

Thursday Evening, May 19, 2022, at 6:00

The Juilliard School

presents

Juilliard Orchestra

Eun Sun Kim, *Conductor*

TEXU KIM (b. 1980) ***Spin-Flip* (2014)**

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827) **Symphony No. 8 in F major, Op. 93 (1812)**

Allegro vivace [e] con brio

Allegretto scherzando

Tempo di menuetto

Allegro vivace

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF (1873-1943) ***Symphonic Dances, Op. 45* (1940)**

Non allegro—Lento—Tempo I

Andante con moto (Tempo di valse)

Lento assai—Allegro vivace

Performance time: approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes, without an intermission

Eun Sun Kim appears by kind permission of the Metropolitan Opera.

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About the Program

By Georgeanne Banker

Spin-Flip

TEXU KIM

Born: in Seoul, South Korea, on December 22, 1980

Currently lives in San Diego

Texu Kim's *Spin-Flip*, commissioned by the Korean Symphony Orchestra and premiered in 2015, is about table tennis. Kim's "personal affinity for humor, his background in science, and his fascination with everyday experiences" energizes *Spin-Flip* and other works, which explore everyday topics from the sacred to the mundane. In his 2014 chamber work, *Bounce!!*, the players emulate the thrilling ball-bounces and shoe-squeaks of a basketball game, and his 2016 work, *Blow, Fly, Pop!!*, which Kim states is "inspired by bubble-blowing," calls for the percussionist to pop balloons during the performance; his 2013 chamber work, *Monastic Sceneries*, echoes his upbringing in the Presbyterian Church, and his vocal work, *Lotus Voice*, is an homage to the Korean Pansori vocal storytelling tradition.

Kim studied both science and music, earning degrees from Seoul National University and a doctorate in composition from Indiana University, and serves as assistant professor of music at San Diego State University. "By highlighting the interaction between folk culture and external influences," his biography reads, "Kim creates meaningful depth while maintaining a signature playfulness and exuberance that is both listener friendly and engaging."

Spin-Flip is an exploration of action and reaction, of how slight molecular shifts—from shifting the grip of your paddle to adding spin to your serve—can alter the entire state of matter. Moments of entropy

exist within this controlled environment, as the orchestra is afforded brief moments of improvisation that underscore the twists and turns of a table tennis game. The players enter the tournament to the sound of the first fervent 15 bars of the work. The match begins with the introduction of a cellular, two-note table tennis motif, played first by the piccolo with two castanets and xylophone, the latter of which are specifically instructed to make a "ping-pong sound." A thrilling symphonic dance, *Spin-Flip* is an evocative homage to this game and the powerful, calculated, and graceful movement of its players.

The composer writes:

The proton and the electron in a hydrogen atom spin permanently with having their rotation axis parallel to each other. That being said, they could rotate in the same direction (clockwise-clockwise, for example) or the other way. When the directional relationship changes due to absorption or emission of a certain type of energy, it is called spin-flip. The same term could also refer a sudden change of a rotating black hole's spin axis, mostly when it merges with another one. Regardless of its use in physics, I titled my piece *Spin-Flip*, simply because the image it gives: of table tennis.

I happened to share my name (albeit spelled differently in English) with a legendary Korean table tennis player, Taek-soo Kim (b.1970), who has been serving as the coach of Korea's national table tennis team since 2010. For this reason, when meeting new people in Korea, I am often asked if I am good at table tennis. Though my answer is 'No!', this silly coincidence has led me to write a musical piece about it.

Spin-Flip is a nine-minute piece which is all about ping-pong: it conveys the driving energy of a (good) ping-pong match; its primary motives are derived from the sounds of cheering crowds and ball bouncing around on the table (and occasionally on the floor); its alternating harmonic pattern and somewhat random form reflect the alternation between service and unpredictable return, respectively. Sometimes academic terms that are hard to explain are easily understood by intuition. Wouldn't it be true for music, too? I only hope that I can share the sheer fun I have with the audience through this piece.

