

Maria Kliegel – About the Artist

A powerful right arm is what is needed for the leap of one fourth from a pianissimo F sharp to a fortissimo B natural in the last bars of Dvorak`s cello concerto – the cello and tennis player Maria Kliegel has that arm! That she unwaveringly plays both – cello internationally and tennis regionally – is typical of her, for the same applies to both: To stay on top requires intensive and consistent training, keeping oneself fit and being even more motivated than someone on the way up to the top. She is also aware that a source of veritable pleasure and *joie de vivre* lies hidden away in any work involving discipline – in Sports as well as in cello playing. Yet she manages it again and again. “La Cellissima” – the name was adopted after a CD bearing this title – triggers these latent powers and embodies a rare melange of natural pleasure in playing, brilliant technique and dazzling expression. Nobody can escape her stage presence and her charismatic virtuosity.

... Kliegel has all the virtues: beautiful “singing” tone. perfect intonation, marvellous style and exquisite taste. Kliegel’s feeling for rubato sets a stunning standard of excellence and her playing is right up there at the level of today’s finest ...
(IN TUNE, Japan)

At an early age she learned how to play the cello in her large family, firstly in her home town and then with Professor A. Molzahn in Frankfurt, winning her first prizes in the national youth competition “*Jugend musiziert*”. When beginning her professional studies in 1971, fate took a hand: A Frankfurt patron with an appreciation of art enabled her to participate in a master-class with Janos Starker in Canada. He immediately discerned the hidden talent of this cello player who had just turned nineteen and he promptly invited her to continue her studies in his own cello class in Bloomington/USA, Indiana University. Maria Kliegel was quick to recognise this great opportunity in her life, accepted the offer, and what was soon to follow were first prizes at the American University Competition in Chicago and at the *1. Deutscher Musikwettbewerb* in 1975.

With Starker, she learnt an astounding cello technique defined by analytical intellect and discipline, yet joining forces with the virtue of interpretative subtlety, while comprehending both the technical and physiological sequences of movement as well as sophisticated work processes – all this explained and clarified by the taciturn, strict master. Maria Kliegel speaks enthusiastically of the great gains in perception from this period with Janos Starker, during which she discovered a relaxed, healthy relationship to music, to herself with body and soul, as well as to life altogether. She thus preserved her essential enchanting naturalness, and was constantly able to make this convincingly tangible and audible on both a human and creative level.

When she had the opportunity to meet up with Mstislav Rostropowitsch in a master-class in Basle in 1977, a new perspective opened up for her, crossing frontiers beyond cultivated instrumental art and artistic integrity. He taught her how to grasp that an artist’s personality can only communicate convincingly, if this “high art” is not left to itself, but –

brought to life through the artist's own lifeblood and unconditional passion – it is made sensuously comprehensible, the artist him or herself being the communicator between composer and listener. Through the realisation of these new discoveries, she matured to become a fascinating musician who was impressively able to prove her development with the attainment of the 1st Grand Prix in the "Concours Rostropowitsch" in 1981. The conductor Rostropowitsch took his prize-winner as a soloist on tours through France and to Washington DC – her international career had been launched.

This dual musical and human influence from completely opposing sources made Maria Kliegel the technically perfect instrumentalist and the superb artistic personality meanwhile known and admired by the whole world from live appearances and through audio storage media.

In the interim, she ranks amongst the most versatile instrumentalists of our time. Radio and television had long taken notice of her. She managed her brilliant start in the audiocarrier branch in 1992 with her recording of Alfred Schnittke's first cello concerto which the composer himself declared to be a reference interpretation of his work and which was immediately selected as "CD of the month" by the German magazine FONOFORUM. Since then she has recorded the entire standard works of cello literature on more than 30 CDs on the Naxos label. This ranges from Bach's solo suites and Dvorak's cello concerto – both immediately showered with international prizes shortly after their appearance – as well as all other "heavyweights" of the classic, romantic and modern right up to the present.

... Her marvellous Dvorak Concerto is full of the most poignant but tasteful touches. The first thing that struck me is the incredible vocal quality of her playing. And the closest I can come to describing is the voice of Maria Callas. Like Callas (in her best years) Kliegel's playing possesses a huge expressive range, a palpably dramatic quality that can, seemingly, communicate any emotion. She can even, like Callas and the late tenor Richard Tucker, crack her "voice" at climactic moments... (THE LISTENER, USA/CANADA)

However, for her instrument she has also dug up a great number of unknown, amusing and valuable pieces well worth listening to, and has resurrected erroneously neglected compositions by, for example, Danzi, Popper, Cassado, von Dohnányi, Saint-Saëns, Kodály or Fauré. World-wide recognition by her public and by critics has been heaped upon her since then due to her persuasive and valid interpretations – and not because of skilfully launched artist promotion of the record label.

