

# MULTICULTURAL APPROACH

## To Korean Contemporary Music With The Traditional Folk Song *Bird, Bird, Blue Bird*

*By Eunjung Choi and Sumi Kwon*

From the end of the 1980s, music educators began to advocate Praxial philosophy that music education must extend beyond the Western art tradition to account for all forms of musical praxis. As a result, multiculturalism in music education integrates various cultural style perspectives and has been expanded throughout the world.

As multiculturalism expands, music teachers are looking for more ethnic music materials. This happens not only with general music teachers, but also with piano teachers. In order to further multiculturalism in music education, we, as music educators, need to include as much diversity as possible, including Korean music. However, it is not easy to find Korean music outside the country, either for classroom use or for piano studio use and the lack of teaching materials may lead the music educators to teach without the fun-

damental musical understanding. When Barbara G. Bowman (2008),<sup>1</sup> a general music and choral teacher in Staunton, Virginia, searched for Korean music to use in the classroom, she noted that there were few examples even in the master index of songs. Besides, there is a misunderstanding that Korean music is “the same as Chinese music, or that Japanese music had an influence on Korean music during the Japanese colonial rule.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to inform music educators of the intrinsic value of Korean traditional music in order to reinforce multiculturalism in music education.

### WHY DO WE WANT TO USE KOREAN MUSIC IN THE STUDIOS OR CLASSROOMS?

These days, many people in the world pay attention to the potential ability of the Korean people, who have made such remarkable progress in many areas. For example, the Republic of Korea took a significant role to serve as a leading country for the G20 Seoul Summit in 2010, even though it was more focused on the economy. In addition, there is a Korean Language Test as part of the SAT for high school students, due to the wide increase of Korean-American population and an interest in the Korean Language in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Young Korean musicians win many international music competitions, such as Tchaikovsky competition and Elizabeth competition, to name a few. People have shown more interest in Korean music and culture through the influence of the “Korean Wave” or “K-pop,” which refers to the significantly increased popularity of South Korean culture around the world,<sup>4</sup> advanced by multiculturalism.

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However, despite numerous Korean musical heritages, people have rarely heard any type of Korean music outside of Korea except, perhaps, *Arirang*, one of the representative Korean folk tunes. Some Korean composers have adapted traditional Korean folk songs in their compositions by transforming the original material to varying degrees, from simple harmonic elaborations of monophonic melodies, to a more complete assimilation of the folk idiom into the contemporary Western style. However, it is not easy for music teachers or students to find the proper level of pieces for beginners and intermediates—even for the Koreans—as most of them are composed for the professional artist’s level.

Therefore, we are going to introduce one of the most famous Korean folk tunes, *Bird, Bird, Blue Bird* (See Figure 1), in various performance types and levels. In addition we are going to provide teaching tips and related historical background of the song for music educators who attempt to incorporate multicultural experiences in their general music classes or piano studios. The reason for selecting this folk tune is the fact that it is easy to remember for people with different cultural backgrounds because it is simply composed of three-notes in slow tempo.



Figure 1: Original melody of the song *Bird, Bird, Blue Bird*

Through the study of this unique Korean folk tune, students will be able to explore an ethnic musical experience, such as its interesting melodic, rhythmic, harmonic features and the related historic background of the song. Teachers will also benefit by acquainting themselves with this piece in depth and will be able to apply this teaching strategy to other Korean musical materials.

**THE CHARACTERISTICS OF KOREAN FOLK MUSIC**

Korean traditional music, in general, can be divided into two categories: *Chong-ak* (music for the upper class) and *Minsog-ak* (music for the common people).<sup>5</sup> To understand Korean traditional music, first of all, it is necessary to understand unique rhythmic patterns. The repetitive rhythmic patterns, which are called *Changdan* (basically meaning “length”), are frequently used to serve as a tool to accompany instrumental, vocal or folk music.

The *Chong-ak Changdans*, usually, stay in a very steady tempo.<sup>6</sup> However, those *Changdans* will not be explained in detail as it is a feature more closely identified with the Korean traditional folk music.

The *Minsog-ak Changdans* can easily be changed depending on the performer’s ability to control the tempo or to depict the atmosphere of the music. There are many different types of *Minsog-ak Changdan*: *Chinyangjo*, *Chungmori*, *Chungjungmori*, *Chajinmori*, *Hyumori*, *Danmori*, *Utmori*, *Kutkori*, *Semach’i* and *Dongsalpuri*.<sup>7</sup> (See Table 1)

NAME OF CHANGDAN	TEMPO	RHYTHMIC PATTERNS
Chungmori	♩ = 72-108	
Chungjungmori	♩ = 60-96	
Chajinmori	♩ = 90-144	
Hwimori	♩ = 116-144	
Kutkori	♩ = 60-72	
Semach’i	♩ = 72-108	

Table 1: All types of *Minsog-ak Changdan*

All of the *Changdans* are accompanied by *Changgu*, one of the representative percussive instruments in Korean traditional music, and are used to express the mood of the music and to keep the tempo in many different types of Korean music.

