

# Jin Hi Kim

**Duality of Ancient Korean Roots  
and Western New Music**



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Living Tones  
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In conjunction with Wesleyan University's World Music Archives & Music Library, where Jin Hi Kim's scores and recordings are housed, she is donating nine CDs titled The Jin Hi Kim Collection: Living Tones Compositions and Komungo Improvisations.

This eBook supports The Jin Hi Kim Collection by providing detailed information on each track included on the CDs. All CDs are available through Wesleyan University's Olin Library and on Bandcamp.



# 1

## FROM KOREA TO AMERICA

### Korean Music Training

My father showed me a newspaper with the excitement of someone who had just won the lottery. The ad announced the establishment of the National High School for Korean Traditional Music (국립 국악 고등학교), which was recruiting 60 students and offering each a full scholarship. The school was set to open in 1973 under the Ministry of Culture and would be housed within the prestigious National Classical Music Institute. This institute—previously known as the Yi Dynasty Court Music Bureau (이왕직 아악부), later renamed the National Center for Korean Traditional Performing Arts, and eventually the National Gugak Center—was dedicated to preserving the 1,500-year heritage of Korean traditional court music and dance. Court music (ceremonial music performed at the royal palace) had lost its function after the Japanese occupation and the Korean War, leaving the nation with a shortage of musicians capable of continuing its performance. The new high school was created to address this problem. My father knew nothing about Korean music, but the news was enticing enough that he was certain I should apply.

At first, it felt almost shameful to apply to study Korean traditional music because Western classical music received so much more respect and attention. At that time, primary, middle, and high schools did not teach Korean traditional music, and all my instruction had focused solely on Western music. Fortunately, the admission policy did not require any prior experience in traditional music; instead, it was based on applicants' middle school grades. My father was adamant that I apply. "Because you're pursuing Korean traditional music that others don't

want to do, you'll be unique and have more opportunities than others!" he kept saying. "Let's give it a try." So I did. And I got in.

Once I began studying at the National High School for Korean Traditional Music, my attitude changed completely. Our teachers explained that we students would grow up to become "musicians for the nation," entrusted with elevating the status of Korean traditional music. Our class was invited to perform at numerous national, government-sponsored events, which fostered a strong sense of pride in all of us. I felt honored to be among those carrying the legacy of past traditions into the present.

For centuries, Korean court orchestras consisted exclusively of men, and by the time I entered high school, many traditional instruments were still regarded as masculine. The exceptions were the *gayageum* (가야금), a 12-string zither traditionally performed by women in folk music ensembles such as *gayageum byeonchang* (가야금 병창), and in *sanjo* (산조) solo performances.

The *komungo* (거문고), the instrument I chose as my major, was considered the domain of men. A fretted board zither with six strings, the *komungo* was known as the Confucian scholar's instrument. These upper-class scholars—highly educated and elite members of society—lived during the Chosun Dynasty (1392–1910). They played the *komungo* to cultivate a meditative mind through *jeong-ak* (정악, "rightful music"), shaping their lives in accordance with philosophical principles of moral conduct. Though it's impossible to know for certain, they likely played the *komungo* in a similarly austere manner, emphasizing abstraction and form rather than the expression of personal emotion found in the folk traditions of other instruments.

I was told that the *komungo* was a difficult instrument to learn, and that to play it, one needed to be as intellectual as the scholars of old. I was drawn to that challenge. Besides, I questioned why a woman shouldn't play it. In fact, in our class, six female students and two male students majored in *komungo*. Most men chose wind instruments such as the double-reeded *piri* (피리) and the *daegeum* (대금), a horizontal bamboo flute with a vibrating membrane. These wind instruments were traditionally regarded as masculine because their piercing and powerful sounds led the Korean music ensemble. Men typically played the main melodic lines.

The beginning of my *komungo* training with my teacher, Gu Yun Guk (구윤국), was very awkward. As beginners, we did not start with a *komungo* solo piece; instead, we learned a very slow *komungo* part from an orchestral work. We used *komungo* notation, but we never heard the wind parts that carried the main melodies of the ensemble. The *komungo* line was sporadic, much like the bass part in a Western orchestra, so it was difficult to get a sense of the music as a whole. My teacher never explained what the piece was about—he simply asked us to imitate him. I had never even heard the *komungo* before, and the very nature of the instrument initially felt somewhat unfriendly. Its dark, muted tone quality

was more abstract than that of any other Korean instrument, and it was certainly not a melodic one. The tuning was not fixed by frets, so the player had to rely on their ear to produce accurate pitches. The lowest string, *dae-hyeon* (대현), was so thick that it could not produce a full, resonant pitch. The physical actions required to play it did not seem particularly graceful: plucking the twisted silk string or striking the soundboard with a bamboo stick produced a dull, percussive sound, as did pressing the strings with my fingers. I even wondered whether the instrument itself was somehow deficient—perhaps because it had been played by Confucian scholars rather than musicians. I had no evidence for this, but I suspected those scholars might have lacked musical imagination.

Beginning to learn any instrument is challenging, but the *komungo* was more difficult than most. For the most part, I learned by listening to my teacher. He sang every note of each piece in *gu-eum* (구음), a stylized solfege that also conveyed the proper articulation for the left hand and the bamboo stick. As he sang, he simultaneously demonstrated the performance techniques I was expected to imitate with my hands and stick. Although we used notation called *jeongkanbo* (정간보) for *jeong-ak* repertoire, there was no written notation for *sanjo*, an improvisatory folk style. Elders had only recently begun to transcribe those pieces, but their work would not become available until I was in college. Not that notation mattered much when I was first starting out—after my teacher sang a phrase, there was no time to look at the score; we simply had to play. As I memorized entire pieces, bit by bit, I began to realize that there was far more to the music than what could ever be captured in written notes.

For more than 750 years, until during the Japanese occupation in the 1930s, court music had been performed exclusively at the palace. None of us had heard this music before the 1970s. Most Korean professional musicians had not heard it either. The *komungo* parts of *jeong-ak* were easier to play than the solos in *sanjo*, and since our teacher couldn't single out one bright student for his or her superior performance, we developed a real sense of camaraderie. Our teacher did not go into great detail about each piece we learned; rather, practicing the whole piece was the goal. I sometimes asked how much I should bend a note, how much vibrato I should do on a note, what I was supposed to express through the music. My teacher used to say, "You will learn when you get older." Now I understand that the questions I had were not about techniques that I could improve by practicing. They were about how a musician expresses his or her soul. I had to find the answers for myself.

Playing *komungo* part in *jeong-ak* orchestra class was abstract enough that I was almost bored, and often impatient. My *komungo* parts were very slow and austere, and sitting on the floor with my instrument made my feet fall asleep. But the orchestra class was required for all students from freshman to senior year, and over time I grew to appreciate it. This was the first time I heard all other instruments

and the main melody of the music through bamboo flutes in the orchestra. I began to understand how my *komungo* part worked.

