

Speaking volumes without saying a word

Corey Lee: The accidental culinarian

Need a fast, nutritious dish?
You're in luck

A perpetual flurry of excitement



This publication brought to you by:



Tenets of her success: Passion and tenacity



Diane Hirakawa

Diane Hirakawa isn't one to avoid a challenge. Indeed, if challenge were a tornado, she would run toward it.

As a student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Hirakawa persuaded her advisers to let her fashion her own educational program combining her love for companion animals – especially dogs – with her interest in nutrition. While fellow students were studying nutrition in livestock, Hirakawa worked with puppies to apply nutritional science to improve health.

Upon graduation with a master's in animal nutrition and a doctorate in nutritional biochemistry, she found a kindred spirit in Clay Mathile, the owner of Iams Pet Food, after one of her university advisers guided her to Iams and to Mathile.

"Although there were bigger players like Ralston, Nestle and Mars, my adviser, Dr. Jim Corbin, told me to join Iams. I thought, 'This small company in Ohio, really?' But he explained ... that I would have a say in the formulae ... " she recalls. "As a result, we had data to support superior immune function, skin and coat quality, muscle tone, energy level; it was a dream come true."

Hirakawa became vice president for research and development at Iams and global vice president for pet health and nutrition at Procter & Gamble, and oversaw the growth of Iams from a

company with \$30 million in annual sales to nearly \$2 billion in 2006. She left to join another Mathile venture, the Mathile Institute for the Advancement of Human Nutrition, and later to lead the Collaborative Ependymoma Research Network Foundation. Today, Hirakawa leads both organizations while raising three children.

At the Mathile Institute, her work builds upon its research surrounding improving through better nutrition in developing countries. The institute focuses on evidence-based research designed to maximize the effectiveness of aid dollars to improve children's health. "We know if we do not nourish these children when they are young, they will fail to thrive and reach their full potential," says Hirakawa.

At the CERN Foundation, Hirakawa focuses on raising awareness of a rare brain cancer. Ependymoma accounts for one-third of primary brain tumors in children. Since it is relatively rare, there are few research dollars and pharmaceutical interventions available.

"We were fortunate to link with Dr. Mark Gilbert, a leading neural oncologist at (the) University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, who was excited about the opportunity to work on ependymoma brain cancer," Hirakawa says. Gilbert is CERN's chief medical officer and leads the foundation's clinical trials.

CERN's mission is to develop new treatments for ependymoma, and improve the outcomes and care of patients, ultimately leading to a cure.

In Hirakawa's home office hangs a photo of the notice instructing people of Japanese descent to report to internment camps following the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941. This memento serves as a stark reminder of the prejudices and fear that Hirakawa's parents and grandparents faced as immigrants who migrated to California in search of opportunity.

Instead of harboring bitterness, her parents fostered their daughters' commitment to education and resilience. One of four children born to a second-generation Japanese family, Hirakawa recalls they made gender a non-issue in their career and educational pursuits. "I was told you can do anything you put your mind to, just try your hardest and make sure you love it. That's the same message I tell my children: Pick something you love, something you have a passion for and want to learn about," she says. "Select a career you love, not just a job that pays your bills."



Diane Hirakawa shares a moment with two students she met in Malawi.



Diane Hirakawa, center, middle row, and other members of the Collaborative Ependymoma Research Network research team attend the organization's annual meeting in 2011.

Dinner, with a serving of spectacle

It must be the food. How else to explain the fast rise of Ed Iskandar within New York City's world-famous theater scene? The 30-something-year-old who got to the Big Apple by way of Jakarta, a British boarding school, Stanford University and Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburg is big on the potluck throw down. A strong connection with food paired with his Chinese-Indonesian heritage has certainly opened doors for the emerging director.

To set the table, Iskandar is founding director of Exit, Pursued by a Bear, a highly regarded theatrical laboratory where young actors develop their skills, full-scale productions are crafted and small audiences enjoy live stage performances in an intimate setting. During his still-budding career, he has worked on more than 80 plays in the United States and abroad, become an Emerging Artist Fellow with the New York Theatre Workshop, and received the Robert M. Golden Medal for distinguished achievement in the creative arts, to name a few accolades.

One of his biggest achievements is directing "These Seven Sicknesses" at The Flea Theater, which is just off Broadway in the city's theater district. After 90 minutes of action, when most plays are steering toward a curtain call, "These Seven Sicknesses" hasn't reached the halfway mark. Instead, there's an intermission to enjoy dinner – served by the actors – then the shows continues for another hour, at which point dessert is served. The play continues. Altogether, it will take you more than five hours to watch "These Seven Sicknesses," and if you are like most theater patrons, you'll love it.

