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STEPHANIE TRICK: Great Strides on the Piano

by Lew Shaw

It was a typical family outing with the grandparents at a local restaurant in St. Louis back in 1992. What made it special for the five-year-old granddaughter was hearing tuneful melodies being played by a pianist while the family was dining. It was her first experience in hearing live music. She watched in awe as the pianist played one beautiful melody after another. When the family acknowledged the musician and told her about the little gal's reaction, the pianist mentioned that she gave lessons, and so began a relationship that was to last for the next 13 years.

Stephanie Trick began the way most young music students do, learning the scales and simple classical pieces to become familiar with the piano. But she quickly separated herself from other students and challenged her teacher, Diane Ceccarini, for more advanced exercises. "Stephanie was the most dedicated student I ever had," according to Diane. "She would never let anything go without fully understanding it first."

At the age of 10, Stephanie was

introduced to ragtime, and when she was in junior high school she took first place for three years in the St. Louis Friends of Scott Joplin competition. As she continued to study the music of the early jazz pianists, Diane gave her the sheet music for *Carolina Shout*, one of James P. Johnson's signature pieces. Stephanie was immediately hooked and knew she wanted to play more of this music.

As she explained, "Stride was developed in the 1920s and kind of sounds like a whole band is performing. The left hand makes the sound of the bass by hitting low notes, thereby creating a very full sound. Once I heard it, I was blown away and started to learn about its history and the people that played it." James P. Johnson is considered the "Father of Stride," while other early practitioners were Donald Lambert, Willie "The Lion" Smith, Fats Waller and Luckey Roberts.

- Comments from Her Peers -

Phil Flanigan was the bass player in Stephanie's trio at this year's Sacramento Music Festival. He was quite expansive when asked his assessment of this talented young lady, saying "I don't know how one acquires such things, but from the



very first bars of hearing her play, you can tell this is one serious believer, a true and faithful Harlem stride pianist. There's something about the feel, the way the beat comes out, the directness of attack,

the certainty and assuredness (not to mention accuracy) in Steph's playing that leaves you thinking you're in a speakeasy on 138th Street."

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"Yet you look and don't see a grizzled old, cigar-chomping saloon dweller at the piano. You see Stephanie Trick, a twenty-something, unassuming young lady from St. Louis. What you hear is the authentic feel of the music which I attribute to her slavish devotion to playing the piano as well as the incredible daily discipline it takes to emulate the old Harlem stride pianists, especially the esoteric Donald 'The Lamb' Lambert."

Rossano Sportiello, a pretty fair stride pianist in his own right (although his abilities are far too great to limit him to just one style), states, "Stephanie Trick is an exceptional young lady. Over the past few years, I've seen her grow musically to the point where she has developed an effortless piano technique. Her specialty is making very accurate transcriptions of the most complex stride and boogie woogie pieces associated with James P. Johnson, Willie 'The Lion' Smith, Fats Waller and Donald Lambert and playing them by heart with extreme accuracy and most of all, with a beautiful soft, yet energetic, sound."

"She reminds me of the great

Ralph Sutton whose touch and rhythmic pulse still represent a reference to many piano players. She can be considered one of today's masters in the field of philological stride piano style along with Louis Mazetier, Bernd Lhotzky and the maestro, Dick Hyman."

- Experiences in Europe -

Although she is well known in ragtime circles, Stephanie's reputation probably grew more over the past four years across the ocean in Europe than in this country, although based on her reception in Sacramento this past May, that is about to change. According to her father **Allan**, who serves as her business manager, "The Europeans really love classic jazz. It all started with a video of her performing Jelly Roll Morton's *Finger Breaker* which was taken by a fan at the 2007 West Coast Ragtime Festival and then posted on YouTube."

"We weren't even aware of it until contacted by someone from Switzerland who saw it and invited Stephanie (then a junior in college) to the 2008 Stride & Swing Summit in Boswil (her first overseas trip) where she played with some of the

world's best stride musicians. She's since been there five times and seems to attract more attention each time she goes. It was here that Louis Mazetier told her that in order to play authentic stride and traditional jazz, the most accurate sources are the recordings of the old masters – not sheet music."

- Family Support -

In explaining his role in his daughter's career, Allan went on to say, "We considered engaging a booking agent, but there really aren't many that understand classic jazz. They just pigeon-hole her in the broad jazz category. I got an MBA a few years ago so knew something about marketing ... and a lot about Stephanie."

"So I assumed that role in 2009, and it seems to be working. By my helping with the business side, she's able to spend more time at the keyboard. She practices six-plus hours a day, and that's really what she prefers doing rather than having

to line up gigs, answer mail and deal with the accounting."

- Academic and Musical Accolades -

Over the years, Stephanie's daily routine involved rising at 5 a.m. so she could practice before going to school where she was an excellent student, graduating at the top in her high school class. She attended the University of Chicago where she studied Baroque and the Romantic and Classical styles and graduated in 2009 with a Bachelor of Arts in Music along with Phi Beta Kappa academic honors.

The Hot Club of France awarded her its 2011 New Talent Prize for her *Stephanie Trick LIVE* album. In May at the Breda Jazz Festival in Holland (Europe's largest outdoor festival), she won the Kobe Award given to one new artist each year and includes an invitation for her to go to the Kobe, Japan Festival in October. This month she will be

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performing at the International Boogie Woogie Festival in France. She will be doing a dozen festivals this year, along with a growing number of concerts and private parties.

Dick Hyman, the Maestro, remarked that "Stephanie Trick is one of the nicest gifts to arrive on the jazz piano scene in recent times." Stephanie says she has no

grand plan and will take what comes while continuing to do what she truly enjoys doing. Wherein Phil Flanigan adds, "Without question, Stephanie makes any listening experience way beyond just worthwhile." He boldly concludes, "If I ran this country, I'd immediately assign her National Treasure status and promote her as an example of the best of American culture."