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MISSA ARIRANG:

A FUSION OF KOREAN AND WESTERN MUSIC
FOR MIXED CHOIR, CHANGGO, OR ANY DRUM
AD LIBITUM: PIANOFORTE

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Key Words CCCU, Christian institutions of higher education, degree completion rates, degree requirements, trends in higher education

Abstract

This article examines Korean nationalism in Cool-Jae Huh's *Missa Arirang*; this sense of nationalism is an extension of a movement that began in the late 19th century. *Missa Arirang* utilizes elements from *Arirang*, a popular Korean folk song, in the context of a *Missa*, or Mass; the work consequently follows the typical structure of a Mass Ordinary. The first movement, Kyrie, morphs from Western to contemporary Korean style using predominantly Western techniques. The Gloria, which follows, symbolically brings peace between two feuding provinces by blending together their respective *Arirang* traditions, and the Credo continues to allude to provinces by using the *Jeongsun-arirang* variation, meant to symbolize the mountainous region of Korea. The Sanctus movement uses a fast tempo and uses the *Shingosan-taryung* variation. Perhaps the most interesting movement, the Agnus Dei, incorporates both the traditional Korean operatic tradition and funeral service.

The style of the *Arirang* varies between provinces and provides a glimpse into the lifestyle of each. Huh's style in *Missa Arirang* points back to the nationalist reunification movement that has dwelled in Korea for many years; the composer appears to be advocating peace in his work. This shows that *Missa Arirang* is a valuable addition to the ethnic Christian choral repertoire because it contains rhythmic challenges with different types of rhythm, uses multicultural folk song modes and scales, and is a sacred major work using secular music and transforming it into religious music.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to discuss Korean nationalism as seen in Cool-Jae Huh's *Missa Arirang*, which is not only significant in Korean culture and ethnomusicology, but also is an ethnic-Christian choral piece to use in Christian higher education settings. This major work is a valuable repertoire of choral music for college students to learn and perform because it contains different types of rhythm, modes and scales as a folk song, and most considerably, value for the choral repertoire as the composer takes secular tunes of Korean folk songs and adds sacred music text to make a religious piece.

Background

Nationalism, as a movement, began in Korea in the late 19th century as an effort to keep Korea culturally and ethnically distinct from China and Japan after repeated invasion attempts by both neighboring countries. The movement was further strengthened when the Japanese invaded and annexed Korea in 1910, and it continued throughout the 35-year Japanese rule. Korean Nationalist movements continued after liberation from Japan. Following World War II and the Korean War, the country was divided, changing the focus of the movements from protecting Korea from outside invasion to attempting to reunify the nation.

Cool-Jae Huh, born in 1965, is a Korean composer known for blending traditional Korean music and Western music, resulting in works such as *Missa Arirang*. He has served as chair of the Korean Choral Composers Association and ambassador for the Juju International Choir Festival. He is also a board member of the Korean Federation of Choral Music and a board member of the Korean Cappella Society. He earned a master's degree in music from Seoul National University and was awarded Best Arrangement at the Taiwan International Contemporary Capella Festival in 2008. He is also the founding artistic director of Cool-a Cappella.

A Fusion of East and West

Missa Arirang, a Korean mass, incorporates musical tunes and phrases from one of the most popular Korean folk songs, *Arirang*. *Arirang* is

a folk song known by all Koreans throughout the world, and the folk tune melody of Kyeonggi *Arirang* has served as an unofficial national anthem of Korea for centuries. *Missa Arirang* uses the folk melodies of the *Arirangs* of each Korean province to manifest a longing for reunification of the Korean nation among the people, which has been present since the Korean War.

Cool-Jae Huh uses folk song tunes in his sacred mass titled *Missa Arirang*, which was commissioned by the Korean Chamber Singers in 2002. The piece takes its name from *Missa*, the Latin word for “mass,” and *Arirang*, the most popular piece of secular Korean folk music. This mass is based on Korean traditional folk tunes: *Arirang*, *Jindo-arirang*, *Milyang-arirang*, *Jeongsun-arirang*, *Shingosan-taryung*, as well as on the *Sanguh-sori* funeral song. *Missa Arirang* is written in the style of many different Korean provincial songs, as well as the Western Gregorian chant. It combines Korean folk tunes accompanied by a piano and a *puk*, a kind of barrel drum, or *jang-go*. A piano accompaniment is also added when more texture is needed. This mass follows the traditional Ordinary: Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei.

