

An Interview With the Ever Charismatic Pianist, Evelyn Ulex

<http://villageattler.com/2010/11/03/evelyn-ulex/>

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Evelyn Ulex (Photo: Matthias Martin)

From the very first time that Evelyn Ulex put her finger tips to the ivory keys of her father's piano, she has received accolades from those who were within earshot. [Evelyn Ulex](#), was born in Berlin, Germany. At the age of ten, she won the national "Festival of Young Talent" competition in Dresden and later received top medals in the J.S. Bach competition in Leipzig, Germany. Recently, Wendy Myhre-Levy, reviewed Ms Ulex in concert for "On the Skyline"; Rockville Center, NY and had this to say: "...if you ever have the chance to hear her in concert, do not miss it. She may be the reason that the piano was invented."



Although a serious musician, Ms. Ulex enjoys being playful with her music and experimenting. This Friday the Cinema Arts Centre in Huntington Village will be hosting her for a benefit performance of her show, "Color is sound, sound is color." The performance will be an inspiring combination of two art forms. Artist Ade Frey created her paintings as an outgrowth of listening to Ulex's music. These paintings will be projected on a screen during the concert and the originals are on display possible as an exhibition. Ms. Ulex graciously took time out of her schedule to answer a few questions for the VT:

VT: What first drew you to the piano and how old were you?

EU: I grew up in a very musical environment. My father was a violinist and concert master with the Radio orchestra in Berlin. He was also an extremely talented pianist, and would spend a lot of time on our grand piano at home. My brother studied violin and my sister piano, and were much older than I, so I grew up with music always being practiced so it was just second nature to me. By the time it was "my turn" the piano was very familiar, like a big toy, and I loved that I could "play" with it. I started studying in earnest when I was seven years old.

VT: What inspires you?

EU: I feel most at peace when I can be out in nature – a desert, a forest, a beach – doesn't matter. I just love the harmony that I find there; interesting people with different interests and thoughts, reading, art, of course a wonderful piano – my Steinway motivates me on those days I feel a little lazy!

VT: A review in the Classical New Jersey Society Journal had Alicia Sanderman, write this about you; “If you’re not inspired by Evelyn Ulex’s piano playing, you are most likely devoid of any emotional bone in your body. You don’t have to be a musician to agree that Ulex’s playing far surpasses the dots and the lines on the page; her music is a means of communication that supersedes the limits of a language of words.”...When you play, what goes through your mind? For example does the music send you a visual story or is it something that you feel internally?

EU: It’s always different. Any sound touches my emotions in some unique way. Playing with other musicians is like have a musical conversation, each time there is a new moment, and even playing the same piece over and again, something happens that didn’t happen before. Just as every day is new, every performance grows from different emotions or new ideas – to me it is kind of an endless universe in itself. Playing solo is the same, but the conversation is with the music. For example, Mussorgsky’s Pictures is visual, it’s a narrative with titles and images. I love to imagine the story, to fill my sound with as many different colors as possible to tell the story, to make it interesting, just as a storyteller tells her tale a little differently each time.

VT: In your opinion, how does a musician get to your level ...how much do you attribute to natural born talent and how much to perseverance?

EU: Of course natural talent is a good thing to have, but it’s only a starting point. You have to have passion; desire to reach a high artistic level. And discipline to work hard. I think that many people imagine a musician to sit in the studio and play lovely music all day – when you’re working, it is usually anything but lovely! Dedicating many hours in my childhood on the piano every day built my foundation – combined with excellent, respected teachers and schools in Berlin. Performing live and competing is also necessary; to learn composure and to test yourself. When I performed in competitions, I was challenging myself more than the others.

VT: Who has been the most difficult composer or piece to master?

EU: Lately I am focused more on mastering new musical genres than any specific composer. I am working on a lot of Jazz and the Jazz-Classical crossover, playing new and original compositions with my TransAtlantic Ensemble partner – Grammy nominated clarinetist Mariam Adam (TransAtlantic Ensemble). The different rhythm structures hold the greatest challenges for a classically trained pianist. I think most will agree about that! We are really fortunate to be performing music from the most talented up and coming composers on the scene. New York is THE place to work and exchange with Jazz musicians and composers – thanks to jazz, it’s an exciting time in classical music. Gershwin touched on it, but otherwise, I don’t know why crossover hasn’t happened really until now, but I’m really glad to be right in the front of it!

VT: What has been your most fulfilling event as a pianist?

EU: I think it might be easier to answer which was the event I would most like to forget! Performing is fulfillment, so it's like the sum total of all my experiences is one long fulfilling moment in a way – it's all connected. When I was a little girl I would sometimes see my father play with the orchestra at the Konzerthaus. Sometimes I would miss school and watch them rehearse. Later on when I performed there, it became a very personal nostalgic connection to him and the music and the place and my past. There was that feeling of the circle closing, and that was very special.

VT: Where is your favorite place to perform?

EU: I couldn't choose a single place. Some of the smallest venues have the greatest memories for me. For sure The Philharmonie and Konzerthaus in Berlin are wonderful places, with their history and importance, like Carnegie Hall in that way – all these places have their very own spirit, which created unique moments.

VT: Can you explain how you came to work with Ade Frey and what her art brings to yours?

EU: Like every struggling young musician, I was earning money giving piano lessons! Her daughter was one of my students – we clicked right away. Ade is such an extraordinary artist. What is fascinating to me is her idea of music as a visual medium. This is something I had never heard of before. She has devoted much of her work over the past years in expressing music on canvass; reflecting what she hears with the artist's brush, using paint, and various materials, such as gauze or lava sand and that sort of thing. She came to one of my concerts and started sketching little drawings out of the music. After listening intently for a year to my recordings, she created pieces for each "Picture" on the exhibition. That is how "Sight & Sound" started. Now when I perform this program, I see the work floating over me, it's like having another "musical conversation" as we talked about before. I feel as though I am communicating with her pictures, with her colors and rhythmical expressions.

VT: What brings you to the Cinema Arts Centre this Friday?

EU: I am a member at the Cinema. We are really fortunate to have a cultural and progressive place like this right here in Huntington, doing important work for our community. They are a non-profit organization and I am glad I can support them. They have so many different interesting events and movies that I would otherwise have to go to Manhattan to see, which is not always convenient. I am playing the "Sight & Sound" inter-media performance next week in Atlanta and in Washington, DC. So the timing is excellent to be able to warm up here and at the same time offer a benefit for the Cinema. All the ticket sales go to supporting the Cinema and its programs.

VT: Do you have a creed or a motto that you like to live by?

EU: *Carpe diem!*