



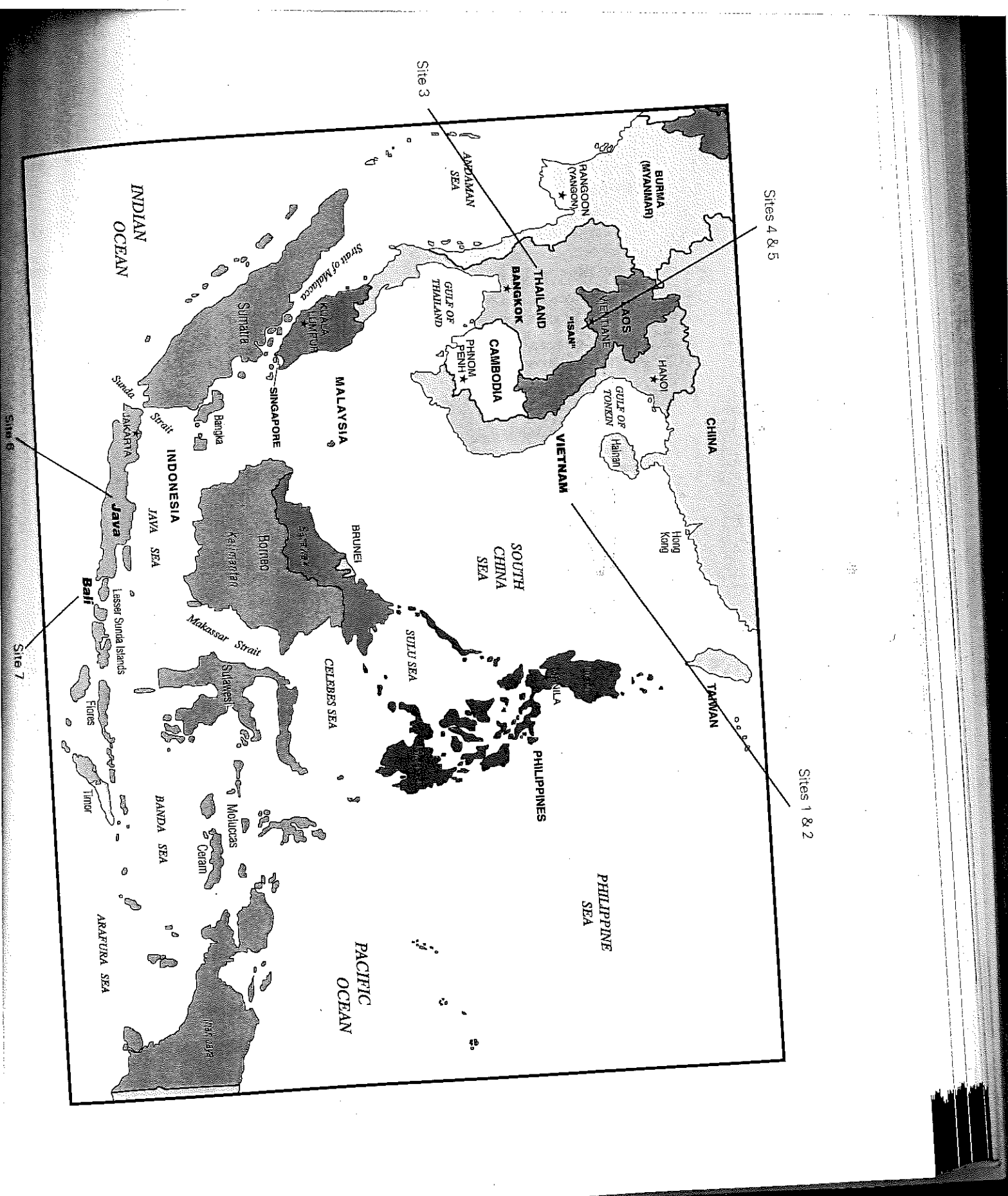
**Southeast Asia: Vietnam, Thailand, Laos and Northeast Thailand, Indonesia (Java and Bali)**

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Bangkok's Wat Arun (Temple of Dawn), a Buddhist complex next to the Chao Phraya River, attracts thousands of visitors each month drawn to its architectural design and brilliant colors



Sites 4 & 5

Sites 1 & 2

Site 3

Sites 6

Site 7

## Background Preparation

It is difficult to imagine a more colorful region of the world than Southeast Asia, a vast area split between the Asian mainland and some of the largest islands in the world. As a result of both internal histories and colonization, the region has developed into eleven independent states, seven on the mainland and four among the islands, of which all but Thailand were earlier colonized by European powers before gaining independence during the twentieth century. Prior to the colonial period, Southeast Asia consisted of both large and small kingdoms, the borders of which constantly expanded or retreated depending on a given power center's projection of influence. The names of some countries may be familiar, but others are understandably little known, including that of the region's newest nation, Timor-Leste (East Timor), which only gained independence from Indonesia in 1999. The nations on the mainland include Myanmar (formerly Burma), Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, while the island nations are Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Timor-Leste.

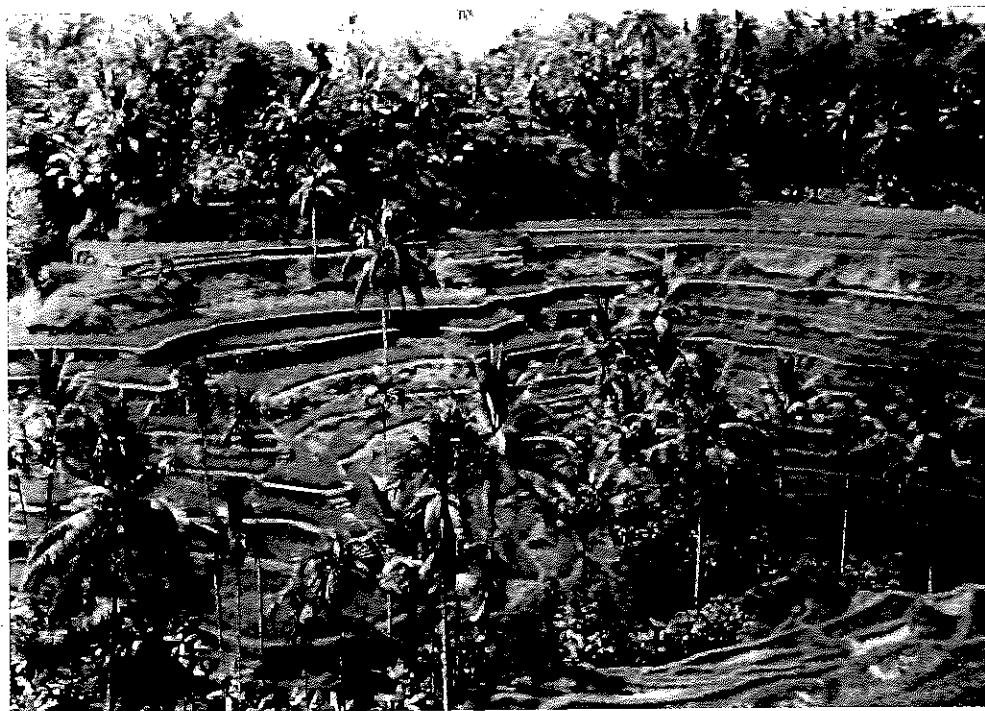
There are many more ethnic groups than there are states, however—mainland Southeast Asia alone is home to more than 140 named ethnic groups and the islands another sixty or more. Population densities throughout the region vary widely: both Vietnam and Indonesia (especially the main island, Java) have high-density and rapidly growing populations, while the populations of Burma and especially Laos are scattered and sparse. The largest urban areas grew rapidly during the last half of the twentieth century, especially as rural populations migrated to the cities seeking safety (during periods of war) or economic opportunities. The region's largest cities include Jakarta in Indonesia, Bangkok in Thailand, Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, Manila in the Philippines, and the city-state of Singapore at the tip of the Malaysian Peninsula. Some capital cities, however, remain relatively small and undeveloped; these include Vientiane in Laos and Phnom Penh in Cambodia. Myanmar, however, recently built an entirely new capital in an isolated area 500 miles/800 km north



Typical of modern Southeast Asian cities, Bangkok's endless traffic and general congestion can be both exhilarating and exhausting



A typically timeless village near the banks of the mighty Maekhong River in southern Laos near the Khong waterfalls



The terraced rice paddies of Bali, Indonesia, effectively utilize every inch of available space  
(Amy Unruh)

of the old capital in Rangoon (Yangon) called Nay Pyi Taw. Because Southeast Asian cities exhibit the most modern aspects of life in each country, it is in the small towns and villages, where rice-growing and animal husbandry are the chief occupations, that "traditional" culture thrives.

Many aspects of Southeast Asian life—agricultural, ritual, and festive—are shaped by broad weather patterns called *monsoons* (winds). Life on the mainland is governed by alternating wet and dry monsoons; the former come from the sea and bring on the rainy season, and the latter come from the Asian continent and bring dry weather, either cool or hot. During a given season, the weather tends to vary little. Island climates are generally more even throughout the year, because the humidity that produces rain is nearly always present. Overall, equator-straddling Southeast Asia is tropical and rather humid, but upland areas, especially on the mainland, can become quite cold during the cool, dry monsoon. Temperatures in northern Thailand and upland Laos can drop to freezing, and snow has been known to fall in the highlands of central Laos. Because most rice is grown in flooded paddy fields, rice agriculture is restricted to the rainy season except where irrigation systems have been constructed. Countries experiencing a dry monsoon period otherwise have only one harvest, while those with rain year-round may have two or more.

Poverty remains a major issue in many Southeast Asian countries. Economically, most of Southeast Asia is still considered "developing," though Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore have achieved rapid growth and modernization in recent decades. In economically advanced countries such as these, one finds fully developed communication and sanitation infrastructures, but in the less developed areas, such as Laos, there are still few paved roads, no railroads, and little modern communication.

## Planning the Itinerary

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Because around 200 distinct, named ethnic groups are found throughout Southeast Asia, an exploration of the region's cornucopia of musics is as daunting as it is exciting. Each of the larger nations, with the exception of the Philippines, has or had aristocratic courts that were longtime patrons of the arts. Wherever these court systems thrived, highly sophisticated "classical" music developed, performed by relatively large instrumental ensembles in a variety of contexts, including dance, theater, and ritual. In one case, that of Bali in Indonesia, these ensembles were primarily associated with Hindu temples rather than with the royal court. Outside courts and temples, music largely flourishes in the rural areas, primarily in villages, because Southeast Asian farmers prefer to live in clusters. In these areas, music-making is necessarily simpler because few musicians are able to devote themselves to it full-time or afford expensive kinds of instruments. Many Southeast Asian nations also have large minority groups, usually living in remote uplands. Their music is often unrelated to that of the dominant lowland cultures. In addition, most cities have large segments of Chinese or Chinese-descended people who are either well integrated, like those of Thailand, or remain more separate, as in Indonesia or Malaysia. Throughout Southeast Asia, though especially in urban areas, there is also a great variety of modernized popular music. In countries with developed media, this type of music reaches into the most remote areas, even if the televisions have to be powered by car batteries.

Southeast Asia is especially known for two materials used to make instruments—bronze and bamboo. Bronze is an alloy of the naturally occurring metals copper and tin. Bronze metallurgy is extremely old, going back to around 2000 B.C.E. For this reason, a great variety of bronze instruments are found throughout the region. Being rigid and heavy, bronze instruments are invariably idiophones. Most ensembles that feature bronze instruments also include non-idiophones, especially drums. A second key feature of this region's music is the widespread use of bamboo, although bamboo instruments are also commonly found in East Asia. In Southeast Asia's tropical climate, bamboo grows rapidly and easily, providing material not just for musical instruments but also for numerous everyday objects, such as bowls, knives, building materials, even textiles from the interior fibers.

Demographics must be considered when categorizing the music of the region. One basic division is between lowland and upland peoples. Lowlanders mostly live in villages and are generally wet rice farmers, though the people of the great lowland cities, who vary from wealthy businessmen and high-ranking government officials to unskilled laborers, live quite differently. Uplanders everywhere remain rural, with some practicing swidden agriculture, in which nomadic communities clear hillsides or mountaintops for temporary agricultural use by slashing and burning the trees and planting dry crops such as rice or maize. Besides its indigenous peoples, Southeast Asia also hosts great numbers of Chinese immigrants, most of whom came to the cities to engage in commerce during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, often retaining their distinct temple traditions, instrumental music, and opera. On a smaller scale, the same is true of immigrants from India.

Southeast Asia is a subcontinent known more for instrumental ensembles than for soloists. Vocal music also plays a strong role, because many traditional forms articulate narratives of great warriors, royalty, and religious men, as well as great women, comic characters, and superhuman heroes. Theater is exceptionally important as well, and virtually all Southeast Asian theater types combine instrumental music, song, and dance. Additionally,

## Priwan Nanongkham

## AN INSIDE LOOK

I grew up in a rice-farming village in Northeast Thailand, a region that is culturally Lao and known locally as Isan. When I was in the seventh grade at the local secondary school, I joined a Thai music club. At that time people said that playing Thai classical music was not just for enjoyment but it also influenced people to be good human beings. There I began my first music lesson on the *ranat thum* (lower xylophone) and later *saw u* (two-stringed coconut fiddle), the first two instruments that brought music into my life. I really enjoyed playing music in our school's music club ensemble. We practiced and rehearsed after school and weekends and had chances to perform locally.

At the end of that academic year, I came to the conclusion that music was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. Thus, I decided to switch schools and restarted seventh grade in Roi-et city at the local *Natasin*, a kind of high school for the arts that includes the first two years of college. There I majored in *piphat* ensemble, one of the classical genres from central Thailand. Classical was the only genre offered as a major program in academia in the mid-1980s.

As an Isan native, however, I felt that I should also know the music of my home region. My school also offered the study of local music as elective courses, but only for the fourth year-students and beyond, and I could not wait that long. In my second year, I began informally taking lessons on Isan music with an older friend at school. The first Isan instrument I studied was the *khaen*, a free-reed mouth organ that is the primary instrument in Lao culture. By the third year I was ready to join our school's "Isan traditional music" troupe (consisting of musicians and dancers) known today as *wong ponglang*. It was so named after the *ponglang*, a vertical log xylophone, the main instrument of an ensemble created during the 1980s to help preserve our tradition in the face of influences from modernization and globalization. Our school troupe rehearsed after school and during vacation periods.

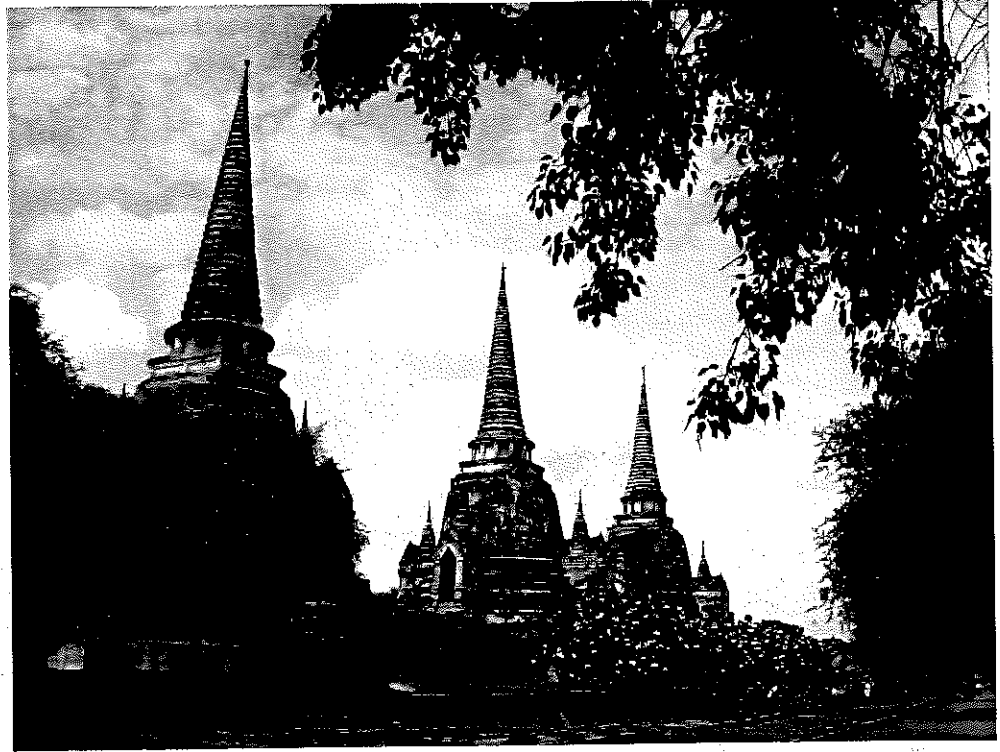


Priwan Nanongkham, Thai musician and teacher

We were invited to perform throughout Thailand and even went to Germany and the Netherlands in the summer of 1989.

