

THE KOREAN WAVE

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*As Viewed
Through the Pages of
The New York Times
in 2012 & 2013*

*This booklet is a collection of 44 articles
selected by Korean Cultural Service New York
from articles on Korean culture
by The New York Times in 2012 & 2013.*

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The Korean Wave: Past, Present Future

By Theodore Hughes

It is only over the last six or seven years that Korean popular culture in all its different dimensions has received extensive coverage in *The New York Times*. As is by now well known, the term to encapsulate this seemingly sudden visibility of Korean culture in the world is the “Korean Wave.” Theories abound as to the recent appearance of the “Wave.” To be sure, the globalization of Korean culture must be linked both to the more liberal political and cultural atmosphere following Korea’s democratization, as well as to Korea’s rise as an economic power in the 1990s. Certainly the current popularity of Korean music, food, TV dramas, and fashion (to name a few examples) is also a testament to the creativity and ingenuity of Korean cultural producers and their increasing awareness of open-ended possibilities on the world stage.

It seems to me that the notion of a Korean cultural “Wave” is often thought of in terms of the relation of wave to shore. A wave appears dramatically, making its impact as it strikes land. When I encounter this metaphor—the wave, and all it seems to imply in terms of emergence, power, excitement, origin, and destination—I cannot help but recall Ch’oe Nam-sŏn’s famous 1908 poem “From the Sea to the Boys.” Yes, in the context of a discussion of the Korean Wave we have moved ever so briefly to what must seem like the distant past. Often cited as the beginning of modern Korean poetry, Ch’oe’s poem was as important as much for its use of free verse as for its celebration of the possibilities opened up for the youth of Korea (the boys) as a result of the new cultural contacts they could make with the west (the sea). I would not, however, call the Korean Wave of the last ten years a simple reversal, a new movement from east to west that counters the earlier power and influence of western culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

FOREWORD

Theodore Hughes is Korea Foundation Associate Professor of Korean Studies in the Humanities and Director of the Center for Korean Research at Columbia University. A specialist in modern Korean literature, he is the author of *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea: Freedom’s Frontier* (Columbia University Press, 2012) and the co-editor of *Rat Fire: Korean Stories from the Japanese Empire* (Cornell East Asia Series, 2013).

Korean culture in the present, as we see in *The New York Times* articles collected in this volume, is cosmopolitan, an innovative fusing of a variety of forms. We do not encounter a one-way flow. Instead, we experience globalized Korean culture as inhering a movement back and forth, a play of cultures and subcultures in which, remarkably, a distinctive Koreanness always lingers, whether at the surface or in the depths. Shall we, then, think of the increasingly visible Korean culture we find in the pages of *The Times* in terms of tides, whose movements high and low allow for a new, shifting relation between sea and shore?

The articles appearing in *The Times* in 2012-2013 tell us something new about the reception of Korean culture in North America. The news is that K-pop is no longer new. Interestingly, a spirit of critique finds its way onto almost every page of the volume, regardless of whether an article deals with music, performing arts, film, food, or sports. In “Bringing K-Pop to the West,” we learn of the factory-style manufacturing of K-pop talent, to the point where potential stars “train like androids” and practice dance routines reminiscent of “goose-stepping soldiers.” An article on

the performing arts tells us that the choreography of Sunhwa Chung’s dance “Arirang—We Go Beyond the Crossroad” “lacks texture.” Another article declares that Haegue Yang’s “Multi Faith Room” “doesn’t quite hold together as an installation.” A piece on the Yeosu Expo notes that the event “may have exposed some of Yeosu’s growing pains.” These are but a few examples of the critical comments found in *The Times*. Of course, throughout this volume we find praise accompanying critique, but the former is tempered by the latter. What does this mean?

I believe we are witnessing another dimension of Korean culture’s movement outside the borders of the peninsula. A given cultural form—a song, a film, a dance, a dish—is not really a part of the context in which it finds itself if it is either simply lauded or rejected. In both of these cases, it remains something outside, something “other.” Korean popular culture has moved to a new stage: it has begun its true entrance into the U.S. scene. The critiques we observe on the pages of *The Times* speak of a desire to engage with Korean culture in a serious way, not simply as an upstart, something fresh, or as the “exotic.”

I would be remiss if I did not mention the “Gangnam Style” phenomenon. The article “Beyond ‘Gangnam,’ The True Wild Heart of K-Pop,” however, attempts to do just that, move beyond Psy’s incredible global success (including reaching No. 2 on the Billboard Hot 100) to the innovative “Crayon” by G-Dragon. The author enthusiastically remarks that the “Crayon” video “makes the excesses of, say, Missy Elliot and Nicki Minaj in that medium look like tiny incremental gains. It is kaleidoscopically weird, hilariously comic and sinisterly effective.” As both the Psy phenomenon and G-Dragon’s sinister humor indicate, the comic and the parodic can now much more easily cross cultural borders in the hyper-globalized, digitalized age in which we all live. “Gangnam Style” has its hook—its power on the dance floor is not to be underestimated. More important, though, is the visual parody in Psy’s video that I believe was intuitively understood by millions of non-Korean speaking YouTube viewers. At the same time as Korean culture can become the object of critique on the global stage, it certainly also has the power to critique global popular culture itself, as well as modes of behavior found in contemporary societies throughout an increasingly homogenized world.

Finally, several articles in *The Times* remind of us in the ways in which Koreans working in the cultural sphere stand ahead of their time, already in the future. From the Korean-owned Café Soho serving as inspiration for the popular Federal Donuts in Philadelphia to the coining of the term “electronic superhighway” by Nam June Paik, the first artist to use a portable video camera, Koreans have become part of North American and global culture by pushing the envelope, creating the new, becoming the object to be emulated. Here, we find a further example of movement and direction, not from one place to another (from wave to shore, west to east, or east to west) but forward in time, ahead of the curve.

2012 & 2013: *Hallyu* at a Glance

By Korean Cultural Service New York

Inaugurated in 1979, the Korean Cultural Service New York (KCSNY) is a branch of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST) of the Republic of Korea. Under the authority of the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in New York, we have been working to encourage support between the US and South Korea via cultural events and program support. Currently, the KCSNY hosts numerous events annually, with emphasis on the performing and visual arts, film, food, sports, education, and K-Pop.

FOREWORD

The *Korean Wave*, which the Korean Cultural Service New York has been publishing since 2006, is a compilation of articles in *The New York Times* that spotlight aspects of Korean culture. By collecting and documenting these articles year after year, it is our hope that this can be used as one such compass of measuring what we call the “Korean wave” – the visibility of South Korean culture across the world. The following trend overview is based solely on the published in *The Times* during the years 2012–2013. Looking through the list of articles, we have made an effort to select those that are most representative of the cultural “flows” that have been taken note of in the US, reflective of the organic, and often unexpected, movements that the Korean wave has been making in the recent years.

K-Pop

In the summer of 2012, Psy’s addictive hit, “Gangnam Style” hit YouTube and social media channels worldwide to gain immense popularity around the globe, including New York. As this song gained an ever-growing following in the US, the music industry began to take note of the K-Pop industry as a significant global influence.

The strength that K-Pop holds across the globe lies in the power of internet platforms and social media channels such as YouTube and Twitter. There is also the dominant appeal of visually attractive “boy group” and “girl group” idol stars who feature impeccably practiced dance moves to highly addictive melodies and beats.

Catalyzed by Psy’s hit song, 2012 saw an overall rise in the number of articles that analyzed the status and appeal of Korean pop culture as well as Korean culture as a whole, spanning the topics of urban space and Korean cuisine. Towards the later half of 2012,

there was a second wave of Korean pop culture articles as one of Korea’s largest entertainment production companies, YG Entertainment, held a concert in New Jersey featuring some of their most popular teams, featuring groups such as Big Bang and 2NE1. The spotlight on K-Pop continued into 2013 with K-Pop star G-Dragon’s new album release, and the resulting articles reflected an interest in his musical talents as a producer and performer, as well as his avant-garde fashion sense which has rekindled interest in Korea and Korean culture.

Classical Music

2012 and 2013 saw a continued interest in Korean performers of classical music. *The Times* featured a special interview with up-and-coming Korean pianist HJ Lim’s successful release of her recording of the complete Beethoven sonatas in 2012, and several articles on the background and upcoming performances in New York for violinist Jennifer Koh who has also performed with the prestigious New York Philharmonic Orchestra. The articles have described these artists’ lives and achievements in depth, noting their technique and artistry with great detail.

Korean Performing Arts

In theater arts, there have been large-scale Korean musicals featured in New York such as “Hero” in 2011 and “Dr. Butterfly” in 2013, performed in New York City’s most prominent theaters on Broadway and at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

In classical performance arts, ballerina Hee Seo was promoted from a soloist position to the principal dancer of the American Ballet Theater, prompting an exclusive article of her promotion in *The New York Times*. As the first Korean to be honored to be in this position, she has received much praise and media attention for the beauty and fluidity of her performances.

Korean traditional arts have also seen a steady growing interest from the New York community, as not only the number of performances has increased, but as the range of traditional music and dances have been showcased. Not only more well-known genres such as *samulnori* (traditional percussion music) have been performed, but an increasing number of lesser-known performances such as *salpuri* (shamanistic ceremonial dance) and *taepyeong* dance (the “great peace dance”) have been garnering more attention and have been noticed for their artistic value.

Visual Arts

The New York art market has seen a growth in the interest in Asian art as a whole; among the expansion of Chinese and Japanese art in the global markets, Korean art has found a target niche market, defining itself as a valued asset in the industry. Accordingly, both the quantity and quality of Korean exhibitions and their reviews has seen a positive development.

In the first half of the year 2012, Korean artist Haegue Yang was reviewed in *The New York Times*. Following her first solo exhibition at the New Museum in 2010, her second exhibition titled, “Multi Faith Room” was on display at the Greene Naftali gallery in Chelsea. As an artist based in Seoul and Berlin, her exhibition in New York was viewed as a encouraging mark of the positioning of Korean art in an international field.

In the beginning of the year 2013, The Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington D.C. featured a large-scale special exhibition titled, “Nam June Paik: Global Visionary,” and the positive reviews of the show, alongside detailed information regarding his life and video installation arts were highlighted in *The Times*. His life and his prominent influence in the contemporary art field were observed.

In addition, prominent Korean curator Doryun Chong who has moved from his position at the Museum of Modern Art to being appointed the chief curator of Hong Kong’s M+ Museum was featured in a special Q & A section in March of 2013, displaying the rising distinction of individual Koreans in the art field.

On October 2012, *The New York Times* featured the now globally famous “Psy” as one the key words of the year, and artist Ai Weiwei’s parody video of “Gangnam Style” made waves as it found audience all over the world; the effects—both lighthearted and serious—that Psy has had in the art world is worthy of being noted.

But undoubtedly the biggest wave was made by the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art titled, “Silla: Korea’s Golden Kingdom.” As the first major museum exhibition in the West to cover one of the world’s longest sustained dynasties, the majestic displays of the over 100 golden pieces received much media recognition and high praise for its refinement and sophistication.

Korean Film

Whereas in the past years *The New York Times* often featured Korean films in the context of particular directors in the spotlight or specific titles that were featured as a part of film festivals, the current trend has seen an increase of focus on Korean actors and actresses in Hollywood films such as Byung-hun Lee (*G.I Joe, RED 2*) and Doona Bae (*Cloud Atlas*), or Korean directors including Chan-wook Park (*Stoker*) and Jee-woon Kim (*The Last Stand*) who have produced films in the US. In addition to the new creative works that have been filmed in Hollywood, there is also a discernible increase in original Korean films that are being remade in the US.

In particular, Director Chan-wook Park’s *Stoker* which came out this past year garnered much attention thanks to the high profile cast that included the likes of Nicole Kidman and Mia Wasikowska. Park was highly praised in the media for his attention to detail and artistic sensibility. Most recently, Spike Lee’s Hollywood remake of the Korean blockbuster hit, *Oldboy*, ten years from its original release in 2003, has gathering attention with mixed reviews from film critics.

2012 and 2013 also saw the New York Asian Film Festival (NYAFF), held at the Lincoln Center, acquire much deserved media attention; over the years, it has been accumulating praise for the consistent high quality of the films that it showcases. With high profile names such as actors Min-sik Choi and Seung-bum Ryu, actresses Jin-seo Yoon and Go-eun, Kim and directors J-Yong E, Ji-woo, Jung, Cheol-soo Jang, and Won-suk Lee joining the festivities, the NYAFF has clearly established itself in the past years as one of the most influential film festivals held in New York.

Korean Food

The New York Times had previously placed its focus on explaining the flavors of a specific dish or introducing recipes, but in recent days, there is a drastic increase in the way that restaurants, chefs, and individual dishes, are receiving most of the attention. Especially Michelin-star rated restaurants such as Danji and Jungsik has seen much of the spotlight as *The Times* has featured exclusive reviews, including explanations of specific menu items and the technique that goes into each, detailing these openings.

An added difference is that there has been a pull away from the focus on the traditional dishes of Korea and instead, there is a newfound highlight on creative hybrid cooking that combines Korean and Western cooking techniques and flavors.

Society and Sports

Recent years have seen an increase in the number of articles that aim to delve into Korea’s culture from a multiple perspectives. Going beyond “Gangnam Style” and kimchi, articles that show both the new and old of Korea—looking at the ways that traditional intersects with the contemporary—are being lit in the spotlight. Whether it is looking at the very roots of Korea in small mountainous villages, at the *hanoks* (traditional Korean homes) that have been restored with modern touches, or focusing on the growing numbers of highly successful Korean athletes such as Hyun-jin Ryu in the US, the desire to understand Korean culture on a more profound level can be evidenced by the articles in *The Times*.

In Closing

Over the last several years, there has been an overall increase in the interest of Korean culture across the US, bolstered by the likes of Psy and a rekindled appreciation for Korean traditions. It seems that for people who have previously held an interest in Korea are now diving deeper—pulling back yet another layer to uncover new aspects of the culture. This is evident by the rising awareness of traditional Korean dance, a newfound focus on Korean actors and directors, and by the conspicuously expanding interest in Korean food. It truly is a great time to nurture affection for Korean culture and we cannot wait to see what the future years will bring.

BRINGING K-POP TO THE WEST

BY CHOE SANG-HUN AND MARK RUSSELL

MUSIC & K-POP IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

SEOUL, South Korea

Patricia Augustin, 19, of Indonesia says she scours the Internet every day for the latest updates on Korean pop music. Paula Lema Aguirre, a high school student from Peru, says she is happiest when she sings Korean songs, especially “It Hurts,” the group 2NE1’s single about teenage love.

Neither Ms. Augustin nor Ms. Aguirre is a native Korean speaker, but that did not stop them, along with about 40 other aspiring singers from 16 countries, from making it to the finals in December of the K-Pop World Festival competition in the South Korean town of Changwon, where they belted out Korean lyrics in front of screaming crowds packed into a stadium.

“K-pop is a good icebreaker for foreigners,” said Tara Louise, 19, a singer from Los Angeles. “It gives a lot of affinity for Koreans and the Korean culture.”

For South Koreans, the festival, the first of its kind, was confirmation of how widely their country’s latest export has spread, first to Asia and more recently to Europe, the Middle East and the Americas, mainly because of the broad use of social media.

K-pop is part of a broader trend known as the Korean Wave and called “hallyu” in Korean. The Taiwanese were among the first to notice the invasion of Korean soap operas in their television programming in the late 1990s and gave the phenomenon its name. Until then, the term had referred to the cold winds blowing down from the Korean Peninsula.

The Korean Wave has long conquered Asia, but before the proliferation of global social networks, attempts by K-pop stars to break into Western markets, including the United States, had largely failed.

But now YouTube, Facebook and Twitter make it easier for K-pop bands to reach a wider audience in the West, and those fans are turning to the same social networking tools to proclaim their devotion.

When bands like 2NE1, Super Junior and SHINee hold concerts in Europe and the United States, tickets sell out within minutes, and fans have used Facebook and Twitter to organize flash mobs demanding more shows, as they did in Paris in May.

K-pop now has its own channel on YouTube, and the videos by bands like Girls’ Generation have topped 60 million views. Girls’ Generation signed with Interscope Records to release the group’s latest album in the United States last autumn and made its American television debut on David Letterman’s “Late Show” in January.

K-pop bands’ style is a fusion of synthesized music, video art, fashionable outfits and teasing sexuality mixed with doe-eyed innocence.

K-pop performances like T-ara’s “Roly Poly,” Wonder Girls’ “Nobody” and Super Junior’s “Sorry Sorry” have repetitive choruses, often interspersed with English, and synchronized dance routines that have become such a fad in Asia that children in their classrooms, soldiers in their barracks and inmates in their prison yards imitate the dancing.

K-pop's nascent success in the West stems from lessons the Korean music industry learned from its home market.

South Korea is one of the most wired countries in the world, and digital piracy devastated its music scene — sales of CDs by units dropped 70.7 percent from 2000 to 2007, according to the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, the international music industry association.

The Korean music industry regrouped by focusing more on digital distribution and touring. As the use of social networks spread globally in the last few years, K-pop bands began to gain more traction in the West.

For example, the R&B singer Jay Park's songs and albums have hit No. 1 on the R&B/Soul charts on iTunes in the United States, Canada and Denmark since 2010.

"Thanks to Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, Jay Park is not just an artist but also his own P.R. agent, fan club president and TV network," said Bernie Cho, president of DFSB Kollektive, a digital music distributor and branding company based in Seoul that also distributes Mr. Park's music. "He is bypassing traditional media gatekeepers locally and gate-crashing his way globally onto overseas charts via social media."

Social media also lend a "dorky cool" factor to these bands, said Marine Vidal, a French journalist and musician who liked Korean pop culture so much that she moved to Seoul last year.

After past attempts to emphasize the sex appeal of K-pop stars like BoA and Rain fizzled in the United States, Korean entertainment companies have also learned to market to a more receptive audience — the preadolescents.

This year, for example, the Wonder Girls made a TV movie for the TeenNick cable channel in the United States. The Wonder Girls, like other K-pop girl bands, sport short skirts and skin-baring outfits, but their song lyrics stay well within the bounds of chaste romantic love and longing.

Not everyone is convinced K-pop has staying power in the United States. Appearances on Mr. Letterman's

show and Billboard's K-pop chart have "very little significance here," said Morgan Carey, a music consultant based in Los Angeles who has worked with Korean pop labels since 2007.

Mr. Carey helped propel an obscure Korean reggae artist named Skull to No. 3 on the Billboard R&B singles chart in 2007 by keeping away from Asian-themed events and trying to build his fan base from the United States grass roots, before Skull had to perform his mandatory military service in Korea.

Mr. Carey said Korean music labels "ignore the realities of the U.S. market."

"Bringing recycled American producers and guest artists into the mix long after their relevance in this market has passed" will keep K-pop relegated to a niche market, he said. "The smart move would be to take a huge talent with no brand in Asia and develop them here."

But even Mr. Carey said he thought some labels were getting smarter about the United States market. He praised the Wonder Girls for getting their TeenNick movie and the singer Rain for his Hollywood roles in the films "Ninja Assassin" and "Speed Racer."

"The way into American pop culture is through fashion and film," he said.

Yet being savvy with career moves, social media and marketing is not enough — old-fashioned hard work and talent still matter. South Korea's "star-management" agencies select and train teenage aspiring singers, often housing them together.

With the international market in mind, the agencies require trainees to learn a foreign language, and they hire foreign composers and stylists.

"It's manufactured with thorough planning," said Lee Hark-joon, a director of the South Korean newspaper Chosun Ilbo's multimedia team, which followed the girl band Nine Muses for a year to film a documentary on the making of a K-pop group. "They train like androids, banned from dating during their trainee period."

For Moon Hyun-a and her fellow singers in Nine Muses, managed by Star Empire Entertainment in Seoul, the training began at 1 p.m. each day.

Electric music throbbed through a glass-and-steel studio and managers yelled encouragement as the women danced for 10 to 12 hours, seven days a week, for up to four years before the group made its debut in 2010.

They practiced synchronized dance routines that were executed precisely — their managers said they should remind fans around the world of the goose-stepping soldiers in North Korea, but with an infectious sense of joy.

If a member lags behind or gives up training, a replacement is brought in. Individual members of a group develop their own specialties, some highlighting their adolescent cuteness and others their dancing skills, and have their own fan clubs. But they fiercely compete to become the "leader," who dances at the head of the formation.

"It's training, training and more training," said Ms. Moon, 24, who worked as a model and vocalist before joining Nine Muses.

If K-pop fuels the dreams of young South Koreans like Ms. Moon, it also fills a hunger for South Korea as a nation.

A global exporting powerhouse, the country had always chafed at its lack of cultural exports that would let the rest of the world know that it was more than a maker of Hyundai cars and Samsung cellphones.

Said Andrew Kang, the arts and recording director at Star Empire: "K-pop has become Korea's killer content."

Choe Sang-hun reported from Seoul, and Mark Russell reported from Barcelona, Spain.



Members of Nine Muses trained for up to four years before the group made its debut in 2010.

Bringing K-Pop to the West

Social Media Help South Korean Bands Find New Fans

By CHOE SANG-HUN and MARK RUSSELL

SEOUL, South Korea — Patricia Agustina, 19, of Indonesia says she scans the Internet every day for the latest updates on Korean pop music. Paula Lema Aguirre, a high school student from Peru, says she is happiest when she sings Korean songs, especially "It Hurts," the group 2NE1's single about teenage love.

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"It's manufactured with thorough planning," said Lee Hark-joon, a director of the South Korean newspaper Chosun Ilbo's multimedia team, which followed the girl band Nine Muses for a year to film a documentary on the making of a K-pop group. "They train like androids, banned from dating during their trainee period."

For Moon Hyun-a and her fellow singers in Nine Muses, managed by Star Empire Entertainment in Seoul, the training began at 1 p.m. each day.

Electric music throbbed through a glass-and-steel studio and managers yelled encouragement as the women danced for 10 to 12 hours, seven days a week, for up to four years before the group made its debut in 2010.

They practiced synchronized dance routines that were executed precisely — their managers said they should remind fans around the world of the goose-stepping soldiers in North Korea, but with an infectious sense of joy.

If a member lags behind or gives up training, a replacement is brought in. Individual members of a group develop their own specialties, some highlighting their adolescent cuteness and others their dancing skills, and have their own fan clubs. But they fiercely compete to become the "leader," who dances at the head of the formation.

"It's training, training and more training," said Ms. Moon, 24, who worked as a model and vocalist before joining Nine Muses.

If K-pop fuels the dreams of young South Koreans like Ms. Moon, it also fills a hunger for South Korea as a nation.

A global exporting powerhouse, the country had always chafed at its lack of cultural exports that would let the rest of the world know that it was more than a maker of Hyundai cars and Samsung cellphones.

Said Andrew Kang, the arts and recording director at Star Empire: "K-pop has become Korea's killer content."

IN VERDI'S PARISIAN SOCIAL WHIRL, A STAR SHINES, THEN PLUMMETS IN FLAMES

BY VIVIEN SCHWEITZER

In Verdi's Parisian Social Whirl, a Star Shines, Then Plummets in Flames

In the opening moments of Willy Decker's striking modern production of Verdi's "Traviata," the dying courtesan Violetta moves slowly across the stage toward a huge ticking clock that symbolizes her mortality, her bright red dress a solitary splash of color against a barren white wall. Her loneliness amid the bourgeois claustrophobia of the Parisian beau monde is evocatively realized in this alluring staging, which returned to the Metropolitan Opera on Friday evening.

It returned without its intended Violetta, however, after the soprano Natalie Dessay withdrew because of illness. (According to a Met spokesman Ms. Dessay is still scheduled to sing the remaining performances.) The soprano Hei-Kyung Hong, a house mainstay when starrier names drop out, was her admirable replacement.

As the partygoers, the male and female chorus members in this production, which originated at the Salzburg Festival in 2005 and had its debut at the Met last season, wear identical black suits and are aggressive from the start. An unsympathetic, androgynous menace, they claw at Violetta in the opening scene as she vamps on a red sofa and later leer at her over the vast, curving wall. The eerie, black-clad figure of Doctor Grenvil often hovers alone and grim-reaper-like in the background.

Ms. Hong, who made her debut at the Met in 1984, still sings beautifully, and performed "Ah, fors'è lui" lying on the sofa, with expressive commitment. But despite a mostly secure technique, her "Sempre libera" sounded cautious, and generally in Act I her voice seemed underpowered and was sometimes hard to hear. But

"La Traviata" continues through May 2 at the Metropolitan Opera House at Lincoln Center; (212) 362-6000, metopera.org.



La Traviata Hei-Kyung Hong filled in for Natalie Dessay as Violetta at the Metropolitan Opera. In Willy Decker's modern production, party guests are androgynous and menacing.

she bloomed in Acts II and III, offering a poignant and elegantly phrased "Addio del passato."

Slender and agile, Ms. Hong was an unaffected actress, whether lasciviously flirting with her admirers or mourning her love for Alfredo by ripping away the homey fabrics that signified her

fleeting domestic bliss. Her understated acting seemed particularly natural in light of the more overwrought dramatics by recent heroines at the Met.

Matthew Polenzani had a stellar night as an emotional Alfredo, his lovely voice strong and supple and his graceful phrasing laud-

able in his passionate rendition of "De' miei bollenti spiriti." One of the most compelling moments came during his hotheaded tussle with Giorgio Germont, his father, a role performed with aristocratic flair by Dmitri Hvorostovsky.

Mr. Hvorostovsky wielded his smooth, velvety baritone to gor-

geous effect in "Di Provenza il mar," spinning out long lines with emotive conviction; the aria earned the most enthusiastic applause of the night.

The smaller roles, including Annina, Violetta's maid, played by Maria Zifchak, were also well sung. Fabio Luisi conducted a

brisk, solid reading of the score. One of the many vivid touches in this staging comes in the final act. As Violetta is dying, the crowd parades in a young woman wearing a red party dress identical to the courtesan's, a callous taunt that she will soon be forgotten and replaced.

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A CONVERGENCE OF BLOOD, SWEAT, TEARS AND TCHAIKOVSKY

BY ZACHARY WOOLFE

On Wednesday evening, during a particularly poignant passage of the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto, blood began pouring out of the mouth of the young violinist Hahn-Bin.

Tchaikovsky wears his heart on his sleeve. Hahn-Bin, it seemed to me, was making that literal.

It was an unlikely occasion for one of Hahn-Bin's dazzling, genuinely provocative takes on classical music as performance art. The Young Concert Artists gala at Alice Tully Hall is usually a proper affair, with talented rising artists playing the standard repertoire with assurance.

The first half of Wednesday's program went according to that script. Narek Hakhnazaryan brought sweet, warm tone to Elgar's Cello Concerto, and Ran Dank met the tremendous technical challenges of Prokofiev's Second Piano Concerto. But neither had a unique or powerful take on the music: I wanted more intense lyr-

icism from Mr. Hakhnazaryan and a deeper sense of the Prokofiev's dark side from the genial Mr. Dank.

But it was clear when the audience returned from intermission that something quite different was happening. The stage had been set with a chair of crumpled black plastic and a small set of steps. The concertmaster of the Orchestra of St. Luke's placed a violin on the chair. The conductor, Jorge Mester, came in, and the music began.

Hahn-Bin entered, draped in an American flag, which he tossed aside, along with a can of Budweiser, revealing a sleeveless denim shirt over a white tank top stained with red; skintight denim shorts; and chunky black leather boots. When the woman behind me asked what was written on the back of the shirt in big pink letters, I was obliged to tell her: It was a derogatory word for gay men, followed, alliteratively, by "freak."

Young Concert Artists Gala
The violinist Hahn-Bin donned a rainbow flag as a cape at the conclusion of his performance of Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto at Alice Tully Hall on Wednesday, in a program that also included the cellist Narek Hakhnazaryan and the pianist Ran Dank.



A Convergence of Blood, Sweat, Tears and Tchaikovsky

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MUSIC REVIEW

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The playing that followed was excellent: alternately husky and honeyed, forceful and impassioned. Hahn-Bin's jerky, aggressive movements — pacing the stage, making dramatic swipes in the air with his bow — heightened the tension between soloist and orchestra that is fundamental to the concerto form.

This is a tension that comes through in any good performance, even a more typical one, but Hahn-Bin's also touchingly suggested a connection between

Tchaikovsky's aching emotionalism and his agonizing battle with his homosexuality.

Other classical artists, including the pianists Yuja Wang and Jean-Yves Thibaudet, have long experimented with unusual concert attire, but Hahn-Bin goes further, evoking something of what Liszt's deliriously sweaty, grandiosely hypersexualized concerts must have felt like.

