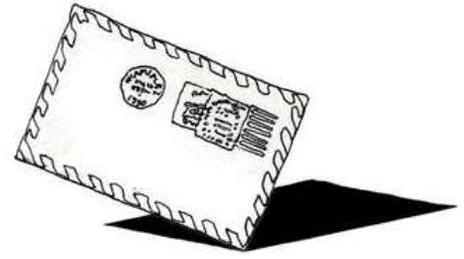


Letter from Mari



November 2009

We are fast approaching the end of the year, and I hope you enjoyed the fall season, which is already coming to an end. Below, I wanted to share some beautiful 'scenes' from our fall.

Fifth Forest Hill Musical Day Concert in San Francisco

Our summer season ended with the fifth Forest Hill Musical Day concert, with musicians from Vienna and Paris, which was our theme this year.

This year, in addition to the huge adventure of gathering personal and professional friends to collaborate, we had a surprise performance by someone new to us, Alexander Palei, a Russian pianist living in New York, who ended up replacing almost the entire repertoire of Igor Lazko, who didn't appear at San Francisco airport right before our festival began. After waiting more than three hours at the airport, we learned that he hadn't traveled, due to an unfortunate family emergency. This would have been a tragedy for a small festival such as ours. But Alexander Palei saved the day by coming within 24 hours' notice and gave around four performances to very enthusiastic audiences and fellow musicians.

All the other musicians had flown in from Europe and were particularly appreciative of the hospitality extended by the residents of Forest Hill. They offered their homes, so that the musicians, made weary by traveling between hotel rooms, airports and concert halls, could stay right in the Forest Hill community and focus on musical - and cultural exchange, rather than on more logistics and impersonal environments. Quite the contrary, Forest Hill neighbors spoiled our musicians with extraordinary meals, ranging from American and Spanish to Russian and Japanese, to name only a few of the ethnic delights they got to sample without even leaving Forest Hill. The neighbors even showed their compassion for the jetlagged musicians by altering their own sleep patterns, staying up late into the night, chatting on terraces and enjoying lively discussions, along with the food and wine that was so generously offered.

*David Grimal, Xavier Phillips and Vincent Lucas brought us French music at the highest level, while Rainer Honeck played amazing Schubert and Mozart. We also had many special guests so that we could perform larger pieces, like Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* and Stravinski's *Soldier's Tale*, which we did in a semi-staged version for the children of Forest Hill. My devoted sister, Momo, was also there again and her*

performances ranged from Mozart to Meecham, one of the American composers representing music of 'today.' In fact he was in the audience, as he lives right in Forest Hill. He joked that it was a secret that if composers were only to live in Forest Hill, they would be sure to have their music played in public at the Forest Hill Musical Days concert.

Beethoven Fest in Bonn and preparing my first fortepiano solo

The 2009-2010 season started with the Beethoven Fest in Bonn. One of the focal points of this historical festival this year was to have all 32 Beethoven Sonatas played on different pianofortes. (Fortepianos are the earliest version of the piano, used from around 1700 to 1900. They look like a small piano, but have keys and foot pedals of different sizes, depending on the period they were used. Some are even played by lifting the pedals with the knees.) It was a great honor for me to be invited to play with the other specialists of period instruments, such as Andreas Staier, whom I admire greatly. The pianoforte has a much more limited range of tone and volume, and is highly dependant on the player's touch. Further, while I was approaching Sonatas I had played many times, and had performed on fortepianos before with orchestras, it felt quite different to maintain the drama alone for two hours. My goal was to prepare so that I could communicate them with heightened clarity. The audience seemed very happy with the result and gave me a standing ovation. I was equally thrilled by the journey of preparing for this concert, as it reminds us of the rich history of the music itself, so wanted to detail parts of it, below.

First, I tried to rent an instrument a few months in advance, but it was a challenge because I needed a particular version of this instrument, one with 6.5 octaves for the late sonata I played. In fact, I could only find 6 octaves. Most of them didn't have enough keys, and had only pedals that you push up with your knees instead of pushing down with your feet.

Later, Christoph Hammer lent me his. It was fascinating for me to feel new muscles in my arms and legs, despite the lightness of the keys. As it turns out, those aches emanated from the fact that the keys are smaller and because there are five pedals instead of two. When you push on a wrong pedal, you sometimes hear a timbale (bang!).

The concert itself was also an experience for me. It took place in a gorgeous church in Bonn, which was in the shape of a circle. They also had a Graf fortepiano copy from Holland, which I had the opportunity to play for my pieces. (Graf was one of the great piano builder's of Beethoven's time. Graf would work directly with composers to make the piano 'to order.' Even copies, such as the one I played on, are rare and

wonderful. It was an incredible honor.) The acoustics and lighting, which changed constantly, as the sunlight moved across the stained glass, added magic to the space.

Another unusual experience was that the church was extremely cold. While this is typical weather for this part of the world in the fall, normally, there is central heating. In this old concert hall, there was none, and the stone floors amplified the cold, giving me cold hands and feet. I got a true sense of what it must have been like to play a Graf during this season in Beethoven's time.

The evening ended with a celebration at a beautiful home right on the Rhine River, where one could feel the spirit of Beethoven. It was a dream-come-true.

Traveling and experiencing a world gem: Spivey Hall in Atlanta, Georgia

Beyond this trip, which took me back in time, our fall has been filled with air travel, bringing us around the world about once each month. The practical (and modern) realities of such travel are that I need to figure out how to pack for different climates each time I set out on a voyage. What I have learned is that five cashmere sweaters can get one through most climates, with the exception of January in Montreal. As for the jetlag, I rely on some reflexology massage.

On my latest round-the-world trip, I got to experience Atlanta, Georgia, home of Coca Cola. It was impressive to see the prosperity of the town and their interest in the arts. Spivey Hall was a gem, with its great acoustics, its perceptive audience and amazing artistic direction. That is to say, that the programs were not simply intellectual, but their artistic director brought together interesting people and a program that was a balance of what the audience would find appealing and challenging. This quality of artistic direction is something which I appreciate enormously.

More about my passions...

On the family side, Kent had his first opera production of the season in Munich, Don Giovanni, Mozart's greatest. He enjoyed sharing this wonderful music with his team of orchestra musicians and singers.

Karin started 6th grade this fall, so she is now in middle school. She goes to school in Paris, where half her topics are in French (Math and French) and the other are in English (Sciences, History, Geography, along with English). Although very demanding, the subjects are all interesting to her and she enjoys school

and tries to make time to practice her piano, as she is considering more performances next summer. In her free time, she takes ballet lessons from Natalia, a former star ballerina of the Munich Opera Ballet.

I hope you are enjoying this season of brilliant color, wherever you may be.

Mari