

Júlia Karosi, the Singer Who Thinks in Songs

(By Barbara Bércesi, in the Young Talent column of Gramofon magazine, June 2011.)

Júlia Karosi not only has a wonderful singing voice, she has also been blessed with a talent in composing music and lyrics, she leads her own quartet, was singled out for special mention at the VOICINGERS International Jazz Competition for Singing in Poland last year, and has been a student at the jazz faculty of The Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest since 2008.

She grew up surrounded by music, her mother is Júlia Pászthy, the opera singer, her brother, Bálint Karosi is an organist. For Juli the presence of music came naturally, so obviously she finds it difficult to pinpoint the spark that ignited her passion for music. She has a curious incident to share though from before she was born. It happened that Juli was profoundly touched by a song cycle of Villa-Lobos, which she showed to her mother, who reacted in amazement - she was recording the same cycle when she had been pregnant with Juli.

She couldn't even read or write when hearing her brother play the piano, she took a fancy to the instrument. Long years of training followed, but when the time of the entrance exams came, she was only accepted to study the theory of music at the Budapest conservatoire, not piano, so in the end she decided to attend a conventional secondary school instead and gave up on her ambitions to become a pianist. She had been studying the violin for five years but never felt close enough to the instrument, however she enjoyed singing in the choir all the more. As a secondary school student she won 8th place in the National Secondary School Academic Competition in philosophy, which was not only an achievement worthy of

respect, it also gained her a place to study philosophy and aesthetics at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. "I've always loved reading and writing, when I was ten I used to dream of becoming a writer." - Juli explains, shedding light on how much she differed from the average little girls. She never sank into the grey depths of the mediocre. She was „infected“ by the love of philosophy by her brother. "I think I started by reading Plato and I immediately felt that his dialogues gave me such a rich experience that no literary text could."

It's easier to identify the spark that ignited Juli's love of jazz music. Even in her teens, she used to love listening to her father's music collection, which included albums of Oscar Peterson, Shirley Horn, Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan. Afterwards she learnt three volumes of Gershwin songs just for her own amusement. This attraction led her to enrol at the Etúd Conservatoire and Music School while in her last year at University. As a student of Gábor Winand, she was dropped into the deep end right away. "I had to improvise on my first lesson, the first time I tried it in my whole life. I felt like flying, it was a cathartic experience!" - remembers Juli, smiling. Later she was taught by Ágnes Lakatos who is currently teaching her, along with Tamás Berki at the jazz department. Lakatos assisted her growth with her systematic pedagogical methods and her advice concerning voice-production, while Berki gave her inspiration to seek different musical approaches.

Julia Karosi's childhood writing ambition continues: she writes lyrics and even composes music, which is not necessarily expected of a jazz singer - though these days there's a bigger pressure on vocalists in this respect. "I think there are two attitudes towards this. A singer may say

that they are an interpreting artist, therefore they won't compose songs, and I can understand this. But I feel that as a European and Hungarian artist, living in the 21st century, I feel the need to define my relationship with jazz, which is basically rooted in Afro-American music." - explains Juli, whose serious objective is to define herself through her art. She strives for simplicity both as a music and lyrics composer, which is an important characteristic of the genre of songs she feels closest to, however, at the same time she aspires to avoid clichés. Her quartet comprising of the pianist Tamás Balázs, the bass-player Balázs Horváth, and drummer Bendegúz Varga, Juli's husband, is already preparing their first album. "I need to write some more songs in major, as the tone is a bit too gloomy so far." - Juli says and adds that many of her acquaintances find it strange how melancholy her music seems to be, as she herself is a very cheerful, happy young woman. The finished album, which will hopefully be filled with sunlight, is expected to appear towards the end of this year.