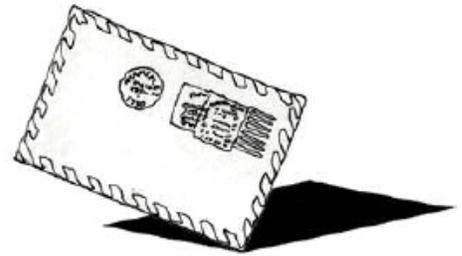


Letter from Mari



August 2015

Dear Friends,

Warm greetings to you all! As usual, I am providing an update with the hopes that this brings my world closer to those who share a connection through music and friendship.

Forest Hill Musical Days in foggy San Francisco

This year, Musical Days in Forest Hill fell during Fourth of July in America. Though hot in the rest of the country, and the rest of the state, of course, we were in San Francisco, which doesn't have typical summer weather. When the musicians from Europe arrived, the city was blanketed in a thick layer of fog. This means that our visitors had a quintessential San Francisco experience that many-a summer visitor shares: they were absolutely unable to see the Golden Gate bridge, even while driving across it. (For those of you who haven't had the experience, imagine a road in front of you, but being able to only see a few meters. Luckily, we had warned them to bring layers because most visitors expect Los Angeles weather in San Francisco.



Our humble venue, a charming Bernard Maybeck Clubhouse

On the other hand, the fog created the perfect backdrop to our concerts. We attributed the fog to the result of an order by our Musical Days in Forest Hill CEO, Sally Kipper, as it was a perfect compliment to the theme, **Piano, Cello & Horn: The Noble Voices of the Instruments.**



Yen Bachmeier

At Rehearsal
Dmitri Makhtin, Johannes Dengler, Markus Pawlik and Matt Haimovitz

This year, we had the pleasure of welcoming guest artist Johannes Dengler. Originally from Germany, he amazed the audience with his wide range of colors and shades and with his ability to, in essence “sing” with his instrument. Our star cellist Matt Haimovitz and my trusted friend of many years, Markus Pawlik, a German pianist, provided the perfect accompaniment. Dmitri Makhtin, a violinist from Saint Petersburg, stepped in at the last minute and shared his profound music-making,

complimenting the team perfectly. They transported us with their amazing Horn trio of Brahms and Mendelssohn Piano Trio.

Kent led the Magellan Ensemble, as he did last year.

Matt performed a very exciting Vivaldi Cello Concerto and the Double Concerto for Violin and Cello with Dmitri. I made my debut in the Magellan Ensemble as continuo player.



Yen Bachmeier

Violin String Broke! No Problem.

Since one of the concerts was on July 4th, American Independence Day, we celebrated in the traditional way, with BBQ in the courtyard after the concert.

For those who haven't heard of the festival, it is primarily for the neighbors of Forest Hill, though others often join us as well. We start selling tickets online only four weeks before the concert begins.

Everyone who attends enjoys the deep-rooted sense of community that we experience by focusing on the people who live and work in the area.



Yen Bachmeier

Fourth of July BBQ
John Balestreri personally grilled over 100 burgers



Yen Bachmeier

Sharing a meal after the performance

One of those neighbors is John Balestreri, a long-time supporter of Musical Days and successful real estate agent. He personally grilled over 100 burgers. Other volunteers at Musical Days in Forest Hill, come as highly decorated as John.

Our bartenders included surgeons and an IT tycoon, while our CD sales cashier is a female executive from Silicon Valley. We all laugh and enjoy musical and

personal moments together as neighbors and friends for many years.

Back stage story to share – the mystery of a poorly fitted shirt & missing cufflinks

Kent had flown in from Germany just for this concert. During the event, he complained about his tuxedo shirt being far too small for the concert. We concluded that it probably got mixed up at the dry cleaner.

However, after the concert, we simply tossed the shirt and forgot about it. On the other hand, we were happy to find some of his long-lost cufflinks, which he had not seen for years. They were in a box marked "City of Manchester" so we were certain that he must have gotten these during the time he played with the Halle Orchestra in Manchester between 1991 and 1998.



After he returned to Germany the next day with the cufflinks we had found at the Clubhouse the night before, I received a panicked call from Markus. "Mari, something strange happened. I cannot find my tuxedo shirt, which I left for tonight's concert in the dressing room. Also, my cufflinks and belt are gone!"

Suddenly, it became clear: Kent had worn Markus' shirt, which was far too small and which he joked made him look very muscular. In fact, it had been tailor-made for Markus, who has, what he himself calls, pianist shoulders.

After a moment of silence, we burst into laughter. Markus explained that he got the Manchester Box when he won the Eurovision competition in 1982 in this City. Thank Goodness I could retrieve the shirt from the garbage and send it to the cleaner before returning it to Markus.



