

WHO DO WE THINK
THAT WE ARE -
ALL ABOUT US.COM

**ALEKSEYS
WELT**

HOW WE MET @ THE MENUHIN SCHOOL

– A PLACE FOR YOUNG MAD MUSIC LOVERS.

It was hate at first sight.

Okay, I may be exaggerating slightly, but when Hyung-ki and I first met at the tender age of 12, we started off on the wrong foot.

Our destinies crashed at the Yehudi Menuhin School, a place for young mad, supposedly talented musicians. The year I entered, there were only 45 pupils in total, all aged 8 to 18.

Founded by the famous violin virtuoso, humanitarian, and, yoga fanatic, Yehudi Menuhin, it was a school full of creativity. Yes, I remember Yehudi coming into school and standing on his head at our morning meeting, without any explanation as to why.

In fact, that may be part of the reason for my obsession with breakdance in recent years and why I often stand on my head during our shows. But back to our story.

Initially I thought Hyung-ki was a little nuts, so to speak.

I have to admit, I was influenced by other kids at school who found him particularly annoying. He was loud, wild, and non-conformist. So not much has changed.

HK: Actually, that's not really true anymore- I'm a lot less loud, a lot less wild, and a lot less non-conformist. What I'm quite proud of is that while there were several people who bullied me at school, years after leaving school, I went out of my way to make peace and I am happy to say that I have no grudges against them and that I am now friends with all of them. But go on with our origin story. Kind of feels like a Superhero origin tale.

LX: You are right, and I only wrote, "So not much has changed" for humorous effect. I admit that you are much calmer in private, but when you put your stage persona on, you can go right back to those wild school days in a jiffy. However, it is extremely commendable that you made peace with your bullies, although the ball really should have been in their court. Perhaps you are a superhero of kind forgiveness? And also a superhero of wildness, but the very controlled kind.

Is it a plane? Is it a bird?

No, it's ForgiveButNeverForgetSuperWildCalmAndKindPianoman

HK: Wow- that's a bit of a handful to write and pronounce, but I'll take it.

Soon after my arrival, I was bullying Hyung-ki in one way or another. It was one way of being considered cool and belonging with the tough kids, who were also abusive to him. This all culminated one day into a standoff where I was holding up a chair ready to smash over his head and Hyung-ki, with a music stand in his hand, revved up to poke my eye out. Just as we were about to strike, two people jumped in and desperately held us back preventing us from ending up in hospital.

HK: You know, Aleksey, you need to explain that you were about 1000 times stronger than me. You were like a bull back then and that famous day you just described, I was running for my life as you chased me all the way down the school drive to the neighboring barn. The music stand was literally my last stand against you.

LX: Damn it, man, I am sorry. I literally forgot about that build up!

HK: As I said, it's all forgiven, but not forgotten. At least it serves as a compelling origin story to ForgiveButNeverForgetSuperWildCalmAndKindPianoman!

Some weeks after that unpleasant episode, Hyung-ki knocked on my room door in our dorm. When I answered the door and saw him standing there, I thought to myself that he came to die. But then, I could not help noticing the divine smell of fish and chips emanating from a rolled up newspaper he was holding. The food in English boarding schools was traditional; traditionally awful.

For breakfast we had "Russian Omelette".

Every 6th egg has salmonella.

And I made up that joke just to demonstrate how awful I thought food was at the time.

My mind was torn. In front of me was the person I despised, but he was also holding food that smelled wonderful and which was not from our abominable boarding school kitchen.

Then my mind went even more berserk when he offered to share the fish and chips with me. With me? I was so confused, but my love of food, which was already highly developed at an early age, won me over and so, I let him sit next to me and feed me.

And I did not beat him up.

HK: I just had this feeling about you, Aleksey, that you could be more than the bull and the bully that you were. And, perhaps it was a ploy for you to stop beating me up since I wanted to find a peaceful solution but I was sure deep down that we would get along. And I knew that food would be a sure way to get to you.

LX: Well, food has certainly been a strong theme in all our years of friendship, and it still continues to be something we both highly enjoy with each other, especially when we are on tour.

HK: I remember that evening very well. But for a while, it was like the Cold War, and we did not speak to each other.

After Hyung-ki passed me over my share of fish and chips, for quite a while we just ate in silence. But kids are kids, and as one does, we started chatting. I think we chatted about food. Then we started talking about school. Then about music and creativity.

