



Sounds for the Soul

MUSIC TO HELP OVERCOME CANCER | MIN-JUNG KYM, PIANO



STEINWAY & SONS


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There is a book to accompany this album entitled *La musique pour dépasser le cancer* published by Éditions Hermann.

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Playing Time: 56:16

A portrait of pianist Min-Jung Kym, a woman with dark, wavy hair, wearing a black blazer and a delicate necklace. She is standing in front of a grand piano, which is out of focus in the background. The lighting is soft and warm, highlighting her features.

Steinway Artist **MIN-JUNG KYM** has a growing reputation as a pianist bringing innovation, fresh quality and musicianship to her performances. Min-Jung has performed internationally in many of the major concert halls and festivals with some of the world's finest orchestras and musicians.

Min-Jung is actively engaged in raising awareness of the benefits of music therapy and has co-written a book to accompany this album on the benefits of music and music therapy when facing cancer. Entitled *La musique pour dépasser le cancer*, it was written with the eminent French radiotherapy oncologist and founder of the *l'Institut Rafaël*, Dr. Alain Toledano, and is published by Éditions Hermann (France).

“MUSIC PRODUCES A KIND OF PLEASURE WHICH HUMAN NATURE CANNOT DO WITHOUT”

— Confucius

Music can be a powerful therapeutic tool and I have always been convinced of the positive effects of music and music therapy. In some ways, we practice music therapy every day. The piece that helps us unwind after a long day, or the song we turn to as a pick-me-up to help boost our mood and energize us. Music has also been shown to bring about positive emotional changes and reduce anxiety. For cancer patients, music and music therapy—the clinical use of music as a tool to help achieve treatment goals—can also be used to develop positive coping skills that come with a cancer diagnosis.

In 2019 when I was diagnosed with breast cancer and colon cancer, facing this disease magnified just how much truth there is in all of this. The power of music and what it can inspire helped me through this period of my life. You don't have to be a professional musician to experience the benefits of music; it's within everyone's reach. It provides a vital anchor in the face of adversity.

This album is a personal selection of works that I either played or listened to during my treatment. I wanted to share my experience because music contains the altruistic dimension of sharing, and perhaps, as a result, others may also find it easier to cope with their cancer.

ARVO PÄRT: THE HYPNOTIC QUALITIES OF SPIEGEL IM SPIEGEL *Spiegel im Spiegel* is one of the Estonian composer's best-known works. Just three notes repeat themselves delicately under a series of melodic variations which return in a loop. Pärt himself defined his musical style as “tintinnabulant” (like the sound of a bell) to describe his minimalist and meditative compositions.

The meaning of its title, “the mirror in the mirror”, is quite self-explanatory: an image that repeats itself endlessly. In fact, it is the notion of infinity that Arvo Pärt wanted to represent in this work. The music is infinitely nostalgic but above all, it is absolutely calm and even. It is totally stable which makes it particularly soothing. It has a dreamy dimension and has the power to transport us into a totally different universe, another dimension.

The emotions evoked by this work come from the introspective dimension and the calm that emerges from it, as opposed to the noisy and sometimes frenetic world in which we live. The performer must have faith in the music to let it speak for itself.

The consistency of the rhythm and notes creates a reassuring setting and captures attention through its repetitions. It's a piece that can be described as hypnotic. This is a tool that is often used in music therapy. To capture the attention of patients at the start of a session, therapists

play on this kind of rhythm to obtain concentration, a bit like entering hypnosis to the rhythm of the practitioner's voice. This creates a reassuring environment for the patient as well as full and complete attention at the moment. *Spiegel im Spiegel* is highly representative of this practice.

JOHANNES BRAHMS - INTERMEZZO OP. 117 NO. 2: LONGING AND COMFORT This intermezzo belongs to a group of works composed by Brahms at the end of his life. He called them the "lullabies of (his) life". Like many of the other pieces he composed around this time, it is very intimate, very introspective. Brahms no doubt wrote it for his great love, Clara Schumann. It's a piece that channels the soul and brings so much comfort. It reveals a rich inner emotional world and is filled with a multitude of colours, and with so many nuances to explore. It is an extraordinarily sensorial experience for pianists to play this piece.

