

CHORALE FANTASY FOR PIANO NO. 1 “COMFORT, COMFORT MY PEOPLE” BY
SHINUH LEE: AN ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIVE GUIDE

by

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INTRODUCTION

Western classical music was introduced to Korea in the early 20th century and further developed in response to rapid modernization and socio-political upheaval. Initially disseminated through missionaries, diplomatic exchanges, and colonial institutions, Western music was soon embraced by Korean society as a symbol of cultural advancement and modern identity. Among the South Korean composers shaped by this legacy is Shinuh Lee, whose works reflect the profound influence of Western figures such as Bach, Beethoven, and Messiaen.

Although Lee received formal musical training in both South Korea and Europe, her compositional language is predominantly rooted in Western idioms. In particular, her Chorale Fantasies vividly demonstrate this inheritance. This study centers on Chorale Fantasy No. 1, offering an analysis from both theoretical and philosophical perspectives. The work draws on biblical texts, which are interpreted and transformed through Lee's original chorale melody, utilizing tonal, modal, and atonal procedures. She describes these compositional techniques as total-serial, polychordal, and polystylistic in nature.

Biblical themes occupy a central position in Lee's recent output, as seen in works such as Four Biblical Scenes (2004) for clarinet and strings, Violin Fantasy No. 2 "Laudate Dominum" (2006), Wind Quintet No. 2 "Homage to Thomas" (2007), and Lament (2010) for clarinet and string quartet. Like Bach and Messiaen, Lee's spiritual convictions are inseparable from her musical expression.

While structural parallels can be drawn between the religious works of Lee and Messiaen, the thematic content diverges significantly. Messiaen's music emphasizes divine love, joy, and

redemption, particularly in works such as *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus*. In contrast, Lee's Chorale Fantasies grapple with the weight of human sin, suffering, and the search for salvation. Her use of biblical narratives serves not only as a testament to her Christian faith but also as a vehicle for exploring existential questions and universal emotional experiences. Ultimately, her music seeks consolation and a language of healing.

The purpose of this research is to examine Shinuh Lee's eclectic compositional voice and her integration of biblical themes within a Western musical framework. By analyzing Chorale Fantasy No. 1, this study aims to provide interpretive and performance insights, while also contributing to the broader discourse on contemporary Korean composers and expanding the solo piano repertoire.

CHAPTER ONE

Background of Shinuh Lee's compositional life

Christian Missionaries brought classical vocal music to Korea in the early 1900s. The introduction of Western vocal music helped create the Changga, which is a Western-style music that is based on tonal structure. As a public school system began to take shape in 1906, a new genre of songs for preschool children called Dongyo gained popularity among composers in the 1920s. The Japanese government forced the use of the Japanese language for communication and singing to suppress the cultural identity of Koreans during the period of Japanese colonization. Many Korean composers began composing Dongyo, believing that keeping cultural identity for the young generation was important for the independence of Korea.¹ Another genre of Western-style songs that emerged after Changga and Dongyo was Gagok, which is similar to the German *lied*. The term Gagok originally refers to vocal music favored by the upper class in the Joseon Dynasty. However, the term was borrowed when a new Western-style song genre was invented in the 1920s. The most notable early example of Gagok is “Garden Balsam” (Bongsunga) written by Hong Nan-pa, a work which expresses the lament of a colonized mother country.

In 1900, instrumental music was introduced by Franz Eckert in collaboration with the Korean military. The Korean royal court invited Franz Eckert, a German musician, to establish a military music corps aimed at training the newly formed Imperial Military Band.² With Western musical instruments, including brass, woodwind, and percussion instruments likely acquired

¹Ch'un-mi Kim. *Harmonia Koreana: A Short History of 20th-Century Korean Music*. Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 2011.

²Choong-sik Ahn. *The Story of Western Music in Korea: A Social History, 1885-1950*. Morgan Hill, Calif.: EBookstand Books, 2005.

from Germany, the Eckert-trained army band made its debut performance on September 7, 1901. Eckert's role of exposing Korea to Western instrumental music was crucial, and he was active until the army band disbanded in 1915. Instrumental music continued to develop in the 1920s. One of the earliest examples of Western style music written by Korean composers was Hong Nan-pa's *Korean Lament* for solo violin in 1920. Several music schools were established to further educate people in Music history and development as Western vocal and instrumental music continued to evolve in Korea. Universities began to provide specialized courses in Western music during the 1920s.³ Korean folk songs and traditional instruments were included in the curriculum for a more comprehensive education. Korean composers began to incorporate elements of traditional Korean music in their compositions until the Japanese occupation, at which point traditional Korean music and Western music began to separate. The disparity of the two styles challenged Korea to produce musicians who expressed "bimusicality" in their music composition.⁴

During the 1930s and 1940s, a notable emergence of a new genre took place with the frequent composition of symphonic poems. Illustrative examples of symphonic poems include "Otello" by Kim Se-hyeong and "Symphonic Fantasia Korea" by Ahn Eak-tai. Even though the number of orchestras began to increase with the popularity of Western instruments, the creation of musical works was still limited due to the Japanese colonialism from 1910 to 1945 and the Korean War from 1950 to 1953.

³Ch'un-mi Kim. *Harmonia Koreana: A Short History of 20th-Century Korean Music*. Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 2011.

⁴Andrew P Killick. "Musical Composition in Twentieth-Century Korea." *Korean Studies* 16 (1992): 43–60. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23720021>.

The rapid economic growth in South Korea after Independence and the Korean War influenced Korean classical music composers to embrace Western modern music. In the 1950s, the term “modern” in music emerged for the first time.⁵ Atonal and serial music was introduced starting with the first Korean twelve-tone piano piece, *Enigma* by Un-Young La. With the increasing globalization of the music industry in Korea, Korean modern composers developed their own philosophy regarding Western-influenced compositional style. Some composers sought to integrate traditional Korean style or Eastern ideology into their compositions, while others opted to express their cultural identity with modern Western musical language.

Korean composers can be categorized into three generations: from early 1900s to the 1960s, the 1960s and 1970s, and post-1980s. The first generation incorporate established Western musical styles into Korean culture. The second generation shifted towards integrating more twentieth-century compositional techniques – such as serialism, atonal language, and electronic idioms – into their works. The third generation reframes Korean musical traditions within a Western-influenced framework. The assassination of President Park Chung-hee in 1979 caused immense social and cultural changes in the 1980s and the collapse of President Park Chung-hee’s dictatorial regime allowed composers greater freedom to express their own thoughts and music. A group of composers in the “Third Generation” led by Lee Geon-yong, declared their purpose as follows:

... We hope to create music that reflects a strength that only the Third World can possess. Our music does not aspire to emulate the present of Western music, nor does it try to go back to the past of Korean music, which is riddled with frustrated efforts to establish Korean identity. ... the first generation of Korean musicians was committed to importing the music of the First Worlds, and the second generation, which was aware of the

⁵Sookin Park. "A Study of Selected Solo Piano Works by Three Korean Women Composers from 2008 to 2012." Doctoral Dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 2017, 31.

underdevelopment of our own culture, was determined to accept the modern culture of the First World.⁶

Since the mid-1990s, Korean composers have had the liberty to craft their artistic realms with a diverse array of choices, allowing them to explore a broad spectrum of musical styles and techniques. The recognition of the need for a more globalized audience has driven many to create works that transcend traditional boundaries. Shinuh Lee (b. 1969), a prominent composer of the third generation, exemplifies this shift. While her music is deeply rooted in Western classical traditions, it largely eschews the incorporation of distinct Korean musical elements, reflecting her focus on universal compositional languages rather than nationalistic or regional styles.