And there it was this connection which we felt immediately. We had very similar ideas, thoughts, and questions, right from the start. Questions such as:

Why was music divided into categories of serious and not serious?

How come music was full of passion and wit but concerts were dry and devoid of joy and humour?

We both loved theatre. We both loved humour and comedy.

And eventually we would both be united in improvising and composing music.

And I realised already back then, that when one meets a “kindred spirit”, ideas just flow. Inspiration is flowing in abundance.



OUR MENTORS

We soon became best friends and a unique bond was formed, which was enhanced by the positive and negative aspects of our boarding school home. With so few people around us, some of our teachers became our greatest inspiration.

From the literary side there was Kevin Jones. As an English teacher, he was more inspiring than Robin Williams's character in *Dead Poets' Society*, yet at times, as equally awe-inspiring as he was feared, much like Snape from *Harry Potter*.

One time, I remember him entering a class room without saying a single word.

He simply sat down and started to read from a book. What seemed like five minutes later, he closed the book and left the classroom, in silence. When I looked out of the window, I noticed that it had turned dark outside, and 90 minutes must have passed by. None of us had noticed the time. Thanks to Kevin, I have written hundreds of poems, many of them published together with my sheet music on Universal Edition and some even included in this book.

A lot of our literary passion, creative approach and theatricality in our shows is inspired by Kevin to this day.

HK: Kevin Jones was very committed to his teaching. One could feel his love of theatre and literature and how he enjoyed helping kids understand it and have access to it. There are a few things about Kevin that I will never forget. He obviously saw the actor in me, and he cast me in the school's production of "Toad of Toad Hall". I only had a small role, but I had the time of my life. After one of the dress rehearsals, I wrote a little monologue to add to the play. When I showed it to Kevin, instead of dismissing it, he told me to go ahead and try it out. The next dress rehearsal performance, I had my few moments to shine for myself, in front of an audience and it received a good response.

LX: Wow, I didn't know. That must have been before my time.

HK: Afterwards, Kevin kindly told me that the scene was good, but that we wouldn't be needing it for the next performances. What was amazing about this whole experience though, was that he gave me permission. He allowed me to follow my creative whims, and gave me the platform to act out my wishes. This act of permission is something I've carried with me all my life and it is something I constantly try to give students who play for me, colleagues with whom I work, and orchestras that I work with.

LX: Very true. So often we are scared as artists or as humans to break the rules and do something without permission. Just to be ourselves.

HK: Yes, we shouldn't need any permission to be ourselves, but society imposes such barriers and codes to follow, that often we forget that we are free to try out things, in the Free World, at least.

LX: Kevin also pushed us to do things we would not have thought of doing.

HK: Absolutely. He once made me perform an exercise of laughing non-stop for two minutes straight, in front of the whole class. I remember starting and thinking that this would be easy fun, but it turned out to be challenging, and embarrassing, humiliating, and therapeutic all at the same time. Kevin was relentless with making sure I carried on laughing for two minutes.

LX: That's funny.

HK: It remains a very strong experience in my life and one of the bricks in my life that fortified me. Actually, laughter is something that has always played a powerful role in my life.

HK: I have been teased for my laugh, I have annoyed people with it, shocked people, and even offended people with my laughter—probably because they thought I was laughing at their expense, which I hardly do as I’m very averse to Schadenfreude. I have definitely amused people with my wide range of laughter, infected others to laugh with me, and have healed people with my laughter.

LX: I guess it is no surprise that you eventually had to write the song, “You Just Have to Laugh”.

HK: Exactly. And you can read more about the power of laughter in the chapter YOU JUST HAVE TO LAUGH.

CHECK THIS OUT ON YOUTUBE:

Igudesman & Joo- You Just Have to Laugh

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64aeM7mtFRU>

Trying to Vibrato Director’s Cut

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NMU_CxGZxsg

Another great inspiration for both of us was Simon Parkin for composition and improvisation. He was a wonderful free spirit who opened our eyes and ears and loved playing ridiculous but fun games with us. He would play us pieces such as the Rachmaninov 2nd piano concerto, but transformed as if it was composed by Messiaen. This may sound a little dorky, but the idea is very funny to us musicians.

HK: His influence is unmistakable in all our parodies and pastiches, either as separate composers, or as Igudesman and Joo.

