

Kim Jong Il and Music

Foreign Languages Publishing House

DPR Korea

Juche 112 (2023)

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Foreword

Music is a noble art that represents the inner world and experiences of man in a profound way and adds ardent passion, rich emotions and vigour to the people. In particular, genuine music leads the times.

It is by no means easy to raise it to the level, on which it can lead the times.

Having loved music ardently since his childhood, Chairman Kim Jong Il created several excellent songs in those days.

He was possessed of a deep receptive mind for music, inborn talent for it and Juche-oriented view on it, and directed strenuous efforts to its development.

Under his leadership, the Korean artists created a new type of opera and radically improved the level of the creation, arrangement and depiction of music.

He aroused the revolutionary enthusiasm in the people by means of music, thus turning music into a powerful weapon and driving force of the revolution and construction.

To him, music was a lifetime companion. Whether he was happy or sad, he would listen to music or sing songs, leading the arduous Korean revolution along the road of victory.

The editorial board publishes this book to introduce his great personality through some anecdotes.

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1

Extraordinary Gift for Music

Possessed of marvellous musical gift, Kim Jong Il approached every phenomenon and thing by linking them with music.

His keen ear for music, musical ability to analyse phenomena and things, powerful memory for music and deep knowledge of the characteristics and playing techniques of various musical instruments often struck people with admiration.

Outstanding Sensitivity to Music

The following happened one spring day in 1946, when Kim Jong Il was a little over four years old.

When he was together with his mother Kim Jong Suk, the anti-Japanese war heroine, and a woman neighbour in the courtyard of his home, birds in trees in the yard started trilling loudly.

“Those chirping birds,” mumbled the woman.

Kim Jong Il said to the woman:

Why do you say chirping when they are singing? Listen. They are singing do, la, sol, mi, mi, sol, do, aren't they?

She was quite impressed. Presently, a car was heard honking from outside the fence.

Immediately Kim Jong Il shouted:

It's do, do, do. It sounds like *Comrades* in the score *Get ready, comrades* in *Guerrilla March*.

Then a locomotive whistled from afar this time.

He uttered;

Sol, mi, sol.

He said that it was not only people that sang songs, and that

trucks and trains also sang, adding that this meant people lived among songs.

Then, he sat at the organ and pressed the key of re, saying that sound was the initial note of *Eight Scenic Spots in Korea*, which he thought was the same with the whistle of a train. Then he proceeded to think up the things representing the initial notes of *Yangsando*, *Platycodon*, *The Nodul Riverside* and other folk songs, and drew a truck, train and the like on each disk containing the corresponding song.

Three Stages of Song Creation

Kim Jong Il was so good at playing the organ and various other instruments from his childhood that he guided a music club during his middle school days.

One February day in 1957, he came to girl students who were practising chorus after school, and asked how their rehearsal went along.

Answering that it did not go well as it should, they asked him to help them.

The song they were practising was about Hero Ri Su Bok, which sings the praises of the hero who, during the Fatherland Liberation War, had blocked an enemy pillbox with his body to open up the way for his unit to charge, the one Kim Jong Il had selected for the schoolgirls to present at a performance to be staged on the occasion of the anniversary of the founding of the Korean People's Army (February 8). It would be the centrepiece of the performance.

After listening to them singing, he said to them that he could see they had practised hard though the time was short, but their singing did not leave much lingering effect.

Then he continued:

The reason for it, I think, is that you have failed to understand what the song is meant to tell, but been concerned only with its rendering. If you are to sing a song well, you should, first of all, grasp the profound meaning of its lyrics and then try to present its ideological content and musical features of its melody. Of these, the former is more important. The song you are practising sings of the hot-blooded, 18-year-old Hero's love for his country. So you should sing in such a way as to express the profound meaning of the song well. Only then can its ideological content tug at the heartstring of the audience and contribute to their emotional education. In other words, you should have an understanding of the meaning of the lyrics, sing the song beautifully and then present the musical features. When representing a song, we should follow these three stages.

The girls were quite struck with wonder at his original principle.

Looking at them, he added:

But you were paying attention only to rendering, skipping this course. As a chorus is sung not by one person but by a group of several persons, the tone quality and presentation of the singers must be unified. For this, all the singers should be possessed of a high collectivist spirit, and each singer should sing while attentively listening to others' singing.

The girls resumed their rehearsal paying attention to the meaning of the lyrics and to ensuring the ensemble as he had instructed. The result was remarkable. They could feel a strong, solemn emotion welling up as if they were standing before the Hero and the enemy's pillbox. Finally, they could present an excellent chorus.

A Grand Symphony at a Construction Site

Around early May in 1958, Kim Jong Il often went to construction sites in the capital city together with his fellow students.

Devoting his strength, wisdom and sweat, he undertook challenging parts of labour, and sometimes organized recreation parties, dancing and singing himself.

One day he wrote the following in his diary:

It is already well past midnight. Everything should have gone to sleep. But the air is not serene but full of loud songs of vibrant reality.

The whistle of the crane signaler seems to me like the clear sound of the trumpet; the humming of the crane moving in answer to it is like the sound of the double bass; the horn of the truck resembles the voice of a tenor; the crackle of the welding rod is like the sound of the timpani; the rumble of the cement mixer, which used to be so clamorous, now seems to me as soft as the sound of the cello. From time to time a locomotive whistle is heard from afar resembling the heavy sound of the tuba. All this reminds me of a grand symphony. Tonight I feel as if I were the conductor

of a grand symphony orchestra.

It is a great night of great Korea.

Why are they working still in this deep night when others are sleeping?

It is because they are the leader Comrade Kim Il Sung's true revolutionary fighters, working class of Korea, who are endeavouring to bring earlier the times, the bright future of the country.

It was a paean to the vibrant night of the country and the heroic labour of the builders of the capital city.

Singing the Melody of a Children's Song

Kim Jong Il knew many foreign classical and modern songs including children's songs, not to mention the Korean songs and world-famous songs.

One June day in 1968, Kim Jong Il telephoned the chief of a recording studio, and gave him the title of a foreign song for children and told him to send it to him in 30 minutes.

The official could not remember the song. Embarrassed, he told Kim Jong Il frankly.

Kim Jong Il said:

Don't you remember the song? It could be. Listen to me, then. The melody is like this.

He then sang the melody over the phone.

Only then did the man recall that he had heard with Kim Jong Il the original of a recording of children's songs of a foreign country.

He was struck with admiration for Kim Jong Il's excellent memory of music with which he vividly remembered the melody of a foreign children's song he had listened to a long time before.

When he said to Kim Jong Il that he remembered it vaguely, Kim Jong Il told him to find and copy it.

After 30 minutes Kim Jong Il called him again.

The man told him that he had just finished copying.

Very pleased, Kim Jong Il thanked him.

Detecting a Faint Noise in an Instant

One day in November 1968, Kim Jong Il listened to the recording of a song with creative workers. When the song came to the last part of the first stanza, he told the recordist to stop the player, and said that he had noticed a noise.

Kim Jong Il asked them if they had not heard the noise.

They answered no.

Saying that it seemed to him that the tape contained a noise, he told the recordist to play the machine again.

But this time, too, no one spotted the noise.

Kim Jong Il thought for a moment, and told the recordist to play it at the half speed.

When the song reached the last part of the first stanza, they noticed something and broke a gasp of surprise.

As he had said, there was a faint but clear thud in the last part.

Looking at the recordist, he said that when he had heard the thud first, he had wondered that the tape had been connected.

The recordist apologetically whispered that he had connected it.

When recording the song, the singer had not produced well the

continuant sound in the last part though she had repeated it several times. With nothing else to do, the recordist had selected and cut the part he deemed best and pasted it to the tape. Then he had repeated playing it several times before assuring himself that there was no problem with the tape.

The creative workers had also told it was perfect after listening to it several times.

Kim Jong Il, however, detected the noise on the tape upon listening to it once.

Quick Ear for Music

The following happened one day in September 1969.

After entering a rehearsal room, where an instrumental ensemble of an art troupe was practising, Kim Jong Il suddenly stopped in his tracks and looked round the room, asking what made this room echo like that.

Not knowing what he meant, no one made an answer.

He asked again if they had not felt a change in the echo of the instrumental ensemble.

The conductor stepped forward, and answered he had not felt anything.

Kim Jong Il insisted:

But there was definitely a change. The room must have been changed. You'd better analyse the acoustic of the room and take relevant measures to ensure that nothing would damage the musical interpretation in the slightest degree.

They soon measured and analysed the acoustic, and found that the vinyl flooring, which had been newly spread, was the cause of the change of echo.

Be Well Aware of Others

The following happened when a song for a film was being created.

One day Kim Jong Il, together with the creative workers, listened to a new song. When the song was over, he said that it sounded like a certain Indonesian song.

Bewildered, the creative workers looked at one another. None of them knew anything of such a song.

The composer of the song hurriedly went to the archive. He found out that particular song from the Indonesian collection and played the cassette on the player.

To his utter surprise, the initial part of its melody was exactly the same with the counterpart of his song.

He could hardly believe that two different composers from two different countries had created an almost identical melody. At the same time, he was ashamed of his shallow knowledge of music, which had led him to copy a foreign song, though by accident.

But, his surprise did not come from his disbelief or shame; it came from the fact that Kim Jong Il was familiar even with the melody of a song composed by a foreigner.

Later, when he met Kim Jong Il, the composer told him what he had felt that day.

Kim Jong Il said with a laugh:

Several people listened to it together, but no one found it. What would have happened if I had failed to find it, too?

After a short while, he continued:

If we are to raise our music to the world level, we must be well-versed in the music of various foreign countries as well just like we need to be well aware of others if we are to beat them.

Where Has Forte Gone?

One day in March 2005, Kim Jong Il guided a performance by the State Merited Chorus.

When the performance was over, he said:

The accompaniment was not satisfactory. The piano was so weak that the accompaniment as a whole was made good for nothing. I came here today with an intention to see how the pianists played the piano, but as they played it too timidly, I could not see their level of performance.

Then he asked the conductor what was the meaning of the name *piano*.

“It means it is an instrument that can be played either quietly or loudly and the original name of the instrument is pianoforte,” answered the conductor.

In a positive response to what the conductor said, Kim Jong Il continued:

The original name of the piano is pianoforte which means it can be played either quietly or loudly. But in today’s accompaniment, the piano showed off the quality of piano alone, not that of forte. Where has forte gone?

Actually, the conductor had prided himself on being a first-class conductor. He had conducted the performance in such a way that the piano could not exhibit its proper quality.

Kim Jong Il said soothingly:

Today I realized that the conductor was restraining the accompaniment the moment I listened to the first number. He probably did so, afraid that the chorus might be suppressed if the sound of the piano was loud. It seemed that he failed to think that restrained piano accompaniment would not contribute to highlighting the character of the song but result in unstable step being revealed. A conductor should consider musical presentation from various aspects and guide it prudently.

He then referred to the need to apply various harmonies, rhythms and performance techniques in piano accompaniment and said:

Try to improve it with a bold resolve. You should find forte without fail.

When the accompaniment was renewed, Kim Jong Il saw the performance again.

It was a success.

Amazing Four Seconds

One day in January 2006, Kim Jong Il saw the artistic performance *The Blue Sky over My Country*, which had been represented.

After speaking highly of the successful performance, he told the officials that it missed one thing, adding:

What do you think? The female folk song ensemble and chorus *Arirang of Prosperity* seems to be a bit slow, isn't it?

