

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4463

Music of Thailand

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General Editor, Harold Courlander

Recorded by Howard K. Kaufman



MUSIC OF THAILAND

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INTRODUCTION BY HOWARD K. KAUFMAN

Thai music, like Thai culture, is derived from both India and China, with the preponderance of influence being Indian. With the influence of Buddhism and Brahmanism, the accompanying liturgical musical styles were also imported. This religious music gradually became secularized, undergoing small modifications. The older styles, however, were retained in the more conservative royal courts.

Inasmuch as there was no written notation, all music was passed on from generation to generation through imitation. This apprentice-student method is still the means of learning Thai music. Since accuracy of melodic line was, and is still of paramount importance, one can assume that the melodic lines and accompaniments as heard today differ only slightly from their prototypes.

Unfortunately, Thai music, like Thai culture, is rapidly dying out. The rapid spread of the radio, accompanied by the recent trend towards "westernization" is gradually rendering the Thai apathetic towards his own musical heritage. Concomittantly, the role of the Thai musician is diminishing.

In general, music is performed primarily as entertainment in connection with the wat (Buddhist church) festivals. In the rural areas, music serves as an accompaniment to repartee singing, shadow plays, and for dance-drama performances of stories based on the Ramayana. This last art, the classic dance-drama, has reached its highest perfection at the Sinlapakorn School of Music and Dance in Bangkok. It is only in the northeast provinces, the area of the Lao speaking people, that solo instrumental music occurs. Here, the can (multi-reed bamboo mouth organ, derived from the Chinese cho) is used. Farmers occasionally, while planting and harvesting their rice, sing various types of songs as they work. However, these are not work songs per se.



Thailand is divided geographically as well as culturally into four regions; north, northeast, central, and south. The music of each of these four areas has its own distinctive style and flavor.

The music of the north is generally slower in tempo than that found in other areas, and consists primarily of ensembles comprised of tenor, alto and soprano brass-reed flutes. One naturally finds a great deal of Burmese musical influence in this area.

The music of the northeast is characterized by the reed mouth organ (can). It is used as a solo instrument and also as an accompaniment in the Mawlam style of repartee singing.

The southern style is epitomized in the syncopated rhythmic style of Manora. From the south also come two other styles; the Angtalung and Nangtalung - both of Indo-Javanese origin (see song notes).

The central area is the most musically developed, and uses the larger orchestral ensembles which can be divided into two groups.

1. The Mahori (stringed) band comprises one or two saw oo (Chinese derived two-stringed soprano violins, tuned at the fifth, with the bow locked between the strings; one or two saw duang (Chinese-derived two stringed alto violins also tuned at the fifth; one or two chakay ("crocodile," derived from the Indian vina); one or two flageolets (khluj), an oboe (pee naj or pee Java), and the ching, a tiny triangle-toned cymbal which serves as a metronome.
2. The pee pat (percussion) orchestra consists of the following instruments:

ranad eg - soprano xylophone (21 wooden bars)

ranad thum - alto xylophone (12 wooden bars)

gong wong lek - set of 16 soprano gongs, circularly arranged

gong wong yai - set of 16 alto gongs, circularly arranged

ranad thong eg - steel-barred soprano xylophone (21 metal bars)

ranad thong thum - steel-barred alto xylophone (17 metal bars)

pee nai - a quadruple-reeded instrument sounding very much like our oboe. It carries the melody and quite often provides the musical embellishments. Its range is two and one half octaves.

In addition, there are various types of drums: the klong tat, a sort of kettle drum; the tapone, capable of eleven different tonal qualities; the songna, similar to the tapone but smaller. A Malay drum is often used in place of the tapone when accompanying a singer. There are also the ching (shaped like thick, heavy, miniature cymbals, but triangle-like in tone), the chop (small cymbals), and the mong (Chinese gong).

The Thai musical scale, contrary to popular belief, is not pentatonic, but consists of seven whole tones. It is true, however, that in the great majority of pieces played, the pentatonic scale is emphasized by the instruments which carry the basic melodic lines. The fourth degree of the scale is

always omitted and the seventh sparingly used. It is not infrequent, however, that the oboe (pee) and soprano violin (saw duang) are used improvisatorily, and weave around the melody, employing six of the seven tones.

