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Opening the Doors
SUNGBIN CHO GUITAR

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This album is a reflection of my journey, and I am deeply grateful to everyone whose love and support have shaped the music within it. I want to express my sincere gratitude to those who have supported me.

To my wife, *Yun Young*, who not only fills my life with love, but also creates the most beautiful guitars in the world.

To my mentor, *Michael Lewin*, for not only guiding my studies in the UK but also helping me find direction in the kind of guitarist and person I aspire to be.

To *Fabio Zanon*, my wonderful dream.

To my beloved *students* who inspire me more than they know.

To everyone I meet, especially my *audience* who endlessly drive me to keep dreaming of what's next.

To my loving friends at *Nottingham Korean Church* and my awesome manager, *Inny*.

To my *family* in Korea, Paraguay, and Canada - thank you for your constant love and support.

And to *Bada*, who we will meet in March (it's a boy!).

Thank you to you all. ■

This album is my first story to share with the public. The pieces I've recorded are full of memories of the moments when I felt a strong chemistry, not only between the artist and the music, but also the artist and the music and the audience.

I first started learning guitar as a way to reconnect with my father when he was recovering from blood cancer. When he first came home after two years in hospital, he had no energy, and because of this he didn't have any passion for anything. Then he started to take classical guitar lessons in a community centre. He had learned classical guitar when he was in university, and when he came back to it now, I saw him having passion and energy again. One day he asked me, "why don't you try classical guitar?" And I thought, *why not?* We had a lot of fun learning guitar together - seeing who could learn this music faster, that kind of thing. One day he realised that I learned the music way too fast for him, and he thought it would be good to bring me to a professional guitar teacher.

After that, I went to the Korean National University of Arts, which is the best place to study music in Korea, and very competitive. I had to spend hours and hours practising every day and night. Music had become my main ambition by then, but somehow in that setting I was starting to lose touch with the joy of the music.

That changed when I went to the military service for two years in the middle of my studies, which is compulsory for all Koreans at that age. Luckily, I was placed in the air force, where I could play classical guitar concerts for the soldiers. I met a lot of different people in the military. They pick people randomly from all over Korea, so the concerts were very different from a normal classical music concert, where the audience self-selects. My audience would request certain things, not classical music but something like a Korean pop tune transcribed for classical guitar. Those were quite hard for me, but still I tried to find some music I knew and that they might like as well. In the end, I did manage to win them over to some classical guitar repertoire. So I was lucky that even though I couldn't arrange the music for them, they accepted me as just myself. That experience also gave me a chance to think about my deeper motives for playing music again. Music ▸

had had such a massive effect on my father and our family, and I wanted to share that same positive energy with my air force colleagues.

I had known about Andrew York's guitar ensemble arrangements for a long time, and I have lovely memories of playing his music with my colleagues, but I had never had a chance to play his compositions before preparing for this album. His music feels different from typical classical repertoire - as though my mind could go to sleep and have beautiful dreams and then come back with new memories when the music ended. I wanted to share this kind of experience with listeners. Sometimes I even play this piece in the interval of the concert, or instead of an interval. Even when I play on stage, I tend to have a different feeling each time, as the music takes me to a different part of my memory.

The Barrios is very special to me, because he's a Paraguayan composer, and my wife, Yun, is from Paraguay. When I thought about the music I wanted to record, I thought partly about what I wanted to play for Yun. She tells me a lot of her childhood stories, and this music led me to imagine some of the scenes from her childhood. Yun is also an instrument maker, and the guitar I am playing on this album is one of hers.

When I play Bach, I think a lot about Christian imagery. There is an article by Anne Leahy, arguing that the three-part structure of BWV 998 is a "trinitarian statement of faith", and that idea spoke to me. I've been imagining the whole arc of the piece as the life of Jesus - prophesy and heavenly singing in the Prelude, struggle and darkness in the Fugue, triumph and glory in the Allegro. I've grown up in the church from a young age and now I conduct my church choir every week. The communication and the emotions there all become my musical resources: I always think about the people I met that week and what I want to play for them.