As for the above-mentioned chorus, he had paid special attention to how to depict it. Now, he was talking about the speed of the chorus.

An official answered that it followed the speed of its music.

Kim Jong Il said:

The characteristics of the performance require the chorus to be faster. It has become much better as *saenap* (a Korean brass wind instrument) and gong were added to its presentation. It will become more cheerful if it gains more speed.

The officials got serious. They were reminded of the fact that Kim Jong Il had defined that the purpose of the performance was to encourage the service personnel and other people who had turned

out, upholding the joint editorial, and stressed that preparations should be made well. But they had failed to do so.

Reading their minds, he urged them, saying that if they quickened the tempo by four to five seconds, it would work.

Quickening the tempo of a song by four to five seconds was a great change in tempo. It was all the more so as the chorus was a song of fast tempo. However, they buckled down to quickening it as he had said, far from following the existing theory.

Before the song *Arirang of Prosperity* was staged in the performance, the programme consisted of slow and lyrical songs. So, the song must have been heard amongst rich lyrical emotions. It would have been too much if its tempo was quickened by four to five seconds when it was sung individually, but it might become different when it was sung in a general performance. Thinking in this way, they made a try.

It was amazing. It did not affect the song but made it much more cheerful than before, instilling strength and courage in the audience.

The song was newly portrayed as befitting a song of advance of the times.

Witnessing the magical effect of four seconds, the officials could not but be struck with wonder by Kim Jong Il's

unexcelled musical talent.

Here is part of the dialogue Kim Jong Il had with the officials a few days later.

Kim Jong Il: I've listened to the re-recording of the performance *The Blue Sky over My Country*, and the female folk song ensemble and chorus *Arirang of Prosperity* is surely cheerful.

Official: We have quickened its tempo by four seconds as you have instructed us. Its mood has changed mysteriously.

Kim Jong Il: Even the instrumentalists must not have imagined that four seconds, not ten or twenty, would bring about such effect.

Official: We want to know what principle you had in mind when you instructed us to do so.

Kim Jong Il: Principle?

Official: Yes.

Kim Jong Il: It was my musical sense, not any principle.

The Double Bass Moved to Its Right Place

One day in October 2006, Kim Jong Il enjoyed a performance given by the State Merited Chorus.

After the performance was over, Kim Jong Il asked a senior official of the chorus why the double bass was placed among the treble instruments like the violin, adding that he had long thought about the problem.

The official answered that he did not know from when, but it had been a kind of formula to place it on the side of the treble instruments.

That place was originally for the harp, Kim Jong Il said, and continued:

From now on, the double bass should be placed among the basses.

Though the official said yes, he could not understand why.

After placing the double bass in that way, a performance was staged.

It was great. Until then, the double bass had been considered to be contributing to supporting the sound effect of the treble instruments, but actually it had covered their sounds. Now,

the sounds of the instruments got clear and more harmonized as well.

But why the double bass had been among the treble instruments? It had been a result of the one-sided view of some officials and other creative workers, who had paid greater attention to the visual balance than to the sound effect; in other words, the side of the bass instruments had been occupied by large instruments like the timpani, whereas that of the treble instruments had been occupied by small instruments.

When reported about this later, Kim Jong Il gave a hearty laugh and said:

They must have done so to ensure visual balance, thinking that, if the instruments were arranged in that way, one side would look like Manmulsang in Mt Kumgang while the other side would look like the Jaeryong Plain. But it was an expression of ignorance. The double bass should be placed together with the bass instruments as it is now.

This was how the double bass could contribute to the sound effect in its right place.

2

Songs Created by Kim Jong Il

In his childhood,
Kim Jong Il created several
immortal works.

These musical works reached
a high ideological and artistic plane
for their seeds, profound ideas and
emotive melodies.

The Embrace of My Motherland

One day in August 1952, when the Korean war (June 25, 1950-July 27, 1953) started by the US imperialists was at its height, Kim Jong Il climbed a hill with his classmates for plant collecting.

The hill was similar to Moran Hill in Pyongyang, so the boys talked about the hill, forgetting what they had to do at the lesson.

Kim Jong Il was standing still by a pine.

Moran Hill was very meaningful for him.

After the liberation of the country (August 15, 1945), he often climbed up the hill with his mother Kim Jong Suk.

When she passed away in September 1949, the Korean people buried her remains on the hill.

Before the war, when he missed her mother, he used to climb the hill. There was a large pine tree next to her grave.

In September 1950, he visited the grave, and left there while looking at the tree with a determination to come again on V-day, before joining the ranks in retreat.

Two years had passed since then.

When he was yearning for his mother, the first thing that

appeared before his eyes was the pine tree next to the grave.

So when he saw a pine tree on the hill at the back of the village he was staying, he was lost in a deep thought.

After a while, the boys, who were talking about Moran Hill, were arguing if the pine trees on the hill were burned or not.

Unable to find an answer, they asked their teacher to tell them who were right.

The teacher, who had no chance as well to climb the hill after leaving Pyongyang, grew embarrassed, and looked at Kim Jong Il for help.

Kim Jong Il said with a serious face:

The pine trees on Moran Hill are alive. However desperately the Americans may act, they cannot burn the hill. They cannot burn our country with any of their bombs. The hill is in the embrace of the motherland, and it can never be burned.

He had regarded the hill wooded with pine trees as his motherland, and his words that Moran Hill was not burned meant his declaration that their motherland was strong and steady.

That evening he described his feeling in the diary, recollecting what had happened that afternoon, and wrote under it a poem.

The title was *The Embrace of My Motherland*.

*Moran Hill is afire with a red glow,
The Taedong is arched with a rainbow.
How beautiful is this motherland
In whose embrace I've grown up!*

*Azaleas smile sweetly in spring,
Larks warble high up on the wing.
As warm and tender as the vernal sun
Is the land that has brought me up.*

*The sun rises on the sea buoyant,
The land glows under the sun radiant,
Stars twinkle with nocturnal grace,
In my father the General's embrace.*

Two days later, the teacher heard someone playing the organ in the classroom. She guessed in an instant that it would be Kim Jong Il who was playing the organ, for at that time though there were scores of students at the school, nobody knew how to play the organ except Kim Jong Il.

So, she would ask him to play the organ in her place for accompaniment at the music lessons.

That night he was setting the lyrics of *The Embrace of My Motherland* to music.

One snowy day in mid-January 1953, Kim Jong Il sang the song standing by the window and looking outside.

When he finished singing, his classmates took him by the hand, and asked him to teach them the song.

He readily agreed.

This was how the song *The Embrace of My Motherland* was created during the days of the grim war and came to be known.

Memorial Song

One day during the war, Kim Il Sung showed officials a letter from his son.

An official read the letter:

...

I want to make a very important request of you, Father. You are not just an individual but the leader of all the Korean people. ...

You should look after your health, guard yourself against the enemy air attacks, and always take care of yourself. This will bring happiness to us and all the Korean people. I wish you safety from afar.

Kim Jong Il

June 1, 1953

Reading the letter, the official was surprised by young Kim Jong Il's mental world, with which he wrote a letter of such a profound philosophical meaning.

After sending the letter to his father, Kim Jong Il composed a song based on the content of the letter, and used to sing it with his younger sister whenever he missed his father.

In May 1961, Kim Jong Il participated in the project to widen a road between Wasan-dong and Ryongsong.

One day, after taking lunch, he visited with his fellow students a kindergarten not far from the project site. While looking round the kindergarten, he saw an organ. Noting that it had been a long time since he had played the instrument, he said he would try it, and skilfully played the immortal revolutionary song *Song of General Kim Il Sung* and other revolutionary songs.

Then he saw a poster published in celebration of June 1, International Children's Day, and said:

Everyone has unforgettable memories. Whenever June 1 comes round, I am reminded of the day of 1953, which I greeted during the Fatherland Liberation War.

He told them how he wrote a letter to his father on June 1, 1953, wishing him good health and how the letter read.

He said:

I still cherish the earnest wish I expressed in my letter that day, and the wish has now crystallized into the unanimous desire and ardent wish of our people to be loyal to the General and uphold him for ever. His longevity is their supreme desire and means everything to them. Only when he is in good health, will our people enjoy prosperity and everything go well. This is a

steadfast faith and will our people have forged while undergoing grim struggle and hardships, and it is their supreme wish that grows more earnest as the days go by. The fatherly leader still remembers the letter. As I wanted to make a song based on the letter, I created a song reflecting my wish for his safety.

At the students' request, Kim Jong Il began to sing the song playing the organ.

*Father General, you have brought spring
And given light to the dark land of Korea.
When gun smoke hangs over the far-off horizon
The people pray for your safety.*

*Father General, you are the leader of the people
Bearing the destiny of the country on your shoulders.
Your safety on the journey to the front
Means happiness to all the families of this country.*

*Father General, you will build a paradise
In our land of heroes, who have crushed the Yanks.
The people pray for your safety
For a brilliant future of Korea.*

The song instantly touched the hearts of the students.

When one of them asked him what the title of the song was, he said he was yet to title the song, and that he would like to title it *Song of Best Wishes* if he had to.

The song became known to others in this way, and later spread across the country.

My Mother

Kim Jong Il graduated from senior middle school on July 15, 1960.

His classmates felt rather sorry to be parting from Kim Jong Il than pleased to graduate from the school.

Looking around his classmates, he proposed to look round the school together before leaving it. As they looked round the school, memories about their unforgettable school days came flooding to them. Everything about the school was dear to them, and the days would soon become the past for ever.

At the graduating ceremony held in the afternoon, Kim Jong Il received the highest commendation together with the diploma of the top honour in all subjects.

Amid the confetti and loud applause filling the auditorium, he mounted the platform and expressed his thanks to the teachers and parents of the graduates.

In the evening there was a meeting for congratulating the graduates. All the graduates requested him to sing a song to crown the end of their school days.

Enjoying their cheering, Kim Jong Il stood up with a smile

on his face.

What kind of song will he sing on this happy day?

The students waited in eager silence.

Kim Jong Il started to sing in a deep and gentle voice.

In the rain or snow, all her life

My mother brought me up in her arms.

Knowing all the wishes in my life

She made Korea's lovely dreams come true.

Rain or snow or on a long journey

She guided me by the hand.

To honour every moment of my life's journey

Her love will throb in my heart for eternity.

In joy or under stress I yearn for

And long to hail my dear, trusted mother.

Feeling the warmth of her loving hand

I'll remain loyal to the leader for ever.

Mother, mother, O my mother,

The more I grow, the more I feel the warmth of your love.

It was a song which he had composed himself out of yearning for his deceased mother.

The participants were all deeply impressed as they understood that he missed his mother so much as to sing that song on the significant day.

That is *My Mother* that is now widely known to the Korean people.

*Greeting the Sun Rising
over the Taedong River*

One day in July 1960, Kim Jong Il went to the Taedong River together with his fellow graduates from the senior middle school.

Looking at the river, he said:

The sunrise on the Taedong River is so beautiful that I feel like reciting a poem.

Presently, the sun began to rise with all splendour on the Taedong.

