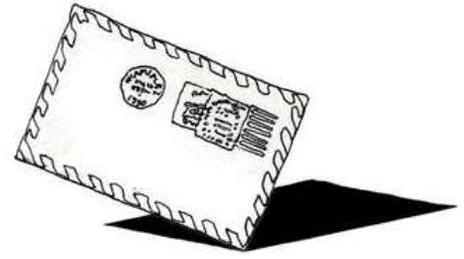


Letter from Mari



June 2011

Dear Friends,

I write this on the summer solstice, sending wishes for bright days and a summer full of big dreams and stolen moments for all. Below I reflect on the spring of 2011.

Japan - recovering and finding courage and force in the arts

Since I last wrote, our world was turned upside down by the earthquake and subsequent tsunami in Fukushima, Japan on March 11, 2011. I returned to Japan two months later in May and was daunted by the how much things had changed, even in Tokyo, which had suffered only minor damage. On a Friday evening, the typically bright area of downtown Marunouchi was rather dark. The lack of laughter and joy in the air was palpable. People did not feel it was appropriate to go out at night, given what their country had suffered.

I was there to perform for the Folles Journees of Tokyo, a relatively large classical musical festival, which usually attracts around one million audience members over the course of four days. Due to cancellations by foreign artists who were affected by widespread fear of radiation at the time, the festival organizers were obliged to completely change the program, reimburse the tickets and start, all over again, selling tickets only two weeks before the opening of the event. Within one hour of the opening of box offices, the event was sold out. Those in Japan were looking for some solace in music and culture.

Folles Journees is not only a fun meeting place for the audience, but for artists as well. Although we all work from morning until night doing rehearsals and performances non-stop, it is always nice to get together with old friends in a beautiful setting. Most soloists are lodged at the five-star Imperial Hotel, within a ten-minute walk of the venue. (This is the perfect way for sedentary musicians to get a little exercise.) We usually gather at a 24-hour sushi restaurant nearby to have dinner until midnight.

It was interesting that the quality of the fish did not seem to be at all what it was the year before. In fact, we ended up testing the quality of the fish, thanks to a friend from Russia. He was one of very few international artists who lived up to his commitment to attend the festival and, being from Russian, thought to bring his own Geiger counter. He measured the radiation levels of everything from the sushi to the rain.

So, while the sushi restaurant stayed open, everything else closed down early due to austerity measures to conserve energy. Despite all this, during the festival we sensed that people were ready for optimism and were mustering energy and strength to start to re-build their country. This was one of the proudest moments I have ever felt for the people of my country.

Karin's first experience playing a double concerto

Karin had her first experience performing on two pianos with a partner in a double concerto in San Luis Obispo, California, which is located along Highway 1 on the Pacific Ocean about halfway between San Francisco and Los Angeles. (It is a convenient stopping point between these two cities so became the home of the world's first motel when car travel first became popular. It also happens to be near to where Kent grew up, so we go to visit relatives there around once each year.)

Karin had been invited to play in the end-of-year gala of the Youth Symphony Orchestra, created by Wachtang Kiosheli (now 94 years old). Karin last played there in 2008, with Mr. Kiosheli conducting. Today, the conductor is Nancy Nagano, Kent's cousin.

For two pianists to play together on the same instrument requires perfect coordination. To me, it conjures up the image of professional ice hockey players: teamwork at its best, requiring quick decisions and perfect coordination. Her partner for the Mozart Double Concert was Salome Jordania, a talented young pianist from Tbiliss, Georgia. Salome arrived in California with her father, a Symphony conductor, traveling 20 hours from home. Although both girls had jet lag, the musical contact was immediate. To everyone's amazement, Salome and Karin spoke the same musical language right away: they looked at each other, made improvised conversation from each piano, and simply had a great time being on stage. Of course, they also enjoyed their free time together, jumping on the trampoline, playing with animals and going out for fish and chips. The two girls received a well-deserved standing ovation.

Judging a high-caliber international competition

The Montreal International Competition is a relatively new piano competition, only ten years old, compared with the great Chopin Competition (since 1927), the Geneva Competition (since 1939), or the Tchaikovsky Competition, (since 1958). Can you imagine how hard it is to judge who is playing better than the others? We all wish it would be like certain sporting events where you can objectively measure the timing, and that the fastest would be the best. Unfortunately, music is very personal and so there is also a great deal of room to be biased in one's interpretation. 'Our goal is to be as fair as possible,' were the first words I heard

from the president, upon arriving at the Jury meeting the day before the beginning of the competition. With this admirable tone of Quebecois determination, we all set out to try to be as 'fair' as possible.

Discussion among the judges is forbidden, and there are no points. Instead, we were to choose among three options, a 'yes,' 'no' or 'maybe.' In addition, there were three different degrees within each of those answers to help avoid any manipulation of the overall result.

