

Korea trip with family stands out for artist

By Jae-Ha Kim
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With her gayageum — a 12-string zither — avant-garde musician-composer-vocalist DoYeon Kim blends traditional Korean music with free jazz.

“When I was in fifth grade, I went to a traditional Korean music performance with my father (and was immediately drawn to its sound,” said Kim, 34. “I loved that I could directly pluck, pull and press the strings to shape the sound myself. I could feel the vibration and the subtle changes in tone through my hands, which made the instrument feel incredibly expressive to me.”

Kim recently released her debut album, “Well-spring.”

This interview with Kim has been edited for clarity and length.

Q: When you came to the U.S. in 2014 to study at the New England Conservatory of Music and then went to grad school at the Berklee Global Jazz Institute, did you think back then that you'd end up staying here?

A: Yes, I did. I always had the intention of living abroad long term. When I was in middle school, I spent a winter in Victoria, Canada, for a language program. It was my first time living outside of Korea and it had a huge impact on me. I've always had a big personality. Growing up in Korea, I was often labeled as a drama queen, which sometimes made me feel self-conscious. But in Canada, people accepted me as I was. I began to see that my personality could actually be a strength. That experience really helped me build a stronger sense



Musician DoYeon Kim has never been to Iceland, but would like to visit to see the Northern Lights. **HYUN PARK**

of self. At the same time, I was surprised by how little people knew about Korea. That made me start thinking, “What if I could share Korean music, especially the gayageum, with a wider audience?” From my second year of middle school, I began to seriously dream about becoming a gayageum player and living abroad. So even though I officially moved to the U.S. for graduate school, in many ways, I had already been preparing for this life since I was very young.

Q: What do you remember about your first professional gig?

A: I believe my first recital was in 2011, during my sophomore year of college. It was my first experience performing in a professional setting, and I prepared for it very intensely. At the time, I was practicing almost obsessively to the point where I would sometimes end up in the emergency room or receiving IV treatments on weekends. I also suffered a serious injury to my left wrist during that period, which made things even more difficult. ... I think I was pushing myself beyond my limits because I was so determined to prove something to myself through that performance.

Q: What are your five favorite cities?

A: Seoul, Mykonos, Barce-

lona, Venice and Hong Kong.

Q: Where would you like to go that you have never been to before?

A: I would love to visit Iceland to see the Northern Lights.

Q: What is your best vacation memory?

A: In 2024, my family and I took a three-week trip to Europe to celebrate my mother's 60th birthday. It was my parents' first time visiting Europe and it meant a lot to me to be there with them as they experienced everything for the first time. I still remember small moments very vividly — walking through different cities together, sharing meals at local restaurants, and seeing my parents react with so much excitement and curiosity to places they had only seen in pictures before.

Q: What was a trip you took as a child that stands out?

A: Anmyeondo (South Korea), without a doubt. I remember it as a place where I could experience seafood in its freshest form, especially the seasonal shrimp that I still think about even now. There was something unforgettable about eating simple, freshly prepared food right by the sea.

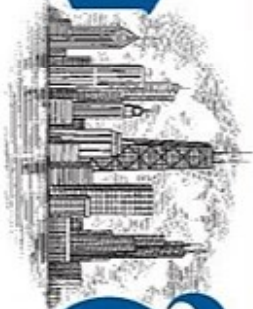
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