The **Kyrie** utilizes portions of the *Arirang* for its motif. It begins with a counter melody that is paired with the *Arirang*, later appearing in a monophonic-like chant, and it is treated in organum, canonic, and fugal styles. The *Arirang* used in the Kyrie contains five pitches, *sol-la-do-re-mi*, which is a traditional Korean pentatonic folk-song scale. This movement is in A-B-A structure, and the composer uses traditional Western techniques, such as a cappella choral singing, as well as the *organum*-like use of parallel fourths in the Kyrie. The use of the *puk*, a traditional Korean drum, and its *saemachi* rhythm, a long–short–short–long beat pattern in two-measure phrases is also introduced, showcasing Korean musical tradition in contrast to the Western style of the movement. The piano begins at measure 21 and overlaps the end of the first section in measure 19. In effect, Huh transitions from the Western style of the first section to the contemporary Korean style using Western technique. The piano is not part of the Korean folk song heritage; thus, with the addition of the piano, Huh also combines the old culture with the new.

In the Gloria section, the *Jindo-arirang* and *Milyang-arirang* melodies are used to form the main melody. Both the *Jindo-arirang* and

Milyang-arirang are derived from the same roots but are from different provinces. The people of *Jindo* and *Milyang* have been quietly feuding with each other for centuries, but the composer tries to make a peaceful union by utilizing both styles in this movement. The arirangs, on which the Gloria is based, are traditionally in 9/8 time, giving the feel of the local oceanside from which they originate. The rondo-like Gloria uses a heavily dotted rhythm and changing meters to show the excitement and constant motion of the people. In the phrase *Laudamus te, benedicimus te*, the composer introduces the *Jindo-arirang* and *Milyang-arirang*, first separately and then overlapped, finally finishing together. Perhaps Huh is attempting first to illustrate the feuding between the two provinces and then to bring them to peace in the end.

Jeongsun-arirang is from *Kangwon* mountain village and is used in the **Credo**. The music reflects the hills and valleys of this province's mountains with music that ascends and descends. The dynamics remain subdued, reflecting the mountain lifestyle of the province from which the *Jeongsun-arirang* comes. There are many Buddhist monks in the mountain region, and this style may represent the sense of a sacred location (e.g., a church or Buddhist temple). The composer also uses a traditional syn-copated Korean rhythm to accent key words in this movement: *credo* (I believe), *filium* (Son), *Dominum* (God), and "Amen."

The Sanctus contains many meter changes and utilizes the *Shingsan-taryung*. The piano accompaniment is mainly composed of the tones *do-mi-la*, the tempo is very fast, and *fp* dynamics are used in the introduction. Interestingly, the use of "Í" in the introduction demonstrates Korean style vocalisms (e.g., a heavy downbeat followed by a lighter upbeat). The form of the Sanctus is rondo-like, but it does not exactly fit the true definition of a rondo due to the inclusion of a repeated B section. This movement is vocally challenging because of the high *tessitura* for sopranos and tenors and the brisk tempo.

One of the most interesting movements, the **Agnus Dei**, introduces the sound of a traditional Korean opera singer into a palette of colors. Korean opera singers do not use the Western classical singing style; however, they use strong throat sounds that Westerners often presumed to indicate a lack of vocal training. In the Korean tradition, the natural speaking voice—coupled with "throaty" vocal sounds—are considered

to communicate one's thoughts and feelings more clearly. Furthermore, Korean listeners will recognize the sound of funeral singing, and many connect these sounds to Christ's suffering on the cross. *Agnus Dei*, written for an operatic solo voice and double choir, is based on a traditional Korean funeral service and subsequent procession to the grave. The soloist represents the minister in the Korean funeral service, who often rings a bell while giving a sermon to the congregation; the congregation is represented by the second choir. The first choir represents the pallbearers, who, in turn, repeat the words of the soloist. The dynamics are consistently *pp*, shifting to *fff* with extremely high vocal writing for sopranos, tenors, and the baritone soloist (i.e., high a-flat for the baritone solo). The texture also thickens greatly here, and the ensuing climax of the movement represents Christ's last moments on the cross. The music becomes calmer, returning to the earlier *pp* dynamic, and is scored for an a cappella chorus. The final note sounds on the *puk* and fades to *niente*.