LX: Yes, in fact our joint piece—“Alla Molto Turka”, is a direct descendant of the type of musical wizardry and fooling around with which Simon Parkin would entertain us.

HK: I remember him writing a Sonata for every instrument, and the one for Horn had the horn player having to tap dance at certain points. No wonder we ended up including choreographies into our skits and compositions.

Then there was Malcolm Singer, our composition teacher who took over Simon Parkin. He was a pupil of György Ligeti and the great Nadia Boulanger. Boulanger was arguably considered the greatest musical influence in the 20th Century, and her openness and deep musicianship led to a diverse array of talents who would seek advice from her, including Copland, Bernstein, Stravinsky, Quincy Jones, Phillip Glass, Piazzolla, Michel Legrand, Burt Bacharach, and countless others.

HK: My favourite Boulanger story is one where after a concert that she conducted- (she rediscovered Monteverdi's "Orfeo" and her recording of Fauré's "Requiem" would definitely be in my list of recordings I take with me to a deserted island)- a woman came backstage to greet her.

Upon meeting her, she told her how amazing it was that she was a conductor and yet a woman.

Boulanger replied,

"I have been a woman all my life and the fact no longer amazes me As for conducting an orchestra, that's a job where I don't think sex plays much part."

Malcolm never imposed any compositional techniques on us. He pointed things out. Encouraged us. Asked us the right questions. In his classes we analysed works by Philipp Glass, Stravinsky, Mozart, and Beethoven. But I also clearly remember analysing "Bohemian Rhapsody" by Queen.

HK: Part of the reason I stayed on an extra year at the Menuhin School was to study more intensely with Malcolm Singer. So much of who I am today as a musician and human, I owe to Malcolm. He had high expectations and was very demanding yet he was always caring and supportive. He was also very patient and respectful. I once wrote a piece called, "The Dream of Gregor Samsa".

The requirement was to only write music for the body or non-musical objects.

My piece was full of things like chest thumping, cheek flicking, knife strumming, table tapping, and at the climax, a chair had to be flung violently across the room which I carried out and broke the chair upon impact of hitting the far wall.

LX: Yes, I remember people still talking about this years later when I went to Malcolm's summer course.

HK: But Malcolm was calm, and he immediately started asking us all questions that led us to a very constructive discussion about extremity in music.

Later, he came to me and spoke to me calmly and while I don't remember his exact words, let's say he found a way to make me reflect and suggested that I find another way of achieving the same effect, as we couldn't afford going around replacing chairs all the time. He was not angry, he did not scold, but his message was clear.

This openness by our teachers, as well as Menuhin's open minded approach to all forms of music clearly rubbed off on us. Menuhin was one of the first great classical musicians to play with jazz greats like Stephan Grapelli and legendary Indian musicians like Ravi Shankar.

And then there was Peter Norris. He was music director during my time. He was also a Nadia Boulanger follower and, without a doubt, the most intense musician I have ever come across in my life. His belief was that one should never play a single note without meaning. Not one phrase without intent, conviction and some form of passion. And in many ways, in spite of the often seemingly irreverent and madcap nature of what we do as Igudesman & Joo, or perhaps even because of it, we are very much advocates of that belief. Be it in music or in life.

HK: Peter Norris is a name that will still strike terror today for so many students who suffered under his wrath. Some students, like myself, were even abused physically by him. I believe that I own the unfortunate accolade of being his last victim. He once threw me against a wall and started to knee me in the nether regions.

LX: God, that must have been painful!

HK: It's a miracle that I could procreate later in life. However, pushing away any psychoanalysis of Stockholm Syndrome aside, and I certainly do not undermine the very serious subject of teacher-student abuse, I am nonetheless so grateful to him for all the years of his intense musicianship that he bestowed upon me.

LX: But he wasn't just a fascinating musician that we feared but looked up to.

HK: Right. He was also inspiring about literature, philosophy, trivial curiosities, and he was forever making bad puns. In many ways he was a great teacher, Socratic, generous, patient, and pushing the student to become his own best teacher. In just as many ways, he was flawed and harmful.

LX: Yet he still kind of liked you, didn't he?

HK: Well, I think I must have been one of his worst students ever, and he even refused to teach me on several occasions. But, years after I left the school, he told a friend of mine that he thought I was the one student from all his many students who was most profoundly impacted by the harmony lessons he taught. I was so surprised to hear this, and moved, and while I can't possibly speak for all the other students, it is true that studying harmony with him did change me forever and I'm still benefitting from it today.