After uncertain, ragged playing in the program's first half, the St. Luke's ensemble was fully committed by the Tchaikovsky blazing finale, where Hahn-Bin was in triumphal mode, wearing a rainbow flag as a cape and marching up the set of stairs. Whether or not the performance was intended as a nod to President Obama's endorsement of gay marriage a few hours before, the timing was impeccable.

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DIGGING DEEPLY INTO BEETHOVEN IN HEAD AND HEART

BY VIVIEN SCHWEITZER

Digging Deeply Into Beethoven in Head and Heart

VIVIEN SCHWEITZER
REVIEW
 Paris over eight consecutive days in 2010, offered two sonatas — No. 29 in B flat (Op. 106, “Hammerklavier”) and No. 30 in E (Op. 109) — in her American debut on Thursday evening, for a small audience at Le Poisson Rouge.



H.J. Lim, a Korean pianist, performing Beethoven sonatas in her American debut Thursday at Le Poisson Rouge in Greenwich Village.

An idiosyncratic player with plenty of original ideas and the technique to carry them out, Ms. Lim has devoted considerable time to studying not only the works themselves but also Beethoven biographies and letters and other historical materials. For her EMI recording (to be released exclusively on iTunes), she has written her own extensive notes, grouping the sonatas into eight unconventional headings like “Aspects of an Inflexible

Personality” (Op. 2, Nos. 1, 2 and 3) and “Extremes in Collision” (Op. 10, Nos. 1, 2 and 3). During a postconcert discussion with the composer Daniel Felsenfeld, Ms. Lim — an engaging speaker whose French-accented English reflects her years in France, where she moved without her family at 12 to study — spoke about her aim of attaining the right balance between composer and interpreter. “Mutual understanding and empathy,” she added, are essential when performing these sonatas.

Ms. Lim has spoken of Beethoven’s “craziness,” and she emphasized the unsettled elements of the sonatas here, like the intense rolling chords interspersed with the gentle melody of the opening of Opus 109 and the wild fugue of the “Hammerklavier.”

Recording the 32 Beethoven piano sonatas is an unusual way for a young artist to make a debut on a major record label, but EMI Classics is taking a chance with the distinctive 24-year-old Korean H.J. Lim. Ms. Lim, who performed the complete cycle in Paris over eight consecutive days in 2010, offered two sonatas — No. 29 in B flat (Op. 106, “Hammerklavier”) and No. 30 in E (Op. 109) — in her American debut on Thursday evening, for a small audience at Le Poisson Rouge.

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For Ms. Lim, Opus 109, initially dedicated to Antonie Brentano, thought by some to be Beethoven’s Immortal Beloved, reflects the “ideal, spiritual love” sought by Beethoven and Goethe. In her notes she includes the sonata under the heading “Eternal Feminine,” the phrase coined by Goethe in “Faust.”

A physically exuberant player, Ms. Lim tossed back her long, untied hair during more tumultuous moments and played with expressive commitment and colorful nuance throughout both sonatas. The overall arc and momentum sometimes felt distorted, but Ms. Lim’s intellectual analysis and emotional engagement resulted in fresh, vigorous interpretations.

MAKING BOLD FIRST IMPRESSIONS AT THE PIANO

BY ANTHONY TOMMASINI

CLASSICAL



The Israeli pianist David Greilsammer made his debut this month at the Mostly Mozart Festival with bold programming.

ANTHONY TOMMASINI

Making Bold First Impressions At the Piano

IN the spring of 1970 Rudolf Serkin announced that he would play the 32 Beethoven piano sonatas in a series of eight recitals at Carnegie Hall during the 1970-71 season to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Beethoven’s birth. Then nearly 67, Serkin was a pre-eminent Beethoven interpreter. Yet he had never played a complete Beethoven sonata cycle.

By late summer Serkin had scaled the series back to four programs, proposing to offer about half of the sonatas. Great as he was, Serkin was “afraid of not doing justice to the music,” the critic Harold C. Schonberg of *The New York Times* wrote in his review of the first recital in the series that October.

The young Korean pianist H.J. Lim had no such trepidation about taking on these towering works. Ms. Lim, now 24, moved from South Korea to France at 12 to continue her musical studies. She played the Beethoven cycle in 2010 over eight consecutive days in Paris, and last year she recorded the sonatas for her debut release on EMI Classics.

In May the company placed the content, almost nine hours of music, on iTunes for downloading at the bargain price of \$10.

Ms. Lim’s Beethoven shot to No. 1 on Billboard’s classical chart. Now EMI has released the recordings as an eight-CD boxed set with extensive notes from Ms. Lim, who has read extensively on Beethoven’s life and works.

Having a recorded Beethoven sonata cycle to your credit at 24 is quite an accomplishment. These works present comprehensive challenges, and not just because Beethoven pushed the boundaries of piano technique and piano sound in ways that performers still grapple with. For all the audaciousness of this music, each sonata, even the playful-seeming works that exude Promethean humor, is an ingenious achievement in formal design. A good Beethoven sonata performance must convey structure as well as daring.

One could view Ms. Lim’s project as presumptuous. She brings distinctive ideas and unabashed impetuosity to these touchstone works. Her interpretations, while passionate and adventurous, cross into the quirky and eccentric. Still, she boasts dazzling technique and plays with dash and spontaneity.

Only a young artist with supreme self-confidence would introduce herself to the wider public with a recording of the complete Beethoven sonatas. Well, almost complete. Ms. Lim does not include the Sonatas Nos. 19 and 20, the two “easy sonatas” (Op. 49, Nos. 1 and 2), works Beethoven probably intended as teaching pieces that were published some years after their composition. Asked about performing Beethoven’s sonatas at a young age, Ms. Lim said in an interview this summer in *The New York Times*, “As far as I know, no composer wrote on their score, ‘Forbidden to those under age 18.’”

“When you feel so passionate about something,” she added, “there is no point to wait.”

Just as the EMI set was coming on the market, the adventurous Israeli pianist David Greilsammer, 35, released a new recording, his first for the Sony Classical label. This month he made his debut at the Mostly Mozart Festival with a late-night recital at the Kaplan Penthouse. The recording, “Baroque Conversations,” and the recital program are the latest projects in what has become a trademark of Mr. Greilsammer’s work since his mid-20s. If Ms. Lim is calling attention to herself through an ambitious single project, Mr. Greilsammer has been taking a conceptual approach to boldly varied programming.

In his recitals he finds fascinating ways to juxtapose pieces spanning centuries, aiming to highlight surprising musical resonances among works vastly different in language and style. There have been traditional aspects to Mr. Greilsammer’s career. He has performed his share of concertos with orchestras; a Naïve recording offers elegant accounts of two Mozart concertos, with Mr. Greilsammer conducting the Soudana Ensemble from the keyboard. And conducting has been important to Mr. Greilsammer since he became the music director of the Geneva Chamber Orchestra in 2009.

But those unusual recital programs, usually lasting about an hour and played with no breaks and no applause between the juxtaposed pieces, are increasingly central to his mission. As a way to project artistic identity, Mr. Greilsammer’s approach could not be more different from Ms. Lim’s.

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He caught my attention in 2008 with the release of a remarkable recording on the Naïve label, "Fantaisie-Fantasme." For this program, an exploration of the fantasy genre, Mr. Greilsammer chose works that were titled fantasies or, to his thinking, were thoroughly fantastical, like Janacek's Sonata "1.X.1905." He arranged them in a mirrorlike structure. The album begins with the fantasy of Bach's "Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue" (BWV 903) and circles through works by Jonathan Keren, Brahms, Schoenberg, Ligeti, Janacek and Cage, and arrives at Mozart's Fantasy in C minor, the center of the program. Then he circles back through those composers and, on Track 16, ends with the formidable fugue from that seminal Bach score.

By organizing the program this way Mr. Greilsammer brought out stunning resonances among these works, but what truly grabbed me was the brilliance and sensitivity of his playing.

In a recent interview in New York, Mr. Greilsammer said that this recording was very important to his career.

"It was the first time I came out to the world and said, 'This is the direction I want to take,' " he said. "I was already playing these kinds of recitals for a few years. But this was the first time I actually put it on the recording. I toured with this program for a year or so. But then I had to go and do something else."

Speaking about these projects, Mr. Greilsammer came across as committed to his convictions and astute about the state of classical music. Early on, soon after he graduated from the Juilliard School, he began asking himself big questions: "What do I fight for as an artist, a musician? What is the aim? Why do I do what I do?"

Just playing beautiful music for the public was not enough. His questions were driven by his perception that the classical music world was becoming "extremely disconnected from everything going on around you." He wanted, he decided, to bring old music "into today." The point is not, he emphasized, to play a piece from the past in some radical way but to give it a modern, contemporary context.

"When it works," he said, "one piece can truly make another piece sound different."

Mr. Greilsammer understands that in doing "what people call a concept recital or recording," he is opening himself to the charge that this is just a gimmick. But so far he has found his experiments emotionally and musically powerful.

Some great pianists, Pierre-Laurent Aimard and Peter Serkin among them, have also presented programs that intriguingly juxtapose the old and the new. But Mr. Greilsammer is immersed in this thinking, and he works hard to give a program a compelling overall structure.

The new recording, "Baroque Conversations," is organized in four parts, like "an opera in four acts," Mr. Greilsammer said. Each part has three pieces, with two Baroque works (from composers including Rameau, Couperin and Handel) surrounding a new or recent piece: first Morton Feldman's Piano Piece (1964), then Matan Porat's "Whaam!" (commissioned by Mr. Greilsammer), Nimrod Sahar's "Aux Murailles Rougies" (another commission) and Helmut Lachenmann's "Wiegenmusik."

He was inspired to construct this program by his growing awareness that many Baroque composers were doing "advanced, crazy things with rhythms and harmony," he said. What better way to tease out that wildness than by pairing Baroque pieces with new ones? The tension below the melancholic and undulant surfaces of Rameau's "Gavotte et Six Doubles" is reflected when the music segues into the Feldman piece, in which eerily slow and soft harmonies and gestures also mask an inner intensity.

Mr. Greilsammer and Ms. Lim somewhat share an attitude toward what Mr. Greilsammer calls the “grand imposing idea of the past.” It is essential to “respect the past and know it really deeply,” he said. But then you “look straight ahead” and “choose what you want to take.”

Ms. Lim, in her interview with The Times, said that Beethoven’s was “a revolutionary mind, and this revolutionary spirit is in each sonata.” Yet on the recordings she places the sonatas into eight thematic groups, invoking lofty philosophical titles like “Extremes in Collision,” “Eternal Feminine” and “Destiny,” an exercise that seems more academic than revolutionary.

Still, here is a new artist swept up in the moment. In striving to project the pathbreaking elements and impetuosity of the music (and Beethoven was renowned for his improvisations), Ms. Lim plays with such rhapsodic freedom and fleet tempos that her interpretations sometimes seem willful, even cavalier.

The iTunes release was pitched, very successfully, to a young demographic, for which she deserves much credit. The CD set is no doubt aimed at older, more traditional music lovers. But there is a rich discography of Beethoven sonata surveys to choose from. In 2008 alone two superb pianists completed multiyear Beethoven sonata cycle projects: András Schiff for ECM New Series (in recordings made in his 50s) and Paul Lewis on Harmonia Mundi (in recordings made in his 30s). Both tower over Ms. Lim as Beethoven interpreters.

Mr. Greilsammer, meanwhile, is busy trying to connect classical music to today. He had much success in doing so with the audience that packed the intimate Kaplan Penthouse recently.

He played some of the works from “Baroque Conversations,” but in keeping with Mostly Mozart’s focus he structured the program around two Mozart works: the melancholic Rondo in A minor (K. 511)

and the stormy Fantasy in C minor (K. 475). In engaging introductory comments he told the audience that in the hourlong program he wanted to highlight the disturbing things beneath the surface of those late Mozart pieces. So he surrounded them with mysterious contemporary works and those wild Baroque pieces.

At the penthouse, with the room lights dimmed, the audience seated at small round cocktail tables and no breaks between the pieces, it was not easy to read the program, which seemed to exasperate a few listeners near me. Mr. Greilsammer wanted his audience just to go with things and not worry about whether he was playing Couperin or Ligeti.

One man, looking frustrated, tried to read his program from the light of the small candle on the table. After a while he just listened. When Mr. Greilsammer ended with a brash, slam-bang performance of “Whaam!,” that man was one of the first on his feet cheering. It was mission accomplished for Mr. Greilsammer on that exciting night.

By the way, I attended two of Rudolf Serkin’s Carnegie Hall recitals in 1970, including the final one on Dec. 16, Beethoven’s birthday, joined by Donald Currier, my piano professor from Yale. The program ended with an exhilarating account of Beethoven’s “Hammerklavier” Sonata. My teacher and I walked back to Grand Central Terminal oblivious to the rain.

Serkin’s approach to the masters may seem Old World today, but I will never forget that performance.

RIDING INTO CARNEGIE HALL ON A MASTERPIECE BY BACH

BY VIVIEN SCHWEITZER

Piano competitions are often criticized for favoring empty virtuosity over originality and introspection. But Minsoo Sohn, the South Korean-born winner of the 2006 Honens International Piano Competition in Calgary, Alberta, and a faculty member at Michigan State University, has proved himself a distinctive artist with his recording of Bach’s “Goldberg” Variations.

The recording was released last year on the Honens label, and the competition presented Mr. Sohn on Saturday evening at Zankel Hall. In addition to Bach’s masterpiece, the recital offered Webern’s Variations for Piano (Op. 27) and Brahms’s Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel (Op. 24). (After quarterfinals held in New York in April, this year’s Honens competition concludes in Calgary from next Wednesday to Oct. 26.)

Unlike his contemporaries, Bach wrote infrequently in variation form, with two decades separating the Chaconne of the Partita in D minor for solo violin and the “Goldberg” Variations. The pianist Andras Schiff has written that Bach may have felt predisposed against the form. “Bach was never interested in cheap success,” Mr. Schiff wrote, “and his goal was to try to elevate the usually extroverted variations onto a hitherto unknown artistic and spiritual level.”

Bach succeeded, of course, surpassing many of his own sublime keyboard pieces with the “Goldberg” Variations. There is a vast emotional range in the work, with sections that are exuberant, tender, desolate and whimsical, moods that Mr. Sohn illuminated here with a thoughtfully conceived and poetic interpretation, enhanced by tasteful ornamentation. The overall arc of the work was less cohesive than on the recording, but Mr. Sohn’s crisp articulation rendered the fast, virtuosic numbers a delight, and he imbued the slower sections with an appealing intimacy.

Whereas Bach never heard a complete public performance of his variations, which were ignored for about 150 years (and offended listeners in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s novela “Kreisleriana”), Brahms heard his Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel performed by Clara Schumann. Like the Bach, they are now a staple of the pianistic repertory. Mr. Sohn played with a warm touch and deft technique throughout, beginning with his elegant trills in the opening Aria.

Webern’s austere Variations for Piano, a 12-tone work written in 1936, may never find as secure a place in the pianistic repertory, but Mr. Sohn found the distinct character of each of the stark fragments.

After the Bach, which ended the program, Mr. Sohn offered Liszt’s transcription of the Schubert song “Der Müller und der Bach” as an encore.

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Minsoo Sohn As the winner of the Honens International Piano Competition, he performed Webern, Brahms and Bach at Zankel Hall.

BEYOND ‘GANGNAM,’ THE TRUE WILD HEART OF K-POP

BY JON CARAMANICA

Beyond ‘Gangnam,’ the True Wild Heart of K-Pop

NEWARK — When you have to understand is that “Gangnam Style,” the goofy crossover hit that has given K-pop a global profile — it has even reached No. 2 on the Billboard Hot 100 — is still something of an outlier, a lightly ironic sendup of the genre’s eccentricities. But it’s very hard to parody something that gets more outrageous by the day.

If anything, the center of K-pop is far stranger. Take “Crayon,” by G-Dragon, an electro-rave-meets-Southern-hip-hop thumper with a video that makes the excesses of, say, Missy Elliott and Nicki Minaj in that medium look like tiny incremental gains. It is kaleidoscopically weird, hilariously comic and sinisterly effective.



G-Dragon This South Korean hip band performing at the Prudential Center in Newark on Thursday night.

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G-Dragon is a member of BigBang, the long-running K-pop boy band, which played its first show in the New York area at the Prudential Center here on Thursday night. He performed “Crayon” early in the night, wearing a jacket with the head of a white tiger attached to the back, a pair of black Air Yeezy 2s and bleached blond hair standing straight up like sheaves of pesticide-soaked wheat.

And that wasn’t even the most energized part of this vibrant show, in which BigBang — G-Dragon, T.O.P., Seungri, Taeyang and Daesung — performed more than two dozen songs wearing almost as many outfits, and in unusual setups: before “How Gee,” which could pass for an early Teddy Riley production, members of the group took to the stage on gilded Segways and lowrider bicycles.

Over the years G-Dragon has emerged as the flamboyant center of the group. He has a soft voice but a shrieking exterior. He’s balanced out by T.O.P., who raps nimbly in a basso profundo voice and has a regal bearing, even walking around the stage wielding a scepter. Taeyang is the group’s battery, a compact dancer and singer with a tender voice. Daesung has a totally credible R&B voice — during a solo song, dancers affixed wings to his back, and he soared over the crowd on a wire — and the baby-faced Seungri plays the straight man.

At one point Seungri called G-Dragon a genius and told him, “I love you.” It can be a challenge to dig up subtext in K-pop, which gleams with outlandish visuals and candy-coated sentiments, but maybe this was penance of a sort for the recent romance scandals that have dogged Seungri in Asian tabloids.

K-pop can be so heavily referential as to be post-referential. The band wove an interpolation of the signature guitar crunch of Nirvana’s “Smells Like Teen Spirit” into a song. Multiple members of the group beatbox, a technique that’s hardly, if ever, used in mainstream American hip-hop, its birthplace, but is a routine part of the K-pop star arsenal. Late in the night Taeyang, heavily tattooed, with long braids and a bandanna worn just so, tore his tank top in two, Usher-style, and did a back flip, which is probably beyond Usher’s skill set.

(Throughout, BigBang was backed by a cadre of dancers, the men emphasizing break dancing.)

BigBang’s more recent material is bubblier and more frenetic, like “Fantastic Baby” (the chorus of which, to be fair, does bear a passing resemblance to the buzzing beat of “Gangnam Style”), but toward the end of the show, the group devoted time to more blatantly romantic fare like “Monster” and “Cafe.”

This show was the first of two nights at the arena, part of a short but loud American tour for an act that, while it has a big following in this country, has not yet achieved American pop success. At the end of the night, during a long encore, Taeyang kept singing the hook from Alicia Keys and Jay-Z’s “Empire State of Mind,” as if he could single-handedly change that.

A Fast Start, But No Race To the Future

By STEVE SMITH



Renown has come gradually to Jennifer Koh, 36, accrued through potent performances and unusually thoughtful recitals and recordings, despite making her Chicago Symphony debut at age 11.

In a video posted on YouTube last summer the gifted violinist Jennifer Koh can be seen offering a poised, passionate account of the first movement from Paganini’s Violin Concerto No. 1 with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. The excellence of Ms. Koh’s playing will surprise no one who knows the quality and integrity of her work. What is unusual is that Ms. Koh, who will play Lutoslawski’s bracing “Chain 2” with the New York Philharmonic beginning Thursday, offered such a splashy showpiece in her Chicago Symphony debut.

Give her a break: she was 11. The performance was filmed in 1988, when Ms. Koh, preternaturally dignified in her girlish white dress and ribbon belt, was a finalist in the orchestra’s young soloists competition. She returned to win in 1992, and in 1994 she claimed a silver medal in the International Tchaikovsky Competition, sharing that accolade with another violinist, Anastasia Chebotareva, in a year when no first prize was awarded. (Clips from that performance are on YouTube too.)

A possible future of further competitions, lucrative contracts and high-profile engagements beckoned. “Even at that age I knew that was not something I wanted,” Ms. Koh, now 36, said during a leisurely interview recently in the airy Washington Heights apartment she shares with her husband, the pianist Benjamin Hochman.

“After the Tchaikovsky competition it



ANASTASIA CHEBOTAREVA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

was only Romantic war horses, and that was a route that I knew I didn’t want,” she said. “I also knew that I didn’t want a full-throttle career right away. When I look back at it, I think it was a really scary decision to make. But at the time it just felt natural, and it felt like something I needed to do.”

Ms. Koh has not disowned her precocious past; after all, she posted that Paganini video. But in bypassing the prodigy’s steep, slippery ascent in favor of a bookish life as an English literature major at Oberlin College, Ms. Koh took her first step on a quieter path, one in which renown came gradually, accrued through potent performances and unusually thoughtful recitals and recordings.

In what could seem like a bifurcated career Ms. Koh emerged as a lucid advocate

for contemporary works by composers like Kaija Saariaho, Esa-Pekka Salonen and John Zorn in New York, Los Angeles and Chicago, while offering penetrating accounts of canonical concertos elsewhere.

Bach has become a fixture lately, in epic concerts of the unaccompanied sonatas and partitas, and in Bach and Beyond, a recital series in which Ms. Koh surrounds those works with other solo pieces and new commissions. Last year she took on the instrumental title role in Philip Glass and Robert Wilson’s opera “Einstein on the Beach” in performances including a celebrated run at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

This week Ms. Koh’s long road brings her back to the Philharmonic, with which she previously played in park concerts and at the Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festi-

val in Colorado. With Lorin Maazel, the orchestra’s former music director, she will make her subscription-series debut in “Chain 2,” a striking late work that bridges Lutoslawski’s chance-infused style with more direct modes of bravura.

The engagement is a token recognition of the Lutoslawski centenary this year. But for Ms. Koh the assignment is rife with personal bonds: to Mr. Salonen and Ms. Saariaho, who had their own connections to Lutoslawski; and to Mr. Maazel, at whose Castleton Festival in Virginia Ms. Koh has become a familiar face.

Such links have been paramount in Ms. Koh’s journey, which began as the only child of Korean parents in Glen Ellyn, Ill. Her mother, now a professor, fled North

Continued on Page E3

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Such links have been paramount in Ms. Koh's journey, which began as the only child of Korean parents in Glen Ellyn, Ill. Her mother, now a professor, fled North Korea with her family during the Korean War. "They wanted me to have everything that they didn't have," Ms. Koh said. "So they started me in everything: ballet, swimming, diving, gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, ice-skating."

Avid subscribers to the Chicago Symphony and the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Ms. Koh's parents urged her to take up an instrument at a Suzuki-method school in Wheaton, Ill. Her teacher, Jo Davis, with whom she is still in touch, recognized her precocious talent and helped her find new teachers when her early training had run its course.

Prodigious activities beckoned. Playing with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra at 14, Ms. Koh was noticed by Isaac Stern, who insisted that she study

with Jaime Laredo at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. Ms. Koh complied, but only after she had graduated from Oberlin and worked with Felix Galimir at the Marlboro Music School and Festival in Vermont. Galimir's personal recollections of Ravel, Schoenberg and Webern helped to inspire Ms. Koh's passion for collaborating with living composers.

"By the time she came to Curtis, she was pretty mature," Mr. Laredo said in a telephone interview from Miami. "She had her own voice. She had her own personality. She definitely had something to say that was very special." The challenge, he added, was in guiding Ms. Koh without stifling her creative freedom.

"There were times when she would do things that I would totally disagree with, completely," he said. "But I just thought: 'That's her. Let her do it her way.'"

Now Ms. Koh is demonstrating her gratitude to Mr. Laredo in another new project: Two x Four, in which the two play double concertos by Bach and Mr. Glass, and commissioned pieces by Anna Clyne and David Ludwig. Ms. Koh handled the legwork for the initiative, arranging concert presenters and securing financing. When she and Mr. Laredo played Bach's Concerto for Two Violins and Ms. Clyne's ravishing "Prince of Clouds" with the Chicago Symphony in December, the union of their disparate sounds enhanced the emotional potency of the performances.

Both of Ms. Koh's current projects are due soon in the New York performance spaces with which she is most closely linked. She will play the second installment of Bach and Beyond on March 2 and 3 at the 92nd Street Y, then present Two x Four with the Curtis Chamber Orchestra on March 13 at the Miller Theater.

Fresh connections loom, including a new concerto by Andrew Norman for the 2014-15 season and a Beethoven-centered project just starting to percolate. But opportunities continue to arise through the personal bonds Ms. Koh has formed. A second project with Ms. Clyne is on the drawing board, and with a run of "Einstein on the Beach" coming up in October at the Los Angeles Opera, Ms. Koh and Mr. Wilson will collaborate in a staged version of Bach's sonatas and partitas in Paris next fall.

It is to such relationships that Ms. Koh attributes her success.

"Even by the time I got to Curtis, after the Tchaikovsky competition and all of that, I still didn't know that I could make a career in music," she said. "I just feel lucky enough to have met so many people — like Jaime and like Felix, and even my first violin teacher back in Wheaton, Ill. — that really helped me along the way. I know that I would not be in this place if it weren't for so many people. At least for me it takes a village."

A CONDUCTOR'S ADVENTUROUS AND RESERVED SIDES

BY ANTHONY TOMMASINI

A Conductor's Reserved Side And His Adventurous One

From First Arts Page

vanized that great ensemble.

The Philharmonic players seemed anything but galvanized on Thursday during the Tchaikovsky and Shostakovich works. Mr. Maazel has said that he has no patience with the sentimental and exaggeratedly Romantic interpretations that he often hears. And I am all for bringing out the ingenious craft and intelligence of Tchaikovsky's music. But in ridding "Romeo and Juliet" of sentimentality, Mr. Maazel also robbed it of passion in this weighty, stolid performance.

In the first movement of the Shostakovich, he seemed to be going for dramatic understatement. He brought a steady tread and exacting execution to the grave opening. During the episode in which the music breaks into militaristic intensity, the Philharmonic played with steely power that shook the hall yet never turned harsh. Still, the effect was calculated. The Largo movement, filled with stretches of quiet anguish, was particularly tepid, though the string sound was often beautiful, especially an eerie moment when the second violins played a sustained, shimmering high tremolo that seemed to be coming into the hall from some far-off place.

Lutoslawski's 20-minute, four-movement "Chain 2," completed in 1985, is a pivotal work in that composer's exploration of two techniques. One involves making linear and melodic phrases seamlessly overlap, rather than letting them unfold like sentences in a musical paragraph; the other touches on Lutoslawski's experiments with introducing elements

This program will be repeated on Saturday night at Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center; (212) 875-5656, nyphil.org.

of chance into his composition. In this work, during sections headed "Ad libitum," some musical materials are to be played with free rhythm and in an improvisatory manner, though, as Lutoslawski explained, within fixed parameters.

In a way, none of this has to matter to the listener. At least in a performance as arresting as this one, "Chain 2" comes across as the urgent dialogue for violin and orchestra that Lutoslawski



MICHELLE V. AGINS/THE NEW YORK TIMES
Lorin Maazel and Jennifer Koh, the featured violinist.

called it. Playing with penetrating sound, myriad colorings and commanding technique, Ms. Koh conveyed the shifting twists of this episodic piece, from its discursive lyrical stretches to its skittish outbursts.

In the orchestral writing there are hints of the composers who influenced Lutoslawski, especially Stravinsky, Bartok and Varèse. Mr. Maazel made those connections vibrant in the bold performance he drew from the Philharmonic.

If only he had been as engaged in the staples.

At 82, Lorin Maazel remains one of the most prodigiously skilled and experienced conductors in the business. Yet during his seven-year tenure as music director of the New York Philharmonic, which ended with the 2008-9 season, he sometimes seemed curiously disengaged, especially toward the end.

That was certainly the impression he gave on Thursday night at Avery Fisher Hall for the second of two programs in a return to the Philharmonic's podium. There was one outstanding performance: the brilliant violinist Jennifer Koh made an auspicious debut on a Philharmonic subscription series program as soloist in Lutoslawski's "Chain 2: Dialogue for Violin and Orchestra." Mr. Maazel has always been excellent in contemporary music, where he responds to the challenges of guiding an orchestra through a complex modern score.

But in two standard repertory works, Tchaikovsky's overture-fantasy "Romeo and Juliet," which opened the program, and Shostakovich's formidable Fifth Symphony, which ended it, the playing of the orchestra under Mr. Maazel was often reined in and often listless.

It may have been harder to please than many other audience members on Thursday night, since I had just heard Yannick Nézet-Séguin conduct the Philadelphia Orchestra in a stunning account of Shostakovich's Fifth a week earlier at Carnegie Hall. This fall the charismatic Mr. Nézet-Séguin, 37, became the music director of the Philadelphia Orchestra, and though his schedule for his first season is limited, he has galvanized that great ensemble.

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CRAMMING FOR STARDOM AT K-POP SCHOOL

BY CHOE SANG-HUN



Kim Chae-young, foreground, practicing her K-pop dance moves along with other students at the Def Dance Skool in Seoul, South Korea.

