
“Digital Buddha” by Jin Hi Kim & Gerry Hemingway

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Photo by Witjak, courtesy of Komunitas Salihara

On September 29th, as an event within the third Salihara festival held in South Jakarta, Indonesia, two musicians of two different backgrounds have collaborated to perform a musical work entitled “Digital Buddha.” They are **Jin Hi Kim**, a composer and maestro of Komungo, a traditional 4th- century musical instrument from Korea, and **Gerry Hemingway**, a composer and percussionist from the USA. The show was held at **Salihara** Theater and is part of the third Salihara Festival held for one full month starting from September 23rd.

Digital Buddha itself is a multimedia performance which combines the solo recital of *komungo/electric komungo* by Jin Hi Kim, percussion by Gerry Hemingway, and digital video images by Benton-C Bainbridge and Joel Chadman, all based on Buddhist spiritualism. The sacred *Digital Buddha* had managed to travel a pilgrimage spanning most of the world starting from the continental North America, Europe, Canada, Asia, Latin America, and Australia; and now Indonesia.

East-West, traditional-modern, female-male

The performance opens with a Komungo solo play by Jin Hi Kim, and the screen begins by displaying simple geometric visuals which somehow seem like live creatures. Complete in distinctively Korean female dress, Jin Hi Kim’s performance seems as if emphasizing the importance of ritual—I don’t know whether to call it a prayer, a self-cleansing, or just a simple warmUp—at the beginning of the performance. And even more so the distinctly Eastern atmosphere, heavy yet dynamic, proves that Kim, though now living in the United States, is still an artist who deeply honors her locality, complete with proper cultural attitudes and gestures.

Without pause, the second and third pieces were continued with the support of Gerry Hemingway’s percussive sounds. Though what stands before him appears to be a complete drum set, Gerry plays them with a distinctively different approach. Sometimes hitting the snare and tom-tom softly, sometimes even scratching the cymbals. Perhaps it may appear and sound very intuitive, that the message behind Kim and Gerry’s performance in these two numbers seems to deliver a deeper message: the harmonization of the perception of spiritualism between East and West.

Based upon Buddhist spiritualism, we can of course say that Digital Buddha by Jin Hi Kim and Gerry Hemingway is more than just a mere artistic response to, say, the Buddhist religion. Both Kim and Gerry have approached closer to a kind of meditation. And of course, the Eastern Kim and the Western Gerry needed to achieve a common conditioning and level of perception in order to reach perfect meditation. And so in these two numbers, we feel a dynamic sound contrast. Sometimes soft and slow, sometimes loud and chaotic.



Jin Hi Kim & Gerry Hemingway; photos by Witjak, courtesy of Komunitas Salihara

On the next numbers, Kim began playing her electric *komungo*. In this part, we hear a new combination. A sitar-like instrument which is a musical instrument traditional to 4th century ad. Korea, married to an electric and MIDI computer system. Using MAX/MSP, the sound created by the komungo is processed directly through a computer program controlled by MIDI pedals operated by Kim.

Despite the modern appearance and sound, Kim continues to play her komungo while holding firm to the original traditional properties of her instrument, and so what we hear was a very wonderful and very complementary combination between acoustic and electric; between traditional and modern.

Not only by Kim, the traditional-modern combination in this part is also shown by Gerry on his drums, the visual images displayed, and the sounds being electronically manipulated. One more proof that such a collaboration can only be realized through a proper and contextual understanding of knowledge, as well as integration between many fields.

And the show enters the final act. On the next two numbers the music, visual, and sound engineering feels as if coming ever closer to their penultimate. Deeply delving in them, there was another fact which was interesting to trace. Jin Hi Kim is a female. And as far as the writer knows, a meditation within the Buddhist religious tradition is rarely lead by a female. And now appear up front one Jin Hi Kim accompanied by Gerry Hemingway, someone who hails from the West, without doubt leading and conducting a meditation so well.

And here, the roles of female and male feel proportional. The question of gender became irrelevant when seeing and hearing the quality of performance and the music produced by the two.

And without even noticing it, 60 minutes have passed, and ended without any pause. Without paying any mind to that where some numbers feel more solid and "attractive" than others, this Digital Buddha performance by Jin Hi Kim and Gerry Hemingway distinctly delivers a certain context. That they have tried and successfully done things which seems only possible in our imagination, without any hesitation whatsoever. That they continue to create unendingly though relatively few in society respond to them. That in truth they are the minority musicians that trigger changes, beneficial changes for the development of music itself.

And this is just like that which had been said by a master composer of Japan, Stomu Yamash'ta, "...truly it is the minority musicians who are the actual main driving force for creativity and development of music in this world, to this day."

(aa/fz)