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## Hong '97 Merges *Breaking Bad*, *Ozymandias*

Dec. 16, 2013

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— To composer Sung Jin Hong, Class of 1997, music is more than sounds. It is more than the combination of instruments, or beauty of form. For Hong, music calls for human interaction. It arouses passion, captures the imagination and defines his work, lifestyle and motivations.

“Art, as an essential part of the human experience, has the power and potential to illuminate, inspire, motivate, empower and ignite change,” said Hong, the creator, artistic director and composer-conductor of One World Symphony.

Hong is currently in the process of developing his most recent, and possibly most anticipated production: *Breaking Bad* – *Ozymandias*, which will be part of One World’s *Addiction* program, premiering in New York on Jan. 26, 2014.

The mini-opera will integrate Percy Bysshe Shelley’s sonnet *Ozymandias*, often called an “ode to impermanence,” with *Breaking Bad*. The award-winning crime drama is centered on a struggling high-school chemistry teacher who, after being diagnosed with inoperable lung cancer, turns to a life of producing and selling methamphetamine in order to financially secure his family before his death.

“I will focus on the classic Greek themes of *hubris* (pride), *arête* (excellence), and *kleos* (glory),” the composer said, all of which are prominent themes in the drama and the poem that lead to the inevitable downfall of both main characters.

With these ideas in mind, Hong desires to ask the audience: Are we all breaking bad?

The show has already garnered national attention, partly because of the pop-culture components that are tied to the piece.

Hong has related his incorporation of a popular television show to the elements that have inspired other composers. “Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Faust* so hypnotized Europe that many great composers during the 19th century wrote works inspired by the visionary poet: Beethoven, Berlioz, Schumann, Liszt, Mendelssohn, Wagner, Gounod and Schubert, just to name a few.”

The complex transformation of characters, intricate storylines and universal themes are just a few inspirational elements in *Breaking Bad*.



*Sung Jin Hong '97 finds similar classic themes in the crime drama and Shelley's poem that inspire his current project. (Photo Credit: Jaka Vinšek)*

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If the concept doesn't seem daring enough, Hong has immense plans for the production, which stem from some invaluable experiences at his alma mater.

He said that Fern Rosetta Sherff Professor of Composition and Theory David Vayo stood out to him as being an integral part of his artistic development.

"His eyes would sparkle when one of his students was inspired, or a piece hit a nerve for one of his students," Hong remembered. "He was never afraid to give his students the space and freedom to grow and develop on their own. He wasn't territorial, but he trusted his students to naturally experience their so-called growing pains."

"Through an imperceptible approach, David encouraged and taught possibly the most crucial part of any relationship: listening," said Hong. "He listens carefully, respectfully and compassionately, which are priceless and intangible gifts."



*Hong is the creator, artistic director and composer-conductor of One World Symphony. (Photo Credit: Jaka Vinšek)*

Hong has integrated the gifts he learned from his professor and the experiences that he has had as a concertgoer in the vision for One World Symphony.

The composer, who believes that music should be embraced as a language, desires to create works that ignite passion, capture the audiences' imagination and encourage a dialogue between the audience and the performance.

In discovering his vision for One World, Hong posed a vital question: What if the relationship between the audiences and the performers became much more collaborative?

"Audiences, as active participants, should be front and center and encouraged to share in the visceral experience of music-making," he said.

This element will be prevalent in *Breaking Bad – Ozymandias*, particularly through the arias, which are long songs sung with accompaniment. Hong said that one aria would explore Jesse Pinkman, a complex character in the show who is described as having a tortured, yet surviving soul.

"The aria will be personal and, at the same time, will hopefully explore a human condition to which the general public can all relate," said Hong. "So, don't be surprised if the audiences will play an important role in bringing the aria alive."

*Breaking Bad – Ozymandias* doesn't mark the first time that Hong has crossed musical norms. In 2009, Hong composed *From the Alchemist*, an orchestral performance inspired by author Paulo Coelho's book.

Hong's innovativeness has brought immense success to both himself and his symphony. He has been reviewed and praised by *Time Out New York*, *BBC* and *The New York Times*, which described One World's performance as "A Lush, Mahlerian Sound."

Though One World's fame continues to grow, Hong's vision for the orchestra and beliefs about the power of music remain consistent. "The notes that composers write are only blueprints. The musicians and the live audiences bring the notes—the blueprint—to life."

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