Learning *Young-san-hoe-sang* (영산회상), a 45-minute suite of twelve orchestral pieces performed without breaks, was a turning point. The piece, inspired by Buddhism, translates to “Enlightenment of the Mountain Spirit.” Unlike Western music, which uses a twelve-tone chromatic scale, this orchestral work is based on a five-tone pentatonic scale. We learned to create tone gestures—what I think of as “Korean spices”—on each note. There is no harmony, only a highly stylized sense of tonality and timing, structured by rhythmic cycles known as *janggu jangdan* (장고 장단). *Young-san-hoe-sang* begins at a very slow tempo (quarter note  $\approx$  30) and gradually accelerates to about 70. The suite includes many different stylized rhythmic cycles based on twelve, eight, and four beats. The twelve- and eight-beat cycles are particularly slow; each beat is subdivided into three, and since not all beats are explicitly counted, long silences occur between them. As the rhythmic cycles repeat and the overall tempo gradually increases, the perception of time becomes mesmerizing. At the beginning, the *komungo* part consists of sparse, widely spaced notes, but toward the end of the suite, it finally joins the rhythmic cycle, contributing a subtle melodic line.

My teacher rarely stopped the orchestra to make corrections, believing it was more important for us to play through the entire piece. We practiced it throughout high school, and I continued to study it in university—seven years that helped me grow both musically and spiritually. I came to understand that performing such long and slow music is itself an act of meditation. Each of the twelve pieces in *Young-san-hoe-sang* has its own nuances and distinct rhythmic cycles. There is no conductor in the orchestra to count beats; instead, every musician listens closely to one another. Each performer follows the rhythmic cycles (*jangdan*) of the *janggu* (an hourglass-shaped drum), while the *janggu* drummer, in turn, listens to the main melody played by the bamboo flutes. The music is heterophonic, meaning that each instrument plays its own interpretation within similar phrases. The traditional notation system, *jeongganbo*, written in a grid, is designed to accommodate an elastic sense of time. This notation allows for subtle inflections and expressive variations around each note, rather than confining them within rigid measures.

We learned all the details of musical nuance during orchestra rehearsals, by listening to the older students practice outside of class, and in lessons on our own major instruments. My *komungo* teacher helped, but my real growth as a musician came from performing with the orchestra. Instead of focusing only on my own part, I learned to listen to the many sonic layers of others, such as the different bamboo flutes weaving through the melody. This was the nature of the *komungo* in *jeong-ak*: compared to other instruments, it played so minimally that there was no story to tell on the *komungo*. Yet it was also the primary instrument of the court

orchestra, functioning almost as a timekeeper. The chief master, or concertmaster, traditionally played the *komungo*, and the entire orchestra began with a very brief prelude—just three phrases long—for the *komungo*.

The *komungo* was even more central to *gagok* (가곡), a form of lyric song historically performed and appreciated by the elite. *Gagok* originated from songs of the Goryeo Dynasty. Playing in a *gagok* ensemble was the most profound musical experience I had with the *komungo*. The *komungo*, bamboo flutes, and voice each have their own individual parts, yet they coexist naturally within a slow *janggo* cycle. When playing in a *gagok* ensemble, I can hear a distinct melody within the *komungo* part. In some ways, *gagok* songs resemble *pansori* singing, in that musicians create unique tonal qualities for each note. However, while *pansori* songs tell the passionate and sorrowful stories of the folk, the slow *gagok* songs are like poems, performed and appreciated by the upper class. *Gagok* is associated with Confucian aesthetics and the inner calm of Goryeo celadon pottery. Our teachers worked diligently to ensure that we learned it as well.

The instruments in a *gagok* ensemble, assembled to accompany a solo singer, include *komungo*, *se-piri* (soft *piri*), *daegeum*, *haegeum*, and *janggo*. Sometimes the ensemble also included *gayageum* and *danso* (단소), but only as supporting instruments for the *komungo* and *daegeum*, respectively. The *komungo* is the leading instrument in a *gagok* ensemble, and its part is much more melodically and rhythmically sophisticated than in orchestral pieces. The tonal gestures—articulated by pushing and bending the *komungo* strings—are masterful and varied, and it was through *gagok* that I learned the most about the *komungo*'s sonic qualities. *Gagok* also taught me about the unique timbral and textural bouquet that is one of the most essential elements of Korean music.

Even though I played *komungo* in *gagok*, I also learned to sing *gagok* songs in class, which deepened my understanding of how the ensemble structures the song as a whole. The vocal part and stylized *janggo* rhythmic cycle introduce the musical phrases, and each instrument expresses the melody differently within those phrases. In the heterophonic structure of the music, the tuning of the voice, *daegeum*, and *komungo* does not need to match perfectly. When they play the same phrases, their individual tonal gestures, or *sigimse* (시김새), create beautifully complex tone colors and textures. Sometimes each instrument has its own phrases within the *jangdan* (rhythmic cycle), so that the *komungo* and *daegeum* parts sound almost like separate pieces. The tonal manipulation of notes and the subtle interpretation of phrases—designed to create personal melodic fragments—are essential for making the music come alive. The music seems to float, without obvious rhythmic patterns or pulses, resulting in an experience that feels both timeless and awe-inspiring.

Playing *komungo* in a *Yong-san-hoe-sang* orchestra and a *gagok* ensemble was a profound experience, and I was fortunate to have it—especially since, during

my training, *jeong-ak* had nearly disappeared from public view. It was performed publicly only at the National Classical Music Institute, which most students from my high school eventually joined. Others became lecturers at Seoul National University. Although it was the most prestigious university in the nation, its faculty positions were already filled, so becoming a full professor there was nearly impossible. The rest of us were encouraged to create our own opportunities by establishing new schools to teach Korean music. It was clear that we were being trained to continue a tradition. Given how little ordinary people seemed to care for *jeong-ak*, it was difficult to imagine a bright future in performing it. Yet we were taught that this music mattered far more than folk traditions because it was considered noble and sophisticated—the art of the upper class. National High School, the National Classical Music Institute, and Seoul National University essentially ignored folk music. That attitude persisted until the 1980s, when the National Center for Korean Traditional Performing Arts (as the National Classical Music Institute had been renamed) began hiring folk musicians.

## Western Music was Superior to Korean Music

My homeroom teacher, who also taught *piri*, was proud to tell us that during the 1960s, Lou Harrison—whom I would study with years later—had visited the National Classical Music Institute to learn about traditional Korean music. Harrison even composed a piece for the *piri*. The fact that some Western musicians appreciated Korean traditional music was a great source of pride among Korean musicians at that time. They believed it was important to introduce Westerners to this tradition, and the National Classical Music Institute sought to cultivate Western interest in Korean music. In the 1960s, the Institute began creating scores of instrumental Korean music using Western notation. Traditional court orchestra notation dates back to the Chinese system of the 12th century, though several other Korean notation systems had been introduced over the years. My teachers relied on two of the more recent versions: *jongganbo* and *hapjabo* (합자보). These traditional notations are written in a grid format, with each square indicating both the pitch and the duration of the note. Each square is measured in elastic time, reflecting the natural fluctuations in the length of each note in Korean music. Because the melody is structured heterophonically rather than vertically, each part exists independently yet coexists within the ensemble, supported by the *janggu jangdan* (rhythmic cycle, or “circle of time”).

