



2014 IVP Experience

By Amanda Jacobs

As a composer, my interest in Jane Austen started with my work on “Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, A Musical.” I began by reading *Pride and Prejudice*, which led me to JASNA in 2000, and now 14 years later, onto the 2014 International Visitors’ Program with a project proposal to set Jane Austen’s prayers to music for congregational worship.

My IVP project was about creating music for “regular voices” not just music for professional singers and musicians. So when the committee chose my project, my dream of living and working in Chawton became a reality. For six weeks, I was composer-in-residence in the village of Chawton, and throughout my time there, I learned so much about myself and what an artist can do when artistic needs are met.

Setting the prayers to music was a joyful process because



everywhere I looked in Chawton, there was beauty: a white rose growing up along a brick wall, a tobacco flower peeping into the window, a nasturtium plant flowing over the edge of an old watering trough. This kind of beauty inspires sound in me because beauty makes my artist heart sing. In Chawton, the beauty overwhelmed me, and inspiration filled me with sound that poured out in musical composition.

When I found manuscript paper (music staff paper) on a shelf in the office at Chawton Stables, this immediately provided me the tool to compose sketches of the tunes I felt and heard in my head. These sketches became my “Chawton Notebook,” which now provides me with valuable melodic and harmonic material that I can and will incorporate in future compositions.

Also, because a 1928 Steinway is beautifully maintained at the Chawton House Stables where I was living, I practiced. I reconnected with Chopin, Beethoven, Mozart, and Mendelssohn, which led to opportunities to play historical instruments including the 1810 Clementi piano at the Jane Austen House Museum, the refurbished 1828 Stodart grand piano at Chawton House, the extraordinary opportunity to play

Chopin’s piano (among others) from the Alec Cobbe Collection at Hatchlands Park, and a Broadwood (Beethoven’s preferred instrument) at The Vyne.

I learned so much by playing these instruments because they provided me a context in which the original music for them was composed. Historical instruments have different actions, smaller dynamic ranges, fewer keys, and require less physical demands. Playing at the museum each day also required me to learn more about Clementi and interact with visitors who asked questions.

Due to the nature of my project, the prayers generated opportunities to connect with the Austen-related churches throughout England. Prior to my visit, the JASNA Churches Committee graciously provided contact information that created opportunities to visit nine of the churches, which led

to opportunities to set up, produce, and perform a concert in Godmersham, and premiere the prayer settings at St Paul’s Church Covent Garden in London. Producing a concert in London presented

a lot of challenges—creating the program, gathering performers, advertising, coordinating rehearsals. However, these concerts connected me with musicians and talent throughout England, which is now creating more opportunities.

In short, Chawton inspired me. It still inspires me. Thoughts of Chawton fill me with gratitude—to the JASNA committee

who chose my project, and for the abundance of opportunities the six weeks provided. Success like

I experienced is immeasurable because it keeps growing, and I am changed.

My success happened because everything I needed as an artist was provided and available to me. Even now, I know I “hear” my first symphony there, and very soon I hope to go back and write it. Until then, I will work to create an environment like that for myself here in the United States. By doing this, I keep Chawton alive in my heart, which will continue to empower me.

Please visit www.facebook.com/sixweeksinChawton where I share an online journal of my 2014 visit. ✿

