

NORTH KOREAN HIP HOP? REFLECTIONS ON MUSICAL DIPLOMACY AND THE DPRK

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This article analyzes the effectiveness of classical music diplomacy toward the DPRK as seen in the New York Philharmonic visit of 2008. After contextualizing the role of the symphony orchestra with reference to North Korea and engaging with some questions of theory and orchestral program, the article goes on to suggest that popular music, specifically rap music, is likely to have a much more lasting impact in the DPRK. As such, the article enters into debates about North Korean cultural identity, U.S. foreign policy (particularly “soft power” directed at the DPRK), and musical practices on the Korean peninsula.

Key words: Cultural diplomacy, New York Philharmonic, socialist culture, Western orchestral music in East Asia, Kim Jong Il and opera, Lohengrin, rap music.

INTRODUCTION

Few institutions are more conducive to totalitarianism than the modern symphony orchestra. Assembling on stage, the orchestra provides a spectacle of up to one hundred musicians, dressed practically identically, following the direction of a single leader, and breathing and moving as a single organism. The conductor of the orchestra simultaneously personifies the leader of the masses, the desire of those masses to hearken to his direction, and the need to subordinate all individual expressive desires—apart from his own presumably superior instincts—to the greater whole.¹ No wonder, then, that the orchestra has excited monarchs

¹ Kim Jong Il, “The Musical Interpretation Depends on the Conductor,” *On the Art of Opera: Talk*

and dictators for centuries, and that communist regimes have been drawn to the symphonic arts with particular intensity.

State propaganda often leans heavily on symphonic sonorities, and orchestras accordingly have received substantial support from totalitarian regimes.² Given the substantive capabilities of symphony orchestras to inflate dictatorial cults of personality, such state support is clearly well-placed. In the communist world, the examples are multiple. Soviet realist composer Dmitri Shostakovich, often styled a secret dissident, actually penned his Second Symphony to Lenin, and tacitly dedicated any number of works to Stalin's greater glory.³ In China, composers followed the stultifying ethos of the 1942 Yenan Forum, bowing to Chairman Mao Zedong with "The East is Red" (*Dongfang Hong*), the revolutionary song-cum-cantata served up as the core anthem of the Cultural Revolution.⁴ North

to *Creative Workers in the Field of Art and Literature, September 4-6, 1974* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1990), 164-171. Following Kim's directives as well as his preference for the male pronoun, the DPRK's dictum for Mass Games performers can be equally invoked for orchestral performances: "[It] can be called perfect only when they synchronize their movements under the command of one man." Kim Sang Mo, Thak Song Il, and Kim Chol Man, *Mass Gymnastics in Korea* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 2002), 26.

² Pamela Potter, "The Nazi 'Seizure' of the Berlin Philharmonic, or the Decline of a Bourgeois Musical Institution," in *National Socialist Cultural Policy*, Glenn Cuomo, ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 39-66; Volker Dahm, "Zur Frage der kulturpolitisch Gleichschaltung im Dritten Reich (An Inquiry into the Cultural-Political Synchronized Takeover by the Third Reich)," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* (Contemporary History Quarterly) Vol. 43 No. 2 (April 1995), 221-265. On Hitler's further fascination with the orchestra as a means of glorifying himself and the specific victories of his Wehrmacht, see Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich: Memoirs by Albert Speer* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 180. On the financial atrophy of American symphony orchestras in the absence of state support, see Robert J. Flanagan, "Symphony Musicians and Symphony Orchestras," Stanford Graduate School of Business Research Paper No. 1989, January 2008.

³ Richard Taruskin, "Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth: Interpreting Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony," in *Shostakovich Studies*, ed. David Fanning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 17-56.

⁴ Richard Curt Kraus, *Pianos and Politics in China: Middle-Class Ambitions and the Struggle Over Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). On the role of lyrically punishing Red Guard songs in the Mao personality cult, see Vivien Wagner, "Keywords of the Red Guards Set to Music," Indiana University East Asian Working Paper Series, <http://www.indiana.edu/~easc/resources/working_paper/noframe_10b_song.htm> accessed March 7, 2006. For extended Red Guard denunciations of the personality cult of Kim Il Sung among ethnic Koreans in China, including takedowns of "The Song of General Kim Il Sung," see Yanbian Daxue Geming Weiyuanhui Jiaoyu Gemingzu [Yanbian University Revolutionary Committee Revolutionary Education Organization], *Zui E Yi Bai Lie: Zichanjieji Zhishifenzhi Tongzhi Jiu Yan'da (Gongpi Panyong)* [Series of One Hundred Guilty Acts: Policies of Capitalists and Intellectuals at Old Yanbian University (Furnished for Criticism and Trial)] (Yanbian: Yanbian University Revolutionary Committee Education Organization, December 1969), 32.

Korea, as in most areas, has charted its own pattern, one derivative yet different from the Soviet-Chinese mould, sponsoring the creation of score after score of orchestral-choral praise of the Kim cult.⁵ As Kim Il Sung (Kim Ilsŏng) implied early on in his reign, Christian musical forms were fine containers for state-centered art, and thus the orchestral-choral oratorio format used by European composers to praise Christ could be modified rather easily to praise Kim.⁶ And orchestrally-accompanied opera plays a key role in propagating state myths. Yet, the prodigious pronouncements of both Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il (Kim Chŏngil) about the function of music in North Korean politics and daily life have not been taken very seriously.⁷ This is doubly unfortunate, because further investigation of musical topics could potentially yield results in a number of ongoing DPRK-related debates. For instance, research on musical practices of the respective cults of praise could be very helpful in arguments over the likeness or the dissimilarity of the Kim cult to that of Hirohito.⁸

Centering upon images of the Kim family, national prosperity, and the power of the Korean People's Army, North Korean orchestral music often combines with the medium of dance. Understanding that Europeans founded the discipline of eurhythmic dance and then pioneered its use as an ideological tool, the Kim regime has taken orchestral-accompanied dance to a highly logical extreme.⁹

⁵ Ch'ŏn Hyŏnsik, *Pukhan ūmak yŏn'gu* (A study on North Korean music), (Ph.D. dissertation, Chung-Ang University, June 2004); Yonhap News Agency, eds., *North Korea Handbook* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2003).

⁶ *Kim Il Sung, Works, Vol. VIII*, p. 236.

