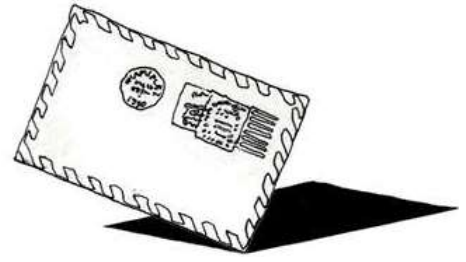


Letter from Mari



January 2007

It is the second week of January, and the year is starting with great force and feeling, from Shostakovich Piano Concerto No.1 in Jena, Germany, to Brahms Symphony No.3 in Berlin.

As we begin the New Year, some of you asked me to share a little of what is planned for 2007 and recap a few of my musical experiences in 2006. You were particularly interested in the completion of my second cycle of all 32 Beethoven Sonatas.

I hope that this note helps keep us connected and wish you a happy New Year.

- Mari

Plans for 2007, including Detroit, with its grand orchestral tradition

I will be in charge of a musical series at the Bad Kissingen Summer Festival, formerly led by the late Boris Pergamentchikov. Many artists grew out of this series and I am very excited to be able to make my contribution.

I will perform in Detroit, Michigan for the first time, and am looking forward to working with this renowned orchestra.

Once again, I will also start including Russian composers, including Prokofiev and Shostakovich, in my concerts this year.

I will continue my recordings of the Beethoven Sonatas.

2006 marked a big mile-stone: finishing all 32 Beethoven Sonatas.

The cycle, which I performed in Tokyo and Nagoya, started in the fall of 2003, and so took me exactly three years. In fact, it was my second cycle. The first, which I performed in Pasadena and Los Angeles, also took three years.

I was asked, 'What was it like?' The best analogy I can think of is to say that it is like climbing Mount Everest. The preparations are endless. Further, even the second time around, it is no easier than the first; though it helps to know the terrain. The views are also different with each climb, and so were my experiences. While some composers have a consistent style, this was not the case with Beethoven. It's as though he created 32 distinct styles. This is partly because of his own dramatic musical development during his life, in addition to the fact that the piano itself evolved so much during his career. As a result, his earlier pieces bear little resemblance to his later ones.

I feel so privileged to have been able to both study and perform the entire cycle: among them, there isn't a single weak piece. I started recording the cycle, which will be completed in around 2009.

Playing Beethoven Concerti No's 1, 2 and 3 in a single evening

Another exciting project was performing Beethoven Concerti Nos. 1, 2 and 3 in one evening. It was a new experience for me. (Usually, a soloist plays one concerto per evening) The concert was part of the Baden Baden Pfingsten Festival, where their 2,500-seat hall was sold out. Luckily, for me, I performed with the Deutsche Symphonie-Orchester Berlin and Kent Nagano, with whom I speak the same 'musical language,' so it felt I was in a small, chamber-like setting. After the performance, we recorded those Concerti in the studio.

Playing Beethoven Concerto on a Fortepiano

Another new experience was to playing the Beethoven Concerto on a Fortepiano. To prepare for the concerts, I rented an instrument and asked the advice of Andreas Staier, a specialist, whom I respect enormously. It was interesting to play this instrument and hear it as Beethoven did when he composed the piece. Since the instrument has neither the volume nor the legato nor color of a grand piano, I decided to change my plan. However, once I began performing at the 1000-seat concert hall (something Beethoven did not have to deal with), I quickly realized that that interpretation would not work. I ended up reverting to my original interpretation. Luckily, this audience, which very attuned to baroque music, seemed to love it.

Forest Hill Musical Days Festival Returns after a two-year hiatus

After a two-year break, we produced the Forest Hill Musical Days Festival in our own neighborhood of San Francisco. This time, we were fortunate to collaborate with Dietrich Hentschel, one of the best baritones

today, and Ichiro Nodaira, a great composer. We openly discussed how to interpret Schubert's *Winterreise*, and we were able to give an exceptionally dramatic performance at the beautiful neighborhood Clubhouse.

Working with Rene Martin, musical entrepreneur in France

Rene Martin is a genius in the realm of music production in France. He started two very influential festivals, which now travel the world. One is 'La Roque d'Anthéron' in South of France. (In fact, at his first festival, 20 years ago, influential pianists including Marta Argerich, Maurizio Pollini, Steven Kovacevich, Alfred Brendel, Sviatoslav Richter and Vlado Perlmutter all attended). He also founded the 'Folles Journées de Nantes' in Nantes, France.

In 2006, I had the pleasure of performing in both festivals. 'La Roque d'Anthéron', in the South of France, which takes place every summer, and the stage is in the middle of the woods. To improve the acoustics, he had a pond built beneath the stage (!) This leads to interesting scheduling issues having to do with the sun. Since the sun reflecting from the pond is too strong to the piano on stage, morning rehearsals must stop by 11:00 a.m. The concerts then start at 9:00 p.m. I participated in the Olivier Messiaen evening, where my sister Momo and I played the *Visions de L'Amen* for two pianos. The evening was dedicated to Momo, who performed a world premiere of a newly discovered work by Messiaen. Messiaen loved birds and used their voices a lot in his works. While we were rehearsing, all the birds suddenly stopped singing - it was magical.

'La Folle Journée' is another remarkable festival. There is a theme every year, (last year was Mozart, as it was the 250th anniversary of his birth) and concerts run from 9:00 a.m. until 11:00 p.m., non-stop in several locations. The tickets are affordable, so it is always well-attended. Last year, 'La Folle Journée' in Tokyo, had 60,000 visitors in four days, a record for any classical music festival. Each concert only lasts 45 minutes and the quality is extremely high. Here, I had a new experience: performing at 9:00 a.m. I loved starting the day with a performance and then spending the rest of the day listening to colleagues and reconnecting with them, some of whom I hadn't seen for over 20 years.