

MCM 3014


Thailand

Ceremonial and Court Music From Central Thailand



MUSIC OF THE EARTH



 - Instrument making area

Thailand

CEREMONIAL AND COURT MUSIC FROM CENTRAL THAILAND

Track Listing

1. Fine Arts Department, Hard Mallets
SATHUKAN 4:30
A ceremonial piece praising Buddha, his teachings and his disciples.
2. Bangkok Metropolitan Ensemble
HOOK 1:57
The Ranat Ek, with hard mallets, produces a bright and penetrating tone quality.
3. Rum Phomburi Ensemble, *Ratchaburi*
KEAKMON-BANGCHANG 6:36
Ceremonial music for Ratchaburi's thirteenth century Wat (temple).
4. Bangkok Police Ensemble, Hard Mallets
SUDSAHOUN 2:07
Bangkok's Police Department requires the ceremonial and entertainment materials of this *Pbat*.
5. Thai Banlang Ensemble, *Samutsongkram*
KANGKAEW-KIM KOY 0:45
Past Thai Kings located musicians at their various residences, and descendants of those musicians continue the tradition today.
6. Fine Arts Department, Soft Mallets
KOM-NGEN 3:54
Musicians from Silpakorn (Fine Arts Department) play for the theatrical and dance performances of the National Theater in Bangkok.
7. Bangkok Metropolitan Ensemble, Soft Mallets
SOI LUMPANG 3:19
The use of soft mallets on the Ranat Ek creates a more muted sound for the total ensemble.

Non-English musical types and styles are indicated by italics. Titles are in capital letters. Because these are field recordings, there may be some extraneous noise despite the high fidelity utilized.

8. Rum Phomburi Ensemble,
Soft Mallets
KLOMNAREE 3:47
Many tonal varieties are achieved
through the interchange of
instruments and mallets.

9. Fine Arts Department,
Mahori
MAHAROK 7:02
An ancient piece used for royal
ceremonies. When strings are
employed, *Mahori* is the term used
for the ensemble.

10. Bangkok Metropolitan Ensemble
Mahori
SUDSAHOUN 2:59
This *Phat* is sponsored by the
Bangkok city government.

11. Bangkok Police Ensemble,
Mahori
KHAMEAPOTHISAD 4:46
Almost all civic and personal
activities have a corresponding
ceremony. Police activities are no
exception.

12. Rum Phomburi Ensemble,
Phat Mon
MANG-PHU-THONG 2:59
In our usage, a *Phat Mon* employs
the Khong Mon as a primary
instrument.

13. Thai Banlang Ensemble,
Samutsongkham, Phat Mon
DEAW KEA JANG 1:18
The size of a *Phat* may vary
considerably. This one consists of
four players. Large *Phats* may have
more than fifteen players.

14. Wat Wihanthong Ensemble,
Phat Mon
Untitled 7:30
Cremation (funeral) ceremonies
represent a joyous occasion. The
deceased has achieved another step
on the path to enlightenment. This
Phat is large and employs four
Khong Mon.

Field Notes

by James S. Upton

Thailand and the Thai

The geographic area that is now called Thailand has been inhabited by humans for a very long time. Neolithic remains have been found west of Kanchanaburi and near Lopburi. A Bronze Age culture, possibly 4,500 years old, existed at Ban Chiang, in the Isarn. Unfortunately, as with other parts of Southeast Asia, there is little written history to inform us of the region's past.

The Indian king, Asoka, reputedly sent Buddhist missionaries to Southeast Asia as early as the first or second century B.C.E. Nakhon Pathom and Lopburi have Buddhist traditions that go back more than 1,500 years. Java and Sumatra also have early Buddhist traditions. The temple of Borobudur in central Java dates from around the year 800CE. The Khmer and Mon show Buddhist influence as well.

