



## Interview: Igudesman and Joo

A musical pair makes high-minded comedy with the classical repertoire. *Amanda Angel*

<http://newyork.timeout.com/music-nightlife/classical-opera/1034759/interview-igudesman-and%20joo>



### **Igudesman and Joo**

Photograph: Elizabeth Weber

It's close to 10pm in Florence, Italy, and Aleksey Igudesman and Hyung-ki Joo, performing the next night with Orchestra della Toscana, are explaining to an interviewer six time zones away the inspiration behind their concerts, parts of which have been seen by more than 20 million people via YouTube. "In the bedroom, I think," Igudesman blurts out, earning a guffaw from Joo. "I'm sorry," he continues, "I can't leave out a punch line."

Meet the Abbott and Costello of classical music. Make no mistake, both Igudesman, a violinist, and Joo, a pianist, are so-called serious musicians with conservatory educations. But for the past seven years the two have been making fun with—not of—classical music in the manner of musical comedians like Dudley Moore and Anna Russell. Their show, *A Little Nightmare Music*, comes to the 92nd Street Y on Wednesday 30.

“Comedy is a very serious thing,” Joo says. “On the other hand, classical music is full of humor, which many people fail to see, and that’s what we’re there to expose.”

In the act, Igudesman exposes his boxer shorts and wiggles his eyebrows like John Belushi. Meanwhile, Joo, who’s usually pulling his share of faces at the piano bench, blurts falsetto screams in either horror or a Barry Gibb imitation. There are nods to *Riverdance*, samurai flicks and, for this upcoming U.S. swing, a mash-up of *The Simpsons* and *West Side Story*. The pair doesn’t discriminate between genres of music or types of comedy. Everything is fair game.

The men found they had similar sensibilities, both comedic and musical, when they met as 12-year-olds at the Yehudi Menuhin School in England. As the story goes, they were fast enemies until Joo offered Igudesman a plate of fish and chips. They’ve been friends ever since. After graduating, they pursued separate paths: Joo was accepted to the Manhattan School of Music, while Igudesman enrolled in the Vienna Conservatory. They’d meet up occasionally at summer festivals or on tour. When Joo moved to Vienna in 2004, the duo decided to build the dream act they’d been planning since their adolescent days.

“We put together all these ideas that had been latent and bubbling and brewing for so many years, and started writing the show,” Joo says. Work began in summer, and *A Little Nightmare Music* premiered in the fall. “Since then, we’ve had a blast,” Joo adds.

Soon, the classical community began to take notice, as musical luminaries such as Menuhin and Gidon Kremer participated in the high jinx. One popular YouTube clip shows the eminent pianist Emanuel Ax playing a violent game of musical chairs with Joo while both accompany Igudesman. Actors Roger Moore and John Malkovich have also joined the duo on stage. And lately Igudesman and Joo have been taking over European orchestras with their *BIG Nightmare Music* European tour, while writing material for a television pilot and a Vienna concert series in the fall.

The performers say they have received nothing but praise from their classical-music peers. Should they encounter any critics, however, they’re prepared. “We’re running away from them,” Joo says. Without missing a beat, Igudesman corrects his partner: “We’re running *over* them.”

[92nd Street Y](#); Wed 30

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