The *hapjabo* notation system includes more than one part for certain instruments, such as *komungo*, *piri*, *daegeum*, and *janggo* in the orchestra, but it does not cover all instruments. It is an ensemble notation, yet it excludes

instruments like *haegeum* and *danso*, whose parts had been transmitted orally. The *komungo* was the leading instrument, so its part was written down, and the *piri* and *daegeum* parts were also notated because they carried the main melody. However, the detailed melodic embellishments for the bamboo flutes were passed down orally through generations, and therefore not captured in the notation. Older master musicians often played from memory. By the time I was studying, my teachers were documenting as much as they could remember of the full court-music repertoire. Meanwhile, other musicians were transcribing it into Western notation. When I entered college, full orchestra scores in Western notation had been published, and many more have appeared since then. Despite those efforts, our teachers still instructed us orally, requiring us to memorize music by ear. I still believe this approach is the best way to learn Korean traditional music, because written notation cannot capture the performer's individual expression. In fact, the National Traditional Music Orchestra's performance of *Sujecheon* (수제천) differed from the version written in Western notation, since that system simply cannot represent the "rhythmic soul" or the tonal gestures—*sigimse*—of Korean music.

Even as the National High School for Korean Traditional Music immersed us in Korean art and history, its location made it easier for me to learn about Western classical music as well. When I attended, the school was located right next to the Tower Hotel, a place frequently visited by foreign diplomats, and just below Mt. Nam, near the National Theater of Korea and the National Classical Music Institute. We often saw government events held at the National Theater, followed by receptions at the Tower Hotel across the street. Sometimes we were invited to attend these events to help fill the audience. Once, I even heard President Park Chung Hee (박정희) speak at the National Theater. Every student at the high school had free access to all performances held in those theaters, which I considered an immense privilege. Not all of my peers seemed interested, but I attended as many events as I could.

After school, at the National Theater, I saw Western classical operas, symphony orchestra and ballet performances, as well as recitals by renowned classical musicians from the West. During lunch breaks, I went to the small theater at the National Classical Music Institute to watch the National Traditional Orchestra rehearse. At that time, their main focus was revising Yi Dynasty court music, which was traditionally accompanied by dance. The stage was designed to resemble a beautifully decorated royal court, and the dancers' and musicians' costumes looked elegant and magnificent. There, I was exposed to many new musical repertoires and dance forms that I never had the chance to learn during my high school years.

While the National Theater, the venue for foreign performers, was almost

always packed with paying audiences, the small theater—where traditional Korean music was performed—was attended mostly by senior citizens who had wandered in from nearby Jang Choong Park and could watch the shows for free. Whenever there was a *pansori* (판소리) performance—an epic drama song—these elderly audience members would sing along, passionately and rhythmically. The professional singers seemed to appreciate their enthusiastic response. However, on one occasion, the theater manager interrupted a *pansori* performance and demanded that the audience be quiet, saying they were being “impolite.” Evidently, he wanted them to follow the Western custom of sitting silently throughout a performance. Folk music had traditionally been performed informally outdoors until the 1960s. Village audiences were accustomed to responding to performers with cheers or by singing along. When folk music performances were moved to formal indoor concert halls, the older audience members felt very uncomfortable being silent during the show.

Even at age 15, I was already witnessing the turning point of a new Korea, and I felt deep anguish seeing Korean traditional music being trampled and on the verge of disappearing after the Japanese occupation and the Korean War. During the Meiji Period, Japan had already incorporated Western culture into its society, and they attempted to do the same with Koreans during the Japanese occupation (1910–1945). After the Korean War, American pop culture entered Korea. Educated people embraced European classical music—they listened to Western piano, violin, orchestral music, and opera arias. As long as people were so fascinated and passionate about Western music, Korean music seemed to have little hope for survival. I knew I was fortunate to receive the education I did, but I also felt insecure about my identity as a Korean musician. What did it mean to study a tradition that might be dying? Was there a path forward for me?

When I told my father about my concerns during my junior year, he decided that we should meet with the school dean, Seong Kyong Rin (성경린), for advice. At that time in Korea, except in cases of special personal connections, meeting the school dean in person was unheard of. Dean Seong Kyong Rin, a *komungo* player, was as reserved as a classical Confucian scholar. When we interrupted him at work, he did little to address my father’s concerns. When my father asked whether it was wise for me, as a female, to pursue the *komungo*, the dean agreed that it was traditionally a male instrument. He did not ask me a single question. The meeting was short and largely unproductive, but I still felt honored to meet him and enjoyed catching a glimpse of what he had been working on obsessively before we arrived: he was notating the *komungo* parts of *jeong-ak* pieces, which he had committed to memory, into *jongkanbo*. Later, my *komungo* teacher and former dean Kim Kisu (김기수) published scores for all

the *komungo* parts of *jeong-ak*, which had previously been transmitted orally and practiced for many years at the Yi Dynasty Court Music Institute.

During my senior year of high school, I decided that it no longer made sense to pursue a career as a *komungo* performer. Korean society was undergoing dramatic changes. During the Japanese occupation, the Yi Dynasty court had been completely dismantled. After the Korean War, Western classical music began to overshadow traditional Korean music. By the 1970s, older male musicians, influenced by Western orchestral music, were composing a new repertoire for the traditional Korean orchestra, which became a sensation with audiences. While the traditional Korean orchestra had traditionally performed seated on the floor, musicians were now arranged on chairs, and a conductor—never before present—directed the timing. They adopted the Western orchestral system, but the new sound of the Korean traditional orchestra resembled a modern Chinese orchestra, which struck me as somewhat corny. The skills I had been learning in high school—performing from memory, following the cues of the group, and finding my place as an individual within a collective—no longer seemed relevant. No female musician had yet composed such new music for Korean orchestras, but perhaps, I thought, I could help shape this new repertoire. So, I applied to major in Composition Theory in the Korean Traditional Music Department at Seoul National University, the nation's top university.

My grades were good, but the application process was daunting. Students majoring in Western music did not need to demonstrate any knowledge of Korean music, but to join the Korean Music Department, I needed to show proficiency in both domains. This meant I would be examined on Western harmony and piano—subjects I had never formally studied. I asked a trainee teacher at my school, who had majored in Western Music Composition, to teach me harmony, and I practiced a Beethoven piano sonata I had been playing since childhood.

All students hoping to study Korean composition also needed to audition on the *komungo*, as it was the traditional instrument of scholars, and to take an exam in Korean music theory. I felt confident about both my *komungo* audition and Korean music theory. But when I discovered that some wealthy students from regular high schools were paying for both private *komungo* instruction and private lessons in music theory from professors at Seoul National University, I grew worried. My parents could not afford private lessons, and it seemed nearly impossible to compete with students who were already being taught by the very professors at the university we were all applying to.

My homeroom teacher, Seo Han Beom (서한범), generously arranged a meeting with his own teacher, Dr. Chang Sa Hun (장사훈), who taught Korean Traditional Music Theory at Seoul National University. When we walked into

Dr. Chang's office, my teacher announced, "This student is a top student and diligent in class. She wants to study Korean Traditional Music Theory. Her major is *komungo*, and we're here to meet you and hear you play your *komungo*." My teacher's intention was to establish a personal connection so that Dr. Chang would remember me during the interview session, and perhaps to ease some of my own worries about the application process. But the meeting was a learning experience as well. Professor Chang played a *Dasrum* (다스름)—a short prelude before the main song to warm up the performance conditions—in a style completely different from how my own teacher, Gu Yun Guk, had instructed us to play. I did not know which interpretation was "authentic," and I began to realize that the same piece could be played in different ways. It was eye-opening for me to appreciate the freedom of individual performance, and I looked forward to expanding my horizons in college.