Shinuh Lee completed her undergraduate studies in composition at Seoul National University in 1991. She later pursued advanced studies in composition in the United Kingdom at the Royal Academy of Music, the University of London, and the University of Sussex. While her early compositions were rooted in contemporary musical idioms, her artistic focus gradually shifted toward the exploration of profound spiritual themes, particularly those centered on divinity. In *Korean Contemporary Composers and Compositions II*, Lee reflects on how the tendency in Korea during the 1980s to elevate specific musical trends as the ultimate form of art diminished, giving way to a more diverse range of approaches.⁷ During the period, Korean music education largely emphasized atonality and structurally rigorous composition, reflecting the influence of Western European composers such as Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz

⁶ Ch'un-mi Kim. *Harmonia Koreana: A Short History of 20th-Century Korean Music*. Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 2011, 59-60.

⁷ Ibid.

Stockhausen.⁸ Lee argues that composers must pursue their own creative paths and redefine artistic values on their own terms. Her growing interest in sacred music was further shaped by the musical possibilities presented in church settings, particularly through the diverse repertoire of hymns.

Her early compositional style was heavily shaped by her mentor, Michael Finnissy, during her time at the Royal Academy of Music. This period of her work is deeply rooted in complex modernism, with notable influence from late-20th-century European music. Finnissy is recognized as one of the pioneers of "new complexity," a compositional style distinguished by disjointed melodic contours, complex rhythmic structures, microtonality, and multifaceted layers of detail in rhythm, timbre, texture, and dynamics. According to composer Christopher Fox, this compositional style refers to a "complex, multi-layered interplay of evolutionary processes occurring simultaneously within every dimension of the musical material."⁹

⁸Youngmi Choi. "Analysis of Shinuh Lee's <Chorale Fantasies>for Piano -focusing on Correlations between the Text and the Music." Doctoral Dissertation, Seoul National University, 2015, 5.

⁹ Christopher Fox, "New Complexity." Grove Music Online, 2001, Oxford Music Online, <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.fsu.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.51676>.

Lee started recognizing a disparity between the music that motivated and brought her joy, and the music she composed. She sought to reconcile her personal interests with her musical creations by contemplating the role of artists within the context of Christianity. She made a conscious decision to set aside her prior knowledge and perspectives on contemporary music, embarking on a journey to discover inspirational elements from within herself. In addition to incorporating tonal consonance and straightforward melodies, she integrated elements of her distinctive stylistic signatures into her compositions. Her sacred music aims to express the meaning and beauty of God. This is rooted in her belief that the most authentic portrayal comes from experiencing it within a spiritual framework. By continuously striving to translate her spiritual encounters into thematic motifs within her music, she seeks to convey the profound essence of her spiritual experiences. In her interview, she described the history of her interest in the use of the Bible in her music.

Personally, by studying the Bible in my first year of my Ph.D. program, I got to think a lot about my life and music. Instead of simply writing music, I thought that there should be a purpose in music, and that it was important to achieve it through music. Along with those thoughts, I think my musical style has been changed. I try to convey my thoughts and/or any inspirations from the Bible through my music, and I think my music follows the meaning of texts and messages.¹⁰

Since her orchestral work *Psalm 20* in 1994 (revised in 1998), she has embarked on a creative journey, writing numerous compositions inspired by various segments of the Bible. This was a turning point in her compositional style; since then, the purpose and the inspiration of her music has been to convey biblical messages. Unlike her previous complex Western avant-garde approaches, her later compositional style is characterized by its simplicity and consonance. Some

¹⁰Sookin Park. "A Study of Selected Solo Piano Works by Three Korean Women Composers from 2008 to 2012." Doctoral Dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 2017, 149.

of these works include *Four Biblical Scenes* (2004) for clarinet and strings, Violin Fantasy No. 2 *Laudate Dominum* (2006), Wind Quintet No. 2 *Homage to Thomas* (2007), and *Lament* (2010) for clarinet and string quartet. During the composition of her second wind quintet, *Homage to Thomas*, she realized the limitations of a single piece in effectively conveying the profound biblical messages and inspirations.¹¹ This realization prompted her to consider writing a series of piano pieces, rather than a single work, to better encompass the vast scale of biblical narratives. This shift in approach eventually led to the creation of piano pieces such as *Chorale Fantasy for Piano* in 2007.

¹¹Ibid., 150.

Commissioned by Siyeon Ryu
VIOLIN FANTASY NO. 2
LAUDATE DOMINUM
 Mozart in memoriam
 (2006)

shinuh lee

Religioso (♩ ca. 84)

Violin

Piano

mp

p

mp

p

mp

mf

mf

Example 1-2: Violin Fantasy No. 2 *Laudate Dominum* (2006), mm. 1-15

CHAPTER TWO

Comparison of Chorale Fantasy No. 1 and *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jesus* by Messiaen

Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992), a formidable French musician, made significant contributions as a composer, organist, and educator. His musical legacy included the exploration of mystical and religious themes, demonstrating a profound connection between his art and spirituality. Messiaen cultivated a distinctive personal style, characterized by the rhythmic complexities that weave through his compositions. His works are further distinguished by the infusion of rich tonal colors, creating a vibrant and evocative sonic palette. Moreover, Messiaen's innovations, such as the modes of limited transposition, created a unique harmonic language. His first theoretical treatise, the "Technique de mon Langage Musicale," was published just prior to the *Vingt Regards* and examines rhythmic and melodic ideas featured in the *Vingt Regards*.

Composed in 1944, *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* (Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus) is a significant two-hour solo piano masterpiece by Messiaen. The piece has three main cyclical themes based on the Roman Catholic faith: the *Thème de Dieu* (Theme of God), *Thème de l'étoile et de la Croix* (Theme of the Star and of the Cross), and *Thème d'accords* (Theme of Chords). The "Theme of God" centers on an F-sharp major chord, embellished with chromatic passing tones in the inner voice. The "Theme of the Star and of the Cross," symbolizing the birth and death of Jesus, employs chant-like monophony. The "Theme of Chords" creates a bell-like resonance through the use of four chromatic and dissonant chords¹².

¹² HeeKyung Choi. "The Theme of God: A Musical and Theological Discussion of Olivier Messiaen's *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus*," 2017.

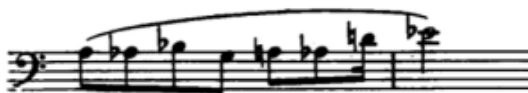
In addition to the three main themes, there are two secondary themes: the Theme of Mystical Love and Theme of Joy.

The Theme of God refers to the first spirit of the Trinity, God the Father, which is present in movements 1, 5, 6, 11, 15 and 20. It is characterized by a simple chordal passage comprising four chords, employing the rhythmic pattern short-short-short-long-long (U U U – –), a fusion of the Greek rhythms Tribrach (U U U) and Spondee (– –)¹³. The theme harmonically incorporates Messiaen's Mode 2, also known as the octatonic scale.



Example 2-1: Theme of God

The Theme of the Star and Cross symbolizes two contrasting meanings, the birth and death of Jesus, through the use of plainchant. This is presented in movements 2 and 7, and its melodic structure mirrors the Cross. (Example 2-2) Messiaen employs this motif to depict Jesus conveying a tilted cross prior to his crucifixion. It begins with a descending half-step, followed by an ascending whole-step, and concluding with a descending minor third. The complete theme employs Mode 7 in its third transposition (D, Eb, E, F, G, Ab, A, Bb, B, D).¹⁴



¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Cole Philip Burger. "Olivier Messiaen's "Vingt Regards Sur l'Enfant-Jésus": Analytical, Religious, and Literary Considerations." Order No. 3389761, The University of Texas at Austin, 2009, 51.

