

PRE-PERFORMANCE FIREWORKS ARE A PART OF LIFE FOR THESE MARRIED DUO PARTNERS

HYUN KANG

JEE-WON OH



MARK KOSOWER

WHEN I FIRST MET MARK HE WAS A FRESHMAN AT INDIANA

University and I was working in János Starker's studio. All the students got together on the first day and had pianists assigned. Mark walked in with sparkly eyes and I thought he looked like a really nice person. I had heard about him because he was known as an up-and-coming star student cellist, but to me he just seemed really nice.

It was extremely easy to play with him from the word go. He is a very clear-cut and honest person, and the way he executes a phrase and makes music in general is very easy to follow. Ever since we began performing together, we have received comments that we have an amazingly intuitive ensemble. Our friendship and partnership translates extremely well into the music. Mark is the type of person who wants to enjoy the journey, to stop and smell the roses, whereas I see the destination and want to get there efficiently.

Playing with Mark is completely second nature to me. In fact, I am so comfortable performing with him that it almost seems easier than playing alone. It can occasionally be difficult to work with other

We threw some nasty tricks at one another through spontaneous use of rubato phrasing

people because of the unspoken things that Mark and I take for granted. When we go into different ensembles I am always surprised by the need to rehearse so much and to work a lot harder in general.

We have had memorable fights, though, that have lasted hours. On one occasion in a rehearsal, some harsh words were said and things got so bad that I boycotted the dress rehearsal and sent Mark to the hall to practise alone. But we managed to resolve the problem just in time, and the performance went well. Another time we were backstage waiting to begin a recital. Everything had been going fine until three or four minutes before the concert when, once again, some words were exchanged that, in this case, didn't help the performance. We played fine, but we were throwing some nasty tricks at one another in the concert through our spontaneous use of agogic and rubato phrasing. Not a proud moment in our history, but that's the peril of working with your spouse.

As a colleague and performer Mark has an enormous personality. As a musician he has an immense audio talent. The way he hears the harmonies and describes them in his playing is amazing to me. Music is the foremost thing in our lives. Being able to make the music you love with someone that you love is really special.

JEE-WON WAS ONE OF FIRST PEOPLE I MET WHEN I WENT TO

study at Indiana University in 1995. She was the studio pianist to János Starker. Because of her position and the fact that she was one of the best pianists enrolled in the school she ended up playing for countless cellists. When we met she offered to play for me. We played a couple of lessons and I didn't bother to look for anyone else. I was really impressed with Jee-Won's pianism and by the fact that her playing sounded so much like an orchestra. She was known among Indiana students as 'the Jee-Won Philharmonic'.

At that point I thought she seemed like a responsible and helpful individual. When we first met, romance never crossed my mind and I never dreamt that six years later she would be my wife. It's easier to click musically with someone when you're under the guidance of the same mentor. One of the first times we rehearsed, Jee-Won said to me out of frustration, 'Mr Starker is going to tell you to do this.' I was annoyed and thought, 'How does she know?' But sure enough, when I went to the lesson Jee-Won's pointers were included in Mr Starker's instruction. She is a very astute person and has a knack for details.

We came together romantically about three years after we started working together. A mutual friend inadvertently referred to our relationship as being each other's 'substitute boyfriend and girlfriend'. By that time we were very good friends, so it seemed natural enough, although potentially dangerous. I remember a dress rehearsal of the cello arrangement of Brahms's Violin Sonata in G major shortly before we got together. For the rest of the day I felt as though I was living in a dream. We have now played together for 14 years and our partnership has developed so much that when we rehearse there are already many things in place, which saves hours of discussions. We have very few arguments on a personal level but we have had our share of professional disagreements. The problem with working together as a couple is that if things don't go well in rehearsal the trouble follows you home. We made it our policy that if there is a disagreement it must be resolved immediately.

Over the years our musical ideas and tastes have grown together. Jee-Won's strengths are in building cohesive musical structures and ensemble playing. I am more intuitive in getting a general feeling for music in connection with harmony – not so unusual considering the instruments we play. Jee-Won has helped me a lot in developing more sophisticated interpretations. I trust her ears over any others.

In 'real life' we are also best friends. We like movies and nature, but music is always around whether we're working or simply enjoying life. After all, it's what brought us together. **Interviews by Hazel Davis**