

## *Chanticleer Festival 2000*

*Ana Cervantes*

### **3. DOG MORNINGS ... AND A MAGICAL MIDNIGHT**

Elizabeth and Rubén bought Mitzi last year in Richmond at the end of the Festival and have brought her along for this year's event. She joins Arlo, Bob and Caroline's huge German shepherd (imagine a small pony almost, no kidding), and Jubal, who is staying at Chanticleer Farm while his owner young Daniel, a friend of the family, is off to Guatemala. Jubal is a large chocolate Lab, goofy and adorable, almost a caricature of his breed. When he runs, it is as though his four legs are flying out in all directions from that barrel-like body, and his tail madly flaps like some kind of weird centrifugal engine. He is completely loving and undemanding and his large deep brown eyes are like big pools of affection. Rubén Mendoza plays with him and says, "Jubal, Joobiejoobiejo", like the Frank Sinatra song, wagging himself in a kind of human impersonation of Jubal's whole-body wagging, and Jubal just loves it. Salvatore, semi-stressed from too much travel and no luggage, starts to become enchanted almost in spite of himself with Jubal's unqualified affection and develops an affection of his own for this goofy adorable dog. "Joobiejoobiejo" he can be heard singing to Jubal.

Well, and then there is Arlo. I met Arlo, whom I still consider a kind of magical dog, when I first came to Chanticleer Farm in February of 1999 for our debut "Crosscurrents" tour with Caroline and wonderful dancer and human being Sam LeSane. Caroline introduced me to Arlo and he immediately accepted me as part of the family. As such, he guarded me. When I went to sleep at night, he slept outside my door. When I stepped outdoors for a smoke, he insisted on accompanying me. There are coyotes in Richmond, Indiana even in the summers; in the dead of winter you can hear their vocalizings and howls in the frosty crystal clear nights. Arlo decided that it was part of his job as Alpha Dog to protect me, and he did.

Since the weather is fine and unusually un-humid for an Indiana summer, we develop the habit, during that first week, of taking our morning coffee outdoors on the little porch outside the kitchen before rehearsal starts, usually at 10:30. Elizabeth or Rubén gets up really early to let Mitzi out, but that doesn't really count: they don't make coffee! It is usually violist Jenny or I who are the semi-earlybirds. One of us makes espresso in Bob's little Krups machine, given to him by Caroline 5 years ago and now getting the workout of its life. Then everyone straggles in, Caroline, the Mendozas, and finally Salvo. We end up gathering on that little stone porch, Salvo, Jenny, and I enjoying our cigarettes (OK, some musicians in the US still smoke tobacco) with the good strong coffee, and watching the dog interplay.

Now, with two other dogs, one a visitor and young and feisty at that, we get a different, comical perspective on Arlo's Alpha Dog identity. Often in the morning Mitzi gets an urge to run. Being a long-legged boxer gal of a dog, she does this fast and enthusiastically. Jubal, legs and tail flying in all directions, immediately joins in. He is fat, no question about it, but his love for this great activity is unmitigated by his weight, although there is never a hope of catching up with Mitzi – who just doubles back and jumps OVER him.

Arlo has to join in to supervise: after all he is The Boss, Big Daddy, In Charge. Now Arlo can run, but he is enormous. He is not fat like Jubal, but he is just large. So when he runs, it has the flavor of his walk, which is more allegro maestoso (brisk in a majestic fashion) than presto (eager, really fast); he's just too big to be nimble and agile like Mitzi. So Mitzi has the time of her life charging around all over the yard while we relax outside. Jubal chases around after her

and Arlo fruitlessly tries to Establish Order. Mitzi gleefully just jumps over Jubal, Arlo nips at her in an admonitory fashion; she ignores him. He is reduced to Establishing Order by chasing the two kittens, Morpheus (all black) and Fuzznugget (all gray) who easily escape him by leaping up into the branches of the apple tree.