⁷ Kim Jong Il's love of the art song is spoofed in Trey Parker and Matt Stone, et. al., *Team America: World Police*, Widescreen DVD (Hollywood, Calif: Paramount, 2005). Parker and Stone told MTV that they read widely in Kim Jong Il's oeuvre, resulting in his being satirized as a lonely pianist. Consequently, the comedians appeared to at least superficially follow Kim Jong Il's guideline that "the librettist can only write lyrics with profound meaning when he explores the characters' inmost world revealed in their mutual relations and in the course of their lives." See Kim Jong Il, "Lyrics Must Be Poetic," *On the Art of Opera*, 32.

⁸ On the Kimist echoes of the Shōwa system, see Brian Myers, "Ideology as Smokescreen: North Korea's Juche Thought," *Acta Koreana*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (December 2008): 163. On thematic connections between DPRK/PRC songs with those of the Japanese army, see Adam Cathcart, "Song of Youth: North Korean Music from Liberation to War," *North Korean Review*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (Spring 2008), 97.

⁹ For a scholarly discourse on the relationship between rhythm and totalitarianism that as yet has no parallel in the literature on North Korea, see Michael Golston, "'im anfang war der rhythmus': rhythmic incubations in discourses of mind, body, and race from 1850-1944," *SEHR* [Stanford Humanities Review], volume 5, Supplement: Cultural and Technological Incubations of Fascism, December 17, 1996, <<http://www.stanford.edu/group/SHR/5-supp/text/golston.html>>, accessed March 14, 2009. For a blunt contemporary view, see Shin Joo Hyun, "UN Should Inspect the Arirang, a Modern Slave Performance: Violation of the Convention on the Rights of the

North Korean practice in this area, while proclaimed as an indigenous development, has been informed by a plausible combination of foreign doctrines.¹⁰ These external theories range from Plato—his discourses on music and loyalty in *The Republic* in particular—to the early twentieth-century European doctrines of Swiss theorist Emile Jacques Dalcroze and Nazi-implicated Carl Orff.¹¹ These ideologies were absorbed in turn, modified by the Japanese, and introduced full-bore in Korea via rhythmical physical exercise, accompanied by Radio Taishō, during the Japanese occupation.¹² With the arrival after 1945 of the Korean Workers' Party and a bevy of Soviet, East German, and Hungarian technicians and pedagogues, these ideas were further developed in socialist guise. Throughout, no matter how grandiose the total work of art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) became, the primary purpose of music remained identical for the North Korean regime.¹³ All art served the center, and Kim Jong Il's vaunted artistic "seed" proliferated in its conditioning of individual wills to the imperatives of the state.¹⁴

Child," *The Daily NK*, April 25, 2007. The notion of Arirang as abuse is implicitly rebutted during an exploration of rhythm's role in Kim Jong Il, "Opera Dance," *On the Art of Opera*, 118–134.

¹⁰ North Korean indigenization of foreign opera was particularly visible in 2009, when Kim Jong Il was reported to have personally supervised productions of the Chinese opera *Dream of the Red Chamber* and the Tchaikovsky opera *Eugene Onegin* for the respective enjoyment of Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and a Russian delegation. See Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Pyongyang, "Chinese premier, DPRK leader watch opera A Dream of Red Mansions," October 5, 2009, <<http://kp.china-embassy.org/eng/zcgxzxxx/t618329.htm>>, accessed November 14, 2009; see also Korean Central News Agency, "Kim Jong Il Enjoys Opera 'The Dream of the Red Chamber,'" June 14, 2009. On the Tchaikovsky, see Korean Central News Agency, "Kim Jong Il Guides Creation of Opera 'Evgeni Onegin,'" June 7, 2009.

¹¹ Emile Jacques Dalcroze, *Eurythmics, Art, and Education* (New York: Barnes, 1931). On the incorporation of Dalcroze theory into fascist systems, see Michael H. Kater, "Carl Orff im Dritten Reich [Carl Orff in the Third Reich]," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* (Contemporary History Quarterly) Vol. 43, No. 1 (January 1995), 5. For interrogation of Orff's Nazi past, see Richard Taruskin, "Can We Please Give Poor Orff a Pass?," *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

¹² Toshio Iritani, *Group Psychology of the Japanese in Wartime* (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1991). North Koreans get around these inconveniently exogenous roots by stating that "Juche-oriented" art, including mass gymnastics, emerged fully formed from the mind of Kim Il Sung in Manchuria in the 1930s. See remarks by Kim Jong Ho, Vice-Chairman of the Mass Gymnastics Production Company, in Kim Sang Mo, Thak Song Il, and Kim Chol Man, *Mass Gymnastics in Korea* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 2002), 6.

¹³ Richard Wagner, "Die Kunst und Revolution [On Art and Revolution]"; see also Wagner's discussion of *Tristan* in his letter to Mathilde Wesendonck, Paris, October 29, 1859, in *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner* (New York: Norton, 1987), 475–477.

¹⁴ Kim Jong Il, "The Libretto is the Ideological and Artistic Basis of an Opera," *On the Art of Opera*, 19–24; Korean Central News Agency, "Adherence to Theory of Seed Called For," *Rodong Sinmun*, March 6, 2001.

Orchestras, in combination with dance and film or on their own, thus emerge as vital elements in shaping personal attachments to the national polity and its leaders.¹⁵

For the West, then, the symphony orchestra is therefore a peculiar instrument for the promotion of democratic values. In the last sixty years, the U.S. Department of State has thrice asked American symphony orchestras to blaze a path into countries with which political relations were either fraught with controversy or non-existent. The New York Philharmonic was dispatched to Moscow in 1956, serving as the face of a short-lived Cold War thaw. In the aftermath of Richard Nixon's path to Peking, the Philadelphia Orchestra ventured into the People's Republic of China in 1973.¹⁶ And in 2008, the New York Philharmonic sojourned to Pyongyang (P'yöngyang).¹⁷ Acting as explicit elements in U.S. foreign policy, symphony orchestras are asked to pacify the troubled waters of relations with difficult negotiating partners. It thus appears that states already armed with formidable orchestral capacities can be soothed by the music of American symphonic ensembles, and that these visits can serve as some sort of cultural beachhead for the West. Is classical music indeed an effective instrument for democracy promotion under North Korean conditions?¹⁸

¹⁵ Perhaps because orchestral music can also inspire revolution, as in the case of the Slave Chorus in Verdi's *Aida* or the whole of Beethoven's *Fidelio*, the need is all the greater for states to harness the power of the symphony.

¹⁶ Adam Cathcart, "Musical Diplomacy in the Opening to China, 1971-1972," presented at *Transforming the Cold War: U.S. Relations with the People's Republic of China, 1969-1980*, U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C., September 26, 2006.