Envious credits aside, it's the laboratory he runs out of his home in Hell's Kitchen that is shaking things up. At EPBB, workshops take place throughout the week and culminate in the Sunday Salon, featured in The New York Times. On

Sunday afternoons, actors arrive at Iskandar's midtown Manhattan loft for rehearsal, after which, they cook. The time the actors spend in the kitchen builds a spirit of community and confidence, and later in the evening after the audience arrives, the cast is once again at work, serving food. It's all a part of Iskandar's vision to "eliminate the distance that has grown between the art maker and the consumer, and artists from their peers."



Grant Harrison plays Ajax in "These Seven Sicknesses."
Photos by Laura June Kirsch.



Erik Olson, as Orestes, and Betsy Lippitt, as Elektra, share a scene in "These Seven Sicknesses."

"I've cooked all my life – I moved away from home at a young age, so the kitchen became a place where I make a home for people around me," the bespectacled and handsome Iskandar explained in a recent interview with Gabriel Jason Dean, a blogger of all things theater and an aspiring playwright. "At Carnegie Mellon, where I went to graduate school, I cooked a huge meal every Sunday night and pretty much left the invitation open to anyone who wanted the comfort of some casual social company and some healthier options than ... was available at the cafeterias. These evenings became a constant in my life, and I started creating a theatrical culture

around it. At EPBB, our Sunday Salons are the staple of the programming, allowing audiences and artists to stage more casual encounters around a meal and a cold reading of a neglected classic or wonderful new play."

For the actors, EPBB is an opportunity to transition from small theaters to the world's most demanding stages, and Iskandar is leaving his mark on all of them. From May 8 to June 9, you can catch a glimpse of Iskandar at The Play Company off West 44. There he is directing Roland Schimmelpfennig's "The Golden Dragon," a play about immigrant kitchen workers, their customer and neighbors, in the heat and frenzy of the dinner rush. Need we say more?

Speaking volumes without saying a word

The three artists featured in *Unity's* Asian Pacific American Heritage Month edition showcase their artworks that celebrate memories of childhood and pride of heritage. Each artist highlights the emotional connections of her culture through visual languages for all to enjoy.



"Feng Seeks After Huang II" by Linling Lu

LINLING LU

Linling Lu was born in Zunyi, China and trained as a classical pianist while living there. Lu received her first bachelor's degree in landscape architecture from Beijing Forestry University in 2005 and worked as a landscape architect. She came to the United States in 2006 and attended Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, and received a bachelor of fine arts in painting in 2008. Lu was awarded a master-of-fine-arts scholarship at the Hoffberger School of Painting, MICA, which she completed in May 2011.

Lu has said her childhood remembrance of batik and embroideries of the Miao (Mee-ow) people – a minority group in the Chinese province of Guizhou (Gwā-jō) – have become an important inspiration to her. "Many of their patterns are about mythology and sacred events," she says. This inspiration is indicative in "Feng Seeks After Huang I," which is vividly displayed on the cover of this issue of *Unity*. Feng-huang is the name of two Chinese mythological birds sometimes called the Chinese phoenix. Lu's interpretation of this mythology is described in a portion of her poem of the same name: "You are the Feng; I'm the Huang . . . You encase the rays of light in my wings. Red is flame, gold is moonlight, and orange is the setting sun." Look closely at "Feng Seeks After Huang II" and you will notice the recurring tapestry that is in symmetry as each side mirrors the other perfectly.

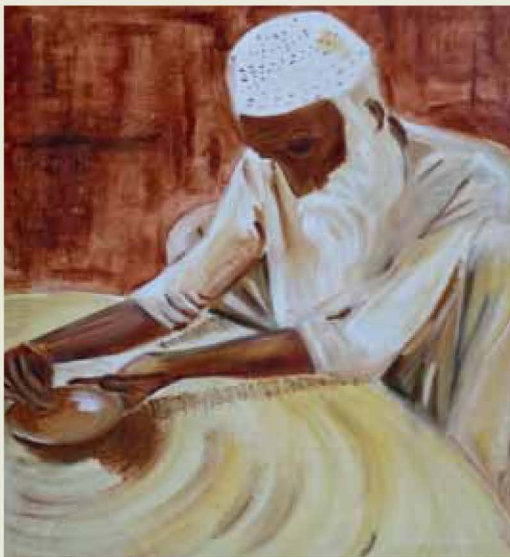
The red-and-green pattern of "Dan Xue Mountain" resembles an inkblot meticulously designed as a symmetrical kaleidoscope of olive green and burnt orange. Lu collects patterns and artworks of the Miao people and visits their habitat in isolated areas. "I see their colorful lives and art in the delicate architecture and in the heavenly natural environment in which they live," says Lu. It is her hope that her work generates indescribable visual and spiritual excitement.



