

“Playing at the Frauenkirche is a unique experience: the beautiful pastel colors on the walls and gold-plated arches paint a European landscape. ... It was impossible to imagine how many people would fit in this gargantuan space.”

— *Katie Jordan*



The Curtis Symphony Orchestra and conductor Robert Spano opened the Dresden Music Festival on May 15, playing in the rebuilt Frauenkirche. PHOTO: DANIEL MCDUGALL

## Postcards from Dresden

CURTIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA MEMBERS BLOGGED THROUGHOUT A RESIDENCY AT THE DRESDEN MUSIC FESTIVAL IN MAY.

BY JENNIFER KALLEND

“Well, it certainly has been an absolute whirlwind five days! Just last Friday night we opened the summer season at the Mann Center, and tonight I just got back from an incredible concert at the Frauenkirche in Dresden, Germany. Oh, and I also graduated with a Masters in Opera in between.”

So wrote opera student and saxophonist Kevin Ray, reflecting on the first few days in Dresden with the Curtis Symphony Orchestra. On the heels of a gala concert at the Mann Center for the Performing Arts, and Commencement the following morning, more than 100 students, faculty, and staff traveled to Germany for performances at the Dresden Music Festival in May. While there, students shared their thoughts, impressions, and experiences on the school’s tour blog, Postcards from Curtis.

“Since we arrived, we’ve seen some unbelievable buildings and landscapes,” Kevin continued in his blog post. “My favorite feature of the countryside is driving past the little ‘Dürfchen,’ very small towns nestled in a valley—often no more than twenty or thirty little houses and always with a church at the center.” Trumpet student Sara Huebner shared Kevin’s fascination with the local scenery. “As we rounded the corner in our Mercedes-Benz tour buses and laid our eyes on the skyline of Dresden for the first time, I could barely

### More Online

See more photos and read the full blog entries from Dresden at

[www.curtis.edu/Postcards](http://www.curtis.edu/Postcards)





Top left: During the concert at the Frauenkirche, Brahms's Double Concerto featured 2010 Curtis graduate Ray Chen, violinist; and Dresden Festival Director Jan Vogler, cellist. PHOTO: © OLIVER KILLIG

Top right: Nathan Laube, a 2009 Curtis graduate now living in Germany, practiced on the Frauenkirche instrument before offering organ selections during the festival-opening concert. PHOTO: DANIEL MCDUGALL

Bottom right and left: The Curtis Symphony Orchestra collaborated with student dancers from Dresden public schools in a choreographed performance of Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra on May 18. The concert also featured Bernstein's *Symphonic Dances from West Side Story* and David Ludwig's *Fanfare for Sam*. PHOTOS: © OLIVER KILLIG

contain myself. Just below the shadows of Dresden's blackened architecture was a running trail so enchanting and seductive, I was barely aware of the gorgeous, lush river flowing right next to it."

Sara took advantage of the trail with an early morning run the following day. "I felt like I was still sleeping as we headed out for the trail. Once we started we found ourselves amidst the daily commute of bicycles that use the path to get to and from work. Between dodging the occasional inattentive biker, we ran out of the downtown, commercial part of the city, and to where the natives of Dresden live and work. Things felt surreal. We had just traveled thousands of miles, crossed international borders, and woke up in a completely foreign, unknown country. But in Dresden it was a regular morning and people still had work to go to and business to take care of."

Horn player Katie Jordan shared some additional impressions of the city. "We all had the morning off and left the hotel ready to explore the Altmarkt square, filled with carnival-ish food and complete with a Ferris wheel. Covered wagons and various carts offered the aromas of cooking bratwurst, fried dough in many shapes, and even cotton candy! Local crafts and souvenirs dotted the square as well. With our bags filled with goodies, we hurried back to the Quartier Frauenkirche to prepare for a dress rehearsal."

That rehearsal, and the festival-opening concert that followed on May 15, took place in Dresden's Frauenkirche, rebuilt in 2005 to its original Baroque splendor after being bombed in the Second World War. Katie described the dramatic venue: "Playing at the Frauenkirche is a unique experience: the beautiful pastel colors on the walls and gold-plated arches paint a European landscape. The dome seems improbable, with never-ending balconies. It was impossible to imagine how many people would fit in this gargantuan space." Bassoonist



## MEET THE STUDENTS



Keith Buncke added a sonic description of the church. “The acoustics were typically church-like, very live and boomy, but also quite clear. In the concert, whenever there was a pause after long chords, I could hear the reverberation for several seconds after the chord was played. This is an experience one does not get in a typical concert hall!”

