

A JAZZ SINGER WITH A DEGREE IN PHILOSOPHY

By Gabriella Bokor in Legato magazine

After graduating with a joint honours degree in philosophy and aesthetics from Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE, Budapest), Júlia Karosi decided it was time to devote herself to her "true love", jazz. At the moment she's in her third year at The Liszt Academy of Music, studying jazz singing, and as a second degree involves considerable financial strain, she appealed to the association Friends of the Liszt Academy of Music for tuition support. Last year she received a Special Mention at the VOICINGERS International Jazz Competition for Singing held in Zory, Poland, and besides attending her classes, she's preparing for other competitions and also performs more and more frequently with her own band, the Karosi Júlia Quartet.

It's simply nice to talk to Júlia Karosi, it's pleasant to spend time with her. This might not be the biggest compliment one can pay to a jazz singer, but for a journalist preparing for an interview with her, this is quite a special experience. She's waiting by the Café ahead of the agreed time, even this is an unusual phenomenon, as most interviewees arrive later than the journalist, she's not wearing make-up and we naturally address each other on familiar terms. When we finally settle down for a latte, she isn't only waiting for questions without saying anything herself, but asks her own questions; we aren't really doing an interview, it's more like an informal conversation. Maybe her unaffectedness and spontaneity are her most endearing characteristics.

She used to be the little girl the French would call *surdoué*, or „severely talented“. Ever since she was six years old, she has played the piano, the violin, has sung in choirs, has

written poems, composed music and even joined a local theatre club. Her family often remembers that whenever Whitney Houston's song came on TV, Juli proceeded to sing it with her in the middle of the sitting room, „and very well at that“, her parents used to say. So Juli tried her hand at many different things and proved talented in all of them. She loved to read, a lot. As a secondary school student she came in 8th at the National Secondary School Academic Competition and as a result was immediately accepted by ELTE to study philosophy and aesthetics. When asked if studying humanities was a somewhat rebellious act on her part, she said yes. Her mother is Júlia Pászthy the opera singer and her older brother Bálint Karosi is an organist... Time to prove herself in another field. Her father was very happy that finally there was someone in the family who wasn't becoming a musician.

However, life always gets complicated. Juli attended the faculty of arts but never gave up music, and enjoyed jazz piano and singing more and more. During her last year at university she enrolled at the Etűd Conservatoire and Music School and started studying jazz singing under Gábor Winand. After earning her degree at ELTE, she was accepted at The Liszt Academy of Music at the first attempt, and with the highest score. Becoming a student of Ágnes Lakatos and Tamás Berki, she finally realised that even though many things interested her, this was her chosen path. What's more, in the jazz world her successes are due to her own talent, nobody brings up her family background. She continues to compose music and write lyrics but she feels most at ease when on stage, especially when performing her own songs. It's then that she can really be herself. She likes solo singing but everyone needs a team, a regular band in which everyone is in tune with everybody else's thoughts. This is what the Karosi Júlia Quartet, set up in 2009, is like, where there's even a

close family tie, as the drummer, Bendegúz Varga is Juli's husband. Many advised them against playing in the same quartet, but luckily it has worked out well. One downside is that if her husband criticizes her it affects her more than if it came from any other musician.

Apart from the band, Juli likes to take up offers of solo work, as a guest singer in other bands. There's always a need for new inspiration and meeting new people. Juli's repertoire is very colourful, she feels at home with different genres, jazz standards, chanson, or covers of Albert Szirmai or Szabolcs Fényes songs. Both solo and with her quartet, she has many concerts in Budapest jazz clubs, and even took the stage in Luxembourg as a guest of the Neuman Balázs Quartet. In the coming weeks she's preparing for a jazz singing competition in Finsterwalde, Germany, as well as rehearsing with her quartet for their next concert in Budapest Jazz Club, on September the 7th. Those who go along will definitely see why Juli received a Special Mention for her refreshing approach to jazz singing last year in Zory.