"Dan Xue Mountain" by Linling Lu

MANJIREE MANOLKAR

Manjiree Manolkar is a self-taught artist born in the historic city of Pune in western India. After moving to the United States with her husband, she rediscovered her childhood passion of creating art. Manolkar reflects on her heritage influencing her work in many ways. "In India," she says, "mythological stories shape our daily lives, our language and even moral values. Each of my paintings has its roots in those stories." Manolkar also says her work is influenced by miniatures (Indian paintings on a very small scale) hanging on the walls of houses and painted on temple walls. Manolkar's "Music Meditation," an image of a lady immersed in swirls of musical melodies, embodies the influence of mythology and figurative imagery of Indian miniatures. Manolkar describes "Pottery Passion" as a depiction of an old potter who is in deep concentration. "Artisans like him are keeping the arts and craft traditions alive in India," she remarks. "This work pays homage



"Pottery Passion" by Manjiree Manolkar



to a tradition that is dying and to individuals who are trying to keep it alive." Manolkar's "Harvest Dance" references the coastal parts of India where rice is grown. "The working woman is thinking of a harvest dance and the dance is depicted in the tribal-style dancing figures around her," says Manolkar.

Manolkar states that although she is passionate about painting everyday life in India, she also wants to develop visual language that reaches people across cultures, borders and time. Her work has been exhibited in cities in India, Nepal and the United States.



"Music Meditation" by Manjiree Manolkar



"Harvest Dance" by Manjiree Manolkar

KAREN KANG

Karen Kang (pronounced Kahng) was born in South Korea and moved to the United States at the age of 1. She attributes creating sculptures in remote areas (mountains in Mexico, woods in Maine and a stone quarry in Norway) to her journey of self-reflection and "acknowledging the beauty and richness of being Korean." The tactile qualities of working three-dimensionally helped her discover her passion for carving wood and stone. Kang says by eliminating layers of stone and wood, she discovers and uncovers buried truths.

Many of Kang's sculptures are basalt stone, a dark, dense volcanic rock with a glass-like finish commonly used for hot stone massages. Her work also expresses elements of her belief and faith in a higher power. The essence of Kang's "Moment of Faith," a spherical balance of smoothness contrasted on a rugged stone pedestal, is best described by Kang: "When we step out in that moment of faith, it gives us the courage and motivation to move forward regardless of circumstances." The curved and slightly concaved piece called "Armourbearer" sits vertically on a wooden base like an upright basin. When creating this piece, Kang says she thought of a protective armour bearer (shield) that is ever present. Kang's lyrical approach of strong and fluid movement in her piece, "Waiting," is also expressed through her spiritual sense. "Waiting, to me, is a letting go of my preconceived notions and being open to something better and perhaps completely new.

"Carving inevitably leads to touching one's roots, exposing the past, touching the blueness of wounds, and healing," adds Kang. Her work has appeared in numerous solo and group exhibitions throughout the United States and internationally.



"Armourbearer" by Karen Kang



"Moment of Faith" by Karen Kang



"Waiting" by Karen Kang

Need a fast, nutritious dish? You're in luck



Noodle-lovers and non-noodle-lovers often serve soba on New Year's Eve.

In Japan, there's a dish that is at once deliciously exotic – so much so that it's the centerpiece of many Japanese meals – but also considered fast food. If it seems hard to reconcile the two descriptions, consider the versatility and long-standing popularity of this dish. Soba, native Japanese noodles made of buckwheat and often served in a broth, has been around for centuries. It's nutritious, high in antioxidants and pleasing to the palate. Mika Kochi, an instructor in the College of Culinary Arts at Johnson & Wales University, attributes soba's popularity to some additional factors.

In Japanese, there is an often-used phrase, *Engi wo katsugu*, which means, "Carry the luck." "You can achieve great fortune and good health, prosperity and so on," Kochi says, "because soba is usually long and skinny. (People believe) that if you eat it you will have long life and slender figure, which means good health." In other words, by eating soba, people carry the luck. For this reason, noodle-lovers and non-noodle-lovers often serve soba on New Year's Eve.