Secondly, it is also important to understand the use of the pentatonic scale in Korean traditional music. The pentatonic scale, as the name indicates, is a five-note scale. It was often used in the music of oriental cultures, the history of which is perhaps longer than that of the diatonic scale system in the West. The most frequently used pentatonic scale consists of whole steps and whole-and-a-half steps. It is best illustrated with the five black keys on the keyboard starting on f-sharp, and may be transposed to the white keys as shown below. (See Figure 2)



Figure 2: Pentatonic scales on black and white keys

## KOREAN FOLK TUNE, *BIRD, BIRD, BLUE BIRD*

### 1 Historical Background of *Bird, Bird, Blue Bird* reflecting Korean Modern History

*Bird, Bird, Blue Bird*, as a form of *Minsog-ak* (music for the common people), is one of the most popular Korean folk tunes and is considered in the society to be one of Korea's heartbreaking folk tunes. Its pitch and rhythm can vary according to the regions where the tune is sung. The original tune with the text is as follows. (See Figure 3)

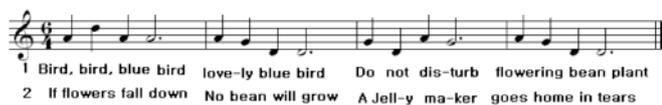


Figure 3: Melody of the song *Bird, Bird, Blue Bird* with the text

There are two different assumptions about the history of the folk song *Bird, Bird, Blue Bird*. The first assumption is that the song is related to the Donghak-Hyeokmyung, a war that took place between Korea and Japan in 1894. Korean people sang this song, *Bird, Bird, Blue Bird*, during the Donghak-Hyeokmyung with the hope of achieving victory and in remembrance of their fallen leader, Bongjun Chun (1854–1895). In the context of the song, the blue bird represents the Japanese army because they wore blue military uniforms. The bean plant represents Bongjun Chun who was the leader of the war, and jelly makers represent the Korean people. The second assumption is that the song ultimately derives from one of the ancient children's song *Dara-Dara- Balgeun-Dara* (*Moon, Moon, What a Bright Moon!*) and that Korean people in ancient society might have changed the text and sang it based on the same melody.

### 2 Melodic and Harmonic Characteristics of *Bird, Bird, Blue Bird*

*Bird, Bird, Blue Bird* may be justified as being based on the pentatonic scale, but this folksong is made up simply of three different notes. The simplicity of the melody must be the reason that this song has been fascinating to native Koreans for generations. This melodic simplicity comprises only three types of intervals: perfect 4th, perfect 5th and major 2nd (See Figure 4). In its harmonic analysis, it may be described either as a quartal or a quintal chord in Western harmony depending on the order the notes are put together, as shown below (See Figure 5). This intervallic characteristic makes the song much more modernistic, even though it is fundamentally a folk tune.



Figure 4: Analysis of the melody



Figure 5: Quartal and quintal chords

The following music score has been taken from the album of Sumi Jo<sup>8</sup>, one of the representative Korean sopranos. (See Figure 6) It is surprising that a simple folk tune can transform into such a refined style along with the modern harmonic accompaniment. This excerpt can be utilized by piano or guitar accompaniment in a general music class.



Figure 6: *Bird, Bird, Blue Bird* with modern harmonic analysis for accompaniment

### 3 Rhythmic characteristics of *Bird, Bird, Blue Bird*

Selecting a *Changdan*, a repetitive rhythmic pattern that matches with *Bird, Bird, Blue Bird*, among all the different types of *Changdan*, *Semach'I Changdan* fits best into the song *Bird, Bird, Blue Bird*. *Semach'I* usually fits into the triple rhythmic pattern. This rhythmic accompaniment can get along with the melody as illustrated below (See Figure 7).