After having six years of intensive training as a performer at *Natasin* Roi-et, I decided to expand my work in music through the study of pedagogy at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, where I earned a Bachelor of Music Education degree in 1992. The following year I entered the masters program in Cultural Studies at Mahidol University near Bangkok where I began my graduate music study. Before finishing, however, I decided to pursue an opportunity to go to the United States to teach Thai music in 1994. Soon after I moved to New York where I taught Thai music in a Thai Buddhist temple. Following that I entered the graduate program in Musicology-Ethnomusicology at Kent State University and wrote an MA thesis on *ponglang* music from Isan. My dream, after completing my Ph.D, is to become a music professor, field researcher, scholar, and musician focused on the study of the music of my own regional culture, Thailand as a whole, and of the rest of Southeast Asia, if not the world.

The famous triple *chedi* in fourteenth-century Wat Sri Samphet in Thailand's former capital, Ayuthaya, which was destroyed by Burmese armies in 1767



theater employing puppets of various sorts—especially flat, leather “shadow” puppets—is a major art form throughout the region. Vietnam’s unique water-puppet theater, which takes place in a pond with the puppeteers behind a screen standing waist-deep in water, features amazingly agile wooden puppets placed at the ends of long, complex mechanical arms.

All musics, whether traditional or modern, require a system of patronage in order to survive. While the courts and royal families of Vietnam, Laos, and Burma have long since disappeared, royal arts in those countries continue to a degree thanks to modest state support. Even in Thailand, Malaysia, and Cambodia, which retain kings and royal families, patronage has also been taken over by the state, which encourages the arts in various ways, especially through the educational system. Only in Indonesia, where Javanese sultans still hold court, does royalty actually help sustain the traditional arts. But even there, government-supported music conservatories can be found. Traditional music, theater, and dance at the local and regional levels, however, are mostly left to their own devices. Many music traditions have had a tough time surviving due to increased modernization and the spread of popular culture through globalization. Some forms have retained widespread support by modernizing, but many have simply become rare or extinct as people turn increasingly to various popular musics, both of local and of foreign origin. All Southeast Asian countries now have their own popular music, much of it originally stimulated by the importation of Anglo-British ballroom dance music from the 1930s and continuing to today with the latest releases from European, American, and Asian pop stars.

## Arrival: Vietnam

Vietnam stretches dragon-like along the South China Sea for some 1,500 miles (2,400 km). Two major rivers create vast sandy deltas before they empty into the sea: the Red River in the north, which flows past the capital city, Hanoi, and the Maekhong River (sometimes spelled Mekong), which splits into nine branches—the “Nine Dragons” (*Cuu Long* in Vietnamese)—and flows through the endless rice fields of the southern delta. Vietnam’s backbone is a chain of mountains that runs from south to north, spilling into neighboring Cambodia, Laos, and China. Vietnam’s vast population of more than eighty-seven million people is predominantly Viet (or Kinh), a wet rice-growing people who live in the lowland plains between the mountains and the sea. In central Vietnam, the coastal plains are sometimes no more than a few miles or even a few hundred feet wide. Indeed, between Danang and the old imperial capital of Hue, “Sea and Cloud Pass” brings the mountains into the sea itself. The majority of Vietnam’s people live in the lowlands, while some fifty-four minority groups, most unrelated to the Viet, live in the interior hills and mountains that border Cambodia and Laos to the west and China to the north.

Culturally speaking, Vietnam has three distinct regions: the north, the center, and the south. Each has a different history, a distinct accent, and different preferences for instruments and genres of music or theater. The north includes Hanoi, the country’s ancient capital and the locale for several important kinds of music, including the music of the distinctive water-puppet theater. The center’s heart is the old imperial city of Hue, seat of the Nguyen dynasty from the early nineteenth century until 1945, when Vietnam’s last emperor, Bao Dai, abdicated. The south, centered on Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) and several major cities in the delta, has the youngest culture and is the least formal in behavior.



An upland Bahna village near Kontum, Vietnam. Note the lightly framed houses with stucco walls and the steps carved into a log.

IMMIGRATION  
VIETNAM  
IMMIGRATION



Members of the Jarai ethnic group, the same ones heard in the track, perform on a set of flat bronze gongs and a drum in Vietnam's Central Highlands (Phong Nguyen)



The people who live in the mountains are mostly different from the Viet and speak a variety of Austro-asiatic and Malayo-Polynesian languages. Living in isolated villages and often practicing “slash-and-burn” or “swidden” agriculture on the mountainsides, they relocate from time to time when the fields are depleted. Their musical cultures encompass both songs and instrumental music. Most instruments in the uplands are made of bamboo and other organic materials, but they are nonetheless incredibly varied. Perhaps most surprising are the large bronze gong sets played during year-round rituals and festivals.

For many in the West, “Vietnam” is a war, but, of course, it is actually a country—and *one* country, not two as during that war. The capital, Hanoi, formerly only known as a forbidding Communist city and the prime target of American bombers in “North Vietnam,” is located along the broad Red River, whose delta forms a vast plain in the north. Hanoi’s architecture reflects three eras: fascinating temples dating back to the eleventh century, French colonial architecture created during the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the modern buildings of a capitalist-leaning and increasingly cosmopolitan Vietnam reborn in the 1990s.

### Site 1: Vietnamese Central Highlands Bronze Gong Ensemble

**First Impressions.** The clanging sound of the gongs may remind you of church bells, albeit a very large set of them, in a small country church. This hypnotic music seems simple, using mainly metal gongs with somewhat “fuzzy” pitches for the short-repetitive melody. A careful listen reveals a mix of sound changes because the musicians are walking in a circle past a stationary microphone.

**Aural Analysis.** The ensemble heard in our example consists of approximately thirty members, all from the Jarai ethnic group, and was recorded in Pleiku in Vietnam’s Central Highlands. Led by young female dancers, the male musicians walk counter-clockwise in a circle, each striking a single bronze gong. These vary in diameter from about 24 inches (61 cm) to around 12 inches (30 cm). Some have bosses (raised knobs), and others are flat; all

are struck by padded beaters. In addition, the ensemble includes two horizontally played barrel drums and metal cymbals. A careful listen reveals six pitches in the octave, expressed as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7—but because the Jarai do not theorize about their music, this scale has no name. The range of the melody is relatively narrow, and the intervals between adjacent melodic pitches are no more than a fifth.

Because each musician has only one gong, each capable of producing only a single pitch, the sounds of the different gongs are “strung together” to produce melody. This is an example of *interlocking construction*, in which a succession of individual pitches played by different people creates the effect of a continuous melody. A Western music tradition that parallels this idea is a bell choir, often heard during the winter holiday season. Considering that each musician only strikes one gong, it is not surprising that there is no ornamentation, as this would disrupt the continuity of the melodic line.

The rhythm follows a clear duple meter and sounds fairly simple except for a certain freedom displayed in the pitches’ non-simultaneity. One senses that these performers cooperate but do not feel obligated to play in lockstep. The melodic units are relatively short and have a narrow range that falls toward the lowest pitch (1). This pitch is the tonal center, or “home” note that creates an aural feeling of rest and resolution. Although the music consists primarily of a single melodic line, making it monophonic, accompanying gong-players sound the “pillar” pitches of 1 and 5 from time to time, giving the music a strong tonal framework. Its form is iterative in that the melody is repeated for as long as necessary. There are no intentional dynamic shadings.

## LISTENING GUIDE



CD 1.9 (1'11")

### Chapter 6: Site 1

## Vietnam: Central Highlands Bronze Gong Ensemble

Instruments: Bronze gongs of various pitches, small cymbals, low- and high-pitched drums

TIME	LISTENING FOCUS
0'00"	Cymbals signal beginning of performance.
0'02"	Opening gong establishes the duple meter and central pitch. The cymbals also mark this regular pulsation, initially at half the rhythmic density of the opening gong and then with the same density (at 0'09").
0'05"	Melodic gongs enter and repeat the melody every sixteen beats. Listen for the primary melodic pitches of 1 and 5 in contrast to the interlocking melodic gongs. The drum also enters, but is not easily distinguished until roughly 0'10".
0'13"	The melodic line repeats.
0'14"	A low-pitched drum enters, adding a recurring “roll” throughout the performance.

- 0'21"** The melodic line repeats. Listen for further repetitions at 0'28", 0'36", etc.
- 0'48"** A syncopated "inner" melody is added to the performance.
- 1'01"** A very high-pitched gong adds an additional syncopated rhythm.

Source: Gong ensemble of the Jarai, Pleiku City, Pleiku province, recorded by Terry E. Miller and Phong Nguyen; from *Vietnam: Mother Mountain and Father Sea*, White Cliffs Media WCM 9991 (6 CDs and 47 pp. book), 2003. Used by permission.

**ETHNO-CHALLENGE (CD 1.9):** Walk along with the basic beat and then choose a prominent pitched gong heard in the recording (such as 1) and clap at the points in the melody where it sounds.

Cultural Considerations. Ensembles of gongs are typical among upland Vietnam's ethnic groups. They are associated with both festivals and religious rituals, including funerals and the annual buffalo sacrifice. Because they require a large number of musicians, no one of whom dominates, these ensembles reflect the communal nature of upland village life. In this music, as in the society, each person has a specific role to play: some reiterate the pillar-like pitches, some play melody, and some dance; overall, there is no apparent distinction between "musician" and "non-musician." Anyone in the community could expect to participate, if so inclined.

Gong ensembles typically play for funerals and thus have a strong association with the afterlife. But visitors are more likely to encounter them during public upland festivals now promoted by the government. Perhaps the most difficult event to witness is the buffalo sacrifice, during which several young men seem to become nearly hypnotized as they begin piercing the hide of a buffalo tied to a tree. Accompanied by the gongs, whose music lends itself to this hypnotic state, they continue stabbing the buffalo until it finally dies. For most visitors, this is not a pleasant experience—but for central highlanders the sacrifice is an important ritual that honors the spirits in order to assure the continuity of human life and successful harvests.

Many unanswered questions remain about the relationship between upland and lowland cultures. While bronze metallurgy has been dated to around 2000 B.C.E., it is unclear which culture developed it first. Are the upland peoples the remnants of the original inhabitants of Southeast Asia, whose ancestors were pushed from their lowland homes by advancing peoples (the early ancestors of the Viet) coming from the north? Because the lowland Viet make little use of bronze and play instruments that reflect Chinese influence, it is tempting to conclude that the upland peoples reflect the earliest layer of musical culture in Vietnam. Others argue, however, that upland cultures have always been at the margins of Vietnamese society and have absorbed and preserved aspects of lowland culture no longer prominent there. That would suggest that upland cultures reflect what is called "marginal survival," in which aspects of mainstream culture now lost are preserved in outlying areas, where culture changes more slowly. At present, however, there is no way to prove either theory. In 2005 the Central Highlands were designated as "The Space of Gong Culture" in the Third

Proclamation of UNESCO's "Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity" program.

## Site 2: *Nhac Tai Tu* Amateur Chamber Music

**First Impressions.** *Nhac tai tu* has a free and improvisatory feel in both melody and rhythm that includes much tone-bending and syncopation. While a prominent fiddle cuts through with a busy melodic line, lower stringed instruments complement with a cornucopia of timbres and rhythmic riffs. The music well reflects the casual setting where a group of friends meet to play favorite compositions, be it in a private village home or in a music club room in the market area of a town.

**Aural Analysis.** While many Vietnamese instruments were derived from Chinese instruments, they nearly always have been modified to allow for the tone-bending so preferred by Vietnamese musicians. Thus, to accommodate this fundamental aspect, Vietnamese stringed instruments have higher frets and looser strings than their Chinese equivalents. The decoration on Vietnamese instruments also tends to be unlike that found on Chinese instruments—generally, it features much intricate mother-of-pearl inlay. These refined decorations are in some ways analogous to the ornamentation that is so crucial in Vietnamese music.

A southern instrumental chamber genre, *nhac tai tu* is a gathering of amateur instrumentalists who play more for their own enjoyment than for others. In this way it is similar to the Chinese *sizhu* "silk and bamboo" chamber music from Shanghai (see Chapter 7). The recording features three melodic instruments—the *dan kim* lute, the *dan tranh* zither, and the *dan co* fiddle—plus the *song lang* "slit-drum" clapper. While this is a typical ensemble for this type of music, on some occasions other instruments may also join in such as a Vietnamese guitar (*dan ghi-ta*), a horizontal flute (*sao*), or a pear-shaped lute (*dan tyba*).

**NHAC TAI TU**  
(pronounced *ni-yak tai tuh*) A type of chamber music ensemble from southern Vietnam.

**SONG LANG**  
(pronounced *shong long*) A "slit-drum" clapper idiophone from Vietnam.

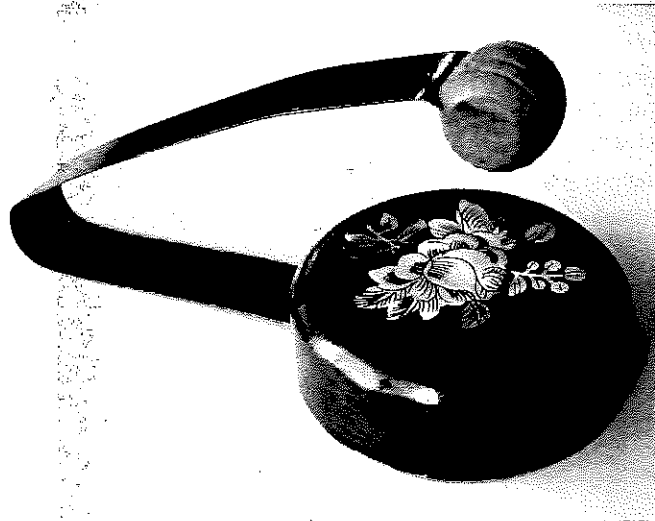
At My Tho, along one branch of Vietnam's *Cuu Long* ("Nine Dragons") making up the delta of the Maekhong (Mekong) River, the area where *nhac tai tu* flourishes



A southern Vietnamese *nhac tai thu* group performs at a festival in Ho Chi Minh City. From left to right: *dan nhi* (fiddle), *dan nguyet* (lute), singer with guitar behind, and *dan tranh* (zither) (Phong Nguyen)



A Vietnamese song *lang* clapper/slit drum. The small beater strikes the slit wooden gong to produce the "clicks" that articulate the rhythmic cycle in Vietnamese music (Phong Nguyen)



Vietnamese music is generated from a complex modal system. Each mode has its own set of pitches (basically five), a hierarchy of strong and weak tones, required ornamentation, and associated extra-musical meanings. In this way, the Vietnamese system resembles the *raga* system of South Asia more than music processes found in East Asia, even though East Asia is the source of Vietnamese instruments. Certain pitches in each of the Vietnamese modes are outside the Western tempered tuning system, giving Vietnamese music a piquant feeling for those accustomed to Western tuning.

Another aspect of Vietnamese music that relates to India is the use of a closed cycle of beats similar to the Indian *tala*; in Vietnam, the clicks of the *song lang* clapper articulate points in these cycles. Unlike the Indian cycle, however, but similar to the Thai cycle, the *final* beat is the most accented. Our example is organized in a four-beat cycle called *nhip tu*, and the *song lang* is struck on beats 3 and 4. It may be easier to feel and hear this cycle in sixteen beats instead of four, counting the clapper strikes on beats 12 and 16. Another distinctive feature of Vietnamese rhythm is its tendency toward rhythmic syncopation (i.e., toward shifting the accent to a weak beat in a measure).

The musicians in a *tai tu* ensemble all play the same fundamental melody but add different kinds of ornamentation typical of their instrument, resulting in the phonic structure called *heterophony*. Before the group begins playing the tune, it is customary for each musician, in succession, to improvise a short introduction in free rhythm. Improvisation of this sort is atypical of the rest of Southeast or East Asia, lending further credence to the view that Vietnamese culture, while deeply influenced by East Asia, sometimes exhibits traits more typical of South Asia where a freely rhythmic introduction is common in classical music performance.

