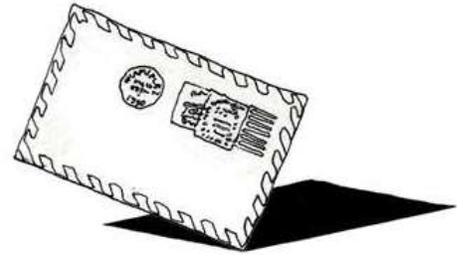


Letter from Mari



February 2011

Dachau, Germany

What crosses your mind when you hear the name of this place?

When I got an invitation to perform a concert series in Dachau, in my ignorance, the image was of a dark, run down place, with spells run rampant.

To the contrary it is a quiet and beautiful suburb of Munich, where the King of Bavaria once had a small castle. This castle is perched on a hill and overlooking a rose garden, and is now used as a concert hall for recitals and chamber orchestra cycles.

The Fall Season started for me with a piano recital, playing the last three Beethoven Sonatas in Dachau. Playing 32 Beethoven Sonatas remains a challenge for pianists, since it reflects the evolution of the keyboard at a time when Beethoven's own development as a composer was profound. The last three Sonatas focus on our world. They take the listener from the happiness of watching a sleeping child to a world devoid of any joy, going through the agony and temptations. To be able to take this journey together with the audience requires incredible concentration on the part of both the audience and the pianist, along with perfect sound and timing from all responding instruments and acoustics.

I will be in the barn in Holland, where I recorded my last CD, to record these giants next month. I hope to be able to share the truth of life through music with you when it is released.

Another concert close to my heart last fall was the Beethoven Concerto No. 4 in Lanaudiere, Canada with conductor Stephane Laforest. With the five very different piano Concertos, the No. 4 stands out as the most refined, where Beethoven uses warm tonality, but still demonstrates energy and wit. Again, this is a very demanding piece, relying on intense collaboration between the orchestra, the piano and the acoustic. We were able to work well together, along with an appreciative and attentive audience in Lanaudiere.

An interesting family collaboration

My husband Kent invited my sister Momo to perform with the Bavarian State Orchestra in Munich. It was fun for us to reflect on the fact that she was our first family member to visit Munich, as she first came in 1997 when she won the Munich International Competition (ARD International Music competition that year). This time, she came to play the Concerto for Left Hand by Maurice Ravel. It was written around the time of the First World War for pianist Wittgenstein, who lost his right hand. As you can imagine, it is an extremely demanding piece, and I saw Momo's left hand grow to nearly twice the size of her right hand during the preparation. She has been applauded as a pianist who looks like a ballet dancer, but plays like a large man, which makes a particularly appropriate analogy when you imagine watching her play this piece. In fact, Joerg Mannes ended up choreographing a ballet based on the piece. His balletic interpretation describes the First World War, and both the destruction and hope that emerged. It is one of the most beautiful ballets today. During the concert with Momo that day, The Bavarian State Orchestra played this French music with elegance, imagination and esprit, just as Ravel had intended.

Hope for the future

The visionary musician Yehudi Menuhin left many important plans to make classical music available to everyone when he left us a few years ago.

One of his important projects is called 'Live Music Now!' and is run by a dedicated team of impassioned volunteers, in collaboration with Conservatories from around the world to bring live music to the disadvantaged, such as the economically challenged and those infirmed in hospitals. At the fundraising gala this year in Munich, Kent conducted Strauss Metamorphosen and a Bruckner Symphony with the students of the orchestra of Munich Hochschule. It is a difficult repertoire, even for 'grown up' orchestras, and I was curious to see, how the children would survive a gigantic Bruckner Symphony over one hour and involving non-stop playing. These children produced the right sound, the right breathing and a mixture of colors so that one could see the seasons and greatness of the Austrian Alps.

My third visit to Moscow in 25 years

My first visit to Moscow was in 1987 when Russia was still very closed. Momo and I had been invited to visit the great professor Vera Gornostaeva to study Tchaikovsky Piano pieces at Christmas time. The country was very strict about letting people enter. Security guards were lurking at almost every corner, and there was little food. We brought cans of meat, corn, beef jerky and crackers to survive the

alternatives available in Russian at the time. We ended up getting sick and even fainting during one of our sessions with Vera. She ended up inviting us to have meals at her house. Given her stature as a renowned professor of music, she had access to food and luxury. Still, what did 'luxury' mean at the time? It meant that we got to sit with her family in a warm kitchen and enjoy two apples, divided among the six of us. This image of Russia as a place of extreme poverty and restraint contrasts starkly with its musical world: the concert halls were filled with very enthusiastic audiences and extremely high levels of performances. We were deeply moved by the deep cultural richness that was available for all.

