One evening in July 2018, I was with two scholars with different research interests: one was a Western-music composer and university faculty who was starting to do research on kugak (traditional Korean music) and the other was a music critic and musicologist whose focus of scholarship has been on kugak. At some point during our casual conversation, both of them commented on a piece of mine they had heard at its premiere a few days before. The short dialogue started with the composer-educator commenting on how the piece, *Azalea Flowers*, did not attempt to sound like kugak or simply present an established Western musical style either. The musicologist’s response to the comment was that the opening of the piece was similar to one of the characteristics of Chinese traditional music, with the melody beginning on an ascending third followed by an ascending whole step, instead of beginning with a perfect fourth; the scholar acknowledged that the perfect fourth is a typical melodic interval commonly used in the opening of kugak.\(^1\)

The dialogue about my piece stopped shortly thereafter, but their brief remarks lingered on my mind for some time. Eventually, that led me to ideas of cultural consciousness and identity construction in newly composed music that uses musical instruments associated with traditional Asian musical contexts. Their comments suggest that they share an unspoken premise, that my piece, written for two common-register *haegŭms* (two-stringed bowed fiddles) and a low-register *haegŭm*, is associated with kugak and should be compared with a kugak frame of reference. The two listeners described two different impressions of the same music composition: aesthetically in between Korean and Western, and “Chinese-like.”

Before *Azalea Flowers*, I had written a few pieces that use traditional Korean musical instruments, such as *kayagŭm* (plucked zither) and *taegŭm* (transverse flute). Some pieces are exclusively for kugak instruments, and others are for mixed ensembles of Western and kugak instruments. Among these pieces, the most recent composition before *Azalea Flowers* was *Morning of the Ocean*, written for a string trio comprising *haegŭm*, violin, and violoncello. After the premiere of the piece, I shared a live performance recording with several Western-music composers. When I asked which musical genre or style they considered the piece belongs to, the response was “classical.”

What does it mean to receive contrasting reactions to the same piece? How did the genre of kugak become a yardstick for comparative views? What does “classical” mean? Where in our music-cultural world do the two pieces of mine belong? More broadly, how is contemporary...
music, written in the present time with multicultural elements perceived by composers, performers, and their audience? Along with these questions, my experiences in writing for kugak instruments and communications with musicians involved in the process of “musicking” the pieces are the inspiration for writing this chapter. I follow Christopher Small’s notion of “musicking,” that is, “to music”:

*to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing.*

(Small 2012:9; italics in original)

At the outset, let us consider aspects of external and staged cultural elements of the concert. For instance, *Azalea Flowers* was written for a solely Korean instrumental ensemble of three haegŭms, written specifically as one of the four repertoire pieces for a launching concert of an ensemble of three professional haegŭm players, all Korean musicians with decades of kugak performance and educational history. The players wore modern hanbok (traditional Korean costume) for the concert. All these external conditions before the music itself probably contributed to the immediate assumption for the audience to link *Azalea Flowers* to kugak. As for *Morning of the Ocean*, the piece was the only one that featured a kugak instrument in a concert programme consisting of pre-twentieth-century Western classical chamber music. The response that *Morning of the Ocean* is “classical,” implies that it was perceived as Western classical music.

Then there are the core elements of the music itself, freshly-pressed packages of cross-cultural perspectives based on what I have experienced and processed over time while being exposed to both Western music and kugak. The purpose of presenting this chapter is to explore and discuss the nature of musical hybridity embedded in my recent compositions that showcase kugak instruments. Using changjak kugak (newly composed traditional music) as a case study, I will first present the historical occurrences and cultural phenomenon in Korean music since the twentieth century. Next, I will continue with a discussion on the musical aspects of the two compositions, *Azalea Flowers* and *Morning of the Ocean*, including musical analyses and perspectives of musicking with the two pieces.

**Changjak kugak**

In approaching the concept of hybrid musicking, it is essential to first understand Korean music history from around the twentieth century, as both *Azalea Flowers* and *Morning of the Ocean* are products and practices that emerged from a unique and contemporary Korean culture.