Example 2-2: Theme of the Star and the Cross



Example 2-3: The Cross

The Theme of Chords consists of dissonant four-voiced chords, incorporating quartal and quintal harmony to evoke the resonance of bells. This theme is present in seven movements: 6, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, and 20. Both the Theme of God and Theme of Chords emerge in three movements, specifically in nos. 6, 15, and 20.



Example 2-4: Theme of Chords

The Theme of Mystical Love appears in movements 6, 19, and 20. This theme combines chords derived from mode 2, also known as the octatonic scale (chords 1 and 2), with a chord pair reminiscent of the Theme of God. The latter is distinguished by a descending fourth motion from F-sharp to C-sharp, rather than the usual descending fifth motion from C-sharp to F-sharp.¹⁵

¹⁵ HeeKyung Choi. "The Theme of God: A Musical and Theological Discussion of Olivier Messiaen's *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus*," 2017, 22.



Example 2-5: Theme of Mystical Love

Lastly, the Theme of Joy is a secondary theme, like the Theme of Mystical Love. It is exclusively utilized in movement 10.

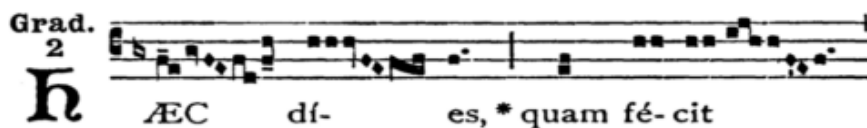


Example 2-6: Theme of Joy

Apart from the themes rooted in Catholicism above, Messiaen's faith is evident in melodies drawn from Gregorian chant, which is monophonic. Accordingly, in mm. 1-2, *Regard de L'Esprit de joie*, Messiaen incorporates the *Haec dies* theme from the *Gradual* for Easter Sunday.



Example 2-7: Regard de l'Esprit de joie of *Vingt regards*, mm. 1-2



Example 2-8: *Haec dies* in *The Liber Usualis*, p.778, 1961

Messiaen's approach to musical rhythm also stands as a profound expression of his faith. In his second treatise, *Traité de Rythme, de Couleur, et d'Ornithologie* (Treatise on Rhythm, Colour and Ornithology), he describes various rhythmic figures, highlighting four key elements: time, color, rhythm, and birdsong. Exotic rhythms such as Greek and Indian rhythms are explored in volume I. In *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jesus*, Messiaen uses various rhythmic devices to express his faith: Greek rhythms, Hindu rhythms, non-retrogradable rhythms, added note values, diminution, and augmentation.

The Indian meter is found in the *Noël* from *Vingt regards*. Çârngadeva, a thirteenth-century Hindu theorist, formulated a Hindu rhythmic system comprising 120 decî-tâlas, and Messiaen applied the miçra varna, number 26 on the decî-tâlas table in mm. 10-12.¹⁶



¹⁶ Ibid., 6.

Example 2-9: miçra varna

Example 2-10: Noël from *Vingt regards*, mm. 10-12

Another characteristic rhythm of his compositions is non-retrogradable rhythm, which is a series of rhythms that can be read the same, either forward or backward. They embody Messiaen's allure of the impossible, where the listener perceives a "certain unity of movement in the symmetry," which he aspires to guide toward a "theological rainbow."¹⁷ The symmetrical rhythmic order, maintaining continuity in both directions from a central common value, is employed in three movements: 6, 12, and 20. The initial gestures with non-retrogradable rhythmic figures display the exploration of God's presence in all things.

¹⁷ Cole Philip Burger. "Olivier Messiaen's "Vingt Regards Sur l'Enfant-Jésus": Analytical, Religious, and Literary Considerations." Order No. 3389761, The University of Texas at Austin, 2009, 13.

Example 2-11: “Regard de l’Eglise d’amour” of *Vingt regards*, mm 1-7

Messiaen's incorporation of birdsong in his compositions serves as a reflection of his religious beliefs as well. For instance, in “Regard des hauteurs” from *Vingt Regards*, he portrays the sounds of nightingales. In the preface, he mentions the songs of various birds like the blackbird, warbler, chaffinch, goldfinch, Cetti’s warbler, and serin. Birdsongs, carrying a theological lesson, symbolize aspects of Jesus, joy, and praise for God's love, and jubilation. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit, depicted as a dove in the Bible, is recurrent in *Vingt Regards*. Birds, in this context, represent God's message of peace to humanity.¹⁸

¹⁸ HeeKyung Choi. “The Theme of God: A Musical and Theological Discussion of Olivier Messiaen’s *Vingt regards sur l’Enfant-Jésus*,” 2017, 57.



Example 2-12: The Nightingale in “Regard des hauteurs” of *Vingt regards*, mm. 5-6

Messiaen strategically employs numbers for theological significance in the 5th movement. In Christian symbolism, the number five represents the crucifixion as a "victory over death." Messiaen portrays a dual Jesus: the Son of God (on the cross) looking down upon the Son of Man (the Infant).¹⁹ This movement features three staves, with the Theme of God in the lowest staff, representing God the Father. The upper two staves convey various harmonic and melodic material, symbolizing different aspects of Messiaen's religious imagery. The upper staves denote the duality of the Divine Son and the Child in the manger - the top staff depicts the Divine Son suffering on the Cross, while the middle staff portrays the Son of Man as the Divine Son gazing upon God in human form. In addition to this movement, every fifth piece throughout the work also describes Divinity.

Another symbolic use of numbers is shown in the placement of the movements in Movements Six and Twelve, where both address the continuity of creation. The significance of the number six originates from the Bible, as the story of creation unfolds over six days.²⁰ Movements Seven and Fourteen represent the Contemplation of the Cross (the “Seven Last Words”) and angels, respectively, with the number seven symbolizing perfection in Christian

¹⁹ Ibid., 45.

²⁰ Ibid., 56.

tradition. Perfection was restored to a sinful world through Christ's sufferings on the cross, and angels are perfect beings.²¹ The use of Mode 4 aligns with Presocratic cosmological speculations, where the number 4 symbolizes the earthly, highlighting the Child aspect through four-note progressions.²²

Similar to Shinuh Lee's *Chorale Fantasy*, in the subheading commentary on the score for *Vingt Regards*, Messiaen quotes from Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:11, and Luke 3:22. Matthew 3:17 describes a voice from heaven declaring, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Mark 1:11 and Luke 3:22 echo the same story as Matthew 3:17, signifying the announcement of Jesus' birth. As *Vingt Regards* explores the contemplation of Baby Jesus, these verses mark the initial reference to Jesus as the Son of Man. These biblical passages incorporate the Theme of God, and the hermeneutic message conveys the Theme of God as God's Love.²³

The analysis of *Vingt Regards* should take into account all the aspects mentioned above: themes, rhythms, ornithology, modes of limited transposition, the symbolism of numbers, and literary references. Messiaen emphasized the importance of a holistic approach, stating, "I require the interpreting artist to make a close study of all...the ideas I want to express...even believe in them to a certain extent, in order to be able to convey them to the listener."²⁴

Both Olivier Messiaen's *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* and Shinuh Lee's *Chorale Fantasy* are grounded in biblical messages, with the composers seeking to translate these

²¹ Ibid., 46

²² Ibid., 46.

²³ Ibid., 44.

