

MUSIC KEEPS US TOGETHER: POP SONGS IN KOREAN TELEVISION DRAMAS

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ABSTRACT

In the early 1990s the “trendy drama” became part of Korean TV programming. Mainly focused on a younger audience, it not only showed the modern urban lifestyle of its protagonists searching for love, but also integrated newly composed pop music into the series, first as theme songs and later by playing musical pieces at crucial moments in the developing relationships of the young couples.

This article analyzes the important part these songs play in the development of the narrative of Korean TV series (or K-dramas) over its whole run, and, in a lesser extent, the part music and singers play in the marketing process. This is exemplified by the musical concepts of three recent series: *Dokkaebi: The Lonely and Great God* (2016-2017); *While You Were Sleeping* (2017); and *Because This Is My First Life* (2017). Similar to the concept of a leitmotif, once established as a song for a character, a couple or a mood, pop songs are used throughout the run of a series. They therefore add a new layer of meaning to a scene, not only through lyrics and music, but especially by referring to past developments and incidents, thus holding the whole series together and giving it an individual character.

1. INTRODUCTION

Pop songs – rather, music in general – are mostly ignored in English academic publications about Korean TV dramas, which instead focus on the reception of said K-dramas outside of Korea and the new digital age or on script-based narrative concepts (Yoon and Kang 2017: 7-10).¹ The omission of musical aspects is not surprising, however, as outside of musicologist studies, music is oftentimes only perceived as mood enhancers for individual scenes and not as a pivotal part of both the narrative and the overall tone of movies and TV series. In K-dramas, music plays an important role for the production team to tell their story, as Roco berry, a Korean indie pop duo, described in an interview when discussing their assignment for the Original Soundtrack (OST) of *Dokkaebi: The Lonely and Great God* (2016-2017). They were asked to compose a song “that conveys suffering and beauty concurrently” (Hong 2017). It took them twelve different compositions until ‘I Will Go to You Like the First Snow’ was chosen, and after this initial acceptance another seven rewrites until the production team was satisfied with the outcome (Hong 2017). The end product, as will be discussed later, was integrated into two episodes where it not only underscored two of the most important and emotional scenes of *Dokkaebi* but also gave them new narrative layers, both on their own as well as in connection to each other. It is thanks to this implementation of pop songs in Korean series, where the placement of music has such a narrative effect, that they have become an integral, and – for people outside of Asia – unique characteristic of the whole genre of K-drama.

Pop music, or vocal music in general, was not an element of early Korean TV dramas, which have been a part of programming since the first public broadcaster KBS (Korean Broadcasting System) went on air in 1961. Many of these early series were period dramas, focused on specific Korean themes; popular music was therefore not fitting for the overall tone (Chung 2011: 59, 62-4). This changed when in the early 1990s Japan set a new trend across Asia with series like *Tokyo Love Story* (1991) or *Long Vacation* (1996), so called “trendy dramas”, which were “urban-set and targeted at women” (Kim 2014a: 8). Right from the start, pop theme songs

were also implemented as integral elements of these trendy dramas, like Kazumasa Oda’s hugely successful ‘Rabū sūtorī no totsuzen ni’ from *Tokyo Love Story* (Freedman 2015: 119). But because of the embargo against all Japanese products until 1998, Korean broadcasters were not able to import the original series. Instead they adopted this new genre and released their own trendy dramas such as *Jealousy* (1992). This series, like its Japanese predecessor, not only introduced an “attractive young cast” (Cagle 2014: 196), but also a catchy pop song as its theme tune. Thanks to the success of the series, the following Korean dramas also integrated pop songs and vocal music started to replace parts of the traditional instrumental soundtrack (Cagle 2014: 196-7), setting off a trend which continues until today.

Jealousy was not only a domestic hit with a viewership of over 50 per cent. It was also the first drama sold to China (Sohn 2016). Since the mid 1990s the number of exported dramas to other Asian countries has increased, a phenomenon called “Korean Wave” or “Hallyu”. For nearly a decade, Korean dramas were imported to Asian countries with huge success,² and they became important for both the economy as well as the international image of South Korea. Around the mid 2000s, the numbers of exported K-dramas dropped, and though huge international hits like *Coffee Prince* (2007) rekindled interest in Korean TV series, the character of the Korean Wave had changed, and was thus labeled by scholars “Hallyu 2.0”: Korean pop music (or K-pop) became the number one exported cultural product, benefitting from the rise of social media, which also made it possible to consume Korean music and dramas in Western countries, thereby also expanding the Korean Wave beyond Asian countries (Jin 2016: vii-viii).

In this age of Hallyu 2.0, different Korean cultural products are often marketed cross-media, thereby interlinking K-dramas and K-pop. As early as 1997, when *Star In My Heart* (1997) introduced leading actor Ahn Jae-Wook’s songs ‘Wound’ and ‘There’s No One Important As You’, dramas were used to promote pop songs, while the signing of “idols” for acting roles was intended to draw back the younger audience who had already lost interest in “trendy dramas” (Cagle 2014: 199, S. Lee 2015: 16). This kind of cross-media promotion is grounded in the Korean idol star system, developed by the big entertainment groups like CJ in the 1990s. In general, it “depend[s] on the medium of records, heavy

1 While Yoon and Kang don’t explicitly mention research on music in K-dramas, all the books about *Hallyu* published in North America they list (2017: 9) hardly mention music connected to television at all. This is also true for the two important books on K-pop by Lee (2015) and Fuhr (2015) and the newer books on K-drama, like the one edited by Park and Lee (2019). The only major exception is Hae Joo Kim’s dissertation “Hearing the Korean Global: *Hallyu* in the Music of K-dramas” (2015).