Figure 7: *Semach'I Changdan's* rhythmic pattern along with the melody

SELECTED WORKS IN DIFFERENT COMPOSITIONAL TYPE,  
BASED ON THE THEME OF *BIRD, BIRD, BLUE BIRD*

Many Korean composers have adapted Western compositional styles and mixed those styles with the traditional musical elements of Korean music into their own works. In selected Korean repertoire, we can find how composers used the traditional folk tunes in their works. The following are examples of this practice:

**1 Piano Solo: *Variation on the theme of Bird, Bird, Blue Bird* Composed by Sang-Keun Lee (1922–2000)**

This solo piano work was composed in 1987 consisting of five variations based on the theme of *Bird, Bird, Blue Bird*. Sang-Keun Lee (1922–2000) is a Korean composer who has adapted Western compositional styles to Korean music for about 50 years. This work is recommended to students who are between the late-intermediate and the early-advanced level. Only the main theme of the variations is presented in this study (See Figure 8).<sup>9</sup>

The main theme consists of nine measures and there are two phrases in it. While the first phrase is stated in the middle range in a single melodic line (mm.1–4), the second phrase is stated one octave higher with intense dynamics (mm. 5–9).

The most attractive feature of this work is the meter change in every two measures from 5/4 to 4/4 which lends a modernistic feel. The frequent use of dissonance in the left part adds modernistic color to the old-fashioned folk tune. In addition, the rhythmic diversity between the steady quarter notes on the right and the subdivided triple 8th notes on the left elevates the difficulty of this work.

**Teaching Or Practicing Tip**

The approach for the piece in applied teaching can start with learning a tune of *Bird, Bird, Blue Bird*. The student should be required to listen to the tune, to sing, and to get accustomed to the main theme of the piece before the student tries to play the notes on the piano. The student also should learn the cultural aspect of the tune. This process will help the student identify the musical style of the song and prepare for the performance of multicultural music within the instrument.

In addition, the student should be ready for the meter changes. They should try to keep each phrase four measures long, even though the phrase line is disturbed by the frequent meter changes and the rests in the middle of melody. They should also play both hands in legato to express the sentimental emotion and the expressive quality of melodic line.

Variation "Blue Bird"

파랑새 변주곡



Figure 8: *Variation on the theme of Bird, Bird, Blue Bird* Composed by Sang-Keun Lee. Reprinted by Permission of Eumag Chun-Chu Edition, Seoul, South Korea.

**2 Piano Duet: *Der blauen Vogel (Blue Bird)*, Op. 240, No. 3 by Kuk-Jin Kim (b. 1931)**

This work was composed as a part of the *Koreaneasche Klang für Vier Händen* collection, which translates to *Korean Music for Piano Duet*.<sup>10</sup> Within the collection, there are 11 pieces in Op. 240 and four pieces in Op. 245 and all the pieces should be played on one piano by two pianists. The basic character of all the music in the collection is based on Korean traditional elements, including folk songs.

*Der blauen Vogel (Blue Bird)*, Op. 240, No. 3 is based on the theme of the Korean traditional folk tune *Bird, Bird, Blue Bird*. It is in 5/4 and the main melody of the piece in the lower part of the piano only consists of three simple notes, A, D, G), derived from the pentatonic scale. The upper part of the piano contains rolled chords and triplets (See Figure 9). There is no concept of development based on a motive or theme, and the piece could easily be played by elementary-level piano students.

3. 파랑새  
Der blauen Vogel

전래 풍요 김 국 진 작곡 240의 3

노래

Figure 9: Piano Duet: *Der blauen Vogel*, Op. 240, No. 3 by Kuk-Jin Kim. Reprinted by Permission of D.J. Publishing Company, South Korea.

### Teaching Or Practicing Tip

This work is actually a piano duo for three hands, not for four hands, because the main melody line of the piece is only supposed to be played by one hand. However, the main melody of the lower part can be played by octave of the two hands as well. As the main theme is simple and easy, the lower part can be played by a beginner and the upper part can be played by a teacher or a more experienced students. It is suggested to consider the balance between the two parts. The rolling and triplets accompaniment should not overwhelm the single melody line.

Another teaching approach can be considered if this piece is taught in the classroom setting. Instead of playing a main melody of the lower part by the instrument, several students in the class can sing a main theme of the piece and the accompanist can play the upper part of the piece on the piano. In this way more students can participate in experiencing a new traditional folk tune by singing and playing all together. In addition, the main theme of the melody in the lower part can be played by a solo instrument, such as a cello, and the accompanist can play the upper part. By experimenting with a piece through different combinations of instrument and voice, students can experience more enjoyable and interesting ways to learn multicultural music in the general music class.

### 3 Choral Music: *Saeya-Saeya* by Kyuhwan Kim (1925–2011)

*Saeya-Saeya* by Kyuhwan Kim was composed in 1977 as part of a Choral Collection, “Kyuhwan Kim Choral Music VII (Korean Traditional Music).”<sup>11</sup> There are 11 pieces in the collection and all the pieces are arranged for the chorus. All the themes of the music are based on Korean traditional folk tunes. The collection was published in 2005 through Eumag Chunchu Edition in South Korea.