²⁴ Cole Philip Burger. "Olivier Messiaen's "Vingt Regards Sur l'Enfant-Jésus": Analytical, Religious, and Literary Considerations." Order No. 3389761, The University of Texas at Austin, 2009, 3.

spiritual themes into musical expression. Although Messiaen's compositional language significantly influenced Lee, the two composers employ distinct approaches to achieve their respective artistic and theological aims. Their distinct ways of conveying "theology in sound" likely reflect the divergent doctrinal perspectives of their respective religious backgrounds—Catholic and Evangelical Christianity.²⁵

Similar to Messiaen's cyclical use of motives, Shinuh Lee employs the chorale melody as a unifying element, connecting all ten movements into a cohesive musical work. The 'comfort' theme of the biblical text is expressed through a simple, tonal chorale melody. Lee's chorale shares a characteristic with Gregorian chant in that the melodic range is restricted to a perfect fifth. However, unlike Messiaen—whose thematic material retains fixed meanings throughout a work—Lee's chorale undergoes thematic transformation across the movements, manifesting changes not only in the shape of the melody but also in its symbolic representation. For instance, the initially hopeful chorale melody presented in *Sinfonia* is reinterpreted to represent 'sin' and 'pain' in Movements II and V, and the crucifixion of Jesus in Movement VIII. In the *Finale*, the chorale melody reappears a half step higher, now in the key of A major. This thematic metamorphosis reflects the duality of human nature, encompassing both good and evil. Consequently, an understanding of the text in each movement is essential for fully grasping the evolving meaning of the chorale motif.

²⁵ Hyojung Huh. "A Performer's Analysis of Shinuh Lee's Comfort My People Chorale Fantasy for Piano." 2013., n.d., 46.

Sinfonia

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,
to comfort all who mourn,

주 여호와의 신이 내게 임하셨으니 이는 여호와께서 내게 기름을 부으사
가난한 자에게 아름다운 소식을 전하게 하려 하심이라
나를 보내사 마음이 상한 자를 고치며 포로된 자에게 자유를, 갇힌 자에게 놓임을 전파하며
여호와와 은혜의 해와 우리 하나님의 신원의 날을 전파하여 모든 슬픈 자를 위로하되

Rubato (♩ ca. 80) arioso



II. Chorale: 'Lord, have mercy'

"Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"

주여 나를 떠나소서, 나는 죄인이로소이다

♩ ca. 92 Inquieto



(Pia)

V. Chorale: 'Lord, have mercy'

'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined!'

화로다 나여 망하게 되었도다

Rubato (♩ ca. 92) con paura
martellato

f

p

f

ca. 104

p

(*rit.*)

373

pp

(*rit.*)

Finale

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'

또 내가 새 하늘과 새 땅을 보니 처음 하늘과 처음 땅이 없어졌고 바다도 다시 있지 않더라 또 내가 보매 거룩한 성 새 예루살렘이 하나님께로부터 하늘에서 내려오니 그 예비한 것이 신부가 남편을 위하여 단장한 것 같더라 내가 들으니 보좌에서 큰 음성이 나서 가로되 보라 하나님의 장막이 사람들과 함께 있으며 하나님이 저희와 함께 거하시리니 저희는 하나님의 백성이 되고 하나님은 친히 저희와 함께 계셔서 모든 눈물을 그 눈에서 씻기시매 다시 사망이 없고 애통하는 것이나 곡하는 것이나 아픈 것이 다시 있지 아니하리니 처음 것들이 다 지나갔음이러라 보좌에 앉으신 이가 가라사대 보라 내가 만물을 새롭게 하노라 하시고

Rubato (♩ ca. 80) con anima

mp

Example 2-13: Chorale melodies in *Sinfonia*, II, V, VIII, and *Finale*

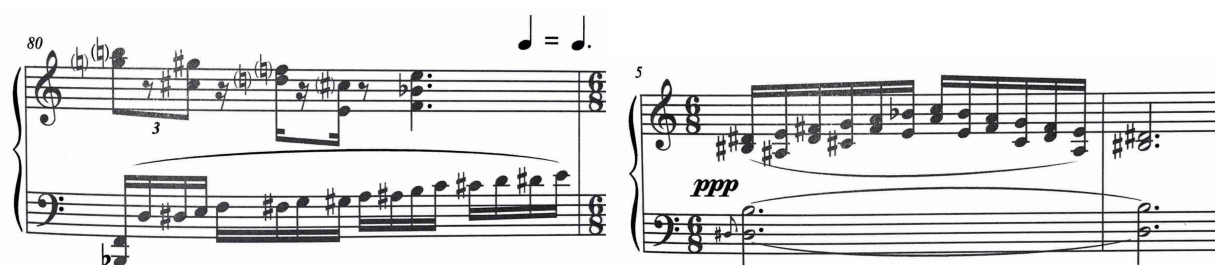
Lee also incorporates birdsong figures into several movements of the *Chorale Fantasy*, using them as symbolic and textural elements that enhance the spiritual and natural imagery of the work. A particularly notable instance is the recurrence of the same birdsong motif in both Movements III and VI. Although the melodic contour remains consistent, Lee introduces subtle rhythmic variations, accompanied by differences in notation. As shown in the example, the motif is written across both staves in Movement III, creating a visually and textually distinct presentation. These modifications not only create a sense of organic evolution but also reflect changes in the emotional and narrative context of each movement. By slightly altering the rhythm while preserving the recognizable shape of the motif, Lee demonstrates a sophisticated approach to thematic transformation, reinforcing the continuity of musical material while simultaneously adapting it to serve the distinct expressive character of each movement.



Example 2-14: Birdsong motif in Movements III & VI

Another notable similarity between their compositional approaches is the use of diverse scalar materials. Messiaen developed and employed his own "modes of limited transposition,"

using them extensively throughout his works to evoke specific spiritual and emotional atmospheres. Similarly, Lee draws on both chromatic and octatonic scales in *Chorale Fantasy* to reinforce the biblical messages and to cultivate a sense of tension and unease. By utilizing these scale forms, Lee not only expands the harmonic palette of the work but also intensifies the expressive impact of the underlying theological themes. While Messiaen typically employs the octatonic scale—also known as Mode 2—as a symbol of divine love and transcendence, Lee’s use of the octatonic scale serves a different expressive purpose. In *Chorale Fantasy*, the octatonic sonority contributes to a fantasy-like atmosphere that portrays negative aspects of the human condition, such as physical desire and sin. Through this contrasting use of similar harmonic material, Lee reinterprets the octatonic scale—a scale consisting of alternating whole and half steps—not as a representation of divine grace, but rather as a vehicle for expressing human frailty and spiritual struggle.



Example 2-15: Octatonic scale in Movement I & III

Although Messiaen and Lee share several compositional techniques, the core theological messages conveyed in their works diverge significantly. Messiaen’s treatment of theology is often poetic and mystical, emphasizing themes of joy, divine love, and the miraculous nature of Christ’s birth. In contrast, Lee presents a more direct and grounded interpretation, focusing on the realities of human sin and the suffering embodied in the crucifixion. While Messiaen’s music

radiates a sense of spiritual optimism, Lee's compositions confront the darker, more painful aspects of the Christian narrative. The "ethical value" in Lee's *Chorale Fantasy* is articulated through vivid musical commentary and depictions of evil.²⁶ By bringing abstract theological concepts closer to lived experience, she seeks to uncover a deeper truth about the human condition through sound.

