

# MANNHEIM GERMANY

## Hochschule für Musik und darstellende Kunst

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Hello and welcome to my Erasmus report. My name is Ashby and I just got back from my exchange in Mannheim, Germany, studying with Prof. Ole Kristian Dahl. I'm going to share a bit about my semester in Germany and offer advice which I feel could be useful to others. I was lucky enough to visit my host institution, Musik Hochschule Mannheim, a few months before the beginning of the exchange and I viewed one apartment which turned out to be great so I took it. Finding a place to stay can be quite tricky but I used the German room finding site [www.wg-gesucht.de](http://www.wg-gesucht.de) and the Uni/Hochschule Facebook page.

I arrived 2 weeks before the beginning of the semester and I am really glad I did because it was HUGE culture shock and adjustment. I spent the first few weeks extremely tired from normal daily tasks. One of the best pieces of advice I was given was to take baby steps. Every little activity, such as food shopping, felt more exhausting than it should, so it is good to see these menial daily tasks as an achievement. I learnt to be proud of these things and then quickly adjusted to life in Mannheim. I slowly unpacked my things and filled my room with photos of friends from home and later went out to meet some bassoonists from the Musik Hochschule. I was very glad to have a family friend out in Mannheim who was a friend of my girlfriend's grandad (weird connection, I know!). Bettina and her family were so welcoming and kind and I was grateful to have them to speak to if I needed. A great language practising tip I learnt from spending time with her family is to speak with children.

Once the semester began, I was thrown straight in with a few days of lessons with Ole, and 3 full days of reed-making with Prof. Mikko-Pekka Svala. It was great to get stuck into the semester and I think it really helped me immerse myself into life in Mannheim. I was fortunate to be selected to play with the Mannheim Hochschule Symphony Orchestra and in October we went on tour to the Landesakademie in Ochsenhausen. I was very glad to have this opportunity to play with the orchestra as it really helped me find more friends - I would definitely recommend throwing yourself into any opportunities like this one. I was forced to speak German with many new people who didn't speak English which gave me more confidence in my limited language skills (this tour was before I'd

started German lessons in the Hochschule). It was a real pleasure to perform in different venues across West Germany including Heidelberg, Neustadt, Mannheim and Ochsenhausen.

I found that I had more time whilst studying in Germany for individual practice, as there were fewer classes and ensemble rehearsals on offer. Creating structure in my days was very important to stay productive and make the most of my time. I would wake up around 9 and be practising in the Hochschule by 10, usually finishing around 5 or 6. Aside from music, I joined a gym, went running and spent most evenings socialising, enjoying German beer and playing lots of badminton and pool with my classmates. The bassoon class was very friendly and supportive, Ole has created an atmosphere free from tension and arrogance where everybody works very hard. I felt very lucky to be there.

I took advantage of being in continental Europe to travel around Germany and beyond. Mannheim has surprisingly great train connections, with direct links to Berlin, Munich, Paris and many more places... I was lucky enough to visit (and be visited by) friends from London, Cologne, Berlin and Munich. Throughout my time there I traveled to Frankfurt, Munich, Cologne and Luxembourg. I also visited Georg Rieger GmbH, a household name for any double reed player, which is a company that makes tools and machines for reed making. They were very friendly and accommodating and I am sure they will be friends and contacts for life. I enjoyed performing in two Klassenabends (class concerts), one in October and the other in December. I arranged two ensemble pieces for the December concert, including the overture from the Nutcracker. Mannheim (and Germany in general) felt very Christmassy, full of Christmas Markets and lots of drinking of Glühwein!

My last few weeks in Mannheim consisted of mainly the same routine, plus final contrabassoon and reed classes with Hans Agreda and Mikko-Pekka Svala as well as my last lessons with Ole. It all came to an end quickly, and it was very difficult to say goodbye to all the wonderful friends I made there. I will be sure to visit again as soon as I can and I am so grateful for everything I learnt whilst studying there.

**My advice for anyone going on an Erasmus exchange:**

- **Study the language. Practise the language. Enjoy the language.**
- **Bring photos with you!** It's so important to make your room feel homely as you will definitely miss your other life.
- **Write a blog.** You won't want to forget your memories and experiences in your time away,

and there is no better way than to write a blog. Even whilst writing this report I had to refer back to my blog to mention things I had forgotten.

- **Baby steps.** Everything will seem harder than it should be, and it is important to be proud of every little achievement on the Erasmus journey.
- **Throw yourself into EVERYTHING.** The main reason why I got so much from my experience was because I threw myself into the deep end wherever possible. It did mean I had some difficult days where I truly struggled, but it was worth it and I am so glad I did!
- **Share experiences.** It's likely you will have friends or meet new people that will also be studying abroad and it is always good to chat to them. Everyone will cope differently but it's always nice to share what you're going through with someone else.
- **Get into a routine.** I found I had a lot of time whilst in Germany, more so than my life in London and it was really important to get into a routine by getting up at the same time and finding structure, otherwise I just watched the day go by.
- **Have fun!** This is the most important thing. Enjoy it!

My Erasmus blog: <https://www.ashbymayes.com/erasmus-blog/>