*Changjak kugak* emerged in the decades following the end of the Japanese occupation in Korea (1910–1945) and the Korean War (1950–1953) in parallel with sweeping sociocultural, political, and ideological shifts in South Korea. “Changjak” (lit. “creation”) “kugak” (lit. “national music”) is commonly defined as “newly-composed Korean traditional music” (Chae 1998). At the outset, the terms “new” and “traditional” may seem conceptually contradictory, and the correlation between “traditional” and “national” may be too limiting. What are the meanings and values of the concept of “new” in creating traditional or national music?

The practical and conceptual boundaries of *changjak kugak* have intrigued scholars and composers of Korean music. Chun In-pyong, for example, broadly surveys how *changjak kugak* has been discussed since it emerged in the 1960s. He defines *changjak kugak* pieces as music written for traditional Korean instruments after the nineteenth century without using established Western compositional methods and models. In particular, Chun notes that *changjak kugak* is an
individual craft rather than a product of group effort. What he means is that kugak is traditionally transmitted aurally and orally through apprenticeship, and a kugak performance one listens to is a result of a performer’s long-term practice of the craft. Such form of musical transmission changed, however, after Western music and Western-modelled education system were introduced in Korea around the early twentieth century. Adapting Western systems of music pedagogy and music notation impacted the traditional and hitherto dominant approach of training and crafting of kugak. The dimension of composing music as a personal endeavour which separated the creator and the performer enabled a different approach to traditional kugak musical creativity (Chun 2013; see also Killick 1992).

Among the early attempts to define changjak kugak, Lee Geon-yong, a composer with a substantial worklist of both Western and kugak mediums, suggested a few conditions for a new composition to be considered changjak kugak: (a) the composer’s academic background should be in kugak; (b) the music is almost exclusively written for Korean traditional instruments; (c) the music should be played by kugak performers, and (d) its audience also has some relationship to the world of kugak (Lee 1987:82). Viewed in this way, instead of exploring musical elements such as form, pitch, and rhythm, non-musical conditions of the three subjects of musicking—background of the composer, the performer, and the audience—are considered together as a significant factor in defining changjak kugak. With Lee’s categorisation, a boundary of changjak kugak is clear, and all participants of musicking changjak kugak should begin from the traditional foundation of kugak.

While Chun In-pyong and Lee Geon-yong emphasise the local-Korean characterisation of changjak kugak, Byeon Gyewon undergirds changjak kugak in terms of Western music when she defines it as “new compositions for traditional instruments using Western staff notation” (Byeon 2007:172) and further notes that:

Changjak kugak emphasises creativity, with a repertory of new compositions primarily or exclusively for Korean instruments and voices. Western instruments and/or vocal styles may be used, but not prominently. However, Western musical influences are evident, from the use of Western functional harmony and equal-tempered tuning, to the arrangement of instruments on stage with a Western-style conductor and the featuring of soloists in “concerto” style. In fact, the musical style of changjak kugak can be compared to Western music in its “seriousness” as art music intended for intensive listening in a concert-hall presentation.

(Byeon 2007:181)

Viewing changjak kugak as a form of art music for contemplative listening in a concert hall, Byeon differs slightly from Lee Geon-yong with the added dimension of audience reception inclined towards the Western model of producing and consuming music in the Euro-American art music traditions (see also Howard 2002, 2006).

While Western influence on changjak kugak is acknowledged, it is also simultaneously criticised as an elitist form of hybrid musicking, a consequence of kugak becoming Westernised after combining disparate elements with a colonialist Western framework (Jeon 2011:323–332; see Howard 2013). Until the 1980s, Western art music in Korea was primarily about absorbing the Western musical language. Similarly, the techniques and aesthetics of much of changjak kugak music were inclined towards those of Western art music (Yoon 2017:126). Yet, the Western and Korean aspects of this bicultural framework are evaluated differently:

In changjak ŭmak [new music], combining diverse musical elements is one of the compositional techniques, and so is combining kugak and Western music. I would like
to point out, however, this combination is interpreted differently between changjak kugak [new Korean traditional music] and changjak yangak [new Western music]. In changjak kugak, Western musical elements, forms, and techniques tend to be discussed in relation to the identity of kugak. In contrast, for changjak yangak, kugak elements are understood as components for creative diversity and as individual elements used by the composer, and not discussed as elements of identity in changjak yangak.