2 It should be mentioned that in this early phase Korean dramas were sold much cheaper than Japanese equivalents, thus the decision by Chinese broadcasting stations to buy these series was largely economic (Kim 2014a: 9).

promotion on television media and management activities” (Lee 2009: 492). Thus from the beginning, new idol acts were required not only to sing and dance, but also to entertain in television programs, both music shows as well as variety (Lee 2009: 492), and dramas became another forum for promoting idols on television.³

One of the biggest hits of this kind of collaboration between music and dramas was *Dream High* (2011). This series revolves around a group of aspiring pop stars at Kirin High School of Arts, played by successful singers like Bae Suzy, IU or Taeyeon of 2PM (Kim 2015: 232-233). Its pop soundtrack became very successful, with IU’s ‘Someday’ reaching number one at Gaon charts and the album reached number five in March 2011, after the *Dream High Special Concert* with the cast was broadcast. This album consisted of 12 tracks, ten of them pop songs. Most of them had already been released individually as downloadable singles during the run of the series, and thus the success of the series and its OST were interlinked even more. This practice of allowing audiences to download not only the whole album but also single songs started in 2009 and 2010 with, for example, *IRIS* (2009) and *Road No. 1* (2010). It remains the case that one or two songs from a series’ OST are made available weekly for download, and then an album is released around the time the last episode airs. These songs can not only be bought via national online music stores like Melon, but also via iTunes or Amazon music, thus making them accessible to foreign fans. Similarly, the distribution of the series also changed during Hallyu 2.0 thanks to streaming sites like Dramafever (2009-2018), Viki (since 2007), Netflix and Amazon Prime. They all provide K-dramas with either fan-made or professional subtitles in multiple languages, and thus make these productions not only available but also understandable worldwide.

Because K-dramas are targeted at both a domestic and an ever-growing international market, they simultaneously set trends for other (Asian) series and adapt to international demands. As Yoon and Jin write, cultural exchange in this age always goes both ways (2017: viii). This willingness to adapt also means that the drama’s narratives and especially the characters constantly have to change, despite tendencies to reproduce formalized schemas and scripts.⁴ One such script

is the typical Cinderella story, which traditionally features a dominant male lead but has also engendered new interpretations: in series like *What’s Wrong With Secretary Kim* (2018) or *Because This Is My First Life* (2017) the economic differences between the man and the woman are still as expected from these stories, namely, the man is rich or at least financially more stable than the woman. However, when it comes to emotions or the question of power and dominance in the relationship, the couples are equals, with the man unconditionally accepting the female protagonist as strong and independent. As a further variation, the Cinderella-concept is even reversed, letting a poor man meet a rich woman in *The Beauty Inside* (2018).

It is because of this continuous change of preferred narratives and overall formulas, I argue that there is no definition of the genre “K-drama” (aside from being a television series made by a Korean production company) which would apply to all dramas produced in the last two decades. Instead, there are some major characteristics which are true for a certain amount of years, and because this paper mainly discusses three dramas from 2016 to 2017, the following generalizations should only be read as true for this time frame – and basically every drama breaks with at least one of them:⁵

1. Most K-dramas consist of only one season with 16 (up to 24) one-hour long episodes,⁶ shown biweekly over the course of two months. Usually there is also only one main writer, one director and one musical producer throughout the series. These conditions allow for a rather conceptualized narrative and style for the end product.
2. The majority of Korean dramas are still live produced (meaning most of the shooting and post-production happens parallel to the airing) by independent production companies. This procedure can result in exploita-

representation in terms of which an expected sequence of events is stored in the memory” (2002: 10). These scripts consist of numeral schemas, like for example the “extremely rich and handsome male lead” (called *chaebol*) consists of schemas like a problematic family-background, adoration by everyone based on physical appearance or a cold and distant character.

5 In addition, this article only discusses music in biweekly prime time series, which have the biggest budget in the Korean television industry, and not the daily morning and evening shows (see Kim 2015: 108-9).

6 In Korea broadcasting stations are not allowed to interrupt a program with commercials. Because of that in 2017 they started to release two half hour episodes every evening (Park 2017). Therefore *While You Were Sleeping* officially has 32 episodes of 30 minutes, but its narrative still follows the structure of a series with 16 episodes of one hour.

3 This kind of horizontal promotion strategy is still very common today. For example Yook Sung-Jae, vocalist and dancer in the boy group BToB, also worked as an actor (e.g. in *Dokkaebi*), as a host (e.g. in 2012 of the music television program *The Show* (2011-present)) and a cast member of multiple variety shows (e.g. *Master in the House* (2017-present)).

4 The term script is used following David Herman, defining it as: “a knowledge

tion of workers, accidents and poor artistic results.⁷ At the same time, the series itself can be extremely consumer orientated and even incorporate viewer input into the narration (Oh 2015: 133, Kim 2015: 83-4).⁸

3. Both the main plot and especially the characters develop throughout the series and most episodes end in a cliffhanger, leading into the next chapter (Kim 2014b: 249).
4. Although basically every TV-genre is represented in Korean series, such as fantasy, horror, medical and legal dramas and so on, most of them also include melodramatic elements and a romance (Kim 2015: 85). These romances have a quite formalized script: from the first encounter of the couple the relationship culminates in a meaningful kiss around mid-season, then leads to an inevitable breakup in the penultimate episode, finally ending in reconciliation. The “couple song” (see Chapter 5: 103-104) follows this script and interlinks the different aspects throughout the series.
5. K-dramas have an OST, consisting of pop songs and instrumental music (Kim 2015: 110). The pop songs are digitally published throughout the run of the series.

