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JAPANESE DIARIES (4)

CONCERTS AND MUSEUMS IN TOKYO, NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2010

The choice of concerts in the autumn season in Tokyo is enormous. Each time I enter any of the concert halls (and there are about 100 of these in the city) I am handed a pile of leaflets with invitations to attend various musical events. Chamber concerts are the most popular, piano recitals as well; there are also many symphony concerts. Following my interests, but partly also out of willingness to meet and listen to friends, I am choosing piano concerts.

14 NOVEMBER - SUNTORY HALL

It is one of major concert halls in Tokyo. I know it from my previous visits. Excellent acoustics and the atmosphere that facilitates listening. Also, the hall is equipped with a cell phone jamming system, so there is no fear of a ringtone ruining the most beautiful piano.

Mozart's two piano concertos – C minor and A major – played by Mitsuko Uchida were very interesting. The Artist was conducting from the piano the Cleveland Chamber Orchestra. Excellent articulation, fantastic own cadenzas, fine sound and care for details made me a breathless listener. I was admiring how much strength and energy is hidden in her slender and delicate body. She is truly adored here in Tokyo. Unfortunately, there were no encores, despite an endless storm of applause...

1 DECEMBER

A long-awaited symphony concert with the participation of Martha Argerich. On my way to the concert hall I could feel the usual emotion rising in me – will Martha play, or won't she? I had with me Motoko - my interpreter, assistant and generally speaking my Japanese 'guardian angel'. Our tickets were waiting on a small table at the entrance. We were given excellent seats. In a moment, W. Dąbrowski and St. Leszczyński (my husband), Directors of the NIFC, entered the building. And so we headed to our seats as a handsome group, meeting a lot of friends on our way. The evening began with Schumann's *Piano Concerto*. I had heard that work in Martha's performance several times before. She plays it differently each time, yet one can always tell that it is she who is playing. The music was rich in moods and varied dynamics, and Martha's temperament soon roused the orchestra. In her Schumann there is always a mystery and a touch of madness hiding. And the attention with which she listened to orchestra musicians and followed their solos! The second part was Ravel – *Concerto in G major*. No other pianist in the world can play this piece like Martha does; with such energy, such articulation, such magic (in the second movement), in such tempos... Martha played splendidly. She was also generous in her encores, playing again the third movement of Ravel's *Concerto*, with orchestra, and then two wonderful, delicate miniatures by Schumann. As it soon turned out backstage, she was in excellent mood, which we could also observe half an hour later meeting her again in a sushi-bar. We spent a lovely evening together, listening to Mischa Maisky's endless jokes.

2 DECEMBER – CHOPIN'S BIRTHDAY IN TOKYO

That was a truly enjoyable evening. It was a great idea of W. Dąbrowski to organize, with a considerable involvement of the Polish Embassy in Tokyo, the meeting of the „Chopin Family”. There were about 300 of us, all associated with Chopin: the Japanese participants of all Chopin competitions, activists of Chopin associations in Japan, the Japanese Minister of Culture, the press. The event started with a press conference with the participation of three winners of the Chopin International Competitions: Martha Argerich (1965), Dang Thai Son (1980), and Yulianna Avdeeva (2010).

Afterwards, there was a reception, preceded by a short recital performed by Yulianna Avdeeva and a ceremony of awarding distinctions to outstanding people connected with Chopin (to my great personal satisfaction, I was honoured with the “Chopin Passport” received from the hands of Director W. Dąbrowski).

3 DECEMBER

Chick Corea playing in the Blue Note jazz club! An incredibly fantastic experience for me, as I had been to a jazz club twice before in my entire life – the first time in Cracow some 20 years ago! The second time was last spring in Washington DC. The Tokyo Blue Note is very famous and they have lots of authentic jazz stars performing there. That day the stars shone not only on the stage but also among the audience: Martha Argerich, greeted effusively by CC, and the Japanese jazz pianist Makoto Ozone, known to us already from the Warsaw „Chopin and His Europe” Festival where he had played the Viennese classics with his own jazz cadenzas. It was wonderful to be able to watch Martha’s reactions to music sitting right next to her. Her spontaneous admiration – ‘bravo!’, ‘beautiful!’ – was contagious: the nearby audience members were becoming even more enthusiastic towards the performers – their fellow pianists.

4 DECEMBER - TOKYO BUNKA KAIKAN CONCERT HALL

Akiko Ebi’s piano recital at 2 p.m. She is my colleague from the 1980 Chopin Competition (we shared the fifth prize) and also my long-time friend. We attend each other’s concerts and always have a lot to say to each other, about music and about life (the same type of close friendship exists between me and Dang Thai Son – the winner of that Competition). The programme featured Faure, Ravel, Liszt and Chopin. I was particularly impressed by Akiko’s performance of Chopin’s *Preludes*. She played them very ‘personally’. Martha, sitting next to me, was interpreting along with my friend! And again – her admiration...