Cramming for Stardom at K-Pop School

In Growing Numbers, South Korean Teenagers Are Studying Singing and Dance Moves

By CHOE SANG-HUN

SEOUL, South Korea — Kim Chae-young attends cram school five evenings a week, toiling deep into the night. But unlike most young South Koreans who spend hours at special schools to polish their English and math, she studies slide steps and bubbly lyrics.

"I want to become a K-pop icon, one like Psy," said Chae-young, 13, referring to the Korean rapper of the viral video

"Gangnam Style." "All these hours I spend here are my investment for that dream."

For the past four years, she has practiced her hip-hop moves at the Def Dance Skool in Seoul, which is just one such school among thousands in South Korea. Even though there is no official tally on the number of schools teaching children and teenagers to become pop entertainers, industry officials all agree that it is on the rise. Even traditional private music and dance schools —

more accustomed to teaching Bach and ballet — have switched their curriculums to get with the pop plan.

They are responding to a growing demand. In a survey by the Korea Institute for Vocational Education and Training late last year, entertainers, along with teachers and doctors, were the most popular choices for future jobs among primary, middle and high school students — a far cry from a more traditional era, when entertainment was considered an inferior profession and

its practitioners belittled with the derogatory nickname "tantara." Now, in college, pop music is one of the most coveted majors, where it's "practical music."

"Eleven years ago, when I first started this school, parents thought only teenage delinquents came here," said Yang Sun-kyu, head of Def Dance Skool, in the Gangnam district. "Parents' attitudes have changed."

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“Eleven years ago, when I first started this school, parents thought only teenage delinquents came here,” said Yang Sun-kyu, head of Def Dance Skool, in the Gangnam district. “Parents’ attitudes have changed.”

That’s because, in large part, career choices have expanded for their children. The golfer Se Ri Pak has dominated on the L.P.G.A. tour, and the figure skater Kim Yu-na won an Olympic gold medal. Then along came the chubby Park Jae-sang, otherwise known as Psy, with his lasso-swirling, clip-clopping “Gangnam Style” dance steps and lyrics that poked fun at South Korea’s rigid social structure.

On a recent evening, Chae-young and other sweating teenagers bobbed and stomped, practicing their hip-hop moves in front of wall mirrors, as instructors

clapped and shouted. Later, in an upstairs recording room, she practiced Adele’s “Rolling in the Deep,” over and over, as her teacher gently admonished her.

With the motto “cultivating the next generation of K-pop artists,” the Def Dance Skool trains 1,000 students, up from about 400 in 2006. Fees vary but usually run about \$135 a month for two or three evenings a week. That’s about the same price that some traditional cram schools, known as hagwon, charge for their academic programs.

Almost half of the students at Def Dance Skool are trying to break into one of South Korea’s top K-pop agencies, which recruit and train young talent to put them into girl or boy bands.

Some of these South Korean “idol groups,” including Girls’ Generation, Super Junior and Big Bang, produce music videos that generate millions of views on YouTube. Fans from across Asia and elsewhere make pilgrimages to South Korea to attend their album releases, concerts and awards ceremonies, or just to stroll around the Gangnam district, renowned for its pricey bars, chic boutiques and plastic-surgery clinics.

Revenue from K-pop has climbed. The combined sales of South Korea’s top three K-pop agencies — SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment and JYP Entertainment — soared to 362.9 billion won, or about \$326 million, last year, from 106.6 billion won in 2009, with most of that growth coming from overseas.

K-pop stars frequently are the faces for top South Korean brands in television commercials, and Psy fronts for a range of products, from Hite beer and Samsung refrigerators to a line of cosmetics for men called Man’s Balm.

“In my days, studying hard was everything, but now we see there are other options for our children,” said Lee Byeong-hwa, a 48-year-old homemaker whose 11-year-old daughter, Kim En-jae, dreams of a career as a K-pop star.

On a recent day, Ms. Lee and En-jae sat with thousands of people at an indoor stadium in Incheon, west of Seoul. Nearly all of them were in their teens or 20s, and each was wearing a number.

They were among two million contestants vying to appear on Season 5 of “Superstar K,” the country’s answer to “American Idol.” Besides South Korea, auditions were held in the United States and Canada. It’s one of several K-pop star-spotting television shows that have become magnets for would-be performers like En-jae.

Hugging a guitar, En-jae watched intently as applicants lined up in front of 25 white rectangular tents on the stadium floor. Eventually, the group was pared to just 100 individual and group acts for the three-month “Superstar K” competition. The weekly broadcast on the Mnet cable channel began on Friday.

For Woo Ji-won, an 18-year-old high school senior, it’s her third year in a row trying to pass the audition.

“My classmates are cramming for college entrance exams,” she said. “But I go to a K-pop school seven evenings a week. After coming home past 10, I study K-pop video on YouTube for hours.”

K-pop critics contend that South Korea is producing cookie cutter performances: perfectly synchronized dances, catchy songs and outfits and chiseled but forgettable features, often the product of the plastic-surgery clinics in the Gangnam district. Psy, they argue, is an anomaly.

Hong Dae-kwang, who ranked No. 4 at the “Superstar K” tournament last year, shared those reservations. “They all sing, dance and perform well, like well-made machines,” he said.

Still, Mr. Hong, 28, acknowledged that the K-pop boom helped to change his life. Before he starred in the competition, he shared a cheap one-room apartment with a friend and was delivering pizza and performing on the streets for a living. Now, he is a regular guest on a local radio show, lives in a three-room apartment and has his own agent.

“K-pop opened the door of opportunities for people like me,” said Mr. Hong, whose debut album briefly topped digital song downloads here in April.

4 HANDS AND 2 HEARTS BEATING AS 1: BOUND BY PIANO AND, SOON, BY MATRIMONY

BY ANTHONY TOMMASINI

Most couples just days from getting married are frantic with last-minute things to do. But on Tuesday night, four days before their wedding, the pianists Ran Dank and Soyeon Kate Lee played a program of four-hand piano pieces at Le Poisson Rouge in Greenwich Village. This was not an offering of the kind of four-hand duets that were meant for informal sight-reading sessions at home with friends. The program included the premiere of a fiercely difficult work by the flinty American composer Frederic Rzewski simply called “Four Hands.” To end, Mr. Dank and Ms. Lee played Stravinsky’s formidable four-hand arrangement of “The Rite of Spring,” a tour-de-force account of a stunning piano piece.

After taking the stage to begin the concert, Ms. Lee said that she and Mr. Dank thought it would be a “good test of their relationship” to put this program together at a “stressful time of their lives.” I would say they aced this test. Mr. Dank, born in Israel, and Ms. Lee, a Korean-American, both in their early 30s,

seem to be thriving in their careers. Ms. Lee made a lasting impression in 2008 when she gave a brilliant performance of a demanding program at Zankel Hall for which, in the second half, she wore an eco-friendly recital dress made from recycled grape juice pouches. And Mr. Dank earned my awed respect last year when on very short notice, still recovering from jet lag, he substituted for another pianist in a performance of Ravel’s Piano Trio for the Chelsea Music Festival. The piano part in this dazzling trio is considered one of the most demanding in the chamber-music repertory, and Mr. Dank had not played it in about two years.

Before turning to the Rzewski and Stravinsky works, Mr. Dank and Ms. Lee began their Poisson Rouge program with eight selections from Brahms’s 16 Waltzes (Op. 39). Here was an example of four-hand piano music intended for performance in your living room. It was charming to see this couple on the verge of matrimony playing these sweet, wistful and charming waltzes with such sensitivity and taste.

4 Hands and 2 Hearts Beating as 1: Bound by Piano and, Soon, by Matrimony

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ANTHONY
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MUSIC
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Ran Dank and Soyeon Kate Lee in a program of four-hand pieces at Le Poisson Rouge on Tuesday night.

piece concludes with a jerky, sputtering fugue. Before the performance, Mr. Dank said that it “was terrifying” to play the piece. But during the performance he and Ms. Lee seemed absorbed and exhilarated, as was I.

In introducing the four-hand piano arrangement of “The Rite of Spring,” Ms. Lee said that when played on the piano the dissonances and rhythmic gyrations of the music sound even more radical, something that came through thrillingly in the incisive, fearless performance she gave with Mr. Dank.

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Written in a spiky modernist language, “Four Hands” begins with pointillist scurrying figures, leaping chords and sporadic soft trills. The effect is at once alluring and ominous. A seemingly dreamy though still tense section segues into a wondrous movement of chiming, sustained harmonies. The

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For an encore Ms. Lee, on her own, played a work for one hand: Scriabin’s melancholic Nocturne for Left Hand (Op. 9, No. 2). Then Mr. Dank, also on his own, played Horowitz’s dazzling transcription of Mendelssohn’s familiar “Wedding March” from his music for “A Midsummer Night’s Dream.” Mr. Dank has pledged to play this piece as an encore at every recital he gives this year, “dedicated to Kate,” he said.

PERFORMING ARTS IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

BENEATH PINK PARASOLS, IDENTITY IN STARK FORM

BY CHARLES ISHERWOOD

Beneath Pink Parasols, Identity in Stark Form

Young Jean Lee is, hands down, the most adventurous downtown playwright of her generation. In previous shows this Korean-American writer has devised a comic revue about black identity politics, re-tailored Shakespeare's "King Lear" and taken to the stage herself to perform a cabaret act mostly about death.

**CHARLES
ISHERWOOD**
**THEATER
REVIEW**

Ms. Lee has said in interviews that she is motivated, in part, by scaring herself nearly to death with each new endeavor. Her latest, called "Untitled Feminist Show" and presented as part of the Coil festival organized by Performance Space 122, may well be her most daunting attempt to push her talent in a new direction. This time she has dispensed entirely with words to create a frolicsome if fuzzy riff on the female body and the female spirit, through movement (and music)

alone.

Speaking of fearlessness: the six performers are naked as the day they were born throughout the work's hourlong running time, excepting the myriad tattoos sprouting across various body parts, and the occasional piercing.

They come from the worlds of modern dance, theater, performance art and that newly revived (and newly respectable) form of entertainment known as burlesque: Becca Blackwell ("known for pushing gender boundaries," according to her program bio); the busty burlesque performer dubbed the World Famous "BOB"; the cabaret artist Amelia Zirin-Brown (also known as Lady Rizo); the modern dancer Hilary Clark; the performance artist and dancer Katy Pyle; and Regina Rocke, a performer whose bio does not specify her specialty.

Continued on Page 5

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In collaboration with her cast, Ms. Lee has created an almost undefinable and often, alas, uncommunicative romp that takes place on a bare white stage under a clean three-dimensional, rectangular sculpture onto which video imagery is projected throughout. (David Evans Morris created the design, Leah Gelpe the evocative projections.)



HELENE WASHINGTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Untitled Feminist Show, conceived and directed by Young Jean Lee, is a wordless performance at the Jerome Robbins Theater.

The show begins with one of its most striking live images, as the sound of coordinated breathing comes at you from behind, and the performers descend the aisles at the sides of the theater to assemble onstage. Their nudity, in tandem with the synchronized breathing and the stately pace of their descent, evokes a gathering in a private space for some ancient ritual.

Unfortunately the purpose of this ritual never comes into focus. “Untitled Feminist Show” was conceived and directed by Ms. Lee, and choreographed by Faye Driscoll, Morgan Gould and Ms. Lee along with the performers. A program note from Ms. Lee suggests some contradictory impulses at work: she writes that the creators “wanted a world in which people could identify and be however they wanted regardless of their sex.” Exposing the fact of their sex so insistently would seem to undermine this precept, and for that matter isn’t feminism by definition concerned with the fact of gender, however mutable it may sometimes be made to seem?

In any case what is onstage at the Baryshnikov Arts Center, where the show runs through Feb. 4, does not speak very volubly of recognizable feminist ideas. There is certainly something celebratory about the performers’ carefree attitude toward their bodies and the joyful abandon of their movement. (Most of the women are not likely to be swanning down a fashion runway anytime soon.) But nudity is hardly extraordinary in modern dance, or theater for that matter. A few passages in the show — such as a frenzied dance in which the performers cycle through domestic chores like diaper changing, cooking and housecleaning — seem to point toward some comment on the traditional roles of women.

But little else seems to address conventional (or even unconventional) notions of feminism. Any real ideas in “Untitled Feminist Show” are clouded in an amiable but weightless air of general playfulness, and the frequency with which the performers strike ingratiating or flirtatious attitudes toward the audience almost seems to cut against the notion of feminine independence.

Feminist or no, the evening has many appealing sequences. The performance begins with a comic vignette in which Ms. Zirin-Brown appears to portray a witch casting evil spells on the other women, assisted by a deformed creature (Ms. Pyle). The only props in the show are frilly pink parasols that the women cavort with like follies girls, and later use as implements of violence. Ms. Pyle’s creature is felled, in an elaborate dance of death that is one of the evening’s funnier bits.

Ms. Rocke, who shares a rapturous duet with Ms. Pyle that is one of the more sustained dances, later struts and sashays in a solo while vocalizing at the top of her lungs to an impromptu melody. Later, as head-banging metal music plays, Ms. Clark embodies a sort of demonic force, flailing her hair violently both onstage and in the audience — the female as Dionysian celebrant, or potentially destructive force of nature? Ms. Blackwell also has a solo turn in the spotlight, in which she sends up the coy come-ons of a seductress and then suddenly becomes a pugilist, punching and jabbing at the air with impressive ferocity before transforming yet again into a stooped, aged figure. Another memorable sequence finds the casts erupting into giggles, which then spread through their bodies to create a kind of jiggle ballet, which in turn seems to evolve into a rollicking sexual orgy. Ms. Zirin-Brown also has a ribald turn at seducing the audience in a series of extravagantly vulgar flirtations in which she points at various audience members and then mimes sexual acts, a gleefully lewd smile flickering across her face.

Ms. Lee’s program note also states that in the process of creation she discovered that the uninterrupted nudity “prevented the audience from imposing identities on the performers.” I think that is mostly true, and detrimental to the work’s effectiveness. Despite their various body types and distinctive faces, the performers gradually come to seem undifferentiated, alike in their sometimes overly cute or coy playfulness.

The goal of the show, Ms. Lee writes, was to “create a utopian feminist experience,” but shouldn’t any utopia be populated by individuals? Oddly, it was only when the show had concluded, and the cast reappeared fully clothed for the curtain call, that I got a sense of how many ways there are to be an individual woman in the world today.

UNTITLED FEMINIST SHOW

Conceived and directed by Young Jean Lee; choreography by Faye Driscoll, Morgan Gould and Ms. Lee, in collaboration with the performers; director of choreography, Ms. Driscoll; associate director, Ms. Gould; produced by Aaron Rosenblum; sets by David Evans Morris; lighting by Raquel Davis; sound by Chris Giarmo and Jamie McElhinney; projection design by Leah Gelpe; dramaturgy by Mike Farry; production supervisor, Sunny Stapleton; assistant directors, Kate Gagnon and Rachel Karp; costumes by Roxana Ramseur. A Young Jean Lee Theater Company production, presented by Performance Space 122 and the Baryshnikov Arts Center as part of P.S. 122’s Coil festival. At the Baryshnikov Arts Center, Jerome Robbins Theater, 450 West 37th Street, Manhattan; (212) 352-3101; bacnyc.org. Through Feb. 4. Running time: 1 hour.

*WITH: Becca Blackwell, World Famous *BOB*, Amelia Zirin-Brown (a.k.a. Lady Rizo), Hilary Clark, Katy Pyle and Regina Rocke.*

FLASHY MOVES AND LOUD STOMPING AS A FESTIVAL COMES TO A CLOSE

BY GIA KOURLAS

Flashy Moves and Loud Stomping As a Festival Comes to a Close

The final Fall for Dance program opened on Thursday evening with Shen Wei’s too familiar 2003 take on “Rite of Spring.” Yet to give indication of the direness that followed, “Rite of Spring” was the high point.

GIA KOURLAS
DANCE REVIEW

Set to Fazil Say’s four-handed piano version of the Stravinsky score, “Rite of Spring” tells no story but ends up as a rather anemic exercise in music visualization. Mr. Shen works in a palette of grays and chalky whites as the dancers, as emotional as marble statues, use their sleek bodies to mirror the score’s percussive notes. Clipped, shuffling walks are offset by sharp turns, jumps that burst straight into the air and spiraling twists that wind their lithe bodies to the floor and back up again.

In “No Comment,” performed by the South Korean group LDP—Laboratory Dance Project, the choreographer Chang Ho

Shin transforms the stage into a testosterone fantasy. Nine men wear sport coats and move with virile aggression, yet the scene is so stylized that it could be a dance in an Asian boy-band video.

Set to music by Goran Bregovic and the London collective Transglobal Underground, “No Comment” showcases a smattering of hip-hop, martial arts and acrobatics. In the end the dancers pound their chests and gradually strip to bare them. (No comment necessary, but whoa.)

The Australian group Circa, in a circus-variety work of the same name, explore balance, strength and acrobatics. It feels dangerous, not so much because of the movement, but because the performers sometimes seemed to be in control of the choreography and, at other times, gripping their muscles for dear life. Their acrobatic feats are clunky at best and often unattractive: Shoulder

Fall for Dance Dai Jun, near right, and Alex Speedie of Shen Wei Dance Arts in “Rite of Spring,” part of this festival at City Center.

balances involve three people. Women are tossed from man to man. “Circa” provides a diversion, but it can’t be mistaken for a dance.

Maria Pagés Campaia concluded the evening with “Deseo Y Conciencia” (“Desire and Conscience”), an over-skipped flamenco display in which she is flanked by musicians and a six-member ensemble. Ms. Pagés makes three appearances in the piece, which also translates into three costume changes. They take over the show. Standing in a pool of crimson fabric while snaking her arms overhead like tentacles, Ms. Pagés eventually bends over and pulls part of the fabric over her head, like a swamp creature.

Since when in flamenco is footwork an afterthought? Later, wearing a white-and-black concoction featuring a long ruffled train that she whips on the floor like a fistful, Ms. Pagés turns her back and undulates her arms like a swan queen. That isn’t to say she moved like one.



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The Fall for Dance festival continues through Saturday at City Center, 131 West 55th Street, Manhattan; (212) 581-1212, nycitycenter.org.

A VOLATILE STEW, BUBBLING IN THE ANGUISH OF ASSIMILATION

BY GIA KOURLAS

A Volatile Stew, Bubbling in the Anguish of Assimilation

Sunhwa Chung moved to the United States from South Korea in 1994, and in her newest dance, performed by her Ko-Ryo Dance Theater at Dance New Amsterdam on Wednesday evening, she explores ideas about cultural assimilation. How does one hold onto one’s roots? What happens if you pull them out completely?

GIA KOURLAS
DANCE REVIEW

In “Arirang — We Go Beyond the Crossroad,” which is named after a Korean folk song, Ms. Chung stirs up an emotional pot of disorientation and agitation: this dance, with its frequent spurts of gestures and random changes of direction, is in constant danger of boiling over.

Set to a spare composition by the Korean traditional drummer Vongku Pak, the piece opens with a sweet sight nonetheless: Sarang Chung West, 9 years old yet full of self-composure, calmly walks to the center of the stage and performs the title’s song on violin. (She is the choreographer’s daughter.)

After a lengthy blackout — Ms. Chung’s ham-fisted way of transitioning from one section to the next throughout much of the program — three gongs signal a scenic shift. Dancers positioned in different areas of the stage stir like creatures of the night. One wraps her arms around her body and shakes her head from side to side, while another swipes her forehead with her palm. When in doubt, Ms. Chung’s choreographic mode of choice seems to be to jab the air. Throughout “Arirang,” dancers point a finger and swirl it around; it’s the aimless hand jive of contemporary dance sharpened to its narrowest tip.

But the more vigorous movement in “Arirang” is familiar and too similar to other works on the program: there is bland, athletic partnering, in which one dancer

crashes into the other and is propelled into the air, as well as spinning dips to the floor. Dancers rise and fall like yo-yos. There are also touches of violence; for Ms. Chung, assimilation is full of trauma, which is seen in jerky partnering and outright shoves, as well as in the stricken stares of her cast. Are they terrified or angry? It’s hard to know.

While Mr. Pak’s composition has a pulse, the choreography lacks texture. What would happen if Ms. Chung slowed her movement and gave it some air? As it is now, the music could be switched to a random pop song, and it would hardly change a thing. Intentionally or not, “Arirang” is all about disconnection.



Arirang — We Go Beyond the Crossroad Sunhwa Chung stirs up an emotional pot of disorientation and agitation at Dance New Amsterdam.

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Sunhwa Chung/Ko-Ryo Dance Theater continues performances through Saturday at Dance New Amsterdam, 280 Broadway at Chambers Street; (212) 625-8369, dnadance.org.

A FRESH PERCH ON THE CAREER LADDER

BY GIA KOURLAS

Dance

A Fresh Perch on the Career Ladder

Hee Seo begins her first season as a Ballet Theater principal.

By GIA KOURLAS

For Hee Seo, becoming a soloist was a high point of her career. She reached that position in 2010 at American Ballet Theater, and the transition was as natural as breathing.

"When I became a soloist, I wanted to be a soloist," Ms. Seo, born in Seoul, South Korea, said in delicately accented English at the company's Broadway studios. "Maybe I wasn't perfect. I definitely wasn't perfect. But I was on the right path, and I still had room to learn and progress."

But just two years later, toward the end of the company's season at the Metropolitan Opera House in July, Ms. Seo (pronounced SUH) got a surprise: She was named a principal dancer. The news came as a shock, both the promotion and the way Kevin McKenzie, the company's artistic director, announced it. "We always have a meeting of, 'It was a great season, you guys did wonderful, and blah, blah,'" she said. "And then out of nowhere, he said, 'But the best news is Hee got promoted to principal.'"

Alexandre Hammoudi, one of Ms. Seo's frequent partners, said: "It was such a great moment. The whole company was going crazy."

The appointment had momentous implications. Rank aside, ballerinas aren't made, they're born, and Ms. Seo, now 27, didn't know if she could live up to the title.

But there was another reason the company went crazy when she was promoted. At Ballet Theater, where imported stars are increasingly commonplace, Ms. Seo is a homegrown dancer who has worked her way up from the ABT Studio Company to the main company, where she was named an apprentice in 2005 and joined the corps de ballet the following year.

"I've done everything," she said with uncharacteristic determination. Her dancing and fluid line exude an unhurried purity that sums up all that is lovely about ballet. But while dramatic, Ms. Seo is also unassuming: as her delicate back and arms melt into place, Ms. Seo fills the stage with serenity. You see a person as much as a dancer.

"I can just look in her eyes and there is a certain connection that makes me feel very safe," Mr. Hammoudi said. "It's a dream for a partner to have somebody like



Hee Seo, above on a break, and right, rehearsing "The Sleeping Beauty" with David Hallberg at American Ballet Theater's studios.

"I am like a white board. You can just put anything on me now."



PHOTOGRAPH BY AMBERLEA TROTT/NEW YORK TIMES

approach her performance schedule as calmly as possible. This season, which begins May 13, she reprises roles in ballets that suit her transcendently dramatic side — "Romeo and Juliet" and "Onegin" — and will also appear in "A Month in the Country," Frederick Ashton's 1976 reimagining of Turgenev's play, as well as in the second dance of Alexei Ratmansky's highly anticipated Shostakovich trilogy. Finally, Ms. Seo will face one of a ballerina's hardest challenges when she takes on two of a ballerina's technically demanding bunhead roles, with debuts in "Swan Lake" and "The Sleeping Beauty."

In an e-mail statement about Ms. Seo, Mr. McKenzie wrote, "If all turns out well for her in regards to managing the rigors of the profession and the distraction of acclaim, I think she can be one of those artists without limits to what she can do."

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Outside of the studio, Ms. Seo, who has a boyfriend — he isn't a dancer — described herself as "a pretty lazy person. When I have a day off, a day is literally an on-the-bed day." Her parents, she said, help her remain down to earth. "Most of my problems are related to my work, and they just don't have any idea what it is," she said. "Once I got caught up with one performance that didn't go well, and my mom was like, 'O.K., move on.' And I started laughing because what I think is the end of the world is not."

But at Ballet Theater, Ms. Seo realizes that her achievements carry weight. "Sometimes I'm just so concentrated on the things I have to do, but then when I make eye contact with my friends —"

She paused for a moment. "I've been there to support other dancers," she went on, holding a steady gaze. "I know how hard it is for them to be onstage and to be cheerful to other dancers. But they are there for me, and I am so grateful that they are. I feel responsible to dance well, not only for the audience or for me, but also for my friends. I am representing them as well."

Alexandre Hammoudi, one of Ms. Seo's frequent partners, said: "It was such a great moment. The whole company was going crazy."

The appointment had momentous implications. Rank aside, ballerinas aren't made, they're born, and Ms. Seo, now 27, didn't know if she could live up to the title.

But there was another reason the company went crazy when she was promoted. At Ballet Theater, where imported stars are increasingly commonplace, Ms. Seo is a homegrown dancer who has worked her way up from the ABT Studio Company to the main company, where she was named an apprentice in 2005 and joined the corps de ballet the following year.

"I've done everything," she said with uncharacteristic determination.

Her dancing and fluid line exude an unhurried purity that sums up all that is lovely about ballet. But while dramatic, Ms. Seo is also unassuming: as her delicate back and arms melt into place, Ms. Seo fills the stage with serenity. You see a person as much as a dancer.

"I can just look in her eyes and there is a certain connection that makes me feel very safe," Mr. Hammoudi said. "It's a dream for a partner to have somebody like that." The shapes happen so naturally."

The unflappable Ms. Seo, who is more apt to laugh than to become upset about a mistake in the studio, also has the perspective that comes from starting late. She began dancing at 12 in Seoul and went on to train at the Universal Ballet Academy in Washington, where she studied closely with the Kirov ballerina Alla Sizova. After Ms. Seo won a scholarship to the John Cranko Ballet Academy in Stuttgart, Germany, and prizes at the Prix de Lausanne in Switzerland and the Youth American Grand Prix, John Meehan asked her to join the ABT Studio Company. She has remained with Ballet Theater since.

Over the past few months Ms. Seo has worked hard to find peace within the high-pressure rank she now occupies. "I'm at the level of who I looked up to," she said. "But I came to a conclusion that I'm in a process of becoming a better dancer — not exactly a principal dancer, but a better dancer and a better person."

That outlook is helping Ms. Seo approach her performance schedule as calmly as possible. This season, which begins May 13, she reprises roles in ballets that suit her transcendently dramatic side — "Romeo and Juliet" and "Onegin" — and will also appear in

"A Month in the Country," Frederick Ashton's 1976 reimagining of Turgenev's play, as well as in the second dance of Alexei Ratmansky's highly anticipated Shostakovich trilogy. Finally, Ms. Seo will face one of a ballerina's hardest challenges when she takes on two of a ballerina's technically demanding bunhead roles, with debuts in "Swan Lake" and "The Sleeping Beauty."

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For Hee Seo, becoming a soloist was a high point of her career. She reached that position in 2010 at American Ballet Theater, and the transition was as natural as breathing.

"When I became a soloist, I wanted to be a soloist," Ms. Seo, born in Seoul, South Korea, said in delicately accented English at the company's Broadway studios. "Maybe I wasn't perfect. I definitely wasn't perfect. But I was on the right path, and I still had room to learn and progress."

But just two years later, toward the end of the company's season at the Metropolitan Opera House in July, Ms. Seo (pronounced SUH) got a surprise: She was named a principal dancer. The news came as a shock, both the promotion and the way Kevin McKenzie, the company's artistic director, announced it. "We always have a meeting of, 'It was a great season, you guys did wonderful, and blah, blah,'" she said. "And then out of nowhere, he said, 'But the best news is Hee got promoted to principal.'"

AN ELUSIVE BALLET WITH AN ELUSIVE HEROINE

BY ALASTAIR MACAULAY



Gillian Murphy and James Whiteside in American Ballet Theater's "Swan Lake" at the Metropolitan Opera House.

An Elusive Ballet With an Elusive Heroine

"Swan Lake" is all contradictions. Its princely hero, like a knight of King Arthur's Round Table on a quest, commutes between this world and an enchanted one. In the beautiful, transcendent purity that he finds by the lakeside, the ballet's Romantic/classical dualism captures something at the core of what ballet is all about.

Yet this, the most famous and perennial ballet in international repertory, is seldom danced well — or well enough. The two best traditional productions are those of the Mariinsky Ballet in St. Petersburg, Russia, and the Royal Ballet in London — though even if you combined their best features (each is seriously flawed), you could not guarantee a performance worthy of the ballet.

American Ballet Theater's production is one of several soloist versions in the United States. The work itself is so moving and so affecting that it's no wonder at every performance many people stand and cheer. Others, however, often leave shaking their heads and saying, "But that's just not 'Swan Lake.'" Certain performances, though, make us feel this could be "Swan Lake" after all. I watched one New York debut performance last week when Ballet Theater showed it again at the Metropolitan Opera House: Hee Seo (Wednesday matinee) and Maria Kochetkova (Friday, replacing the injured Alina Cojocararu) as the ballet's heroine, Odette, and antiheroine, Odile, and James Whiteside (Thursday) as Prince Siegfried.