“The essential conditions of everything you do must be choice, love, passion.”

“Life is denied by lack of attention, whether it be to cleaning windows or trying to write a masterpiece.”

“Never forget that your days are blessed. You may know how to profit by them, or you may not, but they are blessed.”

“The art of music is so deep and profound that to approach it very seriously only is not enough. One must approach music with a serious rigor and, at the same time, with a great, affectionate joy.”

“To study music, we must learn the rules. To create music, we must break them.”

– Nadia Boulanger

WHAT WE WENT ON TO DO

From pretty much the moment of our fish and chips encounter to all the years that have passed since then, Hyung-ki and I have remained best friends. We always wanted to do something together, something special, a performance, or show or whatever we would call it. A concert which we ourselves would love to go to.

Back at school, we had the yearly Christmas party, for which we wrote sketches and humorous songs. Whatever we would create would have to involve some frivolousness. But it also had some music we love, be it Beethoven, Brahms or works of our own. It had to be theatrical. Surprising. And with elements of spontaneity, improvisation and audience interaction.

HK: I remember some sketch where we pulled out spaghetti from inside the piano.

LX: Yes, and then I had to take some spaghetti out of my underpants. I guess our quality of humour has evolved a little bit since then.

HK: But only marginally...

A CONCERT WHICH WE OURSELVES WOULD LOVE TO GO TO.



After a brief time in Vienna, Hyung-ki went on to study in New York at the Manhattan School of Music, whereas I studied in Vienna, with Boris Kuschnir. Boris was a wonderful professor. I am not sure he quite understood my creative aspirations back then – I was never interested in doing competitions. Later Boris became a friend and a fan. After several years of two-sided torture that is! And I mean that lovingly.

HK: I went to the USA and things turned out differently than what I had envisioned. I always had my heart set on studying with Leon Fleisher and for two years, it was my main goal to achieve. When I finally auditioned for him, he accepted me into his class, so mission accomplished. A few days after my happy news, Roger Shields, the Director of the Stravinsky International Piano Competition, whom I had met a year earlier when I won my first and only piano competition, suggested I should go and pay Nina Svetlanova a visit, even though I was all set to study with Fleisher.

HK: I went to see Nina, and after a few hours of spending time with her, something told me she is the right teacher for me.

LX: So you gave up the plan you had for years just because of a gut feeling?

HK: Well, the next step was not easy. For a month, I struggled with whether I should follow my 2-year plan, or follow that gut feeling after just 2 hours.

In the end, I chose Nina, and I never looked back. She made me believe I could be a pianist, and perhaps the greatest things I leant from her was life lessons. This decision, that I had to make on my own, taught me a lot and proved to me that you should listen and trust your gut, your instincts.

Already during my studies with Boris Kuschnir, I started performing and working with my string trio Triology, with Daisy Jopling on the violin and Tristan Schulze on cello.

For years we were reinventing the genre of the string trio in many ways, writing, arranging for 2 violins and cello and delving into a myriad of diverse styles. One of our CDs was called “Who killed the Viola Player”.

I always loved different types of music. Studying diverse styles of music is one of my favorite things to do to this day. But I didn't want to sound like a classical musician playing jazz or Irish music. I wanted to sound as authentic as possible. At the same time, I also wanted to give it its own type of “Igudesman” twist – to make it my own. Otherwise, what would be the point? We started traveling together to different countries. We learned about Irish music playing in pubs with traditional musicians in Ireland. We went to India for a month to absorb the world of Indian classical music with local musicians in the intensely smelly but beautifully inspiring Varanasi.

CHECK THIS OUT ON YOUTUBE:

Triology

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6LJDBFXp44>

I enjoyed many successful years of my career touring the world with Triology, recording several CD's and working with the Hollywood legend, Hans Zimmer, who then became a dear friend. Meanwhile, Hyung-ki was collaborating with Billy Joel and eventually recorded Joel's final album.



CHECK THIS OUT ON YOUTUBE:

Billy Joel & Hyung-ki Joo Fantasies & Delusions: The Making Of

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sR-qwFP1N38>

Hyung-ki Joo & Billy Joel

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZmSSm_RKbI

After Hyung-ki had his first experiments in music-come-dy-theatre with the cellist Laurent Cirade from the French group, Le Quatuor, both Hyung-ki and I felt it was time to make our dream come true and create our own show.

