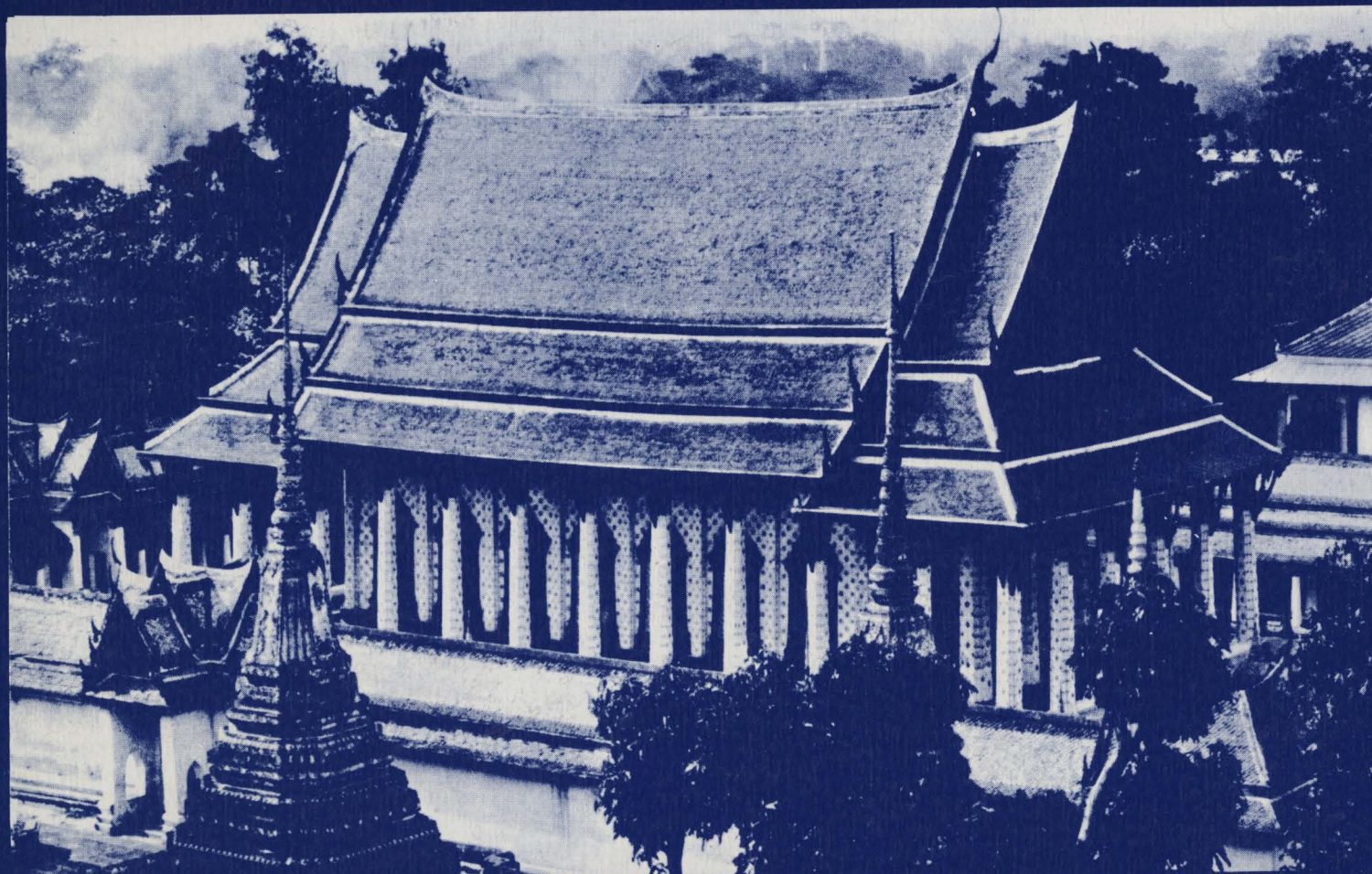


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MUSIC OF SOUTHEAST ASIA



BANGKOK PRAYER HALL

BURMA

MALAYA

VIET NAM

THAILAND

CHINA

LAOS

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

COMPILED BY HAROLD COURLANDER / NOTES BY HENRY COWELL

MUSIC OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

FOLKWAYS FE 4423

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SHAN SON, BURMA
FLOWER OF HEAVEN, BURMA
THE SOUTHERN ISLAND, BURMA
BUDDHIST CEREMONIAL ODE, BURMA
CHINCHEM, PERAK, MALAYA
SIKU, CAMERON HIGHLANDS, MALAYA
ADMIRATION OF A SLEEPING MAIDEN, THAILAND
ORCHESTRAL COMPOSITION, THAILAND
FOLK SONG, VIET NAM
RECITATION FROM HUE VAN, LAOS
WOMAN'S SONG, LAOS
FOLK DANCE, LAOS
LOVE SONG, LAOS
FOLK TUNE, SOUTH CHINA

FOLKWAYS FE 4423

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MUSIC OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

by HENRY COWELL

Music in Southeast Asia is dominated by a well-integrated, highly cultivated style which is characteristic of the whole area, with only minor differences among the many peoples who inhabit it. These are differences of style, language and performance; the fundamental scale of seven almost entirely equal steps in the octave is the same, as is the nasal vocal style without vibrato, the importance of the curved xylophone (renê) as the leading instrument, and the flow of eighth notes (as they would be set down in Western notation) dominating the rhythm. There are two principal classical influences -- those of ancient Hindu and ancient Chinese music, styles, and instruments. These are thoroughly mixed and amalgamated with elements of Malayan culture, making a hybrid form which has been integrated for many centuries, and which is one of the characteristic and recognizable styles of the world. The center of this musical culture is in Thailand and Cambodia. It is more mixed with Hindu style in Burma, with Chinese style in the northern part of Viet Nam, and it becomes more primitive in the Malayan Peninsula, which contains some of the world's most primitive music (as in the case of the Malacca tribes). From Singapore north along the coast of Annam there is to be found the usual international modern hybrid, mixtures of Western jazz with popular Oriental forms. Inland, agricultural workers sing folk songs, sometimes work