## LISTENING GUIDE



CD 1.10 (1'37")

### Chapter 6: Site 2

### Vietnam: *Nhac Tai Tu* Amateur Chamber Music

Instruments: *Dan Kim* (plucked lute), *dan tranh* (plucked zither), *dan co* (bowed lute, i.e., fiddle), *song lang* (clapper idiophone)

TIME	LISTENING FOCUS
0'00"	<i>Dan tranh</i> (zither) enters with a freely rhythmic improvisation.
0'05"	<i>Dan kim</i> (lute) enters.
0'09	<i>Dan co</i> (fiddle) enters.
0'23"	<i>Song lang</i> (clapper) sounds to mark the transition to the composed/metered section of the performance.
0'24"	<i>Dan tranh</i> initiates composed section with a gradual increase in tempo.
0'26"	The <i>dan kim</i> and then the <i>dan co</i> reenter to affirm the basic pulse, but listen for the heavy use of syncopation.
0'28"	<i>Song lang</i> sounds on the third beat of the rhythmic cycle. Breaking the cycle down into sixteen subdivisions, the instrument marks the twelfth subdivision.
0'31"	<i>Song lang</i> sounds again on the fourth beat (sixteenth subdivision) to close the rhythmic cycle.
0'42"	Melodic instruments "close" the melody (i.e., reach a cadence) on the sixteenth beat of the cycle as the <i>song lang</i> sounds.

- 0'50" *Song lang* sounds on the third beat (twelfth subdivision).  
 0'53" *Song lang* sounds on the fourth beat (sixteenth subdivision).  
 1'03" Melodic line reaches a closing cadence again.  
 1'25" Closing cadence.  
 1'47" Closing cadence.  
 1'55" The example fades.

Source: "Xuan tinh (Spring Love)" performed by Nam Vinh, *dan kim*; Sau Xiu, *dan tranh*; and Muoi Phu, *dan co*; recorded by Terry E. Miller and Phong Nguyen. From *Vietnam: Mother Mountain and Father Sea*. White Cliffs Media WCM 1991 (6 CDs and 47 pp. book), 2003. Used by permission.

**ETHNO-CHALLENGE (CD 1.10):** Keep track of the *song lang* rhythmic cycle and clap on the beats where it sounds.

Cultural Considerations. Vietnam is, musically, an extremely complex country. The example used here, *tai tu*, is but one of many kinds of music that are essentially songs accompanied by a small instrumental ensemble. Some types of music were originally associated with court ceremonies in the former imperial capital, Hue; some are associated with rituals such as possession rites or funerals; and some, like *tai tu*, are still used simply for entertainment. Sophisticated poetry is much appreciated in Vietnam, and even though *tai tu* songs are "amateur," they are also refined.

It is difficult to divide Vietnamese music into categories such as "classical" and "folk," because the same repertory of tunes can be played in many different ways. A learned musician will most likely approach a given piece differently than a farmer would—but in fact many farmers are highly refined and skilled musicians. Within the span of a few days, the same musicians might be hired to play for a religious rite and a theater performance—and might also perform together for their own enjoyment. In fact, *tai tu* music was the basis for the music that accompanied the *cai luong* theater, a "popular" (i.e., commercial) genre created and cultivated in the south from around 1917 until its gradual decline in the 1990s in the face of competition from film and television.

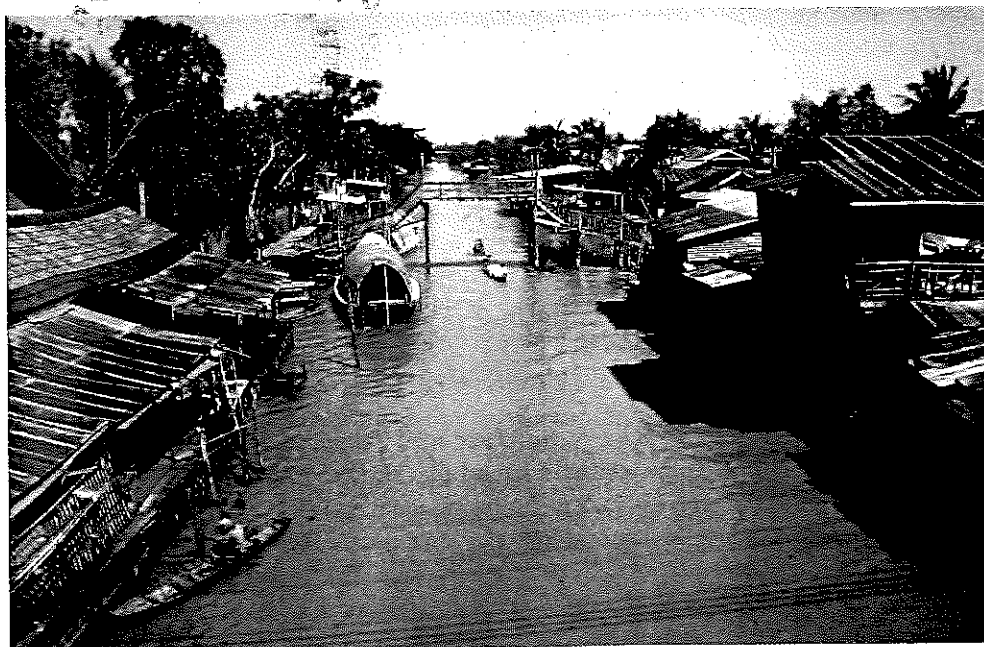
The challenge for visitors to Vietnam today is finding genuine "traditional" music as opposed to what is normally offered as such, what the Vietnamese call *cai bien* music and which can be translated as "neo-traditional." During the communist period from the 1950s until the 1990s, many northern Vietnamese studied in eastern Europe where they learned about the propaganda value of "folkloric" state troupes that presented modernized forms of old music, fully composed and rehearsed, that conveyed ideas of national solidarity and identity. Most returned as professors at the Hanoi Conservatory of Music, and there they created Vietnam's response to these ideas. They combined "improved" (i.e., modernized) versions of lowland Viet instruments with similarly altered versions of instruments from the Central Highlands and composed elaborate compositions making use of harmony, full orchestration, and having politically loaded titles. Although the promoters claimed the music

came from “the people,” in fact it came from European ideas of “socialist realism,” an aesthetic philosophy that uses music to influence people’s political thinking. Conservatories came to teach this style almost exclusively, and the current generation of students tends to believe that this is indeed Vietnam’s “traditional music.”

## Arrival: Thailand

Thailand has long been one of Southeast Asia’s favorite tourist destinations. For many years travelers entered the country through Bangkok’s Suvarnabhumi (pronounced *Suwannaphum*) Airport, but with the development of southern Thailand’s beaches and island resorts, quite a few fly directly to Phuket (pronounced Poo-ket) Island and skip Bangkok altogether. As beautiful as these islands are, they provide visitors with little of the country’s musical and artistic culture. Although going to Bangkok is obligatory for anyone wishing to experience Thai music, many visitors also travel to the northern region and its principal city, Chiangmai, where many tourist-oriented regional musical performances can be heard. Few travelers, however, make it to the northeast region, called Isan. Isan maintains a vibrant traditional culture, which, if somewhat modernized at times, remains an integral part of society and is not geared toward outsiders.

Bangkok is a busy, sprawling city famous for its gorgeous Buddhist temples, palaces, shopping, and, alas, world-class traffic jams. Tourists are still enticed to Thailand by colorful posters of small boats laden with produce and crafts on the *khlong* (canals), but if you want to see this “floating market” phenomenon, you must now travel southwest of Bangkok, where it is maintained both for tourists and for Thai. While old neighborhood open markets can still be found in many areas, the outlying and newer parts of Bangkok are served by gigantic



Old-fashioned *khlong* (canal) at Bang Khen east of Bangkok in 1972. The same area now is fully developed with high rises, the small boats replaced by fast, modern boats





malls and megastores that dwarf American Wal-Marts and attract throngs of shoppers, many from Japan and China who fly to the country specifically for this purpose.

The tourism authorities have in recent years promoted the slogan “Amazing Thailand.” What we find most amazing about Thailand is that, no matter how modern it seems, beneath the apparent development, commercialization, and Westernization is a “Thainess” that triumphs over all things imported or imposed. As you walk through one of Central Corporation’s many gigantic malls and observe thousands of ordinary Thai walking, shopping, eating, and generally relaxing in the air conditioning, understand that hidden within remains a Thai worldview that makes room for spirits alongside Toyotas, magic alongside the stock market, a faith in Buddhism alongside a job running computers, and a complex form of traditional “classical” Thai music alongside every imaginable form of popular music, both domestic and imported. Sometimes this clash can be maddening to a foreigner trying to figure out just what Thai culture is. While there is the appearance of modernization, democratization, and globalization through the Internet, there are also factors, such as the monarchy, Buddhism, village life, and age-old rituals (such as the “teacher greeting ceremony”), which connect even the most forward-looking Thai to the past and his/her culture.

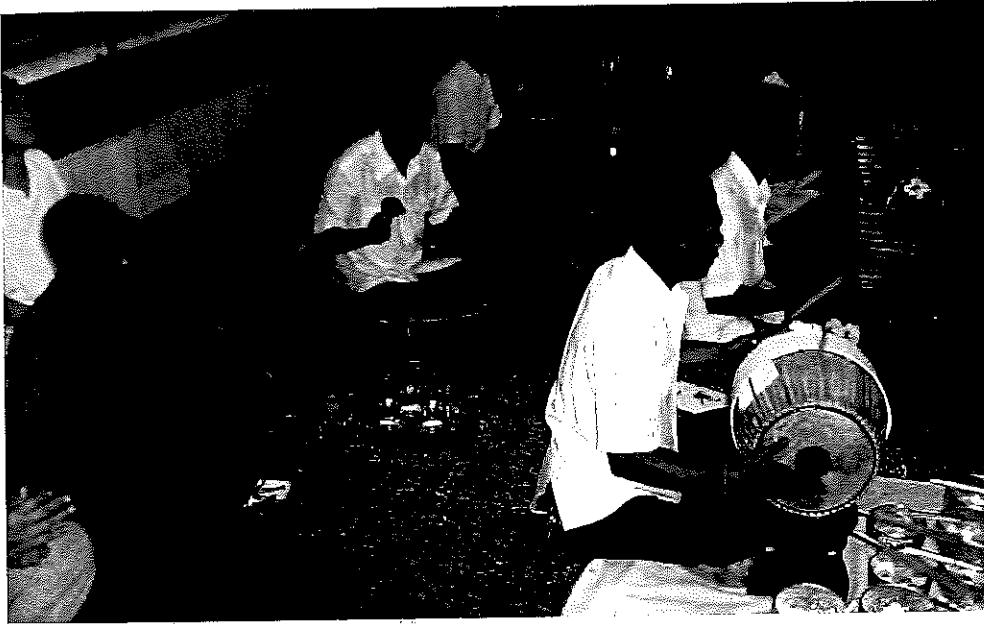
Traditionally, Thailand (or Siam, as it used to be called) was an absolute monarchy. Following the revolution in 1932, the monarchy lost political power, though it retains tremendous moral authority to this day. Thailand is now a constitutional monarchy with a revered royal family headed by King Bhumibol Adulyadej, Rama IX—who, incidentally, earlier aspired to become a jazz musician. Traditional music requires a context in which to thrive, and as much of that context (age-old rituals, old-style farming, close-knit villages, a slow pace of life, etc.) has diminished, some of the music and dance associated with it has disappeared or survived by moving to the stage. One thing that remains, however, is “classical” music. Though classical music was never popular with the masses, there is a general tendency to think of classical traditions, such as the *piphat*, as representing the essence of Thainess through music.

### Site 3: Classical *Piphat* Music

**PIPHAT**  
(pronounced  
*bee-paht*) A type of  
classical ensemble  
from Thailand  
characterized by the  
use of melodic and  
rhythmic percussion  
and a double-reed  
aerophone.

**First Impressions.** For many listeners new to world music, *piphat*, considered the main Thai classical court ensemble, may have to be appreciated as an acquired taste. The percussive timbre of the melodic instruments overlaid with a nasal aerophone play what seems to be a clamor of notes only held together by drums and some minimal percussion. After an initial listening, some elements will stand out, such as the regular ring of a small pair of cymbals and the predominance of a very active high-pitched xylophone. Several different melodies seem to overlap continuously in a sort of “organized chaos.”

**Aural Analysis.** Called *piphat mai khaeng* (“hard-mallet *piphat*”), this ensemble produces what is perhaps the most characteristic sound of Thai traditional music. Central Thai instruments are quite varied. They may include prominent wooden- or bamboo-keyed instruments played with mallets (higher and lower xylophones), circular frames of tuned metal gongs, bowed and plucked strings, flutes, double reeds, drums, and small rhythmic percussion. Although some of these have solo repertoires, Central Thai instruments are more characteristically found in ensembles. Three ensemble types predominate: (1) *piphat*, made



A *piphat* ensemble performs for a *wai khru* (teacher greeting ritual) at Bangkok's Thammasat University. From left clockwise: *pi* (double reed), *khawng wong yai* (large gong circle), *klawng thaj* (barrel drums), *ranat thum* (lower xylophone), *ranat ek* (higher xylophone), and *taphon* (horizontal drum).

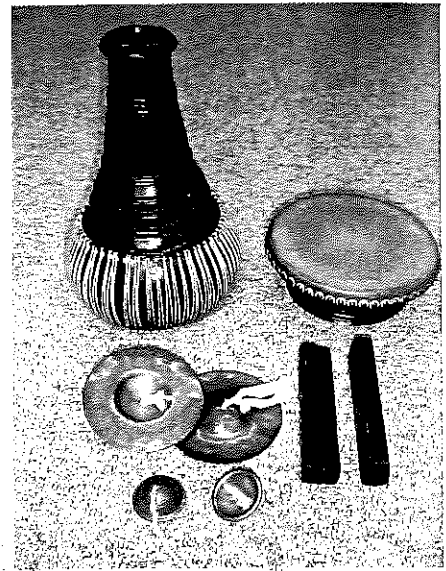
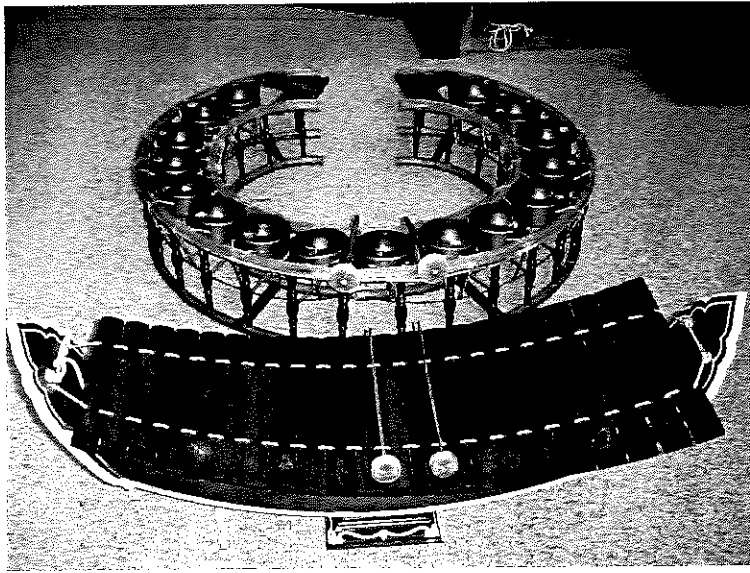
up of melodic and rhythmic percussion and the double reed (heard in this track); (2) *mahori*, consisting of melodic and rhythmic percussion, strings, and flute; and (3) *khruang sai*, consisting of strings and flute with minimal rhythmic percussion. Whereas the *piphat* primarily plays theater, dance drama, and ritual music, the other ensembles ordinarily play lighter, more entertaining and tuneful music.

*Piphat* ensembles require at least three melodic instruments and two rhythmic instruments but usually add to these. The lead instrument is a high-range xylophone (*ranat ek*) with twenty-one bars of either hardwood or bamboo suspended over a boat-shaped resonator. Although this instrument's performance is the most rhythmically dense, the lower circle of tuned gongs (*khawng wong yai*)—whose player sits in the middle of its round rattan frame—plays the fundamental form of the composition. In addition a full ensemble includes a lower-ranged xylophone (*ranat thum*) that plays a highly syncopated, even playful, version of the composition, plus a higher-ranged gong circle (*khawng wong lek*) that plays a highly embellished version of the main melody. The aerophone used in hard-mallet ensembles is a quadruple-reed oboe (aerophone) called *pi*, and its duty is to play a flexible, seemingly distinct, version of the same main melody. Although it works as a double reed, each half is folded, making it actually quadruple.

