

AN ELECTRIFYING KALEIDOSCOPE OF MUSIC, “ASPIRE” EARNS GRAMMY® NOMINATION FOR AWARD-WINNING CLARINETIST SEUNGHEE LEE AND CELEBRATED COMPOSER JP JOFRE

Recognition for Musica Solis Recording Highlighted By World Premiere of First Ever Double Concerto for Clarinet and Bandoneon

As the saying goes “it takes two to tango,” and in the case of the album *Aspire*, an inspired duo came together to dance off with a Grammy® nod. When acclaimed clarinetist Seunghee Lee heard the mesmerizing performances of bandoneonist JP Jofre, a master of the instrument that’s the very soul of yes, the tango, something “just clicked.” Certain the reedy voice-like quality of the bandoneon would match perfectly with the clarinet, she commissioned Jofre to compose a piece that would let these simpatico instruments shine.

Jofre’s Double Concerto for Clarinet and Bandoneon--the first concerto ever written expressly for these instruments--is the centerpiece of *Aspire*, which features the London Symphony Orchestra under the direction of conductor Enrico Fagone. The Musica Solis release nominated as the Best Classical Compendium also includes five additional specially arranged Jofre compositions and pieces by Villa-Lobos and Piazzolla.

Applauded by critics worldwide, multifaceted artist Seunghee Lee has won accolades from music critics for the radiance of her sound or as one reviewer put it: “as warm, silvery, and woody a tone as anyone could imagine with fast and keen finger work to match... amazing expressive capabilities.” Hailed as “an explosively talented performer and composer,” JP Jofre is constantly forging new ground, taking the bandoneon into exciting new directions.

Their close collaboration evolved over the course of three years. “The beauty of working with another musician, another creative being, is that we collectively create something that’s totally unexpected and different from what we would’ve done by ourselves,” says Lee, an entrepreneur and motivational speaker as well as talented artist. “The two instruments have such a similar sound in the high registers that in the end you don’t know who’s playing what,” she adds.

Jofre’s music is an interplay of the traditional and the modern, steeped in the world of tango and Argentinian folk music and dance, while reflecting a deep respect for the classical canon. With the double concerto, Jofre combines hauntingly beautiful melodies with his signature driving rhythmic pulse, giving ample opportunities for both soloists to soar.

The CD was recorded at LSO St. Luke’s, a once derelict church rebuilt to serve as a studio, event venue and education center that is the physical embodiment of the London Symphony Orchestra’s dream to draw more people in to enjoy music. Its mission inspired the album’s title, but the idea of reimagination could equally apply to the career and journey of Seunghee Lee.

Born in South Korea and raised in Chicago, Lee showed her musical promise at an early age, winning prestigious competitions as a teen, earning a bachelor's degree from the Eastman School of Music under the tutelage of Charles Neidich, and a master's degree and Artist Diploma from the Yale School of Music as a full scholarship student of distinguished clarinetist David Shifrin. Her debut album *Brava* landed her on San Francisco's KDFC list of "30 Top Classical Stars Under 30," alongside such esteemed artists as Maxim Vengerov, Midori, and Hilary Hahn.

Rather than enjoying her success, Lee felt trapped by her own drive for perfection, always wanting something more from herself and fearing she would never reach it. "It was a vicious cycle," Lee admits. "I would play a phrase one way and compare it to how I could play it another way, maybe, better. But then you don't stop there. It was never good enough."

Plagued by doubts and stage fright, Lee stepped back from her career to live in Hong Kong with her husband and raise her family. And she found another passion—golf. After picking up the sport, Lee advanced quickly, and within two years sported a single digit handicap and was featured in Hong Kong Golfer Magazine. In pursuit of her club championship and with the help of a life coach, she learned lessons—patience, self-belief, and the ability to move on, whether it's from a missed shot or a flubbed note— that would serve her on and off the course.

"Golf represented a parallel world and helped me let go of that perfectionist mindset. It really comes down to me believing, not against myself but in myself," Lee says. "Par is par no matter how you get the ball in the hole, and if you don't there's always the next hole. I got a second chance in music through golf."

Golf became the bridge that led to performing again, beginning with charity events and the founding of Concerts for Cause, and a second album, the aptly named *Embrace*. The CD, which rose to the top of numerous classical charts, signaled her acceptance of a new way of thinking. "Taking that time off from music gave me some distance to digest the pressure of expectations that you put on yourself," she says. "I realized I could use music as a tool to benefit others rather than serve my own ego. My satisfaction derives from knowing I can make a difference through my concerts."

The reawakening of Lee's passion for music opened the floodgates for more creative endeavors. In addition to performing, touring, and putting out albums like *Hidden Treasures* and *Solace*, she chronicled her struggle with—and triumph over—perfectionism in a TedX Talk (<https://youtu.be/75iIGr8OLDU>), delivered lectures on the topic of music entrepreneurship and building your own empire, and has appeared as a speaker at the Harvard Business School.

She started the primarily clarinet-centric recording label, sheet music publisher and event company Musica Solis to give bandwidth to instruments like the clarinet that may not get the attention in the classical repertoire and from larger record labels. "They're afraid to risk putting out something beyond the mainstream, which I think is a missed opportunity," says Lee, now

living back in the US. “My goal is to spotlight the next generation of young composers who will shape the future in music.” The label has several projects in progress for release in 2023.

The Grammy® nomination for *Aspire* is a testament to Lee’s determination to, as she says, “be the author of her own life.” She sparked a unique creative partnership, kept the project alive through the pandemic, and worked to secure the LSO. “I’ve come to realize that I have more than enough in me—whether in music or business or even a knack for organization—to accomplish my dreams and bring joy and comfort to others,” she says.

Jofre’s other works on *Aspire* include the clarinet-bandoneon duets Como El Agua (Be Like Water) inspired by a Bruce Lee quote, and Sweet Dreams, a lullaby originally written for his niece, as well as two tango-informed pieces—Tangodromo and Taranguino—with pianist Steven Beck joining the soloists. The album opens with the composer’s lively ode to spring, Primavera, marking the debut of Jofre’s orchestration written especially for Lee.

Seunghee Lee has performed as a soloist and with renowned orchestras at prominent venues throughout Europe, Asia, and the U.S, including at Hollywood Bowl, Ravinia, Chicago’s Cultural Center, and Carnegie Hall. She serves on the National Advisory Board of the Eastman School of Music, the Board of Advisors at the Yale School of Music, and on the Executive Committee of the YaleNYC, and on the Board of Directors at the Concert Artists Guild in New York City.

A native of San Juan, Argentina, award-winning bandoneon player and composer JP Jofre has won critical praise from *The New York Times* and was named one of today’s leading artists by Great Performers at Lincoln Center. He has performed throughout the world and his music has been recorded by the London Symphony Orchestra, 16-time Grammy® winner Paquito D’ Rivera, and the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, among others. The recipient of the National Prize of the Arts grant in Argentina, Jofre has also given lectures at Google Talks, TEDtalks, Juilliard School of Music, The New School and other venues.

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