By 500, the Hindu Tambralinga

Empire had been established in Sumatra, with a ruling center in Thailand at Nakhon Si Thammarat (Ligor). Within three centuries it became known as the Srivijaya Empire, and around the year 1000 it conquered both the Mon kingdom at Lopburi and the Khmer kingdom at Angkor. Thailand still exhibits Hindu influences, although fewer than those of the Buddhists. Srivijaya, however, slowly disintegrated, leaving a Mon Dvaravati kingdom behind.

By 600, the city of Nanchao, and much of the surrounding Yunnan province of China, appear to have been controlled by a people called the "Thai" (free), who seem to have allied themselves as a vassal state with the rulers of the Sung Dynasty (960-1279). By the twelfth century the Thai had begun a series of southern migrations, although the exact date and number of these is unclear.

Linguistic evidence indicates that they

began as early as 200. By the thirteenth century the Mongol invasions of China seem to have persuaded some Nanchao residents to leave, and Kublai Khan's invasion and eventual capture of China in 1253 doubtless precipitated more departures. One of these migrating groups captured the Khmer city at Sukothai in 1238, thereby providing us with a somewhat recognizable starting point for Siam's (Thailand's) history. These Thai seem to have acquired the Khmer practice of making tunable gongs, of which the *Khong Wong Yai* is a modern, and much modified, adaptation. By 1257, Sukothai had become the first capital of Siam, and a brief period of artistic activity followed. The Thai alphabet developed under the auspices of King Ramakhamhaeng (1279-99), whose court seems to have favored the *So-Sam-Sai* and other stringed instruments.

In 1378, the capital moved to Ayuthaya, probably for defensive reasons. For the next four centuries Ayuthaya was the center of Thai life and culture. Although the National Museum in Bangkok possesses a *Khong Rbang* from early in this period,

the court seems to have favored such stringed instruments as the *Chake* and the *Krajappi*. Early traces of the *Phat* (band) —employed for court, temple, and dramatic purposes— also date from this time. The *Phat* may have originated in drama, although various court and the Buddhist Thai dramatic types already existed.

In 1767, a Burmese invasion sacked and destroyed Ayuthaya, and King Taksin briefly held court in Thonburi. His successor, Chakri or Chao Phya (Rama I), the first king of the present dynasty, moved the capital across the Chao Phrya River to the new city of Krungthep (Bangkok). A considerable amount of information regarding Thai music is available from 1782 to the present. Various Thai kings have been major patrons of the arts. A *Ranat Kbaew* (glass *Ranat*), which once belonged to Rama I, is on display in the National Museum. Rama II (1809-24), a *So-Sam-Sai* player and a poet, was responsible for the compilation of the "Ramakien," the present form of the Thai national legend. The National Museum also contains four court *Ranats* from the time of Rama IV

(*Phra Chom Klao, Mongkut*), and various instruments from the reigns of Rama V (*Chulalongkorn*) and Rama VI (*Vajiravudh*) are in public and private collections. The modern *Phat* participates in secular and religious ceremonial functions and in theatrical, civic, and military events. In recent times, *Phats* have begun to serve as entertainment in restaurants and cafes.



The two-stringed So-U.

The Instruments

The *Ranat Ek* (xylophone with wood bars) produces the *Phat's* most characteristic sound. Its 21 hardwood bars are struck either with hard mallets made of wood (tracks 1,4) or soft mallets made of cord (tracks 6, 7, 8). Hard mallets produce a characteristically bright sound, while the soft mallets produce a more subdued effect. The *Ranat Thum*, with 17 wooden bars, resembles the *Ranat Ek* and is played in a similar manner but is pitched lower.

Two similar *Ranats* have metal bars, normally of iron but sometimes of brass for special purposes. The *Ranat Ek Lek* has 21 iron bars and the *Ranat Thum Lek* 17. Each has a range of approximately two octaves (in Western music's mid-range). Unlike the keys of Western pianos, all of the bars appear alike. (There is no piano keyboard tradition in Thailand.)