Symphony No. 8 in F major, Op. 93

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born: December 16 or 17, 1770, in Bonn, Germany

Died: March 26, 1827, in Vienna

Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony No. 8 reads as a thrilling experiment where actions may not have their presumed consequences. The work was sketched in 1812, shortly following the completion of his Symphony No. 7, and was premiered in Vienna in 1814, outlining a particularly tumultuous two-year span of the composer's life. From the Bohemian town of Teplitz, Beethoven penned his famous "Immortal Beloved" letter in summer 1812, which itself has sparked a plethora of inconclusive hypotheses. Later that year, as Napoleon Bonaparte and his Grande Armée made their way to Russia, Beethoven traveled from Teplitz to Linz in a failed attempt to vanquish his brother Johann's romantic relationship with Therese Obermeyer. In 1813, Beethoven became the legal guardian of his nephew Karl and also became involved with the inventor Johann Nepomuk Malzel, who developed various mechanical contraptions including the chronometer, better known

today as a metronome. Malzel also created numerous automatons such as the panharmonicon, a giant, 19th-century version of a synthesizer for which Beethoven composed his 1813 work *Wellington's Victory*. Beethoven also scored this programmatic piece for a colossal human orchestra, and it was billed on the same program as the premiere of his Symphony No. 8.

Considering the significant personal difficulties Beethoven faced at the time, this resultant symphony is unexpectedly lighthearted: most notably, it lacks a slow movement and largely stays within the bounds of an exuberant major mode. Jan Swafford notes that compared to his earlier symphonies, here Beethoven exhibits a deliberate "retreat into nostalgia," a tribute to the symphonic music of Mozart and Haydn. The premiere of what Beethoven called his "little symphony in F" at Vienna's Redoutensaal must have sent sonic shockwaves throughout the city: The orchestra included 36 violins, 14 violas, 12 cellos, and 7 basses, whose parts were reinforced by two contrabassoons. However powerful this sound must have been, its critical reception was markedly lukewarm. Learning that his audience was upset by its stylistic departure from the popular seventh symphony, Beethoven remarked to Carl Czerny, "That's because it's so much better."

The symphony is not lacking in Beethoven's zest and astringent wit, and it is certainly as much fun to play as it is to hear. The opening *Allegro vivace e con brio* begins with a long, soaring F-major melody, whose six-note pattern returns in various configurations. Throughout the movement, radiant melodic lines always prevail, even when interrupted by brash rhythmic figures and jarring, accented dissonances. The second movement is a real fan favorite; Lewis Lockwood notes that even Hector Berlioz said that this particular music had "fallen from heaven and to have immediately

entered the composer's mind." Marked Allegro scherzando, a repeated 16th-note staccato pattern chugs along for nearly the full duration of the movement while winds and strings volley brief, two-note idioms, much like a game of table tennis.

The third movement, a minuet, includes a series of deliberate missteps. Beethoven notes sforzandi on each beat of the opening two bars, and throughout the opening section, strong, heavy beats appear just as the dancer's heels should be in the air, a calculated contradiction to the dance form's typical strong-weak beat pattern. The trio features lilting melodies provided by the horns and clarinet, underscored by an active triplet continuo line provided by a solo cellist. The last movement, which Beethoven wished to be played as quickly as possible, begins with a soft, scurrying theme in the strings. Then, without warning, a C-sharp suddenly appears, catalyzing a frenzy of activity throughout the entire orchestra. A driving march precedes the return of the movement's thematic material, which now faces no fewer than five C-sharps flying in from left field. As the work draws to an end, soft pairs of thirds move up and down the wind and brass sections just before the symphony's vivacious closing celebration of its home key of F major.