Ms. Kochetkova, a principal with San Francisco Ballet, was making her first appearance with Ballet Theater; Ms. Seo, who has worked her way up the ranks, became a principal last July; Mr. Whiteside, who joined the company last September as a soloist, was previously a principal for three years with Boston Ballet.

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Mr. Whiteside, the most successful of these debutants, is an ardent performer. Leading the second cast of the “Chamber Symphony” centerpiece of Alexei Ratmansky’s new “Shostakovich Trilogy” this month, he actually made a stronger impression than the stellar, beautiful David Hallberg had at the May 31 premiere. Mr. Whiteside has the star’s instinct of not just claiming our attention but also taking us into his inner world, and he suggests real force of mind. Announcing himself purposefully as Siegfried in “Swan Lake,” he drove the drama throughout.

A powerful dancer, he’s still stylistically immature. On Thursday, when he raised his leg high in arabesque in an Act I solo, he just threw it loosely. We didn’t see or feel its line as a gesture from the center of his body. He was partnering the redheaded Gillian Murphy, who, though an established virtuoso and principal, is immature in the same way. She’s technically resplendent, but her arms and spine don’t shape the arabesques of Odette or Odile with eloquence.

Even so, you can’t miss how these two excite each other as artists. The great adagio became an emotional progression, as it so seldom is. Ms. Murphy began with regal aloofness and feminine reluctance and reached a highly vulnerable form of trust. At moments she seemed to vibrate, in quite different ways. Before the initial descent to the floor, she froze momentarily — as if indignant, shaking him off coldly. At the adagio’s close, the delicate quiverings of her raised foot (petits battements serrés) against her ankle were the fluttering of wingtips charged with tremulous feeling.

Her Odile — a complex parody of her Odette — cunningly wields don’t-touch-me flashes. And where Odette’s forlorn doubting quality suggests an inner reluctance to give herself to love, Odile’s worldly assurance suggests the antithesis. Ms. Murphy has bravura skills astounding even to those of us who see “Swan Lake” more than we should, and she never takes Siegfried for a fool.

Ms. Kochetkova, Friday’s ballerina, is petite. In replacing Ms. Cojocararu, she was a partner for the short but beloved Ballet Theater star Herman Cornejo. (It’s to be hoped that Ballet Theater will invite the exceptional Ms. Cojocararu back for this part, the ballerina role she has yet to conquer definitively.) As Odette-Odile, Ms. Kochetkova is intermittently successful. She’s completely the mistress of the role’s technique; you can’t easily take your eyes off her; she has moments of marvelous linear amplitude. Her arms often rise from her torso with the full power of swan’s wings, although elsewhere she’s still girlish in manner. Her Odile is without complex allure.

Both physically and stylistically, Mr. Cornejo was ideally suited to several of the soloist roles he has now left behind. Is he the right material for ballet’s princes? Even after some years, some people argue the point. Yet he is so imaginative an artist that he makes each role distinct. The sophisticated nobility he wears in “The Sleeping Beauty” is nothing like the boyish excitement he brings to Siegfried. The text he chooses for his Act III solo is regrettably short-phrased, but it begins and ends superbly. Beating his legs in the air in tremendous cabrioles, brilliantly interspersing his double air turns with pirouettes, he makes it abundantly clear that these steps are expressions of passionate excitement.

Everything Ms. Seo did as Odette and Odile was demure, accomplished, lovely, forgettable. In other dramatic roles she can be admirable. Her Natalia Petrovna in Frederick Ashton’s one-act “Month in the Country” last month, though too youthful, was sophisticated and subtle. What’s mainly missing from Ms. Seo at this stage is stylistic authority. She doesn’t differentiate Odette’s phrases as if they revealed successive thoughts. Does the rigorous classicism of “Swan Lake” inhibit her? As Odette-Odile, the ballerina must absorb the audience with her imagination.

FINE ARTS & FILM

IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

HAEGUE YANG

BY KAREN ROSENBERG

Haegue Yang

Greene Naftali
508 West 26th Street, Chelsea
Through March 24

Haegue Yang's first New York gallery solo, "Multi Faith Room," doesn't quite hold together as an installation. But that may be the idea, judging from the show's reference point: the prayer spaces in airports, which must serve transient worshippers of diverse religious backgrounds.

Ms. Yang, who is from South Korea and works in Seoul and Berlin, has impressive range as a maker of sculptural assemblage. Among the works in this exhibition are several of her "Towers on String," which turn suspended Venetian blinds into architectural fantasias, and her treelike "Towel Light Sculptures," of printed terry cloth, pet accessories and other found objects bound with rope and strung up on clothing racks. Also here is an intriguing pyramid made from cans of Spam covered in gold knitting yarn.

She is less inspired when working in two dimensions, to judge from a series of collages that arrange the patterned interiors of torn-up security envelopes into

benign gradations of color.

Some of the sculptures appear in a large-scale digital wallpaper print (a collaboration with the graphic designer Manuel Raeder), floating in the sky of an upside-down cityscape. Although this piece is well placed, near the gallery's wall of windows, creating a camera-obscure effect, it forces total coherence on works that coexist peacefully enough.

KAREN ROSENBERG

A SKETCH ARTIST ANIMATES A FRATERNITY OF BUMBLERS

BY NICOLAS RAPOLD

The four interrelated tales of “Oki’s Movie,” Hong Sang-soo’s beguiling new film, are preceded by “Pomp and Circumstance,” played over handwritten credits. Elgar’s stately march becomes an ironic refrain to the misadventures and regrets of the three recurring characters, two men and a woman, who navigate different stages in their lives at a film school. The unsubtle musical theme is also a sharp contrast to Mr. Hong’s casually brilliant feat of storytelling, akin to an ingeniously wrought suite of literary short fiction.

The cycle, both comedic and poignant, begins with Jingu (Lee Sun-kyun), a disgruntled film teacher in his 30s, as he bickers with his wife over social plans. Jingu belongs to the hapless brotherhood that Mr. Hong has assembled and refined over a 12-movie oeuvre that includes “Woman Is the Future of Man”: young souls blundering through romantic and professional exchanges, not yet really where they want to be, and, through a mix of cluelessness, libido and misapplied principles, staying there.

These guys often bear artistic aspirations and their hearts on their sleeves but range across a spectrum of likability. The scarf-wrapped Jingu — who browbeats a student (“Your sincerity needs a form”) and proclaims unbidden to a cute photographer in a park that he is a filmmaker — at first comes across as comically pompous and a little pathetic. But when he drunkenly embarrasses a professor at an outing with colleagues,

and at a screening of his own movie is grilled over past personal indiscretions, it’s hard not to feel a little for his face plants.

So fizzles the tale of Jingu the teacher, but what Mr. Hong does with the subsequent segments reconfirms him as one of contemporary cinema’s freshest innovators in narrative form, restlessly (and meaningfully) exploring point of view and how life does and doesn’t add up.

That means not just switching vantages among characters but also within individual experience. The next portion of “Oki’s Movie” unceremoniously clicks back to Jingu as a film student (Mr. Lee again). Not yet overcompensating for career disappointments, Jingu spends his free time relentlessly pursuing a schoolmate, Oki (Jung Yu-mi), and plays down an echo chamber of rumors about a filmmaking prize that he might receive as the favored student of the respected Professor Song.

The film shifts gears twice more: first to delve into the world of Song (Moon Sung-keun), reduced by a snowstorm to teaching a class of two starry-eyed pupils (Jingu and Oki), and finally to seeing things through Oki’s eyes. With her segment, also titled “Oki’s Movie,” Oki reflects on her relationships, analyzing separate strolls she took with Jingu and Song on the same park path. Mr. Hong, an avowed admirer of François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard, outdoes himself here, neatly upturning our perspective on the vagaries of allegedly grown men.

A Sketch Artist Animates A Fraternity of Bumpers

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NICOLAS
RAPOLD

FILM
REVIEW

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All of which might sound schematic on paper, but one of Mr. Hong’s qualities, underrated of late, is a self-effacing yet deeply considered style, applied in this movie to episodes as vivid and offhand as journal recollections (perhaps the filmmaker’s). A park, an anonymous restaurant, a street curb serve as quotidian settings for the stories’ rendezvous. Bracingly light on scene-setting cues, this 80-minute feature gets in and gets out, a model of editorial economy by a formidable sketch artist.

The compact parts of Mr. Hong’s film can seem to fit together abruptly, without tidy explanation, and that may be partly why it has taken time for “Oki’s Movie” to find a run in an American theater. But to recall Jingu’s words, Mr. Hong has found yet another stimulating form for sincerity, not to mention irony and insight, and it’s worth savoring.

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JEONWONSA FILM COMPANY
Lee Sun-kyun, one of three characters in “Oki’s Movie.”

MY WAY

BY NICOLAS RAPOLD



JC ENTERTAINMENT

"My Way," a war movie from Kang Je-kyu stops all over the world.

My Way

Opens on Friday in New York and Los Angeles.

Directed by Kang Je-kyu
In Korean, Japanese, Russian and German, with English subtitles
2 hours 24 minutes

"My Way" is a lot of war movie. This corny globe-trotting melodrama about a friendship strained by World War II is Kang Je-kyu's lavish follow-up effort to his domestic hit "Tae Guk Gi." The friendship story line acts mostly to tie together enthusiastically shot battle-field set pieces, innumerable episodes of intra-army abuse, and generally demonstrations of heroic endurance amid wretchedness.

Before the bullets and bodies start flying, a Korean boy named Jun-shik and his Japanese pal Tatsuo, whose grandfather employs Jun-shik's father, bond over their love of running during Japan's occupation of Korea. Some years later Jun-shik's violent objection to a rigged Olympic qualifying race wins him conscription in the Japanese Army, where he runs into Tatsuo, now a colonel (played by Joe Odagiri).

Life in the Japanese Army for Jun-shik (Jang Dong-gun) is filled with beatings, raw deals and humiliation. Then a Soviet victory sends the two friends on a brutal involuntary tour of prisoner-of-war purgatory, which includes more conscription, capture by the Nazis and reunion at Normandy on D-Day.

The battle scenes by land and sea — in China, the Soviet Union and France — are of the throw-everything-on-screen-and-see-what-sticks school of war filmmaking, with scenarios cribbed from "Saving Private Ryan" and other Western genre films. The bloody chaos can be suitably overwhelming, but you're too aware of the whizzing camerawork, helter-skelter editing and bombastic score. "My Way" is billed as the most expensive Korean film ever, but at around \$23 million — compared with the reported \$140 million cost of "Pearl Harbor" — Mr. Kang's assaultive picture seems a bargain.

As for people, whose inner lives occasionally figure into the experience of strife, Mr. Odagiri and Mr. Jang's characters come into focus, against a mostly mugging cast, as handsome symbols of brotherhood in arms against all odds in a world where war is hell.

NICOLAS RAPOLD

"My Way" is rated R (Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian). Graphic violence.

HE TICKLED HIS FUNNY BONE, AND OURS

BY KAREN ROSENBERG

WASHINGTON

It's been a while — more than a decade — since the last big American survey of Nam June Paik (1932-2006), the avant-garde musician, multimedia wizard and video art pioneer. That's a whole epoch in the history of the Internet, and eons in the shelf life of consumer electronics; the chunky televisions Paik tinkered with, the building blocks for his most famous installations, are now obsolete. Yet much of his work, as seen in "Nam June Paik: Global Visionary," at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, feels startlingly current.

Paik, from our current vantage point, looks like a master prognosticator. He coined the term "electronic superhighway." He was one of the first artists — possibly the first, period — to use a portable video recorder. And he foresaw the expansion of television into a dizzying array of niche channels, even if he didn't quite guess that it would spring out of the box and sever its ties to the cathode-ray tube.

His 1973 video "Global Groove" opens with the pronouncement, "This is a glimpse of the video landscape of tomorrow, when you will be able to switch to any TV station on the earth, and TV Guide will be as fat as the Manhattan telephone book."

Contemporary artists like Christian Marclay, Jon Kessler, Cory Arcangel, Ryan Trecartin and Haroon Mirza owe a great deal to his tweaked televisions and frenetic, technically innovative videos. (Mr. Marclay and Mr. Arcangel, it's worth noting, share Paik's back-

ground in experimental music and sometimes seem to be channeling his early Fluxus works.)

Also ahead of its time was Paik's cross-cultural aesthetic, shaped by his experiences living in Korea (where he was born), Japan, Germany and the United States. His videos channel-flip from avant-garde performances to folk rituals to kitschy dance numbers, all of it made MTV-ready with bright colors and painterly postproduction. I would love to see what he could have done with "Gangnam Style." (I imagine it would have rivaled the excellent parody by Ai Weiwei.)

The "Global Visionary" exhibition was organized by John G. Hanhardt, the curator of major surveys of Paik at the Whitney Museum of American Art (in 1982) and the Guggenheim Museum (in 2000). The present show is distinguished from its predecessors by a large and fascinating trove of material from the Nam June Paik archive, acquired by the Smithsonian from the artist's estate in 2009. It contains folk sculptures and early-model electronics, as well as notes, photographs and correspondence. (Mr. Hanhardt, writing in the catalog, calls it Paik's "memory/image bank.")

The exhibition opens with two large installations, arranged on opposite sides of a long hallway, that attest to the conflicting impulses in Paik's art. To the left is the Minimalist Zen "TV Clock" (1963/1989), a row of 24 color televisions that collectively evoke a clock face or sundial; their cathode-ray tubes have been compressed so that their screens display thin lines that tilt in various directions.

To the right is the disorienting “Megatron/Matrix” (1995), made up of 215 monitors playing eight different video channels; here, athletes from the Seoul Olympics meet Korean folk dancers and semi-clothed women.

The psychic split is also evident inside the main gallery, where restrained early-1960s works like “Zen for TV” (more televisions as linear abstractions) surround the theatrical centerpiece: 1974’s “TV Garden,” a thicket of live plants that seem to have sprouted monitors screening “Global Groove.”

Works like “Magnet TV” (1965), in which a large magnet placed atop a black-and-white television set generates abstract patterns, marry art and technology with striking simplicity. But slightly later creations, like 1969’s “TV Cello” and “TV Bra for Living Sculpture,” played and worn by Paik’s charismatic collaborator Charlotte Moorman, better capture his mischievous, performative streak.

So do works that make humorous use of closed-circuit video, like the Nauman-esque “TV Chair,” which makes the sitter simultaneously an object of surveillance and a hindrance to it. He was not above creating one-liners, or repeating them; in “TV Buddha” a statue meditates on its own televised image. (A later version of the piece, made for the Whitney show, incorporated a small model of Rodin’s “Thinker” and a Sony Watchman portable television.)

It’s difficult to remember, in our age of digital video editing, that the special effects in Paik’s more elaborate videos — the collagelike layering, the hallucinogenic color changes and distortions — weren’t so easy to achieve in his day. With the Japanese engineer Shuya Abe, he invented one of the first video synthesizers (now known as the Paik/Abe video synthesizer). The machine, he once wrote:

*will enable us to shape the TV screen canvas
as precisely as Leonardo
as freely as Picasso
as colorfully as Renoir
as profoundly as Mondrian
as violently as Pollock
and as lyrically as Jasper Johns.*

And in his masterpiece “Global Groove,” which can be seen in a screening room as well as in the installation “TV Garden,” he did all of these things.

The show could have done with fewer of Paik’s off-screen paintings and drawings, particularly the scribbles on newspaper made after he suffered a debilitating stroke in 1996. And it might have worked in even more selections from the archive: the objects here, arranged on shelves and cataloged on a touch-screen, are engrossing. Among them are antique bird cages (collected for tributes to his friend and mentor John Cage); old-fashioned console televisions; homemade robots; and a marvelous painted-plaster elephant, culture of origin unknown, that appeared in his installation at the 1993 Venice Biennale.

Much like the videos, the archive is a grand bazaar of folk art and audiovisual gadgetry. And it will help ensure that artists keep picking up Paik’s signals, no matter what the television of the future looks like.

“Nam June Paik: Global Visionary” is on view through Aug. 11 at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Eighth and F Streets NW, Washington; (202) 633-1000, americanart.si.edu.

He Tickled His Funny Bone, and Ours

WASHINGTON — It’s been a while — more than a decade — since the last big American survey of Nam June Paik (1932–2006), the avant-garde musician, multimedia wizard and video art pioneer. That’s a whole epoch in the history of the Internet, and even in the shelf life of consumer electronics; the chunky televisions Paik tinkered with, the bulking blocks for his most famous installations, are now obsolete. Yet much of his work, as seen in “Nam June Paik: Global Visionary,” at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, feels startlingly current.

Paik, from our current vantage point, looks like a master prognosticator. He coined the term “electronic superhighway.” He was one of the first artists — possibly the first, period — to use a portable video recorder. And he foresaw the expansion of television into a dizzying array of niche channels, even if he didn’t quite guess that it would spring out of the box and sever its ties to the cathode-ray tube.

His 1973 video “Global Groove” opens with the pronouncement, “This is a glimpse of the video landscape of tomorrow, when you will be able to switch to any TV station on the earth, and TV Guide will be as fat as the Manhattan telephone book.”

Contemporary artists like Christian Marclay, Jon Kessler, Cory Arcangel, Ryan Trecartin and Haason Mirza owe a great deal to his revealed televisions and frenetic, technically innovative videos. (Mr. Marclay and Mr. Arcangel, it’s worth noting, share Paik’s background in experimental music and sometimes seem to be channeling his early Fluxus works.)

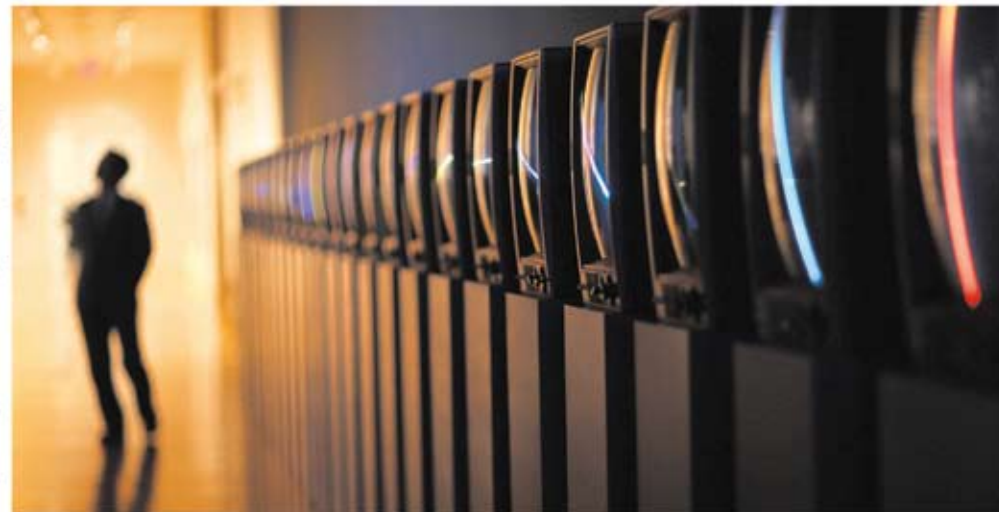
Also ahead of its time was Paik’s cross-cultural aesthetic, shaped by his experiences living in Korea (where he was born), Japan, Germany and the United States. His videos channel-flip from avant-garde performances to folk rituals to kitschy dance numbers, all of it made MTV-ready with bright colors and painterly postproduction. I would love to see what he could have done with “Gangnam Style.” (I imagine it would have rivaled the excellent parody by Ai Weiwei.)

The “Global Visionary” exhibition was organized by John G. Hanhardt, the curator of major surveys of Paik at the Whitney Museum of American Art (in 1982) and the Guggenheim Museum (in 2006). The present show is distinguished from its predecessors by a large and fascinating trove of material from the Nam June Paik archive, acquired by the Smithsonian from the artist’s estate in 2009. It contains folk sculptures and early-model electronics, as well as notes, photographs and correspondence. (Mr. Hanhardt, writing in the catalog, calls it Paik’s “memory/image bank.”)

The exhibition opens with two large installations, arranged on opposite sides of a long hallway, that attest to the conflicting impulses in Paik’s art. To the left is



“Whitney Buddha Complex: TV Buddha” (1982), a statue pondering its televised image, evidence of Paik’s sense of humor.



“TV Clock” (1963/1989), above, and “TV Garden” (1974/2000), below, at the Nam June Paik show, which includes writing and folk art from the artist’s archives.



Nam June Paik
Global Visionary
Smithsonian American Art Museum

achieve in his day. With the Japanese engineer Shuya Abe, he invented one of the first video synthesizers (now known as the Paik/Abe video synthesizer). The machine, he once wrote:

will enable us to shape the TV screen canvas as precisely as Leonardo as freely as Picasso as colorfully as Renoir as profoundly as Mondrian as violently as Pollock and as lyrically as Jasper Johns.

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the Minimalist Zen “TV Clock” (1963/1989), a row of 24 color televisions that collectively evoke a clock face or sundial; their cathode-ray tubes have been compressed so that their screens display thin lines that tilt in various directions.

To the right is the disorienting “Megatron/Matrix” (1995), made up of 215 monitors playing eight different video channels; here, athletes from the Seoul Olympics meet Korean folk dancers and semi-clothed women.

The psychic split is also evident inside the main gallery, where restrained early-1960s works like “Zen for TV” (more televisions as linear abstractions) surround the theatrical centerpiece: 1974’s “TV Garden,” a thicket of live plants that seem to have sprouted monitors screening “Global Groove.”

Works like “Magnet TV” (1965), in which a large magnet placed atop a black-and-white television set generates abstract patterns, marry art and technology with striking simplicity. But

slightly later creations, like 1969’s “TV Cello” and “TV Bra for Living Sculpture,” played and worn by Paik’s charismatic collaborator Charlotte Moorman, better capture his mischievous, performative streak.

So do works that make humorous use of closed-circuit video, like the Nauman-esque “TV Chair,” which makes the sitter simultaneously an object of surveillance and a hindrance to it. He was not above creating one-

liners, or repeating them; in “TV Buddha” a statue meditates on its own televised image. (A later version of the piece, made for the Whitney show, incorporated a small model of Rodin’s “Thinker” and a Sony Watchman portable television.)

It’s difficult to remember, in our age of digital video editing, that the special effects in Paik’s more elaborate videos — the collagelike layering, the hallucinogenic color changes and distortions — weren’t so easy to

DORYUN CHONG, ON ART, ARCHITECTURE AND CONSERVATION IN SEOUL

BY EMILY BRENNAN

The Seoul of today, said Doryun Chong, a curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, is far different from the one he left in 1992, the year South Korea elected its first civilian leader after three decades of military rule. Instead of student protesters and riot police, the city center now brims with museums, galleries and restaurants. And its transformation is still under way, said Mr. Chong, particularly where art and architecture are concerned: “All of those ‘what do you preserve, and what do you not?’ questions,” as he put it.

Below are edited excerpts from a conversation with Mr. Chong about how to see art in Seoul and understand the history behind it.

Q. Where do you go to see modern and contemporary art in Seoul?

A. The past decade Artsonje Center and the Leeum, Museum of Art have given spaces for a new generation of Korean artists like Lee Bul and Haegue Yang to show. Because they were becoming so internationally active and sophisticated, the museums had to keep up. Artists took the lead in many ways.

The Leeum (below) started as the personal collection of Lee Byung Chull, Samsung’s founder. During colonial times, much of Korean heritage was taken by the Japanese, and he thought of it as his mission to build a collection of traditional Korean art. With the new generation inheriting the leadership, the collection grew to include modern and contemporary Korean art and important masterpieces by Western artists like Cy Twombly, Mark Rothko, Damien Hirst.

Q. How do you find out about exhibitions in Seoul?

A. ArtInfo is quite useful, and ArtForum’s art guide is excellent. You can search by the region, country, city, and it lists all of these exhibits and galleries.

Q. Where do you find most of these galleries?

A. Bukchon, an area known for having traditional houses, with pagoda-style slate roofs, which is quite rare in Seoul because much of that has been destroyed. It’s right around Gyeongbokgung Palace. Quite lovely area. Many important gallerists like Kukje and Hyundai moved near there.

Q. The National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea, is opening a new branch in that area in November. What do you think of the space?

A. I did a hard-hat tour of the seven main galleries in October, and the scale is impressive. The national museum is outside Seoul and doesn’t get as many visitors as it should. For a branch to be situated there, smack in the middle of the tourist area, next to the palace, is fantastic. But I was a little ambivalent at first. The museum’s site was the headquarters of the Defense Security Command, where, under the military dictatorship, student activists and political prisoners were brought in to be tortured and interrogated. This is a building with a lot of history and ghosts.

The structure itself is a rare surviving example of early Korean modernist architecture. So I began to wonder what the other options were — turn it into a monument or some kind of memorial — but that’s not the most interesting way to think about historical and architectural heritage. In the end, I thought the site becoming part of the national museum was not a bad idea.

Q. Do you usually advocate for preservation?

A. Not necessarily. In the ’90s, there was all of this discussion over the Japanese Governor General Building, this beautiful, stone Beaux-Arts-style building. Preservationists believed it should be kept because even the colonial remnants are part of our history. But there was all this — some will call it theory; some, historical truth — that the Japanese built this building to block the qi from the mountains. Living outside of the country, I was quite cautious of the nationalist sentiment, how it affects our reading of history. But once the building was demolished, I saw how the whole vista opened up. This is what I love about Seoul: it’s a very big, very vibrant city, and yet everywhere you turn you see mountains.

Q&A

DORYUN CHONG, on art, architecture and conservation in Seoul.



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WONHAEE/CHONG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A MYSTERIOUS REALM OF EXQUISITE OBJECTS

BY KEN JOHNSON

A Mysterious Realm of Exquisite Objects

Here's a good question for "Jeopardy!": One of the world's longest-running dynasties, it emerged around 57 B.C. and grew to dominate the Korean Peninsula in the seventh and eighth centuries before meeting its demise in A.D. 935.

The answer: What was Silla?

If the name Silla is unfamiliar, it might be partly because no major museum exhibition about this kingdom's art, craft and culture has been mounted in the West until now. "Silla: Korea's Golden Kingdom," at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, presents more than 130 objects dating from A.D. 400 to around 800, organized by Soyoung Lee, associate curator, and Denise Leidy, curator, in the Met's Asian art department, with colleagues at the National Museum of Korea in Seoul and the Gyeongju National Museum.

The first of the show's three sections presents small objects excavated from fifth- and sixth-century royal tombs buried under enormous earthen mounds in Silla's capital city, Gyeongju, near the peninsula's southeastern coast. It was customary to put valuables in tombs to provide the dead with resources in the afterlife. The jewelry, pottery, metal vessels and weapons here from early Silla belong to a culture based in shamanism and influenced by the arts of horse-riding tribes of the Eurasian steppes. Most conspicuous are pieces of delicate, gleaming gold jewelry, including dangling earrings made of links, rings and geometric and organic forms. There are also necklaces

"Silla: Korea's Golden Kingdom" runs through Feb. 23 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; 212-535-7710, metmuseum.org.



Religion and opulence from Korea at the Metropolitan Museum's "Silla" exhibition: a bronze bodhisattva from the seventh century, and a gold crown with chains and jade that is accompanied by a belt with gold charms.

Silla
Korea's Golden Kingdom
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

made of glass beads, another favorite material in Silla jewelry.

The pièce de résistance is a crown in the form of a gold headband with attached, upright, branchlike elements cut from thin gold sheets. Many small, comma-shaped pieces of jade are attached by fine wires, and chains of spangles and leaf shapes hang down from the headband, all of which adds to its appearance of gaudy opulence. The crown is accompanied by a belt of linked squares of flattened gold from which dangle gold charms in the shapes of a fish, a knife, tweezers and a medicine bottle. Like a number of other

works in the exhibition, the crown and the belt have been designated Korean National Treasures.

The pottery is striking for its simplified form, all-gray surface and abstract decoration consisting of finely incised lines and geometric shapes. One enormous bottle has the shape of a bubble about two feet in diameter. There's not a lot of representational imagery in the first section, but a delightful little stoneware vessel in the form of a dragon-tortoise hybrid from the early sixth century attests to a lively mythic imagination. So do several eighth-century sculptures of zodiac figures in the show's second part, including a wonderful pair of sword-wielding deities with human bodies and animal heads (a horse's and a bear's) crisply carved in high relief from cutting-board-size slabs of agalmatolite.

Many objects found in the tombs



raises the fingers of his right hand to touch his cheek while resting his right foot on the thigh of his left leg. This sculpture — also a Korean National Treasure — is jaw-droppingly beautiful, and it exudes an infectious serenity.