2. POP SONGS IN K-DRAMAS

Although many parts of this definition are not unfamiliar to Western viewers, the overall shortness of the series, which is reminiscent of miniseries rather than the weekly installments stretching over a couple of years on European or American television, is initially quite unusual. Maybe even more unusual is the use of newly composed pop songs in the soundtrack. This approach is somewhere between using a newly composed instrumental score and the compilation soundtrack, consisting of pre-composed pop songs (or sometimes, as in *Amadeus* (1985), classical pieces) found in Western movies and series, and reflects the storytelling of especially Korean Melodramas and RomComs: their main plots revolve around

7 Oh Youjeong (2015: 134-5) gives some examples of this problem from the early 2010s. A more recent occasion was the second episode of *A Korean Odyssey* (2017-2018) where parts of green screen and wires used for fighting scenes were seen in the aired episode (Kim 2017).

8 The airing of several episodes of *Clean With Passion For Now* (2018-2019), for example, were delayed because of sport events. Consequently, in Episode 13, a dialogue about a football match substituting for the drama a character wanted to watch was added, a tongue-in-cheek acknowledgment of the viewer's complaints about the delay.

smaller, daily themes like finding true love and improving the living conditions of the main characters, not grand schemes about saving the world (Kim 2015: 108). Donnelly (2005: 136) suggests that pop songs, which are already part of the daily life of most viewers, fit these kinds of stories better than grand orchestral scores. At the same time, love stories in K-dramas are usually not mundane, but (melo-)dramatic and highly idealized. Because of this mixture of both daily and overly dramatic themes in the storytelling, many pop songs in K-dramas also reflect this narrative approach in their music by having a melodic, ballad-like part, followed by a more dramatic, fully orchestrated finish.⁹

While newly composed songs together with an instrumental score make up the bulk of the soundtrack in Korean series, pre-composed pop songs are also used and are often presented as diegetic, that is, the music is produced by a source within the series' narrative. Most scholars argue that “diegetic music serves primarily to reinforce the realistic depiction of the *mise-en-scène* so as to enhance the verisimilitude of the narrative action” (Holbrook 2005: 48). The very common “restaurant scenes” in K-dramas, for example, are often underscored by diegetic pop songs (both Western as well as Korean) “and can range from an *eumak gamdok*'s personal musical preference to songs that subtly comment on the discussion taking place between the characters onscreen” (Kim 2015: 109).

In addition, pre-composed pop songs are used diegetically and non-diegetically to set a scene in a certain timeframe: the soundtrack of the three installments of the *Reply*-series, set in 1997 (2012), 1994 (2013) and 1988 (2015-2016), for example, consists mostly of pop songs from these eras, some of them newly recorded (H. Lee 2015). The same goes for flashbacks: the tenth episode of *First Life* begins with the story of how the now adult female leads first met in High School, starting with pictures of their hometown of Namhae, underscored by Kim Jong-Kook's ‘Loveable’ from 2005. While in this instance the song is mostly a gateway back to the past, the different temporal layers transmitted through songs can also have a deeper narrative meaning: in the final episode of *A Gentleman's Dignity* (2012), all eight main characters visit a club where Psy's ‘Gangnam Style’ is playing. The episode aired about one month after the release of the single, so this song was part of the original viewer's everyday life. Another tem-

9 See for example ‘Beautiful Moment’ by K.Will from *The Beauty Inside*. It starts as a melodic ballad, the singing voice mostly accompanied by a single piano and guitar. When the chorus starts for a second time, a short pizzicato bridge leads to the more dramatic part of the song, now accompanied by strings and percussion.

poral layer is added when Lee Jung-Rok (Lee Jong-Hyuk), while on the dance floor, offers his still beloved ex-wife Park Min-Sook (Kim Jung-Nan) headphones, referencing a similar scene in *La Boum* (1980), which was previously also reproduced in the Korean movie *Sunny* (2011). Just like the main characters in both movies, Jung-Rok tries to draw Min-Sook into a romantic world of their own, underscored by a song only they know about. But in the K-drama, it is not a schmaltzy ballad like 'Reality' by Richard Sanderson which starts to play, but Los del Rio's 'Macarena'. This song is not explicitly established as being important for their relationship, but viewers know that the two married in 2002 (1.07), and one can assume that 'Macarena', which became popular in Korea around 1996, was a song from their dating time, probably with fun and happy associations, because quite soon the two start to dance together and rekindle their relationship without dialogue.

These correlations between music and narrative are possible thanks to certain associations tied to pre-composed music. These "images" [are] conjured by the lyrics, its iconic singer(s), its record-sleeve, the ubiquitous accompanying video-clip, its previous use in adverts [or other movies and series] or the 'dream-images' it conjures up for the individual or collective consciousness [...]" (Lannin and Caley 2005: 9-10). Newly composed songs on the other hand come without these images and offer in a way a clean slate, which then can be filled with new associations created by the series itself (Kim 2015: 124) and the music process of the product: 'Stay With Me' from *Dokkaebi's* OST, for example, brings images of the two singers Chanyeol (from the boy group EXO) and Punch. Its video clip was released on the day of the first episode, one day before the actual song became available. Here we see images of both singers in the recording studio, scenes from the series itself and new footage with the actors. And finally, as it is reused multiple times in the series, the song also brings more and more images of past events within the universe of the story, in this case especially to the first part of the romance between Kim Shin (the *Dokkaebi*) and his bride. It is played the first time Ji Eun-Tak confesses her love to Shin (1.01); in this case, though, it is not an expression of her love (yet), but the acceptance of her destiny as his bride. The feelings are similarly indistinct when the song is played again for Kim Shin's confession of love. Here he already has feelings for her, but also tries to push her back because he knows that their love has to end in tragedy (1.05). So when the song is played at their first kiss (1.06), viewers bring these images of a problematic and maybe even tragic love story with them, making the kiss bittersweet in the end. Therefore, the pur-

pose of 'Stay With Me' is to connect three major steps in Eun-Tak and Kim Shin's relationship, and to illustrate its contrary emotions, similarly to an instrumental score which "functions to sustain structural unity and illustrate narrative content of films, both implicitly and explicitly" (Rodman 2017: 120). 'Stay With Me' therefore becomes a kind of "leitmotif" for the relationship.