*Saeya-Saeya* translates to “Bird, Bird” and is also based on the theme of the Korean traditional folk tune *Bird, Bird*,

*Blue Bird*. The piece starts with 6/4 and changes to 4/4 and then to 2/4. It is composed for three part treble voices.

There are three sections of the entire piece. In the first section, the lower part of the voice leads the melodic line and the upper part of the voice supports the harmonic line, based on the pentatonic scale (See Figure 10). In the other two sections, there are many Korean traditional rhythmic patterns, which are called Kutkori (See Table 1). Kutkori Changdan, in general, consists of 12 beats within one phrase which also could be expressed in several different ways in terms of tempo.

새야 새야  
Saeya-Saeya 한 국 민 요  
김 규 환 편곡

Andante grazioso.

Figure 10: Choral Music: *Saeya-Saeya* by Kyuhwan Kim. Reprinted by Permission of Eumag Chun-Chu Edition, Seoul, South Korea.

### Teaching Or Practicing Tip

One of the most important teaching approaches in the choral setting involves preparation. Before having a rehearsal, a teacher or a director must prepare for the rehearsal process. It is mandatory that he or she must understand the text of the song, which should be translated into English. Then, they should also deal with vocal technique, such as intonation, dynamics and articulation, to name a few. Coupled with these features, the balance of the sound could be considered.

In *Saeya-Saeya*, there are three different tempo changes: *Andante grazioso*- *Moderato ben portando*- *Allegretto agitato*. All the singers should be aware of tempo changes. In the first section A, there are two voices, singing smoothly in two-part canon style: the main theme in the lower part and the counterpart in the upper part (See Figure 11). In the other two sections, they are variable. In general music class, as this folk tune consists of three notes only, students can sing in two-part canon style to develop their inner hearing.



Figure 11: *Bird, Bird, Blue Bird* in two-part canon style

### CONCLUSION

When we think of multiculturalism in music education, we naturally tend to search for ethnic-based teaching materials to bring into the classroom. Many cultures have different styles of music in terms of rhythm, melody, harmony and so on. To fully understand music, students need to explore music from many cultures, not only their own. By studying music from various cultures, students have the opportunity to learn about different cultures, histories and traditions. Studying many different musical traditions will help students accept diversity in their lives. In this respect, Korean folk music easily falls into the category of multicultural music and may be attractive to educators who are in search of cultural diversity.

*Bird, Bird, Blue Bird* in particular has enormous potential to fulfill this role in multicultural music education and to act as a strong representative of the Korean musical tradition. It can also serve to create a connection between new listeners who feel its subtle power, and the generations of Korean to whom the piece has meant so much.

In order to advance the understanding of multicultural music, teachers should first open their minds, try to communicate with other minority teachers to learn their diverse concepts and apply new musical ideas to multicultural teaching approaches. In addition, music educators should develop multicultural teaching systems for teachers and students, and see them put to use in classrooms or studios. Thus, music can be used as an effective aide to the furtherance of multicultural education. ♪

### Notes

1. Barbara G. Bowman, "Korean Folk Music in Your Curriculum," *Music Educators Journal* 95, no. 1 (2008): 48–53.
2. Oh-sung Kwon, "Traditional Music: International Perspectives," *A Quarterly on Korean Art & Culture* 12, no. 4 (1998): 18–23.
3. [http://www.ukopia.com/ukoEducation/?page\\_code=read&uid=118201&sid=14&sub=5](http://www.ukopia.com/ukoEducation/?page_code=read&uid=118201&sid=14&sub=5).
4. [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-11/21/content\\_393440.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-11/21/content_393440.htm).
5. Seong K. Kim, *Introduction to Korean Traditional Music* (Seoul: Eunha Publishing Company, 2004), 51–52.
6. *Ibid.*, 122.
7. *Ibid.*, 131–133.
8. Sumi Jo, "Bird, Bird, Blue Bird," dictated by the author from *Sumi Jo-Korean Favorite Songs*, with the Korean Symphony Orchestra, Nansae Kum, conductor, (Seoul: E&E Media SCC-003PSM. 2001), compact disc.
9. Sang-Kuen Lee. *Five Variations on a theme of Blue Bird* in *Sang Kuen Lee Piano Works*, (Seoul: Eumag Chun-Chu Edition, 2001), 26–30.
10. Kuk-Jin Kim, "Der Blauen Vogel," Op. 240, No. 3 in *Koreaneasche Klang für Vier Handen*. (Seoul: DongJin Music Publishing Co., 1997), 8.
11. Kyuhwan Kim, "Saeya-Saeya" in *Kyuhwan Kim Choral Music VII: Korean Traditional Music*, (Seoul: Eumag Chunchu Edition, 2005), 11–12.

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