The last piece in the exhibition, a massive, larger-than-life Buddha seated in the lotus position, made of cast iron in the late eighth or early ninth century, is equally compelling. But in contrast to the youthful bodhisattva, this one seems ancient, a monumental embodiment of timeless cosmic consciousness.

The works in this section, including many smaller representations of Buddhist divinities in stone and gold and other metals, show that, along with Buddhist beliefs, came what seems a suddenly enhanced skill in figurative representation among Silla's artisans. They obviously learned from Indian and Chinese examples, but the leap from the comparatively primitive works to these pieces of world-class sophistication is dumbfounding.

Silla's embrace of Buddhism also brought about a change in its burial practices. No longer were the dead interred with valuable works of art for the afterlife. Under Buddhism, art would be for living beings, and so it would have a large public dimension. And since gold was used profusely in Silla's Buddhist public art, the nation acquired the moniker "the golden kingdom."

Many, if not most, of the greatest works of Silla art are site-specific and unmovable. One of the most prized is the Seokguram Grotto, an underground, dome-ceilinged room occupied by a colossal seated Buddha all made of granite. Here, a fascinating short video gives a tour of it and shows, by digital animation, how it was put together. After seeing it, you might experience an irresistible urge to book a trip to Gyeongju.

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Many objects found in the tombs were evidently not of local origin. The second section of the exhibition presents glassware believed to have come from Rome and China and an extraordinary dagger and sheath resplendently decorated in curvy gold tracery inlaid with colored glass and garnet. This luxurious fifth-century weapon is thought have hailed from the Black Sea area or Central Asia. Imported artifacts like these bespeak a cosmopolitan society whose trade routes reached far and wide in the known world.

Nothing in the exhibition's first two parts prepares you for the third section, which finds Silla galvanized and unified by a new and powerful import: Buddhism, which became the kingdom's state religion between 527 and 535. One of the most captivating pieces here is a three-foot-high sculpture of a young, lithe bodhisattva made of gilded bronze. Smiling sweetly, he nods his head and raises the fingers of his right hand to touch his cheek while resting his right foot on the thigh of his left leg. This sculpture — also a Korean National Treasure — is jaw-droppingly beautiful, and it exudes an infectious serenity.

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FOOD

IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

THE BO SSAM MIRACLE

BY SAM SIFTON

January 15, 2012

EAT



The Bo Ssam Miracle

A recipe for slow-roasted Korean pork turns anyone with an oven and a few hours into a chef.

By SAM SIFTON

This weekend's dinner is a slow-roasted shoulder of pig, a meal that can be picked apart by a table of friends armed only with chopsticks and lettuce. A tight and salty caramel crust sits on top of the moist, fragrant collapse of meat, and juices run thick to pool beneath it, a kind of syrup, delicious in its intensity. It is pork as *pommes soufflé*.

The dish is known in Korea as *bo ssam* — pork wrapped like a package in fresh greens, with rice and kimchi. David Chang, the chef and an owner of a small restaurant empire in New York and abroad, offers an exemplary version at his Momofuku Ssam Bar in Manhattan's East

Village for \$200, where it serves 6 to 10 people and regularly blows minds.

That you can achieve almost exactly the same result at home for a fraction of the cost is both a testament to Chang's magnanimity (he published a recipe for the dish in his recent "Momofuku" cookbook) and also an example of how important it is for chefs to be able to write good recipes.

The best restaurant kitchens are filled with exceptional cooks, or are meant to be. This is particularly the case in the kitchens run by Chang, whose restless, inventive cooking requires a great deal of skill and training. You cannot stuff mushroom caps in a sports bar and then expect to get a job working for him straight

out of culinary school. (You can try!) But hacks will still sometimes get in the door, just as they do in every game: craftsmen rather than artists, regular joes, people exactly like most of us.

For them, perhaps (for us, for sure!), recipes like Chang's *bo ssam* are a godsend. They make any cook appear to be better than he or she really is, elevating average kitchen skills into something that approaches alchemy. Tell no one how easy this all turns out to be, though. Simply cook the food and serve it and watch as those at your table devour the meat in a kind of trance.

The drill is simple. Buy a pork shoulder — it

COMMENT Your thoughts are welcome at nytimes.com/magazine. Sam Sifton on Twitter: @samsifton.

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The drill is simple. Buy a pork shoulder — it is generally labeled "Boston butt" in supermarket meat racks. Rinse and dry it with paper towels and cover it in a large bowl with salt and sugar, a dry brine that will begin to cure the meat. The next day, put the shoulder in a low oven for six hours, until the meat surrenders and becomes a kind of heap. Let it rest. Turn the oven on high. Slather on brown sugar and salt, and blast it into lacquer. Rest it again, then serve. (The skin at this point will have fused into a kind of caramel bark; you may need to use a pair of tongs to get at the meat.)

Meanwhile, make condiments. Chang, like most proper New Yorkers, is addicted to the ginger-scallion sauce used to flavor noodles at the Chinatown restaurant Great N.Y. Noodletown. The brightness of the ginger in his version, as well as the zap of the scallions, is an excellent match for the pork.

You will need spice too, something with some heat to it, to provide contrast. *Kochujang*, a sweet Korean hot-pepper paste, is one possibility, as is its cousin *ssamjang*, a fiery soybean paste. Chang thins out *ssamjang* with oil and sherry vinegar to achieve a marvelous result. Having all three sauces on the table would not be a waste.

From-scratch kimchi is a tall order for weekend warriors (it takes weeks to achieve the proper taste and fermentation). But commercial varieties are available in some supermarkets and online. In a pinch you can buy new pickles and amplify them with red pepper. Rigorous testing confirms their deliciousness in a homemade *bo ssam*.

There should be rice on the table and clean, cold bibb lettuce in which to wrap everything up. Chang suggests raw oysters as well. "I like the textural contrast," he says, "as well as the temperature contrast." But these are not strictly necessary for the miracle to occur.

What is necessary: close attention to the final disposition of the pork itself, when you return it to the oven to build its crust. "Once that last bit of sugar and salt is on there and the meat is back in a hot oven," Chang says, "you want to watch it carefully. You're not looking for a color so much as for the moment when the fat and the skin begins to fluff up a little. It's not so much about the sugar caramelizing as it is about the fat starting to bubble."

When that happens — Chang calls it the soufflé effect — you are ready to go. The meat should look roughly like a deflated and yet strangely attractive football. Let it rest a little while longer (take some of the sugar-thickened fat and whisk it into your thinned-out *ssamjang* for some extra oomph) while you gather together a quorum to eat.

Now take a piece of lettuce to show others the way. Place into it a torn string of meat, a dab of rice, some hot sauce or kimchi or pickles. Fold and bite, fold and bite. Try it with a scissored shard of the candied pigskin. Or with an oyster. Or both. Repeat.

Chang served *bo ssam* at his new restaurant in Australia recently. "We put a lot of sugar on the meat at the end," he says, "and served it like a pork petit four." Most of the diners had eaten a full tasting menu already, so Chang did not think people would really eat the *ssam*. It was almost abusive, he felt: "People were full, you know, they'd eaten like 10 courses already."

But then he looked out at the dining room. The *ssams* were being taken apart as if by frenzied animals. "People were just housing them," Chang said. "They smell it and they look at it and they just go crazy." See for yourself.

Momofuku Bo Ssam

Pork Butt

1 whole bone-in pork butt or picnic ham (8 to 10 pounds)

1 cup white sugar

1 cup plus 1 tablespoon kosher salt

7 tablespoons brown sugar

Ginger-Scallion Sauce

2½ cups thinly sliced scallions, both green and white parts

½ cup peeled, minced fresh ginger

¼ cup neutral oil (like grapeseed)

1½ teaspoons light soy sauce

1 scant teaspoon sherry vinegar

½ teaspoon kosher salt, or to taste

Ssam Sauce

2 tablespoons fermented bean-and-chili paste (*ssamjang*, available in many Asian markets, and online)

1 tablespoon chili paste (*kochujang*, available in many Asian markets, and online)

½ cup sherry vinegar

½ cup neutral oil (like grapeseed)

Accompaniments

2 cups plain white rice, cooked

3 heads bibb lettuce, leaves separated, washed and dried

1 dozen or more fresh oysters (optional)

Kimchi (available in many Asian markets, and online)

1. Place the pork in a large, shallow bowl. Mix the white sugar and 1 cup of the salt together in another bowl, then rub the mixture all over the meat. Cover it with plastic wrap and place in the refrigerator for at least 6 hours, or overnight.

2. When you're ready to cook, heat oven to 300. Remove pork from refrigerator and discard any juices. Place the pork in a roasting pan and set in the oven and cook for approximately 6 hours, or until it collapses, yielding easily to the tines of a fork. (After the first hour, baste hourly with pan juices.) At this point, you may remove the meat from the oven and allow it to rest for up to an hour.

3. Meanwhile, make the ginger-scallion sauce. In a large bowl, combine the scallions with the rest of the ingredients. Mix well and taste, adding salt if needed.

4. Make the *ssam* sauce. In a medium bowl, combine the chili pastes with the vinegar and oil, and mix well.

5. Prepare rice, wash lettuce and, if using, shuck the oysters. Put kimchi and sauces into serving bowls.

6. When your accompaniments are prepared and you are ready to serve the food, turn oven to 500. In a small bowl, stir together the remaining tablespoon of salt with the brown sugar. Rub this mixture all over the cooked pork. Place in oven for approximately 10 to 15 minutes, or until a dark caramel crust has developed on the meat. Serve hot, with the accompaniments. Serves 6 to 10.

Adapted from "Momofuku," by David Chang and Peter Meehan.

TILL THE LAST DOUGHNUT AND DRUMSTICK

BY PETE WELLS

PHILADELPHIA

A Doughnut was falling, and everyone in the restaurant watched.

The woman behind the counter at Federal Donuts in the Pennsport neighborhood here might have reached just a bit too high, or else she never really had a grip on it. Whatever happened, the doughnut slipped from her fingers and began to tumble through space.

Almost all of the two dozen or so customers packed into the tiny room stood motionless, wondering if anything could stop the plunge.

The outcome was going to have a direct effect on one of those bystanders, who would not be getting a cinnamon-apple-walnut doughnut that day. Federal Donuts starts out each morning at 7 with somewhere around 150 glazed doughnuts, more on weekends. When they are gone, there are no more until the next day.

When the restaurant first opened, in October, and for many weeks after that, the glazed doughnuts would sell out by 9:30 or 10 a.m. The hopeful would arrive early, parking in front of fire hydrants and even on the sidewalk. Some wrote rapturously on Yelp of tasting the doughnuts, and others wrote bitterly of trying to taste one and failing.

When the doughnut began its descent toward the floor, the time was already past 11. Caramel-banana and brown-sugar grapefruit glazes had already sold out. For some other flavors, like cinnamon-apple-walnut, the shelves held just two or three more.

By that point, I'd already tasted every flavor in the shop. And I understood why two dozen pairs of eyes were watching the path of the dropped doughnut. I even understood the unconventional parking arrangements. These were world-class doughnuts.

The flavors of the glazes were true and clean. There was one called piña colada, which did not taste very much like the average piña colada, but did taste exactly like ripe pineapple and a newly cracked-open coconut. Another glaze caught the galvanizing brightness that passion fruit has in the tropics, and was coated with poppy seeds that weren't just decorative but delicious, with a marked nuttiness and sweetness.

What really caught my attention, though, was the doughnut itself. Doughnut aficionados tend to revere delicate and tender yeast doughnuts above cake doughnuts, and often they are right. Cake doughnuts can be dry and dense. Federal Donuts sells cake doughnuts, yet they are rich, creamy and light all at once.

The crowd groaned. The doughnut had hit the floor. Yes, there were more. But not enough. There are almost never enough.

Neither does the supply of fried chicken meet the demand. The only other item on the menu, not counting coffee, the chicken is sold by a number system. On the day I visited, around 80 red cards were distributed starting a little before noon, each one entitling the bearer to a golden, juicy half chicken. The last card was handed out 35 minutes later.

Some cities have speakeasies where would-be customers step into an antique phone booth to petition for entry. Others have underground supper clubs. At the moment, though, Philadelphia's most dedicated eaters covet no prize more than a red ticket at Federal Donuts, with the possible exception of the morning's last glazed doughnut.

The restaurant is the third opened by the chef Michael Solomonov. His high-end venture, Zahav, explores the flavors of contemporary Israel. He and a business partner, Steven Cook, also operate Percy Street Barbecue. They wanted to do a fried chicken place, and got together with some friends who were interested in opening a coffee shop. Somewhere along the line, nobody quite remembers how, doughnuts entered the picture.

For a chef with Mr. Solomonov's background (he worked in some of this city's most highly regarded kitchens, including Vetri and Striped Bass) to lavish his skills on drumsticks and a piece of equipment called a Donut Robot may strike some as pandering. But making a more delicious version of something that is both beloved and neglected is an ambition that feels like a calling to many chefs these days.

To Mr. Solomonov, selling doughnuts for \$2 or less, and half chickens for \$9 or whole ones for \$17, is a way to tap into the growing crowd of potential customers with more enthusiasm than money.

"It's a strange time with restaurants right now," Mr. Solomonov said in a phone interview. "On the one hand, you've got people who are willing to eat anything, provided you market it properly. On the other hand, I don't know what's happening in fine dining, but you don't see prices going up. You see more people interested in food, and more places, but less money."

Federal Donuts also reflects an impatience with the rhythms of fine dining that may be generational. (Mr. Solomonov is 33.) "Frankly, I'm not that interested in eating at the type of places where I used to work," he said. One of the inspirations for Federal Donuts is a Korean fried-chicken spot called Café Soho in this city's Cheltenham neighborhood.

"The décor is so ridiculously gaudy," he said. "They've got half Korean and half American pop playing at 2,000 decibels at all hours, they stay open until 2 a.m., and I've never had wings as good as this."

The chef in charge of Federal Donuts, and the one who recently developed a s'mores doughnut featuring a marshmallow glaze browned with a blowtorch, is Zachary Engel. He has a kind of silent partner in the kitchen, too: a New York spice merchant named Lior Lev Sercarz.

In addition to the glazed doughnuts, there are doughnuts fried to order. While still hot, these are sprinkled with sugar and a little sea salt mixed with one of Mr. Lev Sercarz's blends, like lavender with powdered vanilla or cocoa with orange blossom. The batter for all the doughnuts contains a Lev Sercarz mix that Mr. Solomonov describes as "almost like Turkish pumpkin pie spice."

The chicken is heavily informed by Mr. Lev Sercarz's work as well. It can be dusted with a dry version of harissa or with za'atar, the Middle Eastern mix of herbs with sesame seeds.

Leaving the realm of the spices, it can also be dressed with a gentle honey-ginger glaze, or with a potent one of red chile and garlic. Unadorned, or "naked" in the restaurant's parlance, the chicken is quite good but will not have many cooks from Tennessee or New Orleans or even New York running to Philadelphia for lessons. The seasonings, especially the chile-garlic glaze and the za'atar, boost it into the realm of the extraordinary.

Federal Donuts has six stools, no chairs and an undecorated restroom just off the kitchen. The place is not built for lingering, and humans competing for limited food resources are not known for sociability. Yet the mood is festive.

When Blake Feldman, who managed the chicken-distribution system, called No. 8, a young woman jumped up and said: "Oh, that's me! Yeah! I'm so excited! Thank you so much! This is, like, my best morning!"

A few minutes later, it emerged that it was Ms. Feldman's birthday. The customers, whether they had been fed yet or not, sang to her. Ms. Feldman said there was no place she would rather spend the day. And we believed her.

Federal Donuts, 1219 South Second Street (Manton Street), Philadelphia, (267) 687-8258; federaldonuts.com.

EASY KOREAN BIBIMBAP FOR HOME COOKS

BY TARA PARKER-POPE

The classic Korean dish known as bibimbap starts with a large serving of rice placed in the center of a hot bowl. The rice is surrounded with hot and cold seasoned vegetables, small amounts of meat and sauce and topped with an egg, and the entire thing is eventually stirred together by eager diners.

It's a delicious dish and eminently versatile, as Martha Rose Shulman demonstrates in the latest Recipes for Health:

Bibimbap can also provide a palette for leftovers. The Korean cookbook author Hi Soo Shin Hepinstall writes, in "Growing Up in a Korean Kitchen," of how her family enjoyed the dish for days after family celebrations, when there would be many delectable leftovers on hand.

The concept of bibimbap is perfect for Recipes for Health. I've broken with tradition and have chosen to make this week's recipes with brown rice and other grains. You can use the recipes as templates and choose whatever vegetables you like. The recipes call for 2 to 3 ounces of protein per serving, as this dish is really about the grains and vegetables. But if you are feeding hungry teenage boys, as I am, you may want to increase those quantities.

Here are five new ways to make bibimbap.

Bibimbap With Tuna, Sweet Potato, Broccoli Rabe or Kale, and Lettuce: Tuna steaks, sliced thinly after cooking, are a vehicle for a traditional Korean marinade.

Bibimbap With Tofu, Cucumbers, Spinach, Shiitakes and Carrots: This cross-cultural dish borrows from Japanese tradition for the tofu marinade.

Bibimbap With Clams, Kale, Daikon and Carrots: The clams' briny broth seasons the rice in this light and flavorful dish.

Bibimbap With Chicken, Broccoli Rabe, Mushrooms and Turnip: This dish focuses on hearty grains and assertive vegetables, so one chicken breast is all it takes to feed a family.

Bibimbap With Beef, Winter Squash, Spinach and Cucumber: Beef is the most typical meat served with bibimbap. It's marinated and quickly seared in a hot wok or frying pan.

KRISTALBELLI

BY JULIA MOSKIN

8 West 36th Street; (212) 290-2211; kristalbelli.com.

At upscale barbecue restaurants in Seoul, the hostess will not only take your coat, but also seal it in plastic: it's protection from the grease and smoke that normally accompany the meeting of meat, marinade and fire.

Kristalbelli, which opened in March near the Morgan Library and Museum, brings that approach to an entire restaurant, buffing the experience with marble tables, crystal grills and an upstairs lounge with glittering banquettes. Uniformed waiters even grill the meat for you. (Traditionally, the host cooks, or each person takes on the task.)

The chef, David Shim, has worked at some top New York kitchens but does not try to rewrite the classics, only to refine them. The tone is set with the first appetizer, gujeolpan (\$15). Tiny rice crepes are spread out like flower petals, and the fillings (sliced mushrooms, seaweed, sweet onions and more) set out in small heaps so diners can roll their own. Three kinds of crisp savory pancakes (jeon, \$14) come out hot and light, perfect with shots of soju (\$16 to \$18 a bottle), the sweetish liquor that quickly sets the mood for a communal meal. (Beer usually follows.)

The grills are gas-powered and quiet, at least when they work; there is often an unnerving period of clicking before flames finally lick the thick, clear plate. When the grill is heating, the banchan (kimchi and other pickles and salads) appear. All the beef is Wagyu (\$29 to \$47), served entirely plain, not marinated; the tastiest cut is galbi, heavily marbled short ribs cut across the grain. Cold paper-thin rounds of lightly pickled daikon are served, for wrapping the hot beef; like the crunchy salt and sesame sauce, it's a lovely touch.

For the barbecue-averse, there are stews, classic noodle dishes and a spectacularly precise bibimbap (\$18), with perfectly cooked rice and vegetables. The bulgogi junggol for two (\$56), beef stew cooked at the table, can feed several. The enormous pile of marinated beef, mushrooms, scallions and broth simmers down into a stew, and the liquid is repurposed to cook rice and seaweed.

Even the desserts (\$10) are unusual and good, cooling and sweet variations on ice cream and mochi.

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JULIA MOSKIN

DINING BRIEFS



ABUNDANCE At Kristalbelli, waiters use crystal grills to cook the meat. At David's Breakfast House, pastrami rules.

OFF THE MENU: KIMCHI GRILL

BY TARA PARKER-POPE

OFF THE MENU

Florence Fabricant

OPENING

KIMCHI GRILL Phillip Lee of the Kimchi Taco truck opens a simple, contemporary-style restaurant. The chef Youngsun Lee, his original partner (no relation), is no longer involved, so it's up to Michael Calderon to cook the creative Korean fare: dishes like kimchi quesadillas, ssam buns with spicy pork or beef, and barbecued beef burritos. The truck still runs. (Opens Thursday): 766 Washington Avenue (Sterling Place), Prospect Heights, Brooklyn; (718) 360-1839.



ANDREA MOHIN/
THE NEW YORK TIMES

NEXT STOP Phillip Lee is opening Kimchi Grill in Brooklyn.

KOREAN FARE, ON TABLES MADE BY THE OWNERS

BY JOANNE STARKEY

LONG ISLAND DINING | STONY BROOK



Korean Fare, on Tables Made by the Owners

By JOANNE STARKEY

KOREAN barbecue is a refreshing change of pace from the big slabs of smoked or slow-cooked meat featured in American styles. At Ssambap Korean B.B.Q. in Stony Brook, for instance, diners cook thin slices of raw meat on gas grills at their tables, then take the cooked morsels of meat and enfold them in a romaine leaf, possibly adding some bean paste, scallions and sliced radishes from among the condiments on the table. The resulting lettuce-wrapped package is a ssam; add rice to the mix and you have a ssambap.

The restaurant Ssambap, which opened in January, is a pretty place

owned by Yung and Misook Kim, a couple who also made most of the furnishings, including the tables and the chandeliers. There are 12 barbecue tables with tops made from river pebbles covered in epoxy, and 8 mahogany tables without barbecues. This is the Kims' first restaurant.

A large aquarium, which covers the back wall of the dining room, is a magnet for children, usually with a parent in tow; a traditional Korean roof towers above it. Another wall is decorated with delicate, latticelike Korean interior doors, backlit with ever-changing colored lights.

Waiters are very nice, extremely helpful in explaining dishes and ingredi-

FAMILY TOUCH At Ssambap Korean B.B.Q., the owners made most of the furnishings, including the chandeliers. At left, the marinated short rib barbecue. At right, ssambap, a lettuce wrap with meat and rice.

ents, and very willing to run to the kitchen for any answers they don't know.

The best appetizers featured vegetables: a tasty seaweed salad, hot and salty edamame accompanied by a spicy mayo dipping sauce, and an iceberg lettuce salad topped by a whole sliced avocado, along with ginger or sesame



dressing on the side.

We were less taken with the meat and seafood options. Deep-fried pork nuggets tossed with peppers and onions in a sweet-and-sour sauce were marred by their soggy coats. A large pancake made with seafood and scallions was limp and needed the accompanying seasoned soy sauce for flavor. Gyoza, made with shrimp rather than the more familiar pork, were also bland.

I noticed that few tables ordered appetizers. That was probably wise, for portions are huge, and diners who order the barbecue (as 90 percent do, according to Misook Kim) have many appealing side dishes to sample, mostly vegetable-based, they vary by day.

One nonbarbecued entrée that we liked was the dobot bibimbap. Bibimbap is a rice dish with assorted toppings; dobot is a sizzling stone bowl

that gives some of the rice touching it an appealing crunchy texture. The one we ordered came with seasoned vegetables, ground beef and scrambled egg strips, plus a spicy chili sauce to swirl through the mix. It was tasty with or without the added sauce. Another nonbarbecued dish we tried, stir-fried clear potato noodles with vegetables and beef, was more pedestrian.

Those who don't want to cook their own food can still sample the ssams and ssambaps. For \$15, diners can choose three meats (from a list of six), which are barbecued in the kitchen, then wrapped in rice paper with greens (plus rice for ssambaps), cut in half and served with a bowl of miso soup. We tried the marinated short ribs, marinated rib-eye and the pork belly, and liked them all.

We found that as a rule, the marinated meats for the barbecue were much tastier than those without the marinade. Also, beef choices were superior to the pork ribs that we tried, which was overly chewy.

Desserts were ordinary: ice cream, fried ice cream and fried banana cheesecake. The last had a delicious creamy interior, but the coating was thick and dull.

A meal of Korean barbecue takes a bit of time, but it is fun, with a lot of activity and the opportunity to sample a wide range of dishes. It is a memorable dining experience.

Ssambap Korean B.B.Q. Restaurant

2300 Newquest Highway
Stony Brook
(516) 673-6482
ssambapbbq.com

WORTH IT

THE SPACE Large, airy, attractive space seating up to 100 people, with an aquarium and interesting lighting. Complete wheelchair access.

THE CROWD Lots of groups and families.

(There is a children's menu with five entrees, priced at \$9 each and served with rice, gyoza and miso soup.) The staff is friendly, helpful and attentive.

THE BAR A small bar with five stools. Soju (a Korean grain spirit) is \$10 for a small bottle; Korean wild black raspberry wine, \$13 for a small bottle; five Western wines, \$12 a bottle and \$6 a glass; and 15 beers, \$5 to \$8.

THE BILL Lunch entrees, \$9 to \$13. Dinner entrees, \$13 to \$17 (seafood barbecue). All other barbecue dishes are in the \$20s, with nonbarbecue dishes all under \$20. Prices are reasonable, especially considering the amount of food served. American Express, MasterCard, Visa and Discover accepted.

WHAT WE LIKED Seaweed salad, avocado salad, edamame, marinated short-rib barbecue, marinated rib-eye barbecue, all the lanchans (side dishes), the made-to-the-kitchen ssams and ssambaps, dobot bibimbap.

IF YOU GO Open Monday to Thursday, 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 11:30 a.m. to 11 p.m.; and Sunday, 12:30 to 10 p.m. Reservations accepted only for groups of seven or more. The restaurant is in a shopping center that is perpendicular to the road and is a bit hard to spot. There is a sign on the highway.

RATINGS Don't Miss, Worth It, O.K., Don't Bother.

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RATINGS Don't Miss, Worth It, O.K., Don't Bother.

PANCAKES FOR DINNER (SYRUP OPTIONAL)

BY TARA PARKER-POPE

Having pancakes for dinner has always been a fun way to shake up a routine meal. Now Martha Rose Shulman has made pancakes healthful, savory and delicious enough that they can regularly be eaten any time of day. She writes:

I'm getting a little bored with the same old pancakes. I've got a pantry full of different grains and flours, a variety of nuts and seeds in my freezer, and a lot of ideas about how these hearty ingredients can contribute to a pancake. So this week I shook things up in the kitchen, and so far, so good.

I also wanted to come up with some savory pancakes and developed a couple of recipes that quickly became favorites in our home. I was thinking along the lines of traditional Chinese and Korean onion pancakes, but I wanted to make something lighter and at the same time more wholesome. When I'm researching whole grains, both for baking and for cooking, I often turn to Heidi Swanson (www.101cookbooks.com) for ideas, and I found a lot of inspiration in her pancake recipes.

Here are five new pancake recipes:

Poppy, Lemon and Sunflower Seed Pancakes: These are inspired by Heidi Swanson's poppy seed and sunflower seed pancakes.

Brown Rice, Sesame, Spinach and Scallion Pancakes: Packed with wholesome ingredients, these savory pancakes can be a satisfying snack, lunch or dinner.

Maple Pecan Pancakes: Using a combination of almond flour and whole-wheat flour produces very moist and delicate pancakes.

Teff and Oatmeal Pancakes: These pancakes, made with teff, a nutrient-dense grain native to Ethiopia, are subtly sweet and studded with berries.

Savory Cottage Cheese Pancakes With Indian Spices, Cauliflower and Carrots: Paired with a green salad, these hearty pancakes make for a delicious dinner, with or without a topping.

THERE'S NO SMOKE, BUT YOU'LL FIND FIRE

BY LIGAYA MISHAN

HUNGRY CITY | LIGAYA MISHAN

There's No Smoke, but You'll Find Fire

At Han Joo, infrared heat eliminates drama, not flavor.

ON A CRYSTAL SLAB lie scarlet ribbons of meat with a bridal trim of fat, hissing and collapsing. Gone is the thunderhead of smoke you expect at a Korean barbecue joint, the constant scraping of the hot plate, the burned debris. At Han Joo, each tabletop grill uses infrared heat to cook everything to an eerie evenness.

You miss the drama, but it's hard to argue with results. The meat — short rib sheared off the bone in featherweight strips; duck as fragile as tissue paper and curling into ringlets; pork belly that has wallowed a lifetime in garlic — is tender, retrieved from the grill moments before dissolution. The juices trickle down the canted slab into heaps of kimchi that the waitress snips apart with scissors.

Tuck meat and kimchi into a leaf of romaine with a dash of doenjang (fermented soybean paste), salt-and-peppered sesame oil and scallions, and your heart grows strong. (This may be in part because of those infrared waves, which, according to the restaurant's Web site, promote cellular renewal and purify the blood.)