The leitmotif is a concept established by Richard Wagner in his operas, to connect music to both the developing narrative and characters. They are "developmental associative themes that comprise an integral part of the surrounding musical context" (Bribitzer-Stull 2015: 7, 255-8). As Rodman argues in his article about music in *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *Trainspotting* (1996), pop songs can also function as a leitmotif: in *Pulp Fiction* mainly to characterize the protagonists through different musical styles and in *Trainspotting* to appropriate different narrative situations (2017: 125-35). Korean dramas go even further and not only connect their songs to certain characters or narratives in one or two scenes, as in Rodman's two examples, but multiple times throughout the series. Contrary to instrumental leitmotifs, however, their musical content is set and therefore has no (musical) development. Still, the songs are established as markers for certain characters, moods or the developing relationship of the couples through repeated connections between a song and certain images, its lyrics and its musical content. Music, therefore, adds not only new layers of meaning to isolated scenes but the overall narrative of a whole series. In addition, there are also some more practical reasons for using pop songs over the course of one series multiple times, as Kim (2015: 188) suggests, it "establishes a feeling not only of familiarity but also, ultimately, of emotional attachment", therefore deepening the connection of the audience to the series and make them tune in week after week. It also fits with the budgeted and time restricted working environment which is still quite typical for many K-dramas and ultimately sells the OST (Kim 2015: 188-9).

These repeated appearances of certain songs throughout a series and their resulting meaning for the overall narrative is the major focus of the rest of this paper. Three series have been chosen to highlight the different aspects of (pop) songs in Korean TV Series: *Dokkaebi*, whose songs have multi-layered meanings connected to different aspects of the narrative; *While You Were Sleeping*, a drama with a K-pop idol as the female lead who contributed one of the series' character songs, 'I Love You Boy' to the soundtrack; and finally, *Because This Is My First Life*, which has one of the most sophisticated musical concepts in a TV series of recent years, not only for

Series	Production company	Music label
<i>Dokkaebi</i>	Hwa&Dam Pictures (subsidiary of the CJ Group)	CJ E&M Music (now Stone Music Entertainment, part of CJ Group)
<i>WYWS</i>	SidusHQ (part of iHQ Inc.)	iHQ, Gazi Contents, LEON
<i>First Life</i>	Studio Dragon (part of CJ Group)	CJ E&M Music

TABLE 1: CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE PRODUCTION COMPANIES AND MUSIC LABELS OF *DOKKAEBI*, *WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING* AND *BECAUSE THIS IS MY FIRST LIFE*.

its romance narrative, but also as a characteristic for the female lead.¹⁰

While You Were Sleeping is a mixture of RomCom, legal drama, thriller and fantasy. These different genres are reflected in the music: while the RomCom-parts are accompanied by pop songs, the other parts only have an instrumental score. *Dokkaebi* uses a similar approach to differentiate its historical and modern-day scenes through music by having only one pop song (1.10) in the multiple flashbacks to historical Goryeo era, thus reserving pop music mainly for the present and the two love stories. This important connection between romance and pop songs is also represented via the musical genres of the songs. All are ballads, pop or R & B, genres dominated by love songs, with occasional hip hop sections. These genres also coincide with the most popular K-pop genres (Lie 2015: 64, 98),¹¹ thus connecting these two successful parts of Hallyu 2.0.

Choosing popular music styles is also an economic decision, as songs play a huge part in the marketing of a series nationally and internationally, and therefore their mass appeal should be considered when talking about the OST (Kim 2015: 142). Also, original songs are part of the package when a series or a movie is sold to foreign companies. This condition does not apply to pre-existing images and music, and therefore the exported versions of a series such as *Reply 1997* (2012) on (German) Netflix may often shed whole music sections or even whole scenes. And finally, the series are also used to promote new songs and certain artists. This is possible because most of the time, the production company and the music label are subsidiaries of the same company (Table 1).

10 It was also taken into consideration to choose series from a broadcasting channel (SBS) as well as a cable channel (tvN) and different production companies (Sidus HQ – *While You Were Sleeping*; Hwa&Dam Pictures – *Dokkaebi*; MI Inc. – *First Life*) to illustrate a certain degree of generality.

11 Other genres like rock or rap are often found in OSTs for series with more action elements like *Prison Playbook* (2017–2018) or *Lawless Lawyer* (2018).

The OST in general and especially the newest released song is advertised in every episode by banners and by being repeatedly featured in the series. And while most of the songs are used for narrative reasons, there are occasions where a song is clearly just promoted. This practice is most obvious when a song only appears in one scene, as is the case in *While You Were Sleeping*. Of the fourteen songs on the OST, eight are featured multiple times throughout the series, but the last six songs can only be heard once, usually in the episode right before their single release. In all instances their narrative impact is minimal to non-existent (because they are only played over the end credits) thus reducing the series to a mere commercial platform.

In addition to these economic considerations, the practice of featuring exclusively composed songs offers artistic and narrative freedom. In a 2014 interview, singer Lisa (Jung Hee-Sun), who contributed to the OSTs for *I Am Happy* (2008) and *Queen Insoo* (2011–2012), explained the production process behind her compositions. In most cases she gets a script beforehand to understand the overall tone of the series and also works together with the script writers and producers, thus adjusting the song to the narrative (Stanley 2014). Aside from external composers like Lisa or, in the case of *Dokkaebi*, RocoBerry or the duo 10cm, many of the songs and the instrumental score are (co-)composed by the music director, thus ensuring a certain level of musical consistency throughout the series. The soundtrack for *Because This Is My First Life*, for example, is mainly (co-)composed by Moon Seong-Nam, who sets a unique tone by using elements of Jazz music in both the songs as well as the instrumental pieces.

