

## **Malavika Gopal NZFGW Fellow 2007**

In 2007, I completed a Post Graduate Diploma at the New England Conservatory and am now pursuing a Masters degree with world renowned violinist and teacher, Miriam Fried. I have had numerous invaluable experiences here and have learned so much musically, professionally and personally - all of which I believe have been essential to my development as an artist.

In recent years, it seems the conservatory has attracted a great deal of distinguished faculty from all over the world thus, circulating some exceptional students and it has been most inspiring to watch and sometimes work with these outstanding musicians.

In my first year at the conservatory, I was selected to play in the schools' top ensemble, The Chamber Orchestra – a string group consisting of 15 players who perform without a conductor. This type of ensemble was a first-time experience for me and as it turned out for the first concert, I was to be the concertmaster and the soloist for one piece! I was totally thrilled but that feeling was slightly tainted by an anxiety as I had never before led *and* directed a group larger than 5 people! As is always the case, there was no sense in worrying; the first rehearsal was exhilarating – my colleagues were patient and supportive but also incredibly enthusiastic and shared musical ideas and a level of playing that was astounding.

Later in the year, a superb violist from Portugal (whom I had been working in a quartet with) and I entered a duo competition which we won and got the chance to play together as soloists with the Chamber Orchestra again. We played Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante for Violin and Viola and it was definitely the highlight of my year! I had waited many years to play what happened to be my favourite piece with an orchestra and I finally had the chance to with a brilliant ensemble in NEC's stunning Jordon Hall. A snippet from the concert can now be viewed on YouTube.

As the year wrapped up, there was another competition at the school for the temporary loan of some fine instruments. I was placed second in that competition and received a beautiful 19<sup>th</sup> century violin made by the highly reputed French Luthier, J.B. Vuillaume. Instruments of his have been greatly sought after and played by some of the greatest string players to have ever lived. The loan period extended for one year and I felt most privileged to be given the opportunity to play an instrument with such a warm, rich and big sound – three qualities which are hard to find in an instrument these days. As you can imagine, one year didn't feel nearly long enough and my numerous attempts to stretch the days longer than 24 hours not surprisingly, failed!

On return of the loaned violin and completion of my post graduate diploma, I decided to take the year off. The teacher I really wished to study with had a full studio and I knew I could only work with her the following year if accepted into her class. I used the year to study intensively and privately with another amazing teacher, Vera Rubin, whom I had in fact studied with in New Zealand while she was playing with the NZSO. (She has since moved over to Boston to complete

her PHD at Boston University). I worked intensively with her and also played in the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra for the year. In December, I was invited to participate in The Sangat Chamber Music Festival, which takes place annually in Mumbai, India. I was absolutely thrilled to discover I would be collaborating with internationally acclaimed and influential chamber musicians and soloists. It was a most exciting experience and one that I hope to repeat in the near future.

I have been very pleased about my decision not to accept the place offered to me at Yale University and instead to continue my studies here at the New England Conservatory. Being back at school now and pursuing a Masters degree is keeping me busier than ever before! I am taking a variety of different classes in music theory and history as well as playing a huge amount. I have also become involved in a genre of music I had previously never explored - The Contemporary Improvisation Ensemble is for musicians majoring in classical music. So far, I have found it to be most fascinating; it has revealed to me a side of my musicianship I never thought I possessed – the ability to improvise! This is an area in which many classical musicians feel they are less competent, but my colleagues and I are discovering that with the musical knowledge we already have, and a few extra tips and pointers, we can improvise much more freely than we thought. And sometimes we even sound good! It is a skill I have always wanted to develop and at the end of the semester, my peers and I will put together what we already knew and what we have learned to give our first ever, improvised public performance! Very exciting!!

In addition to the CI Ensemble, I have joined another ensemble with a slightly different focus. It is a brand new group that has just received official support from the mayor of Boston, called The Discovery Ensemble. Its aim is to start outreach education work in an area of the city that doesn't have access to classical music, with the hope of awakening people to its incredible power. Each concert will be preceded by a week of workshops in community centers where every member of the ensemble will have the opportunity to help plan exactly how we interact with local residents. Over the course of the year we will build a new audience for classical music, away from the usual central venues in town, along with audiences who already listen to classical music, through unusual programming, and passionate, electrifying performances. Prior to moving to Boston, I was involved in outreach educational work in New Zealand, which I had thoroughly enjoyed. This new project will give me invaluable experience and ideas to assist projects of similar focus in the future when I head back to NZ.

In one month, the work I have undertaken with my new teacher Miriam Fried has challenged me to think differently about the concept of violin playing. Perhaps what I value the most is her commitment to finding the simplest solutions and most efficient methods of practice for reaching my desired goals. The experience of working with Ms Fried and being here in a wonderfully inspiring and nurturing environment has been totally invaluable. I am sincerely grateful to the New Zealand Federation of Graduate Women for their support, without which my study here might not have been possible.

Thank you so much!!

Malavika Gopal