The style of the Korean folk song varies from province to province, and the style of each province reflects the lifestyle of the natives of the area. For example, in the provinces of the plains, there are few differences in tempo, and rhythms are not complicated, perhaps reflecting the simple lifestyle of a farmer. In the oceanside provinces, the music is often faster, with more active rhythms reflecting the busy life of a fisherman or a merchant. In the mountainside provinces, the music is often slower, with more ascending and descending lines, reflecting the terrain of that area. In his *Missa Arirang*, in addition to showcasing the provincial styles of Korean folk song, Huh is attempting to inspire peace and unity, not only in reference to the provinces, but also throughout all of Korea and the world. In the Gloria, his utilization of the *Arirangs* from the Gyeongsang and Jeolla provinces is an attempt to unify the two groups of people. His use of traditional songs from both North and South Korea in the *Sanctus* shows a desire for reunification of the countries as they once were and should be again. The *Agnus Dei*, with its use of the funeral song *Sanguh-sori* in the final *dona nobis pacem*, is symbolic of the death and resulting end of all conflict. It appears that the composer is pleading for peace, not only within Korea and its provinces, but worldwide.

Implications for Teaching and Learning

Finding a repertoire is one of the most difficult tasks of the choral director of each choral group. Choral directors at colleges and universities take their responsibilities seriously and thus strive not only to provide excellent music but also to influence students and the community. *Missa Arirang* is the one of the ideal repertoire pieces for higher education choirs because it incorporates multicultural aspects of music as well as includes various modes, pentatonic scales, and musical challenges. Since this work contains different scale systems and rhythmic style, it would be very helpful if students learn or already know pentatonic scales, Korean rhythmic patterns, and how to use the Korean operatic style (e.g., a throaty vocal sound) to sing Agnus Dei. In addition, it would be beneficial to teach students each province's Arirang song because it would enable students to better understand the concept and style of singing if they know the original song.

Choral directors choosing *Missa Arirang* for their choirs should know the history of Arirang and that Arirang more than a Korean folk song; it was also used as the unofficial Korean National Anthem. As conductors should research each song's historical background, they should also study the pentatonic scales—most folksong uses this scale—and the Korean rhythms because they differ significantly from Western rhythms; it can be challenging to teach the right rhythm and conduct a choir at the same time.

Having decided to include *Missa Arirang* in the students' repertoire, conductors will also need to find Korean *puk* and teach a couple of students how to play the drum with both hands, an additional challenge. However, despite the challenges, *Missa Arirang* provides an excellent way to teach students about Eastern and Western history, traditions, and music and to teach the Mass as well as complex rhythms and scales. Choosing *Missa Arirang* for a college or university choir to perform is appropriate for both secular and Christian institutions; however, this Arirang would be more beneficial for Christian institutions because this major work not only glorifies God, but also can bring students as well as the audience to a greater love and understanding of God's truth, mercy, charity, goodness, and beauty.

Thus, for the reasons outlined above, *Missa Arirang* is a valuable

addition to the repertoire for ethnic Christian choral pieces, which can be studied and performed by Christian college students because it contains rhythmic challenges with different types of rhythm, uses multicultural folk song modes and scales, and is a sacred work that uses secular music but transforms it into religious music.

Dr. Imgyu Kang is Director of Choral Studies and Assistant Professor of Music at Oral Roberts University. He received his master's degree in choral conducting from Georgia State University, his master of arts in church ministry from Luther Rice Seminary, and his D.M.A. from the University of Alabama. Dr. Kang is also an active member of the American Choral Directors Association and has conducted and performed at the 2001 Georgia ACDA convention and the 2002 Regional ACDA convention. His researching and teaching focuses on a wide-ranging repertoire—covering all periodic styles and genres, while incorporating many performance techniques and practices for vocal students as well as aspiring conductors, especially in facilitating the discovery of expression and spirituality in musical performance. Dr. Kang can be reached at ikang@oru.edu.

