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THE MAG INTERVIEW

Pianist Kairy Koshoeva has the keys to the beauty of Bach

By CINDY HOEDEL
The Kansas City Star

Pianist Kairy Koshoeva, 36, was born in the former Soviet republic of Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia. Koshoeva earned a master's degree from Gnessin's Academy of Music in Moscow and a doctorate from the Conservatory of Music and Dance at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She has won numerous piano competitions internationally and now teaches at the University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg and Kansas City Kansas Community College. To hear samples of Koshoeva's playing, go to www.kairykoshoeva.com.

One of the early competitions you won was a concerto competition in Chautauqua, N.Y., in 2001, when you had just arrived in the United States. How did that feel?

It was exhausting. All summer I had to practice a lot and play for different teachers, and my English was not very good.

The following year, as is the custom with the competition winner, I was invited to play at the amphitheater with the Chautauqua Orchestra. You don't get much practice — there is one run-through with the orchestra in the morning, and then you perform at night.

What is it like as a pianist to perform with an orchestra, compared to playing solo?

There are lots of time issues. You have to really watch the conductor. When you are playing solo you have to be



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really precise, but you can keep your own time. With an orchestra, it's a really big deal because the whole orchestra is under the conductor's direction

Are you following the orchestra or are they following you?

We take turns. Usually if you are the soloist the orchestra follows you, but sometimes it's the opposite, so it really requires skills. And it's so much fun. The term "concerto" came from "competition." It meant you were competing against the orchestra.

How would you describe your playing style?

It's hard for me to describe it. That is a question best left to the audience. But what people have told me is it is very expressive, with good tone, virtuosic.

Are there other pianists whose style has influenced you?

All my teachers influenced me a lot. Because I belonged to a Russian piano school, I appreciate the Russian style.

What is the Russian style?

Very strong basic technical skills, also very good articulation, what I would call "speaking fingers." Also I appreciate French music and the French style.

How is French style different from Russian style?

That's a difficult question. The French style is more maybe abstract, more impressionistic, like French painting, like Claude Monet.

It's a different technique, and the teachers are totally different. There is more pedaling, lots of moods, creating different pictures, you get clouds, you even get a sense of smell — you think you can hear these kinds of things in French music, in my opinion. It's hard to describe, but it's really amazing.

Is there an American style?

Of teaching, yes.

But not of playing?

Maybe not much.

What is the American style of teaching?

Russian style is more strict. This is the teacher, and this is the student. Here it is more liberated, it is more collegial, more respectful.

More collaborative?

Exactly. So it's very different. ... I really enjoyed all my experiences with all my teachers.

Now you are a teacher. What is your schedule like?

Mondays I teach at Kansas City Kansas Community College. Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays I teach in Warrensburg. On Wednesday I teach privately at my house. On Saturday or Sunday if there are any recitals in Warrensburg, they need me there.

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If I am lucky, occasionally on a Saturday or Sunday I get to just stay home and do nothing.

Which composers are your favorites to play?

Chopin. Bach, of course. Bach is my very favorite of all time. Rachmaninov.

What do you like about Chopin?

The beautiful, endless lines and phrases, which are just amazing.

What do you like about Bach?

This intellectual side of him — all the counterpoints and the different voices and polyphonic lines. It's just amazing, incredible.

What about Rachmaninov?

Rachmaninov is everything together, a combination of wonderful techniques. He does polyphony, he has beautiful lines. But what mostly speaks to me is his Russian background and his expressiveness. His music is infused with Russian folk music, in every beautiful line you can recognize an old Russian song. It is very nostalgic music.

Do you have a favorite recording you like to listen to around the holidays?

Yes. Ekaterina Dershavina playing the "Goldberg Variations" by Bach (Artenova, 1998). Dershavina won first prize at an international Bach competition in Germany.

She is a friend of mine, but I did lots of research when I was writing my dissertation for my doctoral degree, and this was my favorite.

What do you love about this recording?

It's very different than Glenn Gould, who recorded the "Goldberg Variations" twice. Before Gould, nobody played it onstage because it's a huge masterpiece that requires more than one hour to play. Gould is the one who brought this recording to the public, so it's very hard not to be influenced by his interpretation and think, "That's it. That's the one."

But she plays it so beautifully with her own interpretation and charm and personality. She is a different type of musician. It makes you hear the piece in a totally different way. I've heard thousands of recordings, but lately I've been enjoying this one a lot.

Interview conducted, condensed and edited by Cindy Hoedel, choedel@kcstar.com.

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