Fort Worth, Texas

Judging a piano competition is not an easy job. One obviously remembers players making a strong impact in a positive or negative way. But when it comes to a decision as to who should go to the next round, it is not easy to choose between someone that you have given the same grades - especially when there are 20 other candidates in between. What I am saying here is that deciding between, say, Candidate No. 3 and Candidate No. 23, who have roughly the same level but without distinction, it is hard to choose one of them.

When judging the "Adult" competition we always have to make our decision based on one important question: "Can this pianist satisfy and excite the audience on a professional stage, competing against all the masters performing today?"

In the case of a Junior Competition, it is even more enjoyable because we can enjoy their raw talent - recognizing their potential, even if it is not a finished product yet. The new energetic Junior Competition CEO from Montreal, Jacques Marquis, recently launched the Van Cliburn Junior Competition, the "baby" part of the Big Van Cliburn

Competition. This is part of something called the Grand Slam of International Competitions. Twenty-four pre-selected young pianists from all over the world get together and compete in ideal surroundings: they all stay in a beautiful dormitory and each candidate has their own piano available to them.

All 24 candidates stayed to the end of the competition and there were many interesting events organized for them. These included a Symposium about Career building, Performance preparation, and Social Media. There were also entertaining activities, including a visit to the zoo, museums, a pizza and ice Cream Party, a Barbecue and ping pong, a movie evening and special performing opportunities across the town.

The atmosphere was upbeat and the candidates became friends and shared their joy of music and piano playing. For me it was a pleasure to discover many talented pianists of this young generation, an encouraging sign for the future of classical music. They were all extremely talented and several already had outstanding personalities professional maturity.



Jury Panel at the Van Cliburn Junior Competition, Fort Worth, Texas

Chairman Jon Nakamatsu, Jon Kimura Parker, Orli Shaham, Christopher Elton, Blanca Uribe and Lydia Artemyev joined me as fellow judges. They all share a passion for discovering the potential in every young musician. This so-called cowboy town, which has become a cultural center of the US, was a source of deep inspiration to all.

Folles Journees

It is a privilege to be part of the Folles Journees Festival, this year in Nantes, Tokyo and Kanazawa. Rene Martin chose the theme of "Passion" which could signify passion in terms of the emotion of joy or in terms of the crucifixion of Christ. (In Latin, it means to suffer).

My Beethoven Sonata was created around the Appassionata Sonata, one of the most passionate pieces written by Beethoven. With my sister Momo Kodama, I played Messiaen's "Vision de l'amen." This was a piece for two pianos, which he wrote for his wife and himself. The piece covers the passion and agony of Jesus and leaves a deep impression when played from beginning to end.

We also played a program of Bach's beautiful choral works, which expressed both aspects of the word, "passion."

Every musician at the festival obviously had a different vision of passion, yet there was a common energy in this festival - everyone wished to share their vision with as many audience members as possible. The Festival had over 20,000 visitors of a diversity of ages and cultural backgrounds. The musicians felt inspired to have the opportunity to interact with an audience of this caliber.



Dress for typhoon, Japan



Les Folles Journees Festival - Japan

A piano lid in piano that resembles a sculpture

With the Hiroshima Symphony Orchestra, Momo and I played the concerto for four hands. This piece dictates that the pianists play in the middle of the orchestra, facing the conductor and the audience. Since a traditional piano lid, opening towards to the right, would cut the view of the conductor to one side of the orchestra, while directing the sound towards the left hand side of the stage, the lid naturally should be removed. If it were removed, however, the acoustics would not work because the sound of the piano would be overbearing to the conductor, sitting with the pianists, while being inaudible to the audience because of the way the sound would disperse.

Our creative conductor Michiyoshi Inoue developed a solution. He had a created tailor-made lid designed specifically for this configuration. It was made of several transparent rectangles of Plexiglas that were tilted towards the ceiling and the audience. It worked very well for everyone – the audience, the conductor, the orchestra and for us too. We enjoyed this unique performance and the beautiful solution, which ended up looking like a sculpture.



Acrylic Piano Lid, Hiroshima

Family news

Karin had a dynamic spring with a concert tour in Japan playing Beethoven Concerto No. 1 and a concert in Canada at Niagara Falls. During this time, we went to visit some colleges in the U.S., as she will be applying there in the fall. One of the highlights of the season included her receiving the Yale Book Award at the U.S. Ambassador's residence. This is an award given presented to outstanding students at the end of their junior year at public and private secondary schools in the area served by the Club or Association.



Karin at Yale
Book Award Ceremony,
with Mme la Balme



Karin Dancing at School Prom

Kent's book "Expected the Unexpected" is being translated from German into French. It will be sold in Canada in the fall. He is very much looking forward to starting the Hamburg Opera in September.



With Kent, sailing on our friend Norio's boat



Kent interview with Alec Balwin

This is our last summer with Karin before she goes off to college and we are carving out time to go hiking and to have our escape to Bodega Bay, which is now a family tradition.

Wishing you a wonderful early fall season.

Mari