

Re:Sound Festival — inside the mind of Joo Won Park

by Jarrett Hoffman



It's one thing to push yourself out of your comfort zone. It's quite another to deliberately put yourself in risky situations over and over again — part of the artistic strategy of electroacoustic composer and improviser Joo Won Park. “I like to solve a puzzle in front of the audience,” he said during a telephone conversation from Detroit.

That might include choosing an electronic instrument or gadget that he doesn't totally understand, and bringing that onstage without knowing what will happen. “That's the exciting moment,” he said. Likewise

performing with another improviser. “I go onto the stage expecting that my partner will do something unexpected. That's the approach that I love.”

Park and fellow composer/improviser Molly Jones will bring their Detroit-based duo [ParkJones](#) to the Bop Stop on Sunday, June 9 during a 4:00 pm concert as part of the Re:Sound Festival. The program opens with the new music ensemble [No Exit](#) presenting works by Yoon-Ji Lee and premieres by area high school students Emma Eddy and Mya Vandegrift as part of the [CoLab](#) project. Following ParkJones, pianist [Ju-Ping Song](#) will perform works by Amy Beth Kirsten and Nicole Lizée based on trauma and fallibility. Tickets are available [here](#).

Joo Won Park encountered Molly Jones at one of the first concerts he heard after moving to Detroit three years ago. “From five minutes of her playing, I knew I really wanted to play with Molly,” Park said. “She has a total understanding of both acoustic

and electronic sounds.” Their common interests were obvious — Park considers himself an electronic musician who incorporates many acoustic sounds. “But she is also a phenomenal saxophone player, which I will never be,” he said, laughing.



A good example of their collaboration is “Knock Knock Joke” from their 2017 album *ParkJones*. It’s fun to hear, but better to [watch](#) and see how each of them moves from one surprising instrument to the next: ID card to slinky, clay flute to saxophone.

One tool at Park’s disposal in that video is a wooden board outfitted with a contact microphone, which picks up vibrations from anything that touches the board. “In that piece I like this squeaky, plastic-y sound that happens when you scratch the plastic card into the board,” he said. Instruments like that appeal to him because they create a signature sound reflecting what they are. “I choose objects that give me their essence in terms of their material,” Park said.

Among non-musical objects, Park has also performed with toys, consumer electronics, kitchenware, and vegetables. That’s all part of a philosophy he describes on his [website](#): he “wants to make everyday sound beautiful and strange so that every day becomes beautiful and strange.”

Back to that element of the unknown, Park said that he and Jones usually try to catch each other off-guard during performances by playing instruments or objects that they intentionally haven’t discussed. “It’s like a game for both of us: can I surprise her, can she surprise me?” he said with a laugh. “We’ve been playing together for quite a while, so it’s hard to do, but there are often one or two moments that I never would have expected.”

Published on ClevelandClassical.com May 28, 2019.

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