The voice (both solo and in chorus), the two-stringed violins (saw-oo and saw-duang), and the oboe often employ intervals using quarter tones. This combination of pentatonic scale, seven whole-tone scale, and the use of quarter tones contributes towards the unique quality of Thai music.

No two sets of instruments are tuned to exactly the same pitch. The oboe in each orchestra gives the pitch and each instrument tunes accordingly. The xylophones and gongs alter their pitches by adding or removing a mixture of beeswax and lead to each bar or gong.

Though one can say that Thai music is primarily monophonic, the sometimes contrapuntal style, mixed with the embellishing of the melodic line by the various instruments, produces a definite, albeit very thin, harmonic flavor.

The musical form and melody vary according to the country from which the style has come, though to the untrained ear, these are often indistinguishable. The more common of these styles are termed Cambodian, Indian, Burmese, Chinese, and Javanese. These styles, however, are not typical of the music found in these various countries, but are eclectic in essence.

Thailand's musical heritage is rich and it is indeed unfortunate that more of its music is not being recorded. When the present generation of teachers has passed away, the great bulk of music will die with them, for the new generation is turning to the radio and to the American jazz idiom for their source of entertainment.

SIDE I, Band 1: SUKSANAEN

Nearly all singing from Northeastern Thailand is accompanied by the can, which is also used in this area as a solo instrument. One often hears a young man sitting on the river bank or under a tree playing this haunting instrument in the evening after the arduous farming tasks are done.

SIDE I, Band 2:

This particular can solo is also used as an accompaniment to the repartee singing called "Maulam Lao." There is an introduc-

tion followed by the song describing a man and his lover cruising down the Mekong river. Notice the drone at the tonic, and upper octave.

SIDE I, Band 3:

This song begins with an introduction in which the singer describes the audience, e.g., a number of priests and other dignitaries present, etc. The song then goes on to describe the singer as a humble farmer with little education, who begs the audience to overlook his errors in singing. The bulk of the song praises the virtues of the present government. This type of song is very reminiscent of the Calypso style of song, in which various contemporary topics are extemporized.

SIDE I, Band 4:

This song is sung by a girl of sixteen. As in the previous song, the introduction pays respect to the dignitaries in the audience. She continues by thanking Buddha for all the beauties of his creation--the trees, lakes, mountains, and especially women. The song is interspersed with nonsense syllables, a common occurrence in this style of singing. Ordinarily this song would have a can accompaniment. Note the syncopated rhythmic style.

SIDE I, Band 5: CHAKAY AND CHING

This is a chakay solo with ching accompaniment. The chakay is a three-stringed instrument which is derived from the Indian vina. A cylindrical bone plectrum is tied to the fore-finger of the right hand which plucks the strings. The ching accompaniment produces a steady metronomic beat. Note how the meter is doubled in tempo in the second part. Though most of Thai music is in duple rhythm, there are three tempi employed: slow, medium, fast. The medium tempo is twice that of the slow, and the fast tempo twice that of the medium.

SIDE I, Band 6: PHLENGCHOI

This folksong style is known as Phlengchoi. The man and woman take turns at improvisatory repartee singing. This is a very popular type of song style among the rural people of central Thailand. An example, as found in this song, is as follows: He -- "My opponent is overdressed and wears too much make-up." The chorus follows with nonsense syllables. She -- "Who is it that

dares offend a woman in this manner? Not only is he badly dressed, but he shows his upbringing by his poor manners." Again the chorus. He -- "What she says doesn't bother me, for I have money; I am free and happy". This particular repartee session continued for thirty-five minutes.

SIDE I, Band 7: FOLKSONG

This is an unaccompanied folksong from northern Thailand, which has become very popular as a lullaby. It is the story of a young man who, after comparing his loved one to the gracefulness of a tree, accuses her of loving someone else. She consoles him by saying that there is no one else.