And then one day, the unthinkable happens: we lose Jubal. On Sunday afternoon, we go to the Dairy Queen. We have been working and working, and we have reached the point at which all good musicians know that it would be more productive to stop and ingest sugar, perhaps accompanied by coffee. We all pile into the ducktaped Jetta and Rubén and Elizabeth's fancy new Subaru and go off to town in search of ice cream, or at least Coffee Blizzards.

Jubal follows us running down to the county road, body flailing in all directions and tail frantically wagging. We wave Goodbye to him as we continue on into town.

The next morning, sipping my coffee on the front porch, I realize that Jubal is nowhere to be seen. Little by little we all realize that no one has seen him since the Dairy Queen expedition. Alarm sets in.

By the afternoon we are all worried: Jubal is definitively missing. After rehearsal, Caroline and Salvo and I drive all around looking for him, with no luck. Finally, returning home, Caroline calls the Animal Shelter and places an ad in the local paper: dog missing.

Friday we make our dry run at the Richmond State Hospital, the "mental hospital". As sometime happens, there is a surprisingly good piano there, a 6-foot Knabe, the brand of piano my mother had before she bought her pride and joy, the 7-foot Steinway which now graces me with its presence. The piano isn't moving anywhere, and there's no room for the quartet near me; we are relying far more on eye contact because of the distance. It's a "prueba", a test of sorts, but the Brahms, with all its intricacies, is together; we get a sense of the weak spots and know where we must rehearse. We have elected not to play the Galindo here: it has a pervadingly dark color even when it is vital rhythmically, and we worry that it may be too intense for these listeners whose sensibilities are heightened, maybe past bearing for some of them.

As have been many such concerts for all of us, it's a moving experience. Each of us has a strong sense after the concert, of "there but for the grace of whatever gods may be ...". We talk, afterwards, of the fine line between hopelessness and inspiration, of how lucky we are to do what we do, of Schumann and how he sank into a desperate depression which caused him to leave us before his 45<sup>th</sup> year, of Mozart, of Schubert. Some time later, I will read Yo Yo Ma in David Blum's book "Quintet", talking so movingly about Beethoven's Heiligenstadt Testament, and I'll remember that concert. Beethoven talks in this Testament about his increasing deafness and the sense of isolation and alienation which it engenders in him; it's written with an openness and lack of artifice which is painful. Reading it almost a month later, I remember that concert at the Richmond State Hospital.

Saturday is playtime; we go canoeing on the Whitewater River, by now almost a Festival ritual. It is my first time ever canoeing and kayaking, and Salvo's as well, but to me falls the honor of capsizing the canoe. Oh well, better to have done it and gotten it out of the way. We stop to swim in a spot where you get yourself placed just right in the river, and then the current takes you and sweeps you along quite fast until you reach a spot a little further down the river where the current slows down and you get out. I think how much this is like a long building phrase where, when you are set right, the phrase itself generates all the energy and it's almost as

though all you have to do is be carried along by it. For this and other reasons this river afternoon is another magical time.

Sunday we play at 10AM, to Salvatore's goodhumored horror, in a church about an hour away. This time the piano is no Knabe grand but a vertical Baldwin. The service is focussed on music, and our concert takes the place of the sermon. We also join in on the hymns, helping to make a joyful noise. The pastor makes a practice of having a time during the service for little kids, inviting them all up to the front of the sanctuary. On this occasion, he talks a little about how precious and important music is, and makes the point that we all have music in us. To prove this point he gives each youngster a comb, together with a piece of wax paper, all nicely wrapped in a plastic bag, and encourages them to make their own music. After the service – whose last hymn is a gospel tune where we all really get rocking! – he gives each of us our own comb too.

On Tuesday we start travelling, driving about three hours to Brown County State Park, in Nashville, Indiana. By now the plight of the travelling piano player has become a running gag. The truth is, you never know what you'll get. It could be a sonorous blessing or a clapped-out broken down piece of junk, it could be something which looks like a beautiful piece of furniture, all black and shiny on the outside with teflon (no kidding) on the inside; it could be some survivor from the 19<sup>th</sup> century sensibility, like the State Hospital's Knabe, which still retains the grace and luster of the sound which the greatest piano makers strove to create in those days.

