Interview with Rupert

What is your favorite element of the AH tours?

Rupert: It’s seeing all the people from the summer and reconnecting with them. It’s meeting their families, breaking bread, eating dinner together. It’s also meeting folks from the state department and embassies. They’re like family, too – the Apple Hill family. There are a lot of repeat places we go where we see all these people we know. And it’s cool to see participants with their teachers on their home turf. The concerts are great too, when we can try out new concert spaces.

What was your favorite “Apple Hill moment” from the summer?

R: The moment when it all fell apart and then it all worked out. There was a night we lost power, and ended up doing the after-dinner concert and skit night in the dark. It was a special night. Everyone was even more charged up about making things happen.

What is the process of learning quartet music like? How does your personal practice fit in with the rehearsals the quartet does together?

R: It’s almost two different things – how to incorporate your personal work with the work of three other people.

Lenny: I assume that your personal practice is about you and your part, but when you get to the group, what happens?

R: What we do in rehearsal calms me down. We start out slowly, which helps us connect to the sound and the intonation and gives us the opportunity to work through tough passages. The hardest part of the personal practice is knowing that it’s going to be different in the group. Your ears hear differently. In the Ligeti, there are parts where we’re playing in minor seconds. I can practice those and learn my part, but then I get to rehearsal and all of a sudden I’m playing in unison with Mike. That’s not right, they’re supposed to be seconds!

L: So it’s about being flexible and adjusting – playing slowly gives you a chance to do that.

R: Yes, when you’re by yourself, you can say, “This is working,” but then you get to the group and see how it really works. It’s like rebuilding an engine over and over again.

L: There is a cello solo at the end of the Ligeti (String Quartet no. 1, featured in the AHSQ 12-13 season) that is so emotional. I thought you played that so beautifully. How do you deal with emotions as a performer? How do you play that without crying?

R: You feel different energies. You want your head to swim at that part but you’ve got to pay attention. I almost have to pinch myself. When we hit those harmonics, you know it’s the end, but it’s not the end
yet. In the most relaxed moment you've got to keep focusing. Focus isn't always the best in some passages – you can get to be too much of a perfectionist. When I'm playing that, I'm responding to the insecurities of playing hard stuff. We're performing incredible feats on the instruments. I still marvel that I'm playing a piece like this! I put my finger down and the note is there, I'm not even thinking about it, it's just there. Something like late Beethoven, though, you're thinking all the time. He just keeps throwing you curveballs. But everything in the Ligeti is so weird. You've got to keep engaged and keep the audience engaged.

L: So the Ligeti isn't about thinking, though, it's about focusing. When people hear really emotional music-making, they think the performer is emotional, but you can't be.

R: I get in a zone. I don't even know where I am. You're dedicated, but you let go – if you've done the work, that is. We had a great Mozart rehearsal this morning. I wasn't even thinking about the instrument, I could just give and be expressive.

_We are intrigued by your “off the dome” cooking, that is, making up recipes on the spot. Is this creative approach inspired by the creative process of being a musician?_

R: So am I! Both are part of something creative in me. The cooking comes from watching other people – like Lenny.

L: I don't cook off the dome!

R: Yes you do. I have chickpeas in my kitchen because of you. I started by making soups. I know nothing about soups or broths, so I tried some weird combos. Sometimes you say “that works.” It's like painting. You put a ton of things together and see what works. I have some basic things now that I go to. For example, my quinoa cakes; they have onions, kale, and gruyere or maybe parmesan. I've been trying different combinations lately. I have this new salad dressing, with balsamic vinegar, raspberry jam, and cottage cheese. I love using jams. I also tried a stir-fry sauce at home with red wine, balsamic vinegar, raspberry jam, and cottage cheese. I stop myself from getting too carried away, though. And I know there's always the “right way” to do things. There are always cookbooks.

5) We have always admired your fashion sense. Now that you've spent so much time in the fashion capital of the world, Nelson, NH, are you finding your style still firming “NYC chic” or are you adopting some elements of “NH chic”?

R: Look at these boots! And I'm wearing khakis and a really fine cashmere sweater that some good friends in New York gave me. But I have to think about leaving the sweater in the sugar house, because the moths will eat it. I've changed so much since I started working here. Back then I had suits, starched shirts, nice shoes. I was so city I don't even understand how I worked here. I think I'm in between NYC and NH now. My daughters are chic, my wife is chic. I don't change clothes 20 times a day anymore. But when I shave my head, then I clean up. When I clean up, I've got to clean up well. But even concerts here, you try, but you don't stress too much.