

# KAMSA CHRONICLE

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A. YANGWON JACKSON, EDITOR

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE Kee H. Kim, M.D.

The Korean-American Music Supporters' Association (KAMSA), conceived and birthed in the last century, now grows bigger and stronger at the start of the millennium. I want to personally thank you, the supporters who have made possible the longevity and vitality of our organization.



Last year KAMSA celebrated its 10th anniversary with pomp and style. World famous Chee-Yun graced the stage at a very successful fundraiser early in 1999. Our Gala 10th Anniversary Concert at Herbst Theatre in September featured Soovin Kim, winner of the 1996 Paganini Competition, and three promising young Bay Area musicians, in what proved to be a shining source of pride for all our community.

In the year 2000 we look forward to another ambitious and spectacular season. The KAMSA Youth Orchestra will

perform in September at Spangenberg Theatre. In June pianist Minyoung Lee will perform at Benefit Dinner Concert at the Stanford Faculty Club and in November the young artist debut concert will again take place at Herbst Theatre.

May I count on your continued support of KAMSA into the 21st Century? I, in turn, pledge to carry on with the organization's traditional mission to promote the careers of young Korean-American musicians.

## 2000 GALA BENEFIT DINNER CONCERT

KAMSA's annual black tie Gala Benefit Dinner Concert will be held on Friday, June 23rd, at 6:00 PM in the Stanford University Faculty Club. Featured artist, pianist Minyoung Lee, was first educated at Seoul University, then at Yale and Rice Universities. To date she has concretized on three continents and won numerous awards. Currently she resides in Houston and pursues a D.M.A. degree at Rice University. She studies with John Perry while continuing an active solo and chamber music career.



## 10TH ANNIVERSARY GALA CONCERT

Anticipation and excitement floated above the audience



before KAMSA's 10th Anniversary Gala Concert at Herbst Theatre in San Francisco last September 26th. Featured artist, Soovin Kim, known the world over as

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## INTERVIEW WITH SOOVIN KIM, VIOLIN VIRTUOSO

*by Annette Yangwon Jackson*

Before he arrived on scene as featured artist at KAMSA's 10th Anniversary Gala Concert all I knew of Soovin Kim was that he had taken top honors at the 1996 Paganini Competition. Of

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The KAMSA Youth Orchestra gains a major share of its budget from the annual benefit concert. As such, your attendance is crucial so that our organization can continue its mission. We aim to promote the careers of young Korean-American musicians and to continue with the one and only youth orchestra made up of Korean youth outside of Korea. If we, as Korean lovers of music and our own youth, do not support this effort, who will?!

Please contact Sung R. Cho at (408)997-8002 or email to friends@kamsa.org.

10th Anniversary Gala Concert.

winner of the 1996 Paganini Competition, has drawn a standing room only crowd. Three up and coming Bay Area musicians performed the Beethoven Triple Concerto emotively beyond their years. Later Soovin played Havanaise and Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso by Saint-Saens, mesmerizing the audience and bringing them to their feet for a standing ovation. Then KAMSA Youth Orchestra, under the expert direction of Maestro Kohl, performed Dvorak's New World Symphony at a truly professional level. Before lights were extinguished, all joined in a traditional close with singing of "Gohyangeui Bom" (Spring Memories of Home). What may sound impossible to any who missed the privilege of attending the Gala, it combined fun for the heart, dazzle for the ear, and inspiration for the soul.

Interview with Soovin Kim

*course this alone was sufficient to capture my attention, but after meeting and getting to know him I grew even more favorably impressed by his character and personality. Possessing humility and a seriousness of purpose, it seemed to me that he could serve as an important role model for the members of the youth orchestra with whom he would share the stage at Herbst Theatre. Thankfully these hopes were to be completely fulfilled. In the interview that follows, conducted before the concert, I invite you to get to know Soovin through his thoughtful answers and I believe you will agree that he manifests some of the best human qualities we would care for our own youth to emulate.*

**WHAT AGE DID YOU START MUSIC INSTRUCTION?**

I began studying the violin when I was 4.

**TELL US SOME OF THE EARLIEST MEMORIES OF WHEN YOU STARTED TAKING MUSIC LESSONS.**

My vague memories of my first lessons include learning how to hold the violin using a converted Crackerjack box with a ruler attached to it to simulate a violin. I was a Suzuki student so my weekly routine involved private lessons as well as group sessions with my other 4 and 5 year-old colleagues. My first teacher was very nice, always encouraging and making it a fun experience. It helped that she bribed us with candy and toys each week as rewards for doing well!



