

The Occasion

A Synopsis

A troupe of traditional Korean drummers, dancers, and musicians has come to Ada Slaughter Hall to mount a performance weaving ritual & theatre with dance & music, punctuated by plenty of drumming.

This multi-disciplinary spectacle features music and choreography created by the company, rooted in the traditional performing arts of Korea, drawing from the shaman, court, and folk traditions.

The show starts not on the stage, but by the house doors, where Ensemble Jeng Yi performs a short “gate cleansing ritual”, full of drumming and energetic hollers, ensuring no evil spirits enter the house. Once completed, they will proceed, drumming and marching, up to the stage, where the entire cast will share an hour with the audience, full of music and dance, touching on themes of loss, nostalgia, and celebration.

The show kicks off with ***P’yong***, the much-talked-about ribbon hat dance, where the members of Ensemble Jeng Yi spin the *Sangmo*, a hat with a streamer—all while dancing and drumming.

The dance is followed by ***The Empress Dowager (she enters the room and fondly remembers her youth)***, a poignant work for the Korean zither. Performed by Joo Hyung Kim, the song is inspired by the story of an aging Korean monarch, who spirals into paranoia, losing not only her sense of reality but also her grip on the kingdom. Not knowing whom to trust, she retreats to the comfort of the memories of her youth.

Next, choreographer Soojung Kwon takes her place on stage to perform ***The Occasion***, the show’s namesake. Her ritualistic dance work features rousing percussion accompaniment performed by Ensemble Jeng Yi. But they are not simply accompanists tucked away to the side of the stage—Ms. Kwon has made them an integral part of the choreography, with instruments strapped to their bodies, standing and moving about in a half-circle formation around her, sometimes joining her in dance.

The finale is an eleven-minute three-movement ***Suite for Korean Percussion Ensemble*** performed by Ensemble Jeng Yi. Composed in 2005, it has been rarely performed, reserved only for special occasions, such as this long-awaited much-needed return to live performance. Three movements, each crafted with a different traditional rhythm, each growing faster in tempo, thicker in density: the first languid and lyrical, the second muscular, and the third, ending with a four-to-the-floor bass and interlocking duelling gongs.