

# KOREAN

## QUARTERLY

music review by layne bittner

### Impressive expressions

*World instruments, rhythms, combine to make world music in latest CD by Comin & Goin*

I apprehensively pause before perusing CDs on the shelves of the 'World Music' section at music stores. I hesitate because of the likely chance that the collection of albums I'll thumb through will force me to endure a violent shudder of disgust not unlike Homer Simpson's seizure reaction to spying a "LOW FAT" label on an item in the snack food aisle at Kwik-E-Mart.

A recent sampling of "World Music" sections of various Twin Cities libraries and music stores included albums by such "artists" as Olivia Newton John, Barbra Streisand and David Hasselhoff. Apparently, simply existing in the world is the only requirement for gaining entrance to this ambiguously-named genre of music.

Still, I continue to make at least a quick stop in the "World Music" section because I have also discovered that it is home to some of the most creative, innovative sounds available to those with a discerning ear. You may even be so fortunate as to stumble across an album by **Comin & Goin**.

**Comin & Goin's** latest album, *Xpressed Impressions* is an eight-song, sixty-four-minute smorgasbord that is sure to satisfy the most refined listening palate. Mixing various instruments with vocals that compliment but never aggressively attempt to dominate tracks, **Comin & Goin** appeases senses as masterfully as the finest of chefs.

**Comin & Goin** wastes no time exhibiting its command of complex instruments in *Seven Steps Down to Earth*, the first song on the band's third studio album. Opening with the calming, yet expectant sounds of waves breaking on a shore accompanied by band member Alex Mayer's didgeridoo (a natural wooden wind instrument), the song erupts into a rhythmic collection of varying beats and tempos which in turn cause heartbeats to race

and burdened minds to relax.

For many bands, occasionally adding another instrument (to the traditional drum, bass, electric guitar, etc) is a major accomplishment; even when that instrument appears in only one or two songs. Such is not the case with **Comin & Goin**. In addition to the afore-mentioned didgeridoo, the six-member band treats listeners to instruments that are far from being household names, even for those with eclectic musical tastes: Udu, cajon, changgo, bodhran, bukk, and surdo (drums with origins from Korea and around the world), and the berimbau (a single string instrument from Brazil). These are all adroitly harmonized with die less obscure sitar, flamenco guitar, electric guitar, guitar synthesizer, electric bass, saxophone and whistles.

Koreas music aficionados will be especially delighted with *Xpressed Impressions* because of renowned drummer and composer Dong Won Kim's involvement with the creation of the album - Kim is also a member of Duk Soo Kim's SamulNori Hanullim group in Korea. In addition to performing on some of the songs, **Comin & Goin** musician and co-founder Bernhard Noriller credits Kim's impact on die entire album. "I think it is Dong Won's spiritual view of music and his presence as a human being which influenced all of us. And of course he is a very powerful and sensitive musician."



*Comin & Goin perform in the KBS television studios in Seoul.*

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Noriller first met Kim in 2003 at one of Kim's drumming workshops in Switzerland. They quickly became friends and that same year **Comin & Goin** was invited to perform in the World Samulnori Festival in Korea. The festival proved to have lasting implications on the life and direction of the band. Again, Noriller: "The experience of Korea as a whole was another influence, too. Its power and modesty and spirituality impressed us deeply. We just played our music in a different way when we came back."

With the role that the World Samulnori Festival has played in helping shape the style of **Comin & Goin's** music, it is necessary to note the Korean music maven Duk Soo Kim, whose name has become synonymous with samulnori, says Noriller: "Kim Duk Soo is a powerful, strong person. He is an incredibly fascinating musician and has a leader mentality. Once you have seen his group you know everything about a functioning collective. And I appreciate very much his work for maintaining and developing the Korean traditional music." (See **Korean Quarterly's** Winter 2005/2006 issue for extensive coverage and photos of last year's World Samulnori Festival in Buyeo, Korea).

The member makeup of **Comin & Goin** has changed at various times since the band was formed in 1996. Currently the group is comprised of five Austrians and one Bulgarian. However, as evidenced by the plethora of world instruments the band integrates into its music, it would be short-sighted to assume their sound could be considered Austrian.

Speaking about band members, Noriller says, "None of us grew up in a strict traditional way. We all traveled a lot, as musicians as well as for personal reasons. As Austrians we could not avoid listening to a lot of traditional Austrian folk music - or let's say what it became in the last decades, which is very commercialized and more for the tourists. None of us like that. You could say we lost contact with our traditional music and are all searching for roots. By "roots" I don't mean daily habits, but what touches you deeply in your soul. That kind of nourishment you can find everywhere in the world. It is more a question of humanity than of culture."



The new CD by **Comin & Goin**

The band's appeal to diverse audiences is supported by their past and upcoming shows in Korea, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Liechtenstein, United Arab Emirates and China. "There are always very different people attending our shows. At our concerts you will meet people who normally listen to varied kinds of music: Classical, jazz, folk, indie, reggae, etc," proclaims Noriller.

As flawless as **Xpressed Impressions** is, those who have heard **Comin & Goin** in concert claim they are nothing short of amazing when experienced live. Sarah Lee, leader of Minnesota's *poongmulnori* troupe **Shinparam**, says, "When we saw **Comin & Goin** perform in Korea, they had a female Indian dancer whose feet were outfitted with microphones. They integrated the rhythmic beat of her dancing feet with all of the other instruments! They're innovative and are not afraid to take risks." Which is not to suggest that the band simply jams when playing live. "Actually there exists a score for each composition, but there are always free parts for improvising. And it also depends on the guest musicians who are playing with us," explains Noriller.

**Xpressed Impressions** closes with an original arrangement by Dong Won Kim of *Arirang*, the most lionized Korean folk song of all time. Infusing the majestic lyrics with the western saxophone proves once again that **Comin & Goin** is worthy and deserving of prominent placement on the shelves of "World Music."

**Comin & Goin's** website, with message board to leave comments about the band and information about ordering their CDs, is located at: <http://www.cominandgoin.com> •