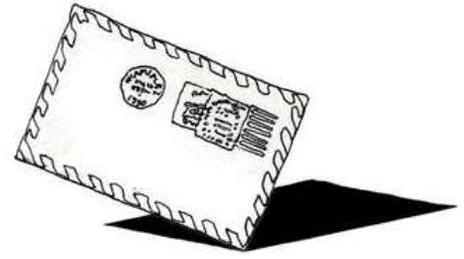


Letter from Mari



November 2011

Dear Friends,

The following are some reflections on last summer and the opening of the Season.

Summer in Europe started with a fall-like chill throughout July. As a result, we spent the month of July tucked into our apartment in Munich, which, luckily had a beautiful outdoor view from our balcony, overlooking our backyard, filled with many grand, old trees. For our daughter, Karin, and our cat, Candy, our summer residence in Munich is a welcome change from the pollution of Paris. They enjoyed nesting at home and listening to heavy thunderstorms throughout the summer.

I focused my time this summer on learning the Mozart Concerto KV488. I performed it end-August at the Rieti Festival in the town of Italy, which also bears this name. At the same time, Karin was preparing her first piano recital, so we spent our days working together at home. Though very simple in some ways, it was a precious time that we will all savor for years to come. Our typical day would be to have breakfast together with a variety of fresh German breads, including rolls topped with sesame- or poppy seeds, a heavy, or a black loaf with liverwurst and sliced cheese. Then we would practice while my husband, Kent, went off to rehearsals. We would try to have a late lunch together, usually centered around vegetarian pasta. This is our selection on the days that Kent has a performance, as this kind of meal seems to work as well for athletes as it does for conductors. We make our own tomato sauce, reflecting our own cultural mix, which includes a mix of Italian, Japanese and French flavors or styles. After practice each day, Karin and I would go out for a walk or visit museums, nap and then go at night to see the opera. Friends come from near and far to join us during the summer Opera Festival in Munich. It is performed at the National Theater (Munich) by the Bavarian State Opera, where Kent has been conductor since 2006. This year, the summer festival occurred during the month of July, so, throughout the month, we ended up enjoying performances among friends and then partaking in a late-night snack, catching up over champagne, Bavarian white sausage, sauerkraut and sweet mustard (which is typically eaten for breakfast). Sushi is another after-the-show favorite of ours in Munich.



Karin's summer, while quiet and calm on the one hand, was a very exciting one for her on the other. She spent the entire month of July preparing her first piano recital at the Steinway Hall in Munich. For pianists, playing a recital is often mentally and physically the most challenging kind of performance. For a piano concert, you are with an orchestra and a conductor, and it lasts roughly 30 minutes and you share the playing with the orchestra. Similarly, in a chamber music concert, you divide the duty of playing with other musicians and also have your sheet music to reference. For a recital, however, you are the only one to hold the attention of the audience for nearly two hours, and usually you have to learn the entire piece by heart.

For this occasion, Karin started with a small, "half-recital," which was a 45-minute program. Though short for professionals, for Karin, who recently turned 13, this was the first time she would be playing without a break for this long on her own. During the month of preparation, she played run-throughs a few times for friends simply to get used to the pace. From the very beginning,, she was completely comfortable. On the evening of the recital itself, she had a full house, including many distinguished guests like the actor Maximilian Schel, who travelled from Austria, driving six hours to listen to her. She succeeded in taking the audience on a metaphorical journey from composer to composer, from Bach to Haydn to Chopin to Mendelssohn and then to Debussy, all in their different styles. Both as her parents and as musicians, we were happy she was able to craft a clear and meaningful musical landscape for her audience.