Throughout, Brahms tells his story. Its narration evokes suffering, sadness and his dwindling strength. The colours are often somber, but reveal moments that bring clarity and light on the other side. It is melancholy and expresses nostalgia, but it is also extremely comforting because of the lullaby aspect and its lyricism.

I listened continuously to all three Op. 117 Intermezzi, but I had never played them. This piece, in particular, accompanied me throughout the treatment. It was a special experience for me to learn to interpret and record it for this album.

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH - ARIOSO: REVERIE AND APPEASEMENT This is an arrangement of the second movement of the fifth concerto in F minor by Johann Sebastian Bach. He composed this concerto after his 1729 cantata, "Ich steh mit einem Fuss im Grabe" (I stand with one foot in the grave). From all his work emerges a purity, an almost religious dimension and this concerto is no exception. The melody weaves its way with elegance and tenderness over a pizzicato arrangement (playing by plucking the strings and not by rubbing them with a bow). An arioso is traditionally an air of song. This is what Bach wanted, for the melody to "sing", as a human voice would. The movement is written in A flat major, a key that leads to reverie. It's serenely simple, its tempo is slow and the left hand follows the rhythm of the human heart beating at rest. It is appeasing with an incredibly moving melody. I played this frequently after my chemotherapy sessions. It gave me comfort and relieved the pain I was experiencing.

VLADIMIR COSMA - REALITY: A KIND OF "MADELEINE DE PROUST" A Proustian moment or a "*Madeleine de Proust*" is when a particular scent conjures up a certain experience, time or place. "Reality" from the soundtrack to the film *La Boum* is for the French a dance back in time. The slow dance tune of the night. The memory of humming this melody, of re-living that teenage moment and the accompanying emotions. "La Boum", an iconic film from the 80s, evokes many of these memories for those who have seen the film. This is why "Reality" always has a positive effect on the listener, especially those born in the 70s and 80s!

CHARLES TRENET - DOUCE FRANCE: MY SINGULARITY I chose to put this Charles Trenet song on the album because there is a very personal tie and it is an integral part of my story. I am British and grew up in London, with South Korean parents. Today I am also French. *Douce France* is a song that illustrates my bond with France since I moved to the country.

When I arrived, I was told that the best way to learn the language was to listen to and read the lyrics of French Chansons (songs). They are often quite complex and really allow one to grasp hold of the soul of the language. I immersed myself in the delectable pleasure of learning the lyrics by Charles Trenet, Boris Vian, Georges Brassens... and many others.

Douce France is also a way for me to express my personal history with the country because in some ways it is also the history of my cancer. France is the country where a cancer diagnosis means that treatment is available for all, the country where a PET scan is automatic. Without these resources, my colon cancer would never have been diagnosed when it was and have been treated so quickly. I am grateful for this.

Douce France is another of my "Madeleines de Proust". It is reminiscent of my first years in France, and recalling these memories makes me smile.

FRANZ LISZT - LA VALLÉE D'OVERMANN: FRUSTRATION AND ACCEPTANCE This is a very poetic work, belonging to the first of three volumes of the *Années de pèlerinage* (Years of Pilgrimage), which Liszt composed during his travels to Switzerland and Italy.

Inspired by Étienne de Senacour's novel *Obermann*, it is a musical poem describing the philosophical meditations, the existential doubts, the torment of unanswerable questions that Obermann experiences while living in solitary refuge in the Swiss Alps. The character is fascinated by the environment around him and the complexities of nature that overwhelm him.

Liszt himself described *Vallée d'Obermann* as "an indicator of human pain and anguish". It was a work that reflected my emotions when I was diagnosed with the second cancer because I kept wondering why this was happening to me. Whilst I had come to grips with my breast cancer, I could not come to terms with this second diagnosis. There was a constant duel in grappling between the frustration and anger of this second cancer and the appeasement of knowing that an early diagnosis made it curable.

During this time, I would often play the last melodious section, in E major. This section is very lyrical, almost as if through the torments, Liszt shows a way out of the darkness. The ecstatic climax is grandiose and sonorous. It gave me physical release to play this and allowed me to transcend my anger.