My second visit was in 2003, for a recording session with the Russian National Orchestra. Since the hall was constantly occupied with many events and concerts, we recorded after-hours each day, from 11:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m. at the great hall of the Conservatory. While life was still modest then, we were able to order sushi during recording sessions.

In the fall of 2010, during my most recent visit, things had changed so dramatically in Russia that it felt like fiction: everything was clean and modern, the smell was gone, and the women dressed with a newfound sense of fashion. Thankfully, people were still reading books in the underground. (If you haven't seen masses of people reading large, hard bound novels, even while riding the long escalators through the deep Soviet era subway stations, you too would take note.) In addition, the great enthusiasm for music was still intact and thriving, as in the past, so I was in heaven. The performance of the five-hour long *Opera die Walkiry* was packed and the audience's eyes were shining with emotion. Despite the fact that there is not a Wagner culture in Russia, the audience was riveted: there was not a cough during the entire performance, though I had expected at least a few. (Typically this kind of weather - cold and damp - would bring on at least a few human sounds during the performance.) During our stay there, we woke up to a spectacular view of St. Basil, as colorful as ever.

Year-end

The end of the year was jam-packed as I finishing editing three CDs while traveling from Montreal to Amsterdam to Nancy for a *Beethoven Symphony, Beethoven Sonatas, and Beethoven Concerti*, which will be released soon.

By the time we arrived in San Francisco, we were all looking forward to some quiet time with friends and family. Karin's vacation project was to film, over the course of three days, how to prepare a traditional Japanese New Year's meal. This was an important family project because we had wanted to document my

mom's Kyoto-style recipes for this holiday. Even Kent, from a third generation Japanese family growing up in Morro Bay, south of San Francisco and north of Los Angeles, has fond memories of his Japanese grandmother's New Year's dishes (called 'osechi'). Like other cultures, this Holiday meal varies by region in Japan and by family. My mother has been dedicated to crafting it in a meticulous and traditional way passed down, word-of-mouth, by her mother, my late grandmother, who are from Kyoto. Karin interviewed my mother, following the entire process, from grocery shopping to the creation of this 15-course kaiseki-style meal. Below, I include photos of the 'main' course, a soup called 'ozoni' which my mom makes according to our local, Kyoto, tradition, in addition to dessert that is recognized primarily only by residents of Kyoto, a New Years sweet called 'hanabira mochi.' For those interested in recipes, please try searching on Google and/or follow the simple instructions I include below. We left the city recharged and full of good spirit, ready to start 2011 - the year of Liszt, Mahler and Stravinsky!

Kyoto

My first concert of the year was playing Liszt in the ancient capital city of Kyoto. In Japan, January is extremely cold, with bone-dry winds blowing in from Siberia. Kyoto is particularly so, where this wind accumulates. If you haven't heard of Japanese winter ghost stories, it is easy to imagine these thrillers during this season. Visions of a fox disguised as a woman or a one-eyed legman are easy to imagine in Kyoto in January. And it is dark! Even McDonald's is kept dark there to maintain the Kyoto winter esthetic. In direct contrast, the concert hall was full of audience members from all generations. This was surprising to me because, though Kyoto is the seat of Japanese culture, its people are also known to focus on a very restricted interpretation of 'culture.' To the contrary, the audience was highly involved and appreciative of the music that was played that day.

Weimar and a ceremony for my mentor, Alfred Brendel



Today I am in the historic town of Weimar, where I am participating in the Liszt Award Ceremony where my mentor Alfred Brendel, who recently turned 80, will be celebrated.

I first met Alfred Brendel through a mutual friend. It was a young pianist's dream to get his advise, but everyone knew that he was not teaching. Out of

kindness and respect for our mutual friend, he agreed to listen to me, but had only one hour. I brought him the Haydn Sonata in E flat major. We worked on about half the first movement during our time together. After the hour was up, he invited me to return to continue our work, and this was the beginning of lessons that occurred whenever he had time, which was about twice each year. Knowing the value of his precious time, I brought the maximum amount of cash I could afford, but he would not take it. Instead, he encouraged me to take what I could afford and it to the victims of the earthquake in Armenia, which had just occurred at that time, in December of 1988.

