

## KOREAN MUSIC TRADITION AND INNOVATION

Presenter: Jin Hi Kim

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### Program 1-Introduction to Korean Traditional Music

### Program 2-Composition Seminar: Living Tones

### Program 3-Solo Recital of Komungo and Electric Komungo

Korean *artiste extraordinaire* Jin Hi Kim shares her insights into the distinctive aspects of the Korean music heritage in a lecture with accompanying demonstrations on the *komungo* (a 4<sup>th</sup> century fretted board zither). The presentation resources include powerpoint and video images.



#### Introduction to Korean Traditional Music

Ms. Kim contrasts folk and court music traditions, demonstrating the influences of Shamanistic ecstatic possession in folk music, Taoism's middle way between the static and dynamic, the Confucian concept of right conduct (emphasizing ceremony and utilization of the universal sound) and Buddhism's meditative quest for nothingness. The originality and distinctive nature of Korean music will be highlighted as well as the interrelations among Korea, Chinese and Japanese music.

#### Composition Seminar: Living Tones

A major portion of this lecture focuses on the compositional concept of "Living Tones," developed by Ms. Kim over the past twenty-five years. She explains that "the conceptual basis for living tones, which is the essential element in Korean traditional music, is that each tone is alive, embodying its own individual shape, sound, texture, vibrato, glissando, expressive nuances and dynamics." The precise timbral persona of each tone generated is treated with an abiding respect, as its philosophical mandate from Buddhism, a

reverence for the 'life' of tones, including the color and nuance articulated from Shamanism. Ms. Kim will discuss her series of cross-cultural compositions to illustrate this essential element of Korean music.

#### Solo Recital: Digital Buddha

Jin Hi Kim's new direction of her solo recital, "Digital Buddha" is a multimedia collaboration with komungo/electric komungo and video artists. The work begins with a contemplative

hypnotic video Mandala and the ancient 4<sup>th</sup> century acoustic komungo that is rooted in Buddhist meditation. The multimedia collaboration gradually moves into a video mix with extraordinary juxtapositions, fast cut swirling images of a deconstructed electric komungo that becomes a reconfigured live performance through contemporary digital technology. The seventy minute long show, performed without breaks, has a range of interlocking and overlapping images and music from quiet contemplation to a romping ecstasy.

Kim's komungo solo pieces represent an evolution of the instrument into the twenty-first century. Her new komungo music is imbued with energy both meditative and vivid that mesmerizes and startles the listener. In 1989 Ms. Kim co-designed the world's only electric komungo. Kim processes komungo sound through a personal computer program, electrified and altered sounds via MIDI foot pedal control of a custom MAX/MSP program. While staying true to the nature of the instrument, her electric komungo solo performances interweave from old timeless mind to space-age blips.

**About the Artist: [www.jinhikim.com](http://www.jinhikim.com)**

Jin Hi Kim is a Guggenheim Fellow in Music Composition and internationally acclaimed innovative *komungo* (4<sup>th</sup> century fretted board zither) virtuoso. Kim featured on Voice of America, PRI's The World and BBC-Global Hit has brought a deeper appreciation for the historical contributions to world culture. Kim was New Haven Symphony Orchestra *Music Alive* Composer-in-Residence, commissioned by the Kronos Quartet, Chamber Music Society for the Lincoln Center, American Composers Orchestra and Boston Modern Orchestra Project.

Kim has performed as soloist in her own compositions at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Smithsonian Freer Gallery of Art, Asia Society (New York), Royal Festival Hall (London), Haus der Kulturen der Welt (Berlin), and prestigious festivals and stages throughout the USA, Europe, Canada, South America, Russia, Asia, New Zealand and Australia.

In Korea, Kim studied and practiced traditional music with masters from National School for Korean Traditional Music, which is affiliated with the Ministry of Culture. The school was established under the nation's single music institute, the prestigious National Center for Korean Traditional Performing Arts. The institute sought to preserve the nation's historical and cultural past, including that of the Korean traditional court music and dance over 1,500 years old. She then studied with Korea's leading ethnomusicologists and earned a BA degree in Korean Traditional Music at Seoul National University before coming to the United States. Subsequently, she studied with composer John Adams, Lou Harrison, and David Rosenboom, receiving an MFA at Mills College, CA.

Traditionally komungo was performed by male Confucian scholars for their meditation, and was used in aristocratic lyric song ensemble as well as court orchestra. Kim's komungo solo pieces represent an evolution of the instrument into the twenty-first century that is deeply rooted in Korean tradition and aesthetic.

Kim has received the Award for Music Composition from the Foundation For Contemporary Performance Art, which was created by John Cage and Jasper Johns to support innovative creative work in the arts. She is a recipient of American Composers Orchestra Composer Fellowship, Wolff Ebermann Prize for at International Theater Institute, Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, and Meet The Composer US Commission as well as the artist residence

fellowships for the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center, Italy, Asian Cultural Council to Japan, Djerassi Foundation in California, and Freeman Artist-In-Residence at Cornell University.

In South Korea, Kim is highly respected for her role of cultural ambassador and her invention of the electric komungo. National Broadcasting System (KBS-TV) produced an hour documentary film on Kim's musical contribution. An interview about her electric komungo was broadcast on Arirang-TV and MBC-TV in conjunction with Korean Traditional Craft Exhibition at United Nation. Kim's autobiography, *Komungo Tango* was published in Seoul Korea.

Kim has given lectures about Korean traditional music and her compositional concept 'Living Tones' at over 200 universities in the USA including Cornell University, Yale University, Wesleyan University, Duke University, Indiana University, Peabody Conservatory, New England Conservatory, Dartmouth College, University of Minnesota, University of California/San Diego, and University of Michigan.

#### **Critical Acclaims**

"Virtuoso, Jin Hi Kim promises thoughtful, shimmering East-West amalgams in combinations that are both new and unlikely to be repeated." Peter Watrous, *The New York Times*

"True world music being made here, both ancient and modern and without borders. Outstanding." Dennis Yudt, *Pulse Magazine*

"This (Living Tones) is new music/world music at its finest, beyond political correctness, into the realm of the sublime, where words and cultural postures fall away." Josef Woodard, *The Los Angeles Times*

"Ms. Kim's lecture-concert on Korean traditional music and her experimental composition is excellent and exciting . . . she introduced Korean music culturally and systematically to our American students . . . The way she led our students into the feeling, style and expression of Asian music is very persuasive."

Dr. Chen Yi, *University of Missouri - Kansas Conservatory*