¹⁷ For overviews of the trip and its origins, see Alexandra Alter and Miho Inada, "The Philharmonic's Quiet Contessa: Orchestra Enlists Patron to Help Underwrite North Korea Concert," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 22, 2008, page W1; Daniel J. Wakin, "North Korea Welcomes New York Philharmonic," *The New York Times*, February 26, 2008. For recollections on the trip by the activist Zarin Mehta, President and Executive Director of the New York Philharmonic, see Christine D. Han, "Americans in Pyongyang: The New York Philharmonic's Journey to North Korea," *The Daily NK*, April 2, 2008.

¹⁸ Very little literature exists on the role of music within the framework of expanding "Track II" relations with the DPRK. See Erin Kruth, "U.S. Alternative Diplomacy towards North Korea: Food Aid, Musical Diplomacy, and Track II Exchanges," SAIS U.S.-Korea Yearbook 2008, Johns Hopkins University 2008, <uskoreainstitute.org/pdf/Yearbooks/2008/Kruth.pdf>, accessed November 14, 2009.

CLASSICAL MUSIC DIPLOMACY

In February 2008, the New York Philharmonic spent two full days in Pyongyang as part of the orchestra's East Asia tour.¹⁹ Well before the performance, this tour was touted as a major breakthrough in musical diplomacy with the DPRK. Supporters of the orchestra cooed at the audacious idea, while headlines pronounced the mere notion of the visit as a "diplomatic triumph."²⁰ It was as if the symphony orchestra itself were no longer a moribund instrument of nineteenth-century culture, but a vital piece on the contemporary chessboard of American and Korean national interest.

Critics emerged from various wings of political opinion. The irrepressibly grumpy John Bolton registered his disapproval.²¹ The venerable conductor and New York Philharmonic Music Director Loren Maazel had to answer critics who used his own opera *1984*, with its bleak descriptions of living in a totalitarian police state, as an argument against the visit.²² Less than a day later, Maazel's warm-hearted reflections on music's role in ending the Cold War were shredded by Brian Myers in an intellectually furious editorial in the *Wall Street Journal Asia*.²³

¹⁹ Other destinations included Taipei, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing, and Seoul. Given the focus on Korea, few commentators mentioned the cross-Taiwan Straits achievements of the tour such as the no-longer-exotic idea of PRC nationals like the outstanding cellist Tu Qiang performing for a Taiwanese audience. Another intriguing storyline was missed by commentators insofar as the orchestra's assistant conductor, Xian Zhang, was a native of the Sino-Korean border city of Dandong. On Xian Zhang, see Vivien Schweitzer, "A Lengthy Journey, Nowhere Near Over," *New York Times*, February 3, 2008; appreciation is also extended to Qing Yang, of the University of Cincinnati, for sharing data from her fieldwork with the orchestra in China. The author is similarly grateful to Maestro Zhang for the pleasure of an interview over dinner in March 2008 following her performance of the Socialist Realist classic, Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky*, with the Seattle Symphony.

²⁰ Donald Kirk, "Philharmonic's North Korea Visit Is Diplomatic Triumph," *The New York Sun*, December 17, 2007.

²¹ Jay Nordlinger, "Date in Pyongyang," *National Review*, February 11, 2008.

²² Loren Maazel, "Why We'll Play Pyongyang," *Wall Street Journal*, February 20, 2008. In an interview with the BBC, Maazel savaged the "cult of Big Brother" and described his disdain for "unbridled, unquestioning patriotism, in the name of which people are exploited." See BBC News, "Premiere for opera on Orwell's *1984*," May 3, 2005. For Maazel's view of growing Orwellian tendencies in the U.S. ("two hundred and fifty years of efforts to secure the rights of individuals have been sweetly undermined by double talk"), see Daniel J. Wakin, "For 75th Birthday Gig, Maazel Does Maazel," *New York Times*, February 25, 2005, B1, B20.

²³ "North Korea Sings New Song of International Relations," October 31, 2007, *Chosun Ilbo*; Yung Jung A, "Avoid Illusions of Progress in US-North Korea Relations," *The Daily NK*, February 15, 2008. See also Brian Myers, "How Pyongyang Plays the West," *Wall Street Journal Asia*, February 21, 2008.

Human Rights groups were more ambivalent toward the visit of the orchestra to Pyongyang.²⁴ Even the U.S. Secretary of State poured cold water on the high expectations, noting that Dvorak's music had limited persuasive power, knowingly referring to the Czech composer whose "New World Symphony" was the centerpiece of the orchestra's program.²⁵

Amid the buzz over the potential opening to the DPRK, few commentators bothered to analyze the social function of the orchestra in a North Korean context. Pontifications from Kim Jong Il on this topic are particularly numinous. Kim's writings on the orchestra are primarily concerned with symphonic music as accompaniment for drama as a means of heightening the emotional impact of a certain ideologically-imbued story. In this sense, Kim's written oeuvre is reminiscent of (and perhaps derivative from) past musical dramatists such as Richard Wagner. Indeed, Kim is concerned with many of the same aesthetic problems as his non-socialist predecessors.²⁶ Following his own alleged innovation of a human-centered universe, Kim enjoined DPRK composers that "orchestral art...shows a person's inmost nature...it can portray man's inmost depth that cannot be expressed through spoken or written words." Kim thereby concedes that orchestral music functions within the realm of implication, but he rapidly returns to the idea that, in opera (his primary medium of musical interest), "the expressive capabilities of orchestral music must...portray the inmost thoughts and feelings of the characters in a deep and subtle way." Music that fails to do this "will merely sound loud and noisy...meaningless, and appealing to nobody."²⁷ Within this context, it might be argued that the New York Philharmonic was creating a wholly new cultural space in the DPRK because the musicians precisely lacked a concrete ideological goal.²⁸

Musical diplomacy is often intended to stimulate further cultural exchanges, but, perhaps more than diplomacy bounded by words, it also has the potential to trigger covert messages. Kim Jong Il's remark to Madeline Albright about missile development during her observation of a Mass Games in Pyongyang in October

²⁴ "New York Orchestra Criticized for Pyongyang Plans," *Chosun Ilbo*, October 30, 2007.

²⁵ Daniel J. Wakin, "Headed for Korea, Orchestra Gets Tips," *The New York Times*, February 25, 2008. See also Condoleezza Rice, "Diplomacy is Working on North Korea," *Wall Street Journal*, June 26, 2008.