At my graduation from the National High School, I received a Ministry of Culture Award for being the best student. This was a real honor, as was learning that, despite my fears about the exam, I had been admitted to the Composition Theory major at Seoul National University. About two-thirds of the 25 incoming students were from my high school, while the rest had taken private lessons from university professors. I was one of two students selected for the Composition Theory track, and the other had spent a year taking private *komungo* and theory lessons from professors at Seoul National University after failing to gain entry as a piano major. I felt like a rising star among Korea's national musicians.

When I entered college, the politics in the music department surprised me. Two-thirds of the students in the music school were majoring in Western music, and the Western music professors were responsible for most of the decision-making in the department. Korean music seemed to be considered "inferior." Most of the traditional Korean music professors were part-time, and those who were full-time appeared to have stumbled into their positions: as students, they had failed to gain admission to the Western music major, taken private lessons from the nation's senior masters for a year, applied the following year as Korean music majors, and became professors when the university opened in 1958. I also learned that until 1973, students from my high school had not even been eligible to apply to university. As the Yi Dynasty Court Music Institute, the school had been dedicated solely to training musicians to perform traditional music, not to providing students with the academic credentials required for university entry. When the school was renamed, just before I attended, becoming the National High School for Korean Traditional Music, its curriculum also expanded to include subjects beyond music. Finally, I understood the tension between Seoul National University (SNU) and the National Classical Music Institute (NCMI). The musicians of NCMI were true Korean musicians who had

practiced authentic music for several years, while the professors at SNU were only briefly trained in Korean music. At NCMI, musicians made music; at SNU, the professors talked about it. The masters at NCMI wished to teach at SNU, but the professors at SNU asserted their superior status over those musicians.

These were disappointing realities. Professors were more highly respected than individual performers, so even the most masterful older musicians—if they played traditional instruments without earning academic degrees—could be regarded as second-rank. As I observed the bright newcomers who had essentially taken over the Korean Traditional Music Department, I felt sympathy for these older performers. Yet I also felt that I had chosen wisely to major in Composition Theory. Since this was a new area of study, the university politics surrounding it seemed likely to be less entrenched. Moreover, I believed that in the years after graduation, surviving as a *komungo* soloist or teacher in Korea would be nearly impossible.

Nevertheless, I enjoyed my classes in Korean music, which included History of Korean Music, *Ak-hak-gwe-bom* (악학궤범, 15th-century court music treatises), and Ancient Notation. Learning to trace the origins of musical forms was fascinating. For example, the *Koryo-gayo* (고려가요) that we play today comes to us from transcriptions made long after the Koryo Dynasty had ended; songs were originally set down for instrumental music, but by the 17th century, the music had become instrumental without the songs. While we have evidence that these songs existed much earlier, no actual notation of the songs survives. Although I had learned folk ritual performances that merged music with dance, literature, and song, I now discovered that similar combinations had once been part of Korean court music as well. This understanding greatly influenced my own perspective on performance later on. Today, court music is performed on stage as a concert program, often separated from the dance and song that were once integral to it.

My composition classes were not productive. At the time, Korean musical composition was experimental for both professors and students. My professors had never studied abroad, yet they were heavily influenced by Western classical music. No one taught us about the sense of time in Korean music, or about Korean musical structure or tonal quality. What's more, the faculty kept changing. During my first year, Professor Yi Song Chon (이성천), who came from outside the circle of the National Classical Music Institute and was one of the leading composers of Korean music, coached me as I created my required piano sonata. The following year, when I was expected to compose for Korean instruments, he left to study independently in America.

Meanwhile, outside the university circle, a new generation of composers was changing the direction of Korean music. They assembled a traditional

orchestra modeled after the Western one. They arranged a large string section, a large bamboo flute section, and added a variety of percussion instruments to the Korean instrumental ensemble, making the orchestra sound more powerful. The orchestra was conducted with a baton, which reduced the individual tonal fluctuations traditionally present in the music. They also sought to address what they saw as a limitation of traditional Korean instruments, most of which have less than two octaves. They introduced a new model of *gayageum* with movable bridges, extending the strings and thus increasing the pitch range. This modification was relatively easy for the *gayageum*, and although it would take more time and research to alter other instruments, the trend quickly took hold. The more strings, the more impressive the sound—especially when played with the youthful energy of a modernized orchestra. They modified other instruments as well: the length of the *piri* was extended with additional holes, and the *ajeng* (아쟁) gained more strings, both increasing their pitch range.

Yet conductors and musicians did not seem enthusiastic about Westernizing changes, and neither did I. Even as a young person, I found the new style awkward and pretentious. Traditionally, Korean court orchestras were led by a concertmaster who signaled the beginning and end of a performance by playing a *bak* (박) clapper. During the performance, he gave the orchestra cues about tempo changes and could adjust the duration of the music as needed for a particular ritual or ceremonial purpose. But he never exerted the mechanistic control of a Western orchestra leader. Instead, all members of the orchestra based their playing on the rhythmic cycles established by *jango* patterns. Korean court orchestras collectively established a sense of time with an organic flow that seemed almost like breathing. All of this disappeared with the adoption of a Western musical mindset. Now, a conductor dictated the time sense for the entire orchestra. Instead of articulating melody and rhythm individually in strings and winds, musicians had to advance a singular, uniform expression. Moreover, the new generation of composers simplified both Korean rhythmic cycles and the traditional pentatonic scale. They Westernized the melodies of old, familiar folk songs. The energy that had once seemed to float throughout traditional orchestra performances was gone. What remained sounded almost like Western music played on Korean instruments. One day, I decided to go to the West to understand why Western music was considered superior to traditional Korean music. I wanted to study Western music directly from Western musicians, not from Koreans, and to experience for myself what made Korean music seem inferior.

It seemed to me that the in-depth knowledge of Korean music I had spent years acquiring was, professionally speaking, nearly worthless. In both metropolitan and national orchestras, Western musicians earned twice as much as

traditional Korean musicians. At that time, there was no independent orchestra for both Korean and Western music. If I wanted to secure a teaching job in a Korean middle or high school, I would have had to pursue a second degree in Western music—the only kind taught in schools.

I remained passionate about Korean traditional music, but I was also deeply disappointed. As graduation approached, I sensed that, as a woman, I would never be recognized as a leading composer. The entire musical network operated under patriarchal authority. Without a powerful male teacher to advocate for me, I would be overlooked. At that time, individual musicians did not apply for grant funding or accept commissions to create new music, and the composers who were successful had institutional connections to the government or orchestras. Society was still under the shadow of Confucian values, favoring men—especially older men—over young women like me. I worried about the direction of my future. Korea was the only place I had ever lived, the place where I felt rooted both as a person and as a musician. But it might not be possible for me to be the best there as a musician.

## America is my Platform

By the time I graduated from Seoul National University, I had decided I needed to study Western music in depth, not in Korea, but in the West from real Western people. I was tired of seeing Korean traditional music treated as inferior to Western classicism, and I wanted to create music that combined both Korean and Western instruments, and treated them equally. I had good reason to think I was up to the task. I was a rising young composer in Korea, and my composition *Yeopo for three daegeum and yang-geum* (영포 - Brave Warrior for bamboo flute with membrane and hammer dulcimer) won the *Chosun Ilbo* newspaper's New Musicians Festival Award. The composition was broadcast on the Korean National Television Broadcasting (KBS-TV). During my college years, I had composed new pieces for Korean traditional instruments as well as a combination of Korean and Western instruments. But while older, male composers received commissions from their older, male conductor friends, I, as a young female composer, was on my own. I had to hire musicians to perform my works when I premiered them outside of the college. I was very interested in combining both Korean and Western instruments in a small chamber ensemble, but I knew I needed to leave Korea to do it.