The Thai tuning system has seven equidistant tones in an octave in contrast to the European system of twelve equidistant pitches, meaning that some of its pitches can sound "out of tune" to non-Thai ears. This is not always obvious since within a given passage a melody will mostly employ a pentatonic scale of only five tones, in the form of 1, 2, 3, 5, 6. Because this kind of music sometimes shifts from one tonal center to another, it is possible to hear a total of six or even seven pitches used in a given composition, including those heard here.

Virtually all Thai music is in duple meter, which means it operates with groupings of two, four, or eight beats. Certain strong beats are articulated by a pair of small cup-shaped

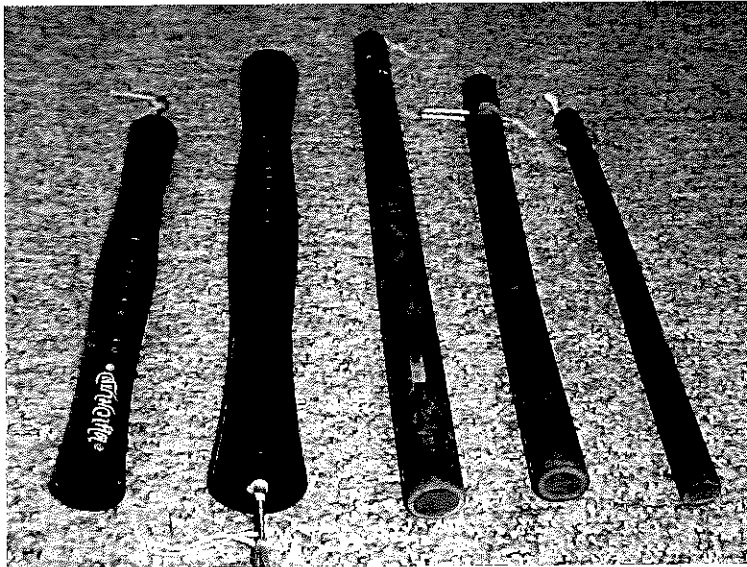
**PI**  
(pronounced *bee*)  
A double reed aerophone found in the *piphat* classical ensemble of Thailand.



(top left) *Khawng wong yai* (large gong circle) and *xanat ek* (higher xylophone)

(left) Left to right: two sizes of *pi* (double-reed aerophones), three sizes of *khui* (vertical flutes)

(top right) Left to right, rear: *thon* (goblet drum), *rammana* (frame drum); Left to right, front: *chapping lek* (larger cymbals), *chapping* (small cymbals), and *krap seph* (wood clappers)



#### CHING

A pair of cup-shaped cymbals from Thailand.

bronze cymbals, called *ching*, that are attached to each other with a string. The *ching* plays two strokes, the undamped (open) “ching” and the damped (closed) “chap.” Thai meter is organized cyclically, somewhat like an analog clock. The cycles of much of the repertory have four *ching* strokes (“ching-chap-ching-chap”), with the final stroke (“chap”) being accented. This means that Thai music is actually *end*-accented, making it the opposite of Western music generally, which accents beat 1. There are three relative rates of ching strokes, the slowest (called “third level” or *sam chan*), a medium rate twice as fast (called “second level” or *sawang chan*), and a fast rate twice as fast again (called “first level” or *chan dio*). These relationships are relative to the rhythmic density and not the absolute tempo. The

track included here consists of three separate compositions: the first (*Sathukan*) uses only “ching” strokes, the second (*Sathukan klawng*) alternates “ching” and “chap,” and the final one (*Rua*) returns to “ching” alone. There are two drums: 1) the *taphon*, a two-headed drum mounted horizontally on a stand, and 2) the *klawng that*, a pair of large barrel drums tilted at an angle toward the player.

The lower gong circle (*khawng wong yai*) is key to the organization of *piphat* music. It plays the simplest and least dense form of a given composition; its part has fewer notes—a lower rhythmic density—than the other instruments. Although it can be hard to hear, all of the other melodic instruments play idiomatic variants of the lower gong circle’s version. Thus, the phonic structure of Thai *piphat* music is best described as a kind of layered heterophony often referred to as *polyphonic stratification*—that is, a layering of simultaneous variants of the same melody.

All Thai music is composed, and the names of the composers are known for most compositions created after about 1800. Unlike Western composition, however, the composer writes nothing, for until the mid-twentieth century there was no notation system used in Thai music. The composer was also a musician and transmitted his creations to fellow ensemble members (or students) by playing the large gong circle version. The others then “realized” that structure into the particular idioms of their own instruments; all memorized the composition.

The track included here presents the first two compositions of a much longer suite played during the “Teacher Greeting Ritual” (*Pithi wai khru*) explained below. All are classified as “action tunes” (*phleng naphat*) because in addition to appearing in several different ritual suites they also accompany the masked drama (*khon*), dance drama (*lakhon*), and the large shadow puppet theater (*nang yai*). The first piece, “Sathukan” (meaning “Greeting” and referring to the Thai custom of greeting each other with hands in “prayer position”), like most “action tunes” is too old to have a known composer but is the opening piece played for all ritual suites and for many theatrical performances. Motivic rather than melodic, this work flows continuously without obvious phrasing, and its rhythmic structure is marked by continuous “ching” strokes. “Sathukan klawng” (meaning “Greeting the drum”) immediately follows. It is more clearly phrased, and the *ching* plays alternating “ching” and “chap” strokes. Completing the track is a short coda called “Rua” (referring to the tremolo technique used by the instruments to sustain pitches) which can be attached to many parts of the suite. It is non-metered, uses only “ching” strokes, and requires players to rapidly alternate the beaters to produce “tremolo.”

#### KHRU

A Thai teacher; the term is linguistically associated with the word *guru* in the Hindi language.

## LISTENING GUIDE



CD 1.11 (4'48")

## Chapter 6: Site 3

Thailand: Classical *Piphat* Music

Instruments: *Pi* (reed aerophone), *ranat ek* (high xylophone), *ranat thum* (low xylophone), *khawng wong yai* (gong circle), *daphon* (barrel drum)

TIME	LISTENING FOCUS
0'00"	<i>Daphon</i> (drum) initiates the performance. Listen for the contrasting high and low pitches of each drum face. Although it follows a cycle, the patterns played do not regularly repeat.
0'02"	<i>Ranat ek</i> (high xylophone) initiates the melodic content followed by the <i>pi</i> (reed aerophone) and remaining instruments. Listen for the higher range of pitches on the lead xylophone played in octaves and its busier rhythmic density in comparison to the other instruments. Also, note the "duck call" timbre of the <i>pi</i> that is quite prominent.
0'05"	Listen for the <i>ching</i> (small hand cymbals) entrance. Note there are no "chop" strokes during this section of the performance.
0'13"-0'14"	The heterophonic structure of Thai classical music makes it difficult to follow the melodic content. A good thing to focus on is the point at which the <i>khawng wong yai</i> reaches a cadence (closing phrase). Listen for the "ringing" timbre and thinner rhythmic density of this instrument, which provides the fundamental melody.
0'49"-0'55"	Listen for the <i>ranat thum</i> (low xylophone). This instrument is most difficult to hear, having a mellower timbre than the lead xylophone. Listen for its characteristic syncopations, broken octaves, and quick three-note ornamentations. Its melodic line frequently moves in a direction contrary to the other instruments.
1'16"-1'29"	Listen for the brief decrease in rhythmic density of the <i>pi</i> for twelve <i>ching</i> strokes as the ensemble moves toward a cadence point that quickly passes. Note how the <i>pi</i> (and other instruments) matches the ending pitch of the phrase at 1'29".
2'30"	Contrast the tempo at this point in the performance with the opening material. The tempo has increased significantly. (From roughly 84 beats per minute to about 104 by this point in the music.)
2'49"	Tempo slows dramatically at closing of opening section.
2'59"	Second section begins. Note the use of both "ching" and "chop" strokes with the <i>ching</i> . Also, note the increased activity of the <i>daphon</i> and clearer synchronization of the melodic instruments.
3'24"	Melody repeats.
3'45"	Tempo slows as ensemble reaches end of section.
3'51"	Third section begins. Note the ensemble plays in free rhythm to the end of the performance. Listen for the contrasting timbre and melodic style of each instrument.

Source: "Sathukan" and "Sathukan Klawng." Produced by The Committee of the College of Music Project, Mahidol University, Bangkok, Thailand, 1994.

**ETHNO-CHALLENGE (CD 1.11):** Match the basic rhythmic density of the *khawng wong yai* by tapping your hands on your book at each pitch. Listen again and match the rhythmic density of the *ranat ek* (lead xylophone), using both hands simultaneously from start to finish (as is the performance technique of the musician). An easier challenge is to listen to the example repeatedly following each instrument through the performance to note its unique realization of the fundamental melody.

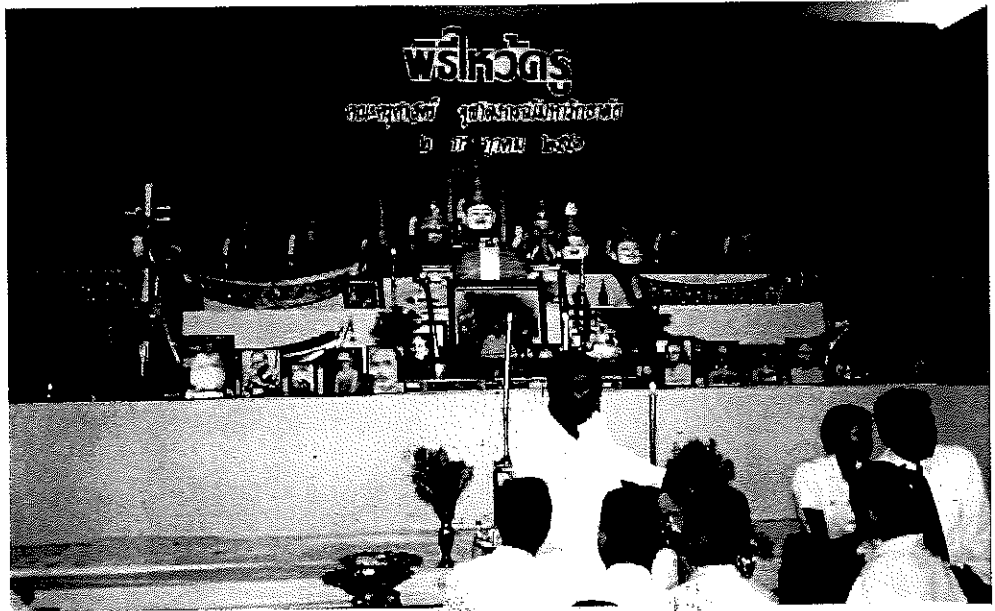
**Cultural Considerations.** During the heyday of the Thai monarchy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, classical music was generously patronized and played a major role in court ceremonies, both secular and Buddhist-related. As a consequence, Thai classical music is closely associated with the society's most important state occasions, festivals, and sacred rites of passage, such as ceremonies to honor teachers, ordinations, funerals, and certain Buddhist rituals. Perhaps we can say that Thai classical music as a sonic structure is mainly of interest to musicians; for others, it serves to engender positive feelings and to reaffirm Thai cultural identity. Although relatively few Thai choose classical music for general listening, there is a broad consensus that classical music best represents the country and its traditional culture.

In Thai society, the acts of teaching and learning, of passing on and receiving knowledge, are considered near sacred, and one honors not just the present-day living teacher, but that person's entire lineage leading back to the ultimate sources of knowledge, the pantheon of gods drawn from animism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Before a master can begin transmitting knowledge to a student, the latter must perform a ritual "teacher greeting ceremony" or *phithi* (pronounced *pee-tee*) *wai khru*, the last word being the Thai pronunciation of the well-known Indian term *guru*. Simple *wai khru* ceremonies are performed at schools in which students simply reaffirm their allegiance to all their teachers, but for classical musicians and other such artists the teacher greeting ceremony is one of the most important rituals of their life.



A *piphat* ensemble using a pair of *klawng khaek* drums (in front) performs at a festival to honor a great teacher near Bangkok, Thailand

A teacher initiates new students of Thai music at the annual *wai khru* "teacher greeting" ceremony at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University (Andrew Shahriari)



A *wai khru* ceremony requires an elaborate altar area containing tables covered with many kinds of food, finely crafted objects, theatrical masks of the deities, and a full set of musical instruments, many being newly made in order to receive blessing during the ritual. A male ritualist intones sacred words in a mix of Thai and Pali, the latter being the sacred language of Thai Buddhism. The *piphai* ensemble performs several pieces throughout the ceremony—which concludes when the ritualist marks the forehead of each student and musician with ashes and places a small cone made of banana leaf behind one of their ears. If a student has not studied before, they are given a ritual first lesson on the large gong circle or, for young children, a lesson on playing the small *ching* cymbals.

Although few non-musicians normally experience Thai classical music except in passing or as background to rituals and ceremonies, such as the *wai khru*, general attention to serious *piphai* music became widespread after the release in 2004 of Itthisoonporn Vichailak's hit film titled *Homrong* (The Overture), now available with English subtitles. A partially fictional life story of Luang Phradit Phairoh (1881–1954), Thailand's most famous composer, the film includes extended footage of classical music performed both solo and in ensemble, climaxing with a dramatic contest between the protagonist and his chief rival, Khun In, the latter played by an actual master musician. Musically, it is accurate in most details and recommended as an introduction to Thai music and culture.

## Arrival: Laos and Northeast Thailand

Various historical events, including the European colonization of much of Southeast Asia, led to the Lao people being separated into two areas. Currently, only about five million live in sparsely populated Laos north and east of the mighty Maekhong River, while approximately thirteen million live in the northeast region of Thailand. The people of both countries

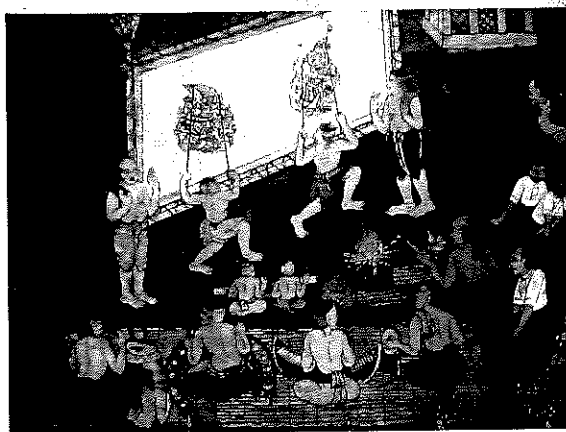


## Explore More

### The *Ramayana*: An Indian Epic from a Southeast Asian Perspective

One of the great epics of world literature is the *Ramayana*, a story based on Hindu mythology and believed to be more than 3,000 years old. Originating in India, this tale spread throughout much of South and Southeast Asia and is fundamental to understanding many elements of the cultures of the region. The *Ramayana*'s influence has been profound. Social and moral codes exemplified in the stories and characters of the *Ramayana* shaped political structures, city planning, marriage customs, and basic human interaction for centuries. Indeed, the present king of Thailand is known as Rama IX, after the *Ramayana*'s main character.

Scenes found in the *Ramayana* inspire much artistic activity in Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and Indonesia, as well as Thailand. In the visual arts, dance, and music. In Thailand, where the story is called *Ramakian*, the most important classical genre of entertainment, known as *Khon*, is based on this work.



Mural scene from the epic *Ramakian* at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok. The performance scene shows a *piphat* ensemble and the large shadow puppets that actually depict the *Ramakian* story



Scene from a *khon* masked dance performance of the *Ramakian*, Thailand's version of the Indian epic *Ramayana*, at the Siam Society. Rama (right) with the "good" demon Pipek (rear), Rama's brother, Lakshmana (left), and fallen monkey warrior, Sukreep.

Performed monthly at the National Theater in Bangkok, *Khon* features masked dancers who enact a different scene from the epic with each performance to the accompaniment of a *piphat* ensemble. The dancers do not speak while on stage; rather, a vocalist chants/sings the story as the actors mime the epic's best-known scenes. *Khon* has become symbolic of the arts in Thailand; it is performed by students and professional performers in tourist shows, school plays, and television broadcasts, as well as in festivals and other cultural programs overseas.

