



**Chiemi's  
Corner**  
**MUSIC  
REVIEWS  
& EVENTS**

Well-known local music veteran Kevin So is back in town with some fresh, new recorded grooves. The Allston native performed recently at the Federal Reserve Bank in the city proper at the Ideas Boston Youth Summit organized and sponsored by the Boys & Girls Club. According to So, he got involved in bolstering this event with his talent in connection with his television appearances on Cityline and Chronicle in the past few years. Back from Hong Kong in April, So also performed at The Burren last month and this month as one of Geoff Bartley's features at The Cantab in Cambridge.

So's continuing musical travels

are storied and diverse. He attended Boston Latin and then went West to the University of Southern California for college. After returning to his hometown, he became a favored performer and contributor in many Somerville venues, recording as he went. With his new Fall release, So will have recorded 10 of his own CDs in 10 years. He has also appeared in that time on those of many other artists, including Danielle Miraglia's Nothing Romantic. Miraglia hosts the Singer-Songwriter Series at The Burren on Sundays.

According to So, his "first encounter" with the world of music was "at his Aunt Eng's place." He was about 10 years old. So said his family would go there every Sunday and he would get to "hang out with [his] favorite cousin and her record collection." He recalled that he listened to "Off the Wall" by Michael Jackson and The Commodores' Greatest Hits. He was intrigued and "blown away."

Also at around the same time, So's older brother and sister began taking piano lessons and he asked his parents to be included in that. "I was interested in doing something fresh, something challenging—something different from just playing on the dead end street—day after day, night after night—that we lived on." So is the youngest of three. So said when he began the lessons he "just played" and it "seemed easy...natural." He described the experience: "Anything you like you do more and more, as often



as possible and that tends to make you better and better." So took classical piano for six years, until he was sixteen and "needed a break from the lessons because [he] was more into pop."

Figuring deeply into So's musical development was his best friend, Henry Ko. Ko passed away on Sept. 28, 2001. So includes moving notes from Ko in his double CD "Leaving the Lights On" (2003). That CD is dedicated to So's father, Yip Chor, who passed away in 2000 and still "remains an inspiration." Plans are "in the works" for an off-broadway production of "Leaving the Lights On" as a musical, with a working title, "The Victor Woo Project." Indeed, it plays easily as such to this listener's ear. "Average Asian American" from the first disk is particularly tart and zesty. Also, the interwoven, So version of Bill Withers' "Just the Two of Us" in "New Day Begun" is a splash of welcome surprise meshed with slick dialogue-lyrics. So described the style as including "lots of hip hop which, unlike rap music, has real chord progressions...there is a distinct

# Kevin So

## In town to spread more of his special sound

melody..."

But who is "Woo?" So explained that Woo is "part Ziggy Stardust...part alter ego...there is a little of Victor Woo in all of us...everybody wants to 'burst out eventually...'"

So described performing in front of a crowd that is "really listening" as a "zone — where [he] is playing the character in the song but not only that... in the scene, everyone in the audience is there too — we are all transported." So said that he always "tries to get to that place as soon as possible." He noted too that sometimes "gigs are most rewarding when you least expect it." One can feel this truth when sampling the 21 song array of "The So Must Go On," So's 2003 "Live in Concert" CD "In memory of Ray Charles."

This year, So released "The Brooklyn Sessions" EP, Kevin So & Midnight Snack. This limited edition is a four-song preview portion of So's work in progress for a funky new full-length CD, "A Brighter Day" scheduled to be released this Fall. Somerville resident, Noah Mattsberger has been recording some guitar tracks for So's upcoming album. Mattsberger said playing with So is "rigorous...like going to school but in a nice way..." He said enjoys creating with So because he "gets to feel and see a real showman at work." Mattsberger and So met playing in New York and then, in effect, switched places, So moving to Brooklyn and Mattsberger to Somerville.

So said that in each song he is currently honing, "there is an epiphany. He spent more time than he ever did crafting the lyrics to make them "tight with the sound." "Lots of the songs have to do with growing up..." said So about his continuous goal of perfecting his art for the time being. "New York City" bangs and crawls simultaneously and with a sensual feel — beginning contemplatively and then swirling over with the passionate cloak of So's long-held notes and lush horns (Elizabeth Dotson-Westphalen) and sax (Dan Schlessinger). "A Brighter Day" is lighter, with a more relaxed rhythm and piano tones — so catchy and inviting that the listener may feel inspired to sing along...like the Ideas Boston attendees. "Dangerous Man" moves and grooves with purpose. The intro may feel at first Eric Clapton-esque blues-reminiscent... but then is directly changed up in a jazzy style very much So's own, with touches of dissonance and hits of So's powerful, soaring vocals. "All I need is you," closes this CD raster nicely, with upbeat sounds and fun-loving images.

So will be performing at Steve's Backstage Pass in Taunton June 17 and at The Lars Andrew Auto Museum in Brookline Sept. 15. For more information, check out [www.KEVINSO.COM](http://www.KEVINSO.COM) and [www.myspace.com/kevinsoandmidnightsnack](http://www.myspace.com/kevinsoandmidnightsnack).