The talented, young pianists were all very strong, and it seemed as if each was equally qualified, on a technical basis, to make it to the next round. Their fingers were amazing and almost indistinguishable because of their consistent level of mechanical skill. You can imagine that, after listening to 24 pianists who were all nearly perfect, it was hard to make a decision as to who would pass to the next round.

As we all know, technique is only part of the picture: it is a tool we use to express our ideas. Today, possessing the most technically advanced cell phone or computer is the easiest part of communication. Having something of substance to say requires insight based upon knowledge and reflection. This is very different from speed and form.

How does one acquire original, substantive ideas to express in music? How do any of us achieve this elusive goal?

My answer would be that this requires experiencing the arts and society fully, with specific emphasis on the cultures of classical music, including German, French, Russian, Hungarian, and Spanish culture. Since classical music has been based on these musical cultures for many centuries, these must be studied in depth.

It is my hope that the next generation of musicians, who has achieved so much on a technical level, begins to distinguish themselves on an expressive basis as well. This will be the opportunity of forward-looking musicians to leave their unique mark on our musical landscape.

Musical Days in Forest Hill

We were ten hands from across the world, including hands from France, Russia, Germany and Japan and gathered for our first only-piano festival in Forest Hill. Those hands belonged to dear friends who came to share a musical experience that was as intense and fulfilling for us, as it was for our audience.

Backstage, you can imagine the banter, as we worked, eight hands at a time, during our rehearsal for this quadruple concerto on two Steinway Hamburg D's.



M: 'Let's try it slowly.'

A: 'DK.'

Ae: 'I think it is too loud all the time.'

Mo: 'Agreed who is playing the middle line? Can't hear it. I should be the theme.'

A: 'Come on! Let's just play.'

Ae: 'Yes, but everything is too loud and incomprehensible.'

M: 'DK, let me give the pulse and we can try the first two pages, one, two three!'

S: (from the hall): 'Sounds great!'

Each pianist brought a distinct cultural context to the performance and created a fascinating mix of sound and perspective. Alexander Palei is a master Russian pianist, considered the Horvitz of today, and his playing is filled with passion. Siegfried Mauser is a thoughtful, yet lively German pianist to whom many composers dedicate their music. Anne Queffelec represented French elegance with incredible inner force. Momo Kodama is considered a romantic and poetic musician with fireworks inside. Each of us comes from a different vantage point, yet we all have respect and sensitivity to one another's differences. Working together and experiencing the magic of creating something new was an incredible experience.

Forest Hill welcomed us with all the warmth that only dear friends and neighbors of many years can provide. The Forest Hill Clubhouse, designed by Bernard Maybeck (designer of the Palace of Fine Arts), was, as

always, a dream-come-true for the musicians and the two Steinways it housed. The sound and mood were perfect in this home-y, dark wood structure, surrounded by tall, majestic trees in a quiet residential neighborhood of San Francisco.

Summer in this city is famous for its chilly weather, and this spring was true-to-form. I had warned my musician friends to bring woolen sweaters. 'This is not Los Angeles,' I warned them, and they were glad I did: it was cold in the evenings. After three intense days of performances, we enjoyed the sites, including lunch at La Garage in Sausalito, a visit to the Gertrude Stein family collection, a special exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art, and a trip to Haight-Ashbury, of course! On our last day together, it rained, which is very unusual for June in San Francisco. (Apparently, the last wet year like this was 1967 or 1887, depending on how you look at it). With the rain, my musician friends said it was like San Francisco was 'crying' as they wrapped up their idyllic visit and returned home. We felt lucky to have spent time together, sharing music with one another and among friends here in San Francisco.

I hope you are having a good summer season, and know I will be thinking of you as I prepare a letter cover these precious months before the fall.

- Mari

FROM MARI'S KITCHEN: Matcha Ice Cream



When I was growing up, matcha (green tea powder) was used almost exclusively in tea ceremonies in Japan, where it was whisked in tea bowls (the size of a café au lait cup in France, but without handles) and savored as part of a meditation with friends, typically in a temple-like setting. The powder is whisked right into the water you drink, so it is unlike most teas, which are strained. Think of making instant coffee, and it gives you a rough sense of how matcha tea is

prepared.

Today, matcha is becoming increasingly popular and is showing up in mass produced products like Häagen-Dazs Ice Cream (Green Tea Ice Cream) and Starbucks Coffee (Green Tea Latte). Most people I know, however, still don't have this wonderful ingredient in their pantries.

While I used to have to get matcha in Japan, today I can pick it up in Japanese supermarkets throughout the world. Of course, it is also easy to get online.

