



## Swimming on the same musical wave

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By: **Christina McEwan**

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A TEACHER at the Cologne Music Academy (Hochschule für Musik und Tanz) since 1986, German cellist Maria Kliegel who is playing with the CPO on Thursday and the *Concert Series* on Saturday, decided it was time to give back to the school to which she is devoted. So she started *La Cellissima*, a competition named for one of her award-winning CDs. The competition was held for this year for the third of 10 years she will sponsor and manage.

About the festival, she says: “ I am very grateful to have been a professor in Cologne for almost 30 years, teaching, educating, leading and forming young people, who give so much back to me . They have such enthusiasm, energy, love for the cello and music.”

Kliegel will also see that the cellists of the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra, who will attend a masterclass with her during her visit, are just as enthusiastic and talented!

The school has five cellos classes in Cologne, and one student from four of the classes is chosen to participate. “It’s about more than performance,” she says.

“Each has to play a 45-minute recital, they each have to moderate the performance. This is the hot spot... communicating with the audience, discovering new talents over and above their playing. Not all performers are good vocal communicators, and sometimes while their performance lacks a little something they can fascinate the audience through sheer personality! So in Cologne we add an extra dimension and always find much more than we

expected to. It is much more a cello fest than competition; there is always an audience prize as well so the audience is part of the event. They all love it!”

For more than 20 years, Ms Kliegel has been visiting Cape Town, the first time in 1994 as a tourist falling in love with the country on the eve of democratisation and did the right things like visit a high-end game park and take a high end train; she followed this up with a performance with the CTPO in 1997 with Bernhard Gueller and after that performance of the Saint-Saens *Cello Concerto* she played excerpts from *Hommage á Nelson M*, a piece she had composed in honour of the South African icon by German composer Wilhelm Kaiser Lindemann.

As a result of a meeting with patron of the CTPO, Govan Mbeki, she was invited to Mandela’s home to play another excerpt for him. While she was nervous, she says, so full of respect and admiration, it didn’t take long for his overwhelming charisma as a human being to relax her.

“I felt surrounded by his friendliness, his humility, his pure greatness. He understood how great music is, connecting people and healing their wounds, bringing peace and joy.”

She is looking forward to playing with Gueller again. They have also collaborated in Johannesburg and Nuremberg. “From the first moment we swam on the same musical wave, with easy communication. There was a natural understanding based on the goal of excellent results. Since Gueller is a cellist himself, he is close to what I do instrumentally. The personal chemistry and empathy is just right! “

Kliegel, who plays a cello made by Carlo Tononi, Venice, ca. 1730, studied with the great cellist Janos Starker in America. This led her to the Rostropovich cello competition in Paris which she won in 1981, and with it won the friendship and mentorship of the great cellist Msistislav Rostropovich himself.

“I will never forget performing under his baton on tour in France and also in America.”

From that point, her career grew worldwide. She holds the record of selling the most cello CDs – more than one million copies. Her recordings of Dvorak’s and Elgar’s cello concerti with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra London are benchmarks, and composer Alfred Schnittke declared her recording of his first *Cello Concert* his own reference work!

Kliegel has two Grammy awards, and awards for her multimedia book and DVD project in German and now in English, *Cello – Master Class Using Technique and Imagination to achieve Artistic Expression*. For her spontaneous commitment to the Nelson Mandela Childrens’ Fund and her untiring efforts for other relief projects, she has received the Order of Merit of the State of North-Rhine Westphalia.

The upcoming CPO concert at The City Hall on Thursday also features Dvorák’s *Midday Witch* and the Beethoven *Symphony no 7*.

At the *Concert Series* at The Baxter Concert Hall on Saturday, she will be accompanied by Albie van Schalkwyk for a programme of works by de Falla, Granados and Grieg. Both concerts begin at 8pm.