

Julia Scherer: Passion for Pianos and People

By Melissa Eddy, *Mu Theta, Austin Alumni*

Julia Scherer's initial reaction on being asked for a *Triangle* interview was, "L'il ol' me?" Yet her diverse career is a good example of how a trained musician can find a satisfying niche in the business side of music. Julia began piano lessons at seven, continuing into college.

Her undergraduate major was linguistics with a piano performance minor, and her love for music led her later to take a master's in piano performance and pedagogy at Texas Tech University. She subsequently helped one of her teachers there, William Westney, develop and market his groundbreaking Un-Master Class, her first foray into the administrative side of music. She has been an active teacher and performer for over two decades. Initiated to *Alpha Kappa* in 1994, she is presently affiliated with *Kansas City Alumni*.

Unexpected Turns

In 2003 Julia's professional life took an unexpected turn when she became Director of Development for Kansas City's Friends of Chamber Music. Julia says, "I'd been attending their Master Pianists series for over a decade and was thrilled to be offered this job. My three years with The Friends brought me into exhilarating contact with the world's finest musicians and also, as chief fundraiser for the organization, with respected community leaders and donors."

Another unexpected turn came in August 2006 when Schmitt Music – the Kansas City area's Steinway/Boston as well as Yamaha dealer – asked Julia to consider working for them. "Selling pianos had,



frankly, never occurred to me. But I agreed to have lunch and listen to what they had in mind." She learned that Schmitt's was looking for a particular profile – piano teacher – and realized that the job encompassed her favorite things: pianos and interacting with people. Working on commission scared her, but she took the plunge. Now, she says, work "doesn't even feel like coming to work. I get paid to follow my passion!" And selling wasn't such a big leap: "As musicians we sell ourselves and the music we perform every time we go onstage."

Matching People and Pianos

Although her job title is salesperson, Julia thinks of herself as a matchmaker, connecting people with just the right instruments. "I wouldn't dream of selling someone something that wasn't right for them. My job is to help people figure out what they need. My years as a teacher come in handy and my network in the music community is also an enormous asset." She says her Mu Phi membership adds to her credibility and is an important part of her network. Schmitt's hosted a recent Kansas City Alumni meeting where, surrounded by gorgeous Steinways, technician John Yeradi enchanted members with his presentation about what makes Steinway so special to concert artists the world over.

As a classically trained pianist, Julia was acquainted with both Steinway/Boston and Yamaha acoustic pianos, but had little knowledge of the Yamaha Clavinovas and Disklaviers, so she had to learn quickly. "Clavinovas are very fine digital pianos. They come closer than anything I've ever played to an acoustic grand piano, both in sound and feel. Disklavier is the state-of-

the-art player piano that marries a superb acoustic piano to a sophisticated computer, resulting in an instrument that can play back exactly what the pianist played, including every nuance of pedaling. We've come a long way from the old paper piano rolls!" The job has also heightened her skills in managing time and – since she works on commission – personal budgeting.

Passion for Customer Service

Julia's workdays are focused on customer service. She responds to phone and email queries, interacts with drop-in customers, and follows up with those from previous days. She takes her turn with phone duty: "It's really important that when people call, they reach a pleasant, knowledgeable, caring person." She helps to prepare the in-store performance center for recitals and to produce special events such as clinics for people who have purchased Clavinovas and Disklaviers. Oh, and when she has time, she dusts the pianos. It's all worked quite well for her: she's already won an award as a top Disklavier salesperson and also sold the store's stunning rosewood Henry Z. Steinway Limited Edition Model B piano – an instrument priced upwards of \$130,000.

Julia Scherer has an uplifting philosophy about selling pianos. "It's enormously satisfying to connect people with an instrument that they love. The more inspiring the instrument, the more the person will want to play, practice and grow." Julia wouldn't say so, but her enthusiasm and matchmaking probably have something to do with it, too. ▲

Contact Julia at julia.scherer@schmittmusic.com. She invites you to visit Schmitt Music's website at www.schmittmusic.com. To learn about the Un-Master Class visit www.williamwestney.com/un-master_class.php.