



Travel Journal: Far East

On September 14, I flew to the Far East. My travels took me to Khabarovsk, Russia. There, I met pianist Roma Eicher and her husband, Sam. We performed at the College for the Fine Arts in Khabarovsk. It was a great occasion to talk about music, meet students and faculty and to perform.

Khabarovsk is a very interesting city with a population of 600,000. Its influences are multiple. Because of its location, it has strong Japanese, Korean and Chinese influences. I was able to meet many people from the many different cultures in the area.

It was a great honor to meet Irina and Slalve Soblevsky. Slalve is world-class pianist and his wife Irina is a former music teacher. They were responsible for my time while in Khabarovsk. They are interested in having me return to sing with the Philharmonic orchestra.

I also was able to attend a public music school for school age children. The children performed for me. They sang, played a variety of musical instruments and danced. It was a highlight for me. I also sang a mini-concert for them, and was able to entice them into singing a few spirituals with me. Afterwards, many children came around me and we continued singing. They attempted to teach me a Russian folk song. It was a great moment for me. Music is truly the universal language of the heart, and all of us on that day were touched by the wonderful gift of music.

I then traveled to Seoul, Korea. I have learned a great deal about Korea. I have come to understand that many people are longing for a unified Korea. The longer I am here, the more empathy I have for the people of Korea. They are a people that have not been able to determine their own destiny. Many people in the south have relatives and family in the north, and politics have prevented them from being together.

On the 21st of September, I sang at an event to celebrate the United Nations International Day of Peace. The concert was held at a large Anglican Church. In attendance were peace-oriented people from around Seoul. The event was sponsored by Korea Anabaptist Center together with other peace organizations.

There was a very positive response to the spirituals. Those in attendance appreciated the opportunity to sing along. I had the opportunity to speak for peace, and I felt a sense of kindredness with those who were there. One highlight was hearing the final prayers for the evening spoken by a Buddhist monk and an Anglican nun. It was an honor to visit with them after the concert and share stories. Know-

ing more about each other's stories is the cornerstone of peace building. It was an honor to be related to the peace community in South Korea.

Seoul has a population of about 12 million and it is a modern city. The history of the area is rich, and there an appropriate is a pride about being Korean. I have been impressed with the forthrightness of the people and their freedom to talk about their experiences.

On Saturday Sept 23, I attended a Korean wedding. It was held at a very expensive hotel. I met the bride and groom, who greeted me as I entered the ballroom. I was invited to the wedding as a result of being connected to one of the hosts who has been planning our time in Korea. I was struck by how similar the wedding was to an American wedding. The only difference was that this wedding lasted about 35 minutes.

We were included in the picture-taking, and stood behind the bride and groom when all of their friends were invited to join them. We were invited to a very good Korean meal after the wedding. We ate quickly, as we needed to drive across town to get ready for our evenings concert.

The concert was held in the Jung Lim Center in downtown Seoul. They billed it as a peace concert. I had the chance to lecture and sing. It was a great evening. The audience loved to sing the call-and-response spirituals.

In the 5000-year history of Korea, they have been invaded 900 times. They, too, have experienced great pain and suffering. They connected to the music of the spirituals, and we found common ground in our respective narratives. There was solidarity around our own historical victimization. We shared a deeper level than at previous performances.





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During the question-and-answer session, the idea emerged to create a cross-cultural event where Korean music could be featured along with the spirituals. We talked about this as something to do when I return. It was a very meaningful connection with the Korean people, and I do indeed look forward to returning someday.

On Sunday, the 24th of September, I gave the morning sermon and sang at an Anabaptist fellowship. The message was about peace, and I used a personal story about my parents to illustrate my points. I also sang before and after the sermon. It was a good Sunday for me, and the people who were there seemed to enjoy the service. When I look out and see tears in the eyes of people, then I know that their hearts have been touched. This was the case on this day. The people moved me as well. Their faith is strong, and they live out their faith in radical ways. Their hearts seemed full of love. We had a great meal together after the service.

In the afternoon, I repeated what I had done in the morning at a Presbyterian church. I had a very good time meeting new people. When I had finished singing and speaking, they wanted more. I sang two more songs. After the service, we were ushered to a nearby room, where we sat on the floor at a table and had a drink and some fruit. Afterwards, we walked to a nearby Chinese restaurant and had dinner together with the pastor, his wife and children and the hosts who invited us to Korea. It was great a meal and a good time of sharing.

On Monday, the 25th of September, we drove north for two hours until we arrived at a peace monument. It is quite close to the DMZ in the north. The monument salutes all those who helped repel the Soviets and North Koreans in 1950. We also went to a nearby park where there is a peace bell.

I look forward to the day when a monument is built for bringing peace with no bloodshed and no violence. All of us must work for this kind of peace. That will be something to celebrate.

The 26th of September was a special day. In the morning, I sang at the Torch Trinity Seminary. The seminary is a multicultural institution, as many people from around the world come to be educated there. The reception was very warm. There was a special energy in the hall and the enthusiasm of the audience made it easy to sing there. I also had the chance to speak for peace. I told the crowd that America overinvests in war. The cost of one stealth bomber would treat all of the people in Africa who are infected with HIV for one month.

Though we represent only five percent of the world's population, Americans consume one-third of the earth's resources. Finding ways to equalize the resources of the world and to reduce wasteful use relates to the peace issue. An important peace value is that we are connected to everything, even the earth. Being respectful of the earth and of others is an important factor in leaving peacefully.

The crowd was very receptive and responded with applause. They sang well and enjoyed the call-and-response spirituals. It was a great way to start my day. After the performance we went out with two faculty members for lunch. The conversation was rich. I am sorry that it is my last full day in Seoul.

In the evening, I sang in a suburb of Seoul. It was a concert venue and the hall was beautiful. It was a concert where parents came with their children. The theme was peace, and I once again had the chance to sing and speak for peace. Most of the people who came were introduced to the themes of peace and they responded with enthusiasm. They screamed for another song when the concert ended. Like the other groups they were engaged and participated freely. As was true in China, their favorite song was "I Am a Small Part of the World." In every venue they love this song. In fact, one lady came to hear a second performance where this song was not on the program. She requested it and I sang it.

What I have been able to find here is a depth of spirit. I think it is born out of the pain of the Korean people. They feel deeply and they long for peace.

I thank the Korea Anabaptist Center for inviting me to be with them. They did a great job preparing for my visit, and they are already brainstorming about how they could organize a repeat tour sometime in the future. I loved being in the Korean room. It is a lovely place and I remember this visit and its impact on me for years to come.