Enjoying the sunrise with arms akimbo, he said:

That sunrise reflects our far-reaching ambition and ideal to march vigorously forward together with the strong and prosperous motherland. I think that our ideal and happiness is to add glory to our youth by supporting the lofty ideas of the great leader whatever we do and wherever we work, just as sunflowers always turn towards the sun wherever it grows. In this sense the magnificent sunrise represents our hearts and our burning youthful passion. All our pleasure, happiness and bright future are reflected in the bright sunshine. Let us all brave storms together and fight staunchly in carrying forward the revolution.

Saying that the splendid sun rising over the Taedong inspired him to compose a poem, he recited the poem with a hand raised towards the sun.

*The day breaks and the sun rises over the Taedong,
The radiant sunrise is a reflection of our minds.
Our youth and hopes are aglow
And will shine all across the motherland.*

*Sunshine floods the Taedong, as in paradise
The burning sunrise is the symbol of our ardour.
Let us advance, weathering storms together
As the vanguard in support of the leader.*

*Let us meet the sunrise on the Taedong today
And greet the communist sunrise tomorrow.
Treading the path of revolution to the ends of the earth
We'll spread the light of Juche all across the world.*

His poem stirred up the hearts of the classmates.
They recited the poem in their minds.

His Reason for Loving Azalea

The following happened when Kim Jong Il was studying at Kim Il Sung University.

One day in September 1962, under the moonlight, a student asked him to tell a story about the Harvest Moon Day.

It was the folk holiday of the year.

After thinking for a while, he started to tell a story:

One year I visited my mother's grave and planted azalea in front of it. Azalea was her favourite flower. That was why I planted it there. When I visited the grave again next year, the flower was in full bloom. I could not forget the flower I saw that day. Since then, the simple, soft and yet beautiful azalea has always remained in bloom in my mind as the image of my dear mother.

As if lost in longing for his mother, he sat in silence for a while.

His fellow students could then understand why he loved azalea so much.

Presently, he said that he would sing a song, saying:

Some time ago I composed a song representing my warm feeling about azalea.

He began to sing in a soft and resonant voice.

*Under the warm sunshine bloom the beautiful azaleas
Heralding the spring.*

*Yesterday and today you look the same,
Azaleas, ye azaleas, Korea's azaleas.*

*Though exposed to all the wind and rain,
Azaleas have bloomed on the hillside.
You have weathered the frost of the long night,
Azaleas, ye azaleas, Korea's azaleas.*

*Azaleas bloom still in late spring
In this land under the bright sunshine.
You are the image of my unforgettable mother,
Azaleas, ye azaleas, Korea's azaleas.*

Every word of the song was permeated with his yearning for his mother and his lofty will to bring his mother's wish into reality on his land.

Where Are You, Dear General?

One day in October 1971 Kim Jong Il went to a soldiers' hall of culture to guide the first rehearsal of the revolutionary opera *The Story of a Nurse* produced by the Korean People's Army Song and Dance Ensemble.

The opera portrayed a young nurse who, in the grim period of the strategic temporary retreat during the Fatherland Liberation War, braved all hardships and performed her duty of taking the wounded soldiers to the rear, and died after saving the wounded from enemy bombing.

After seeing the opera, he advised the creative workers to highlight the spiritual world of the heroine in the scene of the field ward on Mt Thaebaek she dropped in at with the patients en route.

He said: If the scene of the ward on Mt Thaebaek is not portrayed skilfully, this opera will not succeed. If you are to make this scene a success, you should not merely show the heroine growing anxious after finding the deserted ward, but portray her sincere reverence for General Kim Il Sung in a profound way.

He gave his opinion on how to portray the scene. And looking at the creative workers who were full of confidence, he stressed that

the most important thing in sustaining this scene was the theme song, so they should create an excellent song.

One day in early November, he came to the production site to inquire about the lyrics of the theme song.

He looked over several songs till late at night, but none deserved to be called a theme song.

Back in his office, he was lost in a deep thought—a young nurse braving the dangerous retreat over the rugged mountains helping wounded soldiers and the girl and wounded soldiers feeling absent-minded to see the deserted ward on Mt Thaebaek.

Suddenly he remembered what had happened in those days.

On a dark night, a farmer, who had left Poptong, Kangwon Province, was driving an ox-cart to the north. On a pass in a deep mountain, he met a stranger. The following is a talk between the stranger and the old man.

Stranger: Where are you going in the dead of night?

Farmer: I am going to the north. Where can I go other than to the north now?

Stranger: Nowhere other than to the north? Have you got any relatives in the north?

Farmer: I haven't got any relatives to visit, and moreover what is the worth of going to them in these days of war?

Stranger: Whom did you believe in when you started for the north?

Farmer: I'm going to General Kim Il Sung, together with the soldiers.

Stranger: Why are you going to General Kim Il Sung in the days of upheaval?

Farmer: What do you mean by *why*? That is the way to our survival and victory in the war.

The stranger, who talked with the farmer, was none other than Kim Il Sung. He recollected later that he had gained great strength from the ordinary farmer at that time.

The mind, with which the farmer yearned for only the General and went to where the General was, with confidence in sure victory in the grimmest period, was the unanimous mind and faith of the Korean people and service personnel, who had entrusted their destiny and future to him.

He took out a sheet of paper, and began to write.

Where Are You, Dear General?

Where is the fatherly General

When the Big Dipper lights the sky?

*Where can the Supreme Headquarters
be with its windows lit
Where is he sure to be?*

*In this dark forest far behind enemy lines
We're wondering where our General is now.
As the chilly autumn wind blows
We yearn for your warm care.*

...

When he finished the lyrics of the song of four stanzas, dawn began to break.

He called an official of the Korean People's Army Song and Dance Ensemble, and gave him the lyrics, saying that the previous night he had thought about the lyrics of the theme song and written some words, and that he wondered whether it was well written, adding that he should give it to the creative workers for reference.

The lyrics draw the attention of the creative workers in an instant; every word was permeated with the ideological emotion of the heroine, who was making up her mind to go to the Supreme Headquarters without fail, looking to the northern sky in a mountain

behind enemy lines.

Common logics or slogan or affectation could not be found in the lyrics, and only the truth of life was reflected in the beautiful and simple words.

The creative workers set the lyrics to music, thus solving the problem of creating a theme song.

The song *Where Are You, Dear General?* was thus created.

3

Unique Outlook on Music

Cherishing a unique outlook on music, Kim Jong Il developed the art of music of Korea in such a way that it served the people both in name and reality and sustained the special features of the nation.

Having expounded the idea that music is humanics, he made public several works including *On the Art of Music*, indicating the road ahead of the Juche-oriented art of music.

His outlook on music is reflected in the songs, whose creation he guided and which he enjoyed singing, and in the instructions he gave on music.

When Singing Even One Song

One day in January 1957, a teacher was playing in the school music room piano sonata *Seasons*, composed in a foreign country.

Suddenly she stopped playing as she saw some students reflected in the mirror on the front wall. Among them was Kim Jong Il.

She stood up.

With a smile on his face, Kim Jong Il said that he had dropped in as he heard the sound of the piano, and asked her to play another piece as he wanted to hear it.

The teacher continued to play it. This time it was *Troika* of the sonata.

She finished playing after leaving the disappearing sound of the last hoof beats of troika in the vast plains as a lingering effect.

Appreciating that it was a good work, Kim Jong Il asked her to play a Korean work that sings of the nature of the country.

Suddenly she became confused as she did not know whether there was such a song or not.

In those days musicians were regarded to be artistic talents only when they sang or played famous foreign songs unknown to others.

The teacher also worshipped foreign music.

After thinking for a while, she played the song *Let's Go to the Mountain and Sea* created by Ri Myon Sang in 1948, before saying, "Excuse me, this is not a work for the piano. I'm sorry for not playing our work for the piano."

Noting that it was not her mistake, Kim Jong Il said:

The nature of our country is incomparably beautiful to that of Europe. It is so beautiful that once upon a time a foreign poet said that seeing Mt Kumgang in Korea was his lifelong wish. But we have not many songs that sing of the pride in having such a picturesque land. It is an aftereffect of the worship of big countries. This ideological malady has made the people blind. I think it prevails much in the field of music.

His instructions brought her to her senses.

Kim Jong Il continued:

Comrade Kim Il Sung said that we should sing with our own spirit when we have to sing even one song. True to his instruction, we should always sing songs that sing of our country with a feeling of high dignity and pride that we are the masters of this beautiful land. To this end, we should create a larger number of excellent songs that sing of the nature of our country and the struggle and life of our people.

He left the room after saying goodbye to her.

Seeing him off, she thought, *We should sing with our own spirit. We should sing a Korean song when we have to sing even one song. Indeed, he values our own things more than anybody else.*

Standard of Beauty

The following happened in June 1961.

Kim Jong Il visited the house of a student, who was extraordinarily fond of music.

He had heard before while talking with the student that he could not enjoy listening to famous musical works as he had no record worth listening.

Suggesting appreciating music together with him, Kim Jong Il placed a record on the gramophone.

After listening to a work performed by a song and dance troupe of a foreign country, Kim Jong Il asked him how he liked it.

The student answered that the work was too complicated and did not suit his tastes.

After explaining what the work meant, Kim Jong Il played the record containing the Korean revolutionary songs such as *March of Guerrillas* and *Song of the Life-and-Death Battle* and Korean folk songs such as *Platycodon* and *Yangsando*.

As the student was quite drunk by the inspiring and charming rhythm of the Korean music, Kim Jong Il said:

The songs, which reflect the life and ideological sentiments of

the people and are easy to sing, enjoy the people's love generation after generation. We should not imitate other countries' music which does not suit the tastes of our people, but develop our music in an original way based on the Juche-oriented stand. Whether our composers create a larger number of songs which can satisfy the aspirations and requirements of the people and are high in ideological and artistic qualities depends on how they are inspired by Comrade Kim Il Sung's ideas on aesthetics.

He also explained what were beautiful and how they should be depicted.

As the student had lacked understanding of aesthetics, he asked Kim Jong Il why the standard of beauty was so important.

Kim Jong Il answered:

The definition of beauty was clarified by Marxism-Leninism on a scientific and materialistic dialectical basis. Though it gave the definition from the viewpoint of the working class, it failed to give an answer to the standard of beauty. The standard of beauty was defined by Comrade Kim Il Sung for the first time. He said that the standard is the aspirations and requirement of the people. The arts should develop its contents and forms according to these demands and aspirations. This is the viewpoint of aesthetics in our era.

The talk, which started with appreciating musical works, ended with his lesson on aesthetics, and the student felt as if he had graduated from the whole course of a university.

Viewpoint on Crooners' Songs

One day in February 1964, a heated discussion was held about the crooners' songs in a dormitory room of Kim Il Sung University.

A student, formerly a soldier, had broached the subject of the degenerate crooners' songs the enemy broadcast on the front line in order to break up our soldiers ideologically and spiritually.

Another student, also a former soldier, said, "Those songs are nothing other than narcotics. We used to close our ears with cotton balls when we were on duty."

"That will make all deaf, won't it?"

This brought laughter.

One said that all the crooners' songs were not bad, and that some of them were full of the patriotic and national feelings of our people, retorting that such songs could not be regarded as bad.

Various opinions were raised.

"It is nonsense that there are some good crooners' songs."

"He's wrong. He is not prepared politically."

"What do you mean? He has a point."

Kim Jong Il, who dropped in at the room, seriously asked the students if they knew songs such as *Spring of Home Village* and

Longing for This Land from the days of Japanese imperialist rule.

The students answered yes.

Kim Jong Il asked them again whether those songs were bad as they were crooners’.