Although countless variations exist, the basic storyline of the *Ramayana* is as follows: Prince Rama, an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu, retreats to the forest at his father's request for several years accompanied by his wife, Sita, and brother, Lakshmana. During his exile, Sita is kidnapped by the evil demon Ravana (Totsakan in the Thai version) after the two brothers are lured from her protection by a golden deer. Ravana takes Sita to his island fortress, Lanka, where he tries to persuade her to marry him, but she refuses as she is loyal to her husband and confident in her rescue. During her capture, Sita drops a clue for a watching band of monkeys



who aid Rama in rescuing his wife. Key among these characters is Hanuman, the white monkey god who has many supernatural powers. Hanuman's adventures are numerous as he searches for Sita. He eventually discovers where Sita is imprisoned and returns to Rama to aid in a great battle with Ravana's demons. Allied with the monkeys and bears of the forest, Rama defeats Ravana's demon army, kills Ravana, and rescues the princess.

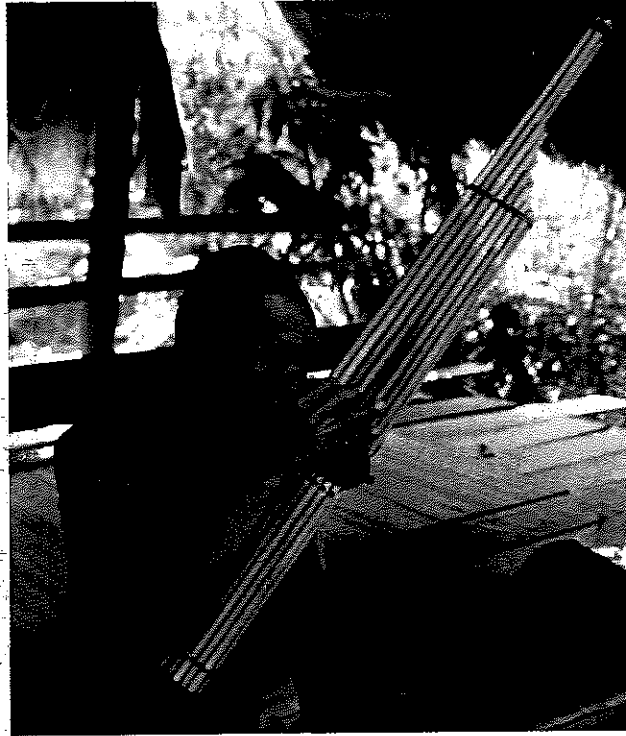
The conclusion of the story varies depending on the region. In the Indian version, Rama and Sita return to his kingdom together, but rumors casting doubt on Sita's fidelity while imprisoned force her to undergo a trial by fire to prove her loyalty. Although she passes the test, Rama still exiles her to prevent his rule from being undermined by rumors that continue to persist. In the Thai version, Rama and Sita are reunited after the trial by fire and live happily ever after.

share a common language, cuisine, literature, and traditional way of life, but the two populations are also now quite different due to their political separation. Until the 1970s both areas where the Lao people are concentrated were equally undeveloped: Laos was a French colony until 1949 with no modern infrastructure while the northeast of Thailand was that country's most neglected region. After 1975, when the Royal Lao government fell to the communist Pathet Lao, Laos went backward economically and is only now beginning to recover, whereas Northeast Thailand's level of development was raised dramatically by Thailand's booming economy and the government's new attention to the region after the 1970s. Indeed, the northeast now includes two of Thailand's largest cities—Khon Kaen and Nakhon Ratchasima (known also as Khorat).

Of the six million plus people in Laos, a significant number live in the uplands—which account for much of the country's terrain—and speak non-Lao languages. The ethnic Lao live in the lowland areas, primarily along the Maekhong and its tributaries. Because the Lao are primarily farmers, growing glutinous (also called sticky) rice in wet paddy fields, the cities are small and economically dominated by Vietnamese and Chinese. Vientiane, the capital, has only about 700,000 residents. With infrastructure being so underdeveloped, Lao culture has developed regionally, giving rise to more than a dozen local musical styles. Northeast Thailand, commonly known as *Isan*, is primarily a flat plateau, and although subject to dramatic variations in weather—drought to flood—facilitates easier travel. With modern development has come the growth of the media and the rise of a vibrant popular music culture drawn from its traditional music. While the people of both Isan and Laos share the same cultural roots, those of Isan are strongly oriented toward Bangkok and the dominant culture. Since World War II great numbers of young Isan people have migrated to Bangkok seeking employment in factories, in construction, as maids, and as taxi drivers, bringing with them their vibrant culture. Earlier looked down upon as inferior and rustic, Isan culture is now viewed positively, and its attractive music (along with its food) was a principal reason.

Music in Isan includes both old-fashioned forms and many newer ones—including pop songs featuring troupes of dancing women, a rock combo, and bright lights. Even the modern types often appear in a traditional context, however, such as a Buddhist or New Year's festival. Our audio example exemplifies an older form of traditional singing that was popular until the 1990s, when it was eclipsed by more modern styles, but people today continue to honor this style by showcasing it at cultural events.

**ISAN**  
(pronounced  
*ee-sahn*) A term  
referring to  
Northeast Thailand  
and its regional  
culture, including  
music.



Mr. Ken Somjindah plays the northeastern Thai *khaen* with sixteen pipes in See-Kaao village, Roi-et province

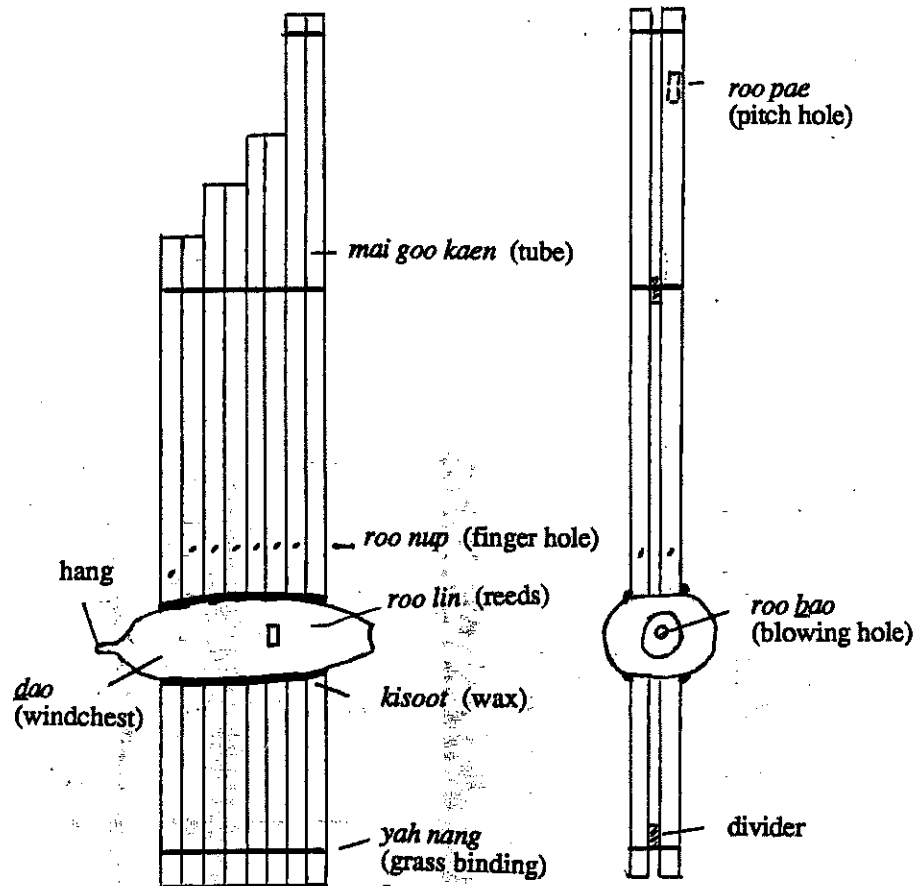
#### Site 4: Lam Klawn Repartee Singing

**First Impressions.** Many first-time listeners will find the sound of the instrument heard in *lam klawn*, known as the *khaen*, relatively familiar, likening it to a harmonica or an organ. The instrument seems to play harmony, a musical concept usually reserved for European-inspired traditions. The two vocalists—one male, one female—have a slightly nasal quality and often seem to be speaking their lyrics between extended melismatic phrases. As the music moves into a more regular rhythm, their performance seems like a Southeast Asian “freestyle rap” more than melodic singing.

**Aural Analysis.** Musically, what defines a Lao is playing the *khaen*, the culture’s most significant instrument. The *khaen* is a free-reed bamboo mouth organ ranging in length from about 23 inches (0.6 meter) to more than 3 feet (one meter). It has sixteen thin bamboo tubes fitted into a carved, hardwood windchest with the pipes wrapped at three points with a kind of wide, dried grass. Each bamboo tube has a small, rectangular hole cut into its wall fitted with a thin plate of copper-silver alloy into which is cut a three-sided tongue, the “reed” (technically, a “free reed”) that produces the sound as it vibrates. With the reeds sealed inside the windchest by a black insect wax, the reed tongue vibrates up and down when the player either inhales or exhales through the windchest. Each tube has a finger hole, and its reed only sounds when the finger hole is covered. Since many finger holes can be covered at once, the *khaen* is capable of clusters of pitches which form sounds analogous to Western chords, that is, harmony.

**KHAEN**  
A bamboo free-reed mouth organ from Northeast Thailand and Laos.

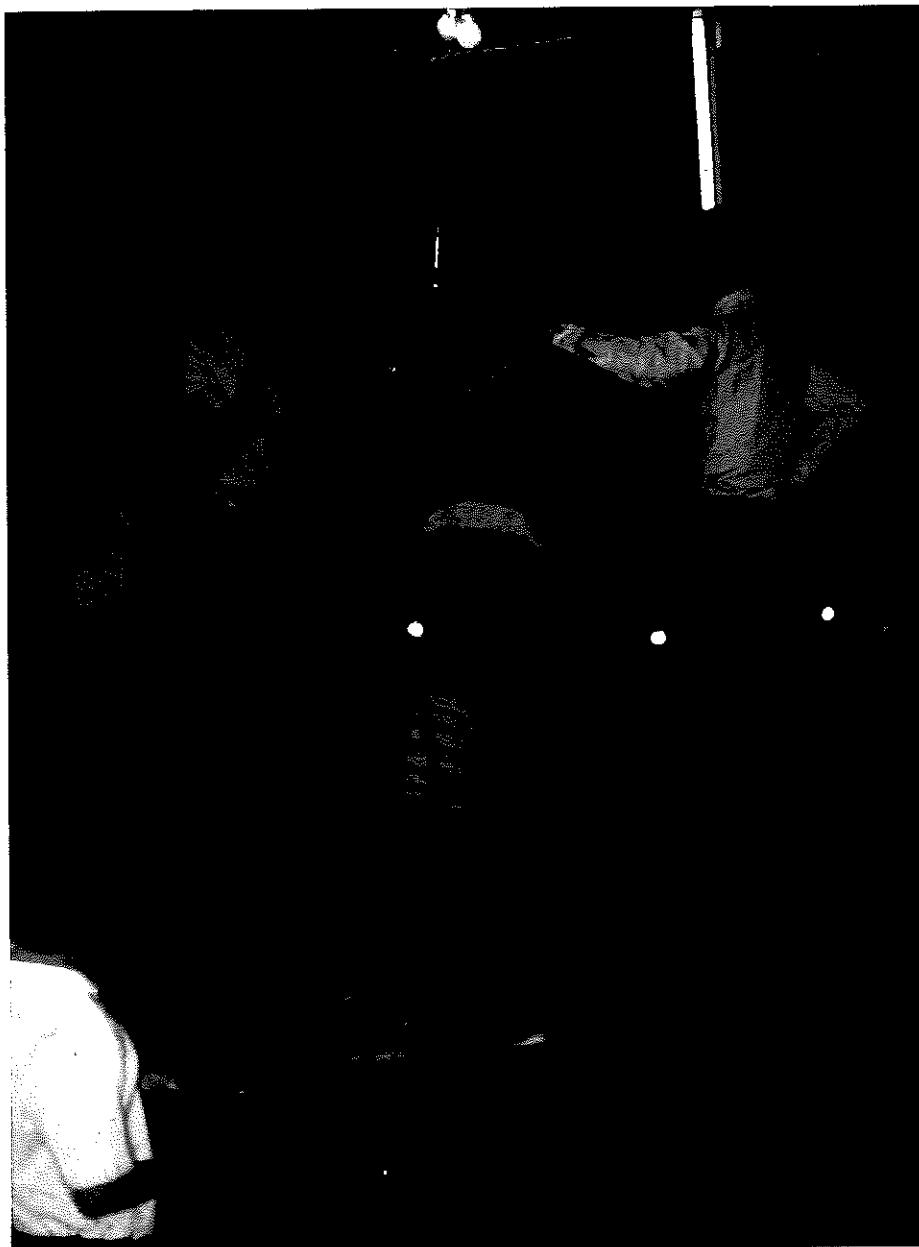
The *khaen* shown in side view and front view with parts labeled.



Isan singers perform *lam*, a kind of singing in which the melody is generated according to a basic pattern coordinated with the lexical tones of the words. (Lao and Thai are tonal languages, meaning that each syllable has, in addition to consonants and vowels, a tonal inflection. Without this inflection, the word's meaning may be unclear or erroneous.) The language is Lao as spoken in Northeast Thailand, which has six tones. The term *maw* denotes someone with a skill, and thus a singer is a *mawlam* and a *khaen* player is a *mawkhaen*. There are numerous genres of *lam* among the Lao; the one heard here is performed by a pair of singers—one male and one female—and is called *lam klawn* (poetry singing) or *lam khu* (pair singing). Although *lam klawn* has lost much of its popularity in the last twenty years as several modernized genres of *lam* have become the rage among the younger generation, it is still performed for special events and embodies Isan-Lao traditions better than any other form.

An old-fashioned traditional performance of *lam* begins around 9.00 p.m. and continues to nearly 6.00 a.m. The performance takes place on a temporary stage, and the singers and *khaen*-players stand to perform. When the male is singing, the female usually performs a simple but graceful dance, and vice versa. The performance proceeds in three sections, the first lasting most of the night. Called *lam thang san* (literally "short-way singing"), this first

**LAM KLAWN**  
(pronounced *lum glawn*) Vocal repartee with *khaen* accompaniment from Northeast Thailand.



A female *mawlam* singer, accompanied by *khaen*, performs on a small temporary stage at a Northeast Thai Buddhist temple in Mahasarakham, Thailand. Her male counterpart dances next to her.

section consists of the male and female vocalists singing in alternation (known as a "repartee"), each beginning a section with an unmeasured introduction, usually on the phrase, "*O la naw*," followed by the main poem in meter. The scale is pentatonic and could be described as C, D, E, G, A (or 1, 2, 3, 5, 6), with C (1) as the "home" pitch. The meter is always duple. Singers memorize vast amounts of poetry, all written in four-line stanzas with a rhyme scheme peculiar to Lao poetry. The example here represents the beginning of *lam thang san* for both male and female singers.

## LISTENING GUIDE



CD 1.12 (3'07")

## Chapter 6: Site 4

Thailand: *Lam Klawn* Repartee Singing

Vocals: Single male, single female

Instruments: *Khaen* (free-reed aerophone, i.e., mouth organ)

TIME	LISTENING FOCUS
0'00"	<i>Khaen</i> enters with improvisatory free rhythm. Listen for the three musical elements of drone, chord accompaniment (polyphony), and melody.
0'04"	Male vocalist enters with improvisatory free rhythm on a single non-lexical syllable ("O"), using a three-pitch melodic line to establish the tonal center.
0'14"	Vocalist continues improvisation with extended melismatic phrase, " <i>O la naw</i> ."
0'30"	Vocalist introduces some poetic verse while the <i>khaen</i> continues to play in free rhythm.
0'55"	Melismatic improvisation on the phrase " <i>O la naw</i> ," again with a brief verse to close the phrase.
1'14"	Vocalist transitions to the metered section with poetic verse.
1'19"	<i>Khaen</i> follows the vocalist with duple-metered performance and regular melodic content.
1'46"	Example briefly fades. Normally, the male vocalist sings for several minutes before the female vocalist enters.
1'48"	<i>Khaen</i> enters with improvisatory free rhythm. Listen for the change in mode (i.e., the pitches utilized).
1'53"	Female vocalist enters with melismatic improvisation on the phrase " <i>O la naw</i> ," sung in free rhythm.
2'07"	Vocalist introduces some poetic verse while the <i>khaen</i> continues to play in free rhythm.
2'27"	Melismatic improvisation on the words " <i>O la naw</i> ," again with a brief verse to close the phrase.
2'44"	Vocalist transitions to the metered section with poetic verse.
2'48"	<i>Khaen</i> follows the vocalist with duple-metered performance and regular melodic content.
3'00"	Example fades, though the female vocal section would normally continue for several minutes.