It takes me a few days to realize that no one knows quite how I will react to this, the reality and the nightmare, occasionally the blessing and grace, of the travelling pianist. I could be a real diva and complain and whine and throw a tantrum, or I could be a trouper; there's no way anyone has of knowing how I will react. My greatest teacher, Ted Lettvin, could make anything sound good, and I learned from him that my job was not to complain and whine but on the contrary to form a bond with whatever instrument I found awaiting me, so that together we could make the best music possible: "yes, make a Sears Roebuck sound like a Stradivarius" said Caroline when we talked about this.

Indeed the Brown County piano would inspire wailing and gnashing of teeth from a diva-type: it's a small nameless spinet of uncertain provenance. So before the show, we go to work, the piano and I, to make friends, to make it sound better than perhaps it ever has. Márquez, CPE Bach, Brahms! Has it ever been called upon to play this many notes at once? 'Cellist Elizabeth Mendoza often asks to tune to the low C on the piano, to make sure we're tight in a certain passage of the Brahms. I say to her, "You're not going to be happy about this", after I've found, upon playing the closing of the Márquez which ends on this same low C, that it's almost a half-step higher than the C two octaves above it. Oh well, ni modo as we say in Mexico, what can you do.

After the concert, Elizabeth says to me, "Ana, I know that piano was no Steinway, but the Bach almost sounded as though you were playing it on a period instrument – it could have been a fortepiano. It really sounded pretty good!" This typically gracious comment of hers now becomes the running joke ... a less-than-impressive piano is now a "period instrument". Period Instrument or no, the audience loves the program, no matter the Bartók, the Shostakovich, the Galindo, "difficult" 20<sup>th</sup> century music. Our introductions and commentary help, everyone is very comfortable talking and giving the listener something for which to listen. The Mexican music is heartwarmingly well received, that little "Oaxaca" waltz just makes everyone feel

happy. We're well taken care of at the State Park, with a palatial dinner and a nice room for each of us.

As a young musician, a baby pianist, travelling around and playing in all sorts of back-of-beyond venues, I used to dread what I'd find and the challenges it might create for me. The dread would make me feel lonely and put-upon and tense. Of course, I wouldn't play as well as I could have if I'd only known that I wasn't alone. Later I learned that gift of forming a cooperation, a kind of loving relationship with the instrument. Learning that, I learned that I wasn't alone out there – rather, the piano and I were making music together. In this fashion a small instrument can give voice to sounds it never imagined possible.

Am I anthropomorphizing? You bet I am, but only if you think a piano is not a living entity, a life form. Every pianist knows deep down inside that a piano is indeed a living thing, just as much as a violin or a clarinet, a dog or a person. Its body is made partly of wood, like a violin's or an oboe's, wood which – just as our human bodies do – reacts to heat and humidity. Its felt-covered hammers react to pressure and retain the mark of the wire which touches them, as would skin. In addition, playing a great piano is like playing with a partner who is so responsive that in the instant you imagine something, he or she is there with you, alive and sensitive, meeting you, each of you carrying the other forward. I absolutely believe that within every piano lives some memory of the music that's been played on it. When my mother's piano first arrived at its new residence at my home in New Jersey, I sat down and played the second Bach Partita, the C-minor; and had the strangest sense that the piano, after its long voyage, was digesting, reacting to, and finally welcoming music that it personally had never before experienced.

Early the following morning, Salvo and I leave for Bloomington while the rest of the quartet continues on to Terre Haute, where our next concert is that evening. Salvo wants to go to Indiana University to see if he can see some of his old teachers there ... a real voyage of return and reconnection for him. I want to see if I can connect with the folks at the Latin American Music Center there. I am unsuccessful; but Salvo is able to see Yuval Yaron and Franco Gulli, two of his greatest teachers at IU after Josef Gingold. Gulli, reportedly, is not feeling well and is not at school. Salvo hesitates to go to his house and seek him out there. I say, you **MUST** go, you know it is really important for these teachers to know how much they've meant to us. My conversation with Joan Lettvin of a few weeks before is fresh in my mind, I feel profoundly aware of how much it meant to her and to Ted to know how I still hear his voice, feel that awareness and those wise questions, those phenomenal ears, guiding me in my practice of music.