Symphonic Dances, Op. 45

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

Born: April 1, 1873, in Novgorod

Governorate, Russian Empire

Died: March 28, 1943, in Beverly Hills

"A composer always has his own ideas of his works, but I do not believe he should ever reveal them," Sergei Rachmaninoff told the *New York World-Telegram* in 1940. "Each listener should find his own meaning in music." Rachmaninoff's *Symphonic Dances*—dedicated to the Philadelphia Orchestra and conductor Eugene Ormandy—was composed that

year and premiered by its dedicatees in January 1941.

Since then, the infinite meanings of *Symphonic Dances* have both enchanted and vexed its listeners. Rachmaninoff's works were often criticized for not being "modern" enough; some perceived his apparent preference for old-style Romanticism as an ineffable protest against modernism. Following its premiere, *Symphonic Dances* found itself in such critical crosshairs. "It might serve for a ballet with a macabre theme," decried a *World-Telegram* critic, citing its allusions to 19th-century works. "The piece teems with weird sounds, some of them just plain echoes. Mr. Rachmaninoff's orchestra is definitely haunted, especially the wind section, which is a real rendezvous of ghosts." Though the work left a decidedly inauspicious impression, the critic just might have put a finger on its spectral pulse; Rachmaninoff's original title for the work was *Fantastic Dances*, after all.

Like much of Rachmaninoff's output, *Symphonic Dances* was composed at a quiet, countryside estate. Throughout his early adulthood, the composer lived and composed at Ivankova, a beloved family residence outside of Moscow. Following its destruction during the Russian Revolution, he lived and concertized in the U.S.—where, if time permitted, he enjoyed a cherry malted milk float following each performance—and later spent time at his family home, Senar, on the bucolic banks of Lake Lucerne. In summer 1940, Rachmaninoff had taken up residence at the Honeyman estate on Long Island. It was not an easy time; his health was in decline, and France and the Low Countries had just fallen to Nazi Germany, which personally rattled the composer as his daughter, Tatyana, resided just outside of Paris with her young son.

Incarnated at the keyboard, *Symphonic Dances* was orchestrated with guidance from Ormandy and other musical experts. The 67-year-old composer was keen to write for the saxophone but was unfamiliar with the instrument, so he invited Robert Russell Bennett—a Broadway orchestrator and former student of Nadia Boulanger—for a visit. “At that time he played over his score for me on the piano,” Bennett reflected, “and I was delighted to see his approach to the piano was quite the same as that of all of us when we try to imitate the sound of an orchestra at the keyboard. He sang, whistled, stomped, rolled his chords, and otherwise conducted himself not as one would expect of so great and impeccable a piano virtuoso.” Rachmaninoff sent a sketch of a phrase from the final movement to Harry Glantz, then principal trumpet of the New York Philharmonic, along with two brief sentences: “Will you be so kind as to answer my question? Is such a passage possible?” (Spoiler alert—it is). Meanwhile, Rachmaninoff’s old buddy, Fritz Kreisler, signed off on the rather intrepid string bowings. Such mindful scoring yielded extraordinary results. Gazing through this sonic kaleidoscope, you glimpse apparitions of Rachmaninoff’s earlier works twirling with novel idioms, and you can’t help but dance along with them.

The *Non allegro*, set in duple meter, fixates on a central three-note rhythmic pattern set against driving eighth notes. First divulged by the English horn, the motif is whispered by the clarinet and bassoon before working its way through the orchestra. The march yields to a wistful wind interlude, where a tapestry of timbres supports the dreamy melody introduced by the alto saxophone. Rachmaninoff concludes the movement with a transfiguration of the opening of his Symphony No. 1, composed some 45 years earlier, appearing here in both rhythmic augmentation and in the major mode.

