

FUNDING GUIDE

In summer 2015, I had the very good fortune to join the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz. During my six weeks of intensive study, I received daily lessons and coachings, twice daily German language lessons, public masterclasses, three opportunities to perform core repertoire with orchestra, coachings with eminent conductors, exposure to agents, and an appearance as a finalist in the Meistersinger Competition. Alongside these brilliant opportunities, I have also garnered what I hope will be long-lasting relationships, both with teachers, and with fellow singers, whose company I so enjoyed. AIMS creates an ideal environment not only to learn – but to positively thrive – and I feel so honored to have been a part of this!

In order to pursue my summer at AIMS, I was lucky enough to obtain funding from a number of very generous sponsors, without whom so many opportunities I have had in the past few years would never have been possible.

Throughout my years of training and my time now as a nascent professional, I have been passionate about finding diverse sources of funding. What I enjoy the most about these experiences is that it has allowed me to forge meaningful relationships and, most importantly, to give back to these generous individuals and organizations in a number of ways.

I would like to share some of my methodology with you now. What I hope to emphasize above all is that a personalized and tailor-made approach to funding is absolutely essential. You are seeking financial help because you (presumably) believe that what you have to offer the world is special and singular; any individual or organization that you approach is just as unique as you are, and deserves to be treated with the exact same care and attention.

- **Introduction:** Firstly, you will need to identify the people and groups that you feel would benefit in some way from sponsoring you. Think about what is special about you and your performance style that would be attractive to this particular person/ group.

If you are as yet unknown to this organization/ individual, you will need to tell them firstly about your background (musical as well as financial). This can take the form of a timeline (what first got you into music, and how you have pursued this passion), or it could even take the form of a series of anecdotes: i.e. a

selection of different stories that illustrate the type of person and musician you are.

- **Describe your Ambitions:** You should then go on to describe what kind of ambitions you have, what kind of things you hope to gain from the course of study you are applying for (AIMS in this case!), what streams of funding you have had in the past and how you have made it work. What challenges have you faced over the last few years of study? There may have been instances where you faced adversity and yet you continued to develop your passion. These experiences are important and will show your potential sponsor that you are a passionate and resilient person!

- **Making a Difference:** You might then want to have a think about how funding from this specific organization would be making a difference to you. For instance, they may be a religious organization, in which case you might mention that AIMS offers a number of opportunities for performances in religious settings (including the excellent 'Spirituals Concerts', and the 'AIMS in Graz Churches' program on Sunday mornings). The organization you are approaching may be one which encourages communication and bridge-building between ages and cultures, in which case you might talk about how you will use your experiences at AIMS to plan a specific outreach project, for seniors or hospital patients for instance. The organization may also be a linguistic or cultural institution, in which case you might talk about how learning the German language at AIMS could allow you to be a more effective ambassador for your sponsors while you are in Europe.

- **Giving Back:** As I mentioned previously, it is of the utmost importance to think about what you would do to 'repay the favor' so to speak. If an individual or organization is to give you money to pursue your dream, how can you use the knowledge you gain at AIMS to raise awareness of this organization? Giving a benefit concert is a good idea, although I would encourage an applicant to think creatively about ways to give back to the community with their newly gained expertise. This exchange of ideas and experiences is really the heart of what this type of creative networking is all about, and is the element that I would encourage you to spend the most time on.

- **Summary:** Lastly, it is worth remembering that a funding organization's entire experience of you will be based solely on any documents and materials you send them. But in a way that is a good thing! It gives the organization the opportunity to get a really clear and positive impression of you as a singer and a human, all on paper, and actually that is great because it is entirely within your

control, as to how you put yourself across. It may also be worth thinking about what materials (videos, recordings, photos – all ideally administered by you on your website) exist of you online, and whether you feel these represent you properly. If you uploaded a performance you gave five years ago on YouTube, it may be time to replace that with a beautiful new one that will impress people if and when they have a look for you online.

When seeking funding for a study program such as AIMS, you will need to approach sponsors directly and won't be able to hide behind a standardized application form. I know that some singers find this daunting – but this really is a gift as it allows you the time and space necessary to get your message across! This really is just an excellent opportunity for you to express yourself.

And a word to the wise: if you apply to a variety of sources, there is a very good chance that not all of your requests will be successful. So, take this on the chin and see it as an opportunity to learn. If you sense that it would be appropriate, then send a (very polite!) reply thanking them for their time, and asking if perhaps there is something you could do to improve when applying in the future. This can be a very worthwhile exercise indeed, and even the smallest and simplest piece of feedback can help you to reinvigorate your approach.

The methodology that I have mentioned above has been helpful to me over the years, but I realize that it only accounts for a small proportion of all the possible funding streams that are available to us nowadays. With resources such as Kickstarter literally at our fingertips, I know that there are many other creative ways to gain recognition which many of my colleagues at AIMS had made good use of. If you audition for AIMS in the fall or winter, you will typically have at least four months to build up some funds, so a grass-roots approach may also suit you better!

All that remains to be said is that I wish you a heartfelt Toi Toi and all the very best of luck pursuing what I know will be a wonderful summer!