We do go, we stop at Gulli's house, and Salvo, seeing him, has a presentiment that perhaps it will be the last time. As I fear every week that perhaps Lettvin's voice will fail, at least in this world. But then I think, no: the voice, the consciousness, of these great musicians and teachers, never fails. We keep it alive in us, the many of us who heard it and continue to be nourished by it. Gulli is courtly and gracious, a real gentleman. He's clearly delighted to see Salvo and wishes to us that we play well.

We take off for Terre Haute, the venue of the next concert. A church with a well-kept Kawai, surprisingly soft in sound and responsive. We're tired. Working with the Period Instrument the night before took more out of me than I'd realized. The audience seems unresponsive to those of us who are accustomed to more demonstrative listeners, although later we find from their individual reactions that they really enjoyed the music. We play well but I at least am

without the enlivening fire that can take you beyond yourself even when you're exhausted. Oh well, ni modo. You do the best you can, and lightning doesn't strike every night.

Afterwards a cousin of Caroline's and his wife invite us to their home (it's on the way to Richmond, where we're headed, back to the farm). They've just spent the last year in Uganda, where he had a Fulbright. His wife is Filipina, and the house is full of the wonderful smells of her cooking and the gorgeous batik tapestries which she's made, the beautiful things they've brought back with them from Africa; and their children are lovely, and we feel pampered and appreciated. Jenny and Rubén and I are designated drivers and drink coffee. The rest get treated to nice Australian red wine. The food is delicious and seems to go on forever. At the end I play their Baldwin Acrosonic, a little of the Bach 3<sup>rd</sup> Partita, and I feel refreshed and they seem to also. As Casals used to say, a blessing on the house; Bach, always a blessing.

Finally we leave; we have a three hour drive ahead of us back to the farm in Richmond: we want to get back so we'll be rested for our recording session the next day. Jenny and Salvo and I go together in the Jetta, I driving. We chat for a while, talking music and telling a little personal history in the way that one does in the car after a concert, on the way to the next place. Finally Salvo goes to sleep in the back seat, as peacefully as a baby, and Jenny and I keep talking up front, about graduate programs and what it's like to take your musical life to a different place, she to Montana and I to Mexico. It's good strong thoughtful talk and we keep each other awake so that the three hours seem easy.

At some point Rubén and Caroline and Elizabeth in the other car pull off into a rest stop and we keep going. By a little after 1AM we're coming into Richmond and we're quite sure that Rubén & Co, guided by Caroline who knows the back roads, will beat us to the farm. We take the idiot-proof front way because we know that we'd never have the chops to do the back way, and exhaustion is setting in. At 1:30 on the dot we drive up the dirt road from the county road, up towards Chanticleer Farm. As we drive past the pasture with the sleeping Angus steers, Salvo, awake now, rolls down the window and calls wistfully, as we did so many times Sunday and Monday when he went missing, "Jubal, JoobieJoobieJoobie, Jubal ..." .

And then a miracle happens. In the headlights ahead of us we see a barrel-shaped chocolate-colored apparition, legs flailing in all directions, tail a centrifugal engine, eyes red in the headlights ... IT'S JUBAL! He's reappeared!!! We are ecstatic, yelling and shouting and carrying on out the car windows, it's as though he has come back to welcome us in our exhaustion, back to the farm which somehow now seems a magical haven not only for musicians but for dogs as well.

And Bob is still up, at 1:30AM. And we are the first, Caroline and the others have still not arrived, so we get to see their delight at the reappearance of Jubal. Time for Oreos. We all have a bite and decompress, and so to our well-earned rest.



My only surviving snapshot of Jubal: after the Farm Concert –the final event of the Festival– breaking down the stage ... with Jubal accompanying.

NEXT... Part 4: [WORKING: THE MIRACLE OF CHAMBER MUSIC... AND OREOS](#)