

Yoona Kim is an Ajaeng (Korean bowed zither) performer, composer, improviser, and music educator originally from Seoul, South Korea, and currently based in Boston, USA. She explores a wide spectrum of sound through ajaeng, bridging Korean traditional aesthetics with experimental and cross-cultural musical practices.

She began her musical journey through Korean folk songs and Gayageum, later studying Pansori, Jeongga, Haegeum, dance, and percussion—experiences that shaped her deep sense of voice, breath, and narrative rhythm. At fourteen, she chose the Ajaeng as her primary instrument and studied ajaeng performance and Musicology (Western Music Studies) at Seoul National University.

In 2016, she founded the contemporary Korean ensemble *Moderngagok*, debuting with *Ajaeng Gagok Hanbatang*, a recital that integrated the Ajaeng into Jeongga and reimagined court music structures. The project received the Sinak-hoi Composition Award and led to her selection as Artist of the Month by Jeongdong Theater, as well as recognition from the Berlin Korean Cultural Center, the Surim New Wave Foundation, and the Exciting Arts Journey series.

Seeking broader expression, Kim moved to the United States, earning her Master's degree and Graduate Diploma from the New England Conservatory under mentors such as Anthony Coleman, Carla Kihlstedt, Hankus Netsky, Joe Morris, Lautaro Mantilla, and Stratis Minakakis. She later completed her Master of Music in Global Jazz at Berklee College of Music, studying jazz with George Garzone, Consuelo Candelaria-Barry, and Linda May Han Oh, expanding ajaeng within the language of jazz and improvisation.

She collaborates with Alma Vatya, developing an Old-time–based sound rooted in both Korean and American folk traditions. The duo has performed at Club Passim in Boston, the Museum of Fine Arts, and the Smithsonian Museum. WBUR (Boston's NPR) described their collaboration as: "Instead of creating a forced fusion, the two musicians dive deep into American and Korean traditions as they trade vocals and licks, showing how both the blues and Korean folk music share a sense of sustain, soul, rhythm, and space."

Building on this cross-cultural approach, Kim now leads the Global String Band JOOL, which explores Old-time music through ajaeng, as well as the Global Yiddish Orchestra, which centers on Klezmer music. Her work, rooted in tradition yet unbound by genre, has been praised for redefining ajaeng as a global narrative instrument.

As a contemporary improviser, Kim is active across both the United States and Korea, performing with artists such as Anthony Coleman, Chris Cochrane, Fay Victor, Satoshi Takeishi, and Greg Kelley. She is currently preparing for the release of the debut full-length album of Global String Band JOOL, as well as a duo free-improvisation album with trumpeter Greg Kelley, continuing her journey of connecting tradition and experimentation through the voice of ajaeng.