Unlike other teas, which are made of larger, tougher tea leaves and which therefore must be strained to be enjoyed, matcha is made from young, tender green tea leaves, which are powdered fine so can be added directly to foods. When used as an ingredient in drinks and desserts, the intense flavor of the matcha powder comes through in a clear way, allowing you to enjoy the distinct flavor of a high-end green tea in a new form.

At home, matcha becomes a quick (almost instant) way to create a flavorful and elegant dessert. Below, is one of the simplest recipes I know. I hope that you also consider adding it to other recipes, like angel food cake, white chocolate bark and more, as the list of delicious combinations is endless.

Ingredients:

- Vanilla Ice Cream (1 Pint - 1 Liter, whatever quantity you desire, but be certain to use the best quality you can, be it homemade, or a high-end brand like Ben & Jerry's here in San Francisco, or even Häagen-Dazs)
- Matcha powder (3-4 Tablespoons, to give it a stronger 'tea' flavor)

Method:

If you care to make your own ice cream, use your favorite recipe for vanilla ice cream and follow instructions below.

Otherwise, allow vanilla ice cream to soften slightly (remove from freezer around 15 minutes).

Slowly incorporate matcha powder

Return ice cream to freezer to 'set.'

You can serve as-is. Consider accompanying with fresh berries, or, for a more 'Japanese' approach, you can add a scoop or sprinkle of sweet red adzuki beans.

FROM MARI'S KITCHEN: *Slow roasted pulled pork with pasta*

Dirk and Jutta Lammerts, both MD's from Duesseldorf, Germany, were my neighbors in Forest Hill, San Francisco. We enjoyed this dish at their house warming dinner. It was sensational, especially as it was served

paired with an Italian wine. It is also one of those rare meals that is both filling and refined, satisfying both for gourmets and gourmands.

This recipe, provided by Dirk and Jatta, combines succulent pork and creamy pasta with a distinct cheese and pepper aroma. Slow-cooking the pork over several hours makes the meat extremely tender and infuses an intense, smoky flavor.

Pulled pork

4-6 lb. bone-in pork shoulder

Rub (see below)

Kosher salt

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

2 tablespoons mesquite liquid smoke

½ cup water

Rub

1 tablespoon garlic salt

1 tablespoon smoked paprika

½ tablespoon onion powder

½ tablespoon freshly ground black pepper

¼ tablespoon cayenne pepper

Pasta cacio e pepe

12 oz. linguine

1 cup freshly grated Pecorino Romano cheese

2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper

1 tablespoon unsalted butter

Kosher salt

Extra-virgin olive oil

Sauce

Plum-chipotle sauce (store-bought)



Trim the fat off the meat and discard; tie the pork shoulder together with butcher's twine for even cooking. Combine all ingredients for the rub in a bowl and mix; cover the meat evenly with the rub and wrap tightly in plastic wrap; refrigerate overnight.

Remove the pork from the refrigerator and unwrap; season with kosher salt. Heat vegetable oil in large stainless steel sauté pan over medium-high heat. Sear the pork on each (!) side until medium-brown (approximately 2-2½ minutes per side for a total of 12-15 minutes). Be careful not to burn the bits that are sticking to the pan. Transfer the pork to the slow cooker. Pour water and liquid smoke into the sauté pan and deglaze over high heat for 1-2 minutes; then pour the contents of the sauté pan over the pork. Start the slow cooker and cook on high for 2 hours followed by 5 hours on low until the meat is very tender and easily falls apart.

Transfer the pork to a large flat casserole. Pour the braising liquid from the slow cooker through a fine-mesh sieve and then into a fat separator; skim off the fat and reserve the braising liquid. Pull the meat from the bone and shred the pork using two forks. Pour a small amount of the braising liquid over the shredded pork to keep it moist; cover the casserole with aluminum foil and keep warm in the oven at low temperature.

In the meantime, bring 4 quarts of water to a boil for the pasta; add a large pinch of kosher salt and a splash of olive oil. Grate the Pecorino Romano very finely (it should have a powdery, airy consistency). Cook the linguine until al-dente; they should still be firm, as they will finish the cooking process in the pan. Drain the pasta and reserve 1-2 cups of the pasta water. Meanwhile, heat a large frying pan over medium heat. Working in batches if necessary, pour ½ cup of the pasta water into the pan together with butter and ground pepper. Add the linguine and the Pecorino Romano; toss and keep heating until the cheese is melted and evenly covers the pasta; the pasta should be almost dry.

Note: The original recipe for pasta cacio e pepe uses spaghetti instead of linguine - I hope the Roman gods will forgive the modification. Feel free to use spaghetti if you fear their wrath.

Plate the pulled pork with the pasta cacio e pepe in deep plates; serve with plum-chipotle sauce over the pork to taste. Pair with a medium-bodied red wine like a Californian Zinfandel or an Italian Chianti.

Makes 4-6 servings