

'A Little Nightmare Music' interview: Aleksey Igudesman and Hyung-ki Joo on classical music comedy

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'A Little Night Music' creators Aleksey Igudesman (the violinist) and Hyung-ki Joo (the pianist) mix classics with pleasure.

A seasoned pianist attempts to play one of classical music's most abstruse pieces — Rachmaninov's Opus 3 No. 2 in C Sharp.

There's just one problem: His fingers are too small to play the chords.

"Rachmaninov's hands were big," he tells the audience in broken English and Korean. "My hands are small. But only hands small."

Finding it impossible to play with such humble fingers, the performer enlists his friend to throw him various plaques of indented wood, which are carved to play the difficult chords on the piano. He catches the slabs and slams them onto keys at different moments in the opus.

"Rachmaninov Has Big Hands" is just one of the many comedic — and complicated — pieces from the viral sensation "A Little Nightmare Music" by [Aleksey Igudesman](#) (the friend and violinist) and [Hyung-ki Joo](#) (the pianist.)

How viral? Igudesman and Joo have more than 20 million combined views on their [YouTube](#) videos. Their live show mixes comedy with classic recital. Think [Mozart](#) meets [Monty Python](#), they say.



The duo crack up audiences with 'A Little Nightmare Music.' ([Elizabeth Weber](#))

"These days, we have random people coming up to us in very random places, like once when a technical engineer knew who we were," says Igudesman, who studied at the Vienna Conservatoire.

"We owe an incredible debt to YouTube," he says.

When you see Joo attempt to play a talking piano that demands the user swipe a credit card to unlock it, you know the show is nontraditional.

"We want people to know that classical music is for everyone," says Joo, who graduated from the [Manhattan School of Music](#).

"A parent or kid might be terrified of this music, but after they come to us they'll never be scared of classical music again."

The show developed over six years, but the performers have been friends since they were 12, when they played at the [Yehudi Menuhin School](#) in [England](#).

They kept in touch.

"We did it the traditional way — this was pre-[Facebook](#). We used pigeons as messengers," says Igudesman.

While Igudesman began collaborating with [Hans Zimmer](#), an [Academy Award](#)-winning film composer, and others, Joo worked with [Grammy Award](#) winner [Billy Joel](#) on his classical piano album.

The two are developing a TV pilot and working with [John Malkovich](#) to create a stage show called "The Music Critic."

"He's such an innovative individual who very well thinks outside the box," Joo says of Malkovich. "We met him on several occasions and he's wonderful, very creative and has a sardonic sense of humor. We all just got along."

"A Little Nightmare Music." Wednesday, 8 p.m. 92nd Street Y, 1395 Lexington Ave. \$35. (212) 415-5500 or 92y.org.