

# Shinuh Lee

Last updated : 25 January 2026

## [Long Bio]

Shinuh Lee is a composer whose work explores the foundations of human existence, tracing the essential meanings of life through sound. Rooted in philosophical inquiry into being, her music has gradually moved toward a restrained and lucid language shaped by stillness and presence, forged over time.

Her recent works—including *Prelude to the Inner Light* (2023), *Poem for Moon Jar* (2024), and *Bright Sadness* (2025), following two SONY Classical albums *Till Dawn* and *Death and Offering* (2021)—mark a decisive artistic turning point. In these works, sound moves beyond dense narrative and overt expression, allowing clarity, restraint, and an understated sense of mystery and transcendence to emerge within the texture of everyday life.

Her compositional language has been noted for its “remarkable structural rigor and lyrical gravity” (The Musical Times) and its “vivid and intellectually charged orchestral language and an original sonic landscape” (ISCM World Music Days). Other critics have observed a “tight, intelligent writing” (Philadelphia Inquirer) that manifests in “an intensely dramatic, alternating evocations of fire and brimstone with those of ethereal peace” (The New York Concert Review).

Earlier works from the 2000s are characterized by these tightly constructed textures and dramatic intensity. Major works from this period include the Violin Concerto *Invisible Hands* (2000/2024), *An Open Door* for strings (2004), *Violin Fantasy No. 2 Laudate Dominum* (2006), and *Chorale Fantasy No. 1, Comfort, Comfort My People* (2007–2009). *Chorale Fantasy No. 1*, a ten-movement work of approximately fifty minutes, has been performed by pianist Hyojung Huh more than fifteen times in ten cities worldwide—including Carnegie Weill Hall and the Vienna Musikverein—and remains a significant repertoire work and subject of academic study.

In recent years, Lee has revisited and revised earlier works, re-envisioning them through her present aesthetic lens. The revised Violin Concerto *Invisible Hands* (2000/2024) and Cello Concerto *Love Song* (1999/2022) preserve the intuitive intensity and raw energy of the originals while rearticulating their trajectories with greater clarity and restraint. In both works, the complete recomposition of the third movement opens a layered musical space in which narrative and state, action and presence, coexist.

Her compositional scope has also expanded into Korean traditional music through works such as *Caprice No. 2 Jeokbyeok* (2020), *Earth Poem* for viola and Korean traditional orchestra (2022), and the symphonic cantata *Song Transfigured into Light* (2025). Commissioned for the 80th anniversary of Korean Liberation, *Song Transfigured into Light* was noted for transforming historical memory into ontological reflection and was recognized as one of the most significant premieres of 2025 by the Gyeonggi Sinawi Orchestra.

Lee's works have been performed by orchestras and ensembles including the BBC Philharmonic, Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, KBS Symphony Orchestra, Korean National Symphony Orchestra, Asko Ensemble, and Ixion Ensemble. Her music has been featured at major festivals such as the Seoul International Music Festival, Casals Festival, Great Mountains International Music Festival, and the Orchestra Festival. In 2019, her symphonic poem *Yeomillak* was performed at Carnegie Zankel Hall by the Sejong Soloists.

Her ongoing curated project series *The Road Not Taken* forms a central axis of her recent work, fostering artistic collaboration with leading performers including cellist James Kim, violist Hwayoon Lee, and violinist Soojin Han. Internationally, her works *Seomjib-agj* and *Caprice No. 1 Kkot* were premiered at Carnegie Weill Hall in 2024 and 2025 as part of Juilliard's 'Leo B. Ruiz Memorial Recital' series, performed by double bassist Nina Bernat and violinist Stephen Kim.

Lee studied composition with Sukhi Kang at Seoul National University and with Michael Finnissy at the Royal Academy of Music, the University of London, and the University of Sussex. She is the winner of the Royal Philharmonic Society (RPS) Composition Prize, a Finalist of the Gaudeamus Award and the Leonard Bernstein Jerusalem International Composing Competition, and her works were selected for performances at the ISCM World Music Days. She is also a recipient of the Today's Young Artist Award, the Korean Composition Award, the Ahn Eak-tai Composition Award, and the Nanpa Music Award, and was elected as an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music (ARAM) in 2019.