(Yoon 2017:124–125)

Yoon Hye-jin further notes that changjak yangak should be produced as Korean-Western music, rather than simply Western music, as kugak characteristics are combined with yangak elements in the music. Through such cultural transaction, she argues, the boundaries of kugak extend from “traditional music” to “our music” (ibid.:127).

While individual scholars worked towards understanding the characteristics of changjak kugak by acknowledging cultural differences, the National Gugak Center, a state-supported organisation for kugak in South Korea, published catalogues of new compositions using kugak instruments. Music compositions listed in the catalogue are selected based on two primary criteria: whether the instrumentation includes kugak instruments and whether the performer(s) or performing groups are in the professional field of kugak (see, for example, Kungnip Kugakwŏn 2017 for works written between 2006 and 2016; see also Park 2012).

What is interesting and important is that the catalogue includes works by both Korean and non-Korean composers. This reflects a significant broadening of the scope of what constitutes Korean music, who can produce Korean music, and also in the overall interest in Korean music. Indeed, the National Gugak Center began conducting regular kugak workshops for non-Korean musicians and scholars at their Seoul campus as early as 1994. In my encounters with kugak instrumentalists, many have expressed their willingness to work with non-Korean composers and to perform their works. They noted that works by non-Korean composers do exude the essence of kugak—whatever that might be—to the extent that they could relate to the new music compositions (see Kim 2018).

Close to a century has passed since the notions and creative output of Changjak kugak appeared in Korean music history. Recently, Changjak kugak tends to be framed as a culturally open phenomenon, consisting of shifting processes rather than a set of boundaries and criteria (Park 2008:6). Yoon further asserts that it is more effective to understand changjak kugak as being inclusive and “open for the present and future” instead of compartmentalising it only within the kugak framework (Yoon 2017:127). Indeed, alongside the development of changjak kugak were other musical genres that shared similar elements of hybridity between different cultural traditions from the twentieth century. For instance, during the Japanese colonial period, a vocal genre known as sinminyo (lit. “new folk song”) gained popularity as one of the mainstream vocal genres (Lee 2018). From the mid-1980s, music groups such as Sulgidung, P’uri, and the Sagye Quartet (kayagŭm) performed “fusion kugak” that integrates popular music with kugak elements (Sutton 2011; see also So 2015). In contrast to changjak kugak, fusion kugak is performer-oriented in that the majority of fusion kugak performers compose music for themselves. Viewed in this way, fusion kugak is more similar to “traditional” kugak than to changjak kugak.

**Kugak tradition and innovation**

As a way to further examine the aspect of hybridity after the development of changjak kugak, I shall use Morning of the Ocean and Azalea Flowers to illustrate some of my compositional approaches towards creating contemporary music that internalise notions of kugak. Borrowing
Homi Bhabha’s concept of the “third space,” I want to show that these two pieces are culturally hybrid in its original conception, and the dialectics of conventional polarities such as Korean-Western, Us-Them, and Traditional-Modern are decentralised in the musical space of new meanings and representations (see, for example, Rutherford 1990:211; see also Park 2011). I suggest that the politics of identity in contemporary kugak are less about how Korean it is or how many kugak elements a piece comprises, but more about how new musical processes traditionalise kugak and foreground creativity (cf. Yung 2019).

I adopted two distinct approaches when I composed Morning of the Ocean and Azalea Flowers. On the one hand, I consciously utilised musical materials representing differences between kugak and Western music. On the other hand, I deemphasised the boundaries between these two musical spheres to weave sonic textures that are neither distinguishable as one or the other nor betwixt and between in a transitional or liminal phase (to borrow Victor Turner’s concept; see, for example, Turner 1979). My compositional process is a personal realisation of musical hybridity that is rooted in, at the same time as it is distinguished from, preexisting musical practices and cultural concepts in kugak, changjak kugak, Western tonal music, or European new concert music, all of which have shaped my development as a composer.