²⁶ Richard Wagner, "On Tannhäuser," Letter from Dresden to Ferdinand Von Beidenfeld in Weimar, February 17, 1849, in *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner* (New York: Norton, 1987).

²⁷ Kim Jong Il, "Orchestral Music Must Be Alive," *On the Art of Opera*, 81, 84.

²⁸ For a rather fascinating and mystical treatment by a North Korean writer about the linkages between music performance and ideology, see Kang Kwi-mi, "A Tale of Music," translated by Yu Yong-nam, in *Literature from the "Axis of Evil,"* (New York: New Press, 2006), pp. 103-129. Originally published in *Chosun munhak*, Fall 2003.

2000 might be a case in point. Another might be how, after Henry Kissinger helped to break the Beethoven blockade in the PRC in 1971, a subtle new layer was triggered of ongoing internal power struggles focusing, along with criticisms of Confucius, on Zhou Enlai's allowance of Debussy on the recital programs of foreign musicians in China.²⁹ Kissinger may have poured scorn on Chinese revolutionary opera in his memoirs, but the briefing books he oversaw for President Nixon's China preparations dwelled extensively on the plot lines and possible implications of various revolutionary operas and ballets.³⁰

What subtle messages did the New York Philharmonic's program content convey to Kim Jong Il or to the North Korean people?³¹ The most obvious piece on the program intended to push the cultural envelope was one redolent of American culture, George Gershwin's "An American in Paris," a jazz-inflected tone poem from the 1920s. In introducing this piece onstage, conductor Loren Maazel remarked that someday, a composer might write a piece entitled "An American in Pyongyang." Maazel was clearly unaware that a whole host of songs had been written already about this idea of Americans in the DPRK: I refer of course to the blazingly anti-American anthems composed in both the DPRK and in China within the context of the U.S. occupation of North Korea in October–December 4, 1950. ("March of the People's Volunteers" reminded the Chinese people that "America has the heart of a wolf," for instance.)³² Maazel, whose titanic fund-raising responsibilities in Manhattan left him little time for perusal of depressing albums of black and white Korean War photos, sought to bypass history in the course of creating it.³³ But perhaps the 78-year-old conductor had a point. With enough Gershwin, any American could feel free to roam the city. But

²⁹ Sheila Melvin and Jindong Cai, *Rhapsody in Red: How Western Classical Music Became Chinese* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2004).

³⁰ "Background on Revolutionized Chinese Opera," Attachment to White House Central Files, Subject Files, Trips, Box 60, Folder 6, EX TR 24 China, People's Republic of (Red China) Proposed 1972, Beginning – 7/28/71, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland. According to Charles Freeman, a Sinologue and diplomat who served as Nixon's interpreter on the trip, Freeman was largely responsible for the creation of the briefing books, and was well attuned to the programmatic content of Cultural Revolution works. Author interview with Charles Freeman, Washington, D.C., September 27, 2006.

³¹ Condoleezza Rice, a rare modern Secretary of State endowed with musical training, probably played a role in the repertoire selections and was in a position to think in this fashion, although the orchestra clearly had final veto power.

³² Adam Cathcart, "Japanese Devils and American Wolves: Chinese Communist Songs from the War of Liberation and the Korean War," forthcoming in *Popular Music and Society*, Vol. 33, no. 2 (Spring 2010).

³³ Bruce Cumings, *War and Television* (London: Verso, 1992), 60–61, 221; Chris Marker, *Coréennes* (Paris, 1959).

for the moment, Gershwin's liberal orchestrations and harmonies would be considered somewhat subversive in North Korea. After all, did not the *Rodong Shinmun* castigate the pernicious effects of jazz?³⁴ And was the jazz bar not a standard trope in North Korean depictions of a South Korea besotted by libidinous foreign influences? By these tokens, the jazzy aspects of the Gershwin—along with close-up views of several of the more well-fed New Yorkers for the domestic television audience—might have simply served to reinforce notions of American decadence which are so frequently at play in DPRK domestic propaganda.³⁵ Ultimately the Gershwin failed as a Trojan horse for changing North Korean culture simply because it has no hidden message: the piece merely breathes with an easy American swagger. Likewise, Antonin Dvorak's Symphony No. 9, "From the New World," evoked obvious themes of exile and American multiethnic nationalism. Like the twin renditions of the North Korean and U.S. national anthems which opened the concert and the Overture to *Candide* played as an encore, the messages of the Gershwin and Dvorak lay on the surface, and were therefore easily effaced.

Perhaps the most meaningful programmatic message, then, was embedded in the selection penned by the composer-philosopher Richard Wagner. The orchestral program had opened in earnest with the Prelude to Act III of Wagner's opera *Lohengrin*. *Lohengrin* is an undisputed staple of the orchestral/operatic repertory, making its potentially subversive qualities that much more intriguing. Why? Wagner's opera centers around questions of the identity of a knight of the Holy Grail, Lohengrin, who marries a star-struck maiden-orphan, Elsa of Brabant, on the conditions that she not ask him his identity or learn of his past. The heroine must, in effect, forge a love for Lohengrin based only upon his resemblance to her fantasies of liberation, the physical protection he offers her, and his promises of fidelity. When he arrives on the scene via a giant swan, fulfilling her dream scenario precisely, and defeats a male doubter in battle, this adds to the swoon. After their marriage (in a scene famous today for its "Here Comes the Bride" theme), it becomes clear that Elsa has yet to overcome her doubts about her new husband. In the third act, Elsa finally breaks down and demands to know her husband's name and his true past. In a magnificent and pensive aria, "*In fernem Land* (In a Distant Land)," Lohengrin then narrates his truth, exposing his identity: "The Grail sent me to you; my father Parsifal wears its crown; and I am its knight, who is named Lohengrin (*Vom Gral ward ich zu euch*

³⁴ Park Sung Kook, "Jazz and Rock Music Killed Socialism?", *The Daily NK*, September 11, 2009.

³⁵ Kurt Achin, "North Korean Piano Prodigy Says He Defected for Art's Sake," Voice of America English service, March 31, 2006, <<http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2006-03/2006-03-31-voa13.cfm>>, accessed March 14, 2009.

daher gesandt / mein Vater Parsifal trägt seine Krone / sein Ritter ich / bin Lohengrin genannt)." His wife having opened the fissure, Lohengrin follows his own vow, vanishing into noble exile and ending the drama.

