

tablished her as high in the pecking order.” Abby beamed.

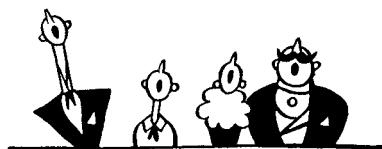
Conversation turned to the subject of death. (The company’s Web site has an F.A.Q. page that includes the question “What if my Rent The Chicken dies?”) “Well, they are living beings, so, yes, they sometimes die,” Ida said. “Sometimes families will request that we deliver a chicken that looks like the deceased one so that the kid doesn’t know.”

One of the biggest problems the chickens face: overindulgence. “We can always tell when spouses don’t talk,” Ida said. “A chicken will never turn down a second meal, so if families aren’t communicating the chickens come back to us heavy and waddling.”

She turned to see Abby feeding another one of the chickens. “Look!” she said. “She’s eating out of the palm of your hand!”

—Parker Henry

DEPT. OF FUSION MUDANG CHILE



Where in New York does one find shoes fit for a shaman? At Meermin, in SoHo, Hong Ok, a singer in the Korean folk-pop band ADG7, confessed recently that she and her bandmates usually shop at Zara or H&M. “Shut up!” Yoo Wol, another vocalist, playfully admonished, sliding over in nylon socks to press a finger against her lips. Nearby, the bandleader, Kim Yak-dae, inspected a pair of patent-leather loafers, a bracelet of skulls turning on his wrist. The store’s understated selection seemed to confuse them. Wasn’t there anything with high heels?

Onstage, ADG7’s three singers resemble a coven of glamorous witches, donning scarves, sunglasses, and the elaborately tiered hats that men wore during Korea’s Joseon dynasty. They are meant to look like *mudang*, or mediums, whose gender-bending attire changes depending on which spirits they serve. Last year, an airline lost the band members’ costumes during their first tour of the United States. “We were so excited,” Hong, willowy and wearing a denim skirt, recalled.

“Oh, this is the beginning of our journey!” She extended her arms like wings. “Then we landed at the airport in Chicago . . . disaster.” Gone, too, were their instruments: drums, flutes, gongs, two varieties of zither, and a towering mouth organ with pipes like city spires.

Miraculously, a Korean cultural association managed to provide everything they needed; by the time they played an outdoor performance at Lincoln Center, they had the crowd enthralled. The band’s clangorous, soulful sound fuses age-old genres called *gut* and *minyo* with alt-rock rhythms and a bouncy showmanship reminiscent of the B-52s. They call it “shamanic folk pop.” Perhaps the most galvanizing track on their two albums is “Hee Hee,” a celebration of laughter in which ululations spiral in hypnotic rounds. The yips and yelps build and then, when a rasping zither called the *ajaeang* hits, all but catch fire.

This year’s tour had taken them to so many far-flung destinations that Hong had to be reminded of their last stop. They had a gig at (Le) Poisson Rouge later that evening, after the shopping trip. Then they were off to the Glastonbury Festival in a lineup that included Elton John and Lil Nas X.

ADG7—whose full name, Ak Dan Gwan Chil, refers to the seventieth anniversary of Korea’s liberation from Japan—was formed eight years ago, by members of a folk ensemble interested in ritual songs from present-day North Korea. “The shaman’s character is so charismatic and so powerful,” Hong explained. But their music wasn’t reaching many people in its canonical form. Why not use it to express their hopes for a unified peninsula, and to summon a wider audience?

The band left Meermin empty-handed and headed for Camper, on Prince Street. Yoo, a cherubic twenty-something in a cable-knit sweater, stared down the barrel of a chunky hot-pink boot. “So big!” she exclaimed. Yoo never intended to become a pop singer. Her mother was tattooing eyebrows in Incheon when a client, overhearing Yoo’s singsong greeting, observed that her voice had a perfect traditional timbre. A degree at Korea’s National University of Arts followed, which might have led to a quiet career in a conservatory had she not received a surprise call from

ADG7 while she was in the bathroom of a Domino’s Pizza in Seoul. On tour, she said, the exuberance of foreign audiences startled her. It was as though they’d been given “a new toy,” she said.

Hong wants to reach people in North Korea, where the music that inspired the band, she was told, is no longer played. She mentioned a North Korean propaganda Web site that denounced the band as sellouts, in an article memorably titled “The Overflowing Yankee Culture Obliterates Folk Music.” Hong said, “They know us! We were shocked about that.” Defectors who’ve attended



ADG7

their concerts, where audiences are asked to close their eyes and make a wish, have written prayers for reunification.

At noon, the band gave up shoe shopping and retreated to the Washington Square Diner. Hong looked impressed as she flipped through the eight-page menu: “I think I saw this type of restaurant in soap operas.” Over burgers, they discussed Rihanna’s pregnancy (“sexier than before”), Lizzo’s crystal flute, and ADG7’s future (“groovy,” Kim pronounced). Afterward, in the park, a jazz trio played near the fountain. “Busking?” Yoo asked; Hong retrieved a ziplock of dollars.

A few days earlier, the band had performed in Louisiana. Did they know Jimi Hendrix’s “Voodoo Chile”? In a way, Hong replied, “all art, all artists, all the stage, I think, came from the shaman ritual.”

—Julian Lucas