

Dear Friends,

I hope everything is going well for you! I'm very happy to be back to share some updates of my life.

When quarantine started, everyone's life became more or less different. For me, since mid-March, everything around just suddenly stopped - all the non-essential shops, restaurants, schools and colleges were closed in a blink. It meant that all classes and individual lessons were stopped, too; and all concerts were cancelled... But after all, we have to thank the wise and quick reaction from the government, so we were able to lift the quarantine in June.

Mozarteum was definitely one of the first colleges that reopened (on 18 May). At first, it was with a lot of strict restrictions, but quite soon after, seeing the positive situation around in Salzburg, our college relaxed the restrictions more. We could book rooms quite easily and have even resumed class concerts since June. Our lives since then have gradually getting back to normal.

In the end, I managed to learn a few pieces. At the end of June, I realised that the Brahms Competition would go forward as planned at the beginning of September. And I realised that I was already working on some of the required music. I decided to apply for it.

Luckily, Thomas's Sommeracademie in August was still happening. It always takes place in Bad Leonfelden, which is a small town to the north of Linz, near the borderline between Austria and Czech Republic. Almost the whole of Thomas's class went, plus a few more people from in and around Austria. It was a perfect opportunity to work intensively with Thomas for those of us who were attending the competition, and a perfect 10-day holiday resort for all of us. (At least for me, it had been too long since I could escape from Salzburg!!) The beautiful colours of buildings in the town centre; the excursion to the tower on top of a mountain, where you could see the land of Czech Republic; the smell of horse shit on the way down from the mountain; the every-day exercise - up and down the hills to get to the music school for lessons; and, most importantly, meeting a bunch of very lovely people; ALL of this revived the dying parts inside of me which were making me depressed a lot of the time when I was trapped in my little room in Salzburg. I had a really great time at Bad Leonfelden. And by the way, I recommend Thomas's summer school to everyone - you will learn and enjoy a lot!

By 6th September, all rounds of the Brahms competition were finished. Everyone played so well, I was just fortunate to get through to the semi-final round. The comments from the juries were very helpful as it was really something I needed to be told - reminding me about all the very basic stuff, such as playing with a good solid sound while not forced, having a good secure intonation, giving meanings to each interval between notes (not saying that when I play I should be that detailed, but at least I have to be aware of it), and I have to be more thoughtful about my usage of vibrato, etc. I've learnt a lot.

The competition was held in Pörtschach. You can tell it is a holiday place from the first look. Brahms took his summer holidays there for three years in a run (1877-1879)! You don't have to doubt it - the huge lake Wörthersee, surrounding the side of it, is just so beautiful and

inspiring. The D major violin concerto and the G major violin sonata were both composed there, among other compositions.

The restaurants in Pörtlach were superb too! I had the most amazing steak for years, and it was not too expensive. I could totally revisit the town just for that.

Now I am feeling quite peaceful sitting on the train back to Salzburg while occasionally looking out of the window to see a mysterious foggy mountain view. I think I'm ready to start a new chapter of my life and learn some new pieces! Looking forward to everything whatever is coming towards me. :)

Yue Yu

September 2020