So we got together and “A Little Nightmare Music” was born.



"The funniest show on music and the life of musicians I have seen since the life of George. I couldn't stop crying of laughter for the whole evening. Go see these gifted musicians. What they show is life at its funniest side. It isn't just entertaining, it is hilarious!"
GIDON KAHNEN - violinist

WWW.IGUESMANANDJOO.COM

Design Photography: John WESSLEY www.johnwessley.com

CHECK THIS OUT ON YOUTUBE:

A Little Nightmare Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojiuoRNizU8>

But every birth takes time. We spent a good year developing the ideas. Refining some of them and throwing new and fresh ones into the mix. Some of our numbers took years to write and develop. Others we came up with within hours or at times even minutes. And it's very hard to say which ones work better. But we love all of them like our own children. Some births are harder than others. Yet one does not love one child any more or less because of it.

If you are wondering what we actually do and you happen not to know, the best way is to go on YouTube and check out Igudesman & Joo. Start with the oldest clips and work your way up.

CHECK THIS OUT ON YOUTUBE:

Alla Molto Turka

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNtYYuWILNE>

Mozart Will Survive

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RS1-lxDgCbs>

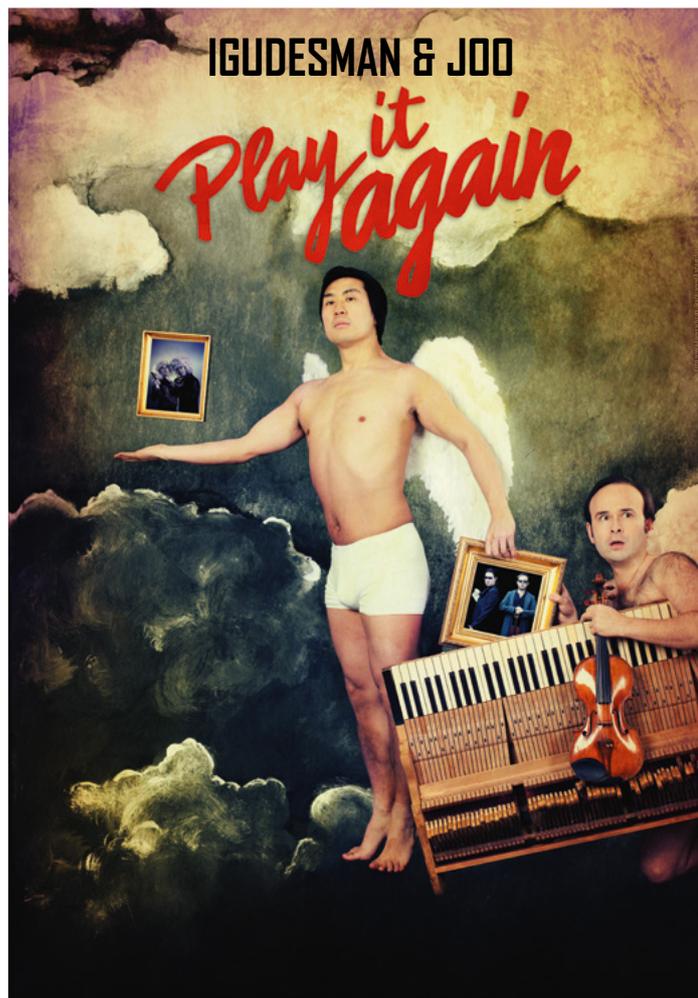
Rachmaninov by Himself

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwPKT3IIL_o

Chopin Allergy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sYvjMNooLn4>

And now you know!



WHAT GAVE US THE BREAK GIDON, JULIAN, JANINE

To start something new and adventurous is always hard. One needs help. One needs support. You can read about that in the chapter **I SENT YOU THREE BOATS**.

We were blessed to have the help and support by great musicians and friends like Julian Rachlin and Janine Jansen who invited us to their festivals in various countries. And in one of those performances in Bergen Norway, one of my idols happened to be in the audience- Gidon Kremer.

Gidon always stood for everything “non-conformist”. He was a violinist who was the epitome of being “outside of the box”. However, he was and is a great virtuoso all the same.

The next day after the performance at breakfast of the hotel where all the festival musicians stayed, Gidon came up to me and complimented me on our show, my composition and my playing. That would be sublime enough in itself, but when he suggested to develop a project with us, I was over the moon.