In August, as a family, we began our own travels, moving from Montreal to Salzburg to Edinburgh. My summer ended with an inspiring concert in Rieti, an old medieval town north of Rome, where I performed with the Baroque Ensemble "Concerto Koeln". A baroque orchestra is tuned much lower than a normal orchestra, and, therefore, the piano is also tuned to their pitch. For someone with perfect pitch, this can be very confusing: it is as if, suddenly, you can no longer speak your own language. But the human ear is amazing. After a few hours of playing with them, I grew accustomed to something that had been totally foreign to me. I was able to truly enjoy the process of shaping the music with them. In the end, it sounded and felt like chamber music, especially because we were playing facing the audience and our conductor, Kent, while being surrounded by the orchestra. The orchestra played in the second half of the Beethoven Symphony No. 6 "Pastorale." We played on instruments in an authentic way, and the audience seemed to be profoundly touched by the simple joy of nature and humanity. We were satisfied that we had succeeded in one of the most challenging tasks of being a musician - creating a natural timing and phrasing so that everyone, at least temporarily, forgot how hot it was in the hall without air conditioning that evening.

I am currently preparing a new repertoire: Bach English Suites, piano pieces by George Benjamin, and the world premiere of a concerto by Jean Pascal Beintkus.

The leaves are changing colors in Paris and are just about to fall, and street vendors, with their warm chestnuts, have made their appearance. At our home here, we are eating home made crepes every day, with caramel sauce for breakfast and Nutella with bananas in the afternoon. Our cozy, cool summer in Munich put us in just the right mood for a similarly heart-warming fall.

Wishing you and yours tender moments as the New Year begins to unfold.

Below are recipes from some of the dishes referenced in this November, 2011 Letter from Mari.

Nagano-Kodama Family Pre-Concert Pasta



I call this "pre-concert" pasta because our family enjoys this type of light, yet sustaining meal, regardless of our role in the concert - ranging from audience member to musician to conductor. It provides the right combination of energy and digestibility for the long night ahead. Also, the taste is just how we appreciate it most. I hope you enjoy this version and that it inspires you to create a signature pasta sauce that reflects your physical and emotional roots.

Ingredients:

Olive oil

8 large tomatoes cut in half

8 mushrooms

1 pinch dried garlic

Topping:

Fresh sliced mozzarella cheese, to taste

8 fresh basil leaves, cut into thin slices (I use cooking shears to snip it over the pasta)

Good salt (I like Fleur de sel)

Fresh ground pepper

Method:

Prepare a pan of boiling water, and cook tomato halves for 30 seconds. Remove and peel the skin off. Cut into 1 centimeter squares

Slice mushrooms very thin and fry in about 3 tablespoons of olive oil. Add a pinch of dried garlic and fry until mushrooms begin to brown. Add the chopped, peeled tomatoes and continue to cook about 3 minutes. Add Fleur de sel (or salt) and fresh

Serve with fresh Tagliatelle, and top with thin-sliced mozzarella and freshly ground pepper

Home-made crepes



When in Europe, we find ourselves making more crepes, following the French tradition of homemade crepes. We enjoy the flexibility of this recipe, which can go in a savory or sweet direction, and from a main course to a dessert or snack.

Ingredients:

250 grams (about 2 cups) flour

3 eggs

1 liter (about 2 cups) milk

A pinch of salt

Topping choices:

Caramel sauce

Nutella and banana

Sugar

Grated cheese (in this case, fold the crepe into quarters and heat about 20 seconds in the microwave).

Sunny-side-up egg

Method:

Mix the flour and eggs. Gradually stir in the milk until you get a smooth, thin, pancake batter-like consistency.

Allow the batter to rest about 1 hour at room temperature.

Wipe a pan (Mari uses a crepe pan, while her Californian friend uses a seasoned, cast iron pan...many like Teflon as well).

Pour a half-ladle of batter into the pan (or use whatever method you would like to get a thin layer of batter onto the pan.

Wait until you see bubbles in the middle and the edges of the crepe start to dry out.

Turn the crepe and cook on the other side for another 10 seconds.

The crepe should retain an egg-y/yellow color and be paper-thin. Serve with any of the toppings suggested above, or make up your own.