The second dance, a waltz, is heralded by the horns and muted trumpets. A solo violin spins upward, leading listeners to a haunting melody introduced by the English horn and oboe. Oscillating between 6/8 and 9/8 time, the movement shifts from the serene to the frenetic and back again, always keeping the dancers on their toes. The thrilling conclusion of this cinematic work, rife with special effects and textually akin to the final movement of Hector Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique*, rings with sacred overtones. The violas are the first to recall a Russian Orthodox chant, “Blagosloven yesi, Gospodi” (Blessed are you, Lord), which appeared in Rachmaninoff’s *All-Night Vigil*, a sacred a capella choral work written in 1915. The *Dies irae* (day of wrath) liturgical sequence also makes an appearance: The trumpet sounds its incipit, in what might be a nod to the sequence’s subsequent text, “Tuba mirum spargens sonum” (the mighty trumpet’s wondrous sound). Though a harbinger of death and chaos, the tumultuous *Dies irae* succumbs to serene finale; Rachmaninoff denotes the final 26 bars with a single word, “Allelulia.”

“In my own compositions, no conscious effort has been made to be original, or Romantic, or Nationalistic, or anything else. I write down on paper the music I hear within me, as naturally as possible,” Rachmaninoff stated in 1941. *Symphonic Dances* was fated to be his final orchestral work. In 1943, two years after its premiere, Sergei Rachmaninoff was laid to rest in a corner of the Kensico Cemetery, just north of New York City. Framed by rhododendron, pachysandra, and small, floral offerings, his verdant grave is marked by a Russian Orthodox cross, standing in quiet memory of an individual who lived so fully in sound.

Georgianne Banker holds a Master of Music degree in Historical Performance from Juilliard.

Meet Eun Sun Kim

Kim Tae-hwan



Korean conductor Eun Sun Kim is the Caroline H. Hume Music Director of San Francisco Opera. Her presence in North America was first established with performances of Verdi's *Requiem* with the Cincinnati Symphony and *La traviata* at Houston Grand Opera, with the latter earning her an appointment as the company's first principal guest conductor in 25 years. The 2021-22 season opened her inaugural term at San Francisco Opera, where she leads *Tosca*, *Fidelio*, and three concerts. She continues a series of important operatic debuts, appearing at Wiener Staatsoper and the Metropolitan Opera for *La bohème*, along with Lyric Opera of Chicago for *Tosca*, before returning to

Houston Grand Opera for a new production of *Turandot*. She is slated to conduct symphony orchestras in Philadelphia, Detroit, Portland, and Toronto. Kim has enjoyed additional North American successes at Los Angeles Opera, Washington National Opera, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. She is a regular guest conductor at opera houses across Europe, including Staatsoper Berlin, Bayerische Staatsoper, Semperoper Dresden, Royal Swedish Opera, Royal Danish Opera, Den Norske Opera, Opernhaus Zürich, and Oper Frankfurt. Concert performances include appearances with Orchestre de Paris, Beethoven Orchestra Bonn, and Stuttgart Philharmonic as well as orchestras in Madrid, Marseille, Munich, Lille, Nancy, Palermo, Turin, Milwaukee, Calgary, and Santiago de Compostela. Kim studied composition and conducting in her hometown of Seoul, South Korea, before continuing her studies in Stuttgart, Germany, where she graduated with distinction. After graduation, she was awarded first prize in the International Jesús López Cobos Opera Conducting Competition at the Teatro Real Madrid.

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virtual projects, including *Bolero Juilliard; Of Thee I Sing*, an expansion of Charles Ives' *Variations on "America,"* co-created by Robertson and Creative Associate Kurt Crowley and conducted by Robertson; and a performance of Elgar's "Nimrod" (Variation IX) from Edward Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, conducted by faculty member and alumnus Itzhak Perlman. The Juilliard Orchestra has toured across the U.S. and throughout Europe, South America, and Asia, where it was the first Western conservatory ensemble allowed to visit and perform following the opening of the People's Republic of China in 1987, returning two decades later, in 2008. In summer 2019, the orchestra traveled to London, performing alongside the Royal Academy of Music in Royal Albert Hall at the BBC Proms. Other ensembles under the Juilliard Orchestra umbrella include the conductorless Juilliard Chamber Orchestra as well as the Wind Orchestra, Lab Orchestra, and contemporary music groups AXIOM and New Juilliard Ensemble.

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