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Azimuth Program

Experiencing Vocal Jazz in Chicago

**Reflecting on your original proposal – What would you do differently and why?
How was your original view different from your experience?**

So many things turned out differently than what I had expected or planned, prior to arriving in Chicago. I think that, although I had lived on my own in a city (Pittsburgh) before, I was not prepared for the enormity and hustle and bustle of a much bigger city like Chicago. I had a very hard time overcoming my fear of getting lost in the city initially, and I think that hampered me from experiencing things in the first few weeks. Probably the most surprising (and frustrating) thing about my experience was that the HotHouse club venture did not work out. My contact person there simply refused to get back in touch with me. Also, I had a lot fewer lessons than expected, because both my teachers were trying to be full-time professional performers, and so were constantly off doing concerts, recording albums, etc, which left me with less time with them.

To counteract the fact that I had so much more free time than I expected, I tried to educate myself about the history of jazz, both by reading and by listening a lot to classic and essential albums that I got out of the local library.

Another frustrating discovery that I made was that not being 21 yet was a rather large impediment to my being able to go out and listen to live jazz, because jazz is mostly played at clubs and bars that won't allow you to get in unless you are 21. So to some extent I really missed out on the live jazz club scene in Chicago, which is so vital to the city's history and current social atmosphere. However, the jazz camp that I attended did provide me with an amazing faculty concert every night. I did also get a chance to see a funky band at Univ. of Chicago, called Pieces of a Dream, who've been around for 30+ years, and I got to see one show at the Jazz Showcase (a famous club downtown that's been around forever), at which I got to experience an amazing Charlie Parker tribute concert.

Did your proposal meet the needs of your actual experience? How could you have improved the proposal and/or the experience?

I think in general I would have made everyone with whom I dealt with (e.g. teachers, contact at HotHouse) send me something signed and in writing stating exactly how much time they were going to commit to me, what we were going to be doing, and how everything would work out. I did that to some extent, yet still, people's careers came first, and there wasn't much I could do about that.

I also wish I could have attended the camp at the beginning of my stay in Chicago, rather than at the end, that way I could have utilized all of the contacts that I made, the information I learned, etc, to better educate myself when I was on my own.

How did you affect/interact with your community/environment?

I made friends with a wonderful young mother and her two daughters in Oak Park, as well as the person whose apartment I was subletting. I got to explore and discover things about the amazing city of Chicago, and attended at least a few concerts here and there, always asking people questions, and trying to find out more about my environment and about jazz in general. I learned so much from Janice Borla, my vocal instructor, and from the camp as well. I don't know that I really affected my environment, because my plans for doing so were cut short by my lack of employment at HotHouse.

What affect did this have on your values? Your idea of vocation?

Oddly enough I think that my experiences this summer with jazz and singing in general made me take a step back from music and realize that I don't need to devote quite so much of my life to it. I think that I have been singing for most of my life because other people wanted me to, and while I enjoy singing to a large extent, I also never feel like I'm doing it to the best of my ability (even after focusing on it so much this summer). There are many other things which I enjoy a lot, in which I can excel and be proud of my abilities, and I realized that I want to spend more time focusing on other things like my artwork, my writing, and my relationships and interactions with people I love and admire. Being alone and essentially jobless for so much time this summer made me feel very lost and adrift, and I realized that I was frustrated with myself for not knowing more about what I want to do with my life after college, in the "real world." I came to the conclusion that I need to be thinking about and preparing myself for some sort of life that involves doing what I love to do, and I need to somehow chart a path that will enable me to achieve this.

What was your interaction with your site supervisors and faculty mentor?

My mentor and I did not really communicate, because it seems he never received the emails that I sent him over the summer. I suppose my supervisor would be Janice, and I would say that I had an overall positive interaction with her, but I just wish that she would have taken me under her wing more, and devoted more time to me while I was there. It would have been nice to be included in her life other than at the camp and during the few lessons that we did have, but I understood that she was a busy, working woman.