As he was not officially a 'teacher,' his approach was unique. He taught me about the results of his research on the pieces we were working on together. He also taught me about achieving perfect balance: the balance between the ten fingers, the harmony, the timing, and other nuances. We also worked on the balance between reading the text and interpreting it with respect to the style of each composer and his cultural background. He also emphasized achieving balance between the brain, the heart and the fingers while performing. It is not easy to achieve all of this on stage, as losing focus of any one of these several elements puts everything out of balance. Brendel also gave me important visual images and helped me find inspiration in the visual arts. For example, we discussed paintings by Da Vinci, where everything is in such perfect balance that it is difficult to analyze what makes them harmonious. Some of our museum unforgettable exhibit visits include those of Schwitters and Picasso, in addition to that of Joseph Cornell at the Chicago Museum of Art. Another important 'lesson' of Brendel's was his advise for me to develop a large repertoire of all periods, from Baroque to Contemporary, before turning 30. He said that, after that, I could focus my work and dive deep. After that, the goal would be to focus on only a few with whom you feel you can develop a life-long relationship. With a first class composer like Beethoven, Bach or Debussy, as time passes, you feel can discover something new in them. If I could sum up my appreciation of Alfred Brendel, I would say that he is the most generous of artists and of humans. He not only explores and researches styles and traditions, but transforms them into living works. He does this, in part, by educating the next generation so that important elements of the oral tradition of music do not get lost over time. Those who now carry on these important traditions, thanks to Brendel, include Till Fellner, Kit Armstrong, and Paul Lewis. [Mari discusses her mentor in greater detail in the supplementary DVD included in her recent Beethoven CD release.]

...And a few words about the city of Weimar, Germany

Weimar is located in central Germany, also close to Dresden and Leipzig. During my stay in Weimar, I was deeply moved by the entire region and all I learned. Weimar was not destroyed during the time of the DDR

(German Democratic Republic), so remains a kind of shrine to its amazing history. It is interesting to note that Schiller, Goethe, Liszt, and Bach all lived in the city of Weimar. And Weimar is a tiny town, about the size of Japan Town in San Francisco (maybe five New York city blocks in total). It is amazing to think that all these great artists lived within a 20-minute walk of one another. During our stay, we also learned that Gropius started the Bauhaus movement in this town as well. Thanks to the beautiful spring weather, I was able to slip away and walk from Goethe's home to the Bauhaus museum by simply walking through Goethe's garden.

May the world become a more peaceful place this spring!

- Mari

FROM MARI'S KITCHEN

Recipe courtesy of www.chanoya.com

HANABIRA MOCHI (gyuuki skins)



In December, 2010, we enjoyed preparing a traditional Japanese New Years meal that both Kent (in Morro Bay, California) and I (in Europe) enjoyed while growing up in our respective Japanese families. This year, here in San Francisco, my mom worked with our daughter Karin, to document the process of preparing this 15-course meal. Here is one recipe and two photos to give you a sense of what this meal is like. The photos include: (1) the 'main' course, a soup called 'ozoni' which my mom makes according to her Kyoto hometown tradition; and (2) a photo of a sweet that is recognized primarily only by residents of Kyoto, which is called Hanabira mochi.

We wanted to add that the concept of this sweet was to mimic the ozoni soup, the way it is made in Kyoto. This soup base is a white miso (this is why the sweet white bean center has white miso added to it), and, of course, the wrapper is soft mochi rice cake, mimicking the roasted mochi rice cake in the ozoni soup. Kyoto ozoni also includes burdock root. The sweet includes a candied version of this root, so it has 'all' the elements of the soup. Apparently, this sweet recipe was invented for the imperial family and was only eaten by them. After a certain point in time, non Imperial family members were allowed to also eat this sweet. Today, practitioners of Urasenke-style tea ceremony in Japan adopted this sweet as part of the New Years tradition of that tea school.

The recipe for this sweet follows. It is complicated but made by devotees of Kyoto culture around the world, as its mix of flavors and textures are both refined and scrumptious.

