

Love, Smile & Dream: Diversity of Expression in the Compositions for Cello and Piano by Dr Saisuree Chutikul

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Abstract

This presentation explores *Love, Smile & Dream*, a set of 15 pieces for cello and piano by Dr Saisuree Chutikul, an esteemed Thai educator and human rights advocate. A lifelong supporter of classical music in Thailand, Dr Saisuree Chutikul studied piano and composition at Indiana University under renowned professors such as Menahem Pressler and George Frederick McKay. While internationally recognized for her groundbreaking work in social policy, her musical compositions—including these recent works—reveal a wide expressive range through colorful harmonies, unexpected modulations, and experimental sound combinations.

At the age of 87, and with complete loss of vision, Dr