songs. The style of the songs and singing has been influenced by the old cultivated style of the traditional court music in Burma, Thailand and Cambodia. In the first two of these courts, there is much theatrical music. The Rama legend is dramatized into an opera lasting thirteen long evenings. In Burma there is much comic opera with a sort of Gilbert and Sullivan legend, embracing both love interest and recent politics. Sometimes there is Western influence in the music, but not enough to make it sound Western to Western ears. The instruments used in the Southeast Asia countries are similar.

The most widely spread, and the chief instrument, is the renê which is like a xylophone, containing the whole scale in several octaves on wooden bars played with hammers. The bars are strung on ropes which are suspended at both ends like a hammock, so that they form a half-circle instead of the straight line of the Western xylophone. There are also a high flute; a high double-reed instrument like an oboe; a low double-reed instrument somewhat between an English horn and a bassoon; a high plucked instrument like a banjo, and a low plucked instrument somewhat lower than a guitar; a tiny stringed instrument played on with tiny hammers related to the hammer dulcimer; a small bowed instrument related to the Persian rebab; sometimes a western violin played oriental style; and various percussively used bells, gongs, bowls and drums.

There is little or no feeling for chords -- instruments and voice usually play together (sometimes the flute or high stringed-instrument may make variations about the vocal melody), although at times some of the instruments may play twice as fast as others, making a sort of second species counterpoint, with the rhythm running along steadily in quarter, eighth and sixteenth notes. This is a classic style of accompaniment for the famous groups of small dancing girls attached to all the courts. They also sing in loud, nasal, steady tones, between dances. In the dramas, the roles were formerly all taken by men (many singing female parts), but now women also take part. The singing is highly artificial and stylized. For Buddhist chants, sung by men, the vocal style is quite simple and natural, closely related to speech. The chants are often accompanied by high metallic percussion sounds, sometimes on bells, sometimes on small gongs.

