures, language, emotion, and people. It bridges and bonds people that are separated by thousands of miles, and by cultural and language impediments; they can all play and listen to the same piece of music. This experience fostered a passion in me to help people connect with those who are different through music. After performing in Europe, the choice became simple. I could not pursue anything but music.

I am studying at Bowling Green State University, like many of my peers, to learn and develop the tools that can help me become the most prepared and effective in my profession and

life after graduation. I have already completed so many beneficial courses during my academic career here and have participated in a variety of extra-curricular teaching opportunities in the classroom. But what I have also learned is that, in order to be an effective professional, I must commit to a lifetime of continued learning! My interest in sub-Saharan music meant it was time to take a deeper dive and explore where that interest would take me, and that would likely be the first of many journeys. After taking this course, I knew that I needed to embrace new experiences outside of the classroom. I wanted to dive more into learning about the musical characteristics of this culture: improvisation, the relationship of music to everyday life, learning music in the oral tradition, and utilizing musical ostinatos to formulate interweaving melodic lines. My learning about these African music techniques would help me become a person with a stronger understanding of the value of different music cultures, and someone who knows how to listen to both music and other people. I can become even a small bridge that leads to more well-rounded, open-minded, and globally-cognizant musicians.

Gilbert K. Chesterton wrote; “The traveler sees what he sees, the tourist sees what he has come to see.” It’s easy for someone to get immersed in what they *think* a culture is about rather than opening their eyes to the realities happening there. That is the foundational thought behind why I want to not just learn through instruction but learn *from experience* about this culture and the music being created there. I want to move beyond the single storyline of African poverty and despair and look at the nuance of life on the continent. I want to explore a new place and immerse myself in this culture to grow as an individual.

After this realization, I brainstormed ways for me to have this experience. While seemingly ideal, flying and “plopping” myself in South Africa to experience this culture on my own would be unsafe and ineffective. Although I have been to Europe, I have never truly experienced what it is like to be completely immersed in a totally different culture than my own--

and I think it would be too overwhelming to fully absorb. So, I strove to find a program that would offer me connections and some structure as well as the freedom to explore opportunities on my own. I applied to a program with Performing Arts Abroad, a non-profit organization that provides students with international performing arts opportunities. I have been accepted into their “Music Education Program in South Africa.” This entails me traveling to White River, South Africa and spending four weeks teaching at the Casterbridge Music Development Academy and learning from high school aged students studying music there.

On the weekends, I plan to take my own weekend trips to major cities in South Africa such as Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Cape Town. I hope to get the opportunity to attend concerts, participate in jam sessions, experience new foods, interact with members of the community, and open my mind and truly experience the people and culture of these cities and how they fit into the overall society of Africa.

It is surprising and almost sad that Americans have a such misconceived and little knowledge about Africa. Stories seem to focus on the AIDS epidemic and the plight of those facing overwhelming poverty. Before that eye-opening course during my freshman year of college, I would have described myself as someone who was also naïve about the richness of the African culture. Although there are areas in Africa that do in fact suffer from poverty or disease, I know now that no one is defined by their social conditions, and in fact, music-making can be an important step towards negotiating these travails towards a better life. I do have a sliver of knowledge about South Africa; but I am really hungry for more.

As a music educator, I cannot change the entire education system to make it so that African culture (or any other culture) is studied more in our schools. However, I can make it my mission to incorporate other cultures in the lessons I present to my students, I can be that voice of change for those in my classroom, urging them to find their OWN South Africa. By

discovering South Africa, I can lift up the concept that exploring other cultures enriches us all, both in and out of the classroom. I expect this experience to impact my pedagogy, repertoire choices, and classroom management in my future classroom- I will be a conduit – leaving part of myself with the people I interact with in the amazing land of South Africa and will bring home new experiences to share with students and parents here. In order to do that, I need to open my own mind and experience this culture for myself. I appreciate your consideration of my application for the Stuart R. Givens Memorial Fellowship, which would offset travel, lodging and living expenses during my four weeks in South Africa as well as provide funding for me to explore the cities of Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Pretoria.

I want to learn more about this culture so that I can address my own personal biases and see that the unknown is not dangerous, is not lesser than, and there are complex musical worlds that belong to other people.

## **Givens Fellowship Budget**

- **Airfare: \$2,090**
  - Cleveland Hopkins Airport to Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport: \$1,045
  - Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport to Cleveland Hopkins Airport: \$1,045
- **Performing Arts Abroad Program Cost (Includes Housing and Breakfast): \$2,595**
- **Work or Study South African Visitor Visa: \$40**
- **Meals: \$502.80**
  - Average Cost of Meals for one day: R242 = \$16.76 x 30 days = \$502.80
- **Travel Insurance: \$250**
- **Miscellaneous: \$400**
  - Train Tickets for traveling to and from Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Pretoria
  - Tickets to concerts in these cities
  - Lodging for these weekend excursions

***Total: \$5,877.80***

Travel Dates: May 31- June 31 2019