

KOREAN CLASSICAL MUSIC AND DANCE

Art Form: Music and Dance
Style: Traditional
Culture: Korean

MEET THE ARTIST:

As a child, *Don Kim*, Director of the **Korean Classical Music and Dance Company**, had a vision of dancing and playing the traditional music of his heritage. He fulfilled his dream by focusing his energy, taking the opportunities that came to him, and working hard. Born in Seoul, Korea, he began his formal studies at the age of 12 and was eventually invited to join a government-sponsored troupe that performed the traditional music and dance of the Korean culture. During their world tour in 1970, Don visited the United States and made a decision to make it his new home. He continued his studies of the music, dance and culture of Korea at UCLA, where he now teaches. His extensive training and experience gave him the foundation to establish the Korean Classical Music and Dance Company and his own school in 1973. The company is dedicated to the preservation of the culture and heritage of Korea.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

Featuring folk and classical forms, this exquisite performance delights the senses. Korean music might sound strange at first because it is based on a 12-tone scale, which is different from our familiar Western scale structure (*diatonic*). The instruments are classified according to the eight basic materials from which they are made - wood, stone, metal, silk, bamboo, gourd, clay and skin. This classification is based on the Confucian idea that the world will be at peace when these substances are united harmoniously. The court dances are composed of slow, abstract movement, while the folk dances are faster and bolder. The repertoire includes: "*Hwa Kwan Moo*," the Flower Crown Dance, featuring scarves as extensions of the dancers' arms; "*Chang-Go Chum*," a dance performed with the *chang-go* (hourglass drum) slung over the dancer's shoulder; and "*Buk Chum*," (Drum Dance), in which the dancers perform difficult acrobatic movements as they play barrel drums hung from frames. The program concludes with "*Buchae Chum*," the elegant Fan



PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

Since the formation of their early kingdom in 1392, the people of Korea called their country "*Choson*," meaning "land of the morning calm." In the mid-19th century, however, another name came into use - Korea. The new term was a reference to the Koryo Dynasty (935-1392). Korea (Koryo) means "land of high mountains and sparkling springs," and became the official name of the country following World War II. At that point (1945), Korea was liberated from 35 years of Japanese rule and was partitioned into northern (Soviet control) and southern (U.S. control) sectors to facilitate the Japanese surrender. In 1948 the southern section formed the Republic of Korea and became democratic. Following the Korean War of 1950-53, the demarcation line remained approximately the same.

Music in Korea today is divided into two categories: traditional, which includes both court and folk, and music of the West. When Korea's last royal dynasty was abolished in 1910, traditional musical compositions and dances of the court became obsolete. However, the royal orchestra was kept together and was able to preserve the old traditions. As time passed, increasing economic growth and political independence have resulted in a fresh spirit of Korean national pride and renewed interest in the ancient culture.

Korean music, like Chinese, is based on a 12-tone scale. However, the Korean musician is free to choose five tones from these 12 to form a pentatonic scale. This performance features several instruments. The *kaya-gum* is a long wooden zither with 12 silk strings stretched over 12 movable bridges on a soundboard. The *chang-go*, a drum with two heads and a lacquered body tapering to a slender waist in between, has two

contrasting timbres - one a soft and low tone, and the other a sharp, hard sound. The *tanso*, an original Korean pipe instrument played vertically, has five finger holes, four on the front and one on the back.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How do the instruments presented by the Korean Classical Music and Dance Company compare with the instruments you are accustomed to hearing?
- The stringed instrument, played by Don Kim in the show, is called the *kaya-gum*. Name several other stringed instruments that you know. How are they similar? How do they differ from the *kaya-gum*?
- All Korean dance places emphasis upon movements of the shoulders, arms and head. What other types of dance movements have you seen that focus on these parts of the body?
- In the Korean vocal styling, the voice often slides from one note to another. Which contemporary Western styles use similar techniques? (Blues, gospel, country, etc.)
- Which dance did you find the most interesting? Name several reasons why you found it so.

FRAMEWORK FOCUS - HISTORY/SOC STUDIES:

In the dance "*Buchae Chum*," the dancers strive to blend their bodies with the fans to create colorful, symmetrical figures in space. They emphasize natural forms such as butterflies, flowers, bird wings and waves. The earliest known use of a fan in Korea was in 918 A.D. This fan, made of peacock feathers, was styled after the fans in daily use, which were made from banana leaves and/or feathers. In ancient Korea, the style, color, size, and ornamentation of a person's fan indicated his or her rank and status in life. Grooms always carried blue fans; brides, embroidered fans; and mourners, white fans. Men frequently used fans to conceal their identities.

Go to the library and research fans, then write a paragraph or short paper about the different uses and functions of fans. Also, identify how other countries traditionally use symbols, props, colors or ornamentation to distinguish different roles, rank or status. Make comparisons between the way fans are used and how other forms of identification are used, (e.g. brides carry bouquets in the U.S. rather than embroidered fans).

- Legend:
- 🌀 Artistic perception
 - ❖ Creative expression
 - ▶ Historical & cultural context
 - ⇒ Aesthetic valuing
 - * Connections, Relations, Applications

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- ❖ Divide into cooperative learning groups. Assign each group a specific dance that was performed. Ask each group member to suggest one word to describe the dance. Then ask each group to jointly create a short paragraph about the dance using all of the contributed words.
- ⇒ Read "About the Performance" to find out how Korean instruments are categorized. Then discuss how instruments are also categorized by how the sound is produced: **aerophones**- instruments that produce sound by a vibrating column of air, e.g. flute; **idiophones** - simple, solid instruments that produce sound by being struck, scraped, or shaken, e.g. xylophone; **membranophones** - instruments that produce sound by striking or rubbing a skin or membrane stretched across a resonating air chamber, e.g. drum; **chordophones** - instruments that create sound by striking, rubbing, or plucking a taut string or chord, e.g. guitar, violin; **electrophones**- instruments that generate sound from electricity, e.g. electric keyboard. Discuss the two systems and the strengths and weaknesses of each.
- ▶ Fans are traditional accessories and props in many Asian countries. After researching fans from countries such as Korea, Japan and China, design a fan using your choice of color, patterns, scenes, natural forms, and style. You can draw within the outlined shape of a fan, or actually make an accordion fan. If you wish, experiment with ways to move with your fan.



BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Hyon, Peter, Editor. Korean Children's Stories and Songs. Hollym International, New York, NY. 1996
- Lee, Hye-gu. An Introduction to Korean Music and Dance. Korean Cultural Service 5505 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90036. (323) 936-7141.
- Artsource®: The Center's Study Guide to the Performing Arts. Unit on Korean Classical Music and Dance Company. Contains background information on the company, traditions, music and dance, sample lessons, video and audio. Call (213) 202-2277.