The student, who had broached the subject, asked Kim Jong Il to tell them about his opinions about the songs.

Thus, a “lecture” on crooners’ songs started in the dormitory.

Crooners’ songs became popular from the late 1920s in our country. After occupying Korea, the Japanese imperialists widely disseminated reactionary bourgeois culture in order to paralyse the ever-increasing thoughts and spirit of struggle against them and reduce the Korean people to their colonial slaves for ever. In particular, in the lead-up to the invasion of the Asian continent they schemed to impose militarist music including Japanese war songs upon our people to infect them with the imperialist aggressive ideas and spread decadent crooners’ songs with the help of hired musicians. At that time, the crooners’ songs spread by them were not only blue and decadent ones smelling of Japanese fashions and lifestyle but also narcotics that gnawed at our people’s sound thinking abilities and contaminated them with nihilism and pessimism.

Stressing that they should not approach all those songs in the

same way, Kim Jong Il continued:

Among them, songs which are not decadent but have inherited the form of our folk songs can be sung in the future, too. Such songs were created by the patriotic and conscientious Korean musicians. Despite the severe oppression by the Japanese imperialists, they struggled to defend and develop their national music against the reactionary music of Japanese style, and created a number of songs that reflect our people's patriotic feelings and national emotions.

Then, Kim Jong Il asked the ex-soldier student, who had said he would close his ears whenever he had heard those songs, if he had felt the same feeling when he had heard *Spring of Home Village* and *Longing for This Land*.

"No," the student answered. "They were different from the others in their quality. These songs made me miss my home village and long for a new world."

Kim Jong Il said:

It seems you have now understood the true meaning of the crooners' songs. Songs like *Spring of Home Village* and *Longing for This Land* are filled with such ideological emotions as love for the lost motherland, love and longing for the lost home village and yearning and aspiration for a free and happy new world, and they are rich in clear, pure and tender national feelings. We should have

a correct understanding of these songs and distinguish the sound ones created by our conscientious and patriotic musicians from the reactionary and bourgeois ones of the Japanese imperialists. At the same time, we should always remain vigilant so that the decadent crooners' songs and their style, which were thrown away to the dustbin of history, cannot revive.

“I thought that all the crooners' songs are bad,” said a student.

Another one said, “You are right. We almost buried the precious national treasure.”

What Is a Musical Masterpiece?

One day in June 1967, Kim Jong Il met some composers.

Saying that he wanted to discuss with them about the film music, he turned on a tape-recorder.

He let them listen to some parts of musical works repeatedly, and said:

Songs should be gentle, soft and full of national sentiments. The song *The Azaleas of the Homeland* is wonderful in melody. The brass musical work *Song of Coast Artillerymen* is lively and high-spirited; it gives the feeling of striking the enemy. The song *Sub-workteam's Farming Comes into Bloom* is also good; it depicts the rural life quite well.

Analysing a dozen songs in detail in this way, Kim Jong Il said that composers were yet to create beautiful and gentle songs which were suited to the emotions of the people as they had not freed themselves from outdated creative methods, and that the creative workers of music should produce many masterpieces that reflected the people's emotions.

Stressing that they should have a correct concept of musical masterpiece if they were to create them, he said:

A song with unfailing appeal, a song that people love and enjoy singing, is a true masterpiece. In short, a masterpiece is a piece of music that sounds better and more impressive the more we listen to it.

Some of them had thought that a musical masterpiece was the one created by famous musicians of other countries, and some others had thought that the one, the “profound meaning” of whose melody could be understood only by experts, was a masterpiece.

Now Kim Jong Il’s instructions put an end to such views.

A Composer Living Forever with Musical Arrangement

At dead of night of one June day in 1978, Kim Jong Il received a report that a composer had died. Unable to believe the report, he stood by the window and looked outside for long. Then, calling his name, he said:

We have lost a precious comrade. He produced excellent arrangements when *The Story of a Nurse*, *Tell O Forest* and several other revolutionary operas were being created. Though their competent comrade-in-arms died, the creative workers of the Korean People's Army Song and Dance Ensemble should create a larger number of musical works with the feeling of doing his shares.

The creative workers could not but be moved as he was speaking highly of an ordinary composer.

The following had happened some years previously, when preparations were being made for a congratulatory performance in honour of the guests from a foreign country.

After seeing its rehearsal, Kim Jong Il said the Korean People's Army Song and Dance Ensemble had portrayed the mixed chorus

well, asking who had arranged it.

When an official mentioned the composer's name, Kim Jong Il again spoke highly of him, and said that the arrangement made the mixed chorus distinctive and much better than the original music.

In the lounge he again said that the music of the chorus became better than that of the original as it was arranged well, adding the composer should be highly praised for his work.

Kim Jong Il continued:

Musical arrangement demands a high level of creative skills, and plays an important role in developing the orchestral music and chorus. However good the original music is, the quality of its depiction becomes low if it is not arranged well. Musical arrangement is immediately creative work. Composers, whoever he is, should be skilful in musical arrangement. Only then can they set the lyrics to music well and further develop our rapidly-developing musical art as demanded by the reality.

Until then, the creative workers had given precedence to producing musical works over to arranging them, and worse still, none of them had thought that arrangement was immediately creative work.

His instructions gave the composer and other creative workers a new understanding of arrangement.

Later, determined to live his life as a composer specializing in arranging musical works, the musician developed as a competent composer, and arranged many musical works in the work of creating revolutionary masterpieces.

This was why Kim Jong Il expressed heart-felt grief over his death, calling his name several times.

The composer lived forever in Kim Jong Il's memory with the musical works he had arranged.

What Is Folk Song?

One day in March 1983, Kim Jong Il, while talking in his office with an official about songs, asked him how he thought about the concept of folk song.

The official answered that folk song is a popular one which is rich in national emotions and has been sung by the people from the olden times.

Kim Jong Il said that he was relatively right, and that in the Soviet Union the song *Rowan Tree in the Urals*, created in 1958, is regarded as a folk song.

“Was it created 25 years ago?”

The official was surprised as he had thought that the song was created long before.

Kim Jong Il continued:

A folk song is the one which has no writer or composer and which has been refined and perfected while it was sung by the masses of the people through a long historical period. On the other hand, even a modern song, if it is rich in national melody and sentiments and is popular among the people, can be called a folk song.

His explanation was giving a new concept of folk song. It was

also an original view, which emphasized the popular nature of the song by broadening its concept on the basis of the principle of acceptability to modern sensibilities.

Saying that our composers can create folk songs, he pointed out that they had created songs so that they sounded too modern. He stressed that if their works smelled of folk songs, those works can be called folk songs.

He meant that Korean folk songs, whose melodies are gentle and soft, should be created in a large number.

That day the official reminded himself of the importance of creating and singing people-friendly folk songs in developing the art of music.

Song's Value as a National Treasure

One day in March 1988, Kim Jong Il saw a variety performance staged by stage and film artistes.

After the performance was over, Kim Jong Il appreciated all the musical works except a chorus by an art troupe.

Criticizing the chorus, he said:

How can the people sing the difficult lyrics which even experts find it hard to sing? Songs should be people-oriented so that they are easy for all the people to sing. The chorus, which is only shouted, is a chorus for the artistes, not for the ordinary people. I love the songs which the ordinary people enjoy singing, not the ones only artistes can sing. To all intents and purposes, a song can receive a proper appreciation only when the people accept it heartily and enjoy singing it. However the holders of the title of People's Artiste sing it, a song cannot be called a work of national treasure unless the people accept it. It can be called a truly revolutionary and people-oriented song only when it moves the hearts of the people. Creative workers should discard the view of absolutizing only their works in disregard of the people's opinions.

His new definition of a song's value as a national treasure made the officials and creative workers realize the seriousness of their misunderstanding.

In fact, the arts separated from the people is meaningless as it is a sector that has to be accompanied always by the audience.

Taking as an example a song created in the period of the great Chollima upsurge, Kim Jong Il said that the song had still great vitality as ever, and stressed that the creative workers and artistes in the field of art and literature should think about all the Party members and other working people as well as their country and fellow people, not about themselves in their work.

That day officials and creative workers clearly learned the truth that they should create songs for the people, and that if they were to create excellent arts, they should first acquire the spirit of loving their country and fellow people.

Song Is Also Humanics

One September day in 2004, Kim Jong Il saw an artistic performance given by the art squad of a Korean People's Army unit.

When the performance was at its height, a medley was put on the stage.

Saying to an official nearby that if the accompaniment had been better, singers would have displayed their skills much better, he stressed:

In performing a medley, it is important to connect the individual songs artistically. The linking part in it is a break for singers as well as a precious time for them to go into the world of emotions of the following song. Therefore the linking part should be composed in a finer way than the prelude or interlude of an individual song. A previous song and the following song should be linked well in tonality or in contrasting rhythm softly and gently.

It was a minutest detail which even experts had failed to pay attention to while guiding the preparation of the performance.

When the performance was over, Kim Jong Il spoke highly of it, and noting that he would take the opportunity to mention more about song, he said:

I said in the past that literature is humanics. Song is also humanics. Literature is called humanics because it describes living man and serves him. Song also depicts real man and his life and inspires him to the revolutionary struggle. While literature describes man's ideological feelings by means of story, song expresses them by means of lyrics and music. In this sense, song can also be called humanics.

His instructions, containing a deep philosophical meaning, continued:

Song separated from man and his life cannot be called as such in the true sense of the word. Singing of mere nature and mere beauty separated from man's independent and creative activities is literally art for art's sake. Even when we sing of nature, we should sing of the genuine life and struggle of man living in it. We say that the orchestral piece and chorus *A Bumper Harvest in the Chongsan Plain* is the masterpiece of masterpieces because the song sings not only of the crop field rolling with golden ears of rice but also of the endless pleasure and joy of the farmers reaping a rich harvest.

Song is also humanics! It was an original aphorism which contained a profound idea.

A Work Should Be Clear in Its Characteristics

In music, motif is the smallest phrase that expresses the theme of the work in a characteristic way, so composers and instrumentalists all pay attention to it. But it is not easy to produce an original symphony which has its unique motif.

One February day in 2006, Kim Jong Il, seeing a performance by the National Symphony Orchestra, gave instructions on it.

It was when the performance just started.

When the first number with rich emotions was presented, he praised it, saying that it was arranged well and the soloist sang the song artistically as well.

The senior official of the orchestra was delighted, as the performance had been prepared for a long time with much effort and it was highly praised from the beginning.

So he expected the leader's appreciation of the next work.

When the next work started, Kim Jong Il said there and then that the work was wrong in its arrangement.

To the official, who was not sure of it, he pointed out that the coloratura was being repeated from the beginning, that it should be

used sparingly in necessary parts, that as it was used not only in the overture but also in the main movements and finale, the work missed its main melody.

How could the song without its main melody move the people?

The orchestra had aimed at producing the work's effect with coloratura, but it was clear that the work without its main melody could not touch the heartstrings of the audiences.

The official admitted the consequence of the obsession with the demonstration of skills.

After listening to the next work carefully, Kim Jong Il shook his head again, saying:

This orchestral work only follows the melody with the playing of its parts. It has no special difference from a female instrumental ensemble.

A musical work that missed its main melody and a musical work that only followed its main melody ... Then, what could be the orchestral work that sustains its main melody while displaying the skills unique to orchestral music?

