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ON THE INTERACTION OF MUSICAL CULTURES IN THE MUSICAL LIFE OF UZBEKISTAN (A CASE STUDY OF THE KOREAN ETHNIC GROUP)

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Abstract

This article examines the work of contemporary Uzbek composers in the context of addressing the song and folklore heritage of the Korean diaspora in Uzbekistan. The study of the interaction of Uzbek-Korean cultures is analyzed from the point of view of historical factors of the development and assimilation of Korean culture in Uzbekistan, as well as by the method of musical analysis of the piano rhapsody “Arirang” on Korean themes by Akmal Safarov. The above study allows us to identify complex specific, typological and similar features of the synthesis of the two cultures as a formative source of rapprochement and strengthening the spiritual and friendly ties of the multinational people of Uzbekistan.

Keywords: *cultural interaction, cultural interpenetration, Korean folklore, synthesis, symbiosis, arirang, musical instruments*

The interaction between Uzbek and Korean cultures is one of the underexplored subjects in Turkic musicology, intrinsically linked with the formation of national musical identities. The dialectic of this interaction is reflected in the gradual expansion of mutual influence and the increasing organic synthesis of the two “worlds.”

It is well known that the history of strong friendship between the Uzbek and Korean peoples began nearly 90 years ago, dating back to the fateful year of 1937, when Korean settlers were forcibly relocated to Central Asia. The people of Uzbekistan, known for their heartfelt generosity, warmly welcomed the displaced Koreans, offering shelter and

support despite the hardships of the time – sharing even their last piece of bread. Thanks to their diligence, resilience, and strong will, as well as the similarities in mentality and values between the two peoples, Koreans found a second homeland on Uzbek soil.

Historically, Korean culture has become an inseparable part of the multicultural society of Uzbekistan. Today, Uzbekistan is home to the largest Korean diaspora in Central Asia, making a significant contribution to the region’s cultural development. Moreover, the Korean population, like all ethnic minorities in Uzbekistan, enjoys full support and conditions for the revival, preservation, promotion, and development of their

national culture, language, traditions, and customs. Dozens of Korean cultural centers operate across the country, serving as platforms where cultural figures and artists realize their potential. These centers regularly host international events, concerts, festivals, conferences, creative evenings, and cultural exchanges, becoming hubs of attraction and mutual enrichment for both Koreans and Uzbeks. Social and historical processes in public life have also found their reflection in the musical creativity of Uzbekistan. The evolution of Korean-Uzbek folk music traditions and the strengthening of diplomatic and cultural exchanges between Uzbekistan and the Republic of Korea have deeply influenced the artistic orientation of modern Uzbek composers. Throughout the prolonged historical assimilation of Korean culture in Uzbekistan, the works of early Korean composers have sparked scholarly interest. These include symphonies and Korean songs by Won Do Ik, and pieces by Pak Yong Din such as a Korean Suite for Uzbek folk instrument orchestra, field recordings of Korean folk melodies from Uzbek kolkhozes, and original Korean songs written in both Korean and Uzbek contexts – such as “Song about Chirchik,” “Syr Darya,” “Harvest Song,” “Rice Collector,” “Girl Picking Cotton,” “The Joyful Courier,” “Youth,” and others. In observing the work of contemporary Uzbek composers, it becomes evident that their growing fascination with Korean folk melodies has led many to adopt Korean themes as the foundation for new compositions. These include *Two Poems on Korean Themes*, the *Fourth Symphony* by Khabibulla Rakhimov, *Five Pieces for Chamber Orchestra on Korean Folk Melodies*, the *Fourth Piano Concerto* by Rustam Abdullaev, and a ballet titled *Farhad and Sonnyeo*, co-created by choreographer Margarita Khan and composer Khabibulla Rakhimov, inspired by an ancient Korean legend of the Seven Fairies. Gentle and refined in lyrical expression, tender in its melodic plasticity, and unhurried in its vocal refrains, the well-known Korean folk song “Arirang” represents a “foundational model” of the Korean musical tradition worldwide. Its initial, repeatedly echoed three-note motif (re–mi–re–mi–sol) is familiar even to many Uzbeks. The melody of “Arirang” is so simple yet distinctive that