Ingredients:

mochiko (sweet rice flour) 100gm (3.5oz)
water 130-150cc (approx. 2/3 cup)
granulated sugar 100gm (3.5oz)
1 egg white lightly beaten
mizuame (or light corn syrup) 1/2tsp
shiro koshian (white smooth bean paste) 30gm (1oz)
potato starch or corn starch
pink miso flavored koshian 150gm (5.28oz)

Preparation:

Mix the water slowly into the mochiko to dissolve, making sure there are no lumps. The consistency should be like a thick marshmallow cream. You may not need all of the water so be careful not to pour it all in at once. When thoroughly mixed, place the mixture on a damp cotton cloth and steam on med/high heat for approximately 10 to 15 minutes until the white (raw) color has changed.

Transfer to a heavy bottom pot and over low/medium heat add the sugar gradually. Stir constantly to keep the mixture from burning. If the heat gets too high, turn it down. When all of the sugar is incorporated add the mizuame or corn syrup. Next add the an and continue to stir until it is mixed in well. Finally add the lightly beaten egg white mixing vigorously to incorporate completely. At this point the gyuki will be quite stiff. Turn onto a board that has been generously dusted with the starch. (A small tea strainer works well

for spreading the starch evenly.) Dust the top with more starch. When it has cooled a bit, but is still warm, roll out the gyuki until it is thin.

To Assemble:

Using a round cutter that is approximately 3.5' to 3.75' in diameter cut the gyuki into rounds. Brush off any excess starch. Add a triangular piece of sweet miso flavored smooth pink bean paste approximately 15gm (1/2oz) to the center of the skin. Add 2 pieces of candied gobo (burdock root) and fold in half. This recipe makes about 8 sweets. (If serving the sweets the next day it is better not to assemble them until just before serving.)

NOTE - The miso flavored smooth pink bean paste is made by adding approximately 15gm (1/2oz), or a little more to taste, saikyo miso (sweet white Kyoto style miso) to the koshian. Mix the koshian and miso together in a heavy pan. Heat on low/medium heat, while stirring, until the miso is incorporated. If the bean paste seems too dry, a little hot water can be added. Turn off the heat and add a small amount of red food coloring to the bean paste and mix in until a pink color is achieved.

GOBO NO SATOZUKE (candied burdock root)

Candied Gobo is what gives Hanabira mochi its distinctive crunchy texture. It is interesting to note that many candied vegetables appear on Chinese tables during the Chinese New Year, so, perhaps, this is the origin of this idea.

You can candy many vegetables and fruits this way.

Ingredients:

*gobo (burdock root) 1 - 2 pieces (approx. 200 - 400gm [7 - 14oz])
granulated sugar 250gm (8.8oz) to start and 450gm (1lb) for later use
water 700cc (2.8 cups)*

Preparation:

Select gobo that is fairly firm with a smooth skin. Rinse under cold water and either lightly peel the skin or scrape with the back of a knife. Cut into 4 1/4' lengths and keep under cold water so it doesn't discolor. Cut each piece into smaller pieces that are approximately 3/16' to 1/4' in diameter. (One piece of 3/4' diameter gobo will yield approximately 14 pieces.) Place the gobo in a non corrosive pan (stainless steel or enameled cast iron) with plenty of water to cover. Bring to the boil, turn down the heat and gently cook

until the gobo is tender, approximately 1 hour or so. It is important not to undercook the gobo as it will not get any softer once the sugar is added. Drain well.

In a clean pan add 700cc of water and 250gm of sugar. Heat until the sugar is dissolved and add the drained gobo. Bring up to a gentle boil and turn off the heat. Let sit in the pan to cool and then cover. The next day add 50gm (1.76oz) of sugar to the gobo and syrup. Turn on the heat and cook until the sugar is dissolved. Turn off the heat, let cool and cover. Repeat this daily over a 10 day period until you have incorporated all of the 450gm of sugar. (Note - This recipe can be cut in half but you must also reduce the amount of sugar added each day so that it happens over a period of 10 days.)

To Finish:

When ready to crystallize, heat the gobo and syrup until it is very hot but be careful not to let it boil too long or it will become caramel. Have a flat container ready that has granulated sugar in it. Quickly, but carefully, remove several pieces of gobo from the syrup and place in the sugar. Using chopsticks, move the gobo around the sugar until completely coated and then remove to a flat surface (tray or plate) to dry. When completely cool and dry store in an airtight container.