

# **KOREAN MUSIC: CHARACTERISTICS AND HISTORICAL-PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS**

**GRADES:** 7-12, University Level

**AUTHOR:** Karen J. Hom

**SUBJECTS:** Society/Culture, Music/Dance

**TIME REQUIRED:** Six class periods

## **OBJECTIVES:**

1. Comprehend the nationalistic elements and characteristics utilized in the various music genres and dance styles of Korea.
2. Recognize the correlation between the historical and cultural history of Korea and its impact on the Korean court and folk music.
3. Experience cultural enrichment at the secondary and university levels by providing an integrated curriculum, including a live professional Korean music and dance group performance.

## **MATERIALS:**

- Copies of student handouts in packet
- Piano
- CD player
- Compact discs
- Music videos
- Slides
- Special performance of Korean musicians and dancers

## **BACKGROUND:**

The teacher has exposed students to the geographical location of Korea and has also given prior lessons on a brief historical timeline and the major religions of the Korean people.

## **PROCEDURE:**

### Session I

1. Distribute a map of Korea and discuss its geographical location in Asia and the world. Review major cities, neighboring countries, bodies of water and other physical forms.
2. Show the video, "Flags of the Nations," Korean segment. Discuss the symbolism of the South Korean flag.
3. Distribute a copy of the South Korean National Anthem. Play the piece on the piano or play the CD, "Complete National Anthems of the World," Vol. 3.
4. Speak the Korean words of the national anthem before having students sing the piece with the piano or CD.

### Session II

1. Distribute the song, "Arirang." "Arirang" is sung in a pentatonic scale. Discuss the significance of this popular folk song. The song has both a historical and literary meaning. Historically, this song was sung by patriots crossing the hills of Arirang on their way to execution after being crushed in a rebellion by an autocratic emperor. The piece also became well known in 1926 when a silent film of the same name emerged and the Korean people struggled against Japanese colonial rule. "Arirang" also has sentimental implications; it is a love song in which a woman addresses her amour.

2. Play “Arirang” on the piano or play the CD, “Traditional Songs of Singing Cultures.” Distribute the piece and speak the words before singing.
3. Distribute and discuss the handout on “Characteristics of Korean Music.” Apply the primary elements of the melodic contour and rhythm of “Arirang.”
4. Distribute and discuss the diagram on the different genres of Korean vocal and instrumental music and the geographical regions.
5. Distribute the handout on folk and court music. Mention that Korean vocal and instrumental music may be divided into the following:  
Minsok-ak or Sok-ak (free style, folk music): This originated in the Cholla region of southwest Korea. The music has descended from shamanism and the major forms are *pansori* (epic stories through song), *sanjo* (melodies for solo instrument and drum accompaniment), and *sinawi* (instrumental musical accompaniment for shaman dances). The performers are free to decide the length of the performance, which is influenced by their mood or surroundings.  
Chong-ak (elegant, stylized, court music): This featured performers from professional and aristocratic families. The tempos are stately and slower than *minsok-ak*. *Kagok* (long, cyclical songs), *sijo* (lyrical song with drum accompaniment) and *kasa* (long, narrative song accompanied by a drum or ensemble).
6. Listen to CD examples: “Korea: Musics and Musicians of the World.” And “Four Thousand Years of Korean Folk Music.”

### Session III

1. Distribute and discuss the handout, “Categories of Korean Musical Instruments,” with illustrations.
2. Contrast the concept of “yin” and “yang” in relation to Korean ritual music and the philosophical nature of the *kayagum* (Korean zither) by following up with the handout entitled, “The Concept of Yin and Yang in Ritual Korean Music,” and “The Philosophical Construction of the Kayagum.”
3. Contrast the folk song style to the classical court music style by following the handout, “The Contrast between the Folk Song Style and the Classical Court Music Style.”
4. Show slides of Korean instruments and video examples of *pansori* and classical court music styles from “The JVC Video Anthology of World Music and Dance, East Asia: Korea, Volumes I and II.”