Source: "Lam thang san" (excerpts), sung by Saman Hongsa (male) and Ubon Hongsa (female), and played by Thawi Sidamni, *khaen*; recorded by Terry E. Miller in Mahasarakham, Thailand, 1988.

**ETHNO-CHALLENGE (CD 1.12):** Learn the melismatic style of the vocalists by matching the introductory phrases ("*O la naw*"). Clap the beat during the metered sections of the performance.

Cultural Considerations. There is a saying about the Lao people: if a man lives in a house on stilts, eats sticky rice, and plays the *khaen*, he is a Lao. Traditionally, the Thai, Lao, Khmer, Burmese, and even Malay lived in houses built on stilts, partly for protection, partly to provide a shelter for their animals beneath. Sticky, or glutinous, rice, however, is peculiar to the Lao; the rest of Asia eats ordinary rice.

*Lam klawn* is not merely entertainment, even though it can be highly enjoyable. While a performance often takes the form of an imaginary courtship between the singers, and can involve earthy double entendres, it also addresses many essential aspects of Lao life. The vocalists often “discuss” or debate (in sung verse) matters of history, religion, literature, politics, geography, etiquette, and excerpts of famous stories, sometimes, but not always, offering listeners a model of approved thinking and behavior. Here is a typical example of love poetry, sung by a female:

*O la naw* [introductory words without meaning] You are a handsome one. Please divorce your wife and then marry me. I will also divorce my husband and we will marry each other; can you? *O la naw*, you are a handsome man. One day I looked at the stars in the clear night and found the moon and many stars. But for myself, I could find no one.

(Translation by Jarernchai Chonpairot)

As recently as the 1980s, *lam* was enjoyed by people of all ages throughout Northeast Thailand. Before Northeast Thai villages acquired electricity, entertainment was scarce, and everyone availed themselves of the chance to hear live music. In Laos the old days remain because there has been less development; the situation there remains much as it was in Isan thirty years ago. In Northeast Thailand, *lam* was most often heard during the cool or warm dry seasons (November to April), in conjunction with various events including monk ordinations, Buddhist festivals, the New Year (Western, Chinese, and Thai), an annual temple fair, and even funerals. People gathered and sat on the ground around the stage, which was open on four sides and the grounds were flanked by vendors selling snacks. As the *lam* performance progressed without breaks, audience members ate, slept, snacked, wandered off, flirted, or gossiped.

This form of *lam* lost popularity in the later 1980s as electricity—and thus radio and television—became widespread, and as a type of popular song called *luk thung* (see Site 5) became the rage. *Lam* singers fought back, creating a new fast-paced, popularized, brightly lit genre called *lam sing* (*sing* meaning “racing” or anything that is fast). *Lam sing* and other modernized genres have since swept Northeast Thailand, although they have barely penetrated Laos. Because there are so many Isan people living and working in Bangkok, *lam sing* and its related genres have also become well known there and throughout Thailand. As a result, Isan music in particular and Isan culture (and food) in general have become popular. Even McDonalds in Thailand for a period offered the now famous Isan green papaya salad called *somtām*.

LAM SING  
(pronounced *lum*  
*sing*) A popular  
music form from  
Northeast Thailand.

## Site 5: *Luk Thung* popular song

First Impressions. As the song starts, it sounds vaguely like the *lam* poetic verse heard in the previous track. But with the addition of drums, other instruments, and harmony this

The three most common musical instruments of Northeast Thailand, left to right: *saw pip* (fiddle), *phin* (lute), and *khaen* (free-reed mouth organ)

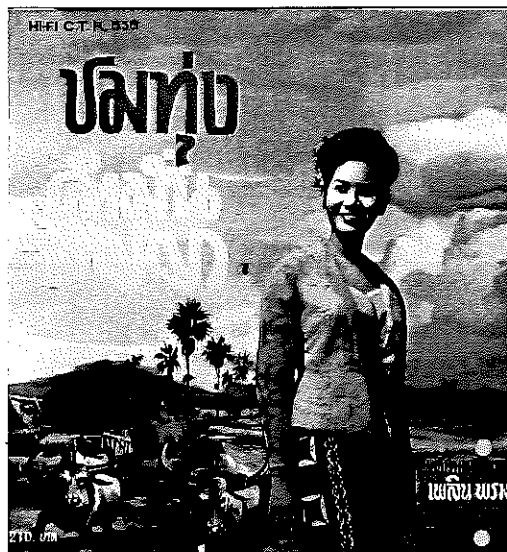


suggests popular song with an attractive, danceable beat. Those who are accustomed to current forms of American popular music may find this style old-fashioned and folk, but it is among the most attractive of current pop styles in Thailand, especially among people living in or from the northeast region.

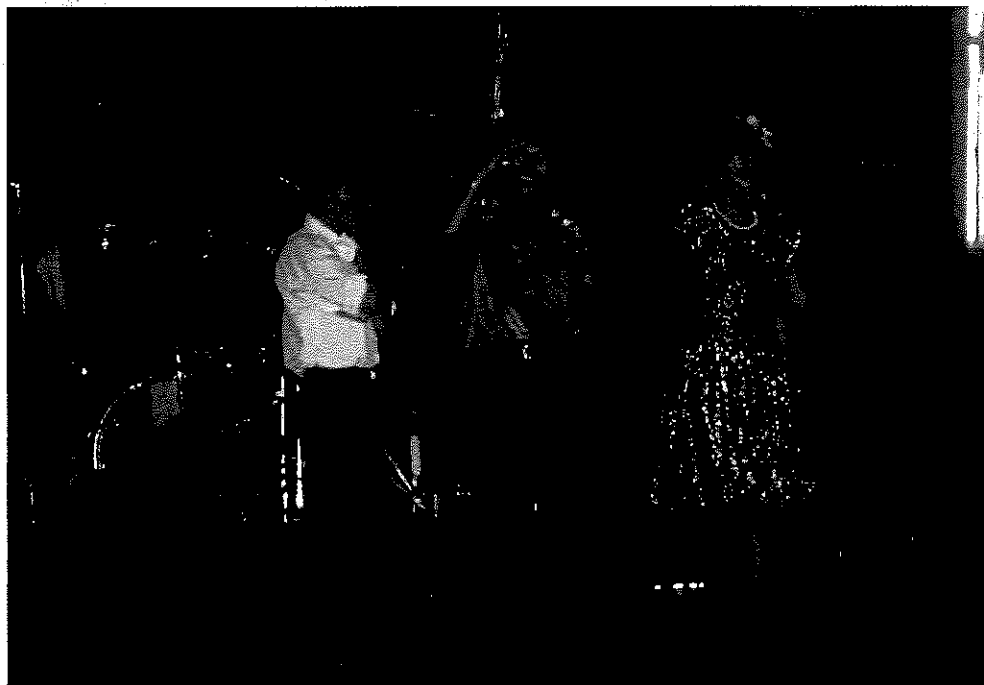
**PHIN**  
(pronounced *pin*)  
A fretted, plucked  
lute from Northeast  
Thailand.

**Aural Analysis.** Melodically, the accompaniment stays close to the traditional style of the *khaen* mouth organ heard in the previous track but here it is played by an electric guitar. During the later 1980s, when this song first appeared, musicians had not yet adapted the traditional plucked lute of the northeast, the *phin*, into a useable electric form, but the guitar heard in this track clearly imitates the style of the *phin*. Accompaniment is provided by a basic rock combo that includes a keyboard synthesizer, electric bass, and drum set. The scale form heard is pentatonic but unlike that of the *lam* in the previous track. Here it sounds minor, having the pitches A, C, D, E, and G, with A as the “home” pitch; sometimes it also uses pitch B in passing.

The song’s title, “Sao Jan Kang Kop,” translates as “Miss Chan’s Broken Heart.” It was released in 1986 by male singer Phawnsak Sawng-saeng (b. 1960) who was born and raised in Isan’s Khon Kaen province. Beginning in 1981 with three albums of *luk thung isan* songs—country songs that used the Isan language but little of any local style—he switched to the new *mawlam* style for this album. Because *luk thung mawlam* remains immensely popular, Phawnsak’s popularity has held over a long period as well, and this song retains its popularity today. While the title suggests a broken heart, *kangkop* literally means “to shade one’s eyes,” referring to the female protagonist constantly looking into the distance for her



Two "classic" *luk thung* covers: (left) Four *luk thung* artists, one holding the *khaen* mouth organ as a reminder of *luk thung*'s connections to traditional northeast Thai music; (right) scene of traditionally dressed singer with drawing of old fashioned village and water buffalos



*Luk thung* pop songs are part of the performance of *lam sing*, a modernized form of the traditional *lam klawn* repartee. This performance took place on a temporary village stage on New Year's Eve southwest of Mahasarakham, Thailand

Bangkok lover, who broke his promises to follow her back to Isan. The lyrics imply that she was too easy in giving in to the demands of her selfish boyfriend who left her without saying "good bye" after exploiting her. She constantly looks into the distance, searching for him. The singer, however, speaks as a local village boy who did his best to warn her of the dangers of Bangkok, of city people, and especially of central Thai. He says "I warned you but you never listened to me. Instead you got mad at me. Now, see! You deserve what happened."



Most of the lyrics are in Isan dialect (actually Lao) and set to a flexible version of a traditional melody called *lam toei phama*, literally "Burmese toei." About halfway through, however, the style changes abruptly to a typical *luk thung* melody similar to such tunes found throughout Thailand. Even within the *toei* sections, however, the singer switches between central Thai and northeast Thai several times. After the pop melody, he returns to the *toei* melody before repeating both sections.

## LISTENING GUIDE



CD 1.13 (3'17")

### Chapter 6: Site 5

### Thailand (Northeast): *Luk Thung* Popular Song

Voice: Single male

Instruments: Electric *phin* (plucked lute), keyboard synthesizer, electric bass, rock drum set with *klawng fifa* (electric drums), *chab lek* (cymbals)

TIME	LISTENING FOCUS
0'00"	(Intro section) Drum set, electric bass, and synthesizer begin with a steady beat in common meter. Listen for the melodic shift of the synthesizer (0'10").
0'17"	(A section, "toei") Electric <i>phin</i> enters followed by the vocalist who sings in the Central Thai language. The text setting is syllabic and the rhythmic density of the voice in this section is thick in comparison to the B section (below). Note also that the synthesizer sustains a single pitch to provide a strong tonal center.
0'40"	(A section) Section repeats with different lyrics sung in the Isan language.
1'12"	(B section, "luk thung") The rhythmic density of the voice lessens and is more melodic. The lyrics are again sung in the Central Thai language. Note the synthesizer plays a complementary melodic line.
1'40"	A section returns with the lyrics sung in the Isan language.
2'05"	B section returns with the lyrics sung in the Central Thai language.
2'32"	A section returns with the lyrics sung in the Isan language.
2'59"	(Outro section) Opening content returns to finish the performance.

Source: "Sao Jan Kang Kop" sung by Phawnsak Sawng-saeng, from *Sao Jan Kang Kop*, JKC Marketing Co., Ltd, JKC-CD 157 (nd), used with permission.

**ETHNO-CHALLENGE (CD 1.13):** Investigate *Luk Thung* artists and popular music from Thailand via the Internet to find the karaoke video associated with this example.

Cultural Considerations. Thai popular music developed out of the ballroom dance music that began to be created in the 1940s by the Sutaraphon Band. With their sophisticated poetic texts, these songs came to be called *luk krung*, literally “children of the city.” During the 1950s some composers began creating songs with poetry that commented on the lives of the working people, both farmers and city people, using more direct and casual words. These were first called *phleng talat* (“market songs”) but later came to be called *phleng luk thung* (“children of the fields”). Today outsiders call these “country songs,” and in many ways the suggestion of Nashville is justified. But while country songs originated in central Thailand, especially in Bangkok, the present track comes from the northeast, culturally Lao but now referred to as Isan. Because this song shows a clear relationship with traditional *mawlam*, it is a *luk thung mawlam*, the current favorite among both immigrants from Isan living in Bangkok and back home in the villages and towns of the northeast. Some of the artists singing these started in traditional *lam* but crossed over into *luk thung*.

*Luk thung* songs have no clear point of origin, but their predecessors, found from the 1940s onward, were those Thai popular songs (called *phleng sakon*, “modern songs”) that had less-sophisticated texts and often commented on the lives of common working people, including farmers. Like the “city songs” with their sophisticated poetry, many were in ballroom dance tempo, especially cha-cha-cha and rumba. Others derived from the music for a Thai couple dance called *ramwong* (“circle dance”), which had its origins in the 1940s. They differed in that *ramwong* songs were accompanied by small percussion only—principally a small clay drum—while *luk thung* used melodic instruments as well.

During the later 1960s and early 1970s singers took traditional regional styles from the north, south, and northeast and began infusing them with local elements. Besides the usual combo instruments—drums, electric guitar, and, later, keyboard—some added regional instruments; whether present or not, composers imitated the styles of local instruments. Many *luk thung* singers had a background in traditional genres and crossed over when it became apparent there was money to be made. *Luk thung* from the north and south, however, declined in popularity, while those from the northeast became increasingly favored, eventually coming to dominate the Thai media in the 1980s. This process snowballed because tens of thousands of northerners had been migrating to Bangkok over the years as Thailand developed into an “Asian Tiger” economy. These economic refugees, many of whom became relatively prosperous, became a natural market for all manner of *luk thung*-related media products and events. These included *luk thung* movies, live *luk thung* shows, and, of course, *luk thung* cassettes, CDs and VCDs. Get into most any taxi in Bangkok and you will hear northeast *luk thung* songs on the radio or on cassette, because most taxi drivers come from the northeast. Go into the servant’s quarters of an upper-class house or into factories and you will encounter them as well.

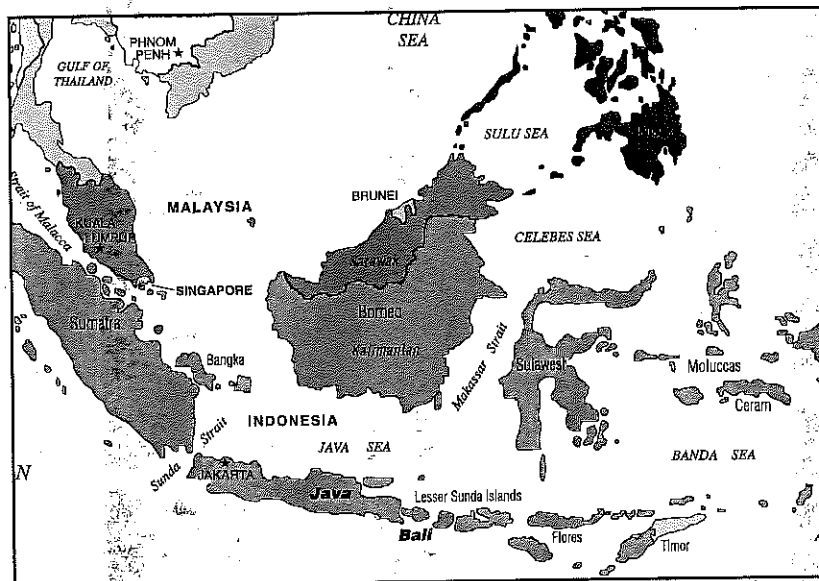
Each stanza of the song includes a switch from the Lao language of the Northeast (called *Isan*) to Central Thai. When this song first appeared, the Central Thai still looked down on Northeasterners, seeing them as country bumpkins. By singing part of the song in Central Thai, the singer demonstrates that he is bilingual and therefore “respectable.” By the advent of the twenty-first century attitudes had changed, and it is now “respectable” to sing in the Isan language alone.

*Luk thung* has given rise to star singers who, in spite of the sparseness in which they grew up, have become quite wealthy singing songs that express the feelings and lives of their compatriots. Early favorites who solidified the style in central Thailand include the late

female singer Pompuang Duangjan and the late male singer Suraphon Sombatjalern. Today there are too many *luk thung* singers to mention, some making recordings and being heard throughout the land, others singing their songs in local restaurants and clubs in gritty upcountry towns. *Luk thung* shows nearly superseded traditional *mawlam* by the late 1980s, and traditional performers, because they receive little government support even as honored "culture carriers," had to change in order to stay in business. The traditional theater genres of Isan adopted *luk thung* songs into their format, as did the *lam klawn* form, with its alternating male and female singers. Because Isan was producing the most popular type of music in Thailand, many people in the other regions modified their thinking of Isan as a backwater full of poor rice farmers and came to see it instead as a hotbed of stylish young musicians.