Most Korean musicians who decided to study abroad went to Germany, which has a rich musical history and free university tuition. However, I wanted to go to the United States. It had risen as the dominant force in the world

politically and economically. I was also curious to experience a broader variety of cultures, since the US is known as an immigrant country. Studying ethnomusicology would have helped me do that, but I wanted to study composition instead. I wanted to create new music. I thought that only a new type of music would make both Korean and Western instruments treated equally. I told my theory professors, Dr. Chang Sa Hun and Prof. Hahn Man Young (한만영), about my decision. Their responses were unanimous: No. They “kindly” advised me that it was impossible for a woman to become a successful composer. But I had not been asking for their permission. “No one can stop me anymore,” I told them. “I want to try.” They were shocked to hear that from me, because up until now, I had not been known to push back against authority. My father worried too. How, he asked, could I be successful overseas if I had not been successful in Korea? I explained that I felt hopeless that I won’t have the best opportunity to become successful inside of Korea, and the whole society doesn’t care much about traditional instruments over Western instruments. I wanted to find out why the Korean music was a failure under the Western music. I needed look at Korean music from outside. My farther understood me, and he left me alone.

In 1980, when I graduated from college, it was hard to obtain a visa to the US unless one had a relationship with someone working at the US embassy. I had no such connections, and I found the application process—writing detailed responses to various questions about my intentions, proving financial documents, securing letters of recommendation, all in English—challenging. My own family was incapable to support my decision to study abroad, and they lacked the financial stability to vouch for my ability to pay tuition abroad. Fortunately, one of my father’s friends loaned him some money so that my father’s bank account temporarily looked good enough for my application. I also felt lucky when, while carrying my application materials to the visa office, I ran into an old boyfriend beneath the subway path. He was now employed at a government agency, and kindly handed my materials over to his friend at the embassy directly.

On the day of visa interview, I arrived at the embassy at 6:00 a.m. to wait in line outside, and stayed there all day, even when the embassy closed for lunch. I finally heard my name called from the interview window. The American consul looked at my financial statement and said that I would not be able to study abroad due to my lack of financial stability, because my father did not have a good income from his job. He couldn’t see the financial stability to pay my tuition for years in the US except the savings in my father’s bank account. I earnestly replied, “I will study hard to get a scholarship, even if I might not have enough money for studying abroad right now.” He and his Korean colleagues just laughed.

After the interview, I sat in an empty waiting room until one of the officers called me up to an open door, handed me a sealed document, and closed the office altogether. Standing outside, I nervously opened the envelope, and saw a student visa with an admission stamp. It was raining heavily, I had no umbrella, and I was soon soaked through, but I did not care. My heart was filled with excitement; I would be studying in the US. I was so thrilled to think ahead that I would be on a right track to prepare for becoming a professional musician.

A few days after, I had a strange dream. I was standing alone, gazing out at the Pacific Ocean, and I looked like a small doll. Suddenly two huge elephants appeared, and walked miraculously across the ocean, until only their tails were invisible upon the horizon. When I told my mother about this dream, she told me her interpretation; the ocean signified my departure Korea, and the two elephants represented someone who would help me out during my time abroad. I had no relatives or friends in the US nor much information about where to go. I decided to head to San Francisco because I liked the name. I was single-minded about studying abroad, but as I boarded the Korean Air flight away from home, I was also insecure. The airline was owned by an American company back then, and even though most of the passengers were Korean, the Korean stewardesses were only speaking English. It was as though even to travel to the US, one needed to be able to speak English. My English was not good, and now—before I even landed in America—I was struggling with my lack of proficiency.

During a four-hour layover in Tokyo, I met Paul, an American soldier. He was about my age, and barely spoke Korean, but soon after he said hello, I found myself asking for his help on my trip to San Francisco. He said yes; he seemed a gift from God. Later, he waited more than an hour for me until I got out of Customs, and helped me take a bus to the city, where I found a motel near the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where I had recently enrolled. Paul's kindness helped me survive my first day in the US. That night, I pulled out a list of contacts friends had given me and started calling people across the US. Not realizing how big the US is, I called people in Los Angeles and Seattle who explained that, though they would like to help me, I was too far away. Fortunately, I eventually got in touch with a Korean family living in San Francisco, and they helped me find a small studio apartment.

Since the San Francisco Conservatory of Music (SFCM) was private, tuition was high, and I would need to economize. The apartment rent was too expensive to continue to pay for. I had to look for a cheaper place. The few other Korean students at the school, who were surprised to hear my story, were friendly and helpful. Some of them put me up for few days to months. Sometimes I played piano for a church's Sunday services, and a member of the congregation would put me up for months. One day I met a Seoul National

University alumna. She let me live with her for some months and helped me to find part-time jobs. I worked at a wig store run by her in the downtown Woolworth's. For almost two years, I lived like a nomad, finding work and lodgings where I could. My financial situation was dire, but I already had been poverty-stricken in childhood. This was nowhere near as bad as that, and I felt content because I was studying what I wanted. SFCM's rigorous admission process required me to start out as an interim student, taking courses like English, Musicianship, Sight Singing, Harmony, and Counterpoint. After completing these prerequisites, I could enroll as a regular student. I had wanted to study Western music from scratch in the US anyway, so I welcomed the opportunity. They did not end up being too hard for me, since I had audited many Western music classes in college at Seoul National University.

## Studying with American Composers

John Adams, the renowned minimalist-music composer, was my composition teacher at the Conservatory. I took three classes with him: 20th Century Contemporary Music, Orchestration, and Composition Seminar. I was a shy girl, and my English was so bad that it must have been very frustrating for him to be my teacher. I wish my English had been fluent enough to have a real dialogue with him at that time, because I know that I missed a precious opportunity to extend my study with him in depth. He looked at my compositions, but he did not offer much feedback. Perhaps he held back because of the cultural barrier, or perhaps he truly liked my different style. He had shown us his own minimalist scores, but compared to the Korean court music I had studied, they seemed mathematical and alienating. Although I respected his work, I was not interested in following his style. I held fast to my Korean training.

John Adams held an annual contemporary music concert with work by active local composers. San Francisco Conservatory faculty and students played new music written by Bay Area living composers. In the winter of 1980, at the end of my first semester at SFCM, he selected my chamber music composition *Yeo-woon* (여운) for the program. *Yeo-woon* (여운) means acoustic phenomena that is still hung over the ears after the sound decayed. I composed it for chamber ensemble: violin, viola, cello, bass, clarinet, flute, French horn, trumpet, percussion and soprano. It was the only student work presented at the concert, a great and unexpected surprise for me. Other works presented in the program were by my teacher John Adams, faculty at University of California Berkeley, and San Francisco State University. The audience loved John Adams' composition most. My music was obviously different from the rest, because it was Korean-style

new music on Western instruments. I treated each instrument with a series of short phrases, and there was silence at the end of each phrase, as the title of the piece implied. The music was poetic, with subtle and brief melodic gestures supported by gentle tone clusters. The soprano singer sang in Korean pronunciation. With my poor English I had a difficult time communicating the meaning of the title of the piece, and I couldn't describe the sounds I intended in the music. However, when the ensemble played my music on stage, I was emotionally overwhelmed. I knew this would help me to get my name known by local musicians, but I was not yet aware how important this opportunity would come to be later in my career.