Kim Jong Il said that when creating and arranging an orchestral work, one should delve into the characteristics of its mood, and it cannot be called an orchestral work if a song, familiar to the people and sung widely, is arranged in such a way that the sounds

could be produced by instrumental parts.

He explained:

An orchestral work and symphony should be developed with a correct motif. Only when they develop the world of music unique to them, can they become philosophical works that can give the audience a deep emotion. The National Symphony Orchestra should create orchestral works with their own characteristics.

The official could see something new.

Taking *A Bumper Harvest in the Chongsan Plain* as an example, Kim Jong Il continued that it was an orchestral work that has its own motif and development, so he had said that it was a masterpiece and he liked it the more he heard it.

He was saying that a successful symphony and a philosophical orchestral work are those that have their own motifs and development.

4

Leading the Times on the Strength of Music

With a keen insight into the position and role of music, Kim Jong Il forcefully advanced the revolution and construction on the strength of music.

His leadership brought about a radical change in all fields of the musical art, creating fundamentally new genres, contents and forms and helping the people feel the breath of the era from songs and other musical genres and exert themselves to accomplish the mission they had shouldered for the times.

A Youth League Official and Musical Instrument

One January day in 1963, while talking to an official of the Central Committee of the then Democratic Youth League, he asked her to play the piano.

Though not confident of her skills, she managed to play it, seeing the score now and then.

Kim Jong Il told her to play it once again from the beginning.

When she was trying, he helped her, turning over the pages of the score and pressing the sustaining pedal so that the piano could produce a longer and richer sound.

Feeling exhausted after finishing playing it, she said that she was afraid that she could hardly learn to play the instrument skilfully.

Laughing heartily, Kim Jong Il said:

If you are to play the piano or accordion, you need to do much practice. As the saying goes, you must not expect too much on your first attempt. It may make you feel tired, but you have to practise a lot so that you can play the instruments skilfully.

Bracing herself up, she began to beat the keys unaware that

her fingertips felt tingling. But she found it had become easy to use her left and right fingers at the same time.

Speaking highly of her rapid development in playing the piano, he gave her the score of a musical work arranged for solo, and said that the work was not so difficult to play, and that she should try the work this time.

Feeling that the work needed a high level of playing skills, she pleaded that she could do anything, but not playing the piano.

Retorting that it was not that he had much time to have her practise on the piano, he said in a serious tone of voice: Officials of the Central Committee of the Democratic Youth League should know how to play the piano, accordion and other musical instruments skilfully in order to work effectively with young people. When they go to factories or farms, they may sit with young people for a recreation party. If one of them volunteers to sing a song and asks an official from the Central Committee for accompaniment, the official should take any instrument and play the prelude skilfully, and continue accompaniment. After singing or dancing is over in this way, the official can give a pep talk. Then, the talk will give the young people a great encouragement. A genuine official working with young people should work in this way.

Feeling remorseful, she practised on the piano very hard.

Later, she developed as an official capable of moving young people and rousing their passion by playing the piano and singing songs.

Song Loved by the People

One March day in 1965, Kim Jong Il visited an organ with some officials.

When he entered a room, *A Bumper Harvest in the Chongsan Plain* was being played on an electric gramophone.

He listened to the music for a while and said:

However much I listen to the orchestral music and chorus *A Bumper Harvest in the Chongsan Plain*, I don't feel satiated. A famous song is not something special. It is the one which the more one listens to it, the more one wants to listen to it and the more one sings it, the more one wants to sing it.

Officials began to listen to the work with a special feeling.

While listening to the work, Kim Jong Il continued:

The man, who composed the song, is possessed of inborn burning passion. A famous song can be said to be a product of thinking, exploration, passion and experience. A composer, who lacks in passionate thinking, profound exploration, rich experience in the reality and outstanding skills, cannot create good songs. In order to set the lyrics of this song to music, this particular composer went to the Chongsan Plain thick with matured rice and gained a rich

experience while working with the farmers there, and composed the music for the song back in his workshop with burning passion. How good the song is! All people like it.

An official said, “Yes, I saw people including farmers singing the song merrily.”

After hearing what the official had to say, Kim Jong Il said in a serious tone of voice:

Now some musical experts do not think about the songs that our people like, but are wont to enjoy the songs created by famous foreign composers like Beethoven and Schubert. Of course, there are some skills in them, which we should learn from. But if they worship only those songs and neglect ours, they may be trapped in national nihilism.

After analysing the foreign songs in detail, he pointed out that some people, who claimed to be specializing in music, failed to realize the aftermath, only thinking that there were some mysterious things in the foreign music. He added:

We should widely disseminate the revolutionary songs and wartime songs. In our country there are many famous songs like revolutionary songs and wartime songs, which our people enjoy singing. Our people love the songs that were created in the days of the anti-Japanese revolutionary struggle, and the songs that were

created in the days of the Fatherland Liberation War. These songs are characterized by high ideological, artistic and people-oriented qualities. They are easy to sing at the same time as being strong in the revolutionary and militant character.

Listening to what he was saying, the officials were convinced that a new era would arrive, when the worship of foreign songs was eliminated and the songs favoured by the Korean people would resound on their land.

Orchestral Music of a New Style

One January day in 1970, Kim Jong Il went to the orchestral music practising hall in the Korean Film Studio to hear the orchestral music *The Girl on the Swing*, which he had given an assignment to arrange.

As he was listening to the different works, arranged by two composers separately, he grew serious.

The composers immediately felt that their arrangements fell short of his intention. They felt quite more remorseful when he scolded them for having arranged the work in the Western style.

Saying that they should not deal with the finishing part of the work silently but merrily and cheerfully, he continued:

Our art is the one which serves the masses of the people, so you should explore many artistic forms that people can accept and understand easily.

And he taught them in detail how to complete the work so that it could suit the feelings of the Korean people.

They launched a creative campaign, but there was not a big advance.

Some days later, Kim Jong Il went to the hall again in the dead

of night, and disapproved of their arrangement, pointing out some problems like its failure to be lively and merry, lack of the Korean national rhythm and of unity in tonality of the instruments, low level of ensemble, and failure to sustain the colour unique to the Korean music.

Informing them of the works they had to refer to, he said:

If orchestral works are created based on our folk songs, there would be nobody who dislikes them. But if you play foreign symphonies alien to our people and say that our people do not understand them because they are ignorant, it is misguided. Our people love music and understand it much better than the people of other countries. Those, who say that our people do not understand orchestral music because they are ignorant, are the ones who have not armed themselves with the Juche idea, but are steeped in the capitalist ideas and make a low estimate of our people.

Later, he visited the hall again, and stressed that it was the policy of the Workers' Party of Korea to create orchestral music based on the folk songs, an asset of the Korean nation, and that they should bring about a great change in the field of orchestral music.

The composers, burning their heart with a creative excitement, presented the orchestral work *The Girl on the Swing* of the new style, the first of its kind.

The harmonious and ever-changing melody familiar to the Korean people and clear seed and theme—the work resounded merrily reflecting the aspirations of the vibrant times and of the people, drawing them to the world of its ideological and emotional content.

Kim Jong Il expressed his satisfaction with the work.

In the period of creating the Juche-oriented orchestral work, the creative workers keenly realized what was the meaning of establishing the Juche orientation in the field of the musical art and what was the Korean-style music which the Korean people could accept and understand.

Opening a New Phase of the Opera

From March to July 1971 a creative team adapted for opera *The Sea of Blood*, a classic masterpiece Kim Il Sung had created in his days of the anti-Japanese revolutionary struggle.

When they were at a loss in their creative endeavour after launching into the campaign for producing the work, Kim Jong Il said to the creative workers:

There should be no aria or recitative in our opera. The songs in the opera should be gentle and beautiful and, to all intents and purposes, they should be stanzaic.

What he meant was that the opera should be created only with the songs similar to the ones of several stanzas, which had long been popular among the Korean people. This was an original policy on producing operas with the stanzaic songs as the main means of portrayal.

Kim Jong Il went to the production site frequently, indicating the ways for producing the opera. Once he gave the creative workers his opinions until dawn.

One day at the production site he listened to the songs, produced by the creative workers collectively, one by one, and said:

I think it would be a good idea to produce songs not by setting speeches to music, but by making them lyrics and setting the lyrics to stanzaic music. Setting speeches to music is an outdated formula. To make the songs stanzaic, you should first pinpoint the cores of speeches of the form of prose, turn them into poetic texts and set the texts to music.

Pointing at the text of a song to be sung by an old man, he said that the text looked like a poem because the words were set apart into lines and, if the lines were connected, it was not a poem but a prose-like speech, and that the speech set to music turned into a recitative-style song. And then he personally revised the text.

When the revised text was set to music and sung, the song became beautiful, gentle and smooth, and the content of the text was conveyed easily. In a word, it had no tinge of aria or recitative in every aspect.

A few days later he came to the production site and saw a rehearsal of the opera.

There were no traces of aria and recitative, but there were some scenes that did not conform to the logic of life. For example, the heroine's husband sang while he was burned at stake; the heroine, who could not move her body owing to harsh torture, stood up and

sang as if she had never been tortured; and the political worker from the guerrilla army, in hot pursuit by the enemy, stopped running and sang with composure.

Pointing out that the contradiction between artistic portrayal and the logic of life should be eliminated in the new style of opera, Kim Jong Il instructed the creative workers to introduce *pangchang*.

Pangchang is a type of singing off the stage, helping the artistic portrayal on the stage. In films and dramas, it played the role of a “narrator” that unfolded the inmost feelings of the characters on the standpoint of a third person and explained the contents of the works additionally. But in the previous operas there had been no such form of musical portrayal.

As it was a first try, the creative workers could not find how to make an effective use of it.

Kim Jong Il, who came to the production site, said that *pangchang* should be used in a scene of the second act of the opera, in which the heroine learns her letters from her son, adding:

When the heroine learns her letters on the earthen verandah of her house, *pangchang* can explain on the standpoint of a third person why she does so.

Thus, the *pangchang* group sang softly off the stage at the

scene, explaining the inner world of the heroine, which could not be expressed in words or behaviours.

As they introduced *pangchang*, the creative workers found that the functions of this musical form were mysteriously diversified. It played the role of a spokesman that sang the feelings which the characters could not express outwardly, of a recorder that narrated the flow of the times and the historical events, of an explainer that described the events happening on the stage, and of an intermediary that connected scenes and acts.

Kim Jong Il also led the creative workers to develop other means of portrayal for the opera.

With a view that dance, which had been regarded in the conventional opera as an auxiliary means of portrayal, was one of essential means in the new type of opera, the creative workers ensured that dance helped portraying the personalities of characters in bold relief and promoting the dramatic flow of the opera; and free from the outdated, stereotyped stage setting, they made it running and three-dimensional so that it could show the life on the stage as truthfully as in real life.

The stanzaic songs, *pangchang*, new type of dance and three-dimensional running stage setting meant producing an opera, the like of which could not be found in the history of the art of opera.

In the days of producing the opera *The Sea of Blood*, Kim Jong Il put his heart and soul into it. He once spent a night, listening to 30 songs to select one from among them. Forty-seven songs are sung in the opera, and he listened to as many as 2 400 songs to select them and make them perfect.

In this way, the production of the opera was finished, and put on the stage.

Musical Accompaniment Devoid of Head and Tail

One October day in 1971, Kim Jong Il saw acrobatic works created by the Pyongyang Circus.