### Session IV

1. Distribute and discuss “Korean Folk, Court, and Religious Dances,” by following the handout of the same name.
2. Show video examples of the Farmer’s Dance, Dance for Purification and Exorcism of Evil Spirits, and a masked dance.

### Session V

Attend the Korean Classical Music and Dance Company’s live performance on campus (auditorium). The group is from Los Angeles, California, and the performers will wear traditional costumes, explain the different musical instruments, and demonstrate the *puch’ae-ch’um* (fan dance), *puk-ch’um* (drum dance), and court dances.

### **EVALUATION:**

1. Student response and oral participation during sessions. Questions: What are the nationalistic elements and characteristics of Korean music and dance? How are these elements, characteristics, and qualities exemplified in Korean music and dance? How do these elements relate to the history of Korea?
2. Short essay covering the three questions stated above with citations of specific historical, musical, and dance examples.

3. Reflective journal writing assignment on the live performance of Korean musicians and dancers.

## **RESOURCES:**

### Books and Pamphlets

- Campbell, Patricia, Williamson, Sue, and Perron, Pierre. *Traditional Songs of Singing Cultures* (includes CD). Miami: Warner Bros. Publications, 1996.
- Kim, Ha-min. "The Concert of Korean and Japanese Court Music." Korea Foundation Newsletter, Vol. 11, No. 2 (May 2002): 1-3.
- Kim, Joungwon, Ed. *Korean Cultural Heritage*, Vol. 3, Performing Arts. Seoul: Samsung Moonhwa Printing Co. and Korea Foundation, 1997.
- Malm, William P. *Music Cultures of the Pacific, the Near East and Asia*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1977.
- Pak, Heong-Sik, dir. "Korean Traditional Stage." Seoul: Chongdong Theater, 2001.
- Reed, W.L. and Bristow, M.J., Ed. *National Anthems of the World*. London: Cassell Publishers, 1997.
- Sadie, Stanley, Ed. *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. London: MacMillan Publishers, Ltd., 1980.

### Compact Discs

- Complete National Anthems of the World, Vol. 3. Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra; Peter Breiner, conductor. Munich, Germany: HNH International Ltd., 1998.
- Four Thousand Years of Korean Folk Music. CD #438. Pismo Beach, Calif.: Legacy International, n.d.
- Musics and Musicians of the World: Korea. #D8010. Paris: Unesco Collection, 1988.

### Videos

- Flags of the Nations. #CL419. Beverly Hills, Calif.: City Island Entertainment Inc., 1993.
- The JVC Anthology of World Music and Dance, East Asia: Korea, Vol 1 (VTMV 31) and Vol. 2 (VTMV 32). Cambridge, Mass.: JVC and Victor Co., of Japan, Ltd., 1991.

## HANDOUT: SESSION I

### Characteristics of Korean Music

1. Pentatonic scale, microtones (notes not found in the Western scale)
2. Triple rhythms or groupings. Folk music combines duple and triple meter (asymmetric rhythm).
3. Vibrato: flexible notes in vocal and instrumental music, which reflect a culture of ambiguity.
4. Emphasis on “the rest” or “cry of silence” in Korean music, particularly in pieces of slower tempos. This is also called “margin” or “empty space” where the imagination is set free. The “empty space” is just as important as musical notes.
5. Flexibility and spontaneity in improvisation by individual artists, even in court music where performers embellish the melody.
6. Raspy, buzzing timbres in the voice or musical instruments.
7. Korean instruments are less decorated than their Chinese or Japanese instrumental counterparts. This illustrates the affinity for nature. Natural wood and silk strings are used except for metal in percussion instruments such as gongs or bells. Much of the Korean music was introduced from China, such as the Confucian ritual.