The influence of Messiaen on Lee is evident in their shared use of compositional language to convey biblical messages. However, despite this clear lineage, Lee adopts clearly different approaches to the interpretation and application of compositional techniques, thematic materials, and symbolism. By structuring the work as a "Fantasy," Lee grants herself greater formal flexibility, allowing for a wide variety of musical forms to accommodate the expansive and diverse range of biblical texts. Each movement exhibits a relatively free structure, shaped by the specific character and theological content of the text, rather than adhering to a strict formal model. Consequently, the overall work resists categorization into a single traditional form, embodying instead a more fluid and organic architecture. Moreover, the biblical narratives are not conveyed solely through musical gestures or textures; they are deeply embedded in the recurring motifs and thematic transformations that permeate the entire composition. These recurring materials acquire evolving symbolic meanings as the work progresses, reflecting the spiritual and emotional development central to the biblical stories. In this way, Lee's *Chorale Fantasy* not only presents the biblical texts through sound but also interprets and reinterprets them through intricate thematic design.

²⁶ Ibid., 34.

CHAPTER THREE

Analysis of selections from Shinuh Lee's *Chorale Fantasy No. 1 – III, VI, and VII*

Between 2007 and 2019, Lee composed a set of five chorale fantasies, each rooted in religious themes. She employs diverse compositional techniques and styles while also establishing a close relationship between the music and text. Describing her *Chorale Fantasy for Piano*, Shinuh Lee emphasized its essence as being rooted in the messages of the Bible. Her intricate process involved deep contemplation on each note, aligning them with the biblical messages from the Book of Romans. This meticulous approach required ongoing revisions, dedicated study, and a persistent struggle to ensure the composition resonated with her deep reflections on the biblical narrative.²⁷

Lee chose to use the genre, chorale fantasy, to deliver the meaning of the biblical messages. The freedom of the fantasy served her purpose, allowing the music to effectively convey the intended meaning.²⁸ As the genre allows for freedom, her compositional techniques and styles show diversity, incorporating elements of polychordality and polystylism. Her simple chorale melody—serving as a unifying musical element throughout the piece—goes through modal and atonal transformations freely, illustrating the fusion of her old and new compositional language. Despite the genre's open structure, the work exhibits cyclicism through its overarching theme, which is 'Sin and Redemption'. The message of comfort and redemption permeates the first movement, Sinfonia, and echoes through the last two movements providing a cohesive

²⁷ Sookin Park. "A Study of Selected Solo Piano Works by Three Korean Women Composers from 2008 to 2012." Doctoral Dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 2017, 151.

²⁸ Hyunjeong Kang. "Shinuh Lee's Chorale Fantasies and Uzong Choe's Piano Preludes." Doctoral Dissertation, Florida State University, 2020, 5.

conclusion to the piece. While the outer movements share the same theme, the inner movements draw inspiration from either sin or the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Lee's *Chorale Fantasy No. 1*, '*Comfort, comfort my people*' comprises 10 movements including a *Sinfonia* and *Finale* as outer movements (Example 3-1). Each is based on and inspired by biblical messages. The inclusion of the biblical text at the beginning of each movement establishes the connection between the theme and the music. Certain movements are composed in accordance with the provided texts, while others are composed with the texts selected by the composer afterward²⁹.

²⁹ Youngmi Choi. "Analysis of Shinuh Lee's <Chorale Fantasies>for Piano -focusing on Correlations between the Text and the Music." Doctoral Dissertation, Seoul National University, 2015, 27.

Movement	Text
Sinfonia	Isaiah 61:1-2
I. Sin: In the long, dim labyrinth of reveries	Romans 1:21-25
II. Chorale: 'Lord, have mercy'	Luke 5:8
III. Sin: Building up the finest armour around a man	Romans 1:26-31
IV. Sin: A brimful living chalice of despair and horror and astonishment	Romans 3:10-18
V. Chorale: 'Lord, have mercy'	Isaiah 6:5
VI. The Cross of Christ	John 1:29
VII. Chorale: 'Christ, have mercy'	From J. S. Bach chorale 'Christ lag in Todesbanden'
VIII. Comfort, comfort my people	Isaiah 40:1-2, 5, 9
Finale	Revelation 21:1-5

Example 3-1: Structure of Chorale Fantasy No. 1, 'Comfort, comfort my people'

Sacred and concert music inspired by biblical texts has been composed since the Renaissance. While drawing from the same source of spiritual inspiration, Shinuh Lee's *Fantasy* diverges in its focus—not portraying the beauty of heaven, but instead reflecting on human frailty and sin.³⁰ Particularly in Movements II and V, the texts are expressed from a first-person human perspective, emphasizing themes of vulnerability and repentance (Example 3-2).

³⁰ Hyojung Huh. "An Ethical, Aesthetical and Philosophical Study on Shinuh Lee's Chorale Fantasy No. 1." Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2015.

Movement	Text
II. Chorale: ‘Lord, have mercy’	“Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”
V. Chorale: ‘Lord, have mercy’	‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined!’

Example 3-2: Texts of Movement II and V

Lee’s compositional language also departs from traditional sacred rhetoric; rather than merely supporting the text, the music functions as an atmospheric and psychological extension of its meaning.³¹ Through various techniques including the use of tremolo, the octatonic scale, atonality, and polychordal sonorities, Lee creates a sonic landscape that embodies the internal conflict and emotional depth of the biblical message.

Lee’s *Chorale Fantasy No. 1* is a deeply reflective and emotional work that connects theological themes with contemporary compositional techniques. While each movement draws from biblical scripture and revolves around the cyclical theme of sin and redemption, the piece functions as both a spiritual meditation and a modern musical narrative. Lee’s decision to frame the work as a chorale fantasy allows her to balance structural freedom with a strong sense of theme, enabling the text and music to connect in an expressive way. The juxtaposition of a simple chorale melody with complex harmonic language—featuring modal and atonal transformations, polychords, and stylistic hybridity—exemplifies her dedication to creating music that pushes stylistic boundaries. Each movement is shaped by its text that was chosen in advance or added later, creating a dialogue between words and music. In this way, *Chorale*

³¹ Ibid.

Fantasy No. 1 becomes more than just a piece of music, but a spiritual journey through sound. It invites the performers and listeners to reflect in a deep and meaningful way. The following section will examine Movements III, VI, and VII to explore their meaning, structure, harmony and emotional impact from various perspectives.

III. Sin: Building up the finest armour around a man

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Romans 1:26-31

The evocative title of the fourth movement, “Sin: Enveloping the Entire Human Body Like Armor,” immediately establishes its theological focus. This imagery points directly to the concept of the oppressive weight and binding nature of sin as a force that constricts the human condition. It strongly suggests an engagement with this aspect of sin's reality—its power to constrain and dominate. This movement does not follow a traditional formal template; instead, it is through-composed and mirrors the chaotic, cumulative nature of the Biblical text. Rather than repeating material, the music builds with a sense of relentless escalation—as if it unveiled sin after sin in an overwhelming surge. The transition between these textural extremes likely forms the core formal gesture of the movement—a single, intensifying arc from fragmentation to oppressive density.

The movement's atonal and dissonant harmonic language illustrates the overwhelming nature of sin. It thrusts the listener into a sound-world of violence, disorder, and despair, which is precisely the atmosphere of Romans 1:26–32. The scripture speaks of people abandoned to shameful lusts and a depraved mind—a spiritual state of dissonance with God—and Lee's atonality paints this spiritual dissonance in literal sound. The lack of a tonal center or restful harmony parallels the lack of moral center in the scripture's portrayal of humanity.

