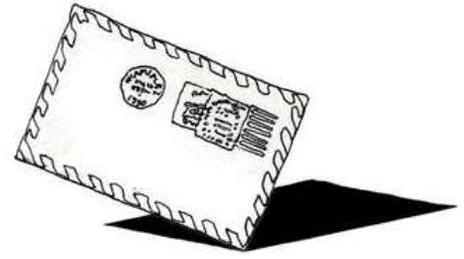


Letter from Mari



June 2007

The first half of the year is almost over, and for me this also signals a time when we switch gears between the professional concert season and the special summer festival season. This means that it is a time when I find myself using a different kind of creative process, one geared towards that of sharing music with the festival audiences who are relating to music within the special perspective of nature, holidays, summer weather, and a lifestyle away from the normal winter schedules.

In this letter, I wanted to profile one such project, which is called Forest Hill Musical Days of which I am the music director. This year, the concert will run from August 12-August 15, 2007.

Forest Hill is the part of San Francisco where we have had a home for many years. My husband and I feel a deep connection to the Bay Area, where he has lived and worked since the 1970's. While San Francisco is where we keep our home, due to our professional schedule, we aren't able to be in residence as often as we would like. The reason we still consider San Francisco our home, in spite of all the time we spend in Europe, is due to the generous and welcoming nature of our friends and neighbors. This priceless community spirit gives us a sense of well being and social fulfillment, for which we are eternally grateful.

This year, we will be hosting our fourth Forest Hill Musical Days festival, something we originally called an 'un-festival,' because we didn't want it to be predictable and become old-hat. While we have decided to continue, we don't fall into the pattern of promising a concert each year. (But secretly, I must admit, we thoroughly enjoy planning and performing these, as much as we enjoy watching how deeply our Forest Hill neighbors appreciate the gathering.)

Each year, we have focused on different musical traditions of Europe, our other home in the world. We have attempted to share a distinct musical form, in terms of its sound, color and style. It is particularly exciting for us to 'transport' a regional musical tradition to the west coast, as it is a singularly contextual art form, born of their unique language, literature and musical heritage. Our friends on the west coast benefit, as these groups usually do not travel to this coast, though individual musicians may come as soloists to perform in American operas, symphonies, etc.

The first year, 2003, we introduced the Vienna Philharmonic, whose musicians come from an ancient tradition of master-apprentice education. The players have been part of musical families for generations, transmitting their talent from teacher to student and parent to child. The result is an amazing, homogeneous sound, where even their breathing is perfectly synchronized. The program that year focused on the music of their region, Austrian Music, from Mozart to Schoenberg.

The following year, 2004, we worked with two Germanic regions that happen to have contrasting traditions: Berlin and Vienna. That year, we also introduced a special children's concert, where young people were able to sit on the floor, just one meter away from world class musicians, and enjoy Carnival of the Animals. Many parents told us that this concert had a significant impact on their children's love of music.

The third year, 2006, we focused on voice, calling it 'The Music of Today and Tomorrow,' and included musicians from both Europe and San Francisco. Dietrich Henschel sang his exceptional 'Winterreise,' which he and others considered an historic performance. Melody Moore, the hope of the San Francisco Opera, added a beautiful counterpoint to Dietrich with her incredible voice and charm. Ichiro Nodaira, a significant composer, played some of his own compositions on the piano. This epitomizes the possibilities of the summer music season when professionals step out of their scripted roles and take risks, and when audiences get once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

This year, August 12-15, 2007, we will have a completely new sound: we have invited musicians from Russia. The renowned pianist, Igor Lazko, from Saint Petersburg, who won the prestigious Bach Competition in Leipzig at the age of 14 will perform Bach for us. His Serbian wife, Maja, will play second violin during the festival. (Note, they were living in Belgrade until the war broke out, but had to leave.) I actually know Igor through our daughter, Karin. He is a professor at the prestigious Scriabine Conservatory and offered to take Karin under his wing, a privilege for any young pianist.

Our first violinist, Dmitri Makhtin, is also from Saint Petersburg. After the fall of communism in Russia in 1989, he was selected, at the age of 14, to be one of the elite music students invited by the U.S. government to study in the US, and moved to Los Angeles. After winning several international competitions, he and his family moved to Amsterdam, where his parents are playing in the Hague Orchestra and where they live today. Soon, he will release his first CD of Bach Suites (Warner Classics).

The violist, Rem Djemilev, is from Uzbekistan. He moved to the Bay Area and has quickly become a powerful force, helping define the future of music for our generation. He teaches at the Crowden School of

Music in Berkeley, and also conducts the Berkeley Youth Symphony. I heard him playing a Shatakovich String Quartet a few years ago, and was impressed with his profound musicality and leadership. When we began planning the festival around a Russian theme, Rem came to mind immediately. We are very much looking forward to hearing him play again.

Adrian Brendel, the cellist, is the only non-Russian member of our group this summer, besides my sister, Momo, and myself. His parents are Austrian and German, and he was born in London. I met him through his father, Alfred Brendel, when he was 11 years old. It has been a pleasure to watch this young musician develop both in terms of technical refinement, surely his father's influence, as well as the individuality that shines through in his flexible, natural and energetic interpretations. His last recording of the Beethoven Cello Sonatas and Variations (Philipps) was a great success worldwide.

I am fortunate to have the continual support of my sister, Momo Kodama, this summer. She kindly kept her schedule free for this concert, while playing at prestigious summer festivals on both ends of the globe. This year in Forest Hill, she will play with Dmitri Makhtin, our first violinist, which will add great color to the venue.

Making her US debut this summer, our daughter, Karin Nagano, will be playing some Tchaikovsky pieces during the children's concert Karin won first prize at the Scriabine International Competition in Paris in February, in addition to 'Best Interpretation' and 'Grand Prix' at the Berlin International Piano Competition in June.

I look forward to seeing our dear friends at this event, and hope that everyone will have a summer that enriches their musical lives.

Mari