

Jin Hi-kim and Gerry Hemingway: A different sensitivity

Proditia Sabarini, The Jakarta Post, Jakarta | Thu, 09/30/2010 9:27 AM | People

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When Korean komungo player Jin Hi-kim looked for a partner trained in the Western style of music to collaborate with, she took her time, just like she does with her music.



Jin Hi-kim (left) and Gerry Hemingway: JP/Proditia Sabarini

Music created by playing komungo, a fourth century traditional Korean zither, differs greatly from rigidly timed music originating from the Western musical tradition, Kim explained. Her instrument, initially only used by male Confucius scholars to meditate, allows for a more relaxed flow of rhythm, compared to Western music. A different sensitivity in approaching music is thus required, she added.

Yet she found it in acclaimed drummer Gerry Hemingway. The two have been collaborating since 2003, performing Kim's vision of cross-cultural music compositions for her komungo/electronic komungo solo

works.

New York-based Kim, currently a composer in residence with the New Haven Symphony Orchestra, and Hemingway, now based in Switzerland, are currently visiting Jakarta for the Salihara Festival.

Kim is slated to perform her solo recital "Digital Buddha" accompanied by Hemingway at the theater tonight.

The two Guggenheim fellowship recipients — Hemingway in 2000 and Kim this year — talked with The Jakarta Post on Tuesday about their collaboration.

The two were in tune with each other's vision of music, adding and commenting on each other's thoughts on music.

"I like how he [Hemingway] describes his drumming as painting the sound. I like that kind of sensitivity because in Western musical tradition, time is always measured like this," Kim said while mimicking tempo gestures with her hand. "But in Asian music, the flow of music is more relaxed".

"It's breath oriented," Hemingway added.

A New Haven, Connecticut native, Hemingway said he had immersed himself in world music from a very young age. He had "digested a fair amount of traditional komungo" before working with Kim. "But I didn't have any direct experience until I worked with Jin," he said. "Intuitively, I understood something about this music that made sense to me. I can't really explain why. But it did," he said.

Listening to Kim's komungo playing, with the strange twanging sounds of the silk strings plucked by her bamboo stick, will stir up a deep seated poignant inner calm, which differs from the expressive emotions of joy, sadness or anger typical of Western music. The music is deeply rooted in Korean shamanism, Buddhism and Confucianism.

"It's inner meditation. Western music is more expressive. But Asian music is muted. There some kind of energy coming out of the inside," she said.