

Preview

A/B Duo to visit Kent State and Oberlin

by Mike Telin



Creating your niche in today's crowded chamber music world is not an easy task. However with talent, hard work and a bit of creative ingenuity many young chamber music ensembles are finding their place in that world and winning over skeptical presenters and audiences.

On Monday, March 10 at Kent State University and Thursday, March 13 at the Oberlin Conservatory, the bi-coastal [A/B Duo](#), comprised of percussionist Christopher G. Jones (Rochester, NY) and flutist Meerennai Shim (Campbell, CA), will

present concerts that feature a variety of fun, intense and thought-provoking new works, most of which have been written for A/B Duo. The concerts will include Matthew Joseph Payne's *Echoloquacious* for flute, percussion and Gameboy/LSDJ, Ivan Trevino's *Things We Dream About* for flute, bass flute, vibraphone and drums, Carolyn O'Brien's *Nocturne* for contrabass flute and djembe and the premiere of Zack Browning's *Sol Moon Rocker* for flute and vibraphone. If seeing is believing, check out A/B's video of "Fun" from [Things We Dream About](#).

"There are so many possibilities with the combination of flute and percussion, with all of the percussion instruments, and I also have five flutes that I can use – piccolo, flute, alto flute, bass flute and contra-bass flute," A/B flutist Meerennai Shim told us during a recent telephone conversation. "And stylistically speaking, some people describe what Chris and I do as chamber rock and I've heard others say it's a combination of popular music and art music."

But how does Shim explain what A/B does when someone asks? "That's a very good question. I was just at the Chamber Music America conference in January. It was a combination of the traditional model of string quartets and piano trios vs. the weird ensembles like us. But actually the combination of flute and percussion is really not that weird. The problem is that there really aren't any duos that are household names. Chris and I find that it's easier to talk about what we do with a new music crowd. But for the more traditional, yes it's a little bit difficult, and we have not perfected our elevator pitch — that's for sure."

On Wednesday, March 12 beginning at 2:00 pm Christopher Jones and Meerena Shim will have an opportunity to work on that elevator speech when they present a workshop titled *Making Contemporary Music* at [Kendal at Oberlin](#). The brainchild of new music aficionados and Kendal residents Larry and Arlene Dunn, the workshop will give the public an opportunity to learn more about how musicians go about asking composers to write pieces, and about the collaborative process between composers and performers. “It’s going to be a little bit of a show-and-tell, said Shim. “We’ll play excerpts from our program and discuss how we interpret what composers write.

One piece they're sure to discuss is Matthew Joseph Payne’s *Echloquacious* for flute, vibraphone, drum set and Game Boy. “This is a prime example of one trend in new music,” Shim says “Composers who are in their 20’s now are writing what they listen to. Matthew is a classically trained composer but he is also a multi-talented instrumentalist who actually has only been experimenting with Game Boy sounds for the last three or four years.”

Shim and Payne met while she was recording the flute parts for a singer songwriter’s album. “He was doing all of the album’s musical arrangements.” Then, Shim said that she saw his band that included Payne on drums, a singer/guitarist and programmed Game Boys. “I was so blown away I said I need this for the flute. It’s pretty simple because a Game Boy is essentially a small computer. It has a sound card that can produce four sounds simultaneously. You load extra software into the Game Boy and then you program it or tell it which sounds to play at which time.”

It was the use of new technologies that, in a way, was responsible for bringing Shim and Jones together in the first place. “I had commissioned a piece from Chicago-based composer Janice Misurell-Mitchell,” Shim recalls. “It was originally to be for flute and cello but that didn’t work out. So Janice said, what about percussion. She finished the piece and an opportunity came up to premiere it in Chicago, except for one problem, I had no percussionist. I contacted a friend I had met on Twitter and he gave me a list of percussionists in Chicago and Chris was on the top of the list. We premiered it, recorded it, and said let’s just keep going — and that’s how we became a duo.”

Although that elevator pitch may not be totally perfected, Meerena Shim is very clear about one thing. “Although our music is by composers who are not household names and you may have no idea what to expect, I can promise you that if you come to one of our concerts you will not be bored. The music is stylistically diverse, and all of our pieces are 10 minutes or less — so if there’s a piece you’re not that into, the next one might just be up your alley. And I promise there will be a few pieces you are going to talk about the next day with your friends.”

Published on clevelandclassical.com March 4, 2014