**Source material**

Two different historical and geo-cultural sources inspired Morning of the Ocean and Azalea Flowers: a seventeenth-century Italian sacred music and a twentieth-century Korean poem respectively. Morning of the Ocean is based entirely on the melody “Tribulationem et dolorem” written in the Renaissance era (circa 1400–1600). One of the songs from Sacred Songs for Five Voices (1603) by Italian composer Carlo Gesualdo di Venosa (1566–1613), the song text is taken from Psalm 114 in the Book of Hours:

\[
\text{Tribulationem, et dolorem inveni: et nomen Domini invocavi. O Domine, libera animam meam, misericors Dominus, et iustus: et Deus noster miseretur.}
\]

[I have found tribulation, and sorrow: and I called on the name of our Lord. O Lord, deliver my soul, merciful Lord, and just: and our God hath mercy.]

The first phrase of the prayer, “Tribulationem, et dolorem inveni,” forms the beginning melodic statement in Gesualdo’s setting (Figure 3.1), which I use as the thematic material for Morning of the Ocean. In all of the three movements in Morning of the Ocean, the theme always takes the primary role that constantly leads the ensemble with its variations. The tribulation-and-sorrow theme is used motivically in that various theme-derived figures (segments) organically connect all the movements.

![Figure 3.1](image_url)  
**Figure 3.1** Beginning of “Tribulationem, et dolorem inveni” by Carlo Gesualdo.
Azalea Flowers, composed within two years after Morning of the Ocean, shares the same title as the Korean poem that inspired it. The original poem was published in a collection of poems titled Jindallaekkot (Azalea Flowers) by the poet Kim So-wol (1902–1934) in 1925. The particular poem I chose is one of the most popular works in modern Korean poetry: it has been included in Korean language texts for public education, and Korean students study the poem from elementary school through university:

When you go,  
weary of me,  
I will let you go without saying a word.

From Mount Yak in Youngbyon,  
azaleas  
I shall gather an armful and scatter them on your way.

Step after step away  
on those flowers  
press deep, step lightly, and go.

When you go,  
weary of me,  
I won’t shed tears though I perish.

The poem has been set to music in various genres from art song to K-pop to changjak kugak. When I reread the poem in the spring of 2018, its immanent but intense expression of love and life struck anew. That was inspiring enough to challenge myself to produce a fresh musical rendition with this popular poem. Besides, verbal expressions, especially if they originated from a well-known literary work, could function as a reference point for the general audience when listening to a new, unfamiliar flow of sounds and hopefully intrigue their artistic curiosity.

Instrumentation

The haegŭm is featured as part of a mixed ensemble in Morning of the Ocean and as haegŭm trio in Azalea Flowers. Used in Korean court and folk music as early as the Koryo dynasty (935–1392), the instrument’s history, organology, timbre, and performance practice exude Koreanness, whether it is played in kugak or fusion music (Sutton 2008). As Keith Howard notes, haegŭm is commonly used as a counterpart to the violin by changjak kugak composers (2002:954).

The nasal, and at times guttural timbre of the haegŭm, often described as “nostalgic,” is derived from its construction and performance mechanism (cf. Willoughby 2000). The instrument is made of a variety of materials: silk, gourd, skin, metal, stone, clay, bamboo, and wood, and it is arguably the only Korean instrument that embodies all eight primary materials that constitute the “pal-eum” (lit. “eight sounds”) (Hwang 1978:35–39; Howard 1995:35). When playing the haegŭm, changes in dynamics produce distinctive timbre changes as the upper partials—especially the fifth partial—are intensified more than the fundamentals as the instrument is played louder. The space between the neck of the haegŭm and the strings requires performers to produce notes by “pressing against the unsupported strings to control both their sounding length and their tension” (Killick 2002:827), which contributes to the instrument’s pitch versatility.
In *Morning of the Ocean*, the performance technique and timbral palette of the *haegŭm* affirm its potential as being simultaneously distinct from, yet analogous to, violin and viola. For the violin and violoncello parts in *Morning of the Ocean*, to embody the nasality or noise that the *haegŭm* is accustomed to playing according to its performance tradition requires extended techniques, such as *sul ponticello* (bowed near the bridge), *sul tasto* (bowed over the fingerboard), and specific vibrato with certain technical instructions varying the degrees of frequency or amplitude. The “traditional” quality of the *kugak* instrument becomes “contemporary” when realised in a newly written—*changjak*—music. Viewed in this way, the sonic juxtaposition of *haegŭm* and Western string instruments together creates a new kind of musical authenticity.

