

Spin-Flip

Texu Kim

After earning bachelor's and master's degrees from Seoul National University, Texu Kim moved to the United States to complete his doctorate in music at Indiana University. Along the way, he studied with such composers as Unsuk Chin, David Dzubay, Sven-David Sandström, Claude Baker, and Sangjick Jun, who prepared him to make the most of his multicultural background. He previously taught at Portland State University and Lewis & Clark College in Oregon and is now on the faculty at Syracuse University's Setnor School of Music, where he is assistant teaching professor of music composition, theory, and history. Kim also served as composer-in-residence of the Korean Symphony Orchestra from 2014 to 2018. In 2019 he was a fellow of the Civitella Ranieri Foundation, an arts residency program that afforded him creative time at a 15th-century castle in Umbria, Italy.

Some of his works have focused on Korean traditions in a modern context. *Monastic Scenes*, a 2013 work for ten musicians, considers from a musical perspective how Protestant religious practices interlace with indigenous shamanistic traditions in Korean Christianity; *Ko-Oh* (2014–15) is a viola concerto based on a Korean folk lullaby; and *Chopsalteok* (2012), for male singer and choir, builds on street cries of Korean vendors of mochi, a popular rice cake.

Spin-Flip falls more in line with a different strand of his oeuvre: works inspired by everyday experiences and observations about the physical world. Other works of this sort include *Bounce!!*, from 2014, prompted by basketballs and incorporating rebounding musical gestures and alternating chords and instruments, and *Shake It!!*, an instrumental octet from 2014, which emanated from the composer's experience of shaking

a coffee grinder up and down while pulverizing coffee beans. ("I am unsure whether or not it made any difference in the taste of my coffee," he reported, but he decided that "it would be fun to translate the effect of the multi-dimensional tremble into music.") About those exclamation marks: as a titlist, Texu Kim does not lack for enthusiasm. His catalogue includes pieces named *Splash!!*, *Flash!!*, *Treppab!!*, *Stre-----tch!!*, *Hiccups!!*, *Pali-pali!!*, and *Blow, Fly, Pop!!*. They were inspired, respectively, by bursting water balloons, momentary sparks of insight, an M.C. Escher lithograph, warm-up exercises, diaphragmatic contractions, a work ethic of efficient diligence, and bubble-blowing. His orchestral piece *Zzan!!* will be premiered by the Busan Philharmonic Orchestra in South Korea this April.

Kim's works have been performed by such groups as the Minnesota Orchestra, Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra, National Orchestra of Korea, Gyeonggi Philharmonic Orchestra,

In Short

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

Resides: in Syracuse, New York, and Portland, Oregon

Work composed: 2014, on commission from the Korean Symphony Orchestra, Hun-Joung Lim, conductor

World premiere: April 1, 2015, at the Seoul Arts Center Concert Hall as part of the SAC Orchestra Festival, by the Korean Symphony Orchestra, Hun-Juung Lim, conductor

New York Philharmonic premiere: this performance, which marks the New York Premiere

Estimated duration: ca. 8 minutes

KBS Orchestra, Ensemble Intercontemporain, Ensemble Modern, and — in New York City — Alarm Will Sound, Ensemble 212, Ensemble Mise-en, Harpyday Ensemble, Arcus Project, and the New York Classical Players. He has been honored with awards from Copland House, American Modern Ensemble, the SCI / ASCAP Commission Competition, and the Isang Yun International Composition Prize. He is also active as an arranger, creating settings performed on commercial recordings featuring such artists as sopranos Sumi Jo and Youngok Shin, violinists Suyoen Kim and Chee-Yun, violist Richard Yongjae O'Neill, harpist Jung Kwak, and pianist Yeol Eum Son, as well as at the opening ceremony of the 2014 Paralympic Winter Games.

As Texu Kim explains, *Spin-Flip* was born of imagery connected to, on one hand, ping-pong and, on the other, the behavior of protons and electrons within a hydrogen atom. Although he has only an outsider's acquaintance with the former, he is considerably more informed about

the latter; as an undergraduate at Seoul National University, he earned bachelor's degrees in both music and chemistry, and in 1998 he won a silver medal at the International Chemistry Olympiad in Melbourne, Australia. *Spin-Flip* draws on the forces of a large orchestra with a substantial percussion section, but the composer employs those resources very selectively, stressing the subtle interactions among individual instruments or sections rather than massive effects. No small part of its delight resides in its celebration of the momentary.

Instrumentation: three flutes (one doubling piccolo), three oboes (one doubling English horn), three clarinets (one doubling bass clarinet), three bassoons (one doubling contrabassoon), four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, suspended cymbals, hi-hat, castanets, vibraslap, triangle, flexatone, crotales, xylophone, log drum, snare drum, tambourine, temple blocks, bongo, tom-toms, kick drum, water gong, harp, and strings.

In the Composer's Words

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

I happened to share my name (spelled differently in English) with a legendary Korean table tennis player, Taek-soo Kim (b. 1970), who coached the Korean National Team of table tennis. For this reason, when meeting new people in Korea, I am often asked if I am good at table tennis. Though the answer is no, this silly coincidence has led me to write a musical piece about it.

Spin-Flip is an eight-minute overture that is all about ping-pong: it conveys the driving energy of a (good) ping-pong match; its primary motives are derived from the sound of cheering.