When *Two-Person Swinging* was performed after several numbers, the music failed to be closely linked to the acrobats' movements, the links of safety lines creaked and the acrobats were not confident in their movements.

The audience, who had been seeing the performance with suspense from the beginning, exclaimed at last, "Oh, dear!" Some blamed the acrobat for making a faux pas, and others expressed sympathy with him.

Looking at the creative workers, Kim Jong Il said that the acrobat made the faux pas because he failed to act to the tune of music as the safety lines creaked and the musical accompaniment did not match his movements.

The creative workers, who had thought that it was a result of a lack of practising, were surprised, for they had never thought about the musical accompaniment.

After the performance was over, Kim Jong Il pointed out the

ineffective musical accompaniment, saying that the accompaniment was devoid of head and tail.

Until then, the creative workers had thought that musical accompaniment for acrobatic performance should be of non-melodic genre, sharp and uncanny, though it cannot arouse an artistic emotion among the audience.

Kim Jong Il continued:

Your musical accompaniment for acrobatic performance is slow and not cheerful. It should be conducted with songs favoured by the people. It would be a good idea to arrange on a trial basis some musical works of the cinema and popular songs as suited to the special features of acrobatic works.

Later, the musical accompaniment for acrobatic performance, which had been devoid of head and tail and existed for so long on the pretext of its “peculiarity” and world trend, disappeared, and cheerful and optimistic circus music was born, adding more to the cultural and emotional life of the Korean people.

Key to New Dramaturgy

On the early morning of one day in April 1973, Kim Jong Il went to a theatre to see the rehearsal of the opera *A Girl of Mt Kumgang*.

He spoke highly of the creative workers for having produced the opera in 40 days.

He then advised that it would be better to change its title to *Song of Mt Kumgang* as it focused on portraying a composer's life.

After a while, the performance began.

When the performance was over, Kim Jong Il pointed out the shortcomings and weak parts of the opera, saying that the opera was not emotive because the focus of dramatism was not clear, not because there was no conflict, and that the opera should put its focus on the forced separation of the hero and his wife so that the audience could feel a tragic feeling together with the characters.

The problem of focus, a key to new dramaturgy, is another part of the Juche-oriented dramaturgy, a novel discovery, the creative workers thought.

They had so far failed to pay attention to the problem of focus,

only thinking that the work did not turn out as it should be because there was no serious conflict in it.

The creative workers polished the overall work with confidence and enthusiasm.

Several days later Kim Jong Il saw the rehearsal of the opera again, and expressed his satisfaction, saying that the opera was excellent and its storyline was also good.

Later Kim Il Sung saw the revolutionary opera, and congratulated the creative workers and artistes on their success, speaking highly of the work.

Over the Mountains and Across the Fields

One February day in 1976 Kim Jong Il was on his way of on-site guidance on a car.

After about two hours, Kim Jong Il said:

We have come a long way over the mountains and across the fields.

And he asked an official if he remembered the song that sings in part, *Our division advances over the mountains and across the fields*, and told him to try the song.

Our division advances over the mountains and across the fields
It advances to defeat the White army in the Maritime Region
It advances to defeat the White army in the Maritime Region
...

When the official finished singing, he thanked him for singing, and asked him what he had thought while singing the song.

The official answered, “I thought that although the road of revolution is difficult, a revolutionary should brave hardships without fear.”

Affirming his answer, Kim Jong Il said that songs are a source of our strength and another powerful weapon of ours.

Then, the Korean wartime song *Advance and Advance* resounded in the car.

The official was convinced that his country would always emerge victorious as Kim Jong Il led the revolution with music, together with the rifle, as a powerful weapon.

Preserve It Forever

The revolutionary opera *The Sea of Blood*, which had been staged in many countries of the world as well as in Korea for years, decorated its 500th performance with splendour in February 1979.

Kim Jong Il saw the performance with the same interest and expectation he had entertained when he saw its premiere.

He congratulated the creative workers on the success of the performance and said in deep emotion:

Nearly eight years have already passed since the opera was staged for the first time. The creative team of this opera has given public performances even when they were mobilized in creating the revolutionary opera *The Flower Girl*, adapted from the immortal classic work of the same title, and the song and dance tale *The Song of Paradise*. Today I've seen the opera after several years. The performance was good. I'm very satisfied with it.

Kim Jong Il continued:

The revolutionary opera *The Sea of Blood* is a work that ushered in the creation of the *Sea of Blood*-type revolutionary operas. While adapting the immortal classic *The Sea of Blood*

into a revolutionary opera, we accumulated valuable experience and, based on it, we created the revolutionary operas *The Flower Girl* in less than a year, followed by the production of *The Story of a Nurse* and *Tell O Forest*, thus drastically changing the world history of opera spanning hundreds of years. The creative group has staged the work as many as 500 times, educating the people along the revolutionary lines and greatly contributing to the art of our era. We should retain the high ideological and artistic qualities of the revolutionary opera *The Sea of Blood* and preserve it for ever.

In 1986 the creative group gave the 1 000th performance of the opera. In the period up to then, the opera had powerfully inspired the people to the revolutionary struggle.

Original Method of Interpretation

One April day in 1983, Kim Jong Il summoned an official.

After receiving the official with a beaming smile, Kim Jong Il turned on a tape-recorder.

A chorus rang out.

It was a song the official had edited and recorded.

After the song was over, Kim Jong Il said that the recording was good, and that what made it particularly good was that it was accompanied by various brass instruments, asking him how he had recorded the accompaniment of as many as six kinds of brass instruments.

The official answered that he had recorded it kind by kind and then blended them.

Hearing him, Kim Jong Il praised him, saying: Though the accompaniment was incomparably larger than the chorus, you ensured the balance excellently.

Feeling flattered, the official reflected on the efforts Kim Jong Il had made to raise the level of the presentation of the song.

Previously, the song had been cast off after it had been criticized

for being in a grim mood, which contradicted the spirit of the times.

But after listening to it, Kim Jong Il had said that it was not a gloomy song, but a good one that reflected the requirements of the times. Then he had ensured that it was further improved, and tasked the Mansudae Art Troupe to depict it as a male chorus. As the song became popular, he set a new task of rendering it as a grand chorus.

The creative workers, not understanding his intention, just increased the number of the chorus and widened the scope of the song.

After listening to the revised rendition of the song, Kim Jong Il said that he was still not satisfied with it, and continued that many lyrical songs had been arranged in such a way as to increase their stanzas, but none of marches, and that in this sense, the song should be presented well in the form of a grand chorus.

Later, after listening to its re-rendition, he pointed out that although the arrangement and composition of the chorus was not bad, the chorus and the orchestral music were still out of balance.

The orchestral music could have added vigour to the rendering as a whole if it had produced the effect of brass and woodwind

instrumental music. But the fact was that as it was led by violins, it was obscured by the chorus.

Presently, Kim Jong Il gave them a tip on solving the problem, saying: It would be a good idea to increase the numbers of bamboo-wind and other woodwind instruments, and the brass instruments in particular, so as to make the orchestral music more powerful.

They were quite impressed by his advice. It was really an original method of interpretation.

Under his five-month-long guidance, the song, which had once been regarded as dross, could be presented as a chorus masterpiece.

He added: The level of presentation of a song will differ depending on what demand you make and how it is rendered.

That night Kim Jong Il gave the creative workers a task of portraying another song. He first had them listen to the represented chorus, and asked them to present it as excellently as the chorus.

The Request Reflected in a Song

On August 15, 1984, the 39th anniversary of national liberation through an anti-Japanese revolutionary struggle led by Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il led some officials to a restaurant, saying he would like to have dinner with them.

When they took some dishes, Kim Jong Il suggested that each of them sing a song in this happy atmosphere.

All agreed, clapping their hands.

Feeling excited at being in the place with the leader, officials began to sing in turn, showing off their skills. One began to sing a female soprano with his husky voice, only to stop halfway as he felt choked. Another one sang an old ballad with zest, winning applause. Still another one, standing upright like a boy on the stage for the first time, sang a song, confusing the words of the song, arousing a burst of laughter.

As time passed, the party gained momentum.

Then someone asked Kim Jong Il to sing a song.

Amid thunderous applause, Kim Jong Il stood up.

Which song would he sing?

Saying he would speak a few words first, he took an official at

the Ministry of the People's Armed Forces by the hand, and helped him stand up.

Is he going to sing a duet?

Orders and medals were glittering on the breast of the official's uniform, as if bespeaking his feats in the revolution.

Feeling the orders and medals with his hand, Kim Jong Il said:

Today seeing the orders and medals glittering on your breasts, I have recollected the days when you have invariably traversed the road of loyalty following Comrade Kim Il Sung and the Party. With the hope that you will be honoured with more orders and medals for your feats on the road of loyalty to the Party and the leader, for the country and the people, I'll sing *My Song in the Trench*.

His voice began to ring quietly.

My song, echo all the way home from the trench.

For three years and three months I have been under arms.

On the grim battlefield showered by enemy bullets,

I have borne in mind your advice to show bravery.

I have borne in mind your advice to show bravery.

All sang the second stanza of the song.

His singing that day was not merely singing but a reflection of his request that all should perform feats at the sacred posts of accomplishing the revolutionary cause of Juche under the leadership of Kim Il Sung and add lustre to their patriotic life with glittering orders and medals.

Who Ever Taught Me?

One day in January 1987, Kim Jong Il called some officials in the sector of art and literature.

Taking a creative worker by the hand, he said that he had thought the creative worker must have been advanced in age, but he was young, and that he could compose excellent lyrics for 20 more years, adding:

You have produced excellent lyrics for songs, including *I Know It Now*, the theme song of the feature film *Wolmi Island*. The lyrics of *Who Ever Taught Me?* which is your creation and the theme song of the feature film *Song of Memories*, is also good. That song is the best of the songs created last year.

Asking the officials to listen together to the song *Who Ever Taught Me?* he told a singer to sing it.

The song raises a rhetorical question of what is more precious than one's youth, one's life and one's lifetime, and gives an answer that this is the embrace of the motherland.

When the song ended, he said:

Who Ever Taught Me? the theme song of the film *Song of Memories*, contains a philosophical quality in its lyrics. The lyrics

of a song should have a philosophical quality. I had always thought that a song that sings of our motherland in our own style should be created, and now my wish was accomplished with the song *Who Ever Taught Me?*

In this way Kim Jong Il implanted in the hearts of the officials the profound world of ardent patriotism.

Song of the Ten-Point Political Programme

One day in January 1987, a music and dance performance was staged by the Korean People's Army Song and Dance Ensemble in Pyongyang.

After the performance was over, President Kim Il Sung, who had seen the performance with a smile on his face, spoke highly of the performers, adding that *Song of the Ten-Point Political Programme* was especially good for its words and music and for its efficient rendering.

The following happened a few days previously, when Kim Jong Il visited the ensemble to see how they were making preparations for the performance.

After seeing the rehearsal, he said that the performance was well prepared as its political principle was clear, and adding that the programme should be finalized, he went over the programme. His eyes stopped at the final song.

Kim Jong Il read the title of the song several times, and replaced it with *Song of the Ten-Point Political Programme*.

The officials were surprised.

The song had been created after the First Session of the Fourth

Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK held in December 1967. At that time the creative workers had created the song, considering in order every point of the political programme made public by Kim Il Sung at the meeting. It had been frequently broadcast by radio and sung by the people, but as time had passed, it had become dim in people's memory.