**Rhythm**

In both *Morning of the Ocean* and *Azalea Flowers*, the *haegŭm* often plays rhythmically slow segments or gradually unfolding musical gestures. Such an idea of rhythmic pacing was inspired by the slow sections in certain *kugak* genres, including *sanjo* (solo melodic instrumental music style accompanied by drum), *kago* (traditional Korean vocal music), and some *kugak* court music. This does not imply copying a *kugak jangdan* (multi-measure rhythm pattern in *kugak*) as featured in the traditional genres but to apply the ideas of metre, accent, and rhythmic structure of the *jangdan*. On the contrary, the *haegŭm* also imitates the Western instrument by playing fast semiquavers (sixteenth notes) passages, such as in the second movement of *Morning of the Ocean* (Figure 3.2):

![Figure 3.2 Second movement (bars 53–60), Morning of the Ocean.](image-url)
While the construction and performing techniques of the haegŭm contribute to its distinctiveness, the absence of a fingerboard and the strength required to grip the neck and both strings of the haegŭm also make it difficult to play rhythmically and intervallically active passages. This is especially the case with performers who have limited experience in changjak kugak or Western art music, as noted in communications with haegŭm performers and kugak scholars. On the one hand, a rapid passage such as shown in Figure 3.2 may be criticised as idiomatically inappropriate or “not well-written” for the haegŭm. On the other hand, the traditional haegŭm performance practice has been considered as being rooted in the past and limited to the music for the courts and the upper class and not adapting to contemporary practices of newly composed music (Kim 1996:205).

In Morning of the Ocean, the haegŭm player has to confront the technical challenges of imitating the violin’s rapid Western-style rhythm patterns while using an accustomed sense of traditional tuning and sound production. Such aesthetically combined practice of haegŭm results in a nuanced imitative play between the two instruments. Haegŭm’s “less precise” sounding performance for the Western equal-temperament-based notation and performance standards functions as an integral element for the composition to be a unique musical rendition of cultural hybridity. The writing of rapid passages for the Korean haegŭm and Western violin certainly accentuates differences, but their interplay also magnifies the aspect of heterogeneity.

**Form**

Both of my compositions in this chapter utilise the man-chung-sak structure. Man means slow or late, chung means middle or neutral, and sak means fast (see, for example, Chun 2002). While Western classical music pays attention to constructing individual sections with the notion of contrast between the sections, man-chung-sak form represents a view to consider an entire piece as one big temporally continuing progression. In kugak performances with this form, moments of temporal relief come in between sections as if regulating a few breaths, and after those held breaks, the music is driven faster than the previous section. The majority of kugak use this temporal-motion phase as a structural scheme.

Along with the concept of man-chung-sak, ki-kyŏng-kyŏl-hae (lit. “rise, hang, bind, loosen”) is considered as an integral part of kugak. The notion is said to be the fundamental concept of kugak jangdan, but it is also a narrative concept applied to multiple structural levels from a phrase to a section to an entire piece. According to Han Myung Hee, the gradually built-up musical tension mounts its energy towards the “kyŏl” phase and is then released in the “hae” phase in ki-kyŏng-kyŏl-hae scheme (2017:200–202).

The two pieces discussed in this chapter utilise the man-chung-sak framework with the Western-classical concept of contrast. In Morning of the Ocean, the piece features the Western three-movement structure, but the Gesualdo theme is constantly utilised throughout the piece, and the global view of the entire piece’s tempo setup and rhythmic activity characterise the man-jung-sak scheme. Morning of the Ocean utilises the man-chung-sak form with bigger breaks than how kugak generally takes them: once with a recapitulation of the slow beginning of the piece between the first and the second movement, and then with another slow section that plays from the end of the second movement to the beginning of the last movement. The piece ends with a deep exhaling of the ensemble that slows down for one last time. Taking these big hold-offs, the music follows the kugak perspective of temporal phasing yet displays it with an overlapping layer of the Western tradition.