Straight from the concert we went to the NHK to listen to Yulianna Avdeeva with the NHK orchestra under Charles Dutoit in Chopin’s *Concerto in E minor*. I listened very carefully, as I had not have the chance to do it before, being absent from Poland during this year’s Chopin Competition. I found Avdeeva’s playing to be very professional. Strong, interesting personality, well-thought-out and consistent interpretation, beautiful poetic phrases of the second movement, great piano skills. I would be very interested to watch the further artistic development of that pianist, whom I have also found to be a very friendly, pleasant person. I would definitely like to listen to more of her concert performances when such an opportunity arises. And here is the reaction of Martha Argerich: ‘We can be proud of such First Prize’ she told St. Leszczyński (Martha was a jury member). Several minutes after the end of the concert Martha began her ‘farewell aria’ – she was going to the airport to take the night flight to Paris.

5 DECEMBER

An evening recital of Dang Thai Son at the Kyoji Hall – my favourite concert venue in Tokyo. I have played there several times and I remember the great acoustics and atmosphere of that place. Tonight the hall was packed full with Dang Thai Son’s admirers who came to listen to his all-Chopin programme. And again *Preludes* were played, but they were different from Akiko’s interpretation we heard yesterday. Dang presented the cycle as a coherent whole marked with its own unique dramaturgy. In slow pieces he bewitched us with his beautiful sound and long phrases. He willingly agreed to play several encores, among them one Chopin’s mazurka, a miniature by Debussy and again Chopin – *Polonaise in A flat major* as the last accent of the evening. Then I was waiting for him backstage – it took quite a while, as he was receiving words of admiration and ... gifts from the enraptured listeners. Finally, we celebrated the evening with a fine Chinese-style dinner.

As this time in Tokyo I do not have any public performances scheduled and do not need to practice that much, I have decided to visit some museums. So I took the opportunity of an official outing and joined the two NIFC Directors on a museum tour. We visited the National Art Centre in Tokyo and also the Mori Museum of Art.

The former turned out to be very interesting, not only due to displayed items but also to the brilliant design of the building itself, which may be considered the biggest and most eye-catching art exhibit of that Museum! 50 000 square meters of space, a magnificent library, wide corridors full of light, numerous cafes and restaurants designed so that visitors can enjoy daylight. Even a pavilion for storing umbrellas is built with refinement, yet very practical. Currently there is no permanent exhibition in this museum, only temporary exhibitions. Lots of visitors. I will definitely be back!

On the same day we also managed to visit the Mori Art Museum displaying contemporary art. It is situated on the 53rd floor of one of the skyscrapers belonging to the Roppongi Hills complex and has a private owner. We saw there an exhibition of the works of a young Japanese visual artist, Odani Motohiko; mainly sculptures, but also several installations and pictures. I was hugely impressed by all I saw! Particularly worth remembering were two sculptures; the first, *Dress 01*, was made of wolf skins. Those skins formed a beautifully arranged skirt but at the shoulders the dress had two wolf heads with a cruel 'facial expression'. Really scary ... The second object, *Dress 02*, was even more disturbing. It was made of human hair plaited in long, thin braids. Obviously my first reaction was reluctance and indignation, my immediate association was with Auschwitz, but despite that I was coming back to look at that sculpture several times. It was attracting me with some sort of energy it emanated. After all, that was "living material". So this is art, because it makes an impression on me? Activates imagination? Does not leave me indifferent, makes me come back? So, ARE various nasty things we are told to be art objects actually art, because they provoke a reaction? Or is the sense of revulsion just that - a sense, an impression? Another work was entitled *Inferno*; it was a photographed waterfall projected on mirrors installed on the ceiling and floor of a specially adapted closed space, the size of a narrow lift. I called it "the kaleidoscope of the 21st century'. The electronic music for this installation was very aggressive and brought to mind Stravinsky ... Still another sculpture, *Pianist/Rondo*, captured the changing movements of human hands playing the piano. Fascinating... And all that created by the artist who was born in 1972.

The afternoon ended with a charming hour spent in a museum club on the 53th floor. We occupied a table at the window to be able to watch the changing spirit of the city illuminated by the last rays of the setting sun and the first glow of street lamps and city lights. It seemed that Tokyo was getting quiet... that enormous, lively city was blending into the landscape, with Fuji visible on the horizon.

Another museum that I visited, this time alone, was the Tokyo National Museum, the Heiseikan. Apart from a permanent exposition of Far Eastern art, one could also see the temporary exhibition devoted to the Tōdai-ji Temple and the Tempyō era cultural artefacts. I spent many hours admiring historical objects from the 13th or even 8th century A.D., among them magnificent statues, sculptures, textiles, as well as everyday items manufactured with great precision and care for details. The place was permeated with the true spirit of the Far East. My current reading list for this stay in Japan includes books by the Nobel Prize winner Kawabata Yasunari and a volume of old Japanese poetry. Also Proust, whose works I decided to refresh in my memory after many years, and Paweł Huelle's '*Moving House and Other Stories*' – always at hand, to be read whenever I am homesick for Oliwa.