FRANZ SCHUBERT - IMPROMPTU D 899 NO. 3: CONCILIATION This piece by Schubert is particularly important to me. Schubert composed his Impromptu a year before his death when he was still very young. He was already ill. Like all of the works he composed during this period, these compositions heralded the end of his artistic life. I can't help but wonder if this particular impromptu represented some kind of spiritual prayer to him.

It is composed in G flat major, a key both sweet and rich, and rarely used. It is a prime example of Schubert's incredible melodic gift. It is one of the most lyrical pieces that can be played on the piano. The melody that sits above an unbroken accompaniment of arpeggios, moves at a slow and steady pace. It represents for me the image of peaceful contentment.

I listened to this piece regularly and also I played it for myself, especially after the discovery of my cancer. I felt no sadness, but entered into a form of contemplation; thinking about what was happening to me, trying to make sense of my diagnosis. It helped me come to terms with the disease and find a way forward, which is why I chose to put it on this album.

EDWARD ELGAR - SALUT D'AMOUR: A DECLARATION This track is dedicated to my husband and my family. Dedicated also to everyone that knows or has known a loved one with cancer. Because it is not just the patients that suffer and struggle with emotions. Cancer is also their ordeal.

Elgar composed this piece for his future wife. For me, this work characterizes the empathic dimension that music can take on. It's a way to send a message, to express feelings to someone, to show them love or gratitude. Elgar expresses the dialogue that we can have through music and succeeds in conveying all the sweetness of his love for his young bride. He transmits the magnitude of feelings that one can have for someone, but also the strength of the bonds that can exist between people.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART - SONATA K 331, THIRD MOVEMENT (ALLA TURCA): LETTING GO This sonata is recognizable from the first few notes. The melody is very simple, almost naïve, but it is not exempt from complexity; Mozart wrote it to show off his prowess as a pianist.

Mozart composed this sonata during his Oriental period (much like his opera *Die Entführung aus dem serail*). He wanted to evoke the fanfare of the instruments that play in a Turkish military orchestra, and we hear this influence in the third movement of the sonata.

For me, the third movement represents the emotions of letting go. The sounds are festive and it allows us to leave everything behind, almost

liberated. Listening to this piece, we are fully and totally in the moment. I started playing it, and also listening to it, when I was halfway through my treatment, because it also embodies for me a form of optimism that I clung to as the treatments were drawing to an end.

HAROLD ARLEN - SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW: HOPE This song by Harold Arlen, composed in just one night, is taken from the soundtrack to the film *The Wizard of Oz*. It was one of the first full films I saw as a child. I must have been about eight and it remained, for many years, etched in my memory. The little girl, transported into a motley and multi-coloured universe, really made an impact on me as a child.

The unconditional friendship that is forged between the heroine Dorothy, the Cowardly Lion, the Tin Man and the Scarecrow, is a wonderful fable that represent the bonds we create through friendship in the real world. For me, this song is the very embodiment of hope. By its key, in E flat major, but also through the lyrics, and of course the memories which are anchored in me. As far back as I can remember, I have always drawn from these resources to find hope.

The notion of hope took on an even deeper meaning during my cancer. This song tells us that somewhere out there you can find a universe with “the blue sky” and leave “the clouds behind” where “trouble melts like lemon drops”. Dorothy lets us know that reaching this cheerful and colourful world is possible. It’s a naïve idea but this almost childish simplicity brings optimism and reinforces the idea that we can have the joy of living for the next day. Basically, it gives us a reason to live.

—Min-Jung Kym

Recorded April - May, 2021 at Steinway Showroom, Paris, France. | Producer: Jon Feidner | Engineer: Lauren Sclafani
Assistant Engineer: Melody Nieuw Hwang | Production Assistant: Renée Oakford | Mixing and Mastering: Daniel Shores
Equipment: Pyramix using Merging Technologies Horus Converters; mixed and mastered through Merging Technologies Horus Converter
Microphones: DPA 4006A, Schoeps MC6/MK2

Executive Producer: Jon Feidner | Art Direction: Jackie Fugere | Photos of Min-Jung Kym: ©Arno
Design: Cover to Cover Design, Anilda Carrasquillo | Piano Technician: Lauren Sclafani | Piano Steinway Model D # 610511 (Hamburg)

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