**KAMSA YOUTH ORCHESTRA AUDITION FOR 2000**

**DATE:** Saturday, May 13, 2000  
**TIME:** 9 AM to 3 PM  
**PLACE:** Santa Clara United Methodist Church, 1001 Ginger Lane, San Jose  
**INSTRUMENTS:** All orchestral instruments  
**AUDITION PIECE:** One piece of choice  
**SOLOISTS:** All instruments  
**AUDITION FEE:** \$10.00  
**AGE:** Through senior year of high school  
**PERFORMANCE DATE:** Saturday, September 9, 2000 at 8 PM  
**PERFORMANCE PLACE:** Spangenberg Theatre in Palo Alto  
**CONTACT PERSON:** Mela Hwang, (650) 948-5797 or email to event@kamsa.org

**HOW HAVE YOUR PARENTS CONTRIBUTED TO YOUR SUCCESS THUS FAR?**

It is difficult to say exactly what my parents have and have not been responsible for, but I do credit them most for making me a happy person. They were supportive all along without being overbearing, allowing me to choose (or at least to believe I was choosing) my path of my own volition. They made tremendous sacrifices of time and money during my teenage years to encourage my music habit, including driving many hours each week to lessons and youth orchestra rehearsals. They are not musicians, and so have kept a certain distance in terms of my music-related decisions. My parents truly nurtured my love for music without pushing me into it. They simply encouraged me to try hard in whatever I

do. They were influential in making me the person I am, which indirectly helped me to make the right choices as a musician.

**WHAT DOES MUSIC MEAN TO YOU?**

This is a difficult question to answer briefly! For me personally, music has become the world. There are occasionally days which go by without it, and these days are somehow incomplete. It is an intellectual, emotional, and spiritual outlet for me, and I daresay it serves this purpose for many people in this world, else music would not survive. The relevance of music to our daily lives may not be as tangible to some people as the importance of a surgeon who saves a life, or a trailblazer who dreams up new technology to improve our quality of life. However, without music, the human spirit is not whole, and we would be left with a gaping hole within us.

**TELL US ABOUT YOUR MUSIC TEACHERS.**

I have had the fortune of having several wonderful teachers. I already told you of my first teacher, who bribed her students so well. The

*Interview with Soovin Kim*

second, William Fuhrberg, was the first to demand a certain standard from me, while always encouraging. If it were not for Mr. Fuhrberg, I might have quit the violin when our family moved away from the Chicago area to upstate New York when I was nine years old. We were having problems finding a teacher in the area. Finally, four months after I left him, Mr. Fuhrberg called us and said that he spoke with the concertmaster of the Montreal Symphony, Richard Roberts. Even at this great distance, Mr. Fuhrberg showed how much he cared and how much he wanted me to continue to play the violin. He still calls periodically and every few years even travels to see an important concert of mine. Mr. Roberts was to become my teacher for the next five and a half years. He is a beautiful violinist with a gentle personality and teaching style; his greatest contribution to me during these formative years was to take me through piles of repertoire. It was during these five years that I studied all of the Paganini caprices, the Bach sonatas and partitas, and most of the major concerto repertoire. I began studying at the Cleveland Institute of Music at age 15 with David Cerone and Donald Weilerstein, renowned as two of the great teachers in America today. They were the perfect complement to each other: Mr. Cerone, also the president of the school, is a model of organization, planning, and discipline; Mr. Weilerstein is a true artist whose mind is mostly in another world, which allows him to be inspired by ideas which do not occur to those of us who are "grounded" by the real world. And finally, my last two teachers at the Curtis Institute of Music were Victor Danchenko and Jaime Laredo. I was actually introduced to Mr. Danchenko when I was eleven years old by Josef Gingold. Mr. Gingold insisted that I study with Mr. Danchenko, calling him the greatest teacher in North America. I did study with him for six summers before I went to Curtis, and so he was a major influence for more than a decade of my life. From him I absorbed many of the traditions of the Russian school; he was a student of David Oistrakh. Jaime Laredo has been acknowledged as one of the great fiddle players of his generation, and teaches as a performer, giving invaluable advice for the stage and for a life in music.

***WHICH IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS ARE ESSENTIAL IN A GOOD TEACHER?***

There are so many different teaching styles which seem to work, as I experienced while growing up. The common denominator between my teachers and other great teachers I have witnessed is that they are selfless and have their students' best interests at heart. A good teacher must nurture a student, not simply drive or push them.

***UNLIKE OTHER PROFESSIONALS, MUSICIANS CANNOT TAKE A VACATION FROM PRACTICING AND LEAVE THEIR INSTRUMENTS AT HOME. HOW DO YOU APPROACH DAILY PRACTICE?***

Some musicians are able to take lengthy vacations or sabbaticals

from playing their instrument; I am not able to do this. When I do take even a day off, I feel it in my fingers the next day. Two or three days - forget it. If I don't have time to do as much work as I would like, I at least try to do my daily hour of scales. I find as long as I do this, at least I don't get any worse!