We got together with Gidon, gathered ideas and came up with a pretty wild show called “Being Gidon Kremer”. This incorporated some of the music he loved and included some made-up episodes from his life which we turned into sketches. I even gave him a violin lesson on stage in the character of a violin professor who speaks a multitude of languages at the same time... none of them properly, of course.

This character was based on our dear friend, the famous violin professor Pavel Vernikov, with whom we developed the arguably most non-conformist music competition “Feast of Duos”, which you can read about in the chapter, The Loser takes it All.

CHECK THIS OUT ON YOUTUBE:

The Loser takes it All

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qy_HsbSrhNo

The Loser Takes It All - We can't understand Pavel Vernikov

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hopi-pAtE2Q>

What surprised us in our work with Gidon, was his incredible ambition to improve everything. We would write an idea for the script and would send it off after many days of work. Within hours we would receive an email, sometimes longer than the ideas that we put together. It was fascinating to see how hungry Gidon still was after all his years of performing and being creative and to see him being involved in something so different from his daily life and so much out of his comfort zone. He was into our project with so much passion and the dedication was mesmerizing.

HK: I remember one time taking a 3-hour train ride to go through Gidon's last email, full of different colours, with things in brackets, and twenty threads of contradictory thoughts and questions to follow. When I finally arrived at my destination, I went online as fast as I could to send my reply.

HK: Only to then discover in my inbox that while I was in that train, he had already written a counter-reply to his own email changing everything, which made my response that I just spent three hours tooth-combing and replying totally redundant. And it was close to three years of correspondence like this.

LX: Well, it was certainly never boring!

HK: Right, and we, as a duo, will always thank and acknowledge him as being the very first classical music legend to support us and believe in us.

Then after doing many performances with Gidon and his wonderful Kremerata Baltica Chamber Orchestra, changing the script and numbers we did together countless amounts of times, we finally felt that we had the "perfect" show.

The audience was in hysterics, the pace felt perfect and the music and the comedy flowed, in our opinion.

The next day the dreaded email from Gidon arrived, which said something like:

“My dear friends. Last night’s show was perfect. Now let’s change it.”

At first I was very surprised why one would change a perfect show. But then I understood. There is no such thing. The moment you are satisfied with something it may be time to start improving it for real. Perfection is an illusion. And complacency one of the biggest enemies of art and creativity.

CHECK THIS OUT ON YOUTUBE:

Where is the remote controle

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_LV6dWcFaw

Fistful of Dollars

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uUo6WMbXPfA>



HOW WE GREW TOGETHER

THE POWER OF YOUTUBE AND SOCIAL MEDIA AND HOW TO “DEBRIEF”

“Why don’t you film a few numbers and put them on YouTube? See what happens!”

These were the wise words of our friend, the renowned music manager Jazz Summers, who sadly passed away a few years back. And we are rather glad we listened to him. Our numbers “Rachmaninov had Big Hands” and “Piano Lesson” started to get millions of hits. Our version of “I Will Survive” soon followed with the same viral frenzy. And this all happened at a time where people from the classical music world had not yet discovered YouTube.

CHECK THIS OUT ON YOUTUBE:

IGUDES MAN & JOO - Rachmaninov had big Hands
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifKKlhYF53w>

IGUDES MAN & JOO - Piano Lesson
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WOQaK7NHY-4>

IGUDES MAN & JOO - I will Survive
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xui7x_KF7bY

It was astounding; more and more people watched us and knew what we did.

But that was all still before we had any kind of real career. People assumed we were way more successful than we were at the time. In fact, it took us many years to reach the level that matched the presumed success of our online presence. I have talked about that phenomenon since with people successful on social media. The transition from being “online-famous” to actually earning money from what you do is a long and laborious path.

Things started to get into full swing with more and more bookings for performances.

The more we performed, the more we were on the road together. And that is certainly not always easy, for a myriad of reasons.

But mainly, how does one stop arguing about pointless things when one is tired?

How does one stop shouting at each other when both people have strong artistic ideas and opinions? And above all, how does one stop pissing each other off altogether?

