

From Creativity to Ideology – How Autocracy Removed Artistic Freedom in North Korean Music

Prof. Keith David Howard
(SOAS University of London)

Date: Thursday, 13 February 2025

Time: 4 pm - 5 pm (NZDT)

Venue: CLL Seminar Room (207-519), UoA

Online available via Zoom: Registration required



Abstract

For half a century, a monolithic artistic policy has gone hand in hand with absolute political autocracy in North Korea. Artists, including musicians and dancers, must adhere to a literary art theory (munye iron) that requires ideological purity and uses approved model works to generate new artistic production. This is the result of a transition away from artistic freedom begun in 1955 with the so-called 'juche speech' and the Ch'ŏllima 'flying horse' mass movement (Howard 2020) which was cast in stone after Kim Il Sung's 1967 'May 25 instructions (5.25 kyoshi)'. To document the transition, I explore articles by musicologists, composers, choreographers, and educators in key journals of the period, revealing divergent and critical approaches to the imposition of ideology and state control. I then fast forward and ask whether the consensus of conformity remains in today's music and dance production.



About Prof. Keith David Howard

Keith Howard is Professor Emeritus at SOAS University of London. He has held academic positions in Korea, Australia, and the USA. A regular broadcaster, and long-time editorial chair of the SOAS Musicology Series (2008–2017), he has written or edited 23 books, 170 academic articles and 200+ reviews.

All are warmly welcome to the seminar room. Online joining is also available, but registration is required. Please scan the QR code above. For any inquiries, please contact ch.song@auckland.ac.nz.