

Sounds of Korea: Tradition and Continuation

Presented by the Department of Korean Traditional Music
College of Music, Hanyang University, Seoul, Korea

Abstract

Presented by the Department of Korean Traditional Music at Hanyang University, *Sounds of Korea: Tradition and Continuation* surveys the principal genres of Gugak, as Korean traditional music is known in Korea, through performance and musicological commentary. Rather than a general introduction, the program is organized around a specific question: what makes a music traditional, when works that sound equally inherited have reached their present form by such different routes? It is arranged accordingly, less as a chronology than as a set of distinct relationships to the past.

Haegeum *sanjo* in the school of Ji Young-hee (1909–1980) represents transmission through lineage (*yupa*). *Sanjo* emerged in the late nineteenth century as an extended solo form moving through a sequence of increasingly fast rhythmic cycles (*jangdan*), and it is inherited not as a fixed text but as a named line of interpretation. The passage from *Simcheongga*, one of the five surviving *pansori* narratives, belongs to the same order of transmission, a single vocalist and drummer sustaining an entire dramatic world. *Yeombul Pungnyu* marks a second route: a suite of the folk *daepungnyu* repertoire assembled and notated by Ji Young-hee himself, whose title preserves a Buddhist genealogy that the music no longer audibly carries.

Two further works are recent creations in an inherited idiom. Seo Yong-seok formed his piri *sanjo* in 1984 from Honam *sinawi* melody, extending to the piri a genre only lately established on that instrument, while *Samdo Samulnori* descends from a quartet first staged in 1978, drawing its material from three regional percussion traditions (*garak*) yet belonging wholly to the concert hall. *Neoul Nori* (“Waves at Play”), written in 2025 by Soonjung Suh (b. 1971) for 18-string gayageum, cello, and percussion, makes that condition explicit, pairing a reformed instrument with Western ones.

Framed by remarks from Dean Kyung-Young Chung, an introduction to the Department by Dr. Soonjung Suh, and musicological commentary by Dr. Hee Seng Kye, the program presents Korean traditional music not as a preserved inheritance but as a living practice continually reconstituted in performance.

Program

Welcome and Introduction

Dr. Kyung-Young Chung, Professor and Dean, College of Music
(*Opening remarks.*)

Dr. Soonjung Suh, Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Korean Traditional Music
(*Brief introduction to Korean traditional music and to the Department.*)

Dr. Hee Seng Kye, Associate Professor and Director, Music Research Center
(*Musicological remarks on the program.*)

1. Haegeum Sanjo in the Style of Ji Young-hee

Sanjo is an extended solo instrumental genre that unfolds through a succession of increasingly fast rhythmic cycles (*jangdan*), accompanied throughout by a single drummer. This performance follows the school of the haegeum master Ji Young-hee (1909–1980). For haegeum (two-stringed bowed fiddle), accompanied by janggu (hourglass drum).

A Hyung Kim, *haegeum*
Jeong Jun Choi, *janggu*

2. ‘Jibirago’ (“Coming Home to an Empty House”) from *Simcheongga*

A passage from the pansori narrative *The Song of Sim Cheong*, sung as Sim Cheong’s blind father returns from his wife’s burial to a silent kitchen and an empty room and gives way to grief, until a neighbor brings his infant daughter home to him. Pansori is a solo narrative singing tradition in which one vocalist (*sori*) is accompanied by one drummer on the *soribuk* (barrel drum used for pansori accompaniment).

Ye Ryeong Jo, *sori* (voice)
Min Seong Jo, *soribuk*

3. Piri Sanjo in the Style of Seo Yong-seok

Solo sanjo for piri (double-reed bamboo oboe), accompanied by janggu. Seo Yong-seok (b. 1940) formed this sanjo in 1984 on the basis of Honam *sinawi* melody, one of a small number of piri sanjo lines established in the later twentieth century.

Sung Bin Park, *piri*

Jae Ha Woo, *janggu*

4. Yeombul Pungnyu

A suite from the folk *daepungnyu* repertoire, wind-led chamber music assembled and notated by Ji Young-hee from the Gyeonggi tradition and performed as independent instrumental music rather than as dance accompaniment. Its title points to Buddhist invocation chant (*yeombul*), though the link is one of nomenclature rather than of surviving melodic derivation.

Shin Pyo Kim, *daegeum* (transverse bamboo flute)

Song Eon Lim, *piri*

Li Won Park, *haegeum*

Sun Jin Lim, *percussion*

Ho Seung Kang, *percussion*

5. ‘Neoul Nori’ (“Waves at Play”) for 18-String Gayageum, Cello, and Percussion

Composed in 2025 by Soonjung Suh (b. 1971), pairing the 18-string gayageum (plucked zither, an expanded form of the traditional twelve-string instrument developed in the later twentieth century) with Western cello and percussion.

Hyeon Ji Jeong, *18-string gayageum*

Ui Hyeon Cho, *cello*

Ik Hyun Lee, *percussion*

6. Samdo Samulnori (Samulnori in Three Regional Styles)

Samulnori is a staged quartet genre for four percussion instruments, first presented in 1978 and derived from outdoor pungmul traditions. This work draws together rhythmic patterns (*garak*) from three regional percussion repertoires: Gyeonggi–Chungcheong, Honam, and Yeongnam.

Jeong Jun Choi, *kkwaengwari* (small gong)

Jae Ha Woo, *janggu*

Sun Jin Lim, *buk* (barrel drum)

Ho Seung Kang, *jing* (large gong)

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List of performers

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