

Gabriel Slesinger  
Amici di Via Gabina reflection

In July of 2016, through generous funding of the Amici di Via Gabina Travelling Fellowship, I studied music in Munich, Germany, and Florence, Italy.

My trip started in Germany, where I studied the style and pedagogy of German orchestral trumpet playing. In America, trumpet players use trumpets built around a system of piston valves, while Germans use rotary valves. This small mechanical difference accompanies a very different style of playing, both physically and stylistically. These differences stem from history. The orchestral tradition in Germany goes back many centuries, and a defining characteristic of German orchestras is a balanced blend of sound between all of the different instruments. Rotary trumpets, with their broad and warm sounds, blend well with other brass instruments.

The American orchestral tradition is much younger, and many of the first orchestral trumpet players were influenced, both in their style and equipment, by jazz. In the early days of American orchestras, it would not have been uncommon for a trumpeter to perform with the symphony on one night and a dance band the next. The piston trumpet (sometimes referred to as a “Jazz trumpet” in Europe) created an American sound known for its brilliance, lyricism, and occasional bravura.

First, I travelled to Munich, where I received five days of trumpet lessons with Martin Angerer, who is one of two principal trumpet players of the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra. This orchestra is one of the most famous in the world, and my lessons were intense and full of new ideas. Mr. Angerer was extremely generous with his time. We met twice a day, and each lesson lasted for at least a couple of hours. In between sessions, I was allowed to watch the orchestra rehearse for an upcoming performance of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. I would have swum the Atlantic for that experience alone. At night, the lessons would continue, verbally, over traditional Bavarian food and drink.

I then travelled to Florence, Italy, where I attended the Italian Brass Week. While my focus in Munich was on orchestral playing, the Brass Week was full of masterclasses and concerts by brass soloists from around the world. Because they perform alone, soloists often have eccentric ways of teaching and working on the instrument. I learned interesting ideas on breathing, sound, and style that I may never have been exposed to otherwise. I also made time to attend classes by teachers of other brass instruments, including trombone and horn. The fundamental principles of how to play any brass instrument are related, and I gained tremendously from observing teachers who were using slightly different pedagogical perspectives than what I was used to.

I learned so much over the course of my studies, and I am grateful to those who support this fellowship. Because of this opportunity, I feel closer to achieving my career goal of joining a symphony orchestra.