The *Khongs* (gongs) are probably older instruments than the *Ranats*. Both the *Khong Wong Yai* and the smaller *Khong Wong Lek* use cast kettles made of brass and are struck with leather mallets. Each has 16



Ensemble featuring Ranat Ek, Khang Wong Yai and two Ranat Thum.

sounding kettles, but the *Khong Wong Lek* has two additional mute gongs. Each instrument consists of sets of kettles (individual gongs) mounted in a circular, cane framework with an opening at the back so that the player may enter and sit in the center. The *Khong Mon* is a specialized, 15-kettle instrument used in cremation ceremonies and available in both *Yai*

and *Lek* sizes. The *Khong Mon's* kettles are mounted in a vertical frame of hollowed wood. The frame is ornately carved, decorated, and painted with motives from the "Ramakien." While the other *Khong* and the *Ranat* are struck with a downward mallet action, the *Khong Mon* is played with both down and up strokes.

The *Pi Nai* and the *Khlui* are the two common wind instruments. The *Pi*, a double-reed (not quadruple as sometimes stated) with a conical bore, is the preferred instrument for ceremonial and outdoor purposes due

to its nasal, penetrating tone quality. Although it resembles double-reed instruments from many places and cultures, its barrel shape, due to the slight expansion of the central portion of the tube, distinguishes it as



So-Sam-Sai and So-U.

uniquely Thai. A slightly longer variant, the *Pi Mon*, is employed as a part of the *Phat Mon* (see below),

while a smaller instrument, the *Pi Chawa* provides background music for Thai boxing.



Ranat Ek.

The *Kblui* is a block flute or recorder with a cylindrical bore. The player blows through a channel in one end of the instrument, and the channel directs air to an edge where the tone is produced. The smaller, quiet *Kblui* substitutes for the much louder *Pi* when the music employs soft mallets or strings.

The term “*So*” (saw) generically refers to bowed stringed instruments. *So* are lute-like, with a resonator body and attached neck. The resonators distinguish the various *So* from each other. The *So-Duang* has a cylindrical resonator, while the 2-stringed *So-U* and the 3-stringed *Saw-Sam-Sai* have coconut shell resonators. The bow is threaded between the strings of the two 2-stringed *Sos*.

The *Chakbe* (crocodile) is a long zither. Although similarly named instruments in other countries are ornamented to resemble the reptile, the Thai *Chakbe*'s name is simply fanciful. Plucked rather than bowed, it is a very quiet instrument and is very difficult to hear among the other instruments of the Fine Arts Department *Mahori* band (track 9).

Thailand has at least fifteen

common drums, cymbals, and hanging gongs (although only a few appear on this disk since our research was primarily concerned with pitch). The *Ching* (small pairs of cymbals), which are high-pitched and very bright sounding, set the basic tempos for the ensemble. The *Poeng Mang Kbaek* (tuned drums) set consists of seven identical, 21-inch, barrel-shaped drums tuned to different indefinite pitches. Tuned drums are used in the *Phat Mon* (tracks 12, 13, 14), the ensemble for cremation ceremonies.

Thai *Phat* vary greatly in their instrumentation. The common *Pi Phat* plays for outdoor ceremonies and functions. Since the ceremonies often include dance, the *Pi Phat* is also associated with dancing. The *Pi Phat* includes the *Pi*, one to four *Ranats* played with hard mallets, and usually one or two *Khong*. The *Ching*, considered essential, are usually accompanied by a large barrel drum, the *Taplon* (not on this recording). For some occasions (e.g., Thai boxing), the ensemble may have as few as three instruments—*Pi*, *Ching*, and *Taplon*.

For indoor occasions, the *Ranat* players exchange their hard mallets for softer, yarn-wound mallets. A *Kblui* player may replace the *Pi* player. The drums are often omitted. If the indoor occasion is entertainment for the court, the *Ranat* players may switch to softer instruments, tuned slightly lower in pitch, and *So* players may be added. If the strings are emphasized, the ensemble is called *Mahori* (tracks 9-11).