“I only played in the first half of the all-Brahms concert, so I had the opportunity to go up into the audience seating and listen to the orchestra perform Brahms’s Second Symphony. I thought the church’s acoustics suited especially well the first and second movements of the symphony ... the audience was extremely receptive, and rightly so. The orchestra played its absolute best in this concert. What an exciting night for us all.”



### COMPARE AND CONTRAST

The following night, harp student Elizabeth White Clark heard a different orchestra. “We had the unique opportunity to watch the sound check for the Vienna Philharmonic. The horn students were particularly excited about this. The horns in the Vienna Phil are distinguished from all other orchestras because of the way they are built. Also, the trumpets position their instrument differently. This produces a different sound. After the sound check, students were raving about the sound the Vienna Phil produces and the unity in the sections. Many students said they were inspired to go home and practice more. It was wonderful to watch! But alas, there was no harp on their all-Mozart concert.”

Moving from the soaring, elegant Frauenkirche to the futuristic, all-glass Volkswagen Transparent Factory made quite a contrast as students prepared for their Chamber Music Marathon on May 17. As violist Jessica Chang put it, “Who in the world decides to program a four-hour-long chamber music concert AND expects a full audience? Call it a marathon, and every Curtis student will want to play. Thanks to [Curtis Director of Student Recitals] Matt Barker’s careful eye, the program achieved a balance in repertoire and instrumentation, and the audience certainly rivaled our beloved Field Concert Hall audiences in enthusiasm. What also excited me about the Chamber Music Marathon was the venue—futuristic, bold, and unusual. In particular, it got me thinking about looking beyond ‘typical’ concert venues and audiences to exciting new collaborations.”



The orchestra’s second appearance at the festival, on May 18, was just such a collaboration, involving urban public school students dancing to Bartók’s Concerto for Orchestra. Elizabeth wrote about the first rehearsal: “We walked into a building that looks like a storage space or airplane hangar of sorts. Inside, we were greeted with a stage full of kids!” While resting between harp entrances, she watched the action onstage, developed by British choreographer Royston Maldoom. “The dancers are telling a story that I believe relates Bartók’s experience as he came to the United States. There is a portion in which a backdrop of New York City is projected onto a screen while the dancers are running around in pandemonium while constantly holding their wrist to their faces as if checking the time on a watch.” Keith agreed that the dancing “brought a completely new aesthetic dimension to the Concerto for Orchestra, a piece I have heard many times. At the same time though, the choreography masterfully complemented the push and pull of tension throughout the music and the numerous colors Bartók weaved into his score.”



In less than a week, the action-packed residency came to a close. Jessica summed up the experience: “The whole tour was a whirlwind of activity—from sightseeing around Dresden to attending the Vienna Philharmonic’s dress rehearsal, dining on the Elbe River, and performing orchestral and chamber music works—and what a privilege to share these experiences among the tight-knit community of Curtis students and staff! We’ve expanded our experiences and sights during our time in Dresden in many ways as individuals, as an orchestra, and as a school. As we boarded our buses at 4:30 a.m. for the final drive back to Frankfurt, I grew sadder and sadder with the realization that I’d just played my final Curtis concerts ever. Bleary-eyed, I looked back and saw rays of sun yawning over the river—rising on a fresh summer and new Curtis season ahead, both with promises to continue looking beyond our own horizons.” ♦

*Jennifer Kallend, director of public relations at Curtis, maintains the Postcards from Curtis blog, which remains live at [www.curtis.edu/postcards](http://www.curtis.edu/postcards).*

From top: Students make their way to the stage of the futuristic Volkswagen factory, where John-Henry Crawford (Cello) was among the participants in the four-hour chamber music marathon on May 17. Between rehearsals, orchestra members enjoyed the sights of downtown Dresden. PHOTOS: © DIE GLÄSERNE MANUFAKTUR, REN MARTIN-DOIKE, AND JENNIFER KALLEND