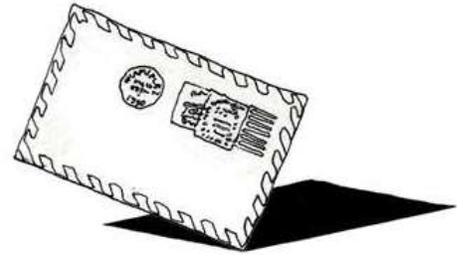


Letter from Mari



September 2010

The days are getting shorter and the chestnut leaves in the Bois de Boulogne are changing color. Paris is filled with the incredible energy of well-rested Parisians, as they settle back into life in the city after the summer season.

The Kodama-Nagano family had an exciting summer festival season. Three festivals, occurring in three countries, anchored it.

Bad Kissingen's 25th anniversary

Bad Kissingen is a spa resort in the middle of Bavaria, Germany, with a history dating back in time as the place to come for therapeutic cures and general restoration. To this day, it is still a restful place, where senior citizens from all over Europe come for a rejuvenating vacation. During the festival, by 4:00pm, while we musicians have worked up a sweat as we rehearse, the spa goers start to enjoy their afternoon coffee on the terrace in front of the concert halls, eating black forest cake (yes, this is the Black Forest region of Germany, the name sake of this regional dessert, which now has traveled the world), dancing and enjoying the sunshine.

This year, the festival celebrated its 25th anniversary, and I had the honor of playing Beethoven Concerto No. 4 with Kent and the Deutsche Symphony Orchestra for the opening. The hall was filled with enthusiastic seniors clapping and dancing and a general stomping of feet that was almost as intense as dancers at a Pop concert. It seems that the week of classical music turned the usual calm of Bad Kissingen into a swirl of energy and movement. This felt like a festival in every sense of the word. Momo and I also played Bartok Sonata for two pianos and percussion at a chamber music concert.

The greatest festival of Southern France celebrates its 30th birthday

When arriving at La Roque D'Antheron late last August, the Parc de Florens is veiled with strong sunshine, the sound of pianos and the smell of couscous and absinthe. This is the place where, every evening, audiences enjoy not only the greatest established pianists, but also young talents, who are just starting their careers. This year, 16 pianists gathered on a single evening to celebrate the 30th birthday of this festival. You may

stop to wonder, 'How can you accommodate so many pianists in a single event, especially the workaholic type?' The answer: platforms installed under their 365 giant plantain trees (the tall, shade-producing and wind-reducing ones that line many country roads in France). Protected by nature's beautiful dappled light, the sounds of birds and a few mosquitoes, even those who walked by and took our photos couldn't disturb our concentration. To close the concert, 12 of us played the Overture of Meistersinger by Richard Wagner on six pianos. We represented a diverse group, with the young leading French pianists reminding me of the young bulls in 'Ferdinand' demonstrating their raw strength, while the older masters focused more on the music itself. The net effect of these differences created a colorful and lively first rehearsal. Christian Zacharias, who came to conduct us and who led the concert, shaped this energy into a thing of pure beauty. We all enjoyed the process and the end-result thoroughly.

There was a moment, during this festival, when I was moved to tears to experience the sound of true mastery. This happens in any art form, be it musical, visual, culinary, architectural or other, when pure creative freedom flows. To me, this is the realm where a deep respect for the past and a disciplined approach to the present actually meet and become 'one.' It is rare and absolutely wonderful. Momo and I will never forget the masterful performances of French and Hungarian pieces by Dezoe Ranki, Michel Beroff and Jean Philipp Collard during the duo piano concerts we shared with them.

