



Get to Know Boram Kang

By: Carole Hamlin, Governing Members Executive Committee Member



Boram Kang joined the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra in September, 2015. She is currently Acting Assistant Concertmaster, which means she usually sits on stage behind Jonathan Carney. Her colleague, Kevin Smith, currently is "Acting 4th Chair," and sits next to her, while Wyatt Underhill is acting Associate Concertmaster.

I had the pleasure of interviewing Boram Kang in April. She is quite gregarious and friendly, and she was happy to talk about her life and her career in music. Boram was born in South Korea and lived with her parents and sister in Seoul. She started playing the violin and piano at age 5 with private lessons in her neighborhood. Her mom loved classical music and so encouraged her. Boram remembers deciding at age 9 or 10 that she wanted to be a violinist; she said she can hardly remember a time when she did not want the violin as a career. Because Boram and her family decided she would have better opportunities in America, she moved here at age 13. Her mother accompanied her on the trip, and she was placed in a guardianship with a distant relative in Silver Spring, Maryland. Her mother returned home, and Boram, who did not speak English, missed her family terribly and called home every day. After six months, her parents sent her sister to join her, which made her transition easier. And a year after that, Boram's mother joined her daughters here. Her father joined the family a couple years later because he missed them so much. They moved to Olney, Maryland, and eventually to Fulton, in Howard County, where they still reside. So Boram had become a Marylander, and she lived here until she went off to college.

She moved to Rochester, New York, for her undergraduate studies at Eastman School of Music and was taught and mentored by Charles Castleman, who taught there for 40 years and was one of the most important people in her life in music. She took four years of private lessons with him at Eastman, and he changed her approach to music. He "gave me the freedom to think for myself, to express my own thoughts in playing." She gained the confidence to interpret music how she wanted to play it. She said it was like the difference between providing someone with daily meals instead of showing them how to cook for themselves. Boram said Castleman was a "great teacher for me at that time." While at Eastman, after her freshman year, Boram had the opportunity to go to Japan for the Pacific Music Festival. It is very difficult to become a participant, but she did well enough at her audition to be selected. The 100 musicians are chosen from auditions around the world, and a player can participate only three times; she was there in 2001, 2002, and 2005. Boram said it was quite a bonding experience - everyone became close to everyone else in the orchestra. The primary venue for the festival is Sapporo, but they also played Tokyo and a few other cities; being a part of that orchestra made Boram realize that she wanted to play in an orchestra as her career.

Charles Castleman recommended Boram study with William Preucil at the Cleveland Institute of Music. He is the Concertmaster at the Cleveland Orchestra, one of the so-called "Big Five" of American orchestras. Boram obtained a master's degree and did another two years of professional study in Cleveland (focusing on performance, no academics). Next came a very important part of Boram's education - she did a Performance Residency program at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. Her mentor there was Andres Cardenes, who served as concertmaster at the Pittsburgh Symphony for 21 years. Cardenes taught her how to be a "good musician and a good person." "He makes sounds with his violin that are amazing. The three years with him were life changing for me."

Boram's first full-time job was one season with the Louisville Orchestra in 2012. She loved Louisville, served as Assistant Concertmaster, and sat next to the Concertmaster, since there is no Associate at Louisville. This was the first time that Boram got to work with older, seasoned players and learned a great deal in interacting with them. She said that sometimes she would ask Mr. Cardenes how to handle a situation, and he always gave her good advice. He told her that "what you say doesn't matter as much as showing them what you can do."

While at Louisville Boram auditioned for the Colorado Symphony Orchestra in Denver and was hired. So she gathered her belongings and drove for three days to get there after finding an apartment online. She served in the "Fourth Chair" position in the first violin section from 2013-15. Boram loved living in Colorado. She had a wonderful view of the Rocky Mountains from her home, on the 37th floor of her apartment building. In that part of the country, "there are so many beautiful places to see." And she learned how to snowboard; she drove an hour practically every Monday to do it. She was careful about protecting herself from injury, but said that if you live where she did, "You have to go to the mountain." Her snowboarding in the powdery Rockies was an experience she would not have had anywhere else. In the summer, the musicians played many concerts at Red Rocks Amphitheatre, an outdoor stage ten miles west of Denver, which opened in 1906. Many famous musicians played there. Another reason that Boram enjoyed the Colorado Symphony so much was that her colleagues in the orchestra were very friendly and close to one another. She said it was fun to work there.

While at Colorado, Boram auditioned for the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and was offered a position in the second violin section. She did a trial week playing during the season with the orchestra and then joined as a new player in September, 2015. After some months, Boram told the BSO's personnel manager that she wanted to audition for two opportunities that had opened up - a position in the first violins and also the 4th chair second violin. As it turned out, she was offered both and was told to decide which one to select. She chose the first violin section and began in January, 2016. When Madeline Adkins went on leave from the Associate Concertmaster job, she auditioned for that. Wyatt Underhill, Assistant Concertmaster, also auditioned and was named Interim Associate Concertmaster and Boram the Interim Assistant Concertmaster. So she has been sitting directly behind Jonathan Carney for much of this season. Boram said that she was "super happy" when she was accepted as a member of the BSO. She said that everyone here has been nice, friendly, and quite supportive of her moves within the orchestra, which to her is very important. She is glad to be living back in Maryland because she is from the East Coast and is "used to this kind of environment." Her family is here, and her mother in particular, who loves music, is able to come to many of her concerts.

Boram enjoys traveling, to destinations both close and far. In December, she and many family members will travel to Cancun, Mexico, for a vacation. On a happy note, Boram is getting married this coming June to Josh Brooks, who works in the District of Columbia for the federal government and lives in Fairfax, Virginia. They are planning a "destination" wedding in Maui, Hawaii, in June and will probably live somewhere in Howard County. Chelsea Knox, Assistant Principal Flute, who joined the symphony the same time Boram did, will play at the wedding.

Boram said her long-term goal is to maintain good health so that she can enjoy playing in the orchestra for many years to come.

One interesting note - Boram used to play a "drum set" for two years in a church band in Pittsburgh. They had needed a drummer, and she had a month's lessons with her drum predecessor in the band. That experience helped her with rhythm in general - with tapping for rhythm and using her whole body to get the beat - she said she became a better violin player because of what she learned playing drums in Pittsburgh.