

Zak Laux

Florida State University graduate Zakarij "Zak" Laux of Naples, Fla., has received a French Government English Teaching Assistantship, which will give him the opportunity to teach in Lyon, France, for seven months.

The Barron Collier High School graduate will be teaching English at an *école primaire*, a primary school, beginning October 1.

Laux, 21, graduated in April with degrees in French and music, with a specialization in principal piano. He was awarded the grant via the Fulbright application process, according to Jody Spooner, director of FSU's Office of National Fellowships.

"Zak is an outstanding student, whose sensitivity to cultural nuance is equaled only by his work ethic," said Dr. Jamie Tarpley, an assistant professor of French at FSU. "In a class with both graduate and undergraduate students, Zak never ceased to impress with his insights, his careful analysis and his thoughtful reactions to the class discussion."

Though his grant is technically funded by the French government, Laux's award required all of the same preliminary steps as a Fulbright award, including lengthy personal statements and project proposals. "Being awarded a Fulbright grant is an extraordinary distinction and a career-launching opportunity," said Jamie Purcell, assistant director of FSU's Office of National Fellowships.

The Fulbright program, the largest international exchange program in the United States, is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. Purcell said only the highest caliber students with a genuine commitment to cultural engagement, are chosen by Fulbright.

"Some students leave deeper footprints than others," said Anne Garee, Program Director for Piano Technology at FSU. "Zak Laux is a student who left those footprints by exhibiting curiosity, a strong work ethic and a fine musical sense. This Fulbright Award has been awarded to a strong cultural ambassador and a dynamic cultural collaborator."

Laux, the son of Debra and Terry Laux of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., believes his name (probably stemming from French roots) and enjoyment of French romanticism in music probably sparked his interest in his majors.

But it was Camille Saint-Saëns' organ symphony, a piece Laux was exposed to in high school, that ultimately inspired him to pursue French romanticism in piano. In college, Laux always requested French pieces to play and, as a result, developed an extensive repertoire, including works for solo piano by composers such as Saint-Saëns, Paul Dukas and Francis Poulenc.

"Sometimes I even feel as though I was meant to live in the 19th century," he said. "I love studying the differences in the French language, comparing then and now. I am also

fascinated by the cultural differences created largely by the French Revolution and the fall of the monarchy."

Laux said the teaching assistantship will help him to perfect his conversational French and fill the educational voids that a classroom cannot satisfy. It is a great opportunity, he said, to experience first-hand the differences between the French and the North American way of life, including views on history, culture, music and literature.

"Zak participated in the French Intensive program and attended the Institut Catholique in Paris through FSU's International Programs during the summer of 2005," said Dr. Aimée Boutin, professor of French literature at FSU. "This is one of the opportunities he found to study French language and culture beyond his classroom work as a French major."

Reinier Leushuis, an associate professor of French and Italian at FSU, said Laux is a remarkable student with a serious work attitude and discipline, and he is constantly trying to find opportunities to improve his spoken French.

"Zak is eager to learn and to discover foreign culture with a mind that is sharp and perspicacious," said Leushuis. "In this process of exploration, Zak strikes a perfect balance between being truly open-minded and critical in a most healthy and constructive manner."

Laux is one of eight FSU Fulbright award winners this year. Half of the school's Fulbright applicants (10 out of 20) were selected as awardees or alternates this year, with 40 percent (8 of 20) actually winning. This is a higher yield than most of the nation's top-producing Fulbright schools.

For more on the Fulbright Program's history, scholarships and awards, visit: <https://us.fulbrightonline.org/about.html>.

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