There are many composers in Southeast Asia, particularly in Thailand. Some write in traditional style, so that the music is still completely traditional and might as easily have been made in classical times; most of the new composed music, however, mixes some few older elements with western popular music a la Hit Parade. The latter type is now the

most commonly heard, and old-style classical music of the sort heard in these recordings is becoming rarer.

SIDE I, Band 1: BURMA. SHAN SONG. Sung by San Toke. This song is from the Shan section of Burma. The Shan people of Burma are related to the Shan population of Thailand. In this piece there is a low double-reed instrument, playing a bugle-like figure on the triad overtones, introducing a man's voice in a folk song with a pentatonic scale -- sol, la, do, re, mi, sol, la, introducing many "graces" or tiny ornaments. As the song progresses, sometimes ti flat is used in the place of la.

SIDE I, Band 2: BURMA. FLOWER OF HEAVEN. Sung by Maung Su. This is theater music, semi-popular in nature, and of modern composition. The performer sings of his longing for his beloved, who is as difficult to attain as a flower in heaven. The song is in the seven-tone scale with sometimes the fourth tone raised, and always the seventh tone resolving down to the sixth -- a characteristic of Burmese music which is just the opposite of Western music (in which the leading tone, the seventh degree, is expected to resolve upward to the tonic, or first degree of the scale). There is a Western violin, and a plucked instrument with long strings, which are sometimes pulled, giving little slides from one tone to another.

SIDE I, Band 3: BURMA. THE SOUTHERN ISLAND. Sung by Sein Party. This is a song in the classical tradition which was performed in the Burmese Court until the time of British rule. The song pays homage to the King as a good, wise and benevolent leader who symbolically attains his place in the "Southern Island" by his goodness. The "Southern Island" is the paradise where the elephant god (spirit of Buddha) came to eat, drink and rest. The first portion of this selection is actually a long introduction to "The Southern Island" proper, a song praising the paradise world where the spirit of Buddha was nourished. The music is in the seven-tone equal scale. A typical Burmese chord is formed between the raised fourth and seventh degrees, resolving into the fifth and eighth degrees. There are low and high plucked instruments, and a high flute. In the voice part there are some of the glottal interruptions to the tone which are characteristic of Malayan-language songs.

SIDE I, Band 4: BURMA. BUDDHIST CEREMONIAL ODE. Sung by Ponna U Hla Maung. This is part of Buddhist liturgy, and speaks of the omniscience of Buddha, and of his teachings of truth and dignity. It is recited to ward off spiritual and physical dangers, and may be heard at the commencement of wedding ceremonies. The first part is in an ancient derivative of Sanskrit, and the second part is in modern Burmese. The words are half-spoken, half-sung, intoned with no rhythmic meter by an unaccompanied male voice, punctuated with a high bell at the beginning and end of the long phrases. The notes used are G#, A, B, C#. The Bell, or gong, is called kyeesi.

SIDE I, Band 5: MALAYA (Perak). CHINCHEM. Recorded by H. D. Noone. The Temiar people of the Malayan jungles sometimes seek a state of trance during which they are inspired to sing and dance by the spirits of nature, or of ancestors. This is a song and dance given to a chief on the Korbu River by the spirit of an ancestor. A mixed chorus sings the three-tone scale, F, G, and A. There is a steady drum beat in equally-accented eighth-notes, and a high metal clang in the offing.

SIDE I, Band 6: MALAYA (Cameron Highlands). SIKU. Recorded by H. D. Noone. Another primitive Temiar song. The trance-dreaming "hala" (Priest) is warned by the spirit of the Siku Mountain to beware of disease brought to jungle-clearing Temiar people by White men. Again there is a three-tone scale -- this time C#, F#, G#. There is the soloist (hala), answered by several voices. The tones C# and F# are often held over, giving the effect of a chord, against the solo singing.

