

VARIATIONS ON A KOREAN FOLK SONG

John Barnes Chance
Boosey & Hawkes, 1967

Variations on a Korean Folk Song is based upon a folk tune that the composer learned while serving the U.S. Army in Seoul, Korea. The tune is known as *Arrirang*, a song of love and heartbreak that can be found in many variations, with an origin that may date back 1000 years.

In autumn 1966, for the *Journal of Band Research*, Chance said: "I became acquainted with the folk song while serving in Seoul, Korea, as a member of the Eighth U.S. Army Band in 1958-59. The tune is not as simple as it sounds, and my fascination with it during the intervening years led to its eventual use as the theme for this set of variations."

Arirang is a tune based on the pentatonic scale, and it can be dated back to the 18th century as a song of love and heartbreak. It was utilized in the 20th century as a resistance anthem during the Japanese occupation of Korea, when the singing of patriotic

songs, including the national anthem, was criminalized.

Chance's set of variations, written for concert band in 1965, begins by presenting the *Arirang* theme, and proceeds to develop it through five variations. The piece alternates between fast and slow variations, with the final variation being marked "Con Islancio" ("with impetuosity"), and it uses a variety of time signatures and rhythmic motives to alter the theme. Chance maintains the Eastern influence of the original tune through his use of the pentatonic scale, as well as prominent use of distinct percussion instruments, such as temple blocks, cymbals, and a gong.

The piece was awarded the Ostwald Award in 1966 by the American Bandmasters Association.