In Azalea Flowers, a single movement piece, both the man-chung-sak and ki-kyŏng-kyŏl-hae schemes function as major structural basis. The piece begins with the tempo of “quaver (eighth
note) = 118” and later returns to this tempo twice, once for a little moment of regulating breaths and then for a closure of the entire piece. While composing Azalea Flowers, I paid attention to the conceptual differences between two structural concepts—ki-kyŏng-kyŏl-hae and ki-sŭng-chŏn-kyŏl (lit. “rise, develop, turn, conclude”). The latter suggests heightening the dramatic aspect by making a contrast and then concluding the drama there, not dissimilar to the Western concept of form in the majority of pre-twentieth century concert music. Either over a local section or sections combined, Azalea Flowers explores the ki-kyŏng-kyŏl-hae concept in constructing drama and controlling tension. For example, the overall structural narrative of the piece is as follows: to begin with a story—continue with it but be more energetic—regulating a breath momentarily before the next part comes in—unfold the dynamic intensity of the story—let go of what was bound previously. In a smaller scale, a similar structural narrative occurs within the first two parts of the piece. While utilising the structural concept from kugak, Azalea Flowers presents different ways of dramatic buildup from how it is practised in kugak.

**Sigimsae: pitch-rhythmic figuration**

The main melody of Morning of the Ocean from “Tribulationem et dolorem” plays a significant role that interconnects the three movements. The theme is the foundation for almost all the melodic lines in the piece and contains a wealth of possibilities to generate cross-cultural properties. One of the methods I utilised the theme with in Morning of the Ocean is pitch ornamentation. I shall explain sigimsae and pitch ornamentation more in relation to their occurrences in Morning of the Ocean.

Sigimsae is a form of pitch–rhythmic figuration in kugak performance. Commonly translated as ornamentation or embellishment, sigimsae is fundamental to the style and structure of kugak and, indeed, constitutes a core characteristic—with melody and rhythm—in defining Korean music. Sigimsae functions to connect the primary melodic pitches and idiomatically shape the resulting musical texture, movement, and sound, depending on the instrument used. In kugak, the sigimsae is differentiated from the melody in two ways: (1) pitches used for sigimsae may be non-scalic and (2) the length of time during which sigimsae is executed may vary with sustaining notes, grouping of beat subdivisions, disjunct movements (e.g., intervalllic leaps usually within the span of a perfect fourth), as well as the use of grace notes not dissimilar to those in Western music (see, for example, bars 77–78 for the violin and haegŭm in Figure 3.3) (Kim 2009).

In Morning of the Ocean, I wrote the ornamental figuration as both sigimsae and the Western musical style of ornamentation. For example, in bars 41 and 46–47 of the haegŭm part in Figure 3.3, the F-C-F perfect fifth interval is a notated sigimsae, followed by the Eb-Ab perfect fourth grace notes. While the figurations do not carry the structural weight of sigimsae in kugak, they exhibit sigimsae in their intervalllic and rhythmic realisations of the main melodic pitches. They appear most frequently in the first movement where melodies unfold in relatively slow tempo. Almost all of such ornamental gestures are intentionally written for the haegŭm because of its construction and performance techniques.

Microtonal pitch fluctuations, intervalllic leaps, subtle shifts in rhythmic divisions, and timbre changes, among other gestures, are conventional performance characteristics of the haegŭm and appropriately suited to produce sigimsae. In the compositional process, I imagined the haegŭm being played in its traditional, kugak style based on the performer’s training in kugak. I intend for this kugak layer to form its own musical narrative and style while playing together with the other two Western instruments. In this way, the figuration of “musical embellishment” becomes a medium through which cross-cultural ties are established. More importantly, the focus of musicking shifts from the composer to the kugak performer. This shift minimises or
even erases the ethnicity and cultural background of the composer and foregrounds the performance of the music sound in our overall understanding of musical identity.

**Intervallic functions**

While some aspects of my compositional process were inspired by kugak elements (without mimicking kugak), other areas, such as the use of intervals, were intentionally based on Western compositional ideas.

At this point, I would like to return to the comment on the use of music intervals in *Azalea Flowers* at the beginning of this chapter. Generally, kugak practitioners and scholars whom I work with recognise that kugak pieces commonly begin with perfect fourth intervals in its melodic figuration. *Azalea Flowers*, as my colleague noted, opens with an ascending third followed by an ascending whole step (Figure 3.4):

The cell of the first two dotted crotchets (quarter notes) in bar 1 forms the base pitch and intervallic motif for the entire piece. F to Bb forms the perfect fourth. My intention, however, was to dissolve this intervallic idea into an idiom of Western tonality. The Bb in the perfect fourth relationship is the subdominant that resolves to the tonic F, with Ab in the progression to
reach Bb and contribute to the shaping of the intervalllic arch-motif around the F tonal centre. The latter half of bar 1 consists of another perfect fourth (Eb-Ab) between the tonic F to further emphasise the tonal centre.

