



SALIHARA/WITJAK

Jin Hi Kim and Gerry Hemingway.

Cosmic Music Meditation

Playing an electric sitar, Jin Hi Kim presented a unique form of Buddhist meditational music.

A VISUALIZATION of the sun was projected on a large screen. Red and green lights swirled around it. Then a spiraling tendril was created that climbed out of the center of the sun shaped like white smoke from burning incense. Writing then appeared, "Brings Me of Understanding Myself."

In front of that screen, Jin Hi Kim, a woman 53 years of age, sat cross-legged on a small stage. A *komungo*, a six-stringed Korean sitar of about 1.5 meters, was sitting in her lap and across her left foot. In her right hand she held a bamboo stick shaped like a pencil. The fingers of her left hand pressed against the strings. The low notes from the plucking of the *komungo* began to flow, beginning the 70-minute composition: *Digital Buddha*, at Theater Salihara, last Wednesday.

The series of notes she produced vibrated strongly. Moreover, even in a low volume, those vibrations not only tug at one's ears, but seem to penetrate even further and subdue the workings of the heart. At times one note was repeated over and over in various tempos. And sometimes the fingers of her right hand beat the strings hard until they sounded without being plucked by the stick. The variations of melodies with

rhythms gave an oriental nuance. In that style, Hi Kim offered us a contemplative-meditative music.

Not long after that, American percussionist Gerry Hemingway began to play the drums. Not with sticks but with his hands. Two tom-toms transformed to resemble *kendang* played with the palms of the hands. Several times Gerry hit the sides of the tom-tom to produce a strident metallic sound. The playing of the percussion adapted to the plucking of Hi Kim. When Hi Kim played in a fast tempo, Gerry rattled the snare and cymbal. His foot also stepped on the bass drum pedal a bit more quickly. Not noisy, but simple and complementary.

Gerry's style of playing included change, in contrast to Hi Kim's which tended to be repetitive. At times Gerry played with a brush stick with the ends made of rubber, wire or small pieces of iron. Later Gerry also used a small

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GERRY HEMINGWAY, PERCUSSIONIST

wooden object shaped like a *bakso* seller's bell and the bow of a violin which he rubbed against the side of the cymbal to produce a drone. He even blew on the cymbal and imitated the sound of a trumpet. "For me, the most important thing is not the style of playing, but how my playing connects with Hi Kim," Gerry explained after the performance.

The visuals on the screen created by Benton-C Bainbridge and Joel Chadman were captivating and also seemed to follow the playing of Hi Kim. It was like a moving mandala. When the playing was slow, the circle of light grew smaller. As the sound of the notes became stronger, in the center of the circle eight buds or petals appeared which eventually faded and changed into new buds.

At times the object pictured would be cloned and appear as many. This was clearly not just the performance of Hi Kim, but a trio that included percussion and visual art.

Following that, two black-and-white pictures appeared on the screen: the right hand of Hi Kim as she was plucking, and her fingers pressing against the strings.

A mini orchestra of *komungo* had begun. At times the *komungo* playing was in a canon style of call and reply. At times Hi Kim played with the style of a broken voice.

The concept of solo-collective playing continued when Hi Kim sat in front of the stage and played the electric *komungo*, the only one in the world. This musical instrument from the 4th century was connected to a MacBook computer. One other cable was connected with a Digitech effect. The sound produced was more futuristic and outer space-like. Laser sounds or radar drones at times influenced the playing. The climax was when the sounds like signals were accompanied by the screen showing the beauty of the rings of Saturn from various angles, the craters on the surface of the moon, and even asteroids.

Perhaps it is difficult to imagine how Buddhist meditation could be undertaken in the atmosphere presented by Hi Kim and Gerry. The audience did not come to meditate. But for Kim, meditation is not always about sitting quietly with one's eyes shut. If the audience felt as if their consciousness was carried into outer space that means the music was successful.

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