Letter from Mari

October 2018

After a record-breaking hot summer in Europe, autumn has finally arrived, bringing with it a welcome freshness and positivity to start the new season.

The first half of 2018 was filled with new and exciting experiences as I discovered diverse cultures and the musical talents of a new generation:

**Trans-Siberian Art Festival with Vadim Repin in Novosibirsk, Russia**

I’ll never forget the first time I heard Vadim perform. A cute and slightly chubby young boy came out on stage wearing short trousers and proceeded to play the virtuosic Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto with such honesty and sincere musicality that you forgot he was still just a child. Today, years later, he is one of our greatest masters of the violin.

When my friends learned that I would be going to Siberia for a music festival, they all reacted with the same startled expression. They were probably imagining a dark and freezing place where people got sent as a punishment. I have to admit, the temperatures were freezing cold, but Novosibirsk’s hospitality and enthusiasm for music and the arts filled the city with warmth.

Vadim has performed a small miracle in this place. As the artistic director of the festival, he helped bring about the construction of a beautiful concert hall, where world-class musicians now love to come and perform.
The Trans-Siberian Art Festival 2018 - Novosibirsk. Photographer Alexander Ivanov
The Chamber Music Series “Vadim Repin and Friends” included some interesting young talents, and it was wonderful performing two eternal masterpieces, Dvorak Piano Quintet and Schumann Piano Quartet, together with Vadim and the younger musicians.

The light shining in people’s eyes and how it brightened the long Siberian winter nights is something I will always remember.

Hammerklavier Sonata at Marathon Concert of 32 Beethoven Sonatas in Sorel Tracy, Canada

Rachel Doyon, the energetic director of a performing arts organization in the small community Sorel-Tracy in Quebec, had the great idea to host a marathon concert of all of Beethoven’s 32 Piano sonatas to open the organization’s new concert space. The 32 sonatas were mostly performed by young professional Canadian pianists, or by Canadians at heart, like myself. Madame Doyon organized a breakfast feast for the performers. With fresh eggs, Canadian bacon and croissants, she made sure we all had enough energy to make it through the 15 hours of music! The first note sounded exactly at 9 a.m. and the last note exactly at midnight. Then we all dashed to Madame Doyon’s home for a joyous celebration accompanied by cheese (It wouldn't have been a party without this ubiquitous French-Canadian snack!), roast beef and lots of wine.

I have played all of Beethoven sonatas several times over the past 20 years, but this was my first experience hearing all 32 within 24 hours. It is easy to think that such an epic concert could have been tiring and intimidating to sit through. After all, Beethoven’s music is normally considered "intellectual" and "serious." But in fact, the flow was very natural, and my interest never drifted away from the music, probably thanks to great choice of pianists by Madame Doyon. Quebec’s culture of classical music is deeply grounded in its choral and organ tradition, and once again I saw and heard just how naturally musical Canadian artists are.
Holland and its open spirit have always fascinated me. I started my career in Amsterdam many years ago, but I haven't had an opportunity to return to the beautiful land of tulips and water in recent years. That thankfully changed in 2018. This year, my sister Momo and I were invited by the Muziekgebouw to present a program of piano duets in its strikingly beautiful hall situated directly on the water in Amsterdam. The program featured pieces by American composers Samuel Barber and John Adams, Igor Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring" and a world premiere of "El Torcal" by the young talented French composer Rodolphe Bruneau-Boulmier.

"El Torcal" was inspired by gigantic and beautiful limestone formations in southern Spain – majestic sculptures created by nature over 100 million years ago. Rodolphe's music, a mixture of power, momentum and mysterious silences, invited everyone to imagine the power of eternity. The audience greeted the work with a standing ovation.
A multiyear concert project came to a close when I presented the final round of the Beethoven Sonata Cycle together with Shogo Kariyazaki, a master of Ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arranging. The farewell program consisted of Beethoven's last three sonatas, which I find to be his most emotional sonatas, the ones that carry you across the boundaries of humanity and time. Master Shogo Kariyazaki made breathtaking creations using flowers and trees that expressed immortality. They transported the audience to another world as together, we finished this three-year-long trip in solemnity and tears.
My first visit to Le Domaine Forget for its 40th anniversary was impressive in every sense. It's located in one of the most beautiful parts of Canada, where the Saint Lawrence River becomes as large as a lake. There, on the river's broad shore, the visionary Paul Fortin created an academy where young musicians and dancers would have opportunities to work with masters in a quite environment. During my stay there, I had the great luxury to have guitarist Pepe Romero as my neighbor. He improvised every late afternoon on his terrace as he watched the setting sun cast its colors over the Saint Lawrence River.

