

## The Conductor-Composer Mentorship Through the Pinnacle Project

In the summer of 2001, Julia Carey was invited to participate in the Pinnacle Project Summit, an event that was directed by Rena Subotnik and sponsored by the American Psychological Association and the Claymath Institute. The purpose of the Summit was to bring together established masters in the arts and sciences, outstanding researchers and professionals who were beginning their careers, and extraordinarily talented high school students.

The goals of the Pinnacle Project were to 'establish a venue for fertilization of ideas about talent development across disciplines; provide an opportunity for highly gifted adolescents to learn from and be guided by mentors in their fields of interest; discuss in a safe forum the joys, stresses, and expectations associated with talent development; plan investigations that would serve as a basis for mentoring; and publicize the talent development needs of gifted adolescents.'

The Pinnacle Summit was a unique opportunity for Julia to see her musical development in the contexts of other disciplines. Each morning of the summit, the teams met to pursue their short-term projects and to develop their plans for the coming year. In addition, each day included lunchtime roundtable discussions that facilitated the exchange of ideas and questions among the various disciplines. During the course of the summit, each of the masters gave a lecture to the entire group. At the culmination of the week, each young scholar gave a presentation of what they had learned from their individual team meetings and talked about projects that they were planning for the coming year.

Julia was paired with conductor Beatrice Jona Affron, the Pinnacle music mentor. Affron has been the music director of the Pennsylvania Ballet since 1997, and has also conducted a great deal of contemporary music, including the national tour of Philip Glass's *Les Enfants*

*Terribles* and the premiere of the revised version of Argento's *Miss Havisham's Wedding Night*. In addition, Ms. Affron has conducted many classical operas, such as *Die Fledermaus* at Boston Lyric Opera and Glimmerglass Opera's production of *Lucie de Lammermoor*.

In this mentorship program, Beatrice Affron and Julia Carey met every morning for a week. They used Richard Strauss's *Salome* as a point from which to explore the interdisciplinary life of the musician, particularly the orchestra conductor. In an effort to understand the specific artistic choices that the composer made in creating his depiction of Salome, they examined Oscar Wilde's version of the story, the biblical story, and portrayals of Salome in visual art. Julia and Beatrice also studied three video recordings of the opera to explore the artistic choices of singers, conductors and directors. In addition, they made detailed analyses of excerpts from the score and talked about how the conductor might approach those sections. In order to develop a shared language about conducting techniques, they worked on the first movement of Beethoven's First Symphony and used solfège to sing the score. The long-term project that Julia and Beatrice designed was to prepare Julia, who is a composer, to conduct one of her own compositions, which she has since done.

Beatrice comments on her work with Julia:

*To what extent did you get to know Julia personally and as a young artist?*

A week is not a long time to get to know someone, but because our project gave us so much to talk about—music, literature, conducting, composition, solfège, the life of the

*continued*

*Julia and I have stayed in touch and we have seen each other periodically since our time together at the Pinnacle Project. Since entering the Harvard/New England Conservatory double degree program, Julia has not only continued to compose, but she has also conducted and played the harpsichord in a number of student productions. Most recently, I attended a performance at Harvard's Arts First Festival in which Julia was both music director and continuo player. The work, which was semi-staged, was a wonderful Monteverdi madrigal, Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda. Julia led the singers and instrumentalists from the harpsichord, and even though her hands were busy at the keys, she found a way, through her body language and facial expressions, to direct the others with real clarity and sensitivity. It has been (and will continue to be) a great thrill to watch Julia develop as an artist/teacher (conductor)/scholar. Her commitment to creating new works in no way overshadows her desire to research, direct and perform music from the past.*

—Beatrice Affron, May, 2007

## MENTORING THE DEVELOPING ARTIST A relationship of mutual respect for learning

In conductor Beatrice Affron's words, "Images from my lessons with Julia convey something of the democratizing effect of singing and conducting music together. One conducts to lead others, of course, but one can also conduct in order to sing with others and to enjoy a shared understanding of the music. Singing while conducting also creates a kind of artistic intimacy and interface between the composer—deceased or living—and the conductor, between the conductor and the performers, and among the performers as they communicate with one another. It is in this milieu of musical expression that singing and conducting allow musicians to shape and translate the ideas that emerge out of musical discourse in order to organize the interpretation itself. Julia's progress with singing and conducting will be a critical factor in the directing of her own music, as well as in her artistic relationships with her peers, mentors, and, eventually, her own students." ¶

