

## **Cold War and the Divergence of Musical Aesthetics and Styles in Korea**

한국의 음악 냉전: 미학 및 스타일의 분화

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This article contributes to musicology and inter-Korean scholarship within the global Korean Studies community. During the Cold War, a vast array of cultural resources, from propaganda posters and radio broadcasts to jazz bands, symphony orchestras, and ballet troupes, was mobilized to propagate the competing ideologies of the East and West. Frances Saunders (2000) termed this the “Cultural Cold War,” wherein propaganda permeated the arts, including music. The global musical landscape was starkly divided. The Western world favored experimental soundworlds, including the improvisational freedom of jazz and the avant-garde movements epitomized by the emancipation of dissonance that grew from the serialism of Schoenberg. In contrast, the Soviet bloc embraced the aesthetic of socialist realism, prioritizing nationalistic tonal music. This paper interrogates the musical divergence of the two Koreas following their establishment in the context of the broader international Cultural Cold War. After liberation and the subsequent national division, both Koreas aimed to forge independent, robust national identities, but their approaches diverged sharply. The Republic of Korea (South Korea) sought to protect its musical heritage through legislation, whereas the Democratic Republic of Korea (North Korea), influenced by Soviet and Chinese ideologies, reformed indigenous musical instruments to align with Western standards, modifying them to accompany propaganda songs framed by diatonic harmonies. This paper explores how the divergent paths were highlighted in the first cultural exchange between the two Koreas, held in 1985 in conjunction with the first family reunions in Seoul and Pyongyang. This historic event marked the first time that citizens and music crossed the border between North and South. Its concerts, held in both capitals, featured blends of folk music, dance, and newly composed Western-style repertoire. The initial joint performance showcased mixed emotions of joy and sorrow at family reunions but was met with blunt criticism from both sides. Thirty-five years of division had cultivated distinct aesthetic tastes, and shared folk traditions highlighted the aesthetic differences more than any other genres. South Korean critics decried the North’s performances as inauthentic ‘mashups’ lacking traditional beauty. Conversely, North Korean critics viewed the South’s music as antiquated and stagnant, mired in old and ‘decadent’ traditions. However, despite the initial

backlash, cultural exchanges and collaborations have persisted, fostering deeper mutual understandings, as my paper will show.