Han Joo, which opened in October in the East Village, is an offshoot of Han Joo Chik Naeng Myun & BBQ, in Flushing, Queens; the chef, Chang Kim, ran the kitchen there



for three years. Alongside barbecue, both restaurants specialize in naeng myun, lissome noodles topped with vinegary radishes and sweet Asian pear, and submerged in an ice-cold beef broth.

Leave that for summer. In the wolf hour of winter, you want to shore up the immune system with soups poured over rice, like galbi tang (\$14.95), a sanguine, garlicky broth of long-simmered short rib, loaded with skinny noodles, radishes and Napa cabbage. These are liquids more potent than soju, the Korean vodka: soon

At Han Joo, a Korean barbecue joint in the East Village, small plates called banchan come unbidden with every meal, an unstoppable flow that overtakes the entire surface of the table.

dubu chigae (\$10.95), a stew of soft tofu served brutally hot, so that the tofu is nearly the texture of custard, and its more fervid cousin, spiked with doenjang, a buzz on the lips (\$10.95).

Sulun tang (\$10.95) is purer. (On a recent evening, a waitress warned, "It is very plain.") It takes hours to make the cloudy bone marrow broth; a chef I know reports waking in the middle of the night to skim the fat off the surface. Do not be shy with the accompanying saucer of salt. A hesitant pinch, and the soup tastes clean but vacant; a gassy flurry, and the flavors click into focus.

After such clarity, you may quibble with other dishes. Duk-boki (\$4.95 small, \$8.95 large), chewy, tubular rice cakes, seesaw between spicy and sweet, never achieving equilibrium. Bibimbap (\$12.95), one of the world's great one-bowl meals, built from rice, vegetables, egg and gochuan (fermented chile paste), is merely fine; skip down to the bottom of the stone bowl, where the rice has sealed into a perfect crust. Pa jun (\$6.95 small, \$13.95 large), a pancake crosshatched with scallions, is not quite thick or crispy enough. Still, it is delicious.

All are upstaged by the small plates called banchan, which come unbidden with every meal, an unstoppable army that colonizes the entire table. You never know what might show up, and that is half the

HAN JOO

12 ST. MARKS PLACE (THIRD AVENUE), (646) 559-8683, HANJOONYC.COM

Recommended Galbi tang; soon dubu chigae; doenjang chigae; sulun tang; mool naeng myun; garlic pork belly; galbi; duck dae pae.

Prices \$4.95 to \$17.95.

Hours Daily, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Reservations Accepted.

Wheelchair Access Entrance is one step up from sidewalk. A handrail-equipped restroom is available on the dining-room level.

pleasure: a barely settled omelet, perhaps, still seething; tiny spiky toasted anchovies; wrinkled bands of tofu skin lashed with sesame oil; and kimchi, of course, a theme in seemingly endless variations.

The space does not quite live up to the makeout music in the background, but that is all right, even if you are shunted to the back room and forgotten for long stretches. Most of your time will be spent looking down, mesmerized by the crystal grill. You may not notice the exhaust hoods looming overhead. Only later will you realize that your clothes don't smell of smoke, that every trace of that gorgeous, meaty scent is lost. You want it back.

On a crystal slab lie scarlet ribbons of meat with a bridal trim of fat, hissing and collapsing. Gone is the thunderhead of smoke you expect at a Korean barbecue joint, the constant scraping of the hot plate, the burned debris. At Han Joo, each tabletop grill uses infrared heat to cook everything to an eerie evenness.

You miss the drama, but it's hard to argue with results. The meat — short rib sheared off the bone in featherweight strips; duck as fragile as tissue paper and curling into ringlets; pork belly that has wallowed a lifetime in garlic — is tender, retrieved from the grill moments before dissolution. The juices trickle down the canted slab into heaps of kimchi that the waitress snips apart with scissors.

Tuck meat and kimchi into a leaf of romaine with a daub of doenjang (fermented soybean paste), salt-and-peppered sesame oil and scallions, and your heart grows strong. (This may be in part because of those in-

fared waves, which, according to the restaurant's Web site, promote cellular renewal and purify the blood.)

Han Joo, which opened in October in the East Village, is an offshoot of Han Joo Chik Naeng Myun & BBQ, in Flushing, Queens; the chef, Chang Kim, ran the kitchen there for three years. Alongside barbecue, both restaurants specialize in naeng myun, lissome noodles topped with vinegary radishes and sweet Asian pear, and submerged in an ice-cold beef broth.

Leave that for summer. In the wolf hour of winter, you want to shore up the immune system with soups poured over rice, like galbi tang (\$14.95), a sanguine, garlicky broth of long-simmered short rib, loaded with skinny noodles, radishes and Napa cabbage. These are liquids more potent than soju, the Korean vodka: soon dubu chigae (\$10.95), a stew of soft tofu served brutally hot, so that the tofu is nearly the texture of custard, and its more fervid cousin, spiked with doenjang, a buzz on the lips (\$10.95).

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SHORT RIBS WORTHY OF WINTER GRILLING

BY DAVID TANIS

February may or may not be grilling season, depending upon your temperament and the climate where you live. I like to grill year-round, sometimes on an outdoor barbecue (even if there's snow), sometimes in the fireplace. Also handy is a ridged stovetop grill, and of course there's the broiler if need be. This means that kebabs, wings and even grilled vegetables are always an option, sunshine or not.

Korean restaurants often have tabletop grills designed to let diners cook their own meal. One day, when my dining room is properly ventilated, I may get one of those, too. In the meantime, my other grills work fine to make galbi, Korean short ribs — utterly simple and completely delicious.

Everyone I know loves short ribs, but most people consider them suitable only for long braising. It's a tough cut of beef, after all. But most cuts of beef will be tender if they are thinly sliced and quickly seared over a hot fire. For Korean cooks, grilling short ribs is as natural as cooking hamburgers.

Galbi is a fine thing to eat in a restaurant, to be sure, but it also makes for a wonderful and easy meal at home. First you need to get the beef, though. There are two ways to proceed. If you buy English-style short ribs, which are cut along the bone, you must butterfly the meat into a thin, long strip. This is easier than it sounds, and it is what most restaurants do.

Home cooks, however, usually buy their ribs flanken-style, in which a band saw is used to cut across the ribs, creating half-inch slices of beef dotted with three little bones. Most Asian groceries sell packages of short ribs cut just this way. Your butcher may also prepare them for you. Give the beef a cold-water bath to remove any bone fragments, and it is ready to season.

The traditional marinade is a flavorful mixture of soy sauce, garlic and sugar, often with the addition of sesame oil and ginger. Some cooks add honey or even cola, and many recommend adding a bit of puréed fruit, like pear, kiwi or pineapple, to help tenderize the meat (it's the acidity and enzymes that do it). In Western cuisine, it's rare to find savory dishes that emphasize sugar (barbecue sauce being the exception), but a balance of sweet and salty is common in Asian dishes, and with these short ribs, sugar is an essential ingredient. It's a good idea to let the ribs marinate for at least two hours to allow the seasoning to penetrate; marinating overnight is even better.

To eat the galbi, it is customary to wrap a small piece of grilled beef in a lettuce leaf, along with a spoonful of steamed rice and a dab of ssamjang, the spicy Korean bean paste, adding hot chiles and raw garlic to taste.

I see no reason not to follow this custom, but if you want to eat your short ribs with a knife and fork, or with your fingers, go right ahead.

A GIANT BIBIMBAP AT A KOREAN FOOD FESTIVAL

BY CHANG W. LEE

There are 24 Korean restaurants concentrated near the intersection of 149th Street and 41st Avenue in Flushing, Queens, and locals refer to the area as Muk Ja Gol Mok, or restaurant street. So merchants and civic leaders decided to organize a festival by that name on Saturday, and they hope to make it an annual event, said Kim Young Hwan, president of the Muk Ja Gol Mok association.

The event, the Inaugural Muk Ja Gol Mok Asian Festival, which was also organized by the Korean American Association of Queens, drew about 5,000 visitors, according to The Korea Times.

The celebration featured dancing, music and even a Korean wrestling competition. But food took center stage at Muk Ja Gol Mok (sometimes spelled Meokjagolmok). In one area, restaurant workers made a giant version of bibimbap, the classic Korean rice-and-vegetable dish, this one serving about 600 people, according to Kwak Ja-Bun, president of the Korean Cuisine Globalization Committee and owner of Kang Suh Korean Restaurant, which sponsored the bibimbap.

The outsize dish had 12 ingredients and 2 sauces, which made for a colorful display. The ingredients were carrots, bellflower root, spinach, ground beef, bracken (a type of fiddlehead fern), squash, bean sprouts, mushrooms, eggs, red and green peppers, and rice.

It took five hours of cooking before it could be served to the crowd.

SOCIETY, TOURISM & SPORTS

IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

CONNECTING THE CENTURIES

BY ELAINE LOUIE

Seoul, South Korea

A few years ago, when Hongnam Kim, a professor here at Ewha Womans University, decided to build a house, she knew she wanted it to take the form of a hanok, the traditional wooden structure dating back to the Joseon dynasty in 1392. But she also needed a modern basement where she could pursue her work.

Dr. Kim, who is 64, is an art historian, but not just any art historian. She is a former director-general of the National Museum of Korea and a former director of the National Folk Museum, and currently helps to run the National Trust of Korea, a nongovernment environmental and cultural preservationist group.

She is also a perfectionist, and she knows her hanoks. Still, she is a woman in a patriarchal society.

Asked how the construction crew liked taking orders from a woman, she said, laughing: “I really annoyed all the workers. They never met anyone like me in their careers. I had many things redone.”

Like all of the walls surrounding the property.

To the casual observer, those granite walls look as if they extend straight up from the ground. Not so. “The outer walls have to be at an angle of 10 to 15 degrees pointing in at the top, or it looks like it’s leaning away,” Dr. Kim explained. “It’s an optical illusion that it’s straight.”



When she discovered that the workers had built the walls straight, she had them torn down and rebuilt correctly.

It took two years and \$1 million, but she finally built the home she had envisioned, two conjoined hanoks (one for her and one for guests), each about 1,600 square feet with its own garden measuring about 533 square feet. The home was completed in 2010, with the help of Lee Moon-ho, a local architect trained in traditional architecture.

But why live in a hanok rather than a modern home? For the sense of architectural history or as a way to preserve Korean culture? Or just because of how it looks? “All those reasons,” Dr. Kim said. “And partly, my memory of my childhood. Home was a hanok in Jinju city, in a southern province.”

Of course, her home is not just a testament to the past — she made sure to install modern bathrooms, sleek kitchen appliances, air-conditioning and double-hung windows. But there is no hint of any of that from the exterior. And even inside, many of the modern amenities are shielded by traditional wood-framed doors.

In the tradition of a hanok, there were spaces for entertaining, men’s quarters, women’s quarters and servants’ quarters. Dr. Kim, who lives alone, with a 15-year-old Shih Tzu named Toto, divided her hanoks into an anchae (her residence) and a sarangchae (a guesthouse).

Her bedroom is upstairs in the residence. Downstairs, where she spends most of her time, is a library with thousands of art books. (A separate entrance allows

her students access to the library from the street.)

She uses the other house for entertaining. Upstairs is a guest room, and downstairs is an open living area with a pristine white kitchen.

Throughout her home, translucent doors of pine lattice frame paper-covered glass. As the sun pours through the lattice patterns, there is a constant play of light and shadow on the pine floors. A visitor noticed that they gleamed, unspoiled by dust or grit tracked in on shoes.

That’s because it’s the custom in Korea to exchange one’s shoes for slippers before entering a home. Dr. Kim puts the shoes on a wooden tray, which she hides under a step on the veranda. “Contemporary shoes are not pretty in the context of a hanok,” she said.

Sitting beside her on the veranda, in slippers, the visitor reflected on the pleasures of this peaceful, shoeless life.

As Dr. Kim put it, “When you are in a modern building, you are walled off, a cold partition dividing you and the world outside.” But in a hanok, “you are surrounded by nature, by the open sky, the smell of wood, and you do not go out.”

“It’s a wonderful place to be, all the time.”

IN SOUTH KOREA, ALL ROADS LEAD TO YEOSU

BY INGRID K. WILLIAMS

In South Korea, All Roads Lead to Yeosu



Until five years ago, Yeosu was an unremarkable, out-of-the-way city on the southern coast of South Korea. Despite a temperate climate, scenic islands and a spicy local cuisine, the city was, among tourists, virtually off the map. A largely rural municipality spread out over a peninsula and 317 islands, it has three commercial and residential hubs that used to be the only places to find anything resembling bustle. Then fate smiled on the city. Yeosu (pronounced YUH-sue) was chosen to host the 2012 World Expo, the smallest city in a generation to have the honor.

Since then, this place of 300,000 residents has gone on a building binge. The sprawling Expo site, which stretches along the waterfront on the eastern edge of the city, has sprouted 22 new futuristic buildings and structures that would seem more suitable for fast-paced Seoul. And large portions of Yeosu have undergone major infrastructure upgrades, including road improvements and new transport links, in part to accommodate the 10 million visitors the city initially expected to attend the Expo from the time it started, last month, through its end, on Aug. 12.

“Yeosu has grown 20 years’ worth in just a few years,” said Moon Ha-Na, a representative for the Yeosu World Expo organizing committee, during a tour of the Expo site in March.

Its improvements are being explored by the more than one million visitors to the Expo who are taking in its ambitious environmental, cultural and educational exhibitions from 104 countries and 10 international organizations (including the United Nations). For South Korea's part, it has created a spectacular structure called the Big-O, which uses lights and lasers to project kaleidoscopic shows on a giant screen of water, and the Korea Pavilion, whose design suggests a huge silver wave. It also has installed a new aquarium, the largest in Korea, that is spacious enough to comfortably house 200 animal species, including a beluga whale. Two former silos have been repurposed as a desalination plant outfitted with a rooftop observation deck and an enormous pipe organ. And across the bay, the glittering, sail-shaped MVL Hotel — a scaled-down imitation of Dubai's Burj Al Arab — has a gleaming facade that dazzles with digital lights after dark.

All of these new attractions are now easy to reach from major cities. A high-speed KTX train line from Seoul completed in October stops at a new train station at the Expo site, cutting travel time from the capital to Yeosu to three and a half hours from about five hours. And in May, a new port at the Expo site began welcoming ferries arriving directly from other South Korean ports and destinations in Japan.

Despite these large-scale developments, just months in advance of the Expo, Yeosu was still the sort of place where Western faces were novel enough that children would run up to me on the street with a "Hello" before giggling and scurrying away.

This is in part because of its relative isolation. "In some ways this was considered a backwater region," Commissioner Lee Joon-hee, a government representative, said in an interview at his office across the street from the Expo site. But now, he said, the government

is focused on making sure that Yeosu remains on tourists' radars long after the Expo has ended. It plans on highlighting its attractions (like the aquarium) and using its improved infrastructure to host events like international conferences and yachting competitions. "The goal is that this could be a hub of marine resorts on the southern coast," he said.

Still, the Expo may have exposed some of Yeosu's growing pains. The influx of so many visitors in a small city with a very new tourism infrastructure has caused a strain, especially when it comes to places to stay. While several hotels were built or renovated to accommodate foreign tourists, including the HS Tourist Hotel, where my husband, Dave, and I stayed, there is still a shortage of available rooms. According to the Expo's accommodations and tourism department, on an average day during the Expo in May, there was demand for more than 35,000 rooms, but there are only 9,941 rooms in Yeosu. The Expo organizing committee has been encouraging visitors who cannot find lodging locally to stay in neighboring towns and take buses to the Expo site. Alternative accommodations have also been opened in community centers, temples, churches and campgrounds.

The off-site lodgings may be just the push visitors need to explore the handful of sights around Yeosu that weren't created for the Expo. To find out what they were, I met Ron Anderson and Corrie Hulse, two American expatriates who teach English at the Yeosu campus of Chonnam National University, for coffee. After suggesting a few nearby attractions — such as Odongdo, a camellia-covered island connected to the mainland by a wide walkway — Mr. Anderson conceded, "There's nothing you can point your finger at and say 'This is what Yeosu is famous for.' Except the food."

Ms. Hulse, a self-professed food lover who has lived in Yeosu since 2007, agreed. "Jeollanam-do, this province, is known for having the best food in Korea, so if you're a foodie, this is the place to come," she said.

After coffee, Ms. Hulse introduced us to boribap, which she described as make-your-own bibimbap, the signature Korean dish, at the restaurant Jin Bok.

As is customary, we left our shoes near the entrance and settled onto pillows on the floor around a low table that was soon covered with an absurd number of small plates. There was barley rice, raw crab in soy sauce, sweet potato root, radishes, kimchi, sweet pumpkin soup, a kimchi pancake dotted with squid, whole grilled fish and honey-filled dduk (a pounded-rice confection). Gat kimchi, a local version of the Korean staple made using mustard leaves, proved an earlier point Ms. Hulse had made: "The further south you go in Korea, the spicier the food, and we happen to be as far south as you can get."

After lunch, with lips still burning, Dave and I set out for Dolsan Island, the one excursion everyone recommended. The large, mostly rural island is connected to the mainland by Dolsan Bridge, a beautiful sight at night when it is aglow with soft neon lights. (A second bridge to the island was recently completed.) After a 40-minute bus ride careening through farmland along scenic oceanfront cliffs and past small strips of sandy beach, we arrived at the southern tip of the island.

A steep uphill hike delivered us to Hyangiram, one of four Buddhist hermitages in Korea. There, amid temple buildings wedged into the rocky outcropping, we were treated to lovely, expansive views of the surrounding island-dotted sea.

Before returning to Yeosu proper, we made a brief detour to an eerily lighted, one-room museum located in a seemingly derelict complex: the so-called North Korean Semi-Submarine Exhibition Hall. On display inside was a largely intact, purportedly North Korean vessel that, according to the entertainingly propagandist information panels, was heroically sunk in 1998.

For dinner later that night, our last in Yeosu, we met up with Mina Park, a local public-school teacher and Yeosu native who lives in the city's Yeoseo-dong district. "Ten years ago, it was all fields," she said of the area, now a vibrant, developed night-life district.

And the reputation of the city as a whole? "Even a lot of Koreans don't know where Yeosu is," Ms. Park said with a laugh. But now, with the Expo in full swing, that, too, is changing.

A WRITER EVOKES LOSS ON SOUTH KOREA'S PATH TO SUCCESS

BY CHOE SANG-HUN

SEOUL, South Korea

A Writer Evokes Loss on South Korea's Path to Success

By CHOE SANG-HUN

LIKE so many South Korean parents at the time, Shin Kyung-sook's mother saw education as her daughter's best chance of escaping poverty and backbreaking work in the rice fields. So in 1978 she took her 15-year-old daughter to Seoul, where Ms. Shin would lie about her age to get a factory job while attending high school at night to pursue her dream of becoming a novelist.

Seoul-bound trains at the time, like the one mother and daughter boarded that night, picked up many young rural South Koreans along the way — part of the migration that fueled South Korea's industrialization but forever changed its traditional family life.

It is that social upheaval that Ms. Shin evoked in her most famous novel to date, "Please Look After Mom," which earned her the 2011 Man Asian Literary Prize and a commercial success attained by few other Korean writers. (Sales in South Korea passed two million this spring, and the book has been published in 19 other countries, including the United States.)

That book and a more recent one, "I Will Be Right There," about friendship and love set in the country's political turmoil of the 1980s, are part of a body of work over three decades that has set Ms. Shin apart as one of the most accomplished chroniclers of modern South Korea.

In "Please Look After Mom," an elderly woman from the countryside travels to Seoul to visit her adult children and gets lost in what is quite literally a mad rush: the scramble to get on a Seoul subway. Reviewers have called her disappearance a metaphor for the profound sense of loss in a society that hurtled from an agrarian dictatorship to an industrialized democracy within a single and often tumultuous generation.

That feeling has not overwhelmed South Koreans' pride in their country's accomplishments, notably its rise from abject poverty to the world's 13th-largest economy. But the sense of loss taps into a growing unease over some of the costs of that success, especially a widening gap between rich and poor and a generation of elderly people left largely to fend for themselves as their adult children work in cities.

The filial guilt that suffuses the novel is universal, but also has a particularly Korean spin. Until a generation ago in South Korea, at least one adult child — usually the eldest son and his family — lived with aging parents until their deaths. Now, a growing number of older people live alone in their rural villages or in the nursing homes that are springing up across the country. Often, they have little money left, having invested their savings in their children's education with the expectation that the children would prosper and eventually care for them.

The children, meanwhile, living in a hyper-competitive society where people work some of the longest hours in the world, often fear that they are too harried to visit their elderly parents. Many also fear using too much vacation time, afraid of being seen as disloyal to their companies.

In what Ms. Shin says is probably the most important sentence in her novel, the missing mother expresses what many guilt-ridden readers imagine as their own mothers' sense of helplessness at having been effectively abandoned by their children. In a scene in which the old woman imagines meeting her own dead mother, she wonders: "Did Mom know? That I, too, needed her my entire life?"

Ms. Shin's life, which is traced in the trajectory of her country's rise, prepared her well for her role as an interpreter of her generation. Born in the countryside like so many characters in her novels, Ms. Shin, 49, now lives in an expensive residential district in Seoul. Her husband is a college professor as well as a poet and literary critic. They have no children.



"I wonder what would have become of me in those days if I hadn't had the goal of becoming a writer to hang on to."

SHIN KYUNG-SOOK

From an early age, she was a voracious reader, hiding herself away with books her elder brothers brought home. (She was the fourth of six children.) By the time she was 15, she was increasingly certain she wanted to be a writer.

After their arrival in Seoul on that night train in 1978, her mother left her in the care of an older brother in a cramped room in a slum. While he worked in a government office by day and attended college at night, Ms. Shin worked in an audio and television parts factory and attended high school in the evenings.

She was one of the youngest employees in the factory, where she witnessed the labor discontent that sometimes rocked South Korea as its economy galloped ahead but many workers toiled in sweatshop conditions.

"The girl sitting next to me at the night school had no fingertips," she worked all day wrapping cables in a radio factory. Ms. Shin said in an interview. "One of my classmates sent part of their meager wages back home to support their little brother's and sister's education. When they came to class, they were so tired none of them slept."

At her work factory, a shift involving one of the country's growing number of laborers was turned violent as managers deployed their own security guards, who joined with the police to crushing down on workers agitating for higher pay and better conditions.

Ms. Shin stayed inside, and she did not appear to be taking her mind off the mayhem by copying a new novel about the adult age in her head.

In the end, Ms. Shin was the only one in her high school class to win admission to college, as a creative writing major. She eventually moved about 100 miles to the factory in "O, Lonely Room," one of her most acclaimed novels. (It is French translation was the Prix de l'Épiphanie in 2005.)

"I wonder what would have become of me in those days if I hadn't had the goal of becoming a writer to hang on to," she said. "I was determined that one day I would write about what I saw and felt."

Few several years after college, she supported her writing with odd jobs, waiting waiters for restaurant meals, radio stations and reading books to blind people. But by 1983, she was successful enough to be able to write novels and short stories full time.

She also was able to fulfill a personal promise: to repay her own mother's sacrifices for her children. The day they went to Seoul, the mother, her mother's face was etched with weariness.

"I promised myself then that one day I would write a beautiful book for Mom," she said.

That book, "Please Look After Mom," embodied her longing as one of South Korea's first living novelists and was her antidote. Her mother's reaction was decidedly mixed, typical of a generation of women who pushed their children hard to succeed but were uncomfortable in consuming their own successes, even when those children met or exceeded their family's high expectations.

As Ms. Shin recalled, "She only said, 'My dear, you have done well.'"

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"In her novels, readers have the chance to pause and reflect upon the other side of their society's breakneck race for economic growth, what they have lost in that pursuit and upon people who were left behind in the mad rush," said Shin Soo-jeong, a professor of Korean literature at Myongji University in Seoul.

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After their arrival in Seoul on that night train in 1978, her mother left her in the care of an older brother in a cramped room in a slum. While he worked in a government office by day and attended college at night, Ms. Shin worked in an audio and television parts factory and attended high school in the evenings.

She was one of the youngest employees in the factory, where she witnessed the labor discontent that sometimes rocked South Korea as its economy galloped ahead but many workers toiled in sweatshop conditions.

“The girl sitting next to me at the night school had no fingerprints; she worked all day wrapping candies in a confectionery,” Ms. Shin said in an interview. “Most of my classmates sent part of their meager wages back home to support their little brothers’ and sisters’ education. When they came to class, they were so tired most of them dozed.”

At her own factory, a clash involving one of the country’s growing number of labor unions turned violent as managers deployed their own security guards, who joined with the police in cracking down on workers organizing for higher pay and better conditions.

Ms. Shin stayed inside, amid the idled conveyor belts, taking her mind off the mayhem by copying a new novel about the urban poor in longhand.

In the end, Ms. Shin was the only one in her high school class to win admission to college, as a creative writing major. She eventually wrote about life at the factory in “A Lone Room,” one of her most acclaimed novels. Its French translation won the Prix de l’Inaperçu in 2009.

“I wonder what would have become of me in those days if I hadn’t had the goal of becoming a writer to hang on to,” she said. “I was determined that one day I would write about what I saw and felt.”

For several years after college, she supported her writing with odd jobs: writing scripts for a classical music radio station and reading books to blind people. But by 1993, she was successful enough to be able to write novels and short stories full time.

She also was able to fulfill a personal promise: to repay her own mother’s sacrifices for her children. The day they went to Seoul, she remembers, her mother’s face was etched with weariness.

“I promised myself then that one day I would write a beautiful book for Mom,” she said.

That book, “Please Look After Mom,” solidified her standing as one of South Korea’s finest living novelists and won her accolades.

Her mother’s reaction was decidedly more muted, typical of a generation of women who pushed their children hard to succeed but were accustomed to restraining their own emotions, even when those children met or exceeded their family’s high expectations.

As Ms. Shin recounted, “She only said, ‘My dear, you have done well.’ ”

GRITTY KOREATOWN BLOCK TURNS HOT WITH A TASTE OF HOME

BY PETER SLATIN

SQUARE FEET

Gritty Koreatown Block Turns Hot With a Taste of Home



Gritty, a recently opened restaurant at 1250 Broadway, is on the 30th floor rather than on the busy street level.



Business along West 32nd Street between Broadway and Fifth Avenue.

Korean food and K-pop have helped create fierce competition for space on a strip of West 32nd St.

business portfolio is managed by the son of a Korean immigrant, Mr. Kim, who is a Korean immigrant and his wife, a Korean immigrant, are the owners of the restaurant. The restaurant is a 10,000-square-foot, 20-story building and is located on the top floor of the 20-story building. The restaurant is a 10,000-square-foot, 20-story building and is located on the top floor of the 20-story building. The restaurant is a 10,000-square-foot, 20-story building and is located on the top floor of the 20-story building.

When Ja-Bun Kwak opened Kang Suh, her two-level, 24-hour restaurant almost 30 years ago at the base of 1250 Broadway, at 32nd Street in Manhattan, there was just a spare handful of Korean businesses on the block catering to the Korean garment industry and import-export laborers.

At the time, Korean food and culture were even more of an outpost in the life of the city than was this gritty block between Broadway and Fifth Avenue, which was mainly a thoroughfare for commuters using Penn Station and fans headed to Madison Square Garden.

But over time, as the Korean immigrant population has grown, 32nd Street has become a destination for immigrants hungry for a taste of home, as well as for curious foodies.

So many Korean businesses have crowded onto the street in recent years that the block has begun to burst at the seams, spilling restaurants and Seoul-based patisseries onto nearby side streets and Fifth Avenue, and pushing karaoke bars, night clubs and spas upward onto higher floors in these mostly class B buildings. Competition has been so fierce along this block that ground-floor retail rents can easily be more than twice what they are on nearby side streets and occasionally up to even 25 percent higher than on Fifth Avenue.

At the same time, Korean culture has steadily emerged from the shadow cast by Americans' longer familiarity with Japan and China. The rising popularity of K-pop — as demonstrated in the breakout hit “Gangnam Style” — and of Korean television dramas has drawn younger and more non-Korean crowds to what is now known as K-town. Many restaurant owners now describe their clientele as heavily “foreign,” as in non-Korean.

Annie Lee, the founder of Daughter of Design, a wedding and event planning business, said there had been a big shift in the number of non-Koreans packing the street's offerings. Ms. Lee, a Korean-American from Southern California, said that there had also been a “huge push” by the South Korean government to raise awareness of the nation's food and cultural riches. Ms. Kwak, the owner of Kang Suh, is the president of the Korean Cuisine Globalization Committee, a promotional effort financed by the government that has backed everything from Korean food trucks to a large Korea Day celebration in Central Park last year. Kristy Park, one of very few Korean-Americans working as a commercial space broker, noted that her involvement in Koreatown deals had risen sharply. Although the area was not the initial focus of her job at Winoker Realty, she said she now got calls daily from Korean business people looking for a foothold on the street.

