

## Royal Holloway & Santander Travel Award

For one week in the summer I had the brilliant opportunity to attend the X Padarewski Piano Academy, hosted in Bydgoszcz Music Academy (Bydgoszcz, Poland). The international Academy, running this year from 5-12 August 2018 is a one week masterclass and performance programme that enabled young pianists studying a concerto to receive lessons from top piano professors in the world, and top students would be selected to perform in the gala concert in a beautiful church in Poland accompanied by Maestro Przemysław Fiugajski accompanied by a full professional orchestra, Toruń Symphony Orchestra at the weekend.

Entering into university I wanted to hone my skill as a classical pianist and increase my exposure to performance, and to also try learning a full piano concerto, a considerably large endeavour as I was mostly used to solo performances in more intimate settings. For many pianists, learning and performing a concerto is no basic undertaking, which I was only enlightened to as the week unfolded. I began learning my first piano concerto from the start of the academic year, and when this masterclass and performance opportunity for piano concertos came up in the music department newsletter, I knew that it was an incredible chance I would not want to miss. My only consideration at that point was that the cost of attending the programme as well as flights were very expensive and having already been accepted into the programme I would be disheartened if cost was the reason why I would not be able to attend. Thankfully, just one week later I was told my application was successful and I would be a recipient of the Travel Award!

Nestled in the northern part of Poland on the Brda and Vistula rivers resides the city of Bydgoszcz. Like any smaller European city little flower markets and dessert cafes line the main streets, cathedrals and smaller churches hosting weekly (if not daily) lunchtime and free classical music concerts. The birthplace of Frédéric Chopin, one of my personal heroes, virtuoso pianist and revolutionary in piano and orchestral music in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is no surprise that much of the capitol Warsaw, and in fact the rest of the country is very much haunted by the ghost of Chopin, his influence with hints of his music almost perceivable at every turn. One of the masterclass professors from Moscow commented that even the average cab driver in the city was so well versed with Chopin that he could engage in a well-informed discussion of the performances from the Chopin International Competition Finals, whereas this was nearly unthinkable for any other city or country. In Bydgoszcz, the music conservatory holds a considerably large presence for such a rather small institution, with students and faculty holding world-class performances regularly throughout the week as part of the city's extremely rich cultural offerings.

My individual goal entering that week was to expose and immerse myself in the world of top-level young classical pianists from many countries, and to attain a higher level of musical sensitivity when it came to piano performance especially when collaborating with an orchestra as a soloist. Day by day during the academy I found myself challenged in massive ways, pianistically as well as psychologically and even emotionally, and as the final performance day was drawing nearer the expectations of the professors and organisers were only getting higher and more was demanded from me. Although in the beginning I didn't think I would be able to fit in or ever match the standard of the other participants, all of whom were full-time piano conservatory students or professionals—some even child prodigies identified from a young age and specialising in piano studies since they were about 7-10 years old—I soon found that our common love and passion for piano and music was enough to bridge those gaps and differences in education, background and nationality.

This Academy allowed me to learn from renowned piano professors from Texas, USA as well as the prestigious Tchaikovsky Institute Moscow State Conservatory, Russia. Their engagement and knowledge of music was highly inspiring, and I was so thankful to be able to learn from them as I felt they really helped me to tidy up bits of my concerto that I was technically less comfortable with and

brought an enhanced dimension of consciousness and aural awareness to my music, truly transforming my performance. They also imparted timeless piano playing techniques that I have since newly incorporated into my regular practice. I felt this incredible (safe-to-say) life-changing week opened my doors to piano performance as a career in the future and I am really glad the university was able to support my endeavour through the Travel Award.



Ke Lei Chloe Ang (2018)