**“Wise men speak because they
have something to say;
Fools because they have to say
something.”**

– *Plato*

We actually discovered a rather beautiful way of communicating and solving problems, which we keep to this day in some form. When we had an argument, or even a brief outburst of emotions, we stopped trying to resolve it right away, which in the past led to more arguing if not even shouting and screaming. We tried not to confront each other when emotions were high. When one of us was in a bad mood or even being obnoxious in some way, even if it would annoy us, we would bear it out and wait until we are in the airplane, train or car on the way back home. There we would start something we called “debriefing”. What it entailed was simply both of us calmly and lovingly telling each other all the stuff that we really liked about the trip. And then the stuff that we didn't like. In that order.

This would start with one of us saying how much we enjoyed a performance.

How well we thought that the other played a certain piece or even the whole show.

Kind words about noticing behaviors that either improved since the last debriefing or was good in general.

And then to follow it up with negative points but through constructive criticism.

All things said kindly, without any spite or bitterness of any kind.

And the issues voiced could still be strong themes – from selfishness to seeming mean-spiritedness. However, since we knew that this was our time to not just vent but more importantly, to listen, understand and improve, there was never any tension. Only attention.

I believe we have saved ourselves from countless more arguments, splitting up and hating each other. And we certainly saved thousands of dollars on therapy!

We found a great way to communicate and that is what has kept us going.

Read more about how important communication is in the chapter **COMMUNICATE AND SAVE THE WORLD**

WHAT GAVE US POWER TO DO WHAT WE LIKE



As time went on, more and more wonderful orchestras gave us the possibility to work with them. And orchestras even started commissioning us to write music for them!

The New York Philharmonic, with whom we performed a New Year's Eve concert under Maestro Alan Gilbert, commissioned us to write "Ring in the Classics". The Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and Manfred Honeck commissioned the work "An Austrian in America".

CHECK THIS OUT ON YOUTUBE:

Upbeat: "Ring in the Classics"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_k1J3S51lM

Radetzky March mixed with Stars and Stripes Forever! (from "An Austrian in America")

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCwSEATZ6ws>

Yankee Doodle Mozart - by Igudesman (from "An Austrian in America")

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8ot5L-bGck>

Oh My Darling Johann Strauss by Igudesman (from "An Austrian in America")

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAU-xLH1Fz8>

Then the Zürich Tonhalle Orchestra commissioned two large works from us for their 150 year anniversary:

“The Historical and Hysterical Guide to the Orchestra” and “Clash of the Soloists” which we premiered with them under Joshua Weilerstein.



In our very own guide to the orchestra we decided to tell the story of the orchestra, paralleled with the entire history of the Universe. A curious customer walks into a shop where the sounds of an orchestra are playing. Upon finally getting the shopkeeper’s attention, the customer says:

- *“I would love to be part of an orchestra.”*
- *“You’ve come to the right place.”*
- *“Which instrument would you like to play?”*
- *“Which one do you recommend?”*
- *“Ah, well, for that we have to go back to the beginning!”*
- *“Back to the beginning of the orchestra?”*
- *“No, back to the beginning of everything!”*

And so the Shopkeeper begins his fascinating guide to each and every instrument of the orchestra from its invention to its inclusion in the symphony. Along this time travelling journey, as each instrument is unveiled, we also discover about its historical context. Did you know that flutes used to be made of mammoth bone and vulture wings? Or that timpani used to be played on horses? And is it a coincidence that cellos were made fatter than violins just around the same time as chocolate was brought over to Europe from Mexico? Or that the toilet was invented at the same time as the tuba? We think not!

CHECK THIS OUT ON YOUTUBE:

A Historical and Hysterical Guide to the Orchestra
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unCGxkksO7k>

In the “Clash of the Soloists” we compete in over 60 violin and piano concertos against each other. Musically and physically.

In Clash of the Soloists, two great virtuosos compete for the ultimate musical wrestling prize in the cross-category violin concertos against piano concertos.

Very much in the style of a wrestling match, the conductor doubles up as a referee and announcer, while we enter the stage in arguably the most flamboyantly outrageous costume the world of classical music has ever seen.

CHECK THIS OUT ON YOUTUBE:

Clash of the Soloists
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AsH1gTxwATw>



We created shows for some of our dear friends from the world of music:

An entire show with Emanuel Ax, (Manny Spring Sonatas), and another one with Viktoria Mullova (Viktoria's Little Secrets). We tailor-made a Christmas Holiday show for us and Joshua Bell, (A Little Silent Night Music), and we created a whole new world for piano virtuoso, Yuja Wang, where she jumps out of a cardboard box and plays a clone of herself. (The Clone)

We wrote a special number for When Billy Joel asked us if he could join us on stage at Carnegie Hall, and one of our favourite sketches, "Music Police", was originally written for Yefim Bronfman, after he begged us to do something with him but funnily enough, he has never jumped on stage with us yet!