## HANDOUT: SESSION II

### Folk Music and Court Music

1. Folk Music (*minsok-ak* or *sok-ak*, roots in shamanism)
  - A. Free style
  - B. Cholla region of Southwest Korea
  - C. *Pansori*
  - D. *Sanjo*
  - E. *Sinawi*
2. Court Music (*chong-ak*, performers were from aristocratic families)
  - A. Elegant and stylized
  - B. Stately tempos
  - C. *Kagok*
  - D. *Sijo*
  - E. *Kasa*

## HANDOUT: SESSION III

### Categories of Korean Musical Instruments

1. Chordophones (strings)
  - A. Plucked (zithers: *komungo*, made by Wang San'ak of Koguryo, 6 strings; *kayagum*, the Silla state adopted this musical instrument of the Kaya confederation, 12 strings)
  - B. Bowed (*haegum*, Koryo era, 2 string fiddle; *ajaeng*, 7 string zither with thick strings)
2. Aerophones (winds)
  - A. *P'iri* (double-reed bamboo flute)
  - B. *Taegum* (large bamboo flute, Silla period)
  - C. *Saenghwang* (mouth organ)
3. Membranophones (drums)
  - A. *Changgo* (hour glass drum)
  - B. *Chinggo* (barrel drum struck with a stick)
  - C. *Kyobanggo* (large barrel drum on a wooden frame struck with two sticks)
4. Idiophones (metal or wood percussion)
  - A. Metal [gongs: *ching*, *kwaenggwari*, *para* (cymbals)]
  - B. Wood [*pak* (clapper), *chuk* (wooden box and stick), *o* (wooden scraper in the shape of a tiger)]
  - C. Bronze bells (*p'yongjong*)

### The Concept of Yin and Yang in Ritual Korean Music

- Yin: The *chuk* is painted blue and placed on the east side of the musical ensemble, which signifies the rising of the sun. It is played at the beginning of a piece with the melody repeating three times.
- Yang: The *o* is painted white and placed on the west side of the musical ensemble, which signifies the setting of the sun. It is played at the end of the piece with the melody repeating three times.

Both instruments are played only once.

### The Philosophical Construction of the *Kayagum*

1. The sound box symbolizes Heaven.
2. The flat bottom symbolizes Earth.
3. The hole in the bottom symbolizes the cardinal directions of a map.
4. The twelve strings symbolize the months.

### The Contrast between the Folk Song Styles and the Classical Court Music Style

#### Folk Song:

1. Early-mid Choson period with male singers. In modern times, female singers dominate.
2. Music of the common people
3. Characteristics: Use of the natural voice, emotional, direct, earthy, frank, colloquial language, performed outdoors.
4. Themes: Rudiments of life with hardship, rejection of hypocrisy.
5. An example is *p'ansori* where the singer is accompanied by a *puk* (double headed barrel drum). The singer uses three elements: dialogue and narration (*aniri*), acting (*pallim*), and

singing (*sori*). Only five traditional *p'ansori* survive: *Ch'unhyang ka* (Song of Ch'unhyang [Spring Fragrance]) *Sim Ch'ong ka* (Song of Sim Ch'ong [The Dutiful Daughter]), *Hungbu ka* (Song of Hungbu [and his evil brother Nolbu]), *Sugung ka* (Song of the Water Palace [The Tale of the Turtle and the Rabbit]), and *Chokpyok ka* (Song of the Red Wall [an adaptation of a story from Chinese novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*]).

Classical Court Music:

1. Choson Dynasty (Confucianism).
2. Music of the intellectuals and ruling class.
3. Characteristics: Use of falsetto, formality, restraint of emotion, refinement, and subtlety, performed in palaces or residences.
4. Themes: morality, duty, propriety.

## **HANDOUT: SESSION IV**

### Korean Folk, Court, and Religious Dances

1. Folk dances: Highly expressive, vigorous, sensual gestures. Example: Farmer's Dance (*nongak nori*).
2. Court dances: Graceful, refined, and elegant. Example: Flower Crown Dance (*hwagwan-mu*).
3. Dance combinations: Drum Dance (*samgo-mu*) and Fan Dance (*puch'ae-ch'um*)
4. Religious dances: Shaman ritual cleansing and exorcism (*salp'uri*), Monk's Dance (*sung-mu*), Line Dance (*il-mu*), Butterfly Dance (*nabi-ch'um*), and Cymbal Dance (*para-ch'um*) showing the transitory world and selflessness.
5. Masked Dances (*t'al-ch'um*): Provincial. Examples: Old Monk's Dance, Leper's Dance, and Lion Dance.