The Orford Festival and Tom & Jerry

Lake Orford, in Quebec, Canada, is blessed by an amazing natural setting and by the endless positive energy of the Orford Festival leader, Jean François Rivest, a highly cultivated Canadian conductor. He is also a violinist, top chef (please see a recipe he shared with me, below), and father of five, among other talents and roles. The festival focuses on future leaders of the music profession by offering select attendees guidance from musicians like Joerg Widmann, Till Fellner and Christian Tetzlaff, and allowing them to experience live performances by masters like the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, lead by Kent Nagano. Nature played a role in the creative inspiration of Orford by offering a stunning new type of light, minute-by-minute, as the day evolved. I enjoyed presenting a chamber music concert with Joerg Widmann and the young American string quartet 'Pacifica.' Joerg Widmann, who is



considered the 'Beethoven' of today, gave me the honor of performing a world premier of his 'Valse Bavaroise,' and the Canadian premier of his piano pieces 'Humoresken.'

Since I usually play pieces by composers like Bach, Mozart and Beethoven, it is a luxury to have the opportunity to discuss the ideas behind a piece directly with the composer. It was my first time to play pieces by Joerg Widmann, and it took a great deal of practice time, as they were quite complicated, in addition to being intermezzo (Italian comic opera interlude), which is very different from the German genre I typically play. It suddenly clicked for me when Joerg explained the character of the piece I was playing by using the image of Tom and Jerry!

Other summer/early fall news from our family

Kent's fall season in Europe started with a successful concert tour with the Bavarian State Orchestra. He was honored with the Furtwaengler Prize in Bonn for his achievement and interpretation of Beethoven.

Karin had an exciting summer. She had her professional debut, playing the Beethoven Concerto No 1 at the Reate Festival in Italy with Kent and Tafelmusik. Next, she played a concert on Elba Island with Yuri Bashmet conducting. She prepared all summer for these concerts. As part of her concert preparation, she had the chance to pay a visit to the great Maestro Wolfgang Sawallisch. He now lives in a beautiful Bavarian villa outside Munich and has a music room with two Steinways and a Boesendorfer (an old, Austrian piano brand) grand piano in the corner, along with beautiful paintings and tapestries. The Maestro gave Karin precious advice while she played a Beethoven Concerto for him. She felt like the luckiest 11-year-old pianist in the world.

Our family had a busy summer, so we needed a few days to focus on one another and to rest. We decided on a road trip through Northern California. We traveled to our favorite places, along the coast, from Big Sur to Mendocino. We breathed in the Pacific Ocean air, hiked the red woods, ate hamburgers at Nepenthe, and enjoyed the sunsets each day. Nature gave us the energy we needed to start the season full of good spirits and inspiration.

I wish you a burst of autumn energy, wherever you may be.

Mari Nagano

RECIPE: Asparagus with a Port Aioli



Created by Orford Festival leader, Jean François Rivest

Jean François Rivest, the conductor and great chef in Orford, gave me a home-style recipe for a distinctive asparagus dipping sauce. He served it as part of a lunch he hosted for us at his summer home on his terrace overlooking Lake Orford. It was interesting to see how he executed such an elegant lunch in the middle of his workday. It included chilled asparagus, duck, and a fine selection of cheeses and chocolates, and served with a beautiful wine. It was perfect for a hot summer day.

I thought the French-Canadian sensibility of the asparagus dish would be fun for my friends in other countries. For me, it is an easy way to have an elegant and healthy appetizer-style snack because I can prepare it the morning of an event and have it ready-to-go when guests arrive.

Here is how he described it to me

Ingredients

- 60% mayonnaise (good quality, even better if it is home-made)*
- 40% port wine (preferably something like late bottle vintage but it shouldn't be a very costly vintage)*
- Some garlic, chopped fine (about 1 teaspoon)*
- Ginger (about 1 teaspoon)*
- Asparagus (large stalks)*

Method

Mix the above ingredients.

Add a pinch of Fleur de Sel (or your preferred salt) and fresh-ground black pepper only just before serving.

Steam asparagus lightly, dip in cold water before the asparagus has finished cooking.

Dry and seal in plastic in the refrigerator until just before it is served.

*Serve with warm baguette, to which the guests can add butter.**

Jean François also recommends this dish with Chablis.

** The butter was yet-another highlight of the lunch. He used a delicious French butter, Beurre de Bretagne, which he keeps preserved using an upside down butter dish that includes water to keep out the air and therefore preserves the as it would be in the refrigerator, even on a hot day.*