At this concert I met Wade Greene, my ex-husband, and an avid supporter of my music. He came to me to say how much he loved my music. He also told me that his older sister was married to a Korean man who was the grandson in a royal family of the last empire known as *minbee* (민비). I was surprised by his connection to a Korean family. He told me that he knew where to hear alternative music outside the Conservatory. Together, we frequented venues for contemporary, world, and jazz music around the Bay Area. The range of live music I experienced was broader than what I was learning at the conservatory, and it made me want to explore all of them as much as possible. The most eye-opening event of all, though, was the New Music America Festival.

The New Music America festival originated in 1979, when a committee of 53 contemporary musicians from across the country gathered at the Kitchen Center in SOHO, for what was then called New Music New York. For over a decade, the festival took place annually, in different cities, and grew in size and influence. The content varied based on the host location, with local musicians usually playing a significant role in the programming, but whatever its locale, the festival focused on the variety of experimental music. It was a vital coming-together of musicians and audiences from around the country.

Wade and I first attended in San Francisco in the spring of 1981. We had a festival pass, and we attended every single concert during a week festival. Only six months after arriving in the US, I had already seen a wide range of American new music. I was extremely lucky. It was eye-opening. For a number of years, as the Festival took place in new parts of the country, over 300 contemporary musicians from across the US came to present their work at each festival. Most years, the festival lasted 7 to 10 days, during which more than 60 concerts in various music genres are held from morning to night. In Korean traditional music, a single piece evolves gradually, over the centuries, as it's played by groups of musicians. When individual composers in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century started working on new repertoire, they still turned to the past, creating new arrangements of folk tunes. The type of music I was experiencing now would not even be con-

sidered music in Korea: improvisation, minimal music, sound installation, electronic music, computer music, multimedia, conceptual music, contemporary chamber music, newly invented musical instruments, a car horn ensemble at a parking lot, a 20-minute score entirely on wineglass music, remote-controlled feedback sound on a large blimp floating above the stadium, sonic sounding of outdoor environment, and music created by visual artists. Audiences respected it, and responded to it, and so did I. I felt inspired to broaden my own sense of what music could do, and grateful to meet a number of avant-garde U.S. musicians who were happy to talk and share ideas. I saw how nationalistic it was for Koreans to claim that good music must be based on old tradition. Rather, in the US, one should pursue one's interests, wherever they might lead.

When the largest New Music America festival yet was held in Los Angeles in 1985, I decided to cover it as a journalist for a Korean music magazine, *Eumak Dong-A* (음악동아). At the time, Korean audiences knew little to nothing about Western music other than European classical music; at the university, students knew a little about German contemporary music that was imported by students of renowned composer Isang Yun (윤이상), who lived in Germany. I wanted to introduce this new, experimental music scene in the US to my colleagues back home in Korea. I went on to cover the New Music America Festival for *Eumak-Dong-A*, a magazine published by *Dong-A Daily News*, for several more years, and also conducted over forty interviews for the magazine with leading composers and musicians such as John Cage, Philip Glass, Steve Reich, and La Mont Young.

The city of Los Angeles was home to two great 20<sup>th</sup>-century composers, Arnold Schoenberg and Igor Stravinsky, and was renowned, more broadly, for its tradition of excellence in movies, theater, art, and music. Still, it was striking to see how fully L.A. threw its support behind the New Music America Festival. Twenty-five external institutions, including the LA Philharmonic, California Institute of Arts, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibition, Inc (LACE), and the Japanese Cultural Center collaborated in the festival, which featured the work of 85 composers, played by more than 300 musicians. Composer Carl Stone was a director. The opening party, a masquerade ball, took place at City Hall, and was crowded with guests, some of whom had chosen to come in costume. The party was decorated with waving balloons in the sky. Over the next 11 days, the festival more or less took over L.A.'s performing centers, galleries, small theaters, museums, and parks. KUSC-FM, a radio station within the University of Southern California, broadcast every single performance, and a local TV station, KCET-TV, joined the effort by broadcasting films about great American artists such as Philip Glass, John Cage, Meredith Monk, and Robert Ashley. The new-music scene seemed very vital then in L.A.

The festival engaged the public with a dozen free, unique installations throughout downtown L.A. that used sound systems, electronics, visuals, and sculptures to create comprehensive artistic experiences. For instance, a microphone inside the garden of the Japanese Cultural Center amplified whatever was happening nearby, usually a sound of continuous calm that reminded audiences how very serene the garden was. A series of speakers in the outdoor concert hall in MacArthur Park, in front of the Park Plaza Hotel, played “poems in diverse languages,” which included the diverse sounds of woods, winds, birds, cars, and non-speaking human voices. It resonated with my belief that any sound can be called music.

There were at least three performances every day, and even the strangest was often sold out. Renowned electronic/computer music composer Morton Subotnick performed an orchestra work, and the Daniel Lentz Ensemble performed on wine glasses with live multi-tracking. Lentz presented the four vocalists sitting around a table with wine glasses. During the performance, the vocalists facing one another, poured a bottle of wine in their glasses when they adjusted keys, drank the wine when they changed pitch, and played the glasses by circling around the edge of the glass top with a fingertip to produce a long sustained pitches, and sometimes hit the glass with a light stick. At the end of the performance, some of them seemed drunk and blew the empty bottles. Later, the piece was featured in a famous TV show, *Meet the Composer*.

At the Cal Arts Modular Theatre, I watched a “prepared piano” performance. About half a century before, John Cage had begun placing various objects on the strings of the piano to change its capacities; now, the Stephen Scoot Boot Piano Ensemble played “bowed piano,” rubbing the piano strings with nylon fishing lines. Stephen and the nine other members of the group gathered around a single grand piano, with intense focus, and the smooth, droning sounds they produced created a beautiful harmony.

In another piece, Gordon Monahan swung three speakers from ropes, each at a different velocity. The performance seemed dangerous—what if the speakers went flying above the audience?—but the audience enjoyed it, and the different sounds produced by the speakers crated a song in themselves. The sine wave fed in the speaker was whirring like wind, when he turned them. The circling motion of speakers as he whirred them quickly created a fearful tornado-like sound around the concert space. And in another remaking of tradition, interdisciplinary composer/performers Carla Bley, Philip Glass, and Paul Dresher performed a “contemporary micro opera” in which the composer was also a performer, or singer. Unlikely the traditional opera, the voice was not predominant in the performance, and the instrumentation was minimal, consisting of electric guitar, synthesizer, keyboard, and computer/electronics. Experiencing that all these

unusual music performances were welcomed by the enthusiastic audience, I got to believe in experimental music in America and I became very liberal myself for creating music.

