

An Organ Adventure in South Korea

Jay Zoller

I had never given much thought to organs or the organ culture in South Korea. My interests, along with, I suppose, those of many organists, lay in the direction of European composers. However, a recent trip to South Korea to visit family got me thinking about this subject, about which I knew nothing. The questions swirled around my head: What was the organ culture like in South Korea? Was it anything like our own? What kinds of organs were there in Korea? What did the organists play? Was there a South Korean style of organ composition? Do they play the same repertoire as we do? In this age of instant communication, I imagined that they must play Bach and Mendelssohn, just as we do, but how was I to know for sure?

Our visit was primarily centered in and around Daejeon, a city of about two million people. With my lack of knowledge of the Korean language, I would have gotten nowhere in my quest without the help of Rosalie Bowker, who is Board Chair at the Daejeon Christian International School, an organist herself, and a missionary to South Korea for over forty years. Her help in taking me to see organs, introducing me to Korean organists, and finding resources for me, was invaluable.

I make no claim that this report is complete, since my discoveries center around Daejeon. I hope that someone more knowledgeable will write about the nation as a whole.

A brief history of Korea

Korea is the only nation in the world where Christianity first took root without priests or missionaries, but solely as a result of the written word. Bibles, which had been translated into Chinese by Jesuits, were brought back by a Korean scholar on a diplomatic trip to Beijing in 1621. Korea has had a long friendship with China, which has lasted for centuries. As a big brother to Korea, China has had a profound influence on Koreans. However, Koreans transformed those influences into their own distinctive advances in fields such as literature, art, ceramics, printing, philosophy, astronomy, medicine, and astrology. As an example, Koreans invented metal moveable type in 1230, 200 years before Gutenberg.

Geography has played an important role in Korean history. This small mountainous country sits in a strategic area surrounded by the larger and more powerful countries of China, Japan, and Russia. During its two thousand years of recorded history, Korea has suffered nine hundred invasions and five periods of foreign occupation. Its relationship with China has seen Korean kings embracing Chinese culture and receiving some protection in return for tribute to the Chinese Emperor.

When Japan was unified in the 16th century, its leader Hideyoshi Toyotomi attacked Korea as a first phase of an invasion of the Chinese mainland. This war,



The author, Jay Zoller, with Rosalie Bowker discussing South Korean organs (photo: Rachel Zoller)



Console of the Speith-Organbau organ in the Daejeon Baptist Church where Eunyoung Kim is organist (photo: Jay Zoller)

which left the country devastated, resulted in keeping relations acrimonious. Korea attempted to stay isolated until western influences in opening the country to trade during the 19th century left Korea vulnerable. In 1875 Japan forced exclusive trade with Korea and then flooded Japanese advisers and military personnel into the country.

In 1905, America and Britain felt that Japanese control over Korea would prevent Russian expansion, and so Theodore Roosevelt traded Korea's independence for U.S. control over the Philippines. The Treaty of Portsmouth, which ended the Russo-Japanese War, made Korea a Japanese protectorate. The Japanese then forced, despite protests and student uprisings, a Protectorate Treaty, which was followed in 1910 by a forced Treaty of Annexation, which made Korea a Japanese colony. The Koreans were treated brutally until the Japanese surrender after World War II.

The end of World War II brought about the arbitrary division of the country, by the West, at the 38th parallel. This

unfortunate afterthought by the major powers in the post-war period has proven to be the one blunder that has caused inordinate trouble for the North and the South as they have grappled for advantage and supremacy over each other.

A Korean guerrilla commander, Kim Il Sung, chosen by the Soviet Union to head its regime in the North, chose, with Soviet and Chinese backing, to invade the South and unite the country under communist rule. This conflict, in a fear of communist menace, drew in U.N. and U.S. troops and savage fighting. The Korean War claimed a huge number of casualties and devastated both halves of a country that had only just begun to recover from four decades of Japanese occupation. When the fighting finally stopped in July 1953, the front line was virtually at the 38th parallel, close to where it had all begun. A demilitarized zone was created, which has remained in place to this day. The North became a dictatorship under the thumb of Kim Il Sung and later his son, Kim Jong Il, and the country closed off from the rest of the world.

In the South, anti-communist dictatorships gradually gave way to democratic reform and growing trade with the world. Under President Park Chung Hee, conglomerates were formed, which made South Korea a major economic power. It is in this period of economic growth and democratic reform that our organ story begins.