SIDE I, Band 7: THAILAND. ADMIRATION OF A SLEEPING MAIDEN. A recently-composed piece in traditional pentatonic scale, with a mixture of Western instruments (violin) and traditional ones (banjo-like and dulcimer-like). This piece is in a hybrid style that is very popular with the younger people in the larger cities. It was composed by a well-known Thai musician named Yakob. The words go:

Behold! A maiden fair, the fairest in
this locale,
Beautiful in all respects,
Beautiful as the fieriest star of stars,
Even the moon is her handmaiden;
Beautiful without a blemish,
Pretty as young jasmine blossom,
As tender as pollen in a flower,
She blossoms forth like a fresh flower.

Ah! How beautiful she is!
Two eyelids shut away the shine of her eyes.
When she awakes, her deep soft eyes
wring at my heart.
Two fresh rosy cheeks as beautiful as
maprang fruits.
Her swelling breasts are akin to the
beautiful young lotus.

How I wish I had liberty to fondle
those lotus flowers,
And pluck them and kiss them,
Compelling the owner, who keeps them
before they blossom,
to yield.
Fate has brought me here and, perhaps
we are one in the other
world.
Heaven blesses us to join us together.
Henceforth it shall be thus.

(Translated by Choon Silasuvan)

SIDE II, Band 8: THAILAND. ORCHESTRAL COMPOSITION. Bang Khun Phrom Palace Orchestra. Female voice singing a dancing-girl's song which contains the steady nasal tone with many glottal stops and some yodeling falsetto carefully cultivated in court singing. There is a 2/4 rhythm made by alternate open and stopped high bell. Between vocal stanzas the orchestra comes in with the rhythmical dance music, played by high flute, xylophones, small bowed instruments and drums in seven-tone scale. The final cadence falls on the tone that sounds like "re" to the western ear.

SIDE II, Band 9: THAILAND. ORCHESTRAL COMPOSITION. Bang Khun Phrom Palace Orchestra. Well-performed instrumental music of the court -- high bells, high metallophone (metal bars arranged like a xylophone), flute, small bowed instrument, xylophones, and the double-reed, oboe-like woodwind in a steady, fast eighth-note rhythm.

SIDE II, Band 10: VIET NAM. FOLK SONG. A primitive folk song for woman's voice alone,

in a seven-tone mode resembling the mixolydian. It gives the impression of a major scale with a lowered seventh degree.

SIDE II, Band 11: LAOS. RECITATION FROM HUE VAN. This is a northern Viet Nam recitation of an old play called Hue Van. The recitation describes the manner in which a Mandarin addresses a King. A man's voice singing in theater style, sometimes low, sometimes in falsetto and yodeling manner. Occasionally there is stylized speech. The scale is sol, do, re, fa, sol.

SIDE II, Band 12: LAOS. WOMAN'S SONG. Popular theater music. A hybrid style, with some Western elements. The voice is nasal, but not trained; it is a folk, or popular singer, imitating the manner of cultivated singers of the court. There is also an imitation of the glottal stop in the voice, trained into the singing of court vocalists. The scale is based on the older folk-scale of five tones - numbers 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8 of the major scale: But it adds tone #4. The tone on the seventh degree is still too much of a refinement. So the final scale is that of degrees # 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8. The instruments consist of a high flute, a medium register reed instrument, and a western violin played in Oriental style. The tune is a modern composed one, but mixes traditional and Western elements.

SIDE II, Band 13: LAOS. FOLK DANCE. This is a folk dance in ancient style, played on two khen (mouth organs), Laotian hurdy-gurdy, and cymbals. This dance tune is in the pentatonic scale.

SIDE II, Band 14: LAOS. LOVE SONG. Sung by a folk singer in unstylized voice, pentatonic scale.

SIDE II, Band 15: SOUTH CHINA. FOLK TUNE. This is a simple pentatonic folk tune in uncultivated country manner, played on a plucked instrument in a banjo-like figure. The tune is easy to understand, in character not unlike some Negro and Scottish songs.

GENERAL EDITOR, HAROLD COURLANDER
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR, MOSES ASCH

SOME OF THE BACKGROUND INFORMATION
ON THESE RECORDINGS HAS BEEN PROVIDED
BY CHOON SILASUVAN, DUC THANH, SAN
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