The crush of restaurants and retail in the area has made ground-floor space a prize to be fiercely competed for. Rents have risen sharply in the last five years, in some cases tripling as leases roll over, tenants and brokers say. Suzy S. Byun, the president of Realty Artes, a small brokerage the Korean-born woman opened in 2006 in a fifth-floor office at 16 West 32nd Street, said that would-be restaurateurs could pay as much as \$1.5 million in key money to obtain leases for these spaces.

Others confirmed that the costly practice had become common, and say that though landlords once looked the other way while tenants pocketed the payments for such transfers, they now often share in the proceeds.

Landlords are saluting the area's growing popularity. David Levy, a principal at Adams & Company, which includes two commercial buildings on West 33rd Street in the 27-building Manhattan portfolio it manages for an investor, said, “It has become such a vibrant area that tenants are expanding off of 32nd Street.” Mr. Levy said he just rented a store on Fifth Avenue to a tenant who found the space cheaper than on 32nd. He and others say rents for storefronts along Fifth Avenue in the low 30s can reach \$300 to \$350 a square foot, and \$250 a foot or more along 32nd Street between Fifth and Broadway, while fetching only around \$100 a square foot on nearby side streets.

For example, Mr. Levy also recently leased to a Korean restaurant a 2,000-square-foot storefront on West 33rd that had been occupied for seven years by an accessories showroom. The new tenant, he said, is paying \$250 a square foot; the showroom tenant, whose rent had been about \$100 a foot, has moved upstairs in the same building.

Others, however, are setting their sights higher rather than wider. In late September, Andy Sung, a Korean-born contractor and first-time restaurateur, opened Gaonnuri, a sprawling 8,000-square-foot, 250-seat restaurant and lounge on the top floor of the 39-story 1250 Broadway — the same building where Ms. Kwak opened her restaurant three decades earlier.

Gaonnuri, a Korean word that translates to “center of the world,” embodies the loftier ambitions of an increasingly energized immigrant community. “This is the center of the center of the world,” proclaimed Mr. Sung, who said he had tried to lease the space for a restaurant 10 years earlier but was rebuffed by the building's owner at the time, the SL Green Realty Corporation. But the restaurant's \$6 million build-out includes at least \$2 million in tenant improvements contributed by the building's current owner, a partnership between the German investment fund Jamestown Group and the local landlord Murray Hill Properties, which also manages the building.

Norman Sturner, the chief executive of Murray Hill, who championed the project, said that as part of its lease deal, the building owner contributed construction capital to cover part of the cost of moving mechanical equipment, demolishing the windowless brick exterior wall and installing huge windows in the previously untenanted top-floor mechanical space. Despite the two years of work and the expense, said Mr. Sturner, “It turned out to be an absolute winner.”

Mr. Sturner noted that interest from Korean investors in New York commercial property had been intense. The Korean National Pension Service was a co-investor in the Helmsley Building at 230 Park Avenue in mid-2011 for \$770 million, and Korean investors also acquired the former A.I.G. headquarters in Lower Manhattan in 2010, according to Real Capital Analytics, a New York-based real estate research concern.

Korean businesspeople on 32nd Street are watching another site, however: the Korean government purchased a development parcel at 122 East 32nd, between Park and Lexington Avenues, in 2009 for \$16 million, according to Real Capital. The site is intended for a Korean cultural center, but plans have not yet been unveiled.

One transfer of space is emblematic of the shifts sweeping Koreatown. NY Kom Tang, a three-level barbecue house at 32 West 32nd Street and one of the first restaurants on the block, is set to close this fall. Its replacement will be Seoul-based Caffé Bene, which recently opened its first New York location at 49th Street and Broadway in Times Square. Other Seoul-based restaurant brands that have moved to or near West 32nd Street are the bakeries Tous les Jours and Paris Baguette, as well as the popular Korean fried chicken purveyor BonChon Chicken. BonChon has four other locations in Manhattan.

Not every Korean restaurant owner insists on a Koreatown location. That was the case for Hooni Kim, who opened Danji, a 36-seat restaurant, two years ago at 346 West 52nd Street, between Eighth and Ninth Avenues. Mr. Kim said the decision to open there was simple: “I couldn't afford 32nd Street.”

Unlike many of K-town's restaurants, Danji is not open around the clock. Mr. Kim said, “There's a reason those restaurants are open 24 hours. They make more money between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m. than I do in a whole day.” That's when patrons of karaoke bars and nightclubs — Korean and non-Korean partyers alike — flock to the block for dinner. During those hours, Ms. Byun says, “it's often the busiest street in Manhattan.”

ALONG THE TRAIL OF KOREA'S MOUNTAIN SPIRITS

BY ELISABETH EAVES



EXPLORER

Along the Trail of Korea's Mountain Spirits

The titanium spork was a Christmas gift from my brother Gregory, a choice that seemed random at the time. I had no use for ultra-light-weight dual-use cutlery. But nine months later, almost 7,000 miles from my home in New York City and nearly catatonic with exhaustion, I was thankful for its lack of heft. Gregory; my husband, Joe; and I had been hiking for 12 hours while hoisting a 30-pound backpack over steep and slippery rock in a thick mist. After nightfall, headlamps fading, we spotted dots of light below us in the dark, and heard the eerie whoosh of a wind generator. We stumbled down to the Satgat-jae shelter, a basic cabin for hikers perched at over 4,200 feet in South Korea's Deogyusan National Park. I unpacked my spork.

It was Gregory, now living in South Korea and flush with the zeal of the newly expatriated, who had suggested we hike a portion of the Baekdu-Daegan trail. The Baekdu-Daegan is a mountain system running the entire length of the two Koreas, some 870 miles. On maps, it appears as the topographical backbone of the Korean Peninsula, but I soon realized it was also a psycho-spiritual one. The notion first occurred to me when Gregory told us that his city-dwelling Korean girlfriend said he would understand her better if he hiked the Baekdu-Daegan. And when Joe and I checked out of our ultramodern hotel in central Seoul, the receptionist clapped when I told her what we were about to do.

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South Korea may be among the most wired and densely populated countries in the world, but its first religion many centuries ago — before the arrival of Christianity, Confucianism and Buddhism — was based on the worship of mountain spirits. The Korean version of feng shui, known as pungsu-jiri, holds that the nation's energy flows south along the Baekdu-Daegan ridge and outward along its branches. By the time of our trip, I had developed a theory that the mountains are to Koreans as the Wild West is to Americans: even if a New Yorker, say, has never set foot on a ranch, he likes to think he's got a little bit of cowboy in his soul. It's part of the collective unconscious.

Since the '80s, as both freedom and wealth have spread in South Korea, so has the popularity of mountaineering. As it has, the South Korean portion of the Baekdu-Daegan has become hikable along nearly all of its 457-mile ridge, with trails built and maintained by the Korea Forest Service, part of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. Weekend warriors tackle it in chunks, and a hardy few attempt the entire length as an epic two-month trek.

In the spring, Gregory had mailed me the only English-language guidebook to the trail. The spork had been a subtle lure, but I took the guidebook as an all-out invitation and began making plans for a September trip. My brother had lived in South Korea for much of his 20s, but, always too busy or broke from my own globe-trotting, I had never visited. Now he was moving back there at the age of 37, in love with Korea,

the Korean language and a Korean woman. I wanted to better understand his decision, which seemed to be either a bold gamble on personal happiness or a crazy one. And I wanted to know the place that might be his permanent home.

Gregory is younger than I am, but he became our leader, particularly after we left the capital and entered the countryside, where we saw no other foreigners and heard virtually no English, and so were dependent on his Korean skills.

The section of trail we had chosen began in a southern farming region and took us north into 90-square-mile Deogyusan National Park. Clouds clung to the hills, a reminder of the unseasonably late typhoon that had passed over the peninsula the day before. As we ascended, we were almost immediately passed by a hiking club — 15 lithe men and women in the black hiking pants favored there, made from panels of high-tech-looking fabric. Their leader broke his stride just long enough to tie a ribbon to a tree marking their passage; some branches we passed were festooned with these brightly colored strips.

In height, South Korea's mountains are more akin to the Appalachians than the Rockies — the highest mainland peak is 6,283-foot Jirisan. They can, however, be jagged in the extreme. We planned to cover just seven miles on the first day, but the steep and constant ups and downs soon had us aching. We often had to climb using our hands, and in many places we used the chains and ropes that the forest service had helpfully attached to the rocks.

As we limped into our second morning, we decided to rethink our itinerary. Instead of sticking religiously to the trail for six days, we would weave our way on and off, stopping at villages and temples along the way. Things immediately improved. For one thing, the sun had come out. For another, we were going downhill. Soon we were following a stream, broken up by waterfalls and pools through a deciduous forest of maple, hazel and birch. We stopped to talk to a pair of Korean hikers on their way up. I would hear Gregory explain our presence so many times over the course of this trip that I began to pick up the words for sister and brother-in-law. "People look at you differently when you're traveling with family," he said to me after another encounter with fellow hikers. "You're not a suspicious bachelor."

Two nights later we found our way to another park shelter, this one just below 5,282-foot Hyangjeok-bong. At sunset we climbed to the peak and had the 360-degree view to ourselves. To both east and west, mountain ranges in shades of gray, blue and black, each one silhouetted against the next, stretched away like waves on an ocean.

After sunset, at a picnic table outside our shelter, we encountered the two best-equipped hikers I have ever met. Kwang Sub Shin and Jin Koo Suk, who both work for a bank in Seoul, hike sections of the Baekdu-Daegan on weekends. Each had a headlamp strapped to his forehead. Music played from a phone, which was attached to a solar battery. Bottles of ice-cold rice wine were scattered around the table. Mr. Suk cut pieces of sweet potato and added them to a bubbling pot of fish broth. From atop a second camp stove he served hot barbecued duck. They put to shame the instant rice and curry we'd been subsisting on.

Fortunately we had two items to add to the feast. Both had been controversial when we set out (the less left the better): canned peaches and boxes of soju, the national tippie. The temperature dropped with nightfall, but the steam and aromas from the table kept us warm. With Gregory translating, I asked our new friends if they thought my cowboy metaphor made sense. Did Koreans all have a little bit of mountaineer in their souls? Mr. Shin looked up from under his headlamp and replied with a simple but emphatic "yes."

The spring outside our shelter had a sign on it, which Gregory told me said the water was drinkable. The next morning, though, seeing me filling my bottle, Mr. Suk dashed toward me in alarm. "Ah," Gregory said. "It says do not drink this water."

"Sorry," he said, and then, in the tone he uses when waxing philosophical, "the window is only half open."

If Gregory's window onto Korea was only half open, then mine was barely cracked. It occurred to me that this sense of traveling through a half-understood world was something we had both sought many times over. Moving to a different culture meant the world suddenly became more mysterious. It could make you feel like a perpetual outsider. But it also made you feel as if you were always learning.

After hiking another stretch of the Baekdu-Daegan, we descended steeply out of the national park and took a bus through fields of garlic, peppers, zucchini and ginseng. We had one more stop to make before ending our pilgrimage, at Haeinsa, a Buddhist temple draped over the folds of Mount Gaya. On the sunny Sunday afternoon when we arrived, swarms of day-tripping urbanites were taking the half-mile stroll from parking lot to temple in full regalia — stretchy tops, hiking boots and black super-pants — as if their gear were a type of modern religious raiment.

Certain temples, Haeinsa included, allow guests to stay overnight, but you have to follow their rules. Gregory and Joe were sent to share a spartan room, while I got my own. We ate silently in the monks' dining hall. Just before sundown we gathered in the central courtyard, where, standing under a pavilion's carved and painted eaves, a young monk in gray and maroon robes beat on a drum taller than he was, the deep sound echoing off the mountains. When it was dark, we ascended to the main worship hall, from which golden Buddhas shone like suns. We took off our shoes and sat next to an enormous window open to the night. Chanting rose and fell around us.

I couldn't understand the words. But I did understand a little more why Gregory wanted to be there. He'd learned enough to know that he could spend a long time learning more.

TRENDY SPOT URGES TOURISTS TO RIDE IN AND SPEND, 'GANGNAM STYLE'

BY MARTIN FACKLER

SEOUL, South Korea

As monuments go, this one seems puny and tasteless next to the designer glass skyscrapers and upscale fashion boutiques of the affluent Gangnam district. Yet, it occupies a spot of honor right across from Samsung's corporate headquarters: a hastily built plywood stage decorated with black, cutout silhouettes of a rotund man who appears to be prancing like a horse.

This is the first public display to honor Psy, the South Korean rapper whose viral dance video, "Gangnam Style," put Gangnam on the lips of YouTube watchers around the world. The local government plans to open a visitor center in February that could eventually include a life-size hologram of the singer, whose real name is Park Jae-sang, performing his buffoonish dance.

But Mr. Park's success has also helped feed much grander ambitions. Already famous within Korea as the opulent stamping grounds of this nation's nouveau riche, the district now wants to seize the "Gangnam Style" craze as a chance to win the global recognition that it believes it deserves as a center of fashion, entertainment and, self-professedly, conspicuous consumption.

"Psy appeared right when we were ready to take Gangnam global," said Shin Yeon-hee, the district's mayor. "We already believe we are on par with Manhattan or Beverly Hills in every way."

Trendy District Lures Tourists, 'Gangnam Style'

From Page A1

and sprays television screens here down with the rest of Asia, the "Korean Wave" has led to a boom in the West — and "Gangnam Style."

But many here seemed surprised by the explosive popularity of the video, perhaps because few expected the breakthrough success from Mr. Park, a mid-level star who is as much a comedian as a singer. The district government has been left scrambling to catch up. Its 13-member tourist promotion office, created in November, first built the small, one-story stage at Gangnam station, the closest thing the area has to a center. Here, it will cover the visitor center, with the hologram of the rapper's pop stars including, they hope, Mr. Park. (They have yet to sign a deal with the rapper.) Within a year or so, officials hope to build Haeinsa, which will feature a large, modern building in its subways.

The district aims to double the number of tourists from about 400,000 in 2012, most of them from China and Japan, by increasing the city's number of visitors from the West.

"I want to see people who don't know South Korea come here," said Kim, who heads the new tourism office.

The officials admit this will be an uphill battle. Despite the song's name, Gangnam itself hardly appears in the video, except at a distant, high-rise-etched skyline. "We need to create a stronger connection between the song and the district," Mr. Kim said.

What Mr. Park does in his video to parody the area's reputation for pretentious displays of wealth. In one scene, a man in a yellow suit and oversized sunglasses stomps over to a red sports car; in another, the rapper himself prances in a tuxedo between glass-walled women.

Some of that flaunting of wealth is apparent in the actual Gangnam district, which sits across the Han River from central Seoul, the South Korean capital. (Gangnam means "south of the river.") Corporations seem to compete for the most futuristic skyscrapers, while residents drive flashy cars, party at swanky bars and get their children at one of the hundreds of private nursery schools.

Gangnam also appears recent on the map of the most sophisticated American lifestyle seen in Hollywood movies or experienced by returning immigrants or students. The area boasts a large, modern shopping mall, a city two hours from Seoul, who visited the Psy stage with friends on a recent Friday morning.

Mr. Park, who is a Gangnam native, did not respond to requests for an interview. But other residents said "Gangnam Style" had accurately captured the spirit of an area that has become an American-style free-spirited neighborhood while still trying to keep a Korean identity.

Mr. Park's song borrowed this preference with lyrics about his preference for women who act like traditional role of women in the district. But he knew how to have fun at night. Residents said that while the reality is not nearly so decadent, they said they were still trying to figure out how to balance Western freedom and traditional values.

"Gangnam residents follow what they think is American on the outside," said Jenny Kim, a 35-year-old investor who arrived here a few years ago. "But inside, they are still very traditional." She said that they were still trying to figure out how to balance Western freedom and traditional values.



Tourists at a plywood stage honoring the rapper Psy in the Gangnam district of Seoul on Sunday.

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"Gangnam is a uniquely Korean brand," she said. "It's not just about the money, but about the lifestyle. It's about the way of life. It's about the way of thinking. It's about the way of feeling. It's about the way of being. It's about the way of living. It's about the way of loving. It's about the way of dying. It's about the way of everything."

That's what got American investors interested in what Psy is and where he's from," said Jayme Mullis, a 35-year-old American who moved here from Los Angeles, who heard "Gangnam Style" by her husband. "The song shows Psy's pride in his home. I can respect that."

The question is how to capitalize on Mr. Park's video, which in the five months since it appeared has already become the first ever on YouTube to register more than a billion hits. While Korea's heavily produced boy and girl bands and syrupy television dramas have done well in the rest of Asia, the "Korean Wave" has so far failed to make inroads in the West — until "Gangnam Style."

But many here seemed surprised by the explosive popularity of the video, perhaps because few expected the breakthrough to come from Mr. Park, a midlevel star who is as much a comedian as a singer. The district government has been left scrambling to catch up. Its 13-member tourist promotion office, created in November, first built the wooden stage at Gangnam station, the closest thing the area has to a center. Next will come the visitor center, with the holograms of Korean pop stars including, they hope, Mr. Park. (They have yet to sign a deal with the rapper.) Within a year or so, officials hope to finish Hallyu Drive, which will feature stars' handprints in its sidewalks.

The district aims to double the number of tourists from about 800,000 in 2012, most of them from China and Japan, by increasing the tiny number of visitors from the West.

"Thanks to Psy, even people who don't know South Korea now know Gangnam," said Kim Kwang-soo, who heads the new tourism office.

The officials admit this will be an uphill battle. Despite the song's name, Gangnam itself barely appears in the video, except as a distant, high-rise-studded skyline. "We need to create a stronger connection between the song and the district," Mr. Kim said.

What Mr. Park does do in his video is parody the area's reputation for pretentious displays of wealth. In one scene, a man in a yellow suit and oversized sunglasses saunters over to a red sports car; in another, the rapper himself prances in a tuxedo between glamorous women.

Some of that flaunting of wealth is apparent in the actual Gangnam district, which sits across the broad Han River from central Seoul, the South Korean capital. (Gangnam means "south of the river.") Corporations seem to compete for the most futuristic skyscraper, while residents drive flashy cars, party at wine bars and get their chins tucked at one of the hundreds of plastic surgery clinics.

Gangnam also appears intent on recreating the sort of upper-middle-class American lifestyle seen in Hollywood movies or experienced by returning immigrants or students. The area boasts broad, Los Angeles-style boulevards (with Los Angeles-style traffic jams). Trendy restaurants offer all-day brunch and

burritos. (Both are rare in most of Asia.) Seattle-style coffee shops are found not only on every block, but in every building.

To hear many Koreans tell it, Gangnam's pretensions are just an extreme form of the desires shared by most of this nation of scrappy overachievers. The district's high-rises emerged from the rice paddies as the South Korean economy took off in the 1960s and '70s, turning Gangnam into a symbol of the aspirations, and the excesses, of an Asian miracle that also created growing social inequalities.

"It can be too flashy, but we all envy Gangnam because it is the most developed and richest place," said Yu Jaeyung, 16, a high school student from Chuncheon, a city two hours from Seoul, who visited the Psy stage with friends on a recent frigid morning.

Mr. Park, who is a Gangnam native, did not respond to requests for an interview. But other residents said "Gangnam Style" had accurately captured the split personality of an area that embraces an American-style free-spirited individualism while also trying to keep a Korean identity.

Mr. Park's song lampooned this predicament with lyrics about his preference for women who act the traditional role of demure female in the daytime, but know how to have fun at night. Residents said that while the reality is not nearly so decadent, they said they were still trying to figure out how to balance Western freedoms and traditional values.

"Gangnam residents follow what they think is American on the outside," said Jenny Tae, a 32-year-old boutique clerk who strolled down a tree-lined shopping street in tight brown corduroy pants, gold-painted nails and pink ear muffs. "But a modern, open lifestyle does not mean getting rid of everything."

That distinctly Korean flavor is one thing that the district government hopes to promote. When asked if Gangnam aspired to be like Beverly Hills, Ms. Shin, the mayor, proudly proclaimed that it no longer needed to imitate the West.

"Gangnam is a uniquely Korean brand," she said.

Indeed, the handful of Western visitors who visited the Psy stage on a recent weekend in Gangnam said that they came not to see the American-style shops but to learn about the artist's Korean origins.

"That song got Americans interested in who Psy is and where he's from," said Jermaine Hollis, a 38-year-old American serviceman from Louisiana, who toured Gangnam by bus with his family. "The song shows Psy's pride in his home. I can respect that."

A SOUTH KOREAN CITY FULL OF FOOD, HISTORY AND BARGAINS

BY SETH KUGEL

There are two phrases to learn if you visit Jeonju, a 650,000-person city — and a paradise for Korean food-lovers — three hours by bus south of Seoul.

First is "Hyundai-ok odi innayo?" — "Where is Hyundai-ok?" — a reference to a tiny restaurant famed for its kongnamul guk, or bean sprout soup, but nearly impossible to find in the labyrinthine bowels of Nambu Market.

The second is "Kamsa hamnida," or "thank you," the inevitable response to whichever generous soul drops what he's doing and leads you to Hyundai-ok, past stalls of frozen fish and fresh fungi and down narrow passageways stacked with empty boxes and piles of dirty dishes.

My guide was a fish salesman, who deposited me at the restaurant, where I took the last of just 10 plastic stools. I was seated right in front of a woman in a pink apron slicing jalapeños, dicing chives and smashing garlic; other cooks filled big clay bowls with rice and the bean-sprout-laced broth or prepared banchan, the free and refillable miniature side dishes that accompany just about every Korean restaurant meal.

The soup is a famed hangover helper, but I had not been drinking, I had been freezing — Jeonju can be frigid in early February — and it transformed me from hungry and icy to satisfied and steamy for just 5,000 won (about \$4.75 at 1050 won to the dollar).

There are now other Hyundai-ok franchises in Jeonju

and elsewhere in Korea, but the original version is unique and representative of the city's rich heritage. Jeonju is seen as a sort of guardian of Korean cultural, historical and, most of all, culinary traditions; last year it served as Unesco's City of Gastronomy. It's the place Koreans warn you not to go if you love Korean food, because you'll never love it quite so much anywhere else again — or pay so little for it.

I spend my life looking for places like Jeonju, a city barely known to Western travelers that barely seems to care: many museums, restaurants and guesthouses don't bother translating signs or menus, or even bother Romanizing their Korean names. (I heard much more Chinese than English among visitors.) The exception that proves the rule is Mosim, a cafe whose menu has headings for "Coffee," "Tea" and the like but all listed items are in Korean Hangul script only. (I'll have the, uh, latte?)

Not all Jeonju restaurants are as pared-down, or as cheap, as Hyundai-ok, but a whole lot are. At Veteran Kalguksu, in a squat, gray, modern building almost certainly the ugliest in the Hanok Village — hanoks are traditional Korean houses — the menu offers three items: dumplings of impossibly delicate skins filled with glass noodles and pork (4,000 won, about \$3.80, for 10); cold, chewy and delicious jjolmyeon noodles mixed with vegetables and a powerful hot sauce (5,000 won), and the noodle soup the restaurant is named for (5,000 won). It was packed, and understandably so: I've been thinking about those noodles in hot sauce ever since.

Just north of the Hanok Village, a tiny and informal restaurant called Chamae Galbi serves short rib in a glorious stew filled with glass noodles and mushrooms for 9,000 won a person. It was packed, too. Outside the village toward the more modern (a relative assessment) city center, a modest restaurant called Han Bat Shik Dong (another without English signage), serves baek ban, a traditional meal of kimchi soup with a lovely variety of banchan (including whole fish, shredded squid and beef slices) to add to it, for 7,000 won. It was not packed at all, but I was there on a weekday afternoon.

The latter two restaurants are hardly famous; in fact, they were unknown even to some residents. But as I heard from one resident via e-mail before my trip and later confirmed by experience, “Bad food or restaurants do not exist in Jeonju.”

There are, however, bad hangovers. Makgeolli, a Korean rice drink with an alcohol content similar to wine, has achieved minor recognition worldwide over the last few years, the latest in formerly low-class tipples that have become fashionable. (See: Mexican mezcal.) Slightly sweet, milky-colored and served cold from kettles, it’s hard not to like, though famed for rough mornings-after.

Order it in New York or Seoul and you’ll likely get a bottle or maybe some snacks. Order it in Jeonju and it is accompanied by an entire free meal.

For this reason, you cannot attend a makgeolli restaurant alone, and I begged a local connection I had drummed up, Hana Kim, to go with me. (Hana works with foreign students who come to Jeonju’s Chonbuk National University to study Korean; like local tourists, they tend to be from Asian countries, not Western ones.) She rounded up two colleagues, Taeyoung Kim and Byoung-Yong Kim, and we went to a spot called Yet Chon, a raucous restaurant with a graffiti-covered interior where the first kettle was 20,000 won and each subsequent one was 15,000.

We stopped at two, and that was plenty. Each arrived with a set of dishes. Pig foot, which I’m not inclined to love, was chewy and delicious; a deep-orange kimchi pancake — the traditional makgeolli side dish — was spicy and perfect. Clams and mackerel came with round two, as did soup. Total cost: 35,000 won — that’s \$33 — for a meal for four, including beyond-moderate drinking.

Of course, there’s more to Jeonju than cheap food and hangovers. The Hanok Village, widely considered the biggest and most authentic in the country, is filled with guesthouses, teahouses and artisans’ shops con-

nected varyingly by wide streets and crooked alleys. Indeed, evidence of the city’s heritage is everywhere. Though Jeonju feels like a slow-moving backwater compared with Seoul, it’s the ancestral home of King Taejo, founder of the Joseon Dynasty in 1392. (The dynasty lasted until 1910.) Gyeonggijeon is the city’s most impressive ancient site, a complex of buildings, some dating to Taejo’s time, that is home to what is considered the only existing portrait of the king. It costs 1,000 won to enter, which is unusual for Jeonju; every other cultural institution I visited was free.

One particularly appealing free spot is Omokdae, a hilltop monument above the Hanok Village with lovely views. But perhaps the coolest attraction is the Hangyo Confucian school (also free). I am apparently not the only one to think so: a sign outside notes it is a favorite filming spot for Korean film and television. The complex of traditional buildings is not well-documented (at least in English), but is nevertheless beautiful and fun to wander through.

There are cultural attractions and shops around every corner in Hanok Village, and plotting out a course doesn’t always work, so your best bet is to simply wander and discover. Following a map to the Fan Culture Hall (Jeonju, I had read, was known for its production of traditional paper and its use in artful fans), I walked by accident into a museum that had no fans at all; it was obviously dedicated to a woman who seemed impressive, at least from the (to me) incomprehensible Korean displays dedicated to her. I wondered briefly if her name might actually be Fan and I had been confused, but it turned out to be the Choi Myeong-Hee Literary Museum, devoted to one of Korea’s most prominent writers.

I eventually found the fan museum, and it was worth the effort, with sufficient English descriptions and displays of both older and contemporary danseon (round with a handle) and jeobseon (folding) varieties, many almost painfully elegant. I was the only visitor, and a worker took me under her wing, telling me a bit more about some of the better-known contemporary fan artists based in the area.

Throughout the Hanok Village there are tiny ceramics shops and art studios, as you’d expect from any such spot, and I wandered in and out of many. But I reserved my gift purchases, mostly of rustic-looking ceramics decorated with delicate tree-designs, to Form. Bigger than most shops, and located toward the edge of the Hanok Village, at 21 Eunhaeng-ro, it had a warm glow that drew me close, bells that jangled when I went in, a tiny white dog that nipped me when I petted him, and a studio in back where artists toiled. I spent the equivalent of about \$150 on four items.

I was happy there was so much to do between meals, because that reduced my overall calorie consumption. But I did reserve two meals for bibimbop, Jeonju’s most famous culinary export. Bibimbop is a relatively simple dish: an array of vegetables like bean sprouts, carrots and mushrooms, a runny egg and perhaps a form of meat that you mix together with rice and red pepper paste. In Jeonju, the ingredients are supposed to be fresher and better; the region is known for its fertile soil.

At Sungmidan, where I paid 11,000 won (for Jeonju, that’s tourist trap pricing), the red sauce came premixed in the rice — some people object to that — but the vegetables were fresh and tasty and the banchan — including scallion pancakes, cabbage salad and a variety of kimchi — plentiful.

But I far preferred the version at Myeong Seong Ok, which gets occasional nods from bloggers and which I also heard about on Twitter. The banchan was vast, including a fresh-tasting leaf with chili sauce — not quite fermented enough to be full-on kimchi — that the server identified as bom dong, a spring cabbage. That alone was worth the 7,000 won I paid. (It’s farther from the Hanok Village; add on cab fare and it’s about the same price as Sungmidan).