In *Morning of the Ocean*, perfect intervals are used obsessively in the chordal voicing of the first movement, in which the first fourteen bars is a chorale involving all three instruments (Figure 3.5). Every chord in the texture is in the open position (more than an octave apart), and either a perfect fourth or a perfect fifth is placed between two adjusting voices among the three instruments. Other adjusting two or three voices consist of so-called imperfect consonances in Western music theory, which includes major and minor thirds, sixths, and tenths. My intention of such a voicing technique is to create a spatially open setting with aural depth. In using all open positions and harmonic voicing that are full of consonances, moments of consequential or intentional dissonances in the chorale section are also generated. This engineered harmonic voicing with static, regular, and slow rhythmic motion using semibreves (whole notes) and notes with longer durations produces tension-release occurrences that reach a climax in bar 9 before settling into bar 13. As with tonal functions, creating a sense of flow and directionality in music through specific “vertical” harmonic arrangements reflects my inclination towards Western compositional techniques.
Furthermore, at the beginning of bar 69, a tritone enters the intervallic vocabulary through arched arpeggios. The first movement of *Morning of the Ocean* focuses much on using the perfect quality intervals and up to this point avoids the dissonant leaps that were not used in *kugak*. The level of complexity in harmonic rhythm, chordal progression, and tonal clarity all heightened from bar 69. Following that, a mashup of pitch-related ideas, ascending melodic contour motion, and consequential register expansion together create a dramatic climax of the first movement. All these segmented modes of thought from intervallic and harmonic progressions regarding how to create this type of dramatic climax are properties of the Western music tradition.

**Communicating with the performers**

In addition to the compositional process, the performance of *Morning of the Ocean* and *Azalea Flowers* brings out interesting challenges for the composer and the performers. Questions such as how to communicate information, how much detail to convey in a score, and whether or how to notate certain nuances are part of the communication process. The Western staff notation has been used for *kugak* instruments since the early twentieth century. However, a music notation system developed for one kind of music may not be the most appropriate for another musical system, as certain values might be lost or misconstrued in translation.

*Morning of the Ocean* was performed multiple times and two professional *kugak* musicians have performed the *haegŭm* part. Although they were conscious of timbral and tuning differences between *haegŭm*, violin, and violoncello, both were conscious of being “in tune” with the other instruments at the outset. During rehearsals, the *haegŭm* players seemed subconsciously pressured to “sound right,” although I assured them that it was fine to be “out of tune” with the Western instruments unless the difference was larger than a half step. From the composer’s perspective, I expected to hear unique and unpretentiously microtonal cells and gestures from the *haegŭm* even though I did not notate detailed microtonal elements in the *haegŭm* part. For the performers, not having such detail in the notation created uncertainties (cf. Yung 1994).

*Azalea Flowers* presents a different set of challenges. To the best of my knowledge, the *haegŭm* trio of two common-register and one modified, low-register *haegŭm* was first formed in 2018. This innovative ensemble set-up motivated me to create new musical interpretations of the well-known Korean poem and encouraged me to make creative compositional choices. One such choice was to enable performers to play the *haegŭm* and sing the text of the poem in three ways: (a) performers singing in parallel motion or unison without playing the *haegŭm* (Figure 3.6); (b) one performer singing while others accompany in polyphonic texture (Figure 3.7); and (c) performers sing and play at the same time (for example, bar 101 in Figure 3.8):

![Figure 3.6 Vocal parts sung by *haegŭm* players in *Azalea Flowers*.](image-url)
Figure 3.7  Singing with polyphonic accompaniment in *Azalea Flowers*.