This movement unfolds from two simple themes. It opens with sparse, isolated notes or small gestures separated by silence serving as a prelude to a dramatic intensification. (Example 3-3) The motive remains unstable, shifting between F-sharp and F-natural without settling into a tonal center, reinforcing the sense of tension and disorientation. The second theme, based on the octatonic scale, appears in measures 5-6. (Example 3-4) This scale, with its symmetrical and ambiguous structure, further contributes to the unsettled character of the opening. Notably, the gentle chorale theme that anchors other parts of the work is absent here—an omission that is itself symbolic. Lee uses thematic absence just as powerfully as presence, creating a sound world that mirrors the theological weights of the movement's title.



Example 3-3: Thematic material, mm. 1-4



Example 3-4: Octatonic scale, mm. 5-6

Lee employs a poly-stylistic approach, as evidenced by potential allusions to a Medieval *Dies Irae* in the low "chant" motif and aggressive rhythms reminiscent of Prokofiev or Ligeti. These varied references are integrated into a compellingly frightening modernist idiom that effectively portrays unrestrained sin. Lee's use of a 12-tone row, a technique derived from Schoenbergian serialism, is significant as well. The journey from a sparse, pointillistic texture to an overwhelming, dense saturation, driven by the transformation of a 12-tone row motif, serves as a powerful sonic analogue for the theological understanding of sin as an "enveloping armor." Such rows ensure the systematic use of all twelve chromatic pitches, often resulting in pervasive atonality and a highly structured, albeit non-tonal, musical fabric. Lee uses the transformation of

this row motif, through repetition and development, to bridge the pointillistic and overwhelming sections (Example 3-5).³²

The image displays a musical score for piano, consisting of three systems of staves. The first system (measures 12-17) features a treble and bass staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. It includes dynamics like *p*, *pp*, *mp*, and *ff*, and a tempo marking 'ca. 72'. The second system (measures 18-24) shows a continuation of the piece with dynamics like *p*, *ff*, *fff*, *pp*, *mf*, and *f*, and tempo markings 'rit.' and 'a tempo'. The third system (measures 25-30) continues with dynamics like *f*, *ff*, and *fff*, and a tempo marking 'ca. 104'. The score is annotated with various musical notations including slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Example 3-5: Prime form of the row and its inversion³³

Lee also employs dense clusters of notes and jarring intervals, generating persistent tension without resolution. The musical texture frequently shifts between forceful low-pitched

³² Youngmi Choi. "Analysis of Shinuh Lee's <Chorale Fantasies> for Piano -focusing on Correlations between the Text and the Music." Doctoral Dissertation, Seoul National University, 2015, 53.

³³ Ibid., 54.

chords and agitated patterns in the higher register. The texture grows increasingly dense and chaotically polyphonic, mirroring the accumulation of ‘envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice’ described in the scripture. Between measure 93 and 103, both the octatonic scale and a 12-tone row appear, marking the climactic peak before the return of the opening material that brings the movement to a close (Example 3-6).

The musical score consists of five systems of staves. The first system (measures 92-94) shows a right-hand melody with a sixteenth-note triplet and a bass line with a similar triplet. The second system (measures 95-97) continues the chromatic ascent in both hands. The third system (measures 98-100) features a more complex right-hand melody with many beamed sixteenth notes. The fourth system (measures 101-103) shows a right-hand melody with a fermata over a whole note and a bass line with a similar fermata. The fifth system (measures 104-108) is marked 'rall.' and shows a right-hand melody with a fermata over a whole note and a bass line with a similar fermata. The piece concludes with a final chord marked with a double bar line and a fermata.

Example 3-6: Octatonic scale (OCT 0,1) and 12-tone scale in mm. 92-108

Lee's compositional choices are not merely technical but are deeply embedded in the spiritual and psychological implications of the text. The absence of the chorale, the pervasive

atonality, and the relentless intensity are all deliberate and symbolic. For performers or pedagogues, this means approaching the movement not only with technical precision but with a heightened sensitivity to its expressive and rhetorical demands. Every gesture—whether fragmented or saturated—should be shaped with awareness of its symbolic resonance. Interpreting this piece requires more than a command of its complex textures and rhythms; it demands a deep engagement with the theological narrative it embodies.

VI. The Cross of Christ

‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’

John 1:29

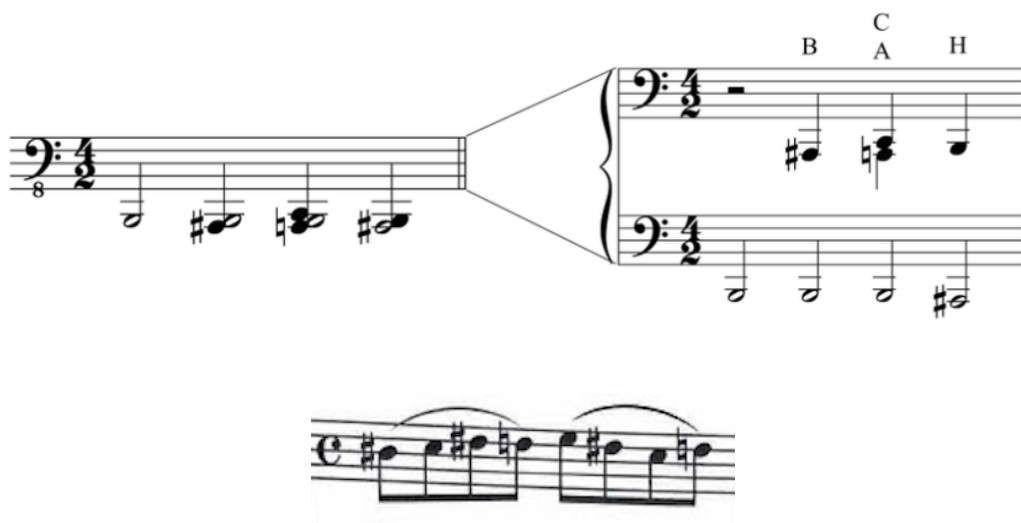
Movement VI, “The Cross of Christ” addresses the central event of the Christian faith: the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This event is theologically dense, representing multiple layers of meaning crucial for understanding the Christian narrative of sin and salvation. Lee aims to evoke the profound gravity and complex theological dimensions of the Passion narrative, which recounts the suffering, death, and burial of Christ.

To dramatize this theological event, Lee employs “musical painting” and gestures throughout the movement. The tone clusters of minor seconds, appearing at both the opening and closing of the movement, depict the physical act of nailing Christ to the cross. This main theme bears notable resemblance to Messiaen’s *Thème de l’Étoile et de la Croix* (“Theme of the Star and of the Cross”), drawing a parallel in both melodic contour and spiritual significance (Example 3-7).



Example 3-7: Theme of the Cross by Lee and Messiaen

The monophonic, chromatic melody of the second theme of this movement is constructed from eight eighth notes centered around F natural. As the passage unfolds, additional voices are gradually introduced, intensifying the musical texture and emotional weight. According to Youngmi Choi, both thematic materials are derived from transformations of a B-A-C-H theme (Example 3-8).³⁴



Example 3-8: Two themes in Movement VI³⁵

³⁴ Ibid., 73.