CHECK THIS OUT ON YOUTUBE:

Manny Spring Sonatas (with Emanuel Ax)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MviD1JU2CXA>

IGUDESMAN & JOO - La Cucaracha (with Viktoria Mullova)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twQbrmuCtOo>

Christmas Confusion (with Joshua Bell)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RyW-Jz3FECs>

Yuja Wang is THE CLONE (with Yuja Wang)

(this is just an early improvisation, which we developed into a full show)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6PQNgcSLiLU>

Billy Joel disrupts Igudesman & Joo in concert with "Baby Grand"

(with Billy Joel)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfOdU3YKFXE>



From the world of theater, cinema and Hollywood, we have often been joined on stage by our dear friends John Malkovich and the late Sir Roger Moore.

John also played the role of our “agent” on our CD “You Just Have to Laugh” and performs with us in “The Music Critic” which you can read about in the chapter Critics and what they are good for.

CHECK THIS OUT ON YOUTUBE:

Being John Sebastian Bach (with John Malkovich)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9A95yzVgBTs>

IGUDESMAN & JOO From Mozart With Love (with Sir Roger Moore)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGjJxEVkkqs>

Sir Roger Moore sings "It Looks Like Rain In Cherry Blossom Lane" with Igudesman & Joo & Friends

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQEXiDMwmSI>

The Music Critic – Teaser (with John Malkovich)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJoDuwsYOUA>

CHECK THIS OUT ON AMAZON.COM:

You Just Have To Laugh - Vol. 1 The Unmaking Of (feat. John Malkovich)

https://www.amazon.com/You-Just-Have-Laugh-Unmaking/dp/B07B26KLCP/ref=tmm_msc_swatch_o?encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=

At some point we asked ourselves, why do all these great musicians, actors and orchestras wish to perform with us? It was never us running after any of them, but them who approached us!

And then the penny dropped; everyone loves to “play”.

And everyone is a child at heart.

As Igudesman & Joo, we have kept the ability to truly play.

Not just “play music” but “play with music”.



The playfulness, the mischief, doing what you are not supposed to, is so liberating for so many of us. Even, or especially for people with a respected stature, who can often feel like they are trapped in a golden cage, and being obliged to behave in certain ways that are expected of them.

We, Igudesman & Joo, on the other hand, are in the luxurious position of having to be playful at all times. Creative and surprising. Also not always an easy task.

But mostly a hell of a lot of fun!



HOW WE PLAN TO SAVE THE WORLD

THE BOOK, LIVE ON STAGE, YOUTUBE, AND OUR FUTURE

The reason I wrote this entire chapter is certainly not to show off. It is to explain a little about how we got to wherever we are, where we came from and why we think we may have something to say on the subject of creativity.

But the bigger question is this:

Is the title of the book a misnomer or can you really save the world?

The answer for us is yes, no, and maybe. What we are trying to do on an individual level for ourselves and on a global level for everyone else, is to give the confidence to ourselves and everyone else. Confidence that we are all able to be creative individuals who have the power to change ourselves and things around us.

That is, starting from our own mood to making many people around you feel happy, from improving your own life in small yet significant ways, to starting global movements that will actually improve and save the entire planet in some way or another.

We cannot and do not want to tell you how to save the world.

That you will do yourself. But we will encourage you in every possible way to do it. Through writing this book. Through doing our live performances. Through posting on YouTube, doing video blogs and reaching out to you on social media.

And above all through setting an example of how we are with each other.

To be honest, we wrote this book for us. Because we needed to read it.

Although all of it comes from our minds, a lot of it had to be “said out loud” in book form for us to truly understand it. It is a reminder to ourselves of how we got to where we are. It shows where we want to go. And what people we want to be. And through that, if you manage to benefit from it also, it’s a win-win situation.

We have so many plans for the future.

We both love writing music.

There are many more works that we have been commissioned to write, individually and together. We have individual projects and many shows together that we are developing. We want to direct and create movies, series, videos. And above all, we want to educate without being educative, through having fun and playing games with you.

ALL PHOTOS © JULIA WESELY