Cremation ceremonies are an important part of life in a tropical, Buddhist country. The *Phat Mon* (tracks 12-14) is a further variant of the above ensembles. The number of *Ranat* may be reduced to one or two, and the *Khong Wong* is replaced by the *Khong Mon*. There may be as many as four of the latter, in two sizes. The *Pi Nai* is replaced by the *Pi Mon*, a slightly longer instrument with a loosely-fitted metal bell. The ensemble may also include hanging gongs of indefinite pitch. This recording includes examples of all of these types of ensembles.

The Music

Listeners to the Thai *Phat* may first be charmed by the overall sound of the instruments, then perplexed. Where is the melody? *Phat* music is heterophonic: each player plays the same melody. However, each ornaments or embellishes it in a fashion that suits the player's experience, instrument, teacher, and imagination. Thus eight or nine versions of the same melody may be played simultaneously. Heterophony contrasts with the three common Western practices of monophony (melody only), homophony (chords), and polyphony (multiple melodies forming harmonies). Thai heterophony produces harmonies, but they are incidental, or even accidental. Recognizing the melody requires experience. Occasionally, an inexperienced player on a lower pitched instrument (*Khong Wong Lek*) may play the melody with little or no ornamentation.

Another feature of Thai music that differentiates it from Western (as well as most other) music is its scale, which, for the past hundred years, has

largely consisted of seven, approximately equidistant, pitches. In earlier times, there may have been other scales and tunings. The Thai scale is the principal reason the music is difficult for the uninitiated to understand.

Thai melodies may be lyrical, somewhat like Western ballads. However, they may also be made up of motives—short, incisive groups of from three to seven notes. To some degree the melodic type corresponds to the performance locale. Motivic melodies tend to appear in pieces for hard mallets. Lyrical melodies are more often associated with indoor music. The more lyrical style is favored when the ensemble includes a singer. Most melodies are either scalar or have gapped intervals, creating a pentatonic effect.

Thai rhythm is generally easy to follow and strongly resembles duple meter in Western music. Beats occur in groups of two, but they are not stressed. When beats are subdivided, producing shorter, quicker rhythms, the subdivisions are also duple. Although Thai music has remained consistent for the past two centuries,

it is not stagnant. During the last half-century several experiments with rhythm have taken place. Pinit Chaisuwan (tracks 7, 10) has experimented with groups of three and five beats in his compositions. Still, duple-meters remain popular with most musicians and audiences.

Tempos (speeds) are limited in their range. Most are moderate. However, a limited number of *accelerandos* (speeding up) and *ritardos* (slowing down) do occur. By manipulating ornamentation a musician may create the impression that the tempo has increased, when it has not. The *Phat Mon* from Suphanburi uses such a procedure on this recording (track 14).

Dynamics (loudness) are determined by the place, the *Phat*, and the particular piece of music. Roughly three levels are set by the *Phat*, and these do not vary in a performance, for dynamic change is neither expected nor desired.

Unlike some of their neighbors, such as the Balinese (Indonesians), the Thai have developed no theory for their music. Since there is no common notation, all music is learned

by rote, and a student is expected to learn as many as 350 tunes (with ornaments). On the other hand, Thai musicians have done much philosophizing about their music. Pairach, a noted musician from a generation ago, was one of the leaders in musical thought.

Personnel

Fine Arts Department, Bangkok (Tracks 1, 6, 9)

Recorded, Fine Arts Department, Instrument Room

Director: Paitoon Cheycharoen

Ranat Ek: Suradej Kimpim
Ranat Thum: Pachon Kongchok
Khong Wong Lek: Jumlong Moungtoum
Khong Wong Yai: Somchay

Dhuriyapraneat
Ranat Ek Lek: Sakchai Ladda-On
Ranat Thum Lek: Pairat Channaj
Pi and Khlui: Singhal Sangjui
Khlui: Sari Simthuchaipark-sari
So-Doung: Teera Poomanee
So-U: Suriya Chittoum
So-Sam-Sai: Lorkert
Mahawinitchaimontri
Chake: Juruwan Pratompatama

Bangkok Metropolitan Ensemble (Tracks 2, 7, 10)

