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UNH Global

Revelations of a Hamel Fellow in Austria and Germany

Tony Hamoui '14

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On my first day in Salzburg, the initial leg of the journey, I saw this ominous looking castle atop the most unwelcoming mountain. As the taxi wound its way closer to my lodging, the castle kept appearing through the tree line, closer each time. I arrived at the lodging, stowed my belongings, and made the 25-minute walk into downtown Salzburg to explore the city. Halfway across the city's bridge, I stopped and caught a glimpse of this castle, taunting me from its perch. In the moment, I declared I would

conquer it. I didn't know if tourists were allowed up there. I didn't even know if there was a path up the mountain but, by God, I was going to reach this castle. Little did I know, my whole trip and newly redefined outlook would revolve around this singular experience.

I couldn't stifle my grin as I sat there next to German movie star Nina Petri at the opening night after-party for the acclaimed play *Die Geburtstagsfeier*. I felt a smile creep up on my face as I listened to the most well-crafted headphone amplifier in existence at the Sennheiser Audio Company world headquarters. (Fun fact, there are only fifty of these amplifiers made and Elon Musk owns the very first one). I almost exploded with laughter as I sat in the front row at Berlin's Pop-Kultur festival, fixated on an interview with David Laurie, head of the Grammy-nominated music label Something in



Tony Hamoui at the Salzburg Festival

Construction. My surreal summer in Austria and Germany was filled with moments like these, thanks to my Stanley A. Hamel Traveling Fellowship ([/global/scholarships-fellowships#hamel-traveling-fellowship](https://global.unh.edu/scholarships-fellowships#hamel-traveling-fellowship))—moments which led to a few existential realizations.



Tony standing at the Berlin Wall

the lead instrument.

My second realization was: **Passion is the most important factor to any kind of success.** Again, this sounds obvious, but I was blown away by how fundamental this has always been to great achievement. In Frankfurt, I visited the Goethe House. Goethe studied to become a lawyer, but he detested learning judicial rules by heart, preferring instead to attend poetry lessons. His obsession with creative writing steered him to publish *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, a seminal novel, and one of the most well-regarded dramas of the 18th century.

Like a character in the musical fantasy film, *Willy Wonka*, which was filmed in Germany, I strayed from the Sennheiser Audio Company tour when I saw a room stuffed to the brim with electronics. I was enthralled by the floor to ceiling machinery and racks of printed circuit boards. Imagine the

I was struck head-on by my first realization: **The reach of American arts and media system is not as pervasive as I previously assumed.**

This may seem obvious, but think about it: how often do you hear any non-English speaking songs on the radio? How often do you find a subtitled French movie on television? My week of operas, orchestras, and plays at the Salzburg Festival consisted entirely of German, French, Russian, and Austrian works and artists. Concerts, such as the Overture Spirituelle and a Bach recital, highlighted seminal works that led to the music we listen to today. For instance, Paul McCartney was influenced by Bach's Brandenburg Concerto #2, leading to the trumpet solo on *Penny Lane*. Schubert provided the basic building blocks of pop music--short songs, structure, and the voice as

trope of the genius mad scientist tinkerer and you'd come close to picturing the engineer who just then poked his head up from these crates and who also builds their signature headphone amplifiers. I spent about twenty minutes trying to politely excuse myself from the conversation with him. As interesting as the mechanical details of his craftsmanship were (he was so passionate about the project, he barely stopped to breathe), my grasp of the German language excluded technical jargon, which I barely understand in English.

Finally, my biggest realization was the corniest and most powerful: **You can do anything you put your mind to.** Failure is a state of mind. Whether it's to build the most well-regarded microphones in the world, as German manufacturer George Neumann sought to do in the 1930s, or to be a pioneer in gender equality for artists in electronic music, you can do it. Whether you strive to be a world-touring accordionist, like the Pop Kulture Festival headliner Natasha Enquist, or you want to make an art exhibit about stickers on CD covers, the only thing stopping you is your perception of success and the fear of failure.

About 5 hours and many café stops later, I found myself in the fortress' shadow. With nothing but my sense of direction and sight, I managed to find my way to the base of the mountain. I was prepared to scale the jagged cliff and risk trespassing, but it occurred to me to check if there were safer/more legal methods of summiting. To my relief, and slight disappointment, there was actually a tram that takes visitors to the top. I stood at the top of the fortress, exhausted, victorious, and unstoppable. I took this as an omen for my journey to come and my journey through life: make your own goals and strive to achieve them. You can do anything with cultural grounding, passion, and sheer willpower. Dreams for my future came to me a plenty thanks to this eye-opening trip. **Next goal: win a Grammy.**



Visiting the Sennheiser Audio Company world headquarters in Germany

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