Within the North Korean context, we could read this plot in several ways. First, we might see it as evocative of themes known well to readers of Andrei Lankov and James Person. Lohengrin is set within a courtly milieu of savage internal power struggles and courtly intrigues. Usurpation of the throne is a constant possibility; factionalism is a constant. Thus we might imagine the repertoire choice of Lohengrin by the Americans to convey the desire to Kim Jong Il to resolve differences before his eventual usurpation or succession.³⁶ Or perhaps we might examine the repertoire choice on the level of the myth of Lohengrin, which parallels that of Kim Il Sung. Like the knight of the Holy Grail, Kim was a mythical hero whose reputation preceded him, but whose claim to the name was perpetually questioned by his enemies and forbidden to his allies. (There were many "verbotene Frage/forbidden questions" in the DPRK, but this was perhaps the most forbidden of all; challenging Kim Il Sung's revolutionary heritage would be to invite entry into the gulag.) And on the mythical level, Kim arrived in North Korea in October 1945 on the back of a metaphorical giant swan, that is, a Soviet frigate.

Lohengrin might further be examined both as evocative of the North Korean stage and expressive of a challenge to the legitimacy of the Korean Workers' Party. Elsa's doubts about Lohengrin place her in pure comradeship with such revolutionary heroines as those in *Sea of Blood*; North Korean literature appears full of stock female prototypes who express doubts about the Party or the revolution, only to emerge with a stronger, literally blazing, faith.³⁷ In other words Elsa (representing the North Korean people) may be in the marriage bed with Lohengrin (representing the North Korean regime), but her inability to question his past (e.g., the record of the Workers' Party's origins and devastating method) leaves her unfulfilled.³⁸ As Andrei Lankov argues, the North Korean regime

³⁶ Music played a key role for the North Korean regime in subsequent campaigns to anoint a successor to Kim Jong Il. For discussion of the role of the song "Footsteps" in the apparently-abortive drive to crown Kim's third son, Kim Jong Eun (Kim Chöngun), as successor in the spring and summer of 2009, see Jung Kwan Ho, "Kim Jong Woon and the Mangyongdae Lineage," *The Daily NK*, August 4, 2009.

³⁷ Of course in North Korean literature, the catalyst for erasing such doubt is the expressed need for anti-Japanese hatred and revenge. See *Sea of Blood* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1982) 169, 172-174.

³⁸ For a beautifully elaborate analysis of the metaphor under different Korean circumstances, see Hyun-Ok Park, *Two Dreams in One Bed: Social Life in Manchuria and the Roots of the North Korean Revolution*, (Duke University Press, 2005).

knows that it stands upon the edge of a chasm: the moment when questions are finally permitted rapidly becomes the moment of regime disintegration.³⁹ In *Lohengrin*, the reckoning is indeed sudden, though it was foretold all along. Elsa asks the forbidden question and destroys the matrimonial harmony predicated upon ignorance. Lohengrin—the knight who had protected her from ravenous outer forces—flees back into the realm of myth.

At this point the knowledgeable reader might throw up his or her hands: After all, the bombastic and triplet-rich Prelude to Act III performed by the Philharmonic is simply a piece of pure music, is it not?⁴⁰ But if we take Wagner and Kim Jong Il's theories to heart, we need to lay to rest the idea that any single piece of music can be separated from a program.⁴¹ The Prelude is integrally part of the whole, and the story and its psychologies cannot be separated from the Prelude. Moreover, metaphorically speaking, the Prelude to Act III is precisely where North Korea finds itself at the moment: full of sound and fury, but on the cusp of having inner doubts (the metaphorical, and by now wholly dysfunctional, "marriage" between Party and people) burst into the open. Cogitation of forbidden questions was precisely the purpose of the New York Philharmonic program.

Should we then praise the programming for the Philharmonic's visit to Pyongyang as some act of subversive genius which the North Korean mass audience somehow grasped? Probably not. Program notes appeared to be scarce, and the broadcast of the concert was conspicuously lacking any mention of Lohengrin's full plotlines.⁴² The implications of the selection could necessarily be known only by a select few (including, of course, Kim Jong Il). Perhaps the best indication of the program's failure as an act of mass subversion was the ease with

³⁹ For persuasive elaboration, see Andrei Lankov, "Turning Back the Clock: Attempts to Reclaim Control in North Korea after 2004," presentation to the U.S.-Korea Institute at SAIS, Washington, D.C., February 11, 2009.

⁴⁰ North Korean student cellists working through the standard method book, David Popper's *High School of Cello Technique*, would attest to this: Popper treated the orchestral excerpt as pure music, creating an entire etude (#19 of 40) out of Wagner's original motif. Popper's work was spawned at the Budapest Conservatory and was subsequently espoused by generations of Soviet and Hungarian musical advisors, including those to the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing.

⁴¹ Wagner reinforces this idea in his discussion of Beethoven's overture to "Coriolanus"; see Richard Wagner in Zurich to Theodor Uhlig in Dresden, February 13, 1852, *The Letters of Richard Wagner* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 249–253.

⁴² Jung Kwan Ho, "Pyongyang Residents' Reactions to Philharmonic Performance Mixed," *The Daily NK*, February 26, 2008; Moon Sung Hwee, "The North Korean Citizens Were Lukewarm about the New York Phil," *The Daily NK*, March 2, 2008; Namgung Min, "Hope New York Philharmonic's Performance is a Nice Little Present for North Korean People," *The Daily NK*, February 27, 2008;

which the North Korean hosts were able to render the orchestra's messages into something resembling tribute missions to the culturally superior worker's paradise.⁴³

Before leaving aside the meaning of the Philharmonic's visit, one further area invites discussion. While media observers tended to reiterate the standard barrage of adjectives about the DPRK, none appeared to note the fact that musical diplomacy had been a standard part of life in the DPRK in the heyday of socialist internationalism.⁴⁴ In the 1950s, North Korean ensembles toured frequently to China, the Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe. In particular, these groups moved about in search of aid to rebuild their war-torn country, a goal in which they were quite successful. Both during and after the war, few audiences, particularly those in East German cities like Dresden, could resist the moving combinations of choirs of Korean orphans along with speeches about unbridled American firebombings. (In a pro-American parallel, the "Pyongyang Art Troupe," a group made up of defectors from North Korea, are today effective fundraisers as well.)⁴⁵ In addition to hosting foreign musicians, the DPRK also sent musicians abroad to study in limited but steady numbers. However, the long lead-up to the botched 1989 World Youth Festival effectively symbolized the coming decades of musical isolation of the DPRK.⁴⁶ Here, precisely in 1989, the question of music and the North Korean regime takes on a new shape.