Organ culture

As one might imagine after the widespread destruction during the Korean War, organs were not a priority and as a result were slow in coming. Gradually, however, South Koreans who had an interest in music began coming to the United States and to Europe for training. Those interested in studying the organ concentrated primarily on the United States and Germany, countries

Speith-Organbau Baptist Church, Daejeon

Man II – Hauptwerk

- 16' Bordun
- 8' Principal
- 8' Gamba
- 8' Rohrflöte
- 4' Octave
- 4' Spitzflöte
- 2 2/3' Quinte
- 2' Octave
- 1 1/2' Terz
- Mixtur IV
- 8' Trompete
- I-II
- III-II

Man III – Schwellwerk

- 16' Quintaton
- 8' Holzprincipal
- 8' Gedäckt
- 8' Salicional
- 8' Vox coelestis
- 4' Principal
- 4' Traversflöte
- 2 2/3' Nazard
- 2' Waldflöte
- 1 1/2' Hornterz
- Scharf IV
- 16' Fagott
- 8' Hautbois
- 4' Clairon

Man I – Positiv

- 8' Holzgedäckt
- 8' Dulcflöte
- 4' Principal
- 4' Blockflöte
- 2' Schwegel
- 1 1/2' Quinte
- Zimbel IV
- 16' Dulcian
- 8' Krummhorn
- Tremolo
- III-I

Pedal

- 16' Principalbass
- 16' Subbass
- 8' Octavbass
- 8' Pommer
- 4' Choralbass
- 2' Bauempfeife
- Hintersatz IV
- 16' Posaune
- 8' Basstrompete
- I-P
- II-P
- III-P

This console has the German-style crescendo pedal (*Rollschweller*) just to the left of the swell pedal. Tracker key action, electric stop action

that offered organ curricula and good instruments to play.

As time went on, students who returned to South Korea wanted similar instruments to play at home and often were able to have their church buy an organ from a builder that they had become acquainted with during their studies. Since there were no Korean organbuilders, they imported organs from the United States and Germany. Seoul, South Korea's largest city, has the greatest number of pipe organs in the country. Wicks began the Seoul imports, followed by such builders as Brombaugh, Flentrop, Schuke, Rieger-Kloss, Ruffatti, Beckerath, Karl Wilhelm, Jäger & Brommer, Bosch, Pels & Van Leeuwen, Klais, and many others. The large six-manual Klais in the concert hall is a jewel in the collection, with its case designed after the traditional Korean plucked musical instrument, the "Komungo," giving the effect of several instruments hanging from the wall. It boasts as well 40 French bells and 32 Korean bells in addition to 270 Spanish trumpets. The organ looks very impressive, although I have only seen it in pictures. We mustn't forget the new Fisk organ installed in 2010 at Incheon, about twenty miles west of Seoul.

There is an interesting story about the Klais in the concert hall. When it was new, apparently the organist at the time had the mistaken impression that it didn't need regular attention for main-

Organmaster Shoes the right shoes on the pedals!

Oxford \$57.⁹⁹ plus postage

Mary Jane \$49.⁹⁹ plus postage

usually SHIPS within 24 HRS not including weekends

Whole & Half Sizes in 3 widths
1 1/4" Full Heel for pedaling
Suede Leather Soles

Call TOLL FREE: 1 (888) 773-0066 www.organmastershoes.com
44 Montague City Rd, Greenfield, MA 01301 USA

**Oberlinger organ
Hyecheon University**

Hauptwerk

- 16' Principal
- 16' Gemshorn
- 8' Principal
- 8' Rohrflöte
- 4' Octave
- 4' Flöte
- 2 3/4' Quinte
- 2' Octave
- 2' Mixtur V
- 16' Trompete
- 8' Trompete
- II-I
- III-I
- Cymbelstern

Schwellwerk

- 8' Suavial
- 8' Doppelflöte
- 8' Salicional
- 8' Voix celeste
- 4' Octave
- 4' Flute octaviante
- 2 3/4' Nazard
- 2' Waldflöte
- 1 3/4' Terz
- 1' Piccolo
- 1 1/2' Scharff V
- 16' Basson
- 8' Hautbois
- 8' Cromorne
- III-II
- Tremblant
- Glockenspiel

Bombardwerk

- 16' Bourdon
- 8' Montre
- 8' Flüte harmonique
- 8' Bourdon
- 4' Prestant
- 2' Doublette
- 8' Cornet V
- 2 3/4' Fourniture V
- 16' Bombarde
- 8' Bombarde
- 4' Bombarde
- Tremblant

Pedal

- 32' Subbass
- 16' Principallbass
- 16' Subbass
- 8' Octavbass
- 8' Gemshorn
- 4' Choralbass
- 16' Posaune
- 8' Trompete
- I-P
- II-P
- III-P

Tracker key action, electric stop action



Right-hand half of the Oberlinger organ in the chapel at Hyecheon University where Min Jin O is Professor of Organ (photo: Jay Zoller)

meeting in the auditorium, so we were unable to see that organ, but in a smaller, happily much more resonant room is an organ built by Paul Fritts. The lower manual contained a Hohlfloete 8', Principal 4', Quint/Cornet, and Octav 2'. The upper manual had Quintadena 8', Spielflöte 4', Gemshorn 2', and Dulcian 8'. A Subbass 16' and Gedackt 8' rounded out the pedal division. Couplers were I/Pedal, II/Pedal, and II/I, and there was also a tremulant. I played the first movement of the Mendelssohn A-major Sonata and it had a nice effect. It is a delightful practice organ and often does double duty for concerts.

