

*An article originally published in Soundpost, the Journal of STANZA, New Zealand, April 2005.*

What follows below is an article written by Megan Aiken who reflects on the “QVSS experience”. Megan is a second-year violin performance student at the University of Otago, and was a first-time attendee at QVSS 2005.

“QVSS is one of those programs that occur in the Summer Holidays. Before attending QVSS this year, I probably would have said that this was a good way to waste two perfectly fabulous weeks of valuable free time. The two weeks I spent at QVSS were perhaps two of the best spent of my life. I have been given an opportunity to write about my “QVSS experience” this year and I intend to fully speak my truth. QVSS is amazing.

A lesson a day, a concert a night, five hours of practice and three group classes in-between may not sound like fun - it certainly doesn't look so great written down like that - but it is! I think it's something about the lessons that really gets you inspired. Working with the best teachers you've ever met, who are in the best moods you've ever seen a teacher in because they love it too. It just becomes this huge, positive time of learning and creating. To come out of a lesson, knowing that you've gotten your teacher excited, really excited, just makes you want to give them another wee surprise the next day. I found myself suddenly delighted by the thought of practicing. Wanting to shock my teacher, shock myself, shocking anyone I could find with my progress.

And then there are the concerts. An opportunity to really express everything you've learnt, to share it with everyone. Walking out onto the stage is the strangest and scariest thing because you have these ridiculously amazing teachers all watching you and the room is basically 95% violinists. Everyone knows you just played the pizzicato section with your bow! There is no escape. Most people there have learned your piece before and they know all the markings. But somehow you walk out there and you can just feel the love and the room is buzzing.

The students at QVSS are fantastic and everyone has this amazing thing in common. You all absolutely love the violin (even if you didn't realise it when you left home). Everyone has their own journey and their own goals. There is always going to be that person ripping into the craziest piece you've ever heard with complete ease. There are others struggling with something you've already tackled. Everyone has their weaknesses and it's wonderful to realise your own strengths.

Oh and the food. You have to be there to experience it. Fresh fruit, cake for desert EVERY NIGHT, ginger crunch for supper along with chocolate slice and

more cake and even more cake. We have our cook, all to our own little community. And she's brilliant, not to mention lovely. It's like living at a restaurant for two weeks and eating like a complete pig! The best part is that you're working so hard you burn it all off.

My progress at QVSS was amazing, I enjoyed the hard work and I met wonderful people. My memories of Queenstown Violin Summer School are the kind that will always inspire me; it makes me smile out loud just thinking about it.