But Kim Jong Il was suggesting staging the old song when the whole country turned out to carry out the tasks Kim Il Sung had set forth in his historic policy speech at the First Session of the Eighth Supreme People's Assembly held some days before.

Kim Jong Il said:

Song of the Ten-Point Political Programme contains all the ideas of the policy speech. So if it is sung by a mixed chorus at the end of the performance, it will show that the whole country has risen up in support of the leader's policy speech.

Only then did the officials understand his intention. At the same time they were surprised as he remembered the text of the 20-year-old, 10-stanza song and as he had an uncommon political insight of making the song serve the day's spirit.

This was how the song was staged by a chorus 20 years after its birth.

Song That Spread Again

One day in January 1988, Kim Jong Il visited a construction site in Pyongyang.

When he reached the building site of a high-rise apartment house, a song the builders were singing was heard in the quiet dawn.

Along the railway glittering in sunset glow

The engine driver went with a whistle.

This brave youth waded through the smoke of battle

Never daunted in the harshest days of ordeal.

...

Kim Jong Il asked officials if it was the theme song of the film *On the Railways*.

The officials were not sure.

Kim Jong Il said the title of the song would be *A Young Engine Driver*.

He was right. It was the theme song of a film, which had been created 20 years before and whose scenes had left a deep

impression on the people.

Kim Jong Il continued to hear them singing, lost in a deep thought.

He then said:

That song instils faith in victory and optimism in the people. It should be disseminated among all the people who are stepping up their advance in the 1980s.

That day saying that if they sang the song when they felt tired, it would give them vigour, he stressed:

People should be encouraged to sing the song. It is a very good song that conforms to the ideological feelings of our people.

This was how the song came to be disseminated again after 20 years of its creation, and it still serves as a companion of the Korean people in their life and work.

An Operation Launched Based on a Song

At midnight one day in May 1991, Kim Jong Il called some officials.

After they took their seats, he suggested listening to *Pyongyang Is Best*, a song created a few days before.

*The flowers blossomed on the foreign lands were not
As beautiful as those blossomed in my country.
To look round, the world is so wide, but
My country where I live is the best.*

When the four-stanza song was over, he again played its recording.

Kim Jong Il asked an official in charge of the sector of cinematic art if he had thought of anything special.

He was pleased that the official's answer agreed with his intention.

He then said:

We created the film *Unknown Heroes* based on the song *Loyal Heart*, and now it would be a good idea to create a film

based on this song.

In fact, when the song had been created, he had already planned creating a film based on the song.

And he continued:

I gave the task to create this song, and it is full of the spirit of Korean nation first. It reflects the psychological feelings of all the Korean people, whether they are young or old, living on their land or on an official trip to foreign countries, or served the south Korean army as generals, or are living in exile. It also reflects the reality of the present days as well as that of the past. It represents in philosophical depth amid dramatic human relations the idea that to look round, the world is so wide, but our country where we live is the best. A few days ago Comrade Kim Il Sung listened to the song broadcast on TV and said that the song is meaningful and very good. If a multipart film is created based on this song, it can become a masterpiece. The film should flow with the song as the main thing like a musical.

Stressing that such a musical needed many songs, he asked them which songs could be used.

The above-mentioned official answered that he had no idea.

Kim Jong Il said:

I think it is not so difficult. You have said that the song is full

of national emotions, so the song *Pyongyang Is Best* can be used as the theme song of the film, supported by a combination of the crooners' and other songs from the period of enlightenment. Then, it can become a characteristic film.

He then asked who could be chosen as archetypes for the major characters of the film, who would conform to the mood of the song, and continued:

The more they listen to it, the more the Koreans who are living in other countries will like it. It is all the more appealing to the Koreans who live abroad experiencing the pains of the nation. If they are set as archetypes and typified and the storylines are woven effectively, it will become a masterpiece. I think a good film can be created. We should create it well to dedicate it to the 80th birth anniversary of Comrade Kim Il Sung.

Produced thus was the multipart film *The Nation and Destiny*, whose seed is the destiny of a nation. In other words, its seed is that the destiny of a nation is immediately that of its individual members. As a masterpiece in the profundity and scope of its contents and scale, the depth of the explanation of its theme and diversity of the means of its portrayal, the film showcases the level of development of the art of cinema in Korea.

New Collection of Choruses

One day in September 1991, Kim Jong Il saw some sample music CDs.

After going over them with satisfaction, he said the musical works on them could be made more colourful, emphasizing that the songs portrayed by the Korean People's Army Song and Dance Ensemble should be recorded on them.

Officials were surprised, for many musical works portrayed by the ensemble had been recorded on CDs until then. For example, they had occupied a large proportion of CDs that contained those portrayed by several art troupes.

Kim Jong Il said:

Two CDs should be recorded with male choruses and titled *Collection of Choruses by the Korean People's Army Song and Dance Ensemble*.

The officials felt refreshed after hearing the title of the CDs.

After a moment of thinking, he asked them which were characteristic among the musical numbers of the ensemble other than chorus.

An official answered that *kayagum* (a traditional musical

instrument of Korea) solo and ensemble was characteristic, that no other art troupes presented that genre of music, and that mixed duet was also very popular.

Kim Jong Il supported him, saying that collections of *kayagum* solo and ensembles and mixed duets could become very popular. He then asked about the problems that might arise in recording so many songs on CD.

An official presented some problems, including that the original recordings of some songs were not available.

Kim Jong Il gave his opinions on how to solve the problems.

Thus, *Collection of Choruses by the Korean People's Army Song and Dance Ensemble* was issued, making the songs portrayed by the Korean People's Army Song and Dance Ensemble resound like a salvo by multiple rocket launchers on the posts of the KPA and in the factories, farms and houses as songs of faith and marches of the times.

Singing of the “Spring” of Socialism

The following happened in 1992, when the international political situation and the world socialist movement were in turmoil. In January that year, while acquainting himself with the preparations for the April Spring Friendship Art Festival, Kim Jong Il said that, for an effective festival, the order of numbers in the programme should be set properly. He then continued meaningfully:

The song *Green Pine on Nam Hill* should be prepared well and sung as the first number at the April Spring Friendship Art Festival to be held this year. The song reflects the idea that the revolution should be waged generation after generation. The idea is vivid in its third stanza, which reads *If I fail my sons will go on fighting/When the spring of liberation comes/To the 3 000-ri lovely land/My dearest motherland Korea, cry out, “Long live independence!”* The cause of winning back our country from the Japanese imperialists was started by Kim Hyong Jik, an indomitable revolutionary fighter, and it was inherited and accomplished by the great leader. The revolutionary cause of Juche pioneered by the leader in this course is now being carried

forward by me. A revolutionary cause should be carried forward generation after generation in this way. This song still has a great influence on those who are waging the revolution.

The following proved his conviction.

The song rang out as the first number for the opening ceremony of the festival.

*Comrade, do you know
The green pine on Nam Hill?
The rigours of snow and frost may strike.
But life returns with warm sunshine
When spring comes round.*

The song grasped the hearts of the audience, and moved the hearts of those who were worrying about the future of socialism.

A few days later, the historic Pyongyang Declaration, titled *Let Us Defend and Advance the Socialist Cause*, was made public in Pyongyang and delegates from 70 political parties of the world signed it.

Folk Songs Accompanied by Modern Instruments

The Korean people had long thought that their folk songs should be played only by national musical instruments, regarding that the Western and other modern electronic instruments were masters in performing modern musical works.

But today the folk songs are played by those instruments as well.

One November day in 1993, Kim Jong Il guided some musical works represented by an art troupe.

He said that recently he had thought a lot about how to develop the folk music, and that he had given an art troupe the task for arranging some folk songs as suited to the modern aesthetic tastes. He continued:

The troupe has presented them at today's performance. The songs are arranged well as intended by the Party. *Let's Go to Pick Mulberry Leaves* and *Moran Hill* are good arrangements and all the folk songs, which the troupe played by combining electronic and other Western instruments, are pleasant to the ear and have an appealing spontaneity. This proves that electronic and other

Western instruments can reproduce at a high level our folk songs in conformity with our people's sentiments and modern tastes. We should subordinate those instruments to the Korean music.

And he added in a convincing tone of voice:

Our people will very much like the folk songs represented by the art troupe. The elderly will feel like dancing to the melodies, and so will the young.

After a while, he continued:

We should develop our traditional music in the form of light music. This means that we should arrange traditional pieces of music in a lively and rousing manner by using electronic and other Western instruments so that they preserve our national characteristics and cater to the modern tastes.

Since then, electronic and other Western instruments were subordinated to playing the Korean traditional tune and representing the Korean folk songs, enjoying a favourable appreciation of the audiences.

My Love, Night of Pyongyang

On the evening of one February day in 1994, Kim Jong Il, while working with some officials, suggested listening to music.

The tape-recorder played *Don't Advance, Night of Pyongyang*, a song full of emotions.

*Illumination is reflected on the calm river water;
With unforgettable memories, my heart beats fast.
O my love, night of Pyongyang, I want to walk endlessly.
Don't advance, night of Pyongyang.*

...

When the song was over, he said that the song sounded better the more he listened to it, and continued:

Training the people ideologically with songs is a good way. Songs play an important role in educating them in a revolutionary way. Good songs strike the enemy with uneasiness and terror and give our people conviction and courage. This song reflects the optimistic life and emotions of our people who have shed

their honest sweat for the prosperity of their country. So I like this song very much.

Later, the song became more famous, making the people yearn for their capital city and cherish an ennobling feeling of patriotism.

Love Your Wife

On March 8, 1995, some officials were called by Kim Jong Il.

Noting that the day was the 85th anniversary of the International Women's Day, Kim Jong Il said that an atmosphere of respecting women should be created in society.

The officials had not thought about the day, and so they had made no relevant arrangements.

Kim Jong Il criticized them for the fact that newspapers and TV channels had not dealt with the women's issue on the International Women's Day, saying that they were prejudiced, lacking in emotions.

At his words, the officials felt remorseful, for as they had received his letter on the New Year's Day after the year of bitterest grief (President Kim Il Sung died in 1994), they had been so engrossed in tiding over the immediate, difficult phase and performing urgent tasks that the international holiday of women had been out of their consideration.

Kim Jong Il said in a serious tone of voice:

We should also approach the women's issue from an international point of view. And in view of the prevailing situation, it is good

to celebrate the day in a more meaningful way. The enemy is now attempting viciously to isolate and stifle our country that is advancing, holding aloft the banner of socialism. We should pay heed to such international holidays and further strengthen international solidarity the more frantic the enemy's attempts are.

He was meaning that they should analyse and judge any problem in a broad way by connecting it with the fundamental interests of the Korean revolution and deal with it adroitly in keeping with the relevant developments.

Changing the subject, he said:

Some days ago I sent the Radio-Television Broadcasting Committee the new song *Love Your Wife*, which calls for the respect of women in society, so that it could be broadcast on the occasion of the International Women's Day. The committee immediately broadcast it through radio and TV. It would have been better if it had been broadcast on the day after an anchor gave a brief explanation of its idea and content.

Under his care, the new song resounded, instilling revolutionary optimism in the hearts of the Korean people.

Only the Mountain Is Visible and Not the Sea

One day in November 1998, Kim Jong Il enjoyed a performance of electronic instruments with a senior official.

The famous song *Let's Go to the Mountain and Sea* was played.

