

East Meets West: South Korea's Pop Music Queen Goes Latin Jazz

Bubbly pharmacist turned pop singer JU HYUN MI's career takes an unprecedented westerly turn

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[/EINPresswire.com/](https://EINPresswire.com/) -- Before the advent of K-pop, "trot" music was South Korea's reigning popular music genre, and pharmacist-turned-singer Ju Hyun Mi was trot music's reigning queen. Achieving viral success in 1984 and signing a record contract the next year, Ju's debut single "Rainy Yeongdong Bridge" nearly upended the Korean music industry and won her the Korean Grammy equivalent for "Best New Female Artist" for 1985. In 2020, Korea experienced a trot music revival that launched a full-fledged second career for Ju, complete with a vibrant YouTube channel and a weekly national radio show.



Phil Yoon (drummer, music director) and Ju Hyun Mi (lead vocalist) of Ju Hyun Mi Jazz Project

“

Ju is an energetic lady, and because of that, she took to the energy of Latin Jazz right away.”

Phil Yoon, Ju Hyun Mi Jazz Project

So why, amongst all this success, would Ju Hyun Mi decide to turn to Latin Jazz?

Ju Hyun Mi Jazz Project, the bubbly, energetic singer's Latin Jazz group, has played three of Korea's largest music festivals to popular and critical acclaim and plans to release its first LP this year. The group also plans to bring their joyous music to North America in the near future.

The project's genesis and success lie in the talents of Berklee-trained drummer Phil Yoon, Ju Hyun Mi Jazz Project's co-founder and music director. Ju Hyun Mi's first meeting with Phil Yoon was in 1992 on the set of a Korean variety show that featured newlywed couples hosting events on the Korean resort island of Jeju. Ju was a guest singer for the show, and Yoon was drummer in the house band. After this chance meeting, Phil Yoon moved to Boston to further his education

in drums at Berklee School of Music.

While at Berklee, Yoon was mentored by pioneering jazz musician Elvin Jones, who played drums on John Coltrane's landmark LP "A Love Supreme" (1965). "I was impressed at what a friendly person he was. He would tell me, 'Hey, Phil, the drum is a natural instrument, so you gotta play it naturally, man, naturally!' He also encouraged me to think of the drum kit as a single instrument and to create harmony within it."

Years later, while teaching classes at Korean universities, Phil received an offer to assemble a world music class, which brought Yoon to Latin Jazz. The work resulted not only in a successful world music class, but a 2019 Latin Jazz album entitled "The Winds from Cuba" and a television appearance on long-running Korean television series EBS Space.

Meanwhile, Ju Hyun Mi's career began to include forays into the exploding [world of K-pop](#), featuring collaborations with members of the idol group Girls' Generation (called "The Nation's Girl Group" in South Korea and precursors to Blackpink). Her radio show "Ju Hyun Mi's Love Letter" debuted on KBS Radio in 2015 and her YouTube channel "Ju Hyun Mi TV" established her as a popular YouTube personality. In 2020, the Korean television show "The Trot God is Coming" swept the country into a trot music revival that gave Ju a flurry of television appearances as the genre's best known legacy singer.

It was a second meeting between Ju and Phil Yoon in 2019 that began Ju Hyun Mi's unprecedented westward turn to Latin Jazz. Yoon was instrumental in encouraging the legacy singer forward in learning to sing Latin Jazz. The results were so spectacular that Ju's management asked Yoon to collaborate with Ju on a full-length LP. "Ju is an energetic lady, and because of that, she took to the energy of Latin Jazz right away," Yoon remembered. "We took



Ju Hyun Mi's 1985 hit "Rainy Yeongdong Bridge" established her as one of South Korea's premier performers in the "trot" music genre



Ju Hyun Mi and Phil Yoon performing with Ju Hyun Mi Jazz Project at a recent South Korean festival appearance

rough mixes to Korea's Tae-hwa International Jazz Festival, and they booked us right away." The group has now played three major [jazz festivals](#) in South Korea to surprising success.

As of this writing, Ju Hyun Mi Jazz Project has released a total of eight singles, which are [available on Spotify](#) and other streaming platforms. "Under Raining Bridge" ("Rainy Yeongdong Bridge"), "Lament in Blue" and "Sinsadong" ("The Man From Sinsadong") reinterpret Ju's three best known trot hits from the 1980s. "Yo, Como Esta" was inspired by Phil Yoon's vacationing in the Philippines. "The Winds From Cuba" finds its inspiration in author Ernest Hemingway, who enjoyed drinking mojitos and listening to Latin music during his regular visits to Key West, Florida.

Look for the band to take their jubilant east-meets-west show to North America and release a full-length LP in the near future.

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