... Kliegel is one of the world's leading cellists - and on the basis of her performance, there is no doubt that she possesses the necessary tools to make an assault to the title .. (BELFAST TELEGRAPH, Ireland).

A million silver discs sold throughout the world bear witness to "La Cellissima" being internationally No. 1 in sales of cello repertoires on CD. Certainly this sales success is

also furthered by Maria Kliegel constantly receiving awards from the international trade press, for example, the "Editor's Choice" in the British GRAMOPHONE for her Schumann and Brahms recordings; or the "SuperSonic Award" in the Luxembourg PIZZICATO and the "CD of the month" in the magazine STEREO for the solo suites by Bach; or by the magazine SCALA selecting the recording of Saint-Saëns' cello concertos as one of the best 50 solo concerto recordings of the 20th century. There were "Grammy" nominations

... this is, quite simply, one of the finest cello ... discs to have appeared for some time, and its virtues are reflected by the sheer quality of her playing. It certainly offers a glowingly accurate impression of Maria Kliegel's magnificent, and frequently titanic cello playing... (GRAMOPHONE, England)

The music of the present takes up a great deal of her creative work: She has played in concert and recorded in the studio compositions dedicated to her by Harald Banter or Jörg Demus or also compositions commissioned by herself. Lera Auerbach is composing a Triple Concerto for her and W. Kaiser-Lindemann at her request wrote a "Homage à Nelson M." for cello and percussion for her. The idea for this work came from Maria Kliegel's ardent admiration for South Africa's president Nelson Mandela, this living example of a champion for true humanity and justice who believes unwaveringly in his destiny. He heard about the world premiere in Düsseldorf and the first performance in Capetown on Heritage Day and - against his usual practice - invited the artist to a private concert in his residence. This encounter made possible through musical creativity was a special and unforgotten highlight in Maria Kliegel's life, and it supported her in her belief to view her instrument as an agent of interaction - and her music as a means to touch upon inner worlds of emotion and sensation where words fail us. This is why after this stirring meeting she gave and still keeps giving numerous benefit concerts for the *Nelson Mandela Children's Fund*, as well as for numerous aid projects in South America or for the *Children's Cancer Aid Association* in Germany. As recognition of these endeavours, but also for her untiring efforts in working for youth and young people, "La Cellissima" was awarded the Order of Merit of the State of North-Rhine Westphalia in 1999 by its Prime Minister Clement.

The "grande dame of violoncello playing" - to quote WELT AM SONNTAG - has been a professor at the Cologne College of Music since 1986, passing on her instrumental, musical and personal knowledge and experience in international master courses there. What the antipodeans Starker and Rostropowitsch conveyed to her in their contrasting natures earlier on fuses in her own teaching to a continuative and completely new creative unit. Her great standing amongst her colleagues leads to her being a much-in-demand jury member for international competitions, such as for the *ARD Competition Munich* or in the *Unisa Competition Pretoria*, the *Leonard Rose Competition Washington/DC*, the *Paulo Competition Helsinki* or the *Casals Competition Kronberg*.

Right from the start, collaboration in chamber music has always been an extension and enrichment for "La Cellissima" in her career as a soloist. "Keeping the score in sight, always having to deal intensively with the most varied partners and ideas and nevertheless finding a common characteristic style in order to get to the very nature and

message of the music together is a thrilling and inspiring work in any phase of such an activity. Human as well as musical heights and depths are constantly seeking their balance anew", is how Maria Kliegel describes this.

Yet it is not enough for her to play in diverse ad-hoc ensembles at festivals every now and again, even if they are such top-class events as Lockenhaus or the Risør Festival in Norway with Leif Ove Andsnes and the Artemis-Quartet. In 2001, she founded the XYRION TRIO with Ida Bieler (violin) and Nina Tichman (piano). Celebrated enthusiastically by the press and general public – and compared even with the *Beaux Arts Trio* or with the *Trio Kempf/Szeryng/Fournier* - the XYRION TRIO on the Naxos label proves its high standing with their recordings of all Beethoven's piano trio compositions. Beginning in 2007, the Music Festival "Andernacher Musiktage auf Burg Namedy" was entrusted to the XYRION TRIO.

For her multimedia book and DVD project, *Schott Master Class – Cello: Mit Technik und Fantasie zum künstlerischen Ausdruck*, published in 2006, she has also received two prestigious awards, the special "Digita Award" and the European Media Award "Comenius EduMedia-Siegel". This was the starting point for the production of the English version Cello-Master Class "Using Technique and Imagination to achieve Artistic Expression", released on the Naxos label in 2010.

Maria Kliegel plays a cello made by Carlo Tononi, Venice, ca. 1730.

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