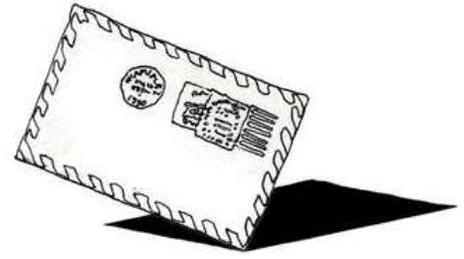


Letter from Mari



August 2009

I hope that the summer finds you well and that you are enjoying the ever-so-brief sense of 'pause' that the month of August can bring in some parts of the world.

The first half of 2009 went by with many new experiences for me, ranging from studying Beethoven Sonatas on a Fortepiano to my first improvisation on-stage, leading quickly to my first jazz 'gig,' in addition to learning to skate, our main source of transportation in Munich. Below, I cover some of the details, as you have asked for snippets from our lives, to help us stay in touch with our neighbors-of-the-heart.

Les Folles Journées in Tokyo and my first improvisation on stage

This year, the theme of Les Folles Journées in Tokyo was Bach. After having spent the last ten years almost entirely with Beethoven, coming back to Bach, felt like a return-to-the-source. At the same time, the event was shrouded in fear over H1N1 (swine flu), which had been discovered only a few days before. The Japanese government had announced that all public events (including ours) would be closed if there were even a single case of the flu detected in Tokyo. The result was that we were truly in-the-moment, wondering if the piece we were performing would be the last of the entire event. Luckily, audiences were not deterred, and the event was continually full, with more than 500,000 enthusiastic attendees.

During the event, my sister, Momo, and I played a Duo concert using two pianos, 'four hands.' As a surprise, we asked our friend, Makoto Ozone, a fabulous Jazz pianist, to be our special guest and to play Bach Kurtag's piece for 'six hands.' He came up from the audience to join us on stage. The three of us sat together, with him in the middle. Then we had a 'secret' conversation on stage:

Makoto: How about improvising?

Mari: But we've never done it!

Makoto: It's O.K.; just play what you feel it should be

Momo: But are you leading us?

Makoto: Yes, and I will give you the cue to enter into Bach-Kurtag

This is the story of my first on-stage improvisation, absolutely not planned. As it was our last concert of the festival, Momo and I celebrated until late into the night. The next morning, the phone rang at 7:00 a.m. It was Makoto, asking us to be a surprise guest for his concert two hours later. It took courage to be on stage for a jazz concert, but we improvised six hands, an invention by J.S. Bach, rotating our chairs during the piece. It was one of the most successful events of the festival.

My Paris debut

I had planned my first concert tour to Mexico, which had to be postponed, due to H1N1. Instead, I ended up using the time to prepare for my 'debut' in Paris, the last major city in the world where I have never performed. While I have performed in London, Berlin, Tokyo and New York many times, I have never performed in the very city where I was a piano student. Of course, as a student at the Conservatoire National de Paris, we spent much time attending concerts at key Parisian concert halls, including Champs Elysées, Salle Pleyel and Opera de Paris. It was moving to be on the stage of the Champs Elysées. Momo and I played Martinu Concerto and the Ensemble Orchestrale de Paris played wonderfully under the baton of Laurence Foster.

It is a challenge to have two matching pianos for our four-handed concerts. In Paris, we were fortunate to have two that matched perfectly, due to the careful guidance of Mr. Osato, Sviatoslav Richter's preferred technician. When we continued on to tour Spain, from Bilbao to Granada, performing with the same group, we weren't so lucky. We had to play a concert where one piano was about 50 years older than the other.

Working with young musicians in Bad Kissingen

Another highlight of the year was the Klangwerkstatt, the sound factory in Bad Kissingen. Here, I am leading a series of concerts where young professionals get together to play chamber music. The opening night was a long, four-hour concert in three parts, almost like a Wagner Opera. The young generation, born in the mid-1980s, are very special. They are strongly committed, just not to succeed professionally, but to improve the depth of their art form. I was overwhelmed by their foresight and skill, and marveled while I witnessed how they seemed to flex a muscle called 'optimism,' using it to take their sound to the next level. I was happy to introduce Shunske Sato, the wonderful young violinist, to this series, and to discover talents like pianists Misha Lifits and Puhar Wang, as well as violinist Feng Ning and Annelien van Walwe. It was also a pleasure to perform again with Danjulo Ishizaka and Mari Samuelson. The only unfortunate moment was

the cancelation of Ligeti's *Symphony for 100 mechanic metronomes*. As it turns out, it is impossible to find even 50 of these metronomes today, let alone 100.

Kent's premier of Lohengrin and Trouble in Tahiti

The big event of the summer was the opera premieres of Wagner's *Lohengrin* and Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti*, which my husband Kent conducted at the Opera Festival in Munich. This is always a big event for this city, and we are happy to see friends from across the world visiting our new home town.

Update on Karin

Our daughter, Karin, is preparing for her first concert with Kent. They will perform with the Orchestre Symphonique de Montreal in Knowlton, Quebec. (This year, the Knowlton Festival became an annual event, with a permanent site.) I am trying to help her, while working on *Pierrot Lunaire* for the Forest Hills Musical Days.

I hope you have a wonderful rest of the summer.

Mari