POP MUSIC AND POST-REVOLUTIONARY IDENTITY

The Workers' Party in Pyongyang doubtless apprehended the deleterious significance of the cultural momentum which popular music helped to create in East Germany, the Soviet Union, and China in the late 1980s.⁴⁷ In particular, the

⁴³ Brian Myers, "How Pyongyang Plays the West," *Wall Street Journal Asia*, February 21, 2008.

⁴⁴ On North Korean internationalism, see Charles Armstrong, "Fraternal Socialism: The International Reconstruction of North Korea, 1953–1962," *Cold War History* Vol. 5, No. 2 (May 2005); Adam Cathcart and Charles Kraus, "International Culture in North Korea, 1945–1950," *Review of Korean Studies* (October 2008); see also Nicolai Volland, "Translating the Socialist State: Cultural Exchange, National Identity, and the Socialist World in the Early PRC," *Twentieth-Century China*, Volume 33, Number 2 (2007), 51–72.

⁴⁵ Yang Jong-a, ed., "Concert for North Korean Orphans attracts new US Ambassador," *The Daily NK*, September 26, 2008.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Campbell, "East German Aid to North Korea in War and Reconstruction: A Reassessment via German Archives," unpublished paper.

⁴⁷ Undated conversation (probably 1987) between Ri Jong Su [Chairman of Central Committee of DPRK Democratic Youth League] and Eberhard Aurich [First Secretary of Free German Youth], State and Party Mass Organization (SAPMO) Archive, Berlin, Germany, DY 24 FDJ/14482, p. 3.

close ties in this period between the North Korean Youth Democratic League and the East German Free German Youth (*Freie Deutsche Jugend*) had given certain North Koreans a close view into the budding rock-and-roll culture in East Germany.⁴⁸ The North Koreans were not far from the mark when they noted that the increased influence of pop music among youth could be very corrosive to the cultural monopolies of the Party itself.⁴⁹ After all, it had not taken long for Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev to be proven stunningly wrong when, speaking of *glasnost*, he stated that “it goes without saying that the policy of the Party is the basis of this process.”⁵⁰ The new era of cultural decentralization and rapid expansion of popular music in the USSR and the Eastern Bloc would have important impacts for North Korea.

In journalist David Remnick’s memoir of the last years of the Soviet Union, the author recounts an unsettling experience he had in the hinterland. On his way to visit a prison camp in Perm, Remnick passes a vegetable stand where he becomes entranced by “an odd throbbing sound.” Almost in slow-motion, he reflects: “It was the first time I had ever heard a Russian rapper.”⁵¹ I have certainly never heard a North Korean rapper, but one has to wonder: do they exist? State monopolies on vegetables are one thing, but cultural monopolies are even harder to maintain. Via South Korean example and contact with the Chinese,

Ri was correct in assessing the youth movements roiling in the PRC: “The Chinese state will not break down,” he stated further hoping “to make great thanks when the friendly relations between socialist countries could be reestablished.”

⁴⁸ “Rockmusikveranstaltungen in der DDR,” especially files “Durchfuehrung eines internationalen Friedenskonzerte anlaesslich des Weltfriedenstages am 29.8.1987 in Berlin (Development of an International Peace Concert on the Occasion of World Peace Day on August 29, 1987),” and “Solidaritaetskonzert mit Bruce Springsteen [sic] und der E Street Band am 19.7.1988 (Solidarity Concert with Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band on July 19, 1988)” in State and Party Mass Organization (SAPMO) Archive, Berlin, Germany, DY 24 FDJ. For an overview of an earlier era, see Timothy S. Brown, “The Politics of Rock in Cold War Berlin,” *German Studies Review* Vol. 32, No. 1 (February 2009): 1–22; see also David Sanson, “Le Mur a des Oreilles [The Wall Around the Ears: Twenty Years After the Fall of the Wall, Berlin Remains One of the Epicenters of Musical Avant-Garde; A Journey of Images and Concerts Which Recall the Partition of a City],” *La Cité du Music Magazine*, June 2009, pp. 27–29.

⁴⁹ Paul French, “Korea: Unification by Stealth,” <<http://www.nthposition.com/korea/reunification.php>>, accessed on November 13, 2007.

⁵⁰ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 61.

⁵¹ David Remnick, *Lenin’s Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire* (New York: Random House, 1993), 336. Remnick also discusses debates in the Soviet youth paper, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, about rock and roll, denunciations which gradually transformed into earnest reports on the rock band Pink Floyd.

creation of rap music might indeed become part of the DPRK's cultural mix.⁵² Moreover, if North Korean rappers themselves do not yet exist, how might they be cultivated?

This is an important question to ask, because, as Bruce Cumings states, "rap defeats Beethoven in the battle for public opinion." That is to say, when it comes to the allegiance of youth, rap wins over classical music hands down.⁵³ Beethoven can be reinterpreted as a democratic and anti-monarchical revolutionary, but his idiom has its limits with a culturally-reorienting DPRK. Even Shostakovich, whose music may well enjoy its greatest revival in North Korea in the coming decades, is from a place and time fundamentally alien from, say, contemporary North Hamgyŏng Province. Classical music in its present form is simply not capacious enough to tell the stories of the North Koreans, and they indeed have stories to tell.⁵⁴ Mahler's world-striding symphonies pale in comparison to traditional mediums such as *pangch'ang* and *p'ansori*—or adaptations of these mediums into rap music—to relay tales of hunger and flight to Manchuria (or project their own dolorous narratives into that of Kim Il Sung's flight north in the 1920s). Certainly classical music remains alive in the North, and it should be stimulated and engaged with as much as possible. We can imagine Western classical music concerts in Ch'ŏngjin, Wŏnsan, and elsewhere, away from the white halls of Pyongyang's apparent perfection, in the land of chipped facades and windy hunger. What has yet to be fully debated is the role that Western music more generally can play in the process of North Korean transformation, and specifically the relative roles of classical versus popular music in stimulating change.

More so than classical music, much likely closer to the hearts and minds of North Korean youth, if and when they gain exposure, will be hip-hop. Hip-hop idioms have shown tremendous resiliency and plasticity in recent decades. Hip-hop is imminently adaptable.⁵⁵ It takes less training or money than, say, the violin, and needs no state support to survive (quite unlike the symphony orchestra). It is individualistic and encourages a free-flowing type of expression. Rap is laced through with individual "battles" growing out of jazz improvisation. Call and response techniques encourage interchange of ideas from performer and audience.