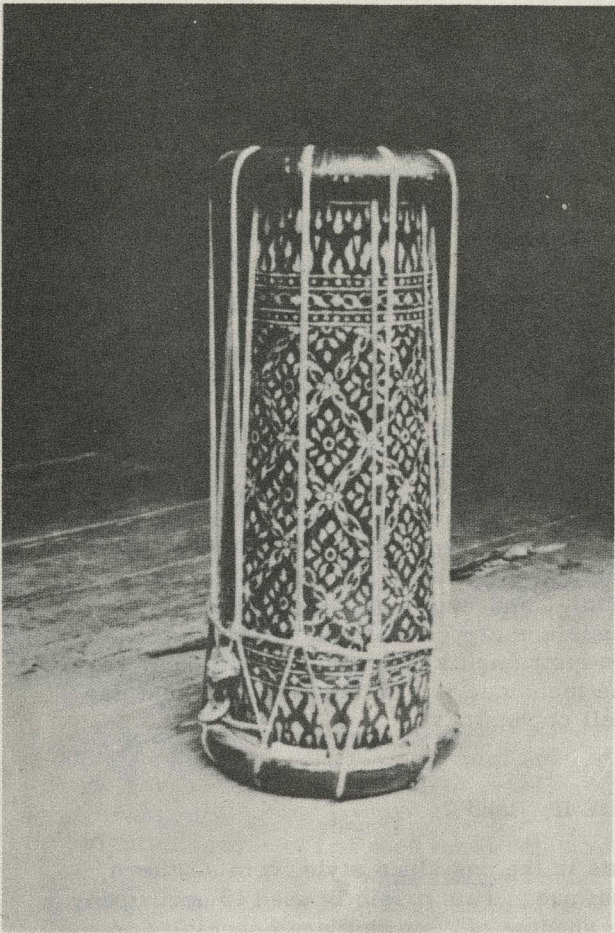
SIDE I, Band 8: PAMAHEI

The use of nasalization, guttural voice and tensing of vocal chords is typical of the classic style of which this is one example. The syllable oe is used in much the same way in which we use la-la. This song depicts a man reminiscing on the beauty of his departed loved one. He compares her skin to the full moon; her eyes to those of the deer; her eyebrows to a bow, etc. The musical style here is Burmese, as indicated in the title.

sai-smɔn nɔ:n tɔ:d pi: ja glɔm
jao ɲa:m jɪŋ prɪŋ prɔ:m daŋ le-ka:
nuan-la-ɔŋ pɔŋ paŋ so-pa:
daŋ jan-tra sɔŋ-klod mod mon-tin
ɲa:m ne:t daŋ ne:t ma-rɪka-ma:d
ɲa:m ka-noŋ woŋ wa:d daŋ kan sin
ɔra-ɔɔ:n ɔn-en daŋ kinarin

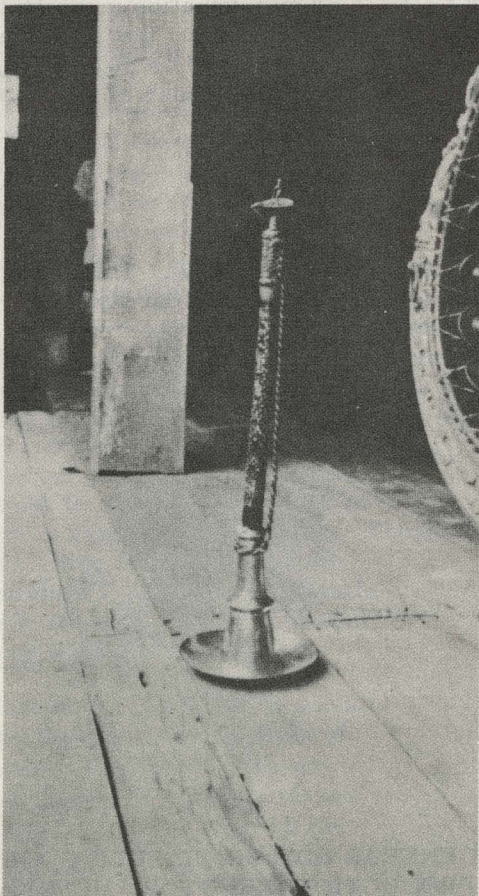
Sleep, sleep, my love!
I will sing you to sleep.
You are the perfection, the beauty
of the beautiful:

Your face is like the glowing moon;
Your eyes are like deer's,
Your brows like curved bows,
And your figure as delicate as Kinarin's---



Malay Drum

Pee Java (altc oboe)



SIDE II, Band 1: ROTCHANASANGTAUNG

These songs are examples of the pee pat or percussion orchestra, and are excerpts from the Lakaun style dance-drama. Following the introduction, the music accompanies the entrance of various suitors from several countries seeking the hand of the king's daughter. The music therefore changes style to match the nationality of the suitor.