## INDONESIA

### Arrival: Indonesia (Java and Bali)



Map of Indonesia.  
Note locals of Java  
and Bali

Indonesia, the largest archipelago in the world, consists of more than 13,000 islands created by centuries of volcanic activity, which continues to this day, sometimes resulting in devastating tsunamis that engulf coastal areas. Though many of these islands are uninhabited, the larger islands, especially Sumatra and Java, are densely populated, making Indonesia the world's largest Muslim nation with 240 million people. The first-time visitor will be struck immediately by the extreme heat and humidity, due to Indonesia's position on the equator and its sea-level elevation. Tropical rainforests, which have suffered extensive deforestation, are found in many of the areas, along with mist-shrouded mountains and volcanoes, white sand beaches with spectacular offshore underwater reefs, colorful flowers, and unique wildlife on less-populated islands, such as orangutans. The heavy annual rainfall helps support an agricultural system largely based on wet rice cultivation, which together with seafaring activity provides the mainstays of Indonesian cuisine.



Dancers at the Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia (College of Indonesian Dance) in Yogyakarta, Java, Indonesia, perform a refined court dance. (R. Anderson/Sutton)

Indonesia recognizes several religions: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and a variety of animistic traditions, each with their own varied cultural activities. Throughout the main islands of Java and Sumatra, Islam gave rise to the courts of the sultans who were the traditional patrons of the arts. Bali, however, preserves an even richer tradition of music, dance, and theater associated with the Hinduism that makes the tiny island so distinctive. Though there are over 300 languages spoken throughout the islands, the national language is Bahasa Indonesia, an Austronesian language common throughout the region and Malay peninsula. English is widely spoken as well in areas frequented by tourists, but the colonial language, Dutch, has virtually disappeared.

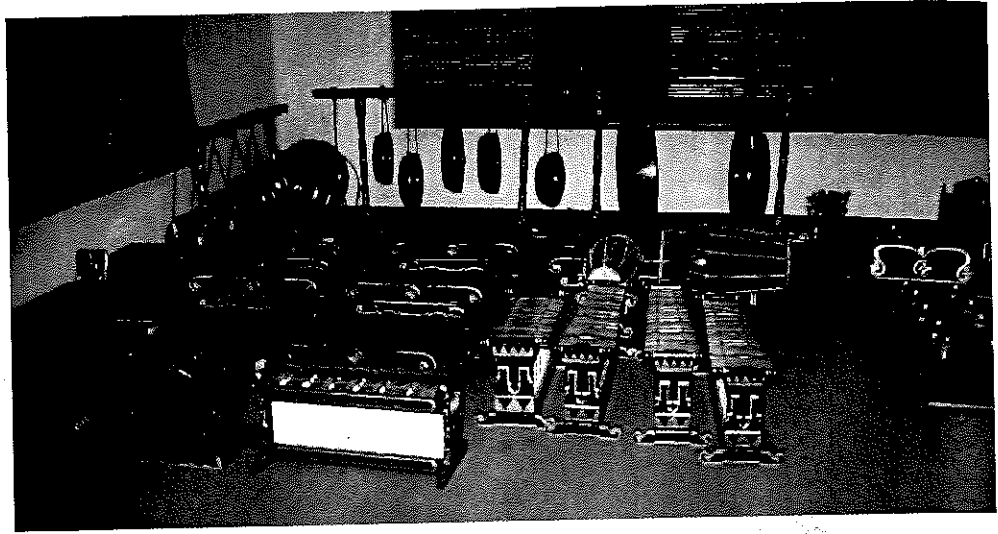
The music of Indonesia, which is dominated by ensembles of bronze instruments, is perhaps the most studied and best known in academia of all world music traditions. Many pioneer ethnomusicologists, such as Jaap Kunst, Colin McPhee, and Mantle Hood, took an interest in the music of Indonesia and spread knowledge of it through writings, teaching, and their own musical compositions. Various composers, including Claude Debussy, Benjamin Britten, Francis Poulenc, Philip Glass, and Steve Reich, have also acknowledged the influence of Indonesian music on their works. Indonesian music has therefore greatly affected the development of modern music in Europe and America, and its influence can still be heard in everything from orchestral music to television commercials.

Although there are hundreds of distinct musical traditions found throughout the numerous islands of Indonesia, the most recognized music is that of the **gamelan** ensemble. We will focus on two traditions, Javanese court gamelan and Balinese *gamelan gong kebyar*, in order to introduce this intricate and entrancing music.

**GAMELAN** - An ensemble from Indonesia comprised primarily of membranophones and metallophones.

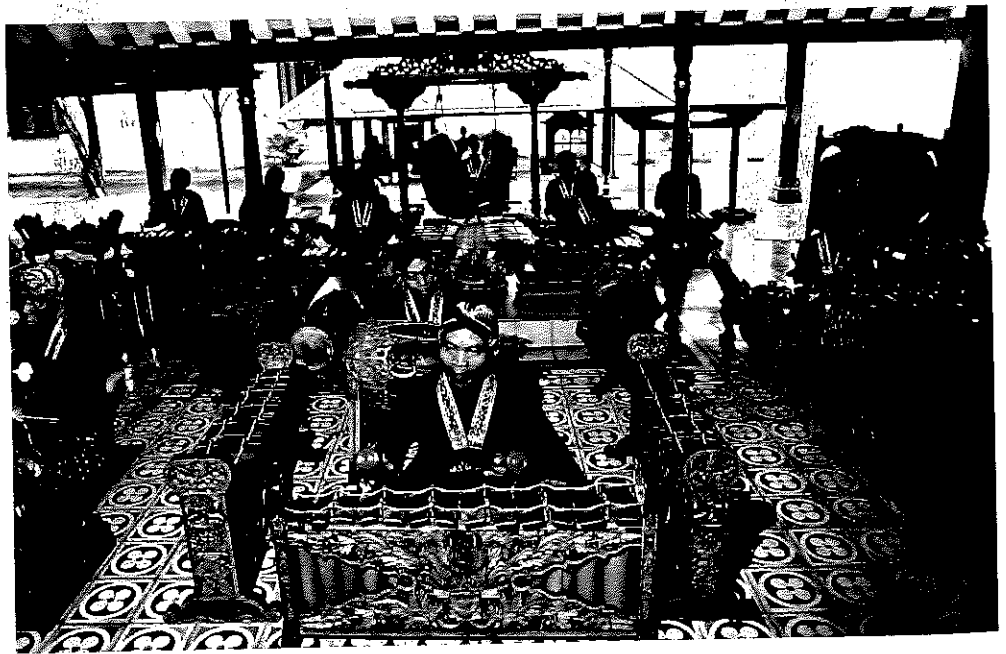
## Site 6: Javanese Court Gamelan

Gamelans are normally made of bronze, but this full Javanese gamelan at Northern Illinois University, DeKalb is actually made of iron, a less expensive, yet satisfactory, substitute for bronze.



**First Impressions.** A gamelan is an ensemble that primarily comprises idiophones made of either bronze or iron, including a variety of hanging gongs, rack gongs, and metal-keyed instruments. The ethereal sound of the instruments is hypnotic, as is the music's repeating cyclical structure. Other instruments, such as flutes, zithers, various drums, and a fiddle called the *rebab*, may also be present along with vocalists, both male and female. The voices, too, contribute an elegant air to the overall feel of the performance. The music of the Javanese

A Javanese gamelan at the *kraton* (palace) of the Sultan in Yogyakarta with a court musician seated at the *gender*, an instrument with bronze keys and tube resonators (Jack Vartoogian/ FrontRowPhotos)



court gamelan is divided into two basic styles, *soft* and *strong*. The soft style has a "misty" quality that is mellow and tranquil, reminiscent of an early morning fog lifting as the sun rises from the ocean. In contrast, the strong style is bold and loud; more reflective of the midday sun watching over hard-working rice farmers during a harvest.

**Aural Analysis.** Javanese court gamelan is based on a *colotomic structure*, meaning that its music is organized into cycles defined by periodic punctuation played by a specific instrument—in its case, hanging gongs. The principal melody is typically provided by either voices and/or melodic instruments, such as the rack gongs, metal-keyed instruments called metallophones, wooden-keyed instruments called xylophones, or non-idiophones such as the fiddle or bamboo flute. Other rack gongs, metallophones, and xylophones embellish this melody by filling in the aural space, giving the music its "misty" quality.

Javanese gamelan must be built and tuned as a unit; interchanging instruments from one ensemble to another is not permitted due in large part to the individuality of the tuning. There are two primary tuning systems: *sléndro* (comprising five relatively equidistant pitches to an octave) and *pélog* (comprising seven pitches to an octave at non-equidistant intervals). Gamelan instruments tuned in one system cannot be played with a set tuned in the other. Furthermore, the fundamental frequencies of two different gamelan using the same system, for example, *pélog*, do not always match, so interchanging instruments even in this case is not possible. Indeed, individual gamelan sets have specific names (the one housed at UCLA in Los Angeles is "The Venerable Dark Cloud"), suggesting the instruments are to be thought of as part of one family. A complete ensemble includes a subset of instruments in both *sléndro* and *pélog* tunings, which can be thought of as siblings in the same gamelan "family." The example here is in *sléndro* tuning—that is, it uses a five-tone pentatonic tuning/scale.

Our example includes two styles of Javanese court gamelan performance, described as *strong* and *soft*. Strong-style gamelan emphasizes the metallophones and bossed rack gongs, which carry the principal melody at a faster tempo and are struck powerfully. Although the soft-style gamelan, when the metal bars or gongs are struck with less force, often includes a female vocal soloist and a male chorus, this example does not. The non-idiophone instruments, namely the fiddle, zither, and bamboo flute, support the principal melody, and the tempo is slower than in the strong style.

After a brief introduction by a *bonang* (rack gong), the principal melody is loudly proclaimed. This melody can be simply notated using numbers to represent pitch. The full ensemble enters on the last pitch of the introduction, which is also the start/stop point of the cycle marked by the largest and deepest pitched hanging gong (*gong ageng*).

#### *Principal Melody of Javanese Gamelan Audio Example*

Introduction	- 1 1 1	5 6 1 2	2 1 6 5	6 1 6 5
A	6 5 3 2	6 5 3 2	2 3 5 3	6 5 3 2 (repeat)
punctuation		- * - -	- * - -	- * - +
B	1 5 6 1	5 6 1 2	2 1 6 5	6 1 6 5 (repeat)
punctuation		- * - -	- * - -	- * - +

\* = upper hanging gong + = lower hanging gong

Each melodic line is repeated once before the entire melody is repeated (AA-BB-AA-BB-AA, etc.). Notice that the phrasing of the melody is symmetrical (there are two groups of four phrases with four beats each), exemplifying an emphasis on balance typical of Javanese music. Underlying this melody is the periodic punctuation provided by the hanging gongs (marked by \* and +). These instruments punctuate specific points in the cycle to articulate the underlying aural framework of the piece. Falling between the pitches of the principal melody at twice the rhythmic density are the quiet embellishments of other metallophones and rack gongs. These three parts are most easily heard in the strong-style gamelan performance.

The soft-style section is signaled by the drums. The tempo slows and the quieter instruments become the aural focus, providing the principal melody along with the subdued sounds of the gongs. The colotomic structure and embellishing instruments are still present, but the shift in mood gives the music a haunting quality. The dynamic level diminishes with the slowed tempo and both increase again when the strong-style gamelan returns.

## LISTENING GUIDE



CD 1.14 (5'34")

### Chapter 6: Site 6

### Indonesia: Javanese Court Gamelan

Instruments: Full instrumental *gamelan* ensemble (metallophones, flutes/chordophones, drums)

TIME	LISTENING FOCUS
0'00"	<i>Bonang</i> (rack gongs) enter with a brief introduction.
0'05"	Full ensemble enters with principal melody (A), embellishments, and periodic punctuation. Listen for each of these musical elements during repeated listening. Use the table included in the Aural Analysis to follow the principal melody and periodic punctuation.
0'13"	Melodic phrase (A) repeats.
0'21"	Second phrase of principal melody (B).
0'28"	Melodic phrase (B) repeats.
0'35"	Melodic phrase (A) returns.
0'43"	Melody phrase (A) repeats.
0'51"	Melodic phrase (B) returns.
0'58"	Melodic phrase (B) repeats.
1'06"	Melodic phrase (A) returns.
1'14"	Melodic phrase (A) repeats. The tempo gradually slows in anticipation of the "soft-style" interlude.

- 1'27" Melodic phrase (B) returns at a slower tempo.
- 1'31" "Quieter" instruments, namely the *rebab* (fiddle), *celimpung* (plucked zither), and *suling* (flute), become the aural focus. The principal melody (B) continues, most easily identified by the low-pitched metallophones heard in the background. Listen for the *gong ageng* (lowest-pitched hanging gong) sounding the end of each phrase.
- 1'49" Melodic phrase (B) repeats.
- 2'10" Melodic phrase (A) returns.
- 2'32" Melodic phrase (A) repeats.
- 2'54" Melodic phrase (B) returns.
- 3'15" Melodic phrase (B) repeats.
- 3'36" Melodic phrase (A) returns.
- 3'56" Melodic phrase (A) repeats. Drums quietly signal the reentrance of the louder metallophones.
- 4'02" Drums play at a louder volume and the tempo increases as the metallophones gradually return as the aural focus (4'06").
- 4'11" Melodic phrase (B) returns.
- 4'20" Melodic phrase (B) repeats.
- 4'28" Melodic phrase (A) returns.
- 4'36" Melodic phrase (A) repeats.
- 4'45" Melodic phrase (B) returns.
- 4'53" Melodic phrase (B) repeats.
- 5'01" Melodic phrase (A) returns.
- 5'09" Melodic phrase (A) repeats at a lower dynamic level and slowing tempo to close the performance.

Source: "Udan Mas" ("Golden Rain"), from the recording titled *Music of the Venerable Dark Cloud: The Javanese Gamelan Khjai Mendung*. Institute of Ethnomusicology, UCLA, IER 7501, 1973. Used by permission.

**ETHNO-CHALLENGE (CD 1.14):** Imitate the upper and lower gongs utilized during the "periodic punctuation" heard throughout the example.

Cultural Considerations. Although the gamelan music of both Java and Bali uses similar instrumentation and is organized in structures governed by colotomic periods, the sharp contrast of musical characteristics between Javanese Court Gamelan and Balinese *gamelan gong kebyar* (see below) reveals strong differences in musical values. These values are in large part due to differences in the function and contextual associations of the two musics.

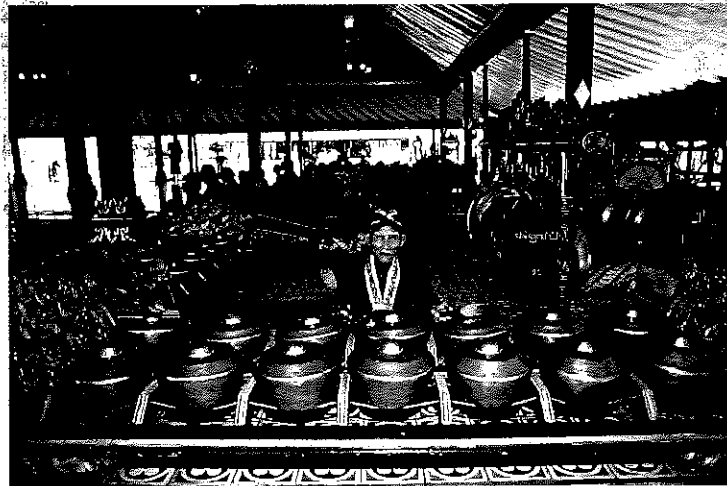


The population of Java is predominantly Muslim, though the Islam here is peculiar to Java. Javanese gamelan music is frequently associated with court ritual functions, usually presided over by a sultan. The sultan is regarded as a secular authority with divine powers, and his palace grounds are imbued with spiritual significance. The slow, stately sound of the court gamelan reflects the regal atmosphere of this environment, and the music is characteristically calm, to avoid distracting attention from the sultan or the ceremonial activity. The music serves the occasion rather than being the primary focus of the event.