3. CHARACTER SONGS

At first glance, *Because This Is My First Life* is an ordinary romance falling within the often used script of “contract marriages”, with Nam Se-Hee (Lee Min-Ki) and Yoon Ji-Ho (Jung

So-Min) as the main couple who first move in together as housemates and then decide to have a platonic marriage under contract to justify their living together to their families. Aside from this relationship, the series also puts the professional and character development of Ji-Ho, a 30-year-old aspiring script writer, full center, accompanied throughout the whole series by the song 'Drawing a Star'. The text of this song has a strong persona who makes multiple references to herself and her feelings while thinking about somebody, presumably a loved one. This reading becomes even clearer when in Episode 16 the meaning behind the picture of the mentioned "stars" is revealed: Ji-Ho's mother explains that throughout her marriage there were multiple beautiful moments which she collected like stars to use them in the darker times of their relationship to be able to stay with her husband. However, the simple romantic connotation of the song is only significant on the surface, and because of its function as Ji-Ho's leitmotif throughout the series it evolves a more differentiated meaning.

Aside from the song itself, there are multiple instrumentations, with only four on the official OST album: 'Star Billy' (piano and brass band), 'Star Picture Strings' (piano and string orchestra), 'Star Game' (Chip-Tunes and sounds from a keyboard) and 'Star Swing' (Swing Band). The first episode also features three other instrumentations: a slower version (in this article designated as 'Star Slow'), a rock version, connected to the rock middle part of the song (designated as 'Star Rock') and finally a banjo/glockenspiel version (designated as 'Star Banjo'). The multiple instrumentations of this song are used to underscore Ji-Ho's emotional journey in the series. At the beginning of the series she becomes homeless (1.01) and soon quits her already unsatisfying job after a co-worker attempts to rape her and nobody takes the incident seriously (1.02, 1.03). With the help of her friends and husband she finds the strength to sue the attacker (1.14) and to get back into her job, even writing her own K-drama in the end (1.16).

The effervescent and, thanks to its simple "la la la" chorus, seemingly somewhat mindless vocal version of 'Drawing a Star' is established at the beginning of the first episode, accompanying Ji-Ho's new-found freedom after working as an assistant writer and living with her boss for the past three months. However, the feeling of freedom and a happy outlook on life displayed both by the scene as well as the song is only short lived: she learns her apartment is now occupied by her younger brother and his pregnant bride, thus requiring her to look for a new home. While she is searching for cheap apartments on the internet, her mother brings her *mijuk gook* (sea-weed soup) for her birthday, accompanied by the melancholic

instrumental 'Star Slow', and gives Ji-Ho some money for the deposit. But obviously her mother has no idea how much it takes to rent a decent apartment in Seoul and so Ji-Ho is completely on her own now. But she still has hope left, shown a little bit later by a montage of her looking at cheap but uninhabitable apartments, which is underscored by the cheery "la la la" chorus. After these setbacks she finally finds a boarding room through her friends, and can even give her mother's money graciously to her new sister-in-law ('Star Slow', referring to the previous scene in which she was given the money) and moves into her new apartment ('Star Rock'). After one day she still has not met her new landlord, who she assumes to be a landlady because of the feminine name "Se-Hee". By chance she finally runs into Se-Hee outside a restaurant while he watches a soccer game. A dedicated Arsenal fan herself she joins him and both are disappointed about their team seeming to lose ('Star Banjo'). The episode ends with them meeting again at the bus station. There Se-Hee consoles Ji-Ho, and in a spontaneous decision, she kisses him before jumping on the bus – still not knowing that they are housemates.

In the other fifteen episodes of the series the full song is only played a couple of times, either representing Ji-Ho's roots or her inner self, for example, when Se-Hee arrives at her home Namhae (1.11) or when she finally becomes more confident either as a writer or in her relationship (1.9, 1.16). The different instrumentations, on the other hand, underscore a kaleidoscope of scenes showing the different layers of her character (her playfulness, awkwardness, shyness, intelligence, and her prevailing positive outlook on life), similar to the first episode, where the emotions tied to music range from happiness to despair. The different renditions of the song also function to highlight every realization (spoken out loud in the scene or by her voice-over) about herself or her relationship and thus closely follow her emotional development throughout the series. Thanks to the different instrumentations 'Drawing a Star' is present in every episode and therefore becomes a major part of both the style of the show as well as its musical brand.

In this first example, one song is used to underline a character and her different emotions. In addition, character songs can also directly express the thoughts of a protagonist, especially when the song is recorded by the actor or actress, who are often (former) K-pop idols. In many series they contribute one or more songs to the soundtrack, but in most cases do not play the role of a musician or diegetically sing, even when the series itself is sometimes quite conscious of the actors' second job and the script may then play with the audience by,

for example, teasing them to hope for a singing performance which never happens.¹² In *While You Were Sleeping* both main actors, Bae Suzy and Lee Jong-Suk each recorded two songs for the soundtrack. They are always used non-diegetically, but the fact that they are recorded by the actors enhances the function of songs as a voice of the characters, especially if viewers are aware of whose song they are hearing, which, thanks to marketing, should be the case. The addressed “image” coming with a song, in this instance of the singer, can thus play an important narrative role by connecting the voice of the singer and the actor. This connection can be exemplified by Bae Suzy’s ‘I Love You Boy’.