During the second week of programming, the festival shifted some 40 miles away to Valencia, at the California Institute of the Arts, to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its contemporary music. I was particularly excited by the work that David Rosenboom and Lou Harrison, who were then my teachers in the master's program I had enrolled in at Mills, performed. Rosenboom's *Zones of Influence* for percussion and computer/electronics, performed by William Winant, introduced new virtuoso performance techniques along with real-time algorithmic composition and advanced interactive linking of percussion instruments with software. David Rosenboom was one of the pioneers using Hierarchical Music Specific Language (HMSL); he had influenced me to study electronic music at Mills. (Later years I co-designed an electric *komungo*). I took a break from being a journalist in the audience to play in the Bay Area New Gamelan with Lou Harrison and Jody Diamond. Lou Harrison and Bill Colvig built the new American Gamelan, a reimagining of the Indonesian form, made of bronze and iron, influenced by Javanese *gamelan*. I rehearsed in the ensemble at Mills for this performance, and we played both Javanese and new music composed for the *gamelan* ensemble in the program. I played *bonang* and *peking* in the ensemble with Lou Harrison and Jody Diamond.

Later, we left the auditoriums and headed to the school parking lot, where 10 parked cars had been transformed into musical instruments. This was a performance of Robert Suderberg's *Freeway Concerto* for performers and automobiles. While some musicians played percussion and trombones on the backs of trucks, others sat in the drivers' seats in the cars, rhythmically honking the horns and switching the headlights off and on. The *Freeway Concerto*, as it came to be known, was a hilarious piece of performance art, but its novel approaches also gave the large and delighted audience a lot to think about.

Throughout the festival, I loved the enthusiasm of musicians and audiences, the dynamism of their interactions, and the depth and range of discussions that took place around the performances. I experienced so many unusual and liberal ideas that make music in America. How could they possibly be so free to do whatever they wanted and still call themselves composers? Nobody criticized them; in fact, every performance I saw was cheered by the audience. It was a marked contrast with my experiences with *Jongmyo* Confucian shrine ritual music and the 45-minutes long *Young-san-hoe-sang* orchestra suite. At the same time, I saw that the strict dichotomy between Western classical music and Korean traditional music in Korea was meaningless. Experimental American composers were not wedded to a European classical music tradition, and

had already turned to world music for inspiration. I had a sense that the types of traditional music I had trained in were not relics of the past, as the Korean university system had seemed to suggest, but could instead have a real future within the experimental scene.

Most of the professional musicians I met in the US were extremely open-minded. They welcomed anyone who was interested in experimental music and did not seem to care about my racial or musical training background. In fact, anybody could create music without musical training, as long as they had original ideas. I felt comfortable around them, like I belonged with them, but I still wanted to finish my master's degree, which I thought would allow me to finally call myself a "composer."

I thought about all that as I prepared to interview Isang Yun, a renowned Korean composer, for *Eumak Dong-A*, when he was the featured composer at the annual Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music in Santa Cruz. I listened to his compositions for a week before we talked. Yun had studied music in Japan during the Japanese occupation, and left Korea in the 1950s to work and study in Europe, eventually settling in Germany. He then was kidnapped by South Korean Secret Service from West Berlin due to alleged acts of espionage in 1967. Yun was released, returning to West Berlin in 1971. Later he began participating in the call for the democratization of South Korea and the reunification of the divided country. The Korean government had censored his music, considering him a political "sinner," and he told me that he felt deeply hurt.

Yun's approach was serious and philosophical, based on both Asian and German thinking. He explained that his sound principle originates from Taoism's "middle balance" and Yin-Yang theory. He described his music beginning in subtle quietness, which symbolizes the eternal continuation of sounds, fading away through its lifecycle, and lasting forever as quietness itself. Compared to the American experimental music I had been following, his music was authoritative and somewhat intimidating. His music is highly respected in Europe, but in the US such music is overlooked by the American liberal mind.

He was the only famous composer professors and students talked about at Seoul National University. If I were in Korea, I probably would not even have gotten to see him so intimately. In Santa Cruz, California, I spent time with him every day for a week as a journalist and musician. It was certainly my honor to interview Yun when he was the featured composer at the festival. Although I appreciated all his compositions performed during the festival, by then I had already been inspired by American new music, which influenced my choice to be freer than the serious German style of Yun's work.

In the fall of 1981, after two semesters, I could no longer afford the expensive tuition at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and transferred to

the San Francisco Music and Art Institute. Though the school was primarily known for being relatively cheap and thus for attracting foreign students, I was fortunate to meet an excellent teacher there, Gable. He had taken a position as an interim professor at SFMAI after receiving his Ph. D in composition (he is now a composition professor at Texas Christian University). Understanding my musical background, he gave me a semester-long assignment to identify the differences between Korean traditional music and Western music and put them into a chart. This was a really valuable project, for it helped me think hard about the uniqueness of Korean music, which I would build on in the years to come, to create my own method of composition, “Living Tones.”

Because of my growing interest in contemporary experimental music, I soon transferred again in 1983, to Mills College, where I finished my MFA in Recording Media and Electronic Music. Over the decades, Mills College, with its astoundingly beautiful campus, had played host to artistic masters like John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Robert Ashley, and Steve Reich. For me, the primary attraction was that Lou Harrison and Terry Riley were on the faculty. Both seemed quite interested in Asian traditional music, and I expected to learn a lot from them.

Ever since the composer Henry Cowell introduced Asian music to the American music scene in California, in the 1950s, a number of American composers had followed his interests. Lou Harrison, as my teacher in Seoul had proudly pointed out, studied Korean traditional music at the National Classical Music Institute, and Terry Riley was famous for applying his knowledge of Indian traditional music to his compositions. But by the 1980s, when I lived in San Francisco, large numbers of Asian immigrants had brought their cultures to America, and some were teaching and performing as well. Traditionally trained Korean musicians like me were rare, but the Bay Area boasted an Indian music school established by Ali Akbar Khan; a Filipino Kulintang Ensemble, a Japanese Taiko Drum Ensemble, and a Chinese Beijing Opera Group. Indonesian Gamelan Ensemble had become popular, and Asian instruments like the *shakuhachi* and *koto*, from Japan, and the *pipa* and *zheng*, from China, had been included in works by prominent US musicians. Even as I was studying with American musicians in my degree program, I was learning quite a bit from the wider Asian American musical community. I was lucky to be living in San Francisco when all these immigrants were tirelessly making musical contributions to the community and to the USA at large; and I was pleased that American audiences were not just open-minded, but legitimately interested in these contributions. I saw my Korean musical training could be another contribution to the community. Therefore, I felt I was very welcomed here in San Francisco Bay Area.

While I was at Mills, I learned Indian *raga* from Pandit Pran Nath, who

was Terry Riley's teacher. I studied with both during my graduate studies. The *raga* singing we did in class was a very ancient practice, and Pran Nath was a master of it. His voice was very old but very spiritual. I did not understand the meaning of the song we were singing, but it certainly calmed me down inside. I recalled my past practicing *gagok* singing in Korea. *Raga* and *gagok* singing are totally different styles; however, both helped to cultivate the mind.