it has gradually permeated the cultural consciousness of Uzbek society. Uzbek composers such as Rustam Abdullaev (*Three Miniatures on Korean Themes for String Quartet*) and Khabibulla Rakhimov (*Fantasy for Uzbek Folk Instrument Orchestra – “Arirang”* and *Arirang Jozibalari*) have incorporated the theme into their works. One of the most compelling examples in the genre of piano rhapsody is *Rhapsody “Arirang” on Korean Themes* by new-generation composer Akmal Safarov on Korean folk melodies. The deepening friendship between the peoples of Uzbekistan and Korea, and the strengthening of international relations between the two countries, inspired the composer to study Korean musical culture – its songs, customs, traditions, cuisine – and ultimately to create musical compositions based on Korean folk melodies.

For the thematic foundation of his rhapsody, A. Safarov turned to Korean folklore, specifically the famous songs “Arirang,” “Kkachi Seollal,” and “Doraji Taryeong.” Given the fact that “Arirang” has countless interpretive variants, the composer selected the most well-known and unifying version – familiar to ethnic Koreans worldwide, including the Korean minority in Uzbekistan. He thus titled his new composition *Rhapsody “Arirang” on Korean Themes*.

Due to the epic nature of the rhapsody genre, which resists rigid structural constraints, the composition unfolds in a single crescendo-like movement with three main sections and a dynamic reprise. Each section corresponds to one of the original folk melodies. The thematic development of each melody, along with their sequential progression, forms the structure A–B–C–A1. The overall presentation of themes resembles a set of variations. The rhapsody adheres to classical compositional principles, featuring structured meter, tonality, and a reliance on diatonic, pentatonic, and anhemitonic scales – highlighting the modal distinctiveness of Korean melody.

The piece begins with a harmonized version of the main “Arirang” theme, presented in a slow, measured tempo that sets the tone for an ongoing process of motivic development. The chordal texture lends the introduction a majestic and poetic quality.

Throughout the rhapsody, broken chords, trills, ascending coloristic passages, and rhythmic fragmentation imitate the timbral quality of the Korean traditional zither-like instrument *gayageum*, which shares similarities in sound with the Uzbek *qanun*. Rather than introducing a traditional dance section, the composer incorporates two thematically new yet intonationally related folk songs into the middle section.

The first, “Kkachi Seollal” (까치 설날), is a festive calendar-ritual song traditionally performed during Lunar New Year celebrations in Korea. It symbolizes the arrival of spring and the hope for prosperity. The word “kkachi” means “magpie” in Korean and is considered a harbinger of good news. According to legend, if a magpie appears before the New Year, it brings happiness and luck. The song itself is childlike in joy and innocence, leading into a livelier tempo.

The second, “Doraji Taryeong” (도라지 타령), is a traditional Korean folk song dedicated to the doraji flower (Korean bellflower root), symbolizing beauty and resilience. The lyrics

often evoke nostalgia and portray the simple yet rich life of the Korean people. This song is a vital part of the Korean cultural heritage and is frequently performed at public events.

The musical intensification of “Doraji Taryeong” leads to the climax of the entire rhapsody – a dynamic reprise. The once calm and poetic “Arirang” theme swells into a vibrant rhythmic progression, culminating in an emotionally charged and dramatic conclusion. This musical transformation symbolizes the spiritual journey of overcoming adversity and reaching the symbolic peak of the “Arirang” mountain – a sacred metaphor for happiness, freedom, and prosperity.

Thus, this work exemplifies how contemporary piano music in Uzbekistan, through the expanding interaction with world cultures, continually evolves in style and expressive depth. Most importantly, the synthesis of two distinct traditions within this composition showcases the unique national characteristics of both Korean and Uzbek cultures – interwoven harmoniously in an artistic dialogue of the Eastern world.

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