Recorded, South Bangkok City Hall, Instrument Room

Director: Pinit Chaisuwan

Ranat Ek: Danai Mongyewya and Pinit Chaisuwan
Ranat Thum and So-U: Niran Jamarun
Kong Wong Lek: Suwan Tolum & Nikum Rukkum-keaw
Khong Wong Yai: Nikum Rukkumkeaw
Ranat Ek Lek and So-Doung: Tawan Ruksawong
Pi and Khlui: Winai Munwichacha

Rum Phomburi Ensemble, Ratchaburi (Tracks 3, 8, 12)

Recorded, Ratchaburi, Private Homes

Director: Pramoun Krutsing

Ranat Ek: Wipas Krutsing
Ranat Thum: Somrang Berkban
Khong Wong Lek: Ratchapon Krutsing
Khong Wong Yai, Khong Mon: Paisan Boonroung
Ranat Ek Lek: Somjed Krutsing
Ranat Thum Lek: Sompong Peypowyen
Pi and Khlui: Pum Peypowyen

Bangkok Police Ensemble (Tracks 4, 11)

Recorded, Bangkok Police Recreation Building Auditorium

Director: Charoen Kupka

Ranat Ek: Wiboonthum Peanpong
Ranat Thum: Chaiya Dhontricharaen
Khong Wong Lek: Witoon Autaki
Khong Wong Yai: Pratan Thongsukchot
Pi and Khlui: Opas Nakpinphat
So-U, Ranat Ek Lek, and Ranat Thum Lek: Jongkol Peanpong

Thai Banlang Ensemble, Samutsongkhram (Tracks 5, 13)

Recorded, Samutsongkhram, Private Home

Director: Saman Keawla-Eat

Pi: Nakorn Thammee
Ranat Ek: Paroup Keawla-Eat
Ranat Thum, Khong Mon: Saman Keawla-Eat
Khong Wong Yai: Pratiew Pukchetan
Khong Wong Lek: Prajack Rungwandee

Wat Wihanthong Ensemble, (Track 14)

Recorded, Viharn of Wat Wihanthong, Suphanburi. Personnel unknown

Equipment and Recording

The recording equipment used on this project needed to be both portable and capable of obtaining an excellent quality recording. It had to be able to deal with the acoustic problems presented by the Thai mallet instruments and by constantly changing and uncontrolled acoustic conditions. Therefore, we chose:

Tape Recorder: Sony TC-D5M
Microphones: Shure 15L (Radio Shack 33-3007) electrets, directional, or Shure 579 (Radio Shack 33-1070) dynamics, omnidirectional

Tape: TDK MA or MA-X
Two 10" microphone stands
The microphones were deployed in a coincident, crossed-microphone arrangement in most cases. When room acoustics did not permit this, the omnidirectional mics were placed in the usual third distance arrangement for two such mics. The master tape was made by copying the field recordings to a Nakamichi 550.

Typical Seating and Microphone Arrangements:

1) Fine Arts Dept., Hard Mallets

Pi	Khong	Khong	
Ranat T.	Ranat Ek	Ranat Ek	Ranat T.
	mics.		

2) Wihanthong Temple, Phat Mon

Ranat Thum	Ranat Ek	Ranat Ek Lek	
	Ching	Pi Mon	Drums
Khong Mon	Khong Mon	Khong Mon	Khong Mon
	mics.		

Credits

The Graduate School and Music Department of Mahidol University, Salaya, Thailand, sponsored the research project that made these recordings possible. The total project posed questions regarding past and present tuning practices in Thailand.

The members of the Mahidol research team:

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Sangad Phukhaothong
James S. Upton

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Janice Dickensheets
Jo Upton
Sanang

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Album Photography: Jo Upton

Recording Assistants: Jo Upton,

Janice Dickensheets, and Sanang

Text Editing: Mark Greenberg

Executive Producer: Stephen McArthur

Co-producers: Andrew Sloan and Chris Mills

Booklet Design: Tim Newcomb