The main leads in *While You Were Sleeping* are Jung Jae-Chan (Lee Jong-Suk), a prosecutor who is neither rich, athletic, nor very experienced in his profession (therefore going against the usual K-drama script for the male protagonist), and Nam Hong-Joo (Bae Suzy), a witty reporter. Both are able to see future events in their dreams and after they meet for the first time, they start to use this ability to help other people and each other. With the support of police officer Han Woo-Tak (Jung Hae-In), who also dreams about the future since being saved by Jae-Chan, they fight against former prosecutor and main antagonist Lee Yoo-Beom (Lee Sang-Yeob). These confrontations, which heat up more and more from mid-season on, become the major subject of the series and provide legal and thriller elements. The romance element consequently plays only a minor role in many episodes and overall the relationship develops without most of the usual detours.

Romantic scenes are always accompanied by pop songs, such as ‘I Love You Boy’, which represents Hong-Joo’s side of this relationship, and is thus both a character as well as a couple song. The song is established in Episode 4 while she and Jae-Chan are on the bus. He falls asleep on her shoulder – a typical staple for the beginning of a relationship, although usually it is the woman who dozes off. In this scene the song only foreshadows Hong-Joo falling in love, which is finally confirmed in Episode 6. Here the song becomes her voice, when we see her emotions shift from being a little bit angry at Jae-Chan, to being drawn to him, and finally expressing these feelings by physical contact: ‘I Love You Boy’ starts after Jae-

Chan confirms he will always be at her side when she is afraid. This confirmation makes her want to hold his hand, but he, unaware of the situation, pulls away. The music stops and is followed by a few seconds without music (a grand pause is also part of the piece’s composition with varying length matching the editing in the series), heightening her disappointment. He then finally grabs her hand and the music starts again with the lyrics of the chorus (in English): ‘Because I love you boy’. In this whole scene Hong-Joo doesn’t say a word, so her changing feelings can only be seen through Bae Suzy’s acting and the music. This use of the song as a mirror of her feelings is repeated in Episode 9: after she dreamt about Jae-Chan being stabbed and (presumably) killed she promises to herself that she will protect him. Following this moment her song starts and this time, during the composed grand pause, she speaks, saying, as the character, “please, don’t get hurt”, immediately followed by the music again playing ‘Because I love you boy’. This time the song is a non-diegetic continuation of the diegetic conversation and again reflects her emotions.

4. MOOD SONGS

All the above examples of character songs accompany a certain protagonist throughout the series, but they are not really paraphrasing a certain mood in each scene in which they are used.¹³ Not even the multiple instrumentations of ‘Drawing a Star’ have consistent connections between music and emotion throughout the series. Certain “mood songs” can appear in scenes with different characters but always underscore one set of emotions. This is quite common in K-dramas and many of the repeated songs in series of the 2000s fall within this category. Cagle analyzed ‘Don’t Forget’ by Ryu from *Winter Sonata* (2002), a series oftentimes labeled as the first big Hallyu hit. The song is played in two episodes: when secondary lead Kim Sang-Hyuk (Park Yong-Ha) breaks up with female lead Jeong Yoo-Jin (Choi Ji-Woo), he tries to let her go, but at the same time, as the lyrics of the song suggest, does not want to forget her. The same is true for the second time the song is played. Now it is main lead Lee Min-Hyung (Bae Yong-Joon) breaking up with Yoo-Jin, thinking they are half siblings. His feelings are paralleled with his love rival’s before, in that he tries to forget Yoo-Jin but also cannot let go (Cagle 2014: 208-9).

12 Eun Ji-Won, former member of 1990s boy group SechsKies, for example, plays one of the main characters, an ordinary teenage boy, in *Reply 1997* (2012). The series itself revolves around the group’s fan culture in the mid 1990s, but Ji-Won’s character in the series is totally separated from his real self in 1997. The writers were nevertheless aware of this non-diegetic layer of the character and wrote in multiple jokes, such as when his friends speculate whether the character actually has some resemblance to Eun Ji-Won of SechsKies.

13 This can both mean enhancing obvious emotions on screen as well as bringing forth more subtle ones. For an analysis of the latter in K-dramas see Kim (2015: 150-6).

In this example the song is only played in two episodes, but like character songs, mood songs often appear multiple times throughout the run of a series, as will be shown by the example of *Dokkaebi*. This series is about Kim Shin (Gong Yoo), a warrior from the Goryeo era, punished by a god with immortality and cursed to search for his true bride, the only person able to pull out the sword piercing his chest and thus enable him to die. After 900 years he finds this bride in the 18-year-old orphan Ji Eun-Tak (Kim Go-Eun) who can see ghosts, and they fall in love with each other. The series also focuses on the developing friendship between these two characters and their surrogate family, consisting of a mostly depressed and vegetarian Grim Reaper (Lee Dong-Wook), his bored-with-life love interest Sunny (Yoo In-Na) who is also Eun-Tak's boss, and Duk-Hwa (Yook Sung-Jae), the good-natured but still sometimes childish grandson of Kim Shin's current servant. There are quite a lot of funny moments in the series, mainly thanks to the bromance between Kim Shin and the Grim Reaper, but overall there is a sentiment of sadness and melancholy, especially when it comes to Eun-Tak. These two general moods of the series are also represented in the OST which has fast and upbeat pieces like the instrumental 'A Glittering Wind', or 'LOVE' by Mamamoo, as well as slower songs like 'Stuck in Love' or 'And I'm Here', which draw their melancholic subtext not only from the serene melody and sad lyrics but also from Kim Kyung-Hee's mellow singing style. Especially 'And I'm Here' becomes an important mood song for Eun-Tak's sad but still hopeful life: After losing her loving mother at age nine she has to live with her aunt who only wants the money Eun-Tak got from her mother's life insurance (1.01). But thanks to the constant intervention of a friendly ghost, the money is kept safe and finally comes back to her (1.10), confirming that her mother in the end successfully cared for her daughter even after death. This sentiment of being always there for another person, "No matter how / Near or far apart", is the theme of 'And I'm Here'. The lyrics are not completely clear about who makes this promise and, thanks to the line, "to let you feel my pulse", it probably is not about a dead person watching over a surviving family member. Nevertheless, the lyrics transfer this feeling of protection even after a physical separation, and as it is featured in multiple scenes when Eun-Tak thinks about her mother, it initially functions as a theme song for their relationship. Throughout the series, however, this interpretation is broadened to a more general promise of taking care of each other, for example, when the song is played while a ghost asks Eun-Tak to help her grieving mother (1.05) and when Duk-Hwa's grandfather and longtime servant of Kim