Kochi also cites the ease of preparing soba – "As long as you have the soup made, hot water on and a variety of garnishes, you can serve soba very quickly," she says – and

its affordability. People often eat it at soba stands while waiting for trains. Railway stations excel at preparing soba, which can be served hot or cold.

There are many regional varieties of soba, and the word is often used in conjunction with noodle dishes even when buckwheat is not involved. For instance, Chinese-style soba, or *Chuka Soba*, features regular wheat noodles. As a native of Okinawa, Kochi grew up on traditional Okinawa soba, which was influenced by the Chinese version and features thick wheat noodles.

There are likely just as many soba side dishes and toppings as there are regional varieties. While traditional soba stands serve the dish by itself, specialty sit-down restaurants are likely to offer anything from tofu pockets filled with sushi rice to chickpeas and cabbage with soba. The toppings range from fried tofu to raw egg to tempura – and beyond.

"There is an old custom called 'Hikkoshi soba,' Kochi concludes. "When you are moving to new home, you treat your next-door neighbors to soba." But she acknowledges that this practice seems to be falling by the way as of late.

What a pity.

Toshi Koshi Soba

4 cups prepared chicken broth
 1/3 cup Japanese soy sauce, called *shoya*, available at Asian food stores
 1/2 teaspoon sugar
 1/2 cup finely diced chicken breast or tofu
 1 pound soba noodles, cooked according to directions on package, drained and kept warm
 1/4 cup finely sliced green onions, for garnish

Pour chicken broth into medium saucepan. Add soy sauce, sugar and chicken or tofu. Stir, and bring to a boil over high heat for 1 minute. Remove from heat.

Divide noodles between 6 soup bowls. Ladle hot broth with pieces of chicken or tofu over each bowl. Sprinkle green onions over soup for garnish.

Corey Lee: The accidental culinarian



Renowned chef Corey Lee owns Benu, which *The Wall Street Journal* called "the best restaurant in America" in 2011. Photos by Eric Wolfinger

For Corey Lee, owner of a thriving San Francisco restaurant and one of Food & Wine's best new chefs of 2012, the foray into cooking was inauspicious. He's been quoted as saying he originally had no ambitions of becoming a chef. Though he fell into the profession somewhat by accident, an amalgamation of early influences created the perfect recipe for success.

Born in Seoul, South Korea, Lee moved to the United States at a young age. Regardless of which continent they were on, the Lee family perpetually filled their kitchen with the aromas of Korean-inspired recipes. Other influences include a stint in Paris and various culinary excursions around the globe, the direction of the highly acclaimed chef Thomas Keller and the evolution of Lee's own palate as he explored his Asian heritage through food.

"I think moving to the States impacted my idea of the role food can have in shaping someone's identity," Lee adds. "I realized early on that food plays an important role in society."

Lee was waiting tables in Manhattan when the rhythm and atmosphere of the kitchen captivated him. He graduated from waiter to parsley chopper, then went on to an internship in

London. He cooked at some of the most esteemed restaurants across Europe and the United States and ultimately earned the prestigious James Beard award.

Lee was meticulous about honing his craft and perfecting his bold vision for Benu, which he opened in 2010, having spent the previous nine years as chef du cuisine at Keller's landmark restaurant, The French Laundry. Benu was dubbed "the best restaurant in America" in a 2011 Wall Street Journal article. Benu's website says Lee spent more than a year collaborating with suppliers, manufacturers and others in the culinary world to fine-tune the blueprint that would become Benu.

A typical day at Benu has Lee dividing his time between prep and service, and working into the wee hours. "The late morning and afternoon is dedicated to new menu development, meetings and preparation for that night's dinner," Lee explains. "In the evening, we are in service until 11 or 12 p.m. Then we write the menus for the following day and call in our orders."

To keep everything flowing smoothly, Lee falls back on cooking must-haves: "I need the basics: salt, vinegar and sugar for pantry items," he says. "For vegetables, it would be onion and ginger. For proteins, it would be eggs, pork, chicken, shrimp and crab."

The results are an intermingling of European and Asian cuisine, a continual work in progress that reflects the seasons and Lee's personal experiences and inspirations. Menu items include everything from abalone quiche with caviar to eel to shark's fin soup.

When queried about what differentiates his style, Lee is humble in his reply: "I have no idea," he says. "We try to do things that are meaningful and interesting to us. Whether the resulting style differentiates us is for others to decide."

Asked to name the accomplishment of which he is most proud, Lee cites the restaurant's initial inclusion in The Michelin Guide. "We received two stars

in our first year and it was a great recognition for the countless people who made Benu possible and what it is," he says. Undoubtedly he is also proud of the distinction bestowed upon him in 2010 when he was named goodwill ambassador for his birthplace of Seoul.