Eunyoung Kim's husband is one of South Korea's German-trained organ technicians, and I was sorry that I did not get to meet him as well. Surprisingly, Eunyoung Kim was working on a recital entitled "The Organ Music of America since 1950," which she played after our trip was over. It consisted of music of David Arcus (b. 1958), *Memorial Festival Overture and Ancient Wonders*; John Behnke (b. 1953), *Three Global Songs*; Derek Bermel (b. 1967), *Two Songs from Nandom*; and David Conte (b. 1955), *Pastorale and Toccata*.

On another day, Rosalie Bowker took my wife Rachel and me to Hyecheon University to meet Mrs. Min Jin O, who is the university organist and who, when we met her, was preparing four students for a required recital. I asked if they would mind playing their prepared music for us and they gave us a remarkable program all played from memory. One girl played the Langlais *Epilogue for Pedal Solo*. A young man, who was autistic, had none of his usual symptoms when he was playing. We were impressed by every one of them. Their playing had confidence and vigor even without music in front of them.

The organ was built by Oberlinger and was located in a large room that looked as though it served for concerts as well as for worship. The acoustics here were much better than what we had heard previously.

Organ miscellanies

Several universities in South Korea offer doctoral degrees in organ, so that an organ student need not travel to a different country to study. However, many do decide to work on degrees beyond their own borders. I got the impression that the two favorite places were Germany and the United States, although not limited to those. Dr. Kim remarked that you could often tell where they studied by the kind of repertoire they played. Of those students who choose to return to South Korea, there is a desire to have the kinds of organs they were exposed to where they studied and a desire for improved acoustics. As more organs are imported, it is a great opportunity to spread the gospel of better acoustics. The Koreans want the best of what the world has to offer and I don't believe it will be long



Paul Fritts organ at the Southern Baptist University/Seminary in Daejeon (photo: Jay Zoller)

before churches begin to hear the difference that good acoustics can make.

There is a Korean Association of Organists that is active in South Korea. It sponsors seminars, festivals, and masterclasses as well as hosting visiting organists from other countries, much like the AGO does in the U.S. Their journal, which contains the usual news about organs and meetings, also publishes new music written by Korean composers. I was able to discover several new pieces, many centered around hymn tunes, but one composer in particular, Ju-Hwan Yu, had written a *Prelude and Fugue on B-A-C-H* in 2005, which I found fascinating and which I played in two recitals earlier this year. As in any other country these days, Korean organ recitalists play music of many countries and different time periods.

Postscript

I very much enjoyed my visit to South Korea and only wish that it could have been much longer. I am attempting this small article in hopes that someone with much more knowledge of Korea and its organ music might take up where I have left off and fill in many more details. It is an organ culture that is growing and trying hard to catch up with the West.

I want to thank Dr. Rosalie Bowker, organist, musician, missionary, and Board Chair of the Daejeon Christian International School, without whose help none of

this would have been possible. I also want to thank Dr. Eunyoung Kim and Mrs. Min Jin O, who provided information and visits to notable Daejeon organs. ■

Bibliography

- Breen, Michael. *The Koreans—Who They Are, What They Want, Where Their Future Lies*. Orion Business Books, 1998.
- Oberdorfer, Don. *The Two Koreas, A Contemporary History*. Basic Books, a member of the Perseus Books Group, 2001.
- Becker, Jasper. *Rogue Regime—Kim Jong Il and the Looming Threat of North Korea*. Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Halberstam, David. *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War*. Hyperion Books, 2007.

Jay Zoller is organist at South Parish Congregational Church in Augusta, Maine, where he plays the church's historic 1866 E. & G.G. Hook organ. He holds degrees from the University of New Hampshire and the School of Theology at Boston University. A retired designer for the Andover Organ Company, he currently designs for the Organ Clearing House and for David E. Wallace & Co. Pipe Organ Builders of Gorham, Maine. Zoller resides in Newcastle, Maine, with his wife Rachel.

In addition to writing several articles about Heinz Wunderlich for The American Organist, Choir and Organ, and THE DIAPASON, he has played in all-Wunderlich recitals in Hamburg, Germany in 1999, 2004, and 2009. His article, "Heinz Wunderlich at 90," appeared in the April 2009 issue of THE DIAPASON.

THE 2012 MIAMI INTERNATIONAL ORGAN COMPETITION

Church of the Epiphany • Miami, Florida



Finals • March 2, 2012

Preliminary round application materials deadline December 16, 2011

First Prize • \$5,000

plus an invitation to play a full-length recital on the 2012-2013 concert series

www.ruffatti.com/MIOC.html

Fratelli Ruffatti

Builders of Fine Pipe Organs to the World

Via Facciolati, 166 • Padova, Italy 35127 • 39-049-750-666 • organs@ruffatti.com