⁵² For an intriguing discussion of South Korean song tunes infiltrating the DPRK and subsequent appending of revolutionary texts to those tunes, see Moon Sung Hwee, "North Korean Youth Sing South Korean Songs," *The Daily NK*, May 1, 2008.

⁵³ Cumings, *War and Television*, 28.

⁵⁴ Juliette Morillot and Dorian Malovic, *Évadés de Corée du Nord: Temoignages* (Escapes from North Korea: Testimonies) (Paris: Belfond, Presses de la Cité, 2007).

⁵⁵ Olivier Cachin, *Hip-hop: L'authentique histoire en 101 disques essentiels* (Hip-hop: The Authentic History in 101 Essential Discs) (Paris: Scali, 2007).

As in certain classical chamber music, these are ideas which one can associate with participatory democracy. There is no need for conductors, ostensibly authoritative interpreters, to guide young musicians through the canon of classical music repertoire; the repertoire is instead created by the performers. Classical music, often encumbered by administrative totalism, rarely plays a central role in forging a post-revolutionary identity, but popular music can.

Having set aside, then, the orchestral model of diplomacy, an investigation of the breakdown of cultural consensus in communist states becomes necessary. The things that bring down regimes are the emergence of individual stories, and thus the true stuff of a North Korean cultural identity *independent of the state* lies more in the realm of smaller bands and individual performers, garage bands, as it were.⁵⁶ We already know that rap music has exploded in the cross-border partners of the DPRK, that is, in South Korea and in China. As Brian Myers states, “the information cordon that once sealed off the country is in tatters,” but it is important to note that the area of greatest relative openness appears to be along the Chinese border.⁵⁷ In that area, South Korean rap, itself the object of no small scholarly attention, may already be infiltrating North Korea, along with American and Chinese counterpart idioms.⁵⁸ The potential adaptations of this music are worth further exploration, particularly given the growth potential for what Stanford scholar Chiho Sawada calls “pop culture diplomacy.”⁵⁹ Rap music, even if distasteful to North Koreans, could play a role in reconciliation between the Koreas.⁶⁰

Since research data on North Korean rap is not existent, Chinese hip-hop

⁵⁶ Stephen J. Epstein, “Anarchy in the UK, Solidarity in the ROK: Punk Rock Comes to Korea,” *Acta Koreana* pp. 107–114. Besides being a fascinating study in fieldwork, Epstein’s article cites S. Widdicombe and R. Wooffitt, *The Language of Youth Subcultures: Social Identity in Action* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1995) and S. Hall and T. Jefferson, eds., *Resistance through Ritual: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1976).

⁵⁷ Brian Myers, “To Beat a Dictator, Ignore Him,” *New York Times*, April 1, 2009.

⁵⁸ Keith Howard ruefully notes the overtaking of rap music in CD sales over traditional Korean music. Howard, p. 6.

⁵⁹ Chiho Sawada, “Pop Culture, Public Memory, and *Rethinking Historical Injustice and Reconciliation in Northeast Asia: The Korean Experience*, Gi-Wook Shin, Soon-Won Park, and Daqing Yang, eds. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 204, 212–214.

⁶⁰ Sonny Kang, a Korean actor living in Los Angeles, describes the antipathy felt by Korean-Americans toward rap music in the aftermath of black-Korean violence in that city in 1992. “Many friends were like ‘forget rap music’ after the riots,” said Kang. . . . “Then when Dr. Dre dropped ‘The Chronic’ album in the summer of ’92 it was like ‘Wow, this album is so good we can forgive everybody.’” Quoted in Peter Prengaman, “Korean Rappers Build Bridges With Blacks,” Associated Press, May 1, 2007.

phenomenon should be examined in the border regions.⁶¹ Hip-hop is prevalent among Korean-Chinese (*Chosŏnjok*) youth in the Yŏnbyŏn (Yanbian) Korean Autonomous region in northeast China, along the border with North Hamgyŏng.⁶² Are would-be North Korean MCs studying developments in Yŏngil (Yanjǐ)? Youth are a major part of the cross-border traffic, presumably, and the extent of their musical acculturation in China is a consequential occurrence that remains completely unresearched. Among elite graduates of Pyongyang high schools, several hundred girls are lodged in hotels and state-owned restaurants in little pockets all over China. Their cultural fare is, by and large, state-sanctioned songs, but they are also exposed occasionally to Canto-pop and the occasional outburst of a wickedly loud Chinese cell phone ring. However, their interaction with *Chosŏnjok* of their own age is rather limited, meaning that cultural transference in the other direction is unlikely; they watch Kung-Fu movies at night and their forays into Chinese culture are most often mediated through Hong Kong.⁶³

Western transformationalist fantasy has had years to envision a “free” North Korea, but has not adequately questioned how music might act as a catalyst for cultural liberalization in the North. One significant change from prior years is that the long-standing wish in the West that the DPRK could be opened up and its culture marketized is now shared with a growing number of Chinese elites.⁶⁴ In this sense, although China has maintained the veneer of Party culture and CCTV remains strong, the hip-hop pressure on the DPRK is now also coming from its northern border.

CONCLUSION

There are many reasons to question the potential for a future emergence of popular music from the DPRK, because we should be asking ourselves what comes next. In other words, culturally speaking, what is the shape and the format

⁶¹ On cross-border flows of sung drama / *ch'anggŏk* between Yanbian and Korea, see Colin Mackerras, “Integration and the Dramas of China’s Minorities,” *Asian Theatre Journal*, Vol. 9 No. 1 (Spring 1992): 11–12.

⁶² A short and relatively professional documentary film on this phenomenon, including short interviews with Chinese Korean MCs, is available online. See “BeatBox in China Yanbian!” <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eb4k2-ll23w>>, accessed March 31, 2009.

⁶³ Personal observations based on several trips to North Korean restaurants and discussions with North Koreans in Yanbian, Dandong, Ji’an, Beijing, Qingdao, and Harbin, 2006–2009.