Dancers at the Sultan's Kraton (palace) in Yogyakarta perform *bedhaya*, considered the "crown jewel" of Javanese court dances (Jack Vartogogian/ FrontRowPhotos)



A Javanese gamelan at the Sultan's palace in Yogyakarta with a musician seated at a large *bonang*, a set of bronze pot-shaped gongs in two rows (Jack Vartogogian/ FrontRowPhotos)



Most often, gamelan performance accompanies dance and/or theatre. The *bedhaya* dance is among the most sacred, symbolizing the mythical union between a historical sultan and the goddess of the sea, an indication of pre-Islamic spiritual beliefs helping to legitimize Islamic secular authority. The slow-moving choreography and subtle gestures of the dancers express serenity and refinement, just as the gamelan itself demonstrates the tranquility and balance valued so highly in Javanese culture. Gamelan also accompanies shadow-puppet theatre, known as *wayang kulit*. The storylines for these productions often draw from the ancient Indian epics of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, similarly revealing the underlying Hindu influence on Javanese culture that pre-dates Islamic rule, which first appeared in Indonesia during the twelfth century.

### Site 7: Balinese *Gamelan Gong Kebyar*

**First Impressions.** Whereas the music of Java conveys a sense of tranquility, the music of Bali is filled with dynamic energy. Similar instruments are used, including bronze gongs, metallophones, flutes, and drums, but the character of the music continually shifts, with sudden bursts of brilliant virtuosity contrasting with airy melodic phrases. A feeling of continual agitation pervades the music as it accelerates, slows, crescendos, and relaxes. Then just when you think you have it figured out, the music again turns in an unanticipated direction.

**Aural Analysis.** Balinese *gamelan gong kebyar*, like the Javanese court gamelan, is organized according to a colotomic structure. However, this structure is not always as evident as with its Javanese counterpart. Many compositions are through-composed, meaning that

#### GAMELAN GONG KEBYAR

An ensemble type from Bali, Indonesia, primarily comprising metallophones and characterized by rhythmically dense performance technique.



Balinese gamelan at the "Full Moon Festival" in Bedulu village, Bali (Shutterstock)

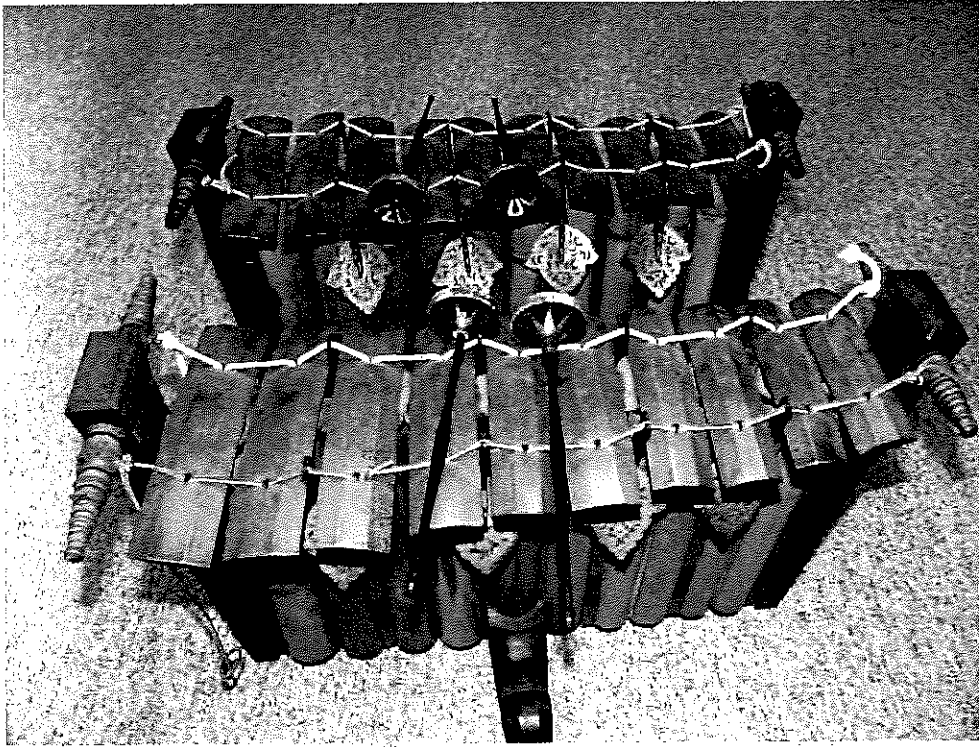
A portion of Bowling Green State University's *gong kebyar* (gamelan) showing flutes and fiddle (front row) with keyed instruments and drum behind. Gamelan, both Javanese and Balinese, have been common since the 1960s in universities worldwide



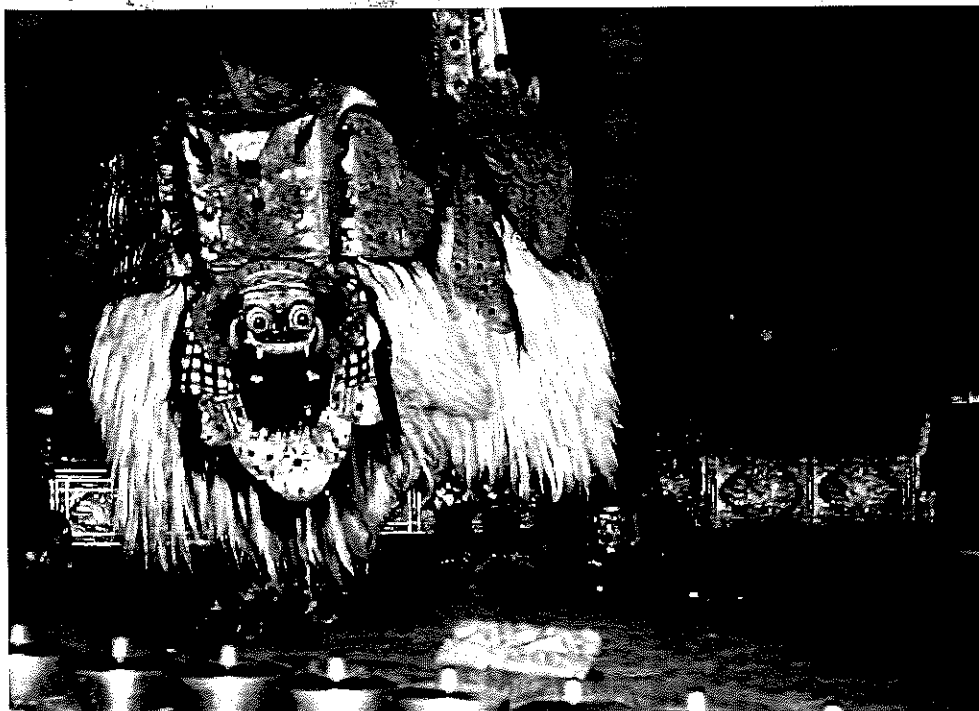
the melody does not repeat in a series of continuous cycles. Also, *gamelan gong kebyar* frequently uses sectional solos in which different instruments, such as the drums and cymbals, flutes, metallophones, or rack gongs, are highlighted. This shifting orchestration emphasis, along with dynamic variation and sudden tempo changes, contributes to the sudden shifts of mood that characterize the Balinese gamelan style.

The high rhythmic density of Balinese *gamelan gong kebyar* is also a distinguishing characteristic. In many sections of a performance the musicians interlock their parts, so that multiple musicians playing identical instruments are required to produce a complete melodic line. For example, if Player X plays the odd-numbered pitches (1, 3, 5, 7) and Player Y plays the even-numbered pitches (2, 4, 6, 8), the players must interlock their pitches to play them in consecutive order from one to eight. This interlocking of melodic pitches, known as *kotekan*, enables the performers to create a high rhythmic density, so that the music sounds as if the melody is being played at a "superhuman speed"; indeed, it is often faster than a single player could perform. While this technique is used in Javanese gamelan as well, the super-thick rhythmic density is associated primarily with the Balinese style.

Another noticeable distinction of the Balinese *gamelan gong kebyar* is what might be described as the "shimmer effect." This shimmering sound is most evident in the wavering tones of the small metallophones on long sustained pitches. The effect is produced by the use of pairs of identical instruments tuned slightly apart. When the instruments are played simultaneously on the same pitch, the slight tuning difference in frequency produces a perceptible pulsation due to the minimal increase in volume as the pitch frequencies overlap. Therefore, a complete Balinese gamelan must include identical pairs of metallophones, with



A pair of *gendèr wayang* bronze-keyed idiophones with tube resonators used, with an identical pair (not shown) tuned slightly differently to produce shimmering sounds, to accompany the shadow play (*wayang kulit*). The larger, lower one is called *gedé* or *pemadé*, and the smaller, higher one is *barangan*.



Danced by two males, the *barong* is a Hindu-derived mythological beast that represents "good" in Balinese theater (Amy Unruh)

separate players on each instrument playing the same notes but with slightly different tuning. When coupled with the need for interlocking pitches, four or more musicians may be required to produce a complete melodic line.

## LISTENING GUIDE



CD 1.15 (4'01")

### Chapter 6: Site 7

### Indonesia: Balinese *Gamelan Gong Kebyar*

Instruments: *Gender* (metallophones), *bonang* (rack gongs), *gong ageng* (pair of hanging gongs), *kempli* ("timekeeper" gong), *suling* (flute), and *kendang* (barrel-shaped drums)

TIME	LISTENING FOCUS
0'00"	<i>Gender</i> initiate performance.
0'04"	Double-interlocking technique (known as <i>kotekan</i> ) on the <i>gender</i> first appears. A "timekeeper" gong is also heard providing a steady beat as lower-pitched metallophones enter.
0'10"	The largest of the <i>gong ageng</i> sounds, and the melodic instruments pause. Listen for the "shimmering" sustain of the metallophones.
0'14"	Melodic activity resumes.
0'20"	Another melodic pause and "shimmering" sustain. The <i>gender</i> become the aural focus, continuing with "start/stop" melodic activity.
0'53"	Lower metallophones and "timekeeper" gong return. The example continues, with frequent melodic pauses followed by "bursts" of melodic passages introduced by the <i>gender</i> and followed by the "timekeeper" gong and others.
2'00"	A new melodic section begins to anticipate entrance of full ensemble. A dancer often performs during this section of the music.
2'26"	Full ensemble enters, including <i>bonang</i> and drums.
2'38"	<i>Bonang</i> performs solo, utilizing the double-interlocking technique to achieve a thick rhythmic density.
2'52"	<i>Gong ageng</i> sounds briefly in the background.
3'00"	<i>Gender</i> return as aural focus. Tempo is slower.
3'07"	Drums sound to introduce return of full ensemble.
3'15"	Listen for the <i>suling</i> (flute) playing as the metal instruments play more quietly.
3'42"	Listen for the <i>gender</i> 's more frequent use of syncopated rhythms, which generally corresponds to a dancer's movements.

Source: "Hudjan Mas," recorded in south Bali by a *gamelan gong kebyar* ensemble; from the recording titled *Gamelan Music of Bali*, Lyricard CD 7179, n.d. Used by permission, Lyricard Discs Inc.

**ETHNO-CHALLENGE (CD 1.15):** Try to perform the “superhuman” double-interlocking technique (*kotekan*) along with a friend by tapping your hands on a flat surface or by using a musical instrument, such as a piano or xylophone. Once successful, add another matching pair of performers.

**Cultural Considerations.** While Java’s population is chiefly Muslim, the island of Bali is predominantly Hindu. Temples are found throughout the island, each devoted to a particular Hindu deity. Most temples have a gamelan ensemble that is expected to perform for festivals or other events associated with the temple’s deity or the Hindu faith. Frequently performances function as a musical offering, and the music is therefore intended to attract and entertain the deity as well as participants. The dynamic character and bright timbre of the Balinese *gamelan gong kebyar*, with its “superhuman speed” and bright, boisterous metallophones, becomes the center of attention. Dances are often vigorous and characteristically “angular,” with quick movements of the head, arms, and legs. These performances, too, are typically related to Hindu mythology and often involve spirit possession and demonstrations of supernatural power, particularly in masked drama performances, such as the *barong* dance.

*Gamelan gong kebyar*, which often accompanies such performances, is a relatively recent musical style that first appeared in the early twentieth century. While numerous styles of gamelan exist on Bali, *kebyar*, translated as “to flare up” or “to flower,” is by far the most



A young boy dances *Baris*, a warrior dance, to the accompaniment of a Balinese gamelan (Amy Unruh)

prominent. The explosive character of the music and astounding displays of virtuosity by its musicians require hours and hours of practice to achieve precise performance. The music is carefully composed, though musical notation is not generally used, and rehearsals are intense, particularly in preparation for the frequent contests that attract ensembles from throughout the island. The high demand for this music encourages experimentation and continual creation of new music to the delight of tourists, locals, and academics alike. Many ensembles have found success touring internationally, presenting spectacular shows to audiences worldwide. The popularity of the *gamelan gong kebyar* has spread to academic institutions around the world as well, where student ensembles perform the music often with the assistance of a guest artist/composer direct from Bali who teaches the ensemble.

The respective styles of gamelan music from the islands of Java and Bali give listeners a strongly differing musical experience. Indeed, the contrast between the hypnotic serenity of the Javanese court gamelan and the entrancing dynamism of the Balinese *gamelan gong kebyar* is a testament to the creative power of Indonesian musicians, who have managed to create two very different musics out of similar resources.

KECAK  
A Balinese theatrical  
performance of  
*The Ramayana*

## Explore More

### *Kecak*: The Balinese “Monkey Chant”

The “Monkey Chant” has become one of the most popular tourist attractions on the island of Bali. Its performers, who are considered a kind of “human gamelan,” act out scenes from the Indian epic the *Ramayana* (see p. 153) with minimal stage props and costumes. The name of the genre, *kecak*, is derived from the interlocking “cak” sounds of the performers as they imitate armies of monkey soldiers in a mythological battle of good versus evil. Other performers sound out the colotomic structure by imitating gongs of the gamelan ensemble. In addition to the monkey armies, whose performers are dressed merely with a black-and-white checkered sarong, there are costumed dancers who portray the major figures of the story. Such performances were originally intended as musical offerings to the Hindu deity



In Bali, a circle of men sway in unison during a *kecak* dance, a modern variation of an ancient *sang hyang* trance dance (Ernst Haas/Getty Images)

Rama, a major character in the epic. This association, however, as well as the storyline, is typically unfamiliar to Bali’s many visitors.

## Questions to Consider

1. To what extent are the terms *classical*, *folk*, and *popular* appropriate labels for describing Southeast Asian musics?
2. What are some factors that help maintain traditional Southeast Asian music in the face of modernization?
3. Metrical cycles are characteristic of many Southeast Asian musics. How do they work in the sites reviewed?
4. How do the types of "heterophony" found in Vietnamese *Tai Thu*, *Thai Piphat*, and Javanese Gamelan differ?
5. Though Thailand and Vietnam are both part of Southeast Asia, what historical and cultural factors have determined the present musical differences?
6. Compare Javanese and Balinese Gamelan in terms of their function and use. How do their differing functions affect their respective musical styles?

## On Your Own Time

Visit the textbook website to find these resources for further exploration on your own.

### Vietnam

**Audio:** Ngyuen, Phong T. and Terry E. Miller. *Music from the Lost Kingdom Vietnam: The Perfume River Traditional Ensemble*. Lyrichord, LYRCD 7440, 1998.

<http://lyrichord.com/musicfromthelostkingdomvietnam-theperfumerivertraditionalensemble.aspx>  
<http://itunes.apple.com/us/album/music-from-lost-kingdom-vietnam/id78666859>

**Book:** Reyes, Adelaida. *Songs of the Caged, Songs of the Free: Music and the Vietnamese Refugee Experience*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999.

[http://www.temple.edu/tempress/titles/1426\\_reg.html](http://www.temple.edu/tempress/titles/1426_reg.html)

**Internet:** Popular Artists from Vietnam

My Tam  
 Quang Dung  
 Lam Truong

### Thailand

**Film:** Homrong (The Overture). Directed by Ittisoonorn Vichailak. Sahamongkol Film International, 2004.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Overture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Overture)  
<http://www.imdb.com/video/screenplay/vi418906393/>

**Audio:** *Royal Court Music of Thailand*. Smithsonian-Folkways, SF 40413, 1994.

<http://www.folkways.si.edu/albumdetails.aspx?itemid=2330>  
<http://itunes.apple.com/us/album/royal-court-music-of-thailand/id83572118>

**Audio:** *Silk, Spirits, and Songs: Music from North Thailand*. Lyrichord, LYRCD 7451, 2006.