***WHAT DID WINNING THE PAGANINI COMPETITION MEAN FOR YOU PERSONALLY AND FOR YOUR CAREER?***



Personally, although it was nice to win, I'm not sure that it changed me very much. I was already at that point a little jaded by competitions and so was not so impressed by the fact that I won it. Indeed, I felt that a good friend of mine played better than I did and I felt a little badly about winning the first prize. As far as my career, the competition did not help me directly very much, as few competitions really do hand a career over on a platter these days. There are too many of them now. But once word got around among my supporters in the U.S., I think it made them feel good

about being behind me, and perhaps encouraged people to help me even a little bit more.

***WHAT MADE YOU COME OUT ON TOP, AHEAD OF YOUR COMPETITORS?***

I don't think that I am the person to answer this question about myself! I was told in comments by the jury that I was the most well-rounded; they said they did not find any particular weakness whether I was playing a Bach sonata, Paganini caprice, Mozart concerto, Brahms sonata, or Brahms concerto. But as I mentioned earlier, I did not feel myself that I was the best violinist out of the lot.

***SOME OF OUR READERS MAY NOT BE FAMILIAR WITH THE PAGANINI COMPETITION. PLEASE TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT IT.***

It began in the 1950's, and so is one of the oldest major competitions in the world. At that time, there were only a few competitions which would attract people from around the world, not like today where one can publish an entire book listing such competitions. The first prize does not have to be awarded by the jury, so there are often years where there is no winner. The first prize includes, along with a cash award and a few concerts, the opportunity to play a concert on Paganini's favorite violin, a Guarneri del Gesu, nicknamed the Cannon. This was a great honor for me.

***DESCRIBE YOUR DAILY PRACTICE SESSIONS.***

Practicing these days can be rather inconsistent as I am often at the mercy of my travel schedule and/or my accommodations. Some-

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thing that is consistent is that the first thing I play every day are scales and arpeggios and various other exercises which allow me to warm up physically and mentally. The music I practice is always a combination of what I must do immediately in the next few days or weeks, along with slowly learning new or especially difficult pieces that I must play months later. I spend a lot of time practicing slowly, and working on small blocks of music at a time rather than trying to learn an entire concerto in one day.

***DESCRIBE A GOOD PRACTICE SESSION. WHAT ARE THE NECESSARY INGREDIENTS FOR EFFICIENT PRACTICE?***

As your question implies, good practice is efficient practice. Concentration is paramount; without the proper focus, practicing even five or six hours can be utterly useless. While practicing, one must always keep a track of the goal or goals, the long-term plan and the immediate task at hand. A note played badly is reinforced that way each time it is repeated, and the opposite is also true. So we should not let bad habits crawl into our playing. These are only the result of negligence. If we pay close attention, these "worms" in our playing will not proliferate. Daily scales and arpeggios work wonders for us as these are the basis of our playing and of the music we play. In our pieces, we must spend the majority of time practicing slowly, to give our brain a chance to think and analyze and digest what we are doing with the instrument.

***WHAT GOES THROUGH YOUR MIND WHEN WALKING OUT STAGE FOR A PERFORMANCE?***

I try to put myself into the proper feeling for the music I am about to play. I am usually also doing some last minute panicking about whatever difficulties I have to face! I try to breathe slowly and

deeply in order to relax myself and not let fear overtake me. It is important not to be intimidated by the audience, and rather to remember that they came to (hopefully) enjoy my playing.

***ANY WORDS OF WISDOM FOR OUR YOUNG MUSICIANS AND THEIR PARENTS?***

Parents, please let your children choose their path. Keep in mind that if you are going to force them into a musical career and it is not quite the right thing for them, they will be unhappy beyond belief for the rest of their lives. On the other hand, if a child truly holds music close to their heart and have the proper talent, they should be encouraged to pursue their dream. I had quite a few friends around my age who were incredible musical talents, but whose parents discouraged them strongly or even refused to allow them to consider going to music school. For most of them, all this did was create a strained family relationship. In most of these cases, my friends finished their studies wherever they were, and then went on to go to graduate school studying music despite their parents. Everybody loses in this situation.

***ON BEHALF OF OUR READERS AND THE WHOLE KAMSA ORGANIZATION I WANT TO THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND EFFORTS AND THE GRANTING OF TIME FOR THIS INTERVIEW. WE REALLY APPRECIATE IT.***

You're more than welcome. I was glad to do it for such a worthy cause.

*These answers from the young Korean-American musician were well reasoned and wise beyond his years. It has been said that the goal of musical training is not just to produce an excellent musician, but rather a beautiful human being. Soovin Kim is a living example of this truth. We wish him continued success.*

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**KAMSA**

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