Shin, dies (1.12). Here the song underscores three scenes in which the above mentioned "family" tries to comfort each other after this loss and therefore keeps the promise in the song, "When you feel so lonely / I'll be here to shelter you". This connection between the song and these emotions of comfort and protection is taken up again in the scene which depicts the greatest loss in the series: in order to destroy an almost invincible evil ghost which plans to possess Eun-Tak, Kim Shin finally forces her to pull out the sword. Together they defeat the enemy with said sword, but afterwards have to face Kim Shin's death. The length of the final scene between the couple perfectly coincides with the song and after nearly a minute of just a silent goodbye between the two lovers (with the song still playing), Kim Shin starts to dissolve into ash when the last line, "And I'm here home, home / With you / With me" fades away. Eun-Tak then breaks down, crying in sadness and despair. These emotions are immediately picked up by Ailee's 'I Will Go To You Like the First Snow' – the title a reference to Kim Shin's promise to come back to her as rain and snow (1.13).

'And I'm Here' is played once again, this time with reversed roles when Eun-Tak dies and has to say goodbye to Kim Shin, who in the meantime came back from the dead (1.16). As in *Dokkaebi*'s death scene, 'I Will Go To You Like the First Snow' follows 'And I'm Here', this time as a symbol for Eun-Tak's promise to come back in her next life. Plot-wise it is clear that these two scenes are connected, but not when it comes to the *mise-en-scène*. For example, Eun-Tak's whole body is visible in a wide angle as she sobs (1.13), while Kim Shin's frame in this scene is much closer and his body is mostly hidden behind bars. Thus, by repeating the connection of the two songs in both scenes, it is the music keeping these two narratives together. At the same time, 'And I'm Here' also brings the "images" of both loss and protection established in the other scenes underscored by this song, and perhaps reminds the viewer who grieves with both main protagonists that this love is stronger than death.

5. COUPLE SONGS

In most K-dramas there is absolutely no question about who the central couple is, mainly because the marketing before the first episode is already quite clear about who will end up together. Because of these set couples, it is not the purpose of the music, or any of the other relationship markers, to confirm who will end up together. Instead, it has to be a second layer for the development of the relationship. It

foreshadows the relationship, similarly to the sleeping on the other's shoulder, offering an umbrella in the rain or catching the other when falling, followed by a dip and a near kiss, in the early stage and later confirms that this couple really belongs together. Especially the last purpose is quite important in K-dramas where, thanks to the already mentioned melodramatic romance script, the main couple sometimes does not share much screen time, especially in episodes towards the end.¹⁴

Couple songs are generally introduced at the first meeting of the lovers. In the case of *Dokkaebi*, it is 'Beautiful' by Crush (1.01). The song then underscores multiple positive moments in the relationship between Kim Shin and Eun-Tak, such as a walk together (1.06) and their first real kiss with true feelings on both sides (1.10). But it is also played in times of distress, such as after an argument (1.02). Here they are physically separated, but still thinking about each other. Playing their song confirms that even after they have fought their love is still alive. Therefore, couple songs can represent the whole love story and multiple emotions by being a reminder of the always present love between the main couple, even when they are fighting and physical or emotionally separated. The very prominent narrative of a destined love in K-dramas can also be transported through the lyrics of couple songs, here exemplified by both couple songs in *Dokkaebi*, Kim Shin's and Eun-Tak's 'Beautiful' and 'I Miss You' by SOYOU for the Grim Reaper and Sunny. These two songs represent the underlying sentiment of each destined love story: while Kim Shin and Eun-Tak live "A beautiful life / Beautiful day", because in their time as a couple they feel happy and a deep connection, there is an overall melancholy throughout the other relationship and even when the Grim Reaper and Sunny are together they feel as if they are missing something or somebody. To some extent, however, both songs spoil the ultimate nature of the two relationships. But because in the series they are never played to the end, only viewers who bought the soundtrack were aware of this foreshadowing. In

14 Kim wrote in her dissertation about an additional aspect: "[The unexpressed] love relationships [in K-dramas] form over time and are bonded through musical moments on the soundtrack where a song fills in, giving expression to words and gestures that remain understated, or unstated." (2015: 135). In more recent K-dramas it is still an important part of the love story that the couple shows restraint, but thanks to the fact that the first kiss now oftentimes already happens in the middle of the drama and not, like in many from the early 2000s, only in the last episode, maybe even last minutes, the development of the relationship after this first kiss, including skinship and sex, becomes more important. Because of that, I argue, couple songs nowadays are not only there to highlight understated love and sexual tensions, but now also underscore obvious love scenes.

'Beautiful' the line about "It's a beautiful life / Beautiful day" turns to "It's a sorrowful life / Sorrowful day" in the last two verses. As mentioned above, after having spent some loving weeks together, their story ends in tragedy when first Eun-Tak is forced to kill Kim Shin and after he comes back she dies in an accident. The lyrics, therefore, are basically a spoiler for the last episodes, while the other couple song *I Miss You* speaks more generally about the reason for the feeling of loss and tragedy behind the love between the Grim Reaper and Sunny: "Did you recognize me right away? / Why did you come to me now? [...] You are my destiny / Even if I'm born again / Wherever you are hiding / I will find you". These lines refer to the fact that they were husband and wife in another lifetime when their love ended tragically because he, the king, ordered her to be killed. Viewers only deduce this information over the course of the series.