I also took *bansuri* (transverse bamboo flute) private lessons at home from G. S. Sachdev for a year. Sachdev told me many times that I was wasting my time learning *bansuri*, and that I should stick with my *komungo*. He thought it better to continue to improve my *komungo* instead of learning a new instrument. But I wanted to learn about Indian music actively, by playing it, not passively, by listening. I found it similar to Korean music. The songs begin with the *bansuri* playing a calm, slow rhythm, *alap*, similar to *jinyangjo* (진양조) in Korean *sanjo*. The *tabla* joins in and the rhythm speeds up, eventually hitting its peak, akin to the *janggo jangdan* (장고 장단), the main structure of the *sanjo*. Both forms possess a deep, philosophical aspect, as performers try to instill their souls in each note. In Korean music, this happens in *sigimse*, but in *raga* it happens in *shrutis*, which are less dramatic. This was an amazing discovery, since I knew very little about Indian music before. I knew that one of the ancient Korean Buddhism monk chants was imported from India. In fact, during the Silla Dynasty an Indian princess lived in a palace; there must have been musical exchanges between India and Korea during that period. Ethnomusicologist Dr. Song Bang Song (송방송) wrote a thesis of comparison between *sanjo* and *raga*. Now I understood his argument. Later years I got to research more about Indian music and collaborated with Indian artists in my creative works.

At Mills, I also studied *gamelan* with Jody Diamond and played in Lou Harrison's American Gamelan. Harrison, in particular, helped remake Indonesian *gamelan* into an American form. Today, *gamelan* music is so popular that there are over 1,000 *gamelan* groups across the US, in a range of styles that include Javanese and Balinese. The American enthusiasm for *gamelan* makes sense. As a percussion instrument, it is easier to learn than other Asian melody instruments, but the variety of its rhythmic structures create elaborate and energetic melodies. There is variety in playing, too, because each player performs on different instruments within a single performance. Players are peacefully immersed not just in the tunes, but in the ensemble itself, a kind of supportive family, where everyone knows everyone else's part. I enjoyed playing *gamelan*. The *gamelan* music is much more straightforward compared to Korean melody. The rhythmic interlocking was particularly intriguing. Jody Diamond directed the ensemble most of time, but once in a while we got to play with Lou Harrison and his partner Bill Colvig. It was so special to spend time with the

famous composer Lou Harrison. My high school teacher used to talk about him so many times in class that he came to Korea to study traditional music, and composed music for the Korean instrument, *piri*. During the Gamelan Ensemble practice, I never mentioned Korean music to him, because it was so obvious that he fell in love with *gamelan*. Lou and Bill's presence in the ensemble always made the rest of us look more professional than usual. We practiced Javanese gamelan pieces, but most of the music we practiced was newly composed by American living composers. We were also encouraged to compose a piece for the ensemble to play.

My enthusiasm about learning about Asian music continued. For my own personal interest, I visited the Chinese Cultural Center in San Francisco Chinatown. I went there hoping to study *qin*, because the scholars said *qin* and *komungo* were related. I was curious about how it was similar to Korean *komungo*. It turned out that the *qin* teacher someone recommended to me had left, but I was introduced to an *erhu* teacher who also played *qin*. I bought his instrument and took lessons for a year. While the *qin*, like the *komungo*, was often played by scholars, I learned that its construction is quite different. The seven-stringed board zither doesn't have any frets, whereas my *komungo* has six strings and 16 frets. Both instruments require the use of the thumb on the left hand, but otherwise they have little in common.

Meanwhile, I continued attending a variety of live new-music performances, including every one of the Kronos Quartet's monthly concerts in San Francisco. I was so taken with their talent, and so influenced by their capacious approach to new music, that I decided to compose a piece for string quartet for my final project at Mills. I titled it *Linking*, to evoke the connection between Korea and America. During the first session of my composition class, I showed Lou Harrison my score, and asked for his opinion on my *Linking* (이음새). He told me that Korean music sounded difficult to him, and he liked Indonesian *gamelan* a lot. I sensed that unless I composed for the *gamelan* ensemble, I wouldn't get to learn much from him. I had enjoyed playing *gamelan*, but I knew that I was not going to compose *gamelan* music.

So, I brought *Linking* to Terry Riley. He told me that he did not write down music but created it by improvising. I understood that he wouldn't advise me about my composition. I decided to take his class instead. He taught Just Intonation, which is known as pure intonation, tuning of intervals as whole number ratios 3:2 or 4:3 of frequencies. Piano tuning is not just intonation. One full class was devoted to listening how the intervals on piano are unnatural and not pure. Back in Korea I learned Korean tuning system *samboon-sonik-bop* (삼분손입법, 12 notes produced based on ratios 3:2 and 4:3), which is written in the 15<sup>th</sup>-century Korean court music treatises *Ak-hak-gwe-beom* (악학궤범). I

had been playing *komungo*, and my ear got accustomed to the natural tuning of my *komungo* strings. When I played *komungo* in Korean *jeong-ak* orchestra, I had to match my *komungo* pitches and intervals to bamboo flutes. In my experience, the tuning had never been a fixed system; constant tweaking the pitches by ear was necessary. It also depended on which instrument I played. I never bothered to tune my *komungo* in just intonation. I imagined that the two famous composers would be my mentors. However, I realized that my work had nothing to do with their interests, so I was right about taking their classes to receive what they offered. Meanwhile, I had opportunities to hear their masterful works at various public concerts during my Mills period. While I appreciated these men's honest responses, I was also frustrated, and wondered who could advise me on my final project.

I finally went to the dean, David Rosenboom, to discuss the issue. He told me that he was sorry I'd been unable to find the right teacher. He encouraged me by saying that Mills College had a strong program for electronic computer music, and that I might find something useful there for my composition study. His comment made a lot of sense to me. I decided to learn about electronic computer music while pursuing composition by myself. Larry Polansky, who taught Electronic Music, advised me as I worked on a new project, *Su-wol-yong-yul*, for computer-generated sound. The title, from a 15<sup>th</sup> century song, means that the basic note (first note of the song) in a scale is chosen for the pitch corresponding to the month of performance in 12 months (12 notes). I designed various graphic symbols (gestures) of Korean tonal fluctuation to add the flavor in the song; and I generated the sound of each symbol one by one, using Hierarchical Music Specific Language (HLSM) by drawing the gestures with a computer mouse. HLSM was a pioneering computer music program at the time. I recorded the computer-generated sounds of the new song and asked Chris Brown to perform harpsichord with the pre-recorded tape. But I also finished *Linking* on my own and presented it at my senior recital concert along with my *Su-wol-yong-yul* (수월용율). Finally, *Su-wol-yong-yul*, computer-generated Living Tones Sounds using HMSL language, was premiered with harpsichord (Chris Brown) and cello.

For the concert, I also composed *X<sub>5</sub> for Solo Flute* (1985), a prerecorded tape and live performance of alto and soprano flutes and piccolo. The composition was written for five parts, but four parts were prerecorded by the soloist who would play one more part in live while playing back the prerecorded tape. At that time, tape recording music was a new trend in the electronic music field. The piece was premiered by Ann LaBerge for the Contemporary Music with Korean Influence program at Mills College, CA (February 22, 1985). In the same year I composed *X<sub>4</sub> for Solo Violin* for Mary Oliver, which was premiered at New

Performance Gallery, San Francisco, CA (September 18, 1985), and performed again at New Langton Arts, San Francisco (November 16, 1985). This piece quickly evolved into *Kee Maek* that I premiered in 1986.

Additional Performances of X<sub>5</sub> for Solo Flute by Barbara Held at the Experimental Intermedia Foundation, New York (April 22, 1986); The Bowery Ensemble, New York (October 7, 1986); and Paul Taub at Cornish College and Western Washington University, Seattle, WA (February 1-3, 1997).

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