³⁵ Ibid., 104.

ca. 60 Pauroso e tormentato

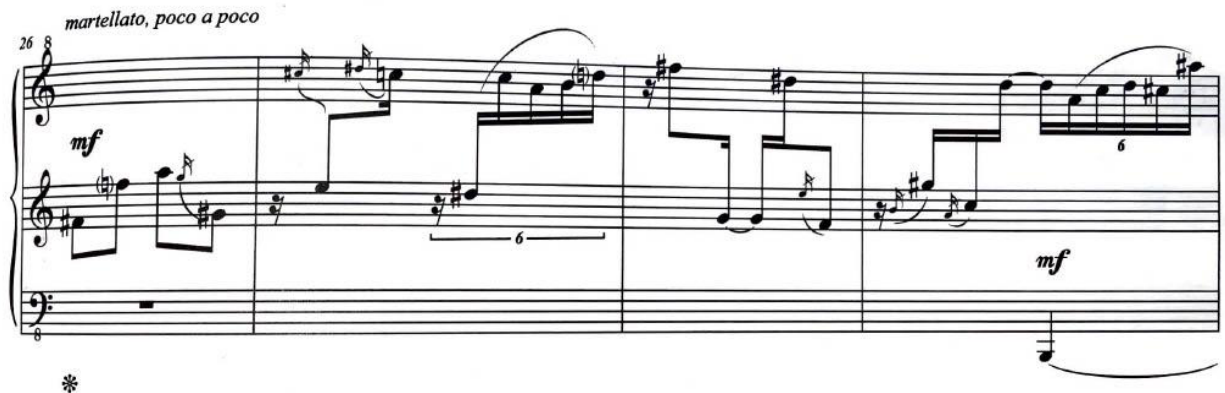
p *p* *mp* *mf* *cresc.* *f*

Rea Rea Rea Rea

Example 3-9: Two themes in Movement VI

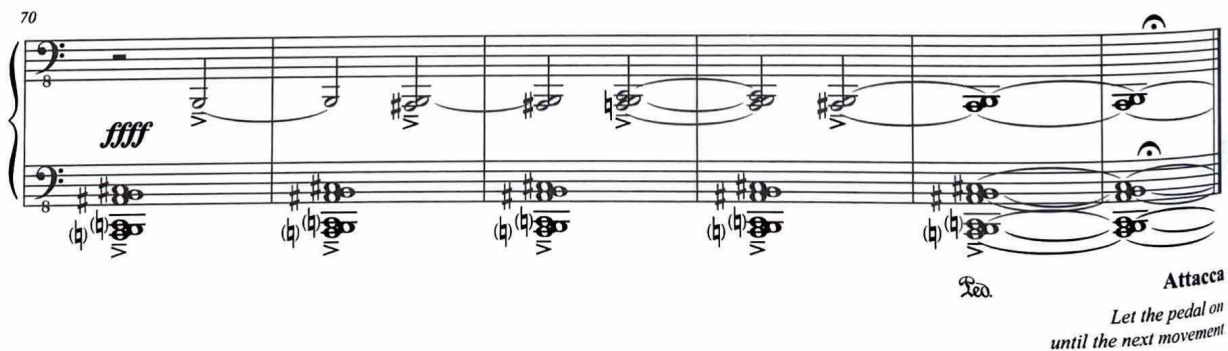
Lee further incorporates atonal sonorities to enhance the expressive palette of the movement. She differentiates musical representations of God and the Devil through the use of

tonal contrast: while the divine theme remains relatively tonal and stable, the diabolical theme is portrayed using twelve-tone technique. The bird motif introduced in the fourth movement—also twelve-tone in construction—reappears here in altered notation, reinforcing thematic continuity across the work.



Example 3-10: Bird motif (Twelve-tone)

The movement concludes with forceful poly-chordal sonorities in the lower register. These harsh, dissonant sonorities symbolize the culmination of Christ's suffering as he bears the cross, culminating in his death. The layering of dissonant harmonies powerfully conveys the weight and violence of this central theological moment.



Example 3-11: mm. 70-75 from Movement VI

VII. Chorale: ‘Christ, have mercy’ from J. S. Bach Chorale ‘Christ lag in Todesbanden’

Christ lag in Todesbanden, Für unsre Sünd gegeben, Er ist wieder erstanden Und hat uns
bracht das Leben; Des wir sollen fröhlich sein, Gott loben und dankbar sein Und singen
Halleluja!

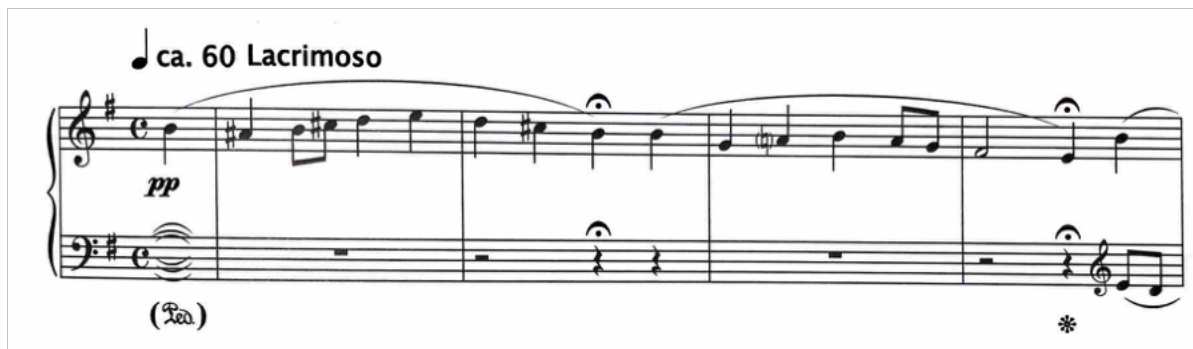
Christ lay in death's bonds, Given for our sin; He is risen again And has brought us
[eternal] life. For this we should be joyful, Praise God and be thankful to him And sing
Hallelujah.³⁶

Lee incorporates a quotation of the Bach chorale *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, a hymn associated with the resurrection of Christ, into this movement. The inclusion of this chorale—set within a texture that recalls earlier compositional idioms such as a walking bass line and traditional harmonic progressions—reflects Lee's engagement with polystylism throughout the *Chorale Fantasy*. As noted by Youngmi Choi, Lee's use of a pre-existing chorale melody is not an act of nostalgia, but rather a deliberate strategy to convey the theological meaning of the text with greater clarity and immediacy.³⁷

³⁶ Translated by Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed

³⁷ Choi, Youngmi. "Analysis of Shinuh Lee's *Chorale Fantasies* for Piano: Focusing on Correlations between the Text and the Music." Doctoral dissertation, Seoul National University, 2015., 175.

The movement opens with a monophonic chant, and the tenor voice enters upon the repetition of the first phrase. As the chorale melody unfolds, the texture gradually thickens, creating a sense of cumulative spiritual resonance.



Example 3-12: Chorale melody in Movement VII

The absence of direct motivic connection in Movement VII highlights its distinct narrative function within the overall structure. According to Hyojung Huh, the *Chorale Fantasy* is divided into three theological layers: the first six movements depict the earthly condition, the final two represent the kingdom of God, and the two central movements (VI and VII) portray key events in the Christian narrative—the Passion and Resurrection of Christ³⁸. These middle movements serve as the narrative axis of the work, propelling the progression from human suffering toward divine redemption. Movement VIII, though part of the heavenly realm, stands apart thematically, emphasizing its role as a culmination rather than a continuation of previous motivic material.

³⁸ Huh, Hyojung. “A Performer’s Analysis of Shinuh Lee’s *Comfort My People* Chorale Fantasy for Piano.” 2013. n.d., 25.