Similar to the character song, aside from this overall meaning the couple song can also reflect and comment on the actual feelings in a specific love scene, such as the first real kiss between the main couple in *While You Were Sleeping*. This kiss first seems to happen when both of them are sitting in the car and 'I Miss You' by Davichi starts to play, a song already connected to one other romantic scene (1.05) but not established as their couple song. Consequently, the attempted kiss and the song are cut short when Jae-Chan cannot move forward because of his seat belt. Feeling quite awkward they do not continue and just say goodbye at her doorstep, accompanied by the instrumental version of the series main theme 'Your World' by SE O. But right before parting, Hong-Joo suddenly decides to finish the kiss. At this moment the music stops, heightening the surprise and awkwardness between the two. Thinking it was the wrong timing for their first kiss, Hong-Joo quickly retreats into her house, while Jae-Chan is left baffled and with ambiguous thoughts. Only when he is back in his home and their already established couple song 'You Belong To My World' by Roy Kim starts, it becomes clear that Jae-Chan is actually quite happy about their kiss, making the couple song and the feeling of love inseparable.

CONCLUSION

Couple songs provide the most recognizable connection between music, narrative and certain images. Nearly every romantic K-drama in recent years has one or two early established songs which accompany the couple through their

courtship. These couple songs repeatedly align images of a first meeting and the first steps toward courtship with a particular song, which then becomes a kind of leitmotif for the rest of the series and signals that a scene about true romance is either happening or to be expected. The same applies to songs which repeatedly underscore certain characters or moods. It is therefore possible to connect multiple images and meanings to certain pop songs, as in the case of 'And I'm Here' (*Dokkaebi*), so that later scenes in a series are not only directly linked to the overall narrative but new layers of meaning not explicitly shown in the actual scene are also added. These outcomes are not only products of repetition, but also of paratextual elements (or "images") outside of the series, such as the singers, especially when they are also the actors. Finally, as shown by the example of the two couple songs in *Dokkaebi*, the lyrics of these songs are usually written to engage with certain emotions and plotlines and therefore add even more to the story. This purposeful context is one reason why many pop songs in K-dramas are still in Korean, but also have at least one English line or chorus, so that both national and international viewers understand at least the core statements of the lyrics.

In the end, these tight connections between pop songs and, in most cases, love, are so overtly used in K-dramas of the last decade that they have become narrative formulas of the whole genre themselves, even when their first role as translating unsaid parts of a love story to audience become less important nowadays, because more and more dramas include both skinship as well as complex developments of a relationship after the first kiss. Nevertheless, their presence readily enhances the emotions of certain scenes, such as that of the first kiss, because viewers are used to expecting a scene of this kind when a pop song is played. These formulas also enable an opportunity to play with them and use them in parodies. When the two (male) friends Yoo Shi-Jin (Song Joong-Ki) and Seo Dae-Young (Jin Goo) use the same umbrella in *Descendants of the Sun* (1.15) both the camera angles and the playing of 'Everytime' by Chen and Punch establish a reference to similar love scenes between main couples in other series. This effect, on the one hand, makes the scene comedic by breaking gender stereotypes, but at the same time also underlines the deep bromance of these two soldiers. Thus, pop songs are not only part of the overall narrative of a series itself, but create a sign system of its own, oftentimes combined with a visual one, which is typical for K-dramas. This becomes even more obvious when you consider the changing styles and narrative approaches of K-dramas in the last

decade. While more detailed analyses of these changes are still rare, authors such as Kim wrote about the importance of subtlety in K-dramas up until the early 2010s, when relationships visually only moved forward by mere suggestions like longing looks or small, accidental skinship. In this kind of story telling the music played an important part in illustrating and deepening the relationship and make it possible for the audience to relate to things they did not really see on screen (Kim 2015: 155). As shown in this article, pop songs in newer K-dramas still follow this kind of style, and, as in the case of the first kissing scene in *While You Were Sleeping*, can illustrate unsaid emotions. But, I would argue, in general K-dramas have become more direct in recent years, especially in the second part of the series after the first kiss. This different narrative style did not change the usage of pop songs though, and they are still dominantly used in scenes relevant for relationships. Therefore it seems that these musical and narrative traditions, together with the structure of the Korean entertainment industry and its cross-promotion, guarantee that newly composed pop songs will also be part of future productions, even when their texts and storylines change over time, thus making these pop songs one of the unique selling points of K-dramas.

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Because This Is My First Life (Yibun Saengeun
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Clean With Passion For Now (Ildan Tteugeopge
Cheongsohara, 2018-2019)
Coffee Prince (Keopi Peurinseu Ihojeom, 2005)
Descendants of the Sun (Taeyangui Hooye, 2016)
Dokkaebi; also *Guardian: The Lonely and Great God*
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Dream High (Deurim Hai, 2011)
A Gentleman's Dignity (Shinsau Poomgyuk, 2012)
I am Happy (Haengbok Hamnida, 2008)
IRIS (Airiseu, 2009)
Jealousy (Jiltu, 1992)
A Korean Odyssey (Hwayuki, 2017-2018)
Lawless Lawyer (Moobeob Byeonhosa, 2018)
Long Vacation (1996)
Master in the House (Jibsabuilche, 2017-present)
Prison Playbook (Seulgirooon Gambbangaenghwal,
2017-2018)
Queen Insoo (Insoodaebi, 2011-2012)
Reply 1997 (Eungdabhara 1997, 2012)
Reply 1994 (Eungdabhara 1994, 2013)
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Road No. 1 (Rodeu Neombeowon, 2010)
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