With so much recognition and acclaim, Lee nonetheless has a firm perspective on the key to his success. It is, he says, "maintaining a healthy balance between my role as a chef and as a restaurateur-entrepreneur."



Benu's menu includes Jelly Fish Wrapped Shrimp. Photos by Eric Wolfinger



Diners enjoy a meal at Corey's Lee Benu restaurant in San Francisco. Photos by Eric Wolfinger



A perpetual flurry of classical excitement



Three million YouTube viewers have taken the time to watch Yuja Wang's rendition of "Flight of the Bumblebee."

Her performances are a clash of blindingly fast fingers on precise, balanced keys made of European spruce. Her favorite writers have names like Rachmaninoff, Scriabin, Prokofiev and Tchaikovsky, but she is also a big fan of Rihanna, Radiohead and Keith Jarrett. A darling among serious music critics and a starling among the mainstream press, 26-year-old Yuja Wang is a youthful and brilliant force on the classical music stage.

While few people will find the time to see a live performance of a pianistic maestro, almost 3 million people have taken the time to watch Wang's rendition of "Flight of the Bumblebee" on YouTube, which hosts dozens of videos of Wang. "Bumblebee," written by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov more than 100 years ago, is iconic for frenzy, and it features impossible rips (for mere mortals) up and down the keyboard.

What's most striking in this particular video is Wang's facial expression. Far from the contortions you would expect from trying to squeeze roughly a thousand notes into a tune lasting less than two minutes, Wang appears to be relaxing with a Sunday morning crossword and a cup of tea.

Wang's speed and unbridled confidence flows from her technical

mastery of physically connecting with the 88 keys and three pedals of a standard Steinway concert grand piano – but speed is only a prelude to all she offers classical music aficionados. Wang's range of emotional expression on the keyboard spans the gamut of what we feel as human beings. This is the trait for which all great artists are known. From nailing Rachmaninoff's somber and obscure Piano Concerto No. 2 to gliding smoothly through the lighter and more playful Orfeo ed Euridice from Gluck, Wang shows command of every skill needed to be one of the world's top concert pianists. She performs intuitively from her heart, and – remarkably – without sheet music.



Yuja Wang's musical inspirations include Rachmaninoff and Rihanna. Photo by Peter Adamik

Wang often listens to Rihanna before a big performance and admits she draws her inspiration from a variety of artists. "I find so many great artists, both living and not, very inspiring, and I can't possibly list them all," Wang shares with *Unity* while preparing for an upcoming European tour. "Some to mention: Horowitz, Gary Graffman (her teacher), Callas, Picasso, Michelangeli, Dudamel, Rachmaninoff, Temirkanov, Eduardo Berliner, Michael Tilson-Thomas, Barenboim, the great orchestras including Berlin Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic,

San Francisco Symphony, Concertgebouw, National Orchestra of Spain, Cleveland Orchestra, etc., etc., etc. I really cannot begin to list them all!"

We also asked about her favorite foods – an appetizing subject for *Unity* readers. "I always like a good salad. And when I'm really working hard, a burger is hard to beat. But real comfort food comes whenever I get a chance to eat excellent Chinese food. I prefer a meal with other people, so either at a restaurant or at home, that part doesn't matter." And before a concert? "I eat something light before a concert and usually have a good cup of tea. Afterwards is when I really like to have a meal."

Born in Beijing, Wang has transposed herself into a cosmopolitan New Yorker who is comfortable in all the great concert halls of Asia, Europe, North America and beyond. She began playing at age 6. She hopes to have her fifth album out later in 2013, and in 2014, she returns to Carnegie Hall with the San Francisco Symphony followed by a tour of Japan. Wang is an exclusive recording artist for Deutsche Grammophon, received an Echo Award in 2011 as "Young Artist of the Year," is a Steinway artist and has been nominated for a Grammy.



Comfortable in concert halls around the world, Yuja Wang began playing at age 6. Photo by Peter Adamik

Cover photos: Top right, Classical-music sensation Yuja Wang wows critics and crowds; middle: Linling Lu's "Feng Seeks After Huang I" explores mythology; bottom right, Nutritious and palate pleasing, soba has been around for centuries; Celebrated chef and restaurateur Corey Lee at his San Francisco eatery, *Unity* is a celebration of food, art and culture. Published six times per year, *Unity* is exclusively distributed to clients of Thompson Hospitality and Compass Group, both world leaders in foodservice. To contact us, send an email to unity@thompsonhospitality.com.