My wonderful pianist colleague Benedetto Lupo, who has always been a source of inspiration for me as a concert pianist and teacher, allowed me to share the program of teaching and performing. It was a truly exciting experience, and I was filled with hope when I saw how eager the enthusiastic and talented students, all between the ages of 16 and 25, were to learn and develop.
First edition of Tra Luce e Sogno Festival in Postignano, Italy

One afternoon, while my charming engineer and philanthropist friend Bita Catellan and I were sitting in a Montreal bar, engaged in good-humored chatter over a glass of wine, we came up with the idea to create an event that would bring the world together through music and friendship. An 1,000-year-old Italian castle, tucked away in Umbria’s beautiful natural landscape and restored with care by Italian architects Gennaro Matacena and Matteo Scaramella, seemed to be the dream place to make it happen.
The castle, or borgo, was built by people who wanted to protect themselves from foreigners and invasion by creating a community around the catholic chapel. It radiates a warm yet majestic atmosphere in every light, from the first beams of morning sunlight to dusk's final rays.

Colleagues were inspired to come and share their artistry with the international audience, and thanks to their generosity, we shared seven exciting programs. We started with a popular music program of Prokofiev's Overture on Hebrew Themes, Haydn's Gypsy Trio and Beethoven's Gassenhauer Piano Trio and ended with our closing concert of Brahms' String Sextet. Other standout programs included one entitled "Beyond Time," which featured Messiaen's Quartet for the End of Time, one presenting Verdi's String Quartet, and one centered on Mendelssohn and Italian poetry.

The musicians included great masters such as Gerold Huber, one of the most profound pianists performing today; Pawel Vernikov, who gave us wise advice and even showed us the steps to Jewish folk dances so we could get a visual sense of style for Prokofiev's Overture; Luigi Piovano, a real ambassador who connects Italian culture with the rest of the musical world; and Pascal Moragues, who I believe is the greatest living clarinetist.

Baritone Christian Gerhaher sadly got ill the day before his performance, but we were lucky to have the wonderful rising star Sheva Tehoval step in for him. My old friend and international star cellist Matt Haimovitz traveled all the way from California to join us, and violist Hartmut Rohde came from Berlin, where he teaches at the
arts university. Rising stars Andrey Baranov (violin), Eivind Holtsmark Ringstad (viola) and Clara Bellegarde (harp) all brought new ideas and fresh interpretations, while my new friends, violinists Svetlana Makarova and Grazia Raimondi, combined their strong musical personalities with my loyal sister Momo to create contagious sparks of musical energy. We all had incredible fun rehearsing day and night to achieve the highest quality of chamber music playing possible. After four festival days filled with music, delicious food, cultural excursions and a pool party, the musicians, castle team and international audience all departed in joyous spirits.
Breakfast Dessert

Fun with Family and Friends

Photo credit Yen Bachmeier
Artists and Creative Team

Photos by Yen Bachmeier
Saito Kinen Festival, Japan

My last festival for summer 2018 was the Saito Kinen Festival in the mountains of Nagano Prefecture, where wasabi grow in the clean and cold mountain water to accompany fresh soba noodles, a specialty of the region. Maestro Seiji Ozawa founded this festival to honor his mentor, Mr. Saito, and to create a place in nature where Mr. Saito’s students could gather together and perform as a whole ensemble.

I last visited this festival over 20 years ago for a special cello recital with Mstislav Rostropovich. This time the program was centered around Poulenc’s Sextet for piano and winds, an extremely demanding piece for everyone involved. My colleagues were soloists from France, Germany, England, Canada and Japan – probably the most culturally diverse group of musicians I have ever performed with. Surprisingly, everyone’s musical tastes matched one another’s well. It was one of my most enjoyable and fun concerts ever.

Smallest Sushi

Saito Kinen Festival Poulenc Sextet
Two special moments

Just a word about two memorable moments that took place for me this summer:

Seeing my mentor, Alfred Brendel, in Salzburg speak about music and the world today and in the future gave me immeasurable pleasure and inspiration. Andras Schiff's performance of J.S. Bach's "The Well-Tempered Clavier" was unspeakable moving and will remain a lifelong memory.
Kent

Kent spent the summer in residence at the Salzburg Festival, where he was conducting the opera "The Bassarids" by Hans Werner Henze. It was one of those rare instances where everything fell together perfectly, from the amazing playing of the Vienna Philharmonic, to the wonderful singers and Krzysztof Warlikowski’s stage direction. Markus Hinterhäuser has been at Salzburg’s artistic helm for two years now, and the festival radiates a beautiful spirit, full of enthusiasm for interesting new ideas and a drive for unrivaled quality.

Another one of my favorite projects that Kent did this summer was conducting all of Beethoven’s nine symphonies in one week which made an unforgettable impact on the audience and musicians in Montreal.
Karin divided her summer between a concert tour playing Schubert's last sonata (B-flat Major) in North America, France, Germany and Italy, and studying at Cambridge University in the UK. She just started her junior year at Yale University, where she is majoring in architecture.

I wish you all a beautiful autumn season filled with color and warmth,

Mari