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A Prodigy's First CD

By STEFANIE COHEN



Chab Lathion

Alma Deutscher

Before she was two, Alma Deutscher was singing with perfect pitch. At three, she'd moved on to the violin. Now, at 8, she has her own CD of works she composed, drawing, apparently unwanted, comparisons to Mozart.

"I don't think Mozart had a CD when he was 8!" says the wunderkind who doesn't like being called "Little Miss Mozart" because "for one thing I'm not little, I'm a very big girl, and for another thing I don't want to write what he wrote. It would be boring if I did the same thing!"

On "The Music of Alma Deutscher," Alma plays piano and the violin accompanied by other musicians. The album, which came out this week, was produced by Big Life Management, the team behind Boy George and The Scissor Sisters.

"It's quite surreal," says Sam Haywood, the pianist who plays with Alma on the album. "She brought her skipping rope to the recording session and I'm showing her magic tricks, and then suddenly she'll snap into this other mode and be so focused."

Alma, who lives in Surrey, England, says the melodies "pour into her head" while she's swinging or skipping rope. Then she plays them for her father, Guy Deutscher, a linguist and amateur flutist, who records them.

She says she gets her inspiration from an imaginary country called Transylvanian. "I made up my own land with its own language and there are beautiful composers there, named Antonin Yellowsink and Ashy and Shell and Flara," she says.

She also has help from some real-life people. When Alma began improvising music on her own before she was four, her father began looking for a teacher. Not many candidates were willing to teach a three-year old. "They laughed at me," he says. He finally came across "Music in the Galant Style" by Robert Gjerdingen, a music professor at Northwestern University. The book explained how musicians were taught in the 18th century.

They were apprenticed at a young age, and taught to improvise so they could compose music for royal courts and churches. Mr. Gjerdingen knew of a handful of teachers who taught in that style, and pointed the Deutschers to Tobias Cramm, a piano teacher in Switzerland. Now Mr. Cramm and Alma Skype once a week, with their Midi keyboards synced up electronically. They take turns improvising music.

"She's able to think music. Most people just hear music," Mr. Gjerdingen says of Alma's rare abilities to understand music on an intellectual level and rearrange melodies in her head. She also has perfect pitch.

Last October, her father took her to see the comedian Stephen Fry perform in "Twelfth Night" at the Globe Theatre in London. Mr. Deutscher and Mr. Fry knew each other through a shared interest in linguistics. After the show, the Deutschers dined with Mr. Fry. When Alma told Mr. Fry she played music, he went home and checked out her YouTube clips, which her father had made to share videos with relatives in Israel.

Shortly thereafter, Mr. Fry tweeted: "Simply mind-blowing: Alma Deutscher playing her own compositions. A new Mozart?" with a link to one of her videos to his more than 6 million followers.

"Literally overnight, we went from a normal life to having television crews queuing outside the door," says Mr. Deutscher. "I emailed to Stephen, 'Look what you've done! This is all your fault!'"

Mr. Fry put the Deutschers in touch with his agent and others who could help the family deal with the attention. The offer to make a CD was soon to follow. Alma says that being famous can be fun, but "I like playing the piano more than I like answering interviews, actually."

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