Figure 3.8  Singing and playing the haegŭm in *Azalea Flowers*. 
It is not uncommon for *kugak* performers to sing and play at the same time. Such a practice was categorised as *pyŏngch’ang* in *kugak*, and the instruments used for performance are mainly *kayakŭm*, *kŏmunko*, and *haegŭm*. With the *pyŏngch’ang* style, a performer plays the same melody that he or she sings along with *sigimsae*. *Azalea Flowers*, however, requires independent vocal layering. For example, some of the vocal parts contain different pitches that are intended to create specific harmonic intervals. Herein lies yet another example of how a traditional practice of singing-playing is given different musical roles to produce new collaborative experiments.

**Concluding thoughts**

Both *Morning of the Ocean* and *Azalea Flowers* presented creative challenges for me as a composer. For me, a guiding question that frames the different stages of composing and rehearsing is: how can I participate in a constantly changing field of music with heterogeneous cultural roots—that is, the field of contemporary music composition—in which culturally different performers and listeners can intersect, collaborate, and be able to confidently express a sense of themselves? As I presented throughout this chapter, both pieces of mine utilise musical materials that may be attributed as Korean or Western. My primary goal is not merely to present these materials in new ways but to create a musical framework where the intersection of cultural differences becomes a catalyst for creative imagination. In this way, musicking demands certain developmental stages for the composer, performer, and even the listener to: (a) recognise the distinctive cultural entities; (b) understand traditional expressive gestures in new aesthetic contexts; (c) negotiate challenges in performing and listening practices; and (d) communicate expectations and aspirations through music notation. There are moments in the pieces when differences are neutralised, and there are points at which they remain distinct. In the latter case, such distinctive qualities might create anxieties, or even confusion, but can also create new opportunities, new originals, and new authenticities in musical and cultural development.

**Glossary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Korean term or name</th>
<th>Korean character</th>
<th>English translation/explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>changjak kugak</td>
<td>창작국악</td>
<td>newly composed traditional music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>changjak ŭmak</td>
<td>창작음악</td>
<td>new music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>changjak yangak</td>
<td>창작양악</td>
<td>new Western music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>haegŭm</td>
<td>해금</td>
<td>Korean two-string bowed fiddle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hanbok</td>
<td>한복</td>
<td>traditional Korean costume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jangdan</td>
<td>장단</td>
<td>lit. “long-short.” A multi-measure rhythm pattern that is a base of <em>kugak</em> composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jindallaekkot</td>
<td>진달래꽃</td>
<td>title: <em>Azaleas Flowers</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kayagŭm</td>
<td>가야금</td>
<td>Korean plucked zither</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kugak</td>
<td>국악</td>
<td>lit. “music of the nation.” In the contemporary context, this term refers to traditional Korean music.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pal-eum</td>
<td>팔음</td>
<td>lit. “eight sounds.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sanjo</td>
<td>산조</td>
<td>musical form with a solo melodic instrument accompanied by drum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean term or name</td>
<td>Korean character</td>
<td>English translation/explanation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>sigimsae</td>
<td>시김새</td>
<td>a technique in Korean music of producing embellishments on one or several pitches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sijo</td>
<td>시조</td>
<td>traditional Korean poetic form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sinminyo</td>
<td>신민요</td>
<td>new folk song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taegŭm</td>
<td>대금</td>
<td>Korean transverse flute</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes

1 I use the McCune-Reischauer Romanisation system in this chapter (e.g., kugak), except for official names which use the Revised Romanisation method (e.g., National Gugak Center).
2 For example, Western-trained composers such as Donald Reid Womack (b. 1966, American), Chih-chun Chi-Sun Lee (b. 1970, Taiwanese-American), and Thomas Osborne (b. 1978, American) experiment with kugak elements and instruments in their compositions. All of them are categorically Western new concert music composers and have composed several pieces including kugak instruments. They have been welcomed in the kugak community and have received commissions from kugak performers and organisations for new music concerts.
3 The Latin text and translation are from http://medievalist.net/hourstxt/deadves.htm.
4 Morning of the Ocean was first composed between 2015 and 2016 for haegŭm, violin, and violoncello and was later arranged in 2017 for saenghwang (reed pipes) in place of the haegŭm.
5 I noticed the changes of emphasised partials while studying the timbral characteristics of haegŭm using audio recordings of my pieces and Sonic Visualiser, a computer software to view and analyse audio files.
6 The second movement connects with the last with attaca.

References

Composing traditions


