

GIULIETTA KOCH
David C F Wright, DMus

Being a pianist myself, and having written three articles containing vignettes of about seventy pianists, which are on this site, I am able to recognise a good pianist when I hear one.

It may be true to say that we have so many good pianists that it is difficult to keep up to date with them and it may be almost impossible for yet another fine pianist to become known and receive deserved praise because there are so many.

But I have been profoundly impressed with such a one, Giulietta Koch, who was born in Basel, Switzerland on 12 January 1989. Her father, Elmar Koch, is an economist and her mother, Christina, is an organist at two churches in Basel and a recitalist. Giulietta has a brother Johannes, who is a journalist and two sisters Renee, who is a flautist, currently in Florida, and Indira who is a violinist and the concertmaster of the Deutsche Opera.



At first, Giulietta studied with her mother from the age of three; then, from the age of 13 with Adrian Oetiker at the Music Academy at Basel and, from 2008, with Klaus Hellwig at the University of Arts in Berlin.



She has won several awards including the 2008 first prize as the most outstanding student of Swiss music.

Giulietta considers Chopin to be one of the finest composers for the piano because 'he truly wrote only for the piano and discovered plenty of ways to make the piano sing.'

I am not a devotee of Chopin, but when listening to her play the Ballade no. 1 in G minor Op 23, I felt her rubato was a little overdone but she played the piece without the usual effeminacy. She could convert those of us who are not espoused to Chopin. Of special note is the excellent balance she has between her hands. Sometimes the slower sections may be a trifle dreamy, but the exciting passages are just that. It is a performance of contrasts without cliches.

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In the Preludes Opus 28, I admired the way she played them straight through with a minimum pause between pieces. She did play with feeling but not mawkish sentiment and she made these little pieces, which many believe are trivia, to be of some worth mainly due to her exquisite tone. These preludes are best played as a complete set.

Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto no 2, Op 18 has suffered from some dreadful performers because some pianists wring all the emotion out of it and play it as slush. Giulietta played it with the Dornach Symphony Orchestra under Jonathan Brett Harrison and the performance is fine and reveals her exceptional talent.

She continued her conversation with me by saying 'Bach is one of the most important composers

because he was the starting point for many and for those who came after him. I adore his polyphonic music and the way you can listen to his music in both a horizontal and vertical way'.'

I asked her what her goal in music was.

She answered, 'It is good to achieve an ultimate goal, but even if I had one, I would not want to reach it because there is no end in sight to all the possibilities that music provides. It is an endless path and the goal is the path itself.'

At the age of fourteen, she made her professional debut playing Mendelssohn's Capriccio brillante in Zurich with the Rundfunk Symphony Orchestra conducted by Michael Sanderling. She showed a splendid technique and fine musicianship even then.

When it comes to the 'exposed' music of Mozart such as the Piano Concerto no 18 in B flat K546, we find in her playing a clarity, reliable finger-work, superb articulation and she fully captures the grace and elegance of Mozart. She played this in Brazil in 2008 with the Bahia Symphony Orchestra under Ricardo Castro. She has also worked on the sublime Piano Concerto no 20 in D minor K466 and performed it with the Norddeutsche Orchestra under Bernhard Klee in Rostock. She also captured the right style in Rossetti's Piano Concerto in G.

This give rise to the fact of her versatility and that she is not going to be typecast. One thinks of one female pianist who seems to play nothing but Mozart and Schubert. Giulietta is first rate in the romantic works and in the classical works as well. However, she may not have captured the style of George Gershwin in his Rhapsody in Blue which she gave with Basel Symphony Orchestra under Howard Griffiths. One could say it was a highly personal performance but, to many, it may have lacked panache.

The most rewarding performance for me was her playing of Beethoven's Piano Concerto no. 1 in C performed in Munich in November 2008 with Carlo Dominuez conducting. The finale was sensational exactly the right speed, rhythmically sound and very exciting. The music was joyful and, consequently, so was I.

One problem for performers is that their performers are judged in the light of other performers. Comparisons can be odious and unfair. But I was moved by her performance of Debussy's the Girl with the Flaxen Hair. It was architectural sound.



She formed a piano trio called the Rahn Trio in which the violinist is Maria Stabrawa and the cellist Julian Arp, now Norbert Anger. Included in their repertoire are works by Beethoven and Shostakovich. She has also played with the Regio Trio with Fabian Klasener and Isabel Gehweiler.

She has a high regard for the pianist Lazar Berman who died in 2005 a few days short of his 65th birthday. She seems at ease in the company of other musicians including Per Norgard whom

she met at the St Moritz Festival. He is a fascinating composer from Denmark who has written seven symphonies, ten string quartets, two violin concertos, two percussion concertos and concertos each for piano and viola and two for accordion. There are two harp concertos, a piano trio, a piano quintet, vocal and choral music including motets and four sonatas for solo cello.

Her congenial disposition has included her performing Rachmaninov's Romance for piano six hands with Frank Laurent Grandpre and Alessandro Stelle.

She is very well known in Switzerland and always receives standing ovations and is asked back for more concerts. She is becoming well known in Germany. She does not have an agent and, generally, concert promoters tend to engage the most well-known and established performers.

I am very fussy about pianists but this young lady is someone I will watch with great interest.

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