In 1999, she became the first woman to be appointed professor of composition at Seoul National University. She currently serves as Artistic Director of *The Pathway*, an initiative dedicated to exploring the creative conditions in which composition, thought, and life are inseparable.

## [Medium Bio]

Shinuh Lee is a composer whose work explores the foundations of human existence, tracing the essential meanings of life through sound. Rooted in philosophical inquiry into being, her music is currently on a journey of translating the stillness and presence attained through life's complexities into a restrained and lucid language. Her recent works—including the SONY Classical albums *Till Dawn* and *Death and Offering*, as well as *Prelude to the Inner Light* (2023) and *Bright Sadness* (2025)—mark an artistic turning point, moving beyond dense narrative to depict the mystery of daily life and the joy of transcendence through refined sound.

Her works from the 2000s feature a heightened dramatic intensity achieved through structural rigor and tightly woven sonic textures. In particular, *Chorale Fantasy No. 1* (2007–2009), performed more than fifteen times in ten cities worldwide including Carnegie Hall and the Vienna Musikverein by pianist Hyojung Huh, encapsulates Lee's musical inquiry and remains a representative repertoire and subject of academic study. Recently, she has focused on re-envisioning her early aesthetics through a contemporary lens, exploring a transition "from narrative to state, and from interpretation to presence" through revised works such as the Violin Concerto *Invisible Hands* (2000/2024) and Cello Concerto *Love Song* (1999/2022).

Lee has collaborated with numerous international orchestras and ensembles, including the BBC Philharmonic, KBS Symphony Orchestra, and Sejong Soloists. Her recent expansion into Korean traditional music led to the symphonic cantata *Song Transfigured into Light* (2025) with the Gyeonggi Sinawi Orchestra and Suwon Civic Chorale, which was recognized for transmuting historical memory into ontological reflection. Through her curated series *The Road Not Taken*, she continues to expand her creative language in close collaboration with virtuosos such as James Kim, Soojin Han, and Hwayoon Lee. Most recently, her works *Seomjib-ag* and *Caprice No. 1 Kkot* were premiered at Carnegie Weill Hall as part of Juilliard's 'Leo B. Ruiz Memorial Recital' series, performed by Nina Bernat and Stephen Kim.

Having studied with Sukhi Kang and Michael Finnissy, Lee has received honors including the RPS Composition Prize and the Gaudeamus Award (finalist), and was elected as an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music (ARAM). Appointed in 1999 as the first woman to be professor of composition at Seoul National University, she continues to balance teaching and composition. She currently serves as Artistic Director of *The Pathway*, an initiative exploring the creative conditions in which life, thought, and composition are inseparable.

## [Short Bio]

Shinuh Lee is a composer who captures the essence of human existence through sound, grounded in a profound perspective on life. While her earlier works questioned suffering, healing, and the meaning of life through biblical texts, her recent focus has shifted toward stillness, perception, and the presence of sound, refining the mystery and grace found in everyday life into restrained acoustics.

Her major works include the Cello Concerto *Love Song*, Violin Concerto *Invisible Hands*, Viola Concerto *Earth Poem*, *Yeomillak*, *Jeokbyeok*, Poem for Moon Jar, *Laudate Dominum*, and the symphonic cantata *Song Transfigured into Light*. She has released several solo albums, including *Till Dawn* and *Death and Offering* on the SONY Classical label.

Lee is a recipient of the RPS Composition Prize, the Nanpa Music Award, the Today's Young Artist Award, and the Korean Composition Award, and was elected as an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music (ARAM) in 2019. Currently a professor of composition at Seoul National University, she continues to explore the integration of life, thought, and composition through her curated series *The Road Not Taken*.