



Jordan Dodson and Jiyeon Kim take lessons together and separately with guitar faculty members David Starobin and Jason Vieaux. PHOTOS: PETE CHECCHIA

Breaking New Ground

GUITARISTS JORDAN DODSON AND JIYEON KIM BRING A FRESH SOUND TO CURTIS.

BY SARA HUEBNER

Around the same time that 11-year old Jordan Dodson was being seduced by the cool, provocative tones of the electric guitar in Columbus, Ohio, Jiyeon Kim was in Seoul, South Korea, passing up the ever-popular violin and piano to explore the little-known world of classical guitar.

Today Jordan, the modest, easygoing Midwesterner, is nonchalant yet expressive as he plays; while Jiyeon, the elegant, poised Korean, takes on a focused intensity in performance. They could hardly be more different. But there's one crucial thing they share: As the first members of Curtis's classical guitar studio, Jordan and Jiyeon are breaking new ground, bringing to the school not only a new instrument but new repertoire and new possibilities for music-making.

Guitar wasn't the instrument Jiyeon originally wanted to play; she admits to being first attracted to drums. Her parents, she recalls, were not too happy about the prospect. One day, her father brought home some Eric Clapton DVDs. She was starstruck—enticed by the legendary rock guitarist's rhythmic, lyrical riffs and his smooth manner on stage. Her father quickly explained that the only way to play cool rock music like Eric Clapton's would be to master classical guitar first. In short, "he tricked me!" she exclaims.

Jordan took a different path. At age 11, Jordan was excited to start electric-guitar lessons at a small music shop in Columbus. The training was informal and covered a variety of genres. "One week, it'd be rock; then the next, classical or blues," he recalls. It wasn't until Jordan was 16 that his teacher gave him an all-classical CD to sell him on the idea of concentrating on the classical guitar. It worked. "The first track was enough to do it for me," Jordan recalls. "It was Andres Segovia playing *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* by Francisco Tárrega." Since then, Jordan has dedicated himself to classical music.

The differences in Jiyeon's and Jordan's expressive styles are typical in the classical guitar world, says David Starobin, who holds the new Fondation Charidu Chair in Guitar Studies; he and Jason Vieaux comprise Curtis's distinguished faculty in the new discipline. Mr. Starobin says that the guitar, "being an instrument where both hands are directly

Curtis's focus on chamber music brings the new guitar students exposure to high-level faculty in various disciplines, and prepares them to interact with colleagues in the larger music world.



An emphasis on chamber music in the new Curtis guitar program allows the students to work with peers in various disciplines. Here, Jordan Dodson rehearses with soprano Alize Rozsnyai. PHOTO: PETE CHECCHIA

involved in sound production, tends to be a very personal instrument, technically speaking. There are no intervening mechanisms between the fingers and the strings, which results in players acquiring unusually individual expressive palettes.”

Curtis's young guitarists are also fulfilling a key goal for the guitar program, says Dean John Mangan, explaining that in creating the curriculum and selecting its first students, the school “needed ambassadors for the instrument and its repertoire who could create interest among their peers, along with a desire to collaborate.”

GROUP EFFORTS

Jiyeon and Jordan have already created plenty of positive waves at Curtis. Both have been busy playing with their fellow students, from vocalists to string quartets. One of the highlights of his semester, says Jordan, was performing a Boccherini quintet for strings and guitar on the first student recital of the year in Field Concert Hall. It “was a lot of fun because we had great players that knew how to have fun and be raucous when the music called for it,” he enthuses. Being the first guitarist to sit in the middle of a Curtis string quartet might have been intimidating, but Jordan remembers the first rehearsal as a happy experience: “We just played through it twice, and thought, ‘Yeah, this is it.’”

For Jiyeon, who holds the John J. Medveckis Annual Fellowship, rehearsing and performing Schubert's Quartet for Guitar, Viola, Flute, and Cello was her first time ever working with a wind player. Playing in a larger ensemble taught her how to “engage other musicians” while listening intently to them. Before Curtis, she admits, she had few such opportunities. But after working with a number of different ensembles, she says, “now I love working on chamber music. ... There are so many beautiful chamber pieces!”

Jordan, too, notes that the expansive chamber music opportunities at Curtis are a step up from the other music schools he's attended. That's by design, according to Mr. Starobin. “Curtis's intense focus on chamber music is highly unusual for young guitarists in conservatory guitar programs,” he explains. It brings Jiyeon and Jordan exposure to high-level faculty in various disciplines, and prepares them to interact with colleagues in the larger music world after they leave Curtis.

Here and beyond, the two guitar students aim not only to distinguish themselves as soloists but also to advocate for the guitar repertoire as a legitimate, exciting classical genre. Jason Vieaux says this is also an aim of the program. Curtis, he says, is setting an example for other institutions with “a new model for presenting organizations and music institutions” that gives each guitar student “more artistic and professional potential (and value) to the international music community.”

When Mr. Vieaux performed at the annual Convocation last September, the audience of students, faculty, and staff roared its approval with a level of applause and excitement rare inside the walls of Curtis. (Were we at a rock concert? It nearly sounded like it.) As Jordan and Jiyeon have begun to appear on the Student Recital Series, they've generated a similar response. If this enthusiastic acceptance is any indicator of the program's future, they will not only have a wonderful few years to look forward to at Curtis but also a long, prosperous future as pioneers for the classical guitar. ◊

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