My final find was the result of more wandering in Hanok Village. I was drawn to an old building — about a century old but beautifully restored — and what I guessed but was not sure were menus written on weathered wooden tablets and propped up on miniature chairs on the sidewalk. (The only Roman letters were a sign reading “Open”.) Peering in the windows, I saw a mostly young crowd, shoes off and sitting on the floor in the traditional style. It was only 5 p.m., and I decided to come back for dinner. It turned out to be Eruwha, where the specialty is ddukgalbi, pork rib meat pounded together with fruits, vegetables and spices and formed into a square, pregrilled then reheated at your table. (They actually had an English menu explaining this and then instructing you how to eat it, using an alternate spelling of the dish: “Put piece of Dduckgalbi on slice of radish...”.) The ddukgalbi was 8,500 won, an absurdly small amount considering that not only included tax and service, but also the accompanying banchan and tea that came with the meal, as well as roasted chestnuts and biscuits that came as dessert.

My first day back in New York, I took a friend to Korean food on West 32nd Street, Manhattan’s Koreatown. The makgeolli was \$20 for a small bottle, and it came without food. The galbi was stringy, the kimchi limp. And the bill was monstrous. It had happened — Jeonju had ruined me. And I couldn’t have been happier.

IF YOU GO

Buses leave about every 10 minutes from Seoul’s Central City Bus Terminal and cost between 12,000 and 18,000 won each way. In Jeonju, taxis are so cheap — rarely more than 5,000 won no matter where you go — that buses are unnecessary.

I stayed at the Jeonju Guesthouse, at the edge of the Hanok Village, a youth hostel with some private rooms run by an English-speaking middle-aged Korean couple, Mr. Lee and Mrs. Kang. They are great hosts, who seem to be at once delighted and bemused by the foreigners who come through. Private rooms are 60,000 won on weekdays and 70,000 on weekends and fit two or three. Bunks start at 19,000 won.

There are also a few hotels, but many Koreans stay at one of more than 20 traditional Korean guesthouses in the Hanok Village, which run about 60,000 to 80,000 won a night per couple. Alas, few have multi-lingual Web sites, listings on international booking sites or English-speaking staff members to answer the phones. Either call the Jeonju Tourist Office at 82-63-282-1330 during local business hours and pray someone speaks English, or book your first night in a hotel and then knock on doors once you get there.

GANGNAM STYLE, BEYOND THE BLING

BY SETH KUGEL

Last summer, Korea started singing along to “Gangnam Style,” by the K-pop star Psy. By October, my nephews in Maryland had joined the chorus. A couple of months ago in Chongqing, China, I saw women exercising by doing its signature horse-riding dance in a public square. In February, Psy performed before thousands at Brazilian Carnival.

The thoroughly global hit (its video is currently YouTube’s most watched video ever, with over 1.3 billion views) has made Gangnam, a 15-square-mile district of southeast Seoul known for packed nightclubs, pricey boutiques and ubiquitous plastic surgery clinics, into a newly magnetic destination.

I normally avoid such spots — a matter of both budget and preference — but during a recent trip to South Korea, I couldn’t resist the challenge: Would it be possible to spend three days in a district defined by opulence without hyperextending my budget?

Not only was it possible, it was easier than pretending to ride a horse. And if you take the time to deconstruct the song, you’ll realize why: this is an upscale neighborhood where, for the price of a cup of coffee or a tube of lipstick, you can spend an afternoon pretending to be rich. In the video, Psy pokes fun at the poseurs who arrive from more humble neighborhoods. But because they are there, businesses have responded. Yes, there are expensive restaurants and high-end boutiques beyond a normal person’s means. But there are also plenty of opportunities to eat, drink, dance and shop for very little. Call it Gangnam Frugal Style.

My visit coincided with the Lunar New Year, which Koreans tend to spend with family; that reduced crowds but left some attractions, like the Pulmuone Kimchi Museum, closed. (“Who cares,” said Youngpo Hong, a student and one of my local sources. “I have a kimchi museum in my refrigerator.”) But most of Gangnam was still open for business, especially the area around the Gangnam Station subway stop, where a honeycomb of crowded, neon-lit, mostly pedestri-

an alleys are home to restaurants, bars and clubs — stacked vertically to around five stories. The shopping districts closer to the Han River were also active, as were a handful of cultural attractions, including the Bongeunsa Temple (no admission), a tranquil hillside Buddhist retreat, and the tranquil park housing the Joseon Dynasty tombs (admission, 1,000 won, or about 95 cents at 1,055 won to the dollar).

It would be a reach to call any part of Gangnam “hip” — an invisible anti-hipster perimeter wall keeps anyone not in line with prevailing high-end fashions across the river in Hongdae — but the hottest spot right now is Garosu-gil, a tree-lined shopping street near the Sinsa subway stop packed with cafes and boutiques.

Psy makes multiple references to coffee in the song, and no wonder: the quantity of cafes on and around Garosu-gil is mind-boggling. I decided to start my exploration of the area with a quick survey. Though the coffee is generally good, most customers seem to care little about fair trade or single origins; the point is to see and be seen. The best example of this in Garosu-gil is Coffeesmith, a monstrous, multitiered space barely nicer than a decent Starbucks, but so popular with Seoul’s stilettoed, Americano-drinking populace that even with the reduced holiday crowds, it was hard to get a table.

At first glance prices seemed high — 4,000 won for an espresso? But that really is just a liquid license to sit for hours among groups of 20-something women preening, giggling over smartphones and sometimes chatting with young men in stylish, slim-fit jackets and even the occasional tie.

Significantly more intimate and mildly less of a scene, Bloom & Gouté sits one block west from the main drag, a classy combination cafe and flower shop. (Flowers adorn each table, often placed in bottles that, appropriate to the local emphasis on vanity, once held beauty products like Aesop Oil-Free Facial Hydrating Serum.) Lattes are a 7,000-won price of admission; a

better deal was to be found at Coco Bruni, a cute spot offering 3,000-won espressos. Here there seemed to be a focus on the actual product: a young barista pulled and tossed at least three shots until he was satisfied with my order.

Shopping options are divided into high-end spots along the main drag offering Korean brands — good for browsing — and small boutiques featuring more offbeat items. A faux-rustic shop called Farmer (the-farmer.co.kr) was full of handmade accessories for women; colorful earmuffs, hats and hair clips, many under 10,000 won, dominated during the freezing Seoul winter. A friend, Eun Young Koh, told me Koreans on a budget often relieve stress by purchasing a small item like a pair of socks — I recommend doing so at a Korean chain called Aland, where I found a 7,900-won blue-and-red-striped pair. (I admit to a brief surge of post-purchase dopamine.)

Here’s the bad news for shoppers: Garosu-gil is too adored for its own good, and a global invasion has begun. As of my trip, a four-story outlet of the South California brand Hollister was the latest; inside, I found throngs of 20-something fashion lemmings browsing as a sound system blared the lyrics “Oh it’s so cliché...” Exactly.

Solace can be found at one of Gangnam’s cheap eating options. Just about every meal I had was under \$10. There is a variety of jajangmyeon — Korean-Chinese takeout spots — but also more upscale places, like Sawore Boribap, where bargains can hide in otherwise upscale menus. For example, the boribap, or barley rice, mixed with vegetables and red pepper paste, is just 8,500 won; and a haemul jeon, a delicious seafood pancake more seafood than pancake, is 7,000 won. As in just about all Korean restaurants, under-order rather than over-order: the small side dishes collectively known as banchan, free and refillable, pick up the slack. (At Sawore Boribop, they include extra spicy raw oysters — a major score in my book.)

Gangnam Style, Beyond the Bling



Near the landmark Kyobo Tower is a restaurant I liked more for its history than its food. Songtan Budae Chigae serves its signature dish for 10,000 won a person. Budae chigae, which means “army base stew,” combines stewed kimchi with meat products American soldiers first introduced to the hungry populace during the Korean War: hot dogs and Spam. It may not be gourmet, but it was hearty and satisfying.

Another money-saver came courtesy of my friend Rob Koh, in a variation on the tabletop-grilled marinated beef that most Americans associate with Korean cuisine: Tak galbi, in which chicken is stir-fried with red pepper paste. Right across the street from my hostel near Gangnam Station I found Chum-Chu-Neun Tak-Galbi (Dancing Chicken Galbi), where 9,000 won bought its namesake dish, along with rice cakes, sesame leaf, cabbage, mushroom and a spicy sauce not for the weak.

In “Gangnam Style,” Psy celebrates women who can sip coffee by day and let loose at night — and indeed, night life is central to the Gangnam experience. But since it can be expensive, two friends offered solutions. Gangnam-raised Si Yeon Kim took me to Rainbow, a hippie-inspired, Korean-style take-off-your-shoes-and-sit-on-the-floor spot where groups of four share 28,000-won scorpion bowls and hookahs. The ambience was plenty unusual but the prices still a bit steep. Youngpo, a self-proclaimed farm boy, had a better idea, taking me to a few “beer warehouses,” newly popular spots that pare the drinking down to its essentials. The warehouses are virtually service-free; at Cube, a spare space with soft neon lighting and a video projected on the wall, there was really just a cashier and someone to bus tables — you take beer (starting at 3,500 won) yourself from refrigerated cases.

My last night called for full-on clubbing, but at the hottest Gangnam clubs — Octagon and Eden, for example — admission can be 30,000 won or more and the scene bruising to egos of those over 30. Both Rob and Youngpo agreed: the solution was Bam-gwa Eumak Sa-I (“Between the Night and the Music”), where the weeknight cover is a more reasonable 10,000 won. Located down a flight of stairs in one of the Gangnam Station alleys, its exposed pipes, grungy floors, 2,000-won drafts and infectious ’90s K-pop “oldies” drew an unassuming but fun crowd. In other words, just the sort of place where someone exhausted from days of straining toward affluence can let loose — although preferably not to the point of horse dancing.

IF YOU STAY

Few budget lodging options exist in the Gangnam district of Seoul; here are three at various price points.

Morning Guesthouse (third floor, 829-13 Sinseong Building, Yeoksam-Dong). Six blocks (and about 10 cafes) from the Gangnam Station spot, up a couple of flights of stairs, tiny, pod-like guestrooms combine a comfortable bed, a desk with its own Wi-Fi router, and a bathroom-and-shower cubicle in a seemingly impossibly small space. I reserved through booking.com and paid 60,000 won, about \$57, for a night.

JA Gangnam (No. 508, Sungwoo Village, 1307 Seocho 4-dong, Seocho-gu). Just a few months old, with only 10 beds and one very hard-working host named Hyunchung Kim (“Dan” in English), this is a charmingly personal little spot, right in the middle of the action — though practically impossible to find without the excellent directions on its Web site. It’s also full of the perks you’d expect from hostels: chargers, Wi-Fi, maps, advice, camaraderie. I booked through hostelbookers.com for 28,000 won a night.

A less conventional lodging option, probably best suited to a single night’s stay, is Gold Spa (fourth floor, 143 Saimdang-ro, Seocho-gu), a 24-hour jjimjilbang, or Korean bathhouse. Enter in the evening (leave your luggage in a locker at nearby Gangnam Station) and pay the 10,000-won fee. You can spend the night in simple bunk rooms (floor mats and blankets are provided). Divided by gender, men and women lounge in hot and cold pools, steam rooms and saunas and come together on another floor for snacks, socializing and a few additional hot rooms.

A KOREAN VISITOR REKINDLES MEMORIES IN FLUSHING

BY ANDREW KEH



The Dodgers’ Hyun-Jin Ryu, pitching against the Mets on Thursday, is the 14th Korean to play in the majors. Right, some of the fans who came to cheer for him at Citi Field.

A Korean Visitor Rekindles Memories in Flushing

My older sister and I were born at Flushing Hospital in Queens, even though it was a 40-minute drive from my parents’ Westchester County home. This week, I text-messaged some Korean-American friends from the New York area, wondering how many were born at that hospital, too. “We all were,” one wrote back.

ANDREW KEH
ON BASEBALL

Northern and Kissena boulevards in Flushing. We bought groceries at Sambok market. We went to a Korean-Chinese restaurant called Sam Won Galbi, still there today, for noodles. Before dinner, we would get haircuts on Roosevelt Avenue. And sometimes we went into Flushing to watch the Mets play. Chan Ho Park, a pitcher from Konkje, South Korea, joined the Los Angeles Dodgers in the mid-1990s, becoming the first Korean in the majors and soon a star. It felt imperative that we travel to Shea Stadium when the Dodgers were in town so we could see Park pitch. And because New York City has America’s second-largest Korean population, after Los Angeles, many people shared our impulse.

In those games, I watched fans in the crowd as much as I watched the players on the field. People waved Korean flags and

chanted, “Park Chan Ho,” the three syllables of his name aligning perfectly with “Let’s go, Mets!” and often drowning it out. That left some non-Korean Mets fans understandably perturbed. This week, one friend texted to me a distinct recollection of seeing pieces of kimchi — rice rolled inside seaweed — flung across the stands during one confrontation among fans. Hyun-Jin Ryu, a 26-year-old Dodgers rookie this season, a Korean roughly my age, saw those games, too. Growing up around Incheon, South Korea, he watched broadcasts of Park’s Dodger outings in the middle of the night, or at dawn. His memories are as vivid and fond as mine.

“It wasn’t just me,” Ryu said, sitting inside the visitors’ dugout at Citi Field this week, as the Dodgers played a three-game series against the Mets. “Everyone

in Korea who was around my age or the same age as me, we all were inspired by him and watched almost every game.” Park was a pioneer, Ryu is not. But on Thursday afternoon, when Ryu took the mound at Citi Field, the sights and sounds were very much as they were way back then. Hundreds of Korean fans, some of them carrying flags and banners, cheered for the visiting team. Kimbap was pulled from plastic shopping bags. My mother texted me before the game from a hair salon — the women there had been talking about Ryu, too.

Over the years, the Mets have had Korean players on their roster, including Park, who pitched one game for them in 2007, when he was well beyond his prime. Before Park, the Mets had the left-hander Dae-Sung Koo in 2005; he was best known for his

only major league hit, a double that he somehow slammed off the Yankees’ Randy Johnson. And before Koo, the Mets had the right-hander Jae Weong Seo, who pitched decently at times from 2002 to 2005. Ryu became the 14th Korean to make it to the majors when he signed with the Dodgers this winter. In South Korea, he led the league in strikeouts for five of his seven seasons. Because of his track record, because of the money the Dodgers spent on him, there are immediate expectations for him to do well here. His easygoing personality has helped. Lon Rosen, the Dodgers’ executive vice president and chief marketing officer, joked that one of the first English phrases Ryu learned was “Hi, Stan,” which endeared him to Stan Kasten, the team president. Ryu has also benefited from living in Los Angeles, which he

said was like being in South Korea because of the large Korean population there. But when I mentioned to him that Park sometimes said representing a whole nation each time he pitched for the Dodgers was draining, Ryu agreed that he felt significant pressure. “I know every pair of eyes is watching every pitch that I throw,” he said.

Everyone was watching when Park pitched, too, and those memories resurfaced during Thursday’s game. During the eighth inning, the scoreboard at Citi Field pulsated with a graphic and a drum beat: “Let’s Go Mets!” But quickly, a different chant — a trisyllabic Korean name, Ryu Hyun Jin — burst through the din, the same way it happened at Shea Stadium almost two decades ago. It was a familiar tension, special to Flushing.

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Flushing, for us, has always maintained a certain unshakable pull. Large numbers of Asian immigrant families, of course, began residing there in the 1960s, when exclusionary immigration quotas were loosened in the United States. My family merely lived nearby.

I remember spending countless nights inside my family's purple station wagon while my dad zigzagged a path between Northern and Kissena boulevards in Flushing. We bought groceries at Sambok market. We went to a Korean-Chinese restaurant called Sam Won Gahk, still there today, for noodles. Before dinner, we would get haircuts on Roosevelt Avenue.

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A SOUTH KOREAN'S SOUNDLESS JOURNEY THROUGH JUNIOR TENNIS

BY JOHN MARTIN

PARIS

A 15-year-old from South Korea has emerged as one of the world's top junior tennis players without ever hearing the sound of a ball being struck or a score being called. He is deaf.

Duck Hee Lee of Jecheon, South Korea, suffered twin losses at Roland Garros, losing in the first round of junior singles and doubles. But last week in Budapest, Lee won five singles matches to collect the Epitok-Abris Cup, defeating Dennis Uspensky of Atlantic Beach, N.Y., in the final. In April, he won the Asian Junior Closed Championship in his age bracket, defeating Ken Onishi of Japan in the final.

Speaking through a translator who is also his sports agent, Lee, ranked 29th by the International Tennis Federation, said he reads the lips of his doubles partner to learn what strategy is being pursued.

At Roland Garros, Lee's partner was a childhood friend, Hyeon Chung, 17, one of the country's top juniors. Chung is ranked 15th.

Lee doesn't play doubles much, said K.C. Lee, a sports agent who travels with Lee (and is no relation) to some of the world's major junior tournaments.

In Tuesday's doubles match, Lee and Chung battled for 85 minutes to a razor-thin defeat, losing 4-6, 6-4,

13-11, to Kyle Edmund, 18, of Britain and Frederico Ferreira Silva, 18, of Portugal, the third seeded team.

The match ended with the victors winning 73 points to the losers' 72.

"What can you do about it?" said Lee in mild exasperation.

Alternatively speaking Korean and writing questions in Korean, the translator obtained brief answers to several questions.

Without hearing ordinary tennis match sounds, Lee watches the ball at every moment. "First he sees, then he acts," said the translator.

Lee is entered in the Wimbledon junior boys competition, K.C. Lee said, adding, "He would like to play in the grass."

Asked if he believed he could some day win one of the world's major junior championships, Lee said he believed he could.

His choice for his first major championship title was clear. "Wimbledon," said young Lee, pronouncing the word carefully and clearly.

A SOUTH KOREAN STAYS IN THE FAIRWAY AND IN FRONT

BY LISA D. MICKEY

GOLF

A South Korean Stays In the Fairway and in Front

By LISA D. MICKEY

PITTSFORD, N.Y. — Continuing rain on Friday did not bother Chella Choi of South Korea, who took a one-shot lead at five-under 67 in the first round of the L.P.G.A. Championship.

Choi tore through the front nine at the Locust Hill Country Club, shooting a five-under 30, before playing the back nine at par.

"My driver was really good today, and my goal was to just keep it in the fairway," said Choi, who hit all 14 fairways and missed only three greens in regulation.

"I had a lot of birdie chances today," she added.

The 22-year-old Choi, who plays with a bright orange ball, began on a torrid pace. She had six birdies on her first 10 holes, but took a bogey on No. 13 when she could not save par from 15 feet.

Choi led going into the final round last month at the L.P.G.A.'s tournament in Mobile, Ala., but finished tied for fourth. If she can hold on for her first L.P.G.A. win this week, she will become the sixth South Korean winner this year in 13 L.P.G.A. events.

Jiyai Shin of South Korea also made an afternoon charge to join Morgan Pressel in a tie for second at 68. Shin recorded four birdies in her bogey-free round.

Pressel and Brittany Lincicome shared a 7:48 a.m. tee time and were among the early leaders. Pressel birdied her last four holes, and Lincicome posted a 69. Pressel said she was concerned when she hit her first shot out of

the wet rough on No. 4. She injured her left wrist at this event last year and has nursed the injury throughout the year with therapy and stretching.

"I was a little bit nervous, but it makes me want to hit it in the fairway even more," said Pressel, who used a hybrid club twice on No. 4 to extract her errant drive out of the thatch. She salvaged a bogey after hitting a 100-yard shot to one foot and tapping the ball in.

"If we didn't have the marshals, we wouldn't find our golf balls out there," said Lincicome, seeking her sixth career win. "The rough was thick to begin with, and now it's wet."

Se Ri Pak, a three-time winner of the L.P.G.A. Championship, and Jessica Korda are tied at two-under 70. Pak's first of 25 wins and 5 major victories came at this championship in 1998.

"We always get wet conditions here every year, but this is the toughest I've ever played here," she said. "I'll just play as hard as I can, and we'll see on Sunday."

Laura Davies of Britain, needing only a win at a major championship to earn a spot into the L.P.G.A. and World Golf halls of fame, shot a 71.

Play began on schedule in the storm-delayed event after two and a half inches of rain pummeled the course on Thursday.

Rain is in the forecast for Saturday. Tour officials anticipate the field will play at least 36 holes on Sunday, with an option to complete play on Monday.

More than five inches of rain has fallen on the course in the last nine days, leaving water standing on the course. Preferred lies were used in Friday's round, allowing players to lift, clean and place their balls in the fairway.

NOTES

YANI TSENG of Taiwan scored a hole in one on the 140-yard 15th hole.

PITTSFORD, N.Y.

Continuing rain on Friday did not bother Chella Choi of South Korea, who took a one-shot lead at five-under 67 in the first round of the L.P.G.A. Championship.

Choi tore through the front nine at the Locust Hill Country Club, shooting a five-under 30, before playing the back nine at par.

"My driver was really good today, and my goal was to just keep it in the fairway," said Choi, who hit all 14 fairways and missed only three greens in regulation.

"I had a lot of birdie chances today," she added.

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MOM WANTS YOU MARRIED? SO DOES THE STATE

BY SU-HYUN LEE

SEOUL, South Korea

As hopeful singles at the speed dating event shifted from table to table introducing themselves, Park Chang-won, a 32-year-old firefighter, grew more and more morose.

By the time he reached the last table, Mr. Park, whose dark eyebrows give him a brooding look, was uttering only his name and age. Then he sank into silence.

"It felt awkward from the outset," Mr. Park said later, as he explained that a lifetime spent around men — at boys' schools, the military and now as a fireman — had made meeting women harder.

Anywhere else, Mr. Park's dating woes might have been strictly personal. But in South Korea, fretful about plummeting birthrates but still tied to conservative ideas about matchmaking, solving the difficulties of the lovelorn has become something of a national priority. In perhaps the surest sign of that anxiety, the event he attended was one of dozens of dating parties nationwide sponsored by an unlikely matchmaker, the government.

In a country where arranged courtships are fading into the past, the Ministry of Health and Welfare began promoting the idea of dating parties in 2010. Under the enthusiastic leadership of its minister at the time, Cheon Jae-hee, it held four parties that year that brought together its workers and employees at local corporations — making a splash in the news media. Ms. Cheon officiated at the wedding of the first couple who met at one. Featured in a magazine article before the wedding, the 31-year-old groom-to-be thanked the

government profusely and wondered if two children would be enough to meet expectations.

Since then, sponsorship of the parties has shifted mainly to ministry affiliates and local governments, which can win financial rewards for activities that promote marriage and childbirth. The municipal government that threw the party Mr. Park attended has been named a role model by the city of Seoul. One government-financed agency, the Planned Population Federation of Korea, claims a different kind of victory: by hosting parties, it is working to undo its past success when it encouraged vasectomies as a booming South Korea feared being held back by population growth.

Government officials are not the only ones trying to replace the traditional matchmakers that many young people consider increasingly old-fashioned. Corporations, fearing critical shortages of workers in an aging society, have begun ending informal bans against office romances, with some now paying for dating services for their workers. College students have leapt online to set up mass dating events, including a much-publicized flash-mob blind date last winter in downtown Seoul. And entrepreneurs have opened bars where waiters serve as informal go-betweens.

There are online dating services as well, but many young Koreans remain uncomfortable searching for a partner on their own. Most prefer to rely on the companies to take their information and make the match for them.

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Trying to connect without family ties or matchmakers.

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So far, though, the results of these efforts have been mixed. Korean society is organized around group affiliations — hometown ties and school and corporate friendships — so meeting a potential spouse without formal introductions to merit family approval has proved difficult, even for those enamored with the concept.

"I usually date girls I get set up with by my friends, but tonight I came to this party to find someone naturally," said Yang Sung-mo, 29, who tucked a dapper purple handkerchief into his blazer pocket to attend a bar event for singles. "Still, I doubt it's going to work unless I am introduced."

Until the 1980s, young people relied on matchmakers and family connections to find spouses, sociologists say. With so many people living in ancestral villages, it was easy for parents to find good matches for their children. Among the criteria considered: family status and birth dates checked by fortune tellers for compatibility.

Those practices waned as industrialization started an exodus to South Korean cities. Far from traditional networks, families turned to a growing number of

In South Korea, State Joins Mom in Wanting You Married



Above, an event at a shopping mall in Seoul in February for single people who didn't get chocolate on Valentine's Day. Left, men and women at a matchmaking event in Seoul in May.



dating services that performed background checks. And young people turned to friends whose role is taken seriously enough that they receive gifts at weddings. (Standard thank you presents include tailored suits and cash.)

But in recent years, urban youth exposed to the West began to complain that even the less formal blind dates set up by friends were stressful.

"I want to meet someone I feel for," said Lee Su-seung, 28, who waited nervously with a group of friends at the Blue Ketchup Bar in Seoul, where waiters hand out "Cupid cards" from admirers as an icebreaker.

The catch with such unorthodox approaches, said Hahm In-lee, a professor of sociology at Ewha Womans University, is that society has not been prepared for such a radical change.

Approaching, or socializing with someone you don't know at all feels very unfamiliar to Koreans," she said. "It is very awkward to mingle with someone without knowing who the other person's parents are, where they are from, etc."

Of all the new approaches now being tried, the flash mob was the most famous failure. About 3,000 young people showed up at sprawling Yeosu Plaza, despite frigid temperatures. At 3:24 p.m.

their phones rang, signaling that the date hunting could begin, but the crowd suffered a case of mass jitters. (It did not help that the police were dispatched to chase the event because parents were afraid of sexual assaults.) The event fizzled in 10 minutes, though the organizer said that about 100 couples managed to arrange a first date.

The heart of the problem, local officials and others say, is that South Koreans have gotten ahead of themselves. As the country modernizes rapidly, many of its urban youth are chafing not only at arranged courtships but also at dates arranged by friends. Mr. Park avoids matches set up by his family, but says countless blind dates arranged by his friends have too often left him stammering through small talk with women who are not interested in him, or he in them.

Still, he and most other young South Koreans are not yet comfortable with the Western notion of casual dating as a path to finding a spouse, and the idea of approaching a stranger to start of a meaningful relationship sends many into spasms of shyness.

But social mores are slowly shifting. Sociologists say young

people are generally more open to premarital sex than past generations were, and with most living at home until they get married, they have found ways to escape parents' prying eyes, including ducking into love hotels. But those changes do not diminish the need for proper introductions for serious relationships.

The difficulties in meeting potential spouses have exacerbated an increasing tendency among South Koreans to marry late. As young women have gotten better jobs, analysts say, many are loath to give them up to shepherd children through a hypercompetitive education system and care for aging in-laws.

In 2011, the average age of a first marriage for South Korean women hit 29.34, up from 24.8 in 1990; for men it jumped to 31.5 from 27.9 in 1990. The birthrate sank to 1.15 children per woman, the lowest among the world's most developed countries.

Young people and researchers say the situation has worsened as South Koreans born into greater wealth have become more materialistic and status conscious.

"Korean women are too picky with all sorts of criteria, including which college the guy goes to, and whether or not he has a car," said Yu Tae-hyeong, who set up the flash mob. Men, he said, are more concerned with women's looks.

So far, several young people said, the government matchmaking parties have proved the best mix of old and new. Local officials perform thorough background checks, matchmaker-style, but once everyone is vetted, officials encourage them to mingle freely.

That is little comfort for the hapless Mr. Park from the speed dating party.

In the end, he abandoned all caution when the organizers asked if anyone would publicly say who they most wanted to meet. He pointed to a woman with an infectious grin who he respected for not trying to hide her braces, then knelt to present her with a bouquet provided by the party planners.

She covered her face with her hands and refused to give him her phone number. Later, she and her friends left with a group of young men. Mr. Park was not invited.

"I guess I will continue the introduction thing through friends," he said later. "But I think praying is the only answer."

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THE LIST OF 2012

The New York Times Articles
on Korean Culture

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Not all articles on the list were selected for this booklet. The articles that are included in this booklet will be in **BOLD**.

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— NEW YORK —



Korean Cultural Service New York is a branch of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the Republic of Korea. Since our inauguration in December 1979 under the authority of the Korean Consulate General in New York, we have worked to promote cultural exchange and stimulate interest in Korean culture through our cultural programs, exhibitions, movies and events.

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THE KOREAN WAVE AS VIEWED THROUGH THE PAGES OF THE NEW YORK TIMES IN 2012 & 2013THE KOREAN W

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I believe we are witnessing another dimension of Korean culture's movement outside the borders of the peninsula. A given cultural form—a song, a film, a dance, a dish—is not really a part of the context in which it finds itself if it is either simply lauded or rejected. In both of these cases, it remains something outside, something “other.” Korean popular culture has moved to a new stage: it has begun its true entrance into the U.S. scene. The critiques we observe on the pages of The Times speak of a desire to engage with Korean culture in a serious way, not simply as an upstart, something fresh, or as the “exotic.”

Theodore Hughes

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