My first memory of playing the Torroba Sonatina is a painful one. I had wanted to play this piece ever since I started guitar, and I chose it for my first ever audition piece. But I was too nervous - my right hand was shaking so hard that it couldn't even reach the string. So in the end, I couldn't play even one note. I just got up and bowed again and I left the stage. After

that, I felt so mortified that I thought to myself, *I'm not going to play the Torroba Sonatina ever again*. One day, much later, Fabio Zanon came to Korea and played the Sonatina, and somewhere between the first movement and the third movement, I decided that I couldn't live without this piece, and that I wanted to learn it with Fabio. I asked him, "Where do you teach?" and he said, "I teach in London, but only once per term." But I thought, *that's enough*. So I came to the UK to study with him at the Royal Academy of Music, and we learned the Sonatina together - and I even ended up winning the London International Guitar Competition with that very piece. I love the moment when I come on stage, give the audience a nice bow, and then offer them that beautiful A major chord. It's just an opening word, it's opening the door to something. Now I play the Torroba Sonatina without any trauma, but full of happiness.

I feel very lucky to have music embedded in my normal life. It's not only my career, but also part ▸

of my family life and my life with Yun. And when I teach my guitar students, we are not only sharing the guitar, but also sharing life. They give me the motivation to play guitar, as well as the church where I go every Sunday and the choir, and the new people I meet when I play concerts. I feel very grateful to have this life and the support of so many people.

I hope that this music also speaks to you and becomes part of your own story. ■

–Sungbin Cho

SUNGBIN CHO

Sungbin Cho is a classical guitarist, based in Nottingham. Active as a soloist, chamber musician and teacher, he strives to be an advocate for the beauty of the classical guitar.

Having fallen in love with the classical guitar in his early teens, Sungbin went on to pursue a formal education in music and graduated with a BMus from the *Korean National University of Arts*. He then completed his two-year military service in the Republic of Korea Air Force before embarking on a new journey to advanced studies in classical guitar performance and moving to the UK with his wife (Luthier, *Yun Young Shin*). Sungbin decided to settle in England, drawn by the sense of belonging he has found here. The inspiring landscapes and vibrant musical atmosphere have captured his heart, making it the perfect place to continue his artistic journey.

In 2022, he earned a *Master of Arts* in Performance from the *Royal Academy of Music*, studying under the renowned guitarist Michael Lewin. He continued his studies at the Academy, earning an *Advanced Diploma* (FHEQ level 8) in 2023. Notably, Sungbin is the first Korean national to be admitted to the classical guitar department of the Royal Academy of Music.

Sungbin has won the *2021 London International Guitar Competition* and the *2023 Blyth Watson Guitar Concerto Prize* and has performed at venues such as *Kings Place Hall, St. James's Church*

Piccadilly, and Duke's Hall in London. Sungbin continues to perform across the country, bringing the timeless beauty of classical guitar music to diverse audiences.

The expressive power of the guitar, as Sungbin has experienced it, remains at the heart of his musical mission. Looking ahead, Sungbin hopes to embrace new artistic ventures and bring you his music across diverse musical landscapes through moments where the guitar becomes a voice that speaks beyond words. ■

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DXL1221

SONATINA *Federico Moreno Torroba (1891-1982)*

1 Allegretto 4:01

2 Andante 4:41

3 Allegro 4:27

4 Pepita *Augustín Barrios Mangoré (1885-1944)* 5:21

5 Joyn *Andrew York (1958-)* 4:23

BARDENKLÄNGE, OP. 13 *Johann Kaspar Mertz (1806-1856)*

6 An die Entfernte 4:03

7 Unruhe 1:51

PRELUDE, FUGUE AND ALLEGRO, BWV 998 *Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)*

8 Prelude 3:22

9 Fugue 6:50

10 Allegro 3:43

11 Woven World *Andrew York (1958-)* 3:53

Total playing time: 46:34

Guitar Yun Young Shin, 2023, Oxford (with mentor Christopher Dean). Spruce top, Indian rosewood back and side | **Sound engineer** John Taylor
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