Conclusion

Shinuh Lee's *Chorale Fantasy No. 1* is a profound musical and theological statement that transcends the boundaries of traditional sacred music. Rooted in biblical scripture and unified by the cyclical theme of sin and redemption, the work exemplifies a unique fusion of historical reference, contemporary technique, and spiritual narrative. Through the freedom offered by the chorale fantasy genre, Lee weaves together polystylism, atonality, modal transformation, and symbolic quotation to construct a sound world that reflects the psychological and ethical weight of the biblical texts.

The three movements—III, VI, and VII—illuminate the spiritual arc from the depths of sin to the redemptive power of the Cross and the resurrection. Whether through the violent dissonances of Movement III, the tone-painting and symbolic resonance of Movement VI, or the stylistic clarity and spiritual reverence of Movement VII, each section demands of the performer not only technical command but also interpretive depth and theological understanding. This includes not only an analytical grasp of harmony, rhythm, and structure but also an engagement with the expressive and philosophical meaning behind each gesture (Example 3-12). Her music challenges performers to move beyond the page, to embody the struggle, suffering, and hope embedded within the sacred texts.

Movement Number & Title	Primary Theological Focus	Biblical/Liturgical References	Key Musical Features & Techniques	Expressive Goal/Function
III. Sin: Enveloping the Entire Human Body Like Armor	Pervasive nature & bondage of sin	Romans 1:26-31	Pointillistic texture evolving to overwhelming density; Transformation of 12- tone row motif; Pervasive atonality/dissonance. ⁸	Depict sin's oppressive, inescapable weight; Establish the theological problem of the work.
VI. The Cross of Christ	Crucifixion: Atonement, Sacrifice, Victory, Divine Love	John 1:29	Extreme dissonance & harmonic tension; Textural extremes (density vs. sparseness); Rhythmic disruption; Potential motivic fragmentation.	Convey the gravity, suffering, and multifaceted theological significance of the Cross; Serve as the work's central pivot.
VII. Chorale: 'Lord, Have Mercy' (Bach Chorale 'Christ lag in Todesbanden')	Resurrection hope & ongoing need for Divine Mercy	Bach/Luther: "Christ lag in Todesbanden"; Liturgical: Kyrie Eleison	Initial monophony ("psalm singing"); Direct quotation of Bach chorale; Juxtaposition of historical material & contemporary language	Offer resolution through resurrection hope while emphasizing continued dependence on God's mercy

Example 3-13: Concise overview of the integrated analysis for the three movements

CHAPTER FOUR

Interpretation and Performance Approach to Shinuh Lee's *Chorale Fantasy No. 1*

Through her interview with Sookin Park, Lee offers invaluable insights for pianists undertaking her piece.³⁹ She emphasizes the profound connection between musical interpretation and a comprehensive understanding of the underlying text. The composer encourages performers to approach her composition with interpretative flexibility, allowing for various performances guided by individual perspectives.

Messiaen said that a choral prelude by Bach cannot be played without being able to understand the text of the Bible. Players will be able to play my music from various interpretations or from their own perspectives. ... However, they will be able to reach the depth of the Bible with this music by thinking and studying hard about the meaning of the texts in each movement and through practice for a long time. They will not be able to understand the true message that I seek to deliver only with their technical skills. A music piece cannot be complete only through superficiality or analysis, and I think it is right to make philosophical, spiritual, and aesthetic approaches.⁴⁰

Here, Lee makes clear that while technical skill is essential, it is insufficient for realizing the full expressive and spiritual potential of the work. She urges performers to embrace philosophical, spiritual, and aesthetic engagement as integral to their interpretive process. This perspective from her interview serves as a guiding principle for pianists who seek not only to execute the notes but to convey the profound philosophical, spiritual, and aesthetic depths embedded in the composition.

³⁹ Sookin Park. "A Study of Selected Solo Piano Works by Three Korean Women Composers from 2008 to 2012." Doctoral Dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 2017.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 151.

In the preface to the score, Lee briefly addresses the use of the pedal, advocating for a non-traditional approach tailored to the specific demands of the composition. Rather than changing the pedal strictly in response to harmonic shifts, she advises performers to alter the pedal according to the textual meaning and expressive content. This instruction grants performers greater interpretive freedom, allowing for pedaling choices that prioritize narrative and emotional expression over conventional harmonic clarity. By encouraging performers to respond directly to the theological and poetic dimensions of the text, Lee fosters a more flexible and individualized approach to performance, aligning musical expression closely with the spiritual message of each movement.

Lee also suggests an alternative order or grouping of movements for performers who choose to present only selected movements from the work. Just as she allows interpretive freedom in the use of pedal—encouraging performers to respond to the text rather than follow traditional harmonic cues—she also permits flexibility in the movement order. However, this flexibility is conditional on maintaining the integrity of the narrative arc. The following is a suggested alternative order from the composer’s notes⁴¹:

IV. Sin: A brimfull living chalice of despair and horror and astonishment

V. Chorale: ‘Lord, have mercy’

Sinfonia

I. Sin: In the long, dim labyrinth of reveries

II. Chorale: ‘Lord, have mercy’

III. Sin: Building up the finest armour around a man

VI. The Cross of Christ

⁴¹ Shinuh Lee. *Chorale Fantasy No.1 Comfort, comfort my people for Piano*. Seoul: Eumag Chunchu Publishing Co., 2007/2009., Composer’s Notes.

VII. Chorale: 'Christ, have mercy' from J. S. Bach chorale 'Christ lag in Todesbanden'

VIII. Comfort, comfort my people

Finale

Here are some possible groups of movements or a movement for performance suggested by Lee⁴²:

Sinfonia, (III)-IV-V, IV-V-Sinfonia, III, IV, VI-VII, VIII-Finale

As performers, one of the most meaningful ways to connect with a composer's language is through a holistic approach—one that extends beyond the score. Gaining insight into the composer's background, influences, and broader body of work can offer essential context for interpretation. In Lee's *Chorale Fantasy*, musical elements such as texture and thematic development serve not only as formal devices but also as interpretive guides. Understanding the significance of texture is especially important, as it often conveys theological or emotional meaning that transcends religious affiliation. For non-religious performers, this means striving to comprehend the expressive weight of the textures rather than simply interpreting them as abstract sonic events. In *Chorale Fantasy*, the cyclical recurrence of musical themes reflects not just a formal unity, but a deeper narrative arc that parallels biblical progression. The piece reveals its full expressive power only when both its musical and theological dimensions are thoroughly explored.

A performer's ability to convey the emotional and spiritual arc of the piece can be significantly enriched by an understanding of Lee's broader compositional voice. Familiarity with her oeuvre, as well as with the works of composers who influenced her—such as Olivier

⁴² Ibid.

Messiaen—can deepen the interpretive process. While Messiaen often portrays divine love and joy in mystical and luminous textures, Lee’s portrayal is more grounded, often focusing on the harsh realities of sin, suffering, and ethical responsibility. This contrast is not merely stylistic; it reflects differing theological outlooks and points of emphasis.

Ultimately, Lee’s *Chorale Fantasy* demands an approach that transcends theoretical analysis alone. While structural, harmonic, and motivic understanding forms a critical foundation for performance, the true depth of this work is only unlocked through sustained theological reflection and spiritual engagement. Lee challenges performers to move beyond technical execution and academic dissection, urging them to consider the profound ethical and biblical meanings behind each movement. Her emphasis on flexibility in pedaling, movement order, and interpretative approach reflects a broader philosophy: music, especially one rooted in sacred texts, must speak not just to the intellect, but to the soul. For pianists seeking to honor both the complexity and the conviction of Lee’s vision, a holistic engagement with the score—combining theoretical rigor with theological and philosophical insight—is not merely beneficial, but essential.

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