SIDE II, Band 2:

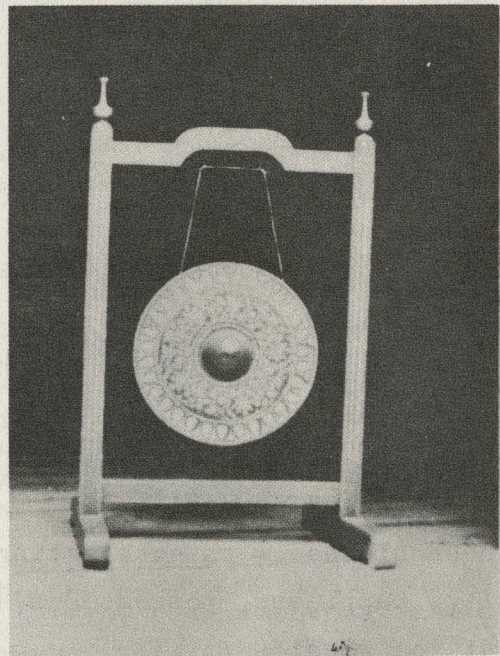
This music is typical of that used in most festive processions. An oboe and the long Malay drum are used as the accompaniment. The Tarzan-like yell is called "ho"-ing. It is quite common during these processions for the participants following the musicians to dance along ecstatically.

SIDE II, Band 3: PHRAYASOK
(the Sad King)

Played by the three-stringed violin (sausamsai). This instrument was very popular in the royal courts, but is rarely seen today. One will notice the employment of half and quarter tones.

SIDE II, Band 4: LAODUANGDOEN
(Lao Moon)

It tells the story of a young girl who laments having to depart from her family and friends since she must go to live with her husband in



Mong, or Chinese Gong

another part of the country. This type of song, with the Mahori orchestral accompaniment, was used "to sooth the tired kings" usually during the evening meal; the Mahori orchestra, being much softer and mellower, was preferred over the percussive pee pat orchestra.

SIDE II, Band 5: CHATREE

This song style is from southern Thailand. Typical of the music in this area is the emphasis placed on the rhythmic, syncopated patterns played on the drum. The piece begins with an introduction, followed immediately with a dance solo.

ŚĀTRĪ:

wan-ni: rao bə:g ba:n
ruam jad ŋa:n duə yin-di:
kɔ: hai ta:n joŋ mi:
kɔ: joŋ mi: tɛ kwa:m ta-wɔ:n
puag rao taŋ lai sai
ta:ŋ taŋ jai am-nuə pə:n
hai kiet ta:n ruəŋ ka-jɔ:n
dam-roŋ ju: mai ru: klai
som-bu:n lɛ bə:g-ba:n
dai tɔy-ga:n joŋ som-mai
tna-sa:n ma:g mai
taŋ rai so:g rai ro:g pai
kɔ:b kit srit pon
wai kaŋ-won jit pɔŋ sai
sua kan nam śa:t tai
ja-rən yin pin-yo tɔ:n

CHATREE

This is the day
We gladly join in the festivity.
May you all be properous!
May you be blessed with everlasting fame,
Prosprity, happiness, possessions, and
All that you wish!
May you be free from illness, and danger!

May you be successful in your career---
Full of pleasantness, void of anxiety!
May you help developing the country to
the highest prosperity!

SIDE II, Band 6: KHMENSAYOK

This piece, played by the angtalung band, employs also the tapone, gong, and chop, although the last two instruments are often omitted. The song was written by one of the Thai kings, Rama VII. The angtalung (of Indo-Javanese origin) consists primarily of three halved sections of bamboo of varying lengths which sound one key at the lower, middle, and upper octave. Usually seven musicians are used, each one holding one or two instruments representing different keys. The technique is similar to the present day "bell orchestras".

SIDE II, Band 7:

This is the angtalung style from southern Thailand. This music is used to accompany the shadow plays which are especially popular among children. The excerpt begins with music played to attract the audience. It is followed by an invocation in which the angels are invited to attend the performance. The accompaniment consists of an oboe, a small drum, and two wooden blocks beaten together.

SIDE II, Band 8:

Music from north Thailand. This song is characteristic of the musical style of northern Thailand, the orchestra here being made up of several brass-reeded flutes. Notice the harmonic effect produced by the simple arpeggio manner of playing.

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