



La Bayadère

KOREAN ARTS MANAGEMENT SERVICE



Yongjae Park

In January 2006, Korea's Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism set up an agency to support the country's arts industry both at home and abroad. The Korea Arts Management Service (KAMS) has the job of promoting Korean arts companies in other countries, quantifying the amount of arts activity going on in the country, providing consulting services for arts groups, and offering training in arts management. 'Overseas expansion is important for commercial affairs, but even more so for the pure performing arts,' says KAMS' recently appointed president Yongjae Park, a poet, playwright and former journalist. 'The world is apparently moving in fast-forward. Art and culture are changing rapidly. And exchanges must be a mutual communication, not a one-way persuasion.'

With that in mind, Park points to the number of international exchanges since KAMS' creation. 'The number of international exchange projects has increased to almost twice that of 2006,' he states, quoting KAMS' own research: '225 performing arts companies have toured 91 foreign countries, presenting 550 performances. And in Korea, there have been 1,219 performances by 745 international groups from 74 countries.' While Park admits the increase is not entirely down to KAMS' work, he sees it as significant that 'Korean performing arts groups have been developing their international activities' year on year.

KAMS research has also shown that in 2006, of Korea's 2,385 arts companies, by far the largest sector was made up of groups performing Western music styles – 33.2 per cent of the total, compared with 19.2 per cent for Korean traditional music. Dance groups made up a more modest 17.1 per cent, while theatre companies accounted for 21.8 per cent. Government subsidy for the entire performing arts industry in 2007 came to 39 per cent of the sector's total income, while donations came to 7.5 per cent. 'Arts companies rely on grants and corporate support for new commissions or touring projects,' Park notes.

He also acknowledges the lack of knowledge, until now, about Korean arts abroad. 'Korea, on account of having its own unique language, is often described as a "black hole of information," he laments. To rectify matters, KAMS has set up forums and events at the Apac conference in New York, Germany's Tanzmesse and the Womex world music festival, among others. It's also responsible for the annual Performing Arts Market in Seoul, which celebrates its fifth anniversary in October 2009, and has a close partnership with the Tokyo Performing Arts Market. A collaboration with the Festival Santiago brought music, dance and theatre companies to Chile to showcase their works.

Locally, however, Park sees room for improvement in the spread of arts facilities across the country – 54.5 per cent of the nation's theatres are located in the 'metropolitan' area, encompassing Seoul and its satellite districts, Gyeonggi and Incheon. 'Many arts facilities and festivals are centred on Seoul, it is true,' he notes, 'but owing to well-made local arts festivals and genre-specific international projects, the gap between Seoul and the provinces is getting narrower.' He adds that KAMS has been providing consulting services in local cities, and is offering seminars and academy programmes this year 'to develop human resources and administration of arts companies.'

'Artists can be arts lecturers in schools,' he adds. 'In my view, it is most important to make job opportunities for artists, develop audiences and produce arts productions to give hope to the public.' Korea's arts sector has not avoided the effects of the recession – Park estimates that audiences could be down by 'about 30 per cent' across the industry.

this year. Only the Korean National Ballet, formed in 1962 as the Korean National Ballet Company, has lasted longer; the company boasts four professional ballet troupes. 'The development since 1984 has been in the number of non-professional ballet groups,' reveals Julia Moon, artistic director, 'most of them associated with dance academies, university dance programs and their alumni associations.'

When UB was founded in 1984, it comprised 15 dancers, augmented by students from the local high schools. Its current roster, by contrast, has about 45 dancers on year-long contracts, 12 dancers on paid apprenticeships and 15 dancers in Universal Ballet's professional training division.

Its full-time dancers. Its repertoire includes full-length ballets, shorter contemporary works and original full-length ballets created especially for the company.

'I don't know if it would be entirely accurate to call it "national" Korean style of ballet,' Moon goes on. 'Both UB and the National Ballet have engaged a lot of Russian stagings and ballet choreographers in the past 10 to 15 years, so both of the major companies have a strong Russian mark on their movement style.' In 2007, choreographer Oleg Vinogradov left UB only last year as its artistic director. Moon also notes the Koreans' 'musicality' and characteristics of their physique: 'relatively smaller-boned and less muscular than Caucasians, Korean ballerinas tend to have a pleasing, non-angular line that works very well with the classical "ballet blanc" image.' It's important to note, though, that all kinds of ballet styles are taught across the nation, and a definitive national style is still difficult to pin down.

Thematically, too, UB has created works inspired by Korean national myths and tales. *Shim Chung*, one of its oldest works that premiered in 1986, illustrates the love of a young girl for her blind father. 'One way of characterising the core of Korean tradition is to say that the focus on the family is very strong,' Moon argues. 'If we look at Western ballet or opera productions, nearly all of them are structured around conjugal love. But Confucian and Korean philosophy places equal importance on other kinds of love – between parent and child, between siblings, and so on.'

Shim Chung is often performed as part of UB's tours, for which it frequently takes on the role of 'cultural ambassador,' receiving the endorsement of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. 'This is sometimes also accompanied by financial assistance, for example, a portion of the company's freight expenses,' Moon adds. 'Financial support is most important for trips to countries where Korean performing arts has not appeared before, or not for a long time.' The ministry's financing is a result of the backing of Sun Myung Moon, founder of the Unification Church and father-in-law of Julia Moon.



Shim Chung