

To the Friends of the Academy,

I don't think of you as just a committee that supports students, but rather friends of my own and a support group that fosters a family rather than just an institution.

I have been at WAAPA for 4 years and unfortunately have no plans to return in the near future; my life is directing me somewhere else outside of study. Right now I'm teaching and sharing the gift of music with children. I'm finding it so rewarding to enrich children's lives with the same skills and experiences that have shaped me as a person and brought me such great happiness. I can honestly say I wouldn't be here without such experiences. I am also working with the City of Perth Thunder Corp (an American Drumline), which is currently contracted with the Perth Wildcats. Some of you may have seen me at a few of the games, please come and say hello if you get the chance in the future! Together these two things have bought me full time employment through music; a huge goal of mine, which I have finally been able to achieve. In the future I plan to keep teaching as well as continuing to write my own music and go into a contemporary setting with electronics and percussion hopefully creating music that is fun to listen to and expresses ideas close to my heart (e.g. Feminism, my cats ect. Ect.)

I have been involved in 8 official Defying Gravity seasons and I have absolutely loved every single one. I don't think there has been a single ensemble that I have enjoyed more. Tim White is not only a brilliant teacher but also an outstanding artistic director. His shows are the very reason that so many of us end up studying at WAAPA. His knack for finding interesting and educational soloists is the reason I have fallen in love with non-western percussion. My two favorite concerts have been *Fascinating Rhythms* (2014) and of course my very last Defying Gravity season as a student, *Karma* (2016). Performing my heart out to a sell out audience that has been so loyal and encouraging over the years has been an absolute honor! I have grown so much from the timid first year you all saw back in 2013 and I couldn't have blossomed into the performer I am today without your support and encouragement, paired with the incredibly fulfilling experience of playing to an eager, caring and enthusiastic crowd.

One of my favorite memories of WAAPA has to be one of the first days I came to the institution. I was a small (and still am), fresh faced and enthusiastic first year and as I walked around the hallways there was music of every single kind and style being played, and even when I went into the bathroom a classical singer was warming up. It was quite a pleasant shock and surprise for me! Other highlights include performing in the musical theatre production *Legally Blonde* in which I danced, I think, for the full two-hour show and Playing *Scheherazade* with the Faith Court Orchestra. Not only was it a treat to be able to play in one of my favorite orchestral works, but I also learned to play the triangle pretty darn well! Being able to go to the Australian Percussion Gathering this year, with the help of the 'Friends of the Academy' and watching one of my biggest idols perform was one of the most inspirational,

rewarding experiences of my life. I wouldn't have been able to make it to Brisbane for the gathering without your financial aid and it was an absolute blast.

I would like to express a special thanks to Neil Archibald whose scholarship directly helped me pursue my interest in composition; half of my recital wouldn't exist without him and his generous benefaction.

My sincere thanks also goes out to the Paolino family whose scholarship has helped me further my education and percussive skills. Being able to honor Luigi's life and memory through performance in percussion has been an extremely special moment for me.

A shameless plug: my final year recital is fast approaching and, as my adopted family and dear friends, I would absolutely love to see you all there. My recital will be held on the 8th of November at 5pm in the Music Auditorium at WAAPA. I will be performing the marimba work *Uneven Souls* which you may have seen at the last DG concert, two high energy snare drum solos, two works of my own composition that I'm excited to premier and *Rebonds B*, one of the epic Xenakis multi percussion works.

It has been a pleasure to perform to you all for these past few years and I wish you all every happiness,

Mercedes Slack-Smith