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Hello, and welcome back to Busy Kids Love Music, the podcast that helps you explore the music of composers, cultures, and traditions from all around the world. I'm Carly Seifert, the creator of Busy Kids Do Piano, and I'm so glad you're joining me for our exciting summer series: Around the World with Busy Kids Love Music!

For every episode this summer, we're visiting a new country to learn about its folk music traditions. So far, we've explored the beautiful sounds of Ethiopia and the heartfelt harmonies of Ukraine. Today, we're flying across the globe to the eastern side of Asia—to a country full of history, rhythm, and rich musical tradition: South Korea!

Before we dive into the instruments and sounds of Korean folk music, let's take a quick look at South Korea's history to understand how it became its own country.

For many centuries, Korea was one united kingdom with its own culture, language, and traditions. But in the early 1900s, Korea was occupied by Japan. Then, after World War II, Korea gained independence—but soon after, it was divided into two separate countries: North Korea and South Korea, based on different political beliefs and systems.

Since then, South Korea has become a thriving, modern country with a deep respect for its past. Its traditional music, called gugak, is still taught and performed today—and it's a wonderful way to understand the country's heart and soul.

Now let's explore the sounds that make Korean folk music so special.

Korean folk music comes in many styles—some are joyful and lively, while others are slow and peaceful. Let's take a look at a few major types.

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Minyo are traditional Korean folk songs that have been passed down through generations. Minyo songs are often about daily life, love, farming, and nature. They're usually sung in a special singing style that involves bending and stretching notes—a bit like singing and sliding your voice at the same time. Let's listen for a moment...

One of the most famous Korean folk songs is called "Arirang." You might think of it as the national folk song of Korea because it's so well-known and loved. Estimated to be more than 600 years old, "Arirang" is a gentle, emotional melody about love, longing, and sometimes farewell. Even though there are many different versions of the song from different regions, they all share the same feeling of beauty and sadness. You might hear "Arirang" sung softly with just one voice, or performed by a full choir or orchestra. In fact, it's such an important part of Korean culture that UNESCO listed it as a piece of "Intangible Cultural Heritage"—which means it's a tradition that should be preserved and celebrated forever!

Pansori is a dramatic musical storytelling performance. One singer tells an entire story through singing, speaking, and acting—accompanied by just one drummer! It's kind of like an opera with only two performers. Pansori performances can last for hours and are often funny, emotional, and full of expression. It evolved from street entertainment into a recognized art form.

The song you're listening to now is the Korean pansori story "Sugungga". After learning that the Dragon King living at the underwater palace has a disease that can only be cured by a rabbit's liver, the turtle goes to land and tricks the rabbit to visit the underwater palace. After learning the truth, the rabbit lies to the Dragon King and makes his way back to land, escaping his death.

Samul nori is an exciting style of percussion music performed with four traditional Korean drums and gongs. The word samulnori means "four things playing." It's fast, rhythmic, and performed with a lot of energy

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and movement. It's a modern adaptation of traditional farming music. Let's have a listen...

Now let's meet some of the amazing traditional instruments used in Korean folk music.

The janggu is a double-headed hourglass-shaped drum played with two sticks. One side is played for low sounds, and the other for high sounds, allowing for a wide range of rhythms. It's used in all kinds of Korean music—from folk to royal court music.

The gayageum is a long zither-like instrument with 12 strings (though modern versions may have more). The musician plucks the strings with their fingers to create gentle, beautiful melodies. You'll often hear the gayageum in both solo performances and in ensembles.

The haegeum is a two-stringed fiddle that's played vertically with a bow. Its sound is bright and expressive and is often used to imitate the human voice.

Folk music in South Korea isn't just something from the past—it's still very much alive today. Children learn traditional songs in school, and there are theaters and festivals all over Korea that celebrate gugak. Musicians even mix traditional sounds with pop and electronic music to create something entirely new.

There's even a K-pop group or two that have performed with **traditional folk instruments**. It's a great reminder that traditional music and modern music can work together to create something amazing.

I hope you've enjoyed our journey through the rhythms and stories of South Korea. As always, I encourage you to check out the accompanying playlist that I've linked in the show notes at [buskidsdopiano.com/podcast/153](https://www.buskidsdopiano.com/podcast/153) so that you can see the beautiful

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Korean folk instruments and witness musicians playing them in the videos I've put together for you. From minyo to samulnori and the gentle sounds of the gayageum, Korean folk music is a celebration of sound and tradition.

Don't forget to download your South Korea passport stamp in today's show notes at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/153, and check out links to any of the past episodes from our series that you might have missed.

In two weeks, we're heading to a whole new part of the world, so stay tuned!

Until then... keep listening, keep learning, and keep making music. Bye for now!