After listening to the music, he said:

The song was not portrayed well enough to highlight the philosophical quality of the lyrics.

Then he added in a roundabout way that only the mountain was visible and not the sea.

The official could not understand what he said.

Kim Jong Il explained:

The music is high-pitched, but there is no emotion in the representation. As electronic music, the representation with only a high-pitched melody but without emotion is sore on the ear. Electronic instruments should be played in a quiet, harmonious and emotive way so that the audience could picture in an emotional way the idea of the lyrics. The text reads *Let's go to the sea*, but the rendering is wide of the mark, and the sea where seagulls are hovering over the surface and fishing vessels are sailing over the

horizon cannot be visualized.

The official recalled the text word by word, and found that, as he had said, the sound was high like a soaring mountain, but there were no sounds of wind and birds, and the seagulls were not visible.

Kim Jong Il continued:

From now on do not try to increase the sound of the electronic instruments alone, but try to play them so that, for example, if a text reads *Let's go to the mountain and sea*, the sentiments of the sea waves and forests swaying in the mountains could be felt.

Later, after listening to the song portrayed in a different way, Kim Jong Il said it passed the test, adding:

The song leads me to the deep world of thought about the beauty of my country. Now that the song *Let's Go to the Mountain and Sea* was arranged as an instrumental music with the sentimental melody as the basis, it makes me feel the beauty of my country. I like philosophical melodies. By philosophical melodies, I mean soft and sentimental ones that lead the listeners to the philosophical world.

We and Leading the Chorus

One day in March 1999, Kim Jong Il saw a performance by the State Merited Chorus.

In the middle of the chorus *Let's Sing the Song of Army-People Unity*, he asked the officials what they thought of the style of the chorus led by a female soloist.

Pointing to the programme of the performance, he said:

The themes of *Let's Sing the Song of Army-People Unity* and *Nobody Knows* are similar to each other. And there is no difference in the form of their portrayal and they sound monotonous as each of them was led by a woman soloist.

The officials did not know what to say for the answer.

After a while, he continued:

As *Nobody Knows* was led by a female soloist, it would be good if *Let's Sing the Song of Army-People Unity* is led by a female duet.

The officials were still wondering what he meant.

Kim Jong Il explained:

From the point of view of literature, it is reasonable that the chorus *Let's Sing the Song of Army-People Unity* should be led by a female duet. The song begins with *We have come to see the*

soldiers, so this part should be sung by a female duet rather than by a female soloist.

We and a duet—it was very simple and clear.

One Plus One Makes a Larger One

One day in July 2001, Kim Jong Il called an official.

The official thought Kim Jong Il called him to give an assignment concerning the preparations for a visit to Russia the national leader was making.

Kim Jong Il said he would give him a special task.

Surprisingly, he presented a musical score and said:

Recently a song, titled, *We Are One*, has been created. It is a good song. Its text is especially good. The expressions in the text like “our nation is one,” “our blood is one,” “united, we become one” and “one plus one makes a larger one” are very philosophical. The KPA Merited Chorus should represent the song as a chorus.

After giving his detailed opinions on how to represent it, he continued:

The Merited Chorus should represent the song to make it a people-oriented one so that the people can sing it easily with the feeling of delight.

Later the song was represented as a male chorus mixed with a female solo, arousing the desire of all the compatriots for

national reunification.

Our nation is one, our blood is one.

This land is one, one that cannot exist as two.

Washing the wound of long time with tears,

Hope of reunification is running high.

We are one, our kindred feelings are one.

...

The Change Is Intolerable

One day in January 2002, Kim Jong Il asked the officials in the field of musical art to listen to a musical work represented by an art troupe by means of electronic instruments.

When the recording of the work was over, he asked them what they thought of it.

An official answered, “I think it is an excellent model that has made electronic music serve our music. The National Symphony Orchestra played the work before, and now the musical sound of this one is the same. If they listen to it, professional musicians would learn a lot from it.”

Kim Jong Il said:

The artistes rendered the song on a high level. Particularly, it is good that they sustained the clear and soft tone of the national instruments with electronic instruments. Electronic music can be highly appreciated by our people only when they are subordinated to the development of the Korean music. The electronic work is a new work of our own style, a hit. To all intents and purposes, we should give priority to the development of the Korean music. Even when we introduce the musical style of other countries, like

electronic music, we should make it serve the development of the Korean music.

These words reflected his will not to tolerate any change in the style of the national music of his country.

An “Extraordinary Order”

The following happened in February 2004, when the United States was waging a large-scale nuclear war game.

Kim Jong Il issued an order to input songs to the equipment for karaoke so that they could be sent to all the companies of the Korean People’s Army.

The officials were surprised for the order was too contrasting to the tense situation.

Kim Jong Il said to them:

I will send the State Merited Chorus the equipment, and songs favoured by the soldiers should be input there. If these equipment are sent to the KPA units, it would be of great help for the soldiers’ cultural and leisure activities. Not only marches and choruses but a large number of lyrical songs and songs based on real life should be input there. The soldiers are fond of singing the songs like *Where My Life Has Come into Bloom*. They also enjoy singing *The Cook Wagon Is Rolling*, created long ago, for its text is plain and its music cheerful. Such songs can be input into the equipment.

So when the dark clouds of reckless nuclear war game by the enemy were hovering across the Military Demarcation Line, a

campaign was conducted to input cheerful songs into the equipment for karaoke.

Later Kim Jong Il, after acquainting himself with how the campaign was going on, set forth a higher goal of inputting 500 songs by the Day of the Sun (April 15, President Kim Il Sung's birthday), and reinforced the team with competent officials.

When the team successfully completed the task, he listened to the songs one by one, and took a measure for deleting the songs which the soldiers did not like.

As a result, when the enemy's nuclear war game was at its height, trucks and buses carried the equipment, each containing over 800 songs, to the places where the soldiers were, and songs of optimism and delight resounded loudly.

Tone of the 21st Century

One day in September 2006 Kim Jong Il said to the officials that they had to introduce 3Ds in acoustics.

3Ds in acoustics?

The officials were surprised as they had never heard the term.

Kim Jong Il continued:

We should apply 3Ds in acoustics. In the past stereoscopic photograph with two pictures on one plane was applied to calendar making. Now we should introduce 3Ds to acoustics. This means when portraying a musical work, we should ensure that music of the work, accompaniment for it and another tone are heard together.

Kim Jong Il was explaining in detail about 3Ds in acoustics.

The officials listened to what he had to say with the expectation that he would explore a new frontier of music.

He gave them an understanding, saying that he had heard that day *At the Spring Site* newly portrayed by singing the song over the pre-recorded backing track, karaoke, accompanied by the piano, and that this produced 3Ds in acoustics.

The officials had been aware that he had possessed an

outstanding sense of sound, and now he was opening a new world of music through the portrayal of a song presented at a simple performance.

Looking at them, he said:

We might experience many failures and twists and turns while trying to solve the problem of 3Ds in acoustics. There can be no success without failures. That is why they say that the road to scientific research is not all plain sailing. New things should be explored in music. At the moment art troupes only divide voice parts when portraying a song without trying to find new tone colours and present a unique rendering. A musical work should be portrayed as suited to its character. It is misguided that a 100-strong chorus tries only to make a resounding sound. What is important in portraying a musical work is to find out new tone colours so that it can give an impression that it is new. We must discover tone colours of the 21st century.

His words convinced them of the arrival of a new era of development of the Juche-oriented art of music.

Rehabilitated Songs from the Enlightenment Period

One day in March 2007, Kim Jong Il told the officials on properly inheriting the songs from the enlightenment period, a valuable musical asset.

He said:

Some songs from the enlightenment period reflect our people's love and yearning for the lost country and the native places they left behind, the sentiments of their anger at and resistance to the aggressors who occupied their country, their affection for their country's beautiful scenery and famous places, and their aspiration for and conviction in the liberation of the country.

He then enumerated them—*Spring of Home Village*, *Wild Rose*, *Site of the Old Royal Palace*, *Ballad of the Eight Korean Scenic Spots*, *Balsam*, *The Tuman River Filled with Tears*, etc.

Saying that he loved *The Tuman River Filled with Tears*, he recollected in deep emotion:

When I was crossing the Tuman River on my way back from my visit to a foreign country a few years ago, the first thing that

occurred to my mind was the song. At that time I told the officials accompanying me that the song reflects the sorrowful feelings of our people, who lost their country, and their desire for national liberation, that the Tuman was a river of grudge, a river of blood and tears in those days, and that it has now become a river of paradise, a river of happiness.

As he said, even a common song reflects the modern history of the Korean nation.

Kim Jong Il continued:

Though they have some limitations, the songs from the enlightenment period are a valuable musical legacy of our nation. If these songs are not allowed to be sung or discarded without any historical consideration on the plea that they are decadent songs, the music of the 1920s and 1930s would be lost in the history of our country's music. Had we not recognized such songs and allowed to be sung, the valuable cultural legacy of our nation would have been buried in history. Rehabilitation of the songs from the enlightenment period is a kind of great event in the musical history of our country and a valuable success we have achieved in inheriting the musical legacy of our nation on the principle of sustaining the Juche character and national identity and on the principle of remaining faithful

to the historical truth. We should be effective in disseminating these songs. If we properly inherit the historical assets, our history will become brilliant; otherwise, we might leave vacancy in our history and experience twists and turns. We must not bequeath the history that has vacancy to the coming generations. This is one of the purposes of why we recognize songs from the enlightenment period and allow them to be sung widely.

Highest Special Thanks

One day in October 2009, after seeing a joint celebratory performance staged by several art troupes, Kim Jong Il said:

The performance was perfect in its artistic character, and especially its policy-oriented principle was clear. It was an excellent performance that pulsates with the ideas of our Party.

As if he was reminded of the emotions he had felt while seeing the performance, he continued passionately:

Break Through the Cutting Edge, sung at today's performance, is an excellent song. It reflects the firm determination of the Party to break through the cutting edge and the requirements of the IT era. It reflects the aspirations and desire of our Party and suits us today. What I think is the happiest is that the finishing section of the performance was portrayed well. As the section was a medley of the orchestra and chorus *Break Through the Cutting Edge*, *Higher and Faster* and *Let Us Meet at the Front*, it brims over with our Party's ideas, aspirations and will. Such excellent musical works will play a great role in rousing the people to promote the flow of the advancing times and bring about a fresh leap forward. I am pleased and the happiest with the fact that not

only their artistic characters but also policy-oriented principle are vivid. Every one will feel their immaculate artistic characters. They reflect the current ideas and slogans of our Party. The ideas of these three famous songs that consisted in the finishing section are the core of the performance.

Then, casting a trust-filled glance at the creative workers, Kim Jong Il added:

Today's joint performance is a completely new one, so I am all the more pleased. It is an artistic performance true to the meaning of the word. It is a success that has satisfied the demands of the times. I extend to all the artistes, who played in today's performance, the highest special thanks in my own name.

* * *

Kim Jong Il loved music all his life, and illuminated for the people the true path to music. He led them to live with music, adding optimism by means of music when his people were feeling happy. This is why the Korean people sang the songs of praises of him when he was alive, and still sing the songs of reverence for him.

Kim Jong Il and Music

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Published by Foreign Languages Publishing House,
DPR Korea

Issued in June Juche 112 (2023)

E-mail: flph@star-co.net.kp

<http://www.korean-books.com.kp>



ISBN 978-9946-0-2210-9



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