⁶⁴ Bonnie Glaser, Scott Snyder, and John S. Park, “Keeping an Eye on an Unruly Neighbor: Chinese Views of Economic Reform and Stability in North Korea,” United States Institute of Peace Working Paper, January 3, 2008, <www.usip.org>, accessed March 3, 2009.

of the "Nachfolgestatt," or the "successor state" to the DPRK?⁶⁵ Much obviously depends on the scenario under which North Korea falls or cracks open, assuming a narrative of collapse still holds validity. But it is difficult to doubt that within a generation, North Koreans will be confronting a significantly changed cultural landscape. Vast changes have already enveloped the people since the death of Kim Il Sung, and it seems likely that cultural diffusion from outside, again entering the DPRK mainly from the northern border, will continue apace. The invitation of the South Korean pop groups "Shinhwa" and "Baby V.O.X." to perform in Pyongyang was an interesting and tentative look for some North Koreans into such developments in South Korea.⁶⁶ But several more durable models might emerge from a North Korea where culture is not the sole purview of the Korean Workers' Party. The East German example has already been rather useful for projecting forward issues of integration, memory, and expression of grief for the state which presumably has to be sacrificed in order to join in the prosperous union with the formal rival brother-country. But in terms of post-revolutionary music, and the shape that a changed (yet still communist) North Korea would take musically, a better model exists still.⁶⁷

The People's Republic of China has failed to bury Mao Zedong's body, but his ideology of ceaseless class struggle appears to be deep underground at the moment. Culturally, however, the impact of the Maoist years remains strong, and Chinese youth and rock musicians have a poignant sense of what has been left behind. Beijing rock star He Yong laces his music with Red Guard harmonies, but sometimes does so in a drunken fashion which consciously profanes the revolutionary tradition.⁶⁸ Virtually the totality of successful Chinese pop art operates along similar thematic lines. (Fortunately for visual artists, their mixtures of communist kitsch and revolutionary nostalgia now command huge prices on

⁶⁵ Ulrich Thamer, *Der Nationalsozialismus* (National Socialism), (Stuttgart: Philip Reclam, 2002), 451.

⁶⁶ "Shinhwa Performs in North Korea," <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QM1avYwLC6I>>, accessed March 13, 2009. From the North Korean point of view, Shinhwa's pop music was less likely to open eyes than provoke criticism for its weak brand of harmonies, androgynous male singers, and exceedingly sloppy group dance moves.

⁶⁷ This is not to say that the East German archives are lacking any advice for North Korea as that country finds its way forward with its socialist culture. See Peter Wicke, "Theoretische Probleme der Produktion von Rockmusik im Sozialismus [Theoretical Problems in the Production of Rock Music Under Socialism]," in *Massenkulture – populäre Künste – Unterhaltung, Theoretische und Praktische Probleme der Unterhaltungskunst in der DDR* [Mass Culture – Popular Art: Discussion, Theory, and Practical Problems of Discussing Art in the German Democratic Republic], in *Freie Deutsche Jugend* [Free German Youth] materials, "Rockmusik Veranstaltungen in der DDR, 1976, 1986–90 [Rock Music Activities in the German Democratic Republic, 1976, 1986–90], DY 24/20627, in Bundesarchiv, Berlin.

⁶⁸ Interview with He Yong, Beijing, June 15, 2007.

the world market.) For would-be rock and rap musicians in the DPRK, China's experience as a model for the North is full of flaws, but lessons can still be drawn. Chinese musicians have succeeded in combining Western globalized musical idioms with revolutionary, even nationalistic, currents.⁶⁹ Chinese trends toward hip-hop have accelerated the acquisition of identity politics for young Chinese and sped along the course toward a truly post-revolutionary society. Assuming that the North will at some point enter a post-revolutionary phase, how will North Koreans look back on their revolutionary culture, musically speaking? Regardless of their position in a unified Korea, it is virtually certain that North Korean rappers and rock musicians will incorporate revolutionary tunes into their pop songs, as has been done by so many (often critical) musical artists in the PRC. If and when the North breaks down, the debates over how to maintain a distinctly North Korean identity will reemerge with great force. I simply mean to suggest here that hip-hop idioms may be one way of asserting a distinctly Northern ethos.

Much more likely, if DPRK remains totalitarian, is the persistence of the musical status quo, orchestral-led, where the model operas remain dominant and pop culture seeps slowly into the country. And, although the notion may appear fantastic, we might also envision an attempt by a possibly younger regime in Pyongyang to co-opt elements of an emerging youth culture and shape them into a pro-government delivery. In other words, as the Chinese Communist Party has effectively managed to do, the Korean Workers' Party might foster the growth of pro-government hip-hop declaring the greatness of their land and the perfection of its system.⁷⁰ In a coming period of instability and change, the North Korean regime might necessarily hearken back to its earliest days of power in 1945, recalling its original crisis with the youth and the flexibility that became necessary when dealing with this volatile population. After all, popular music is not by its very nature opposed to dictatorships; in fact in places like China, pop music and repressive government are involved in a more complex relationship than that of the symphony orchestra. Popular music, ideally in a totalitarian state, is used to pacify the people, narrow their political options, and help them to recognize their common prosperity.

One final question bears consideration. How might revolutionary hip-hop, if generated, be justified in terms of the writings of the Kim family? Here lies one potential avenue for any future change in North Korea—simply find a way to

⁶⁹ Anthony Y. H. Fung, "Western Style, Chinese Pop: Jay Chou's Rap and Hip-Hop in China," *Asian Music*, 39, no. 1 (2007): 69–80. See also Howard French, "The Sound, Not of Music, But of Control," *New York Times*, October 25, 2007.

⁷⁰ See Yin Tseng, "Zai Beijing," track 5 from the 2006 album *Wei Renmin Fumu* (Serve the People).

reinterpret the leader's great directives to serve pragmatic contemporary needs. In his lectures collectively entitled "On the Art of Opera," Kim Jong Il enjoins composers to be "audacious" while "serving the people" with an "understandable art."⁷¹ Is this an opening toward the embrace of a new medium in the service of an old goal? If in fact the story of Kim Il Sung is a myth with a core, then it needs to be told in new and far-reaching idioms, including rap ballads. Although it is counterfactual to say so, had rap music been a viable idiom in the 1930s, the young guerilla leader would certainly have approved of its use in the anti-Japanese struggle. And today, North Korea's foreign competitors—the U.S., South Korea, and Japan foremost—have apprehended the medium of hip-hop but are only beginning to grasp the full political potency of the art form, let alone its reception in the North Korean context.⁷² If in fact North Korean MCs are up to the task, we may indeed witness a rebirth of a distinctly northern hip-hop on the Korean peninsula whose "authenticity" simply cannot be doubted.⁷³

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⁷¹ Kim Jong Il, *On the Art of Opera*, 94.

⁷² Stephen Epstein, "The Axis of Vaudeville: Images of North Korea in South Korean Pop Culture," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 10-2-09, March 7, 2009.

⁷³ K. McLeod, "Authenticity within Hip-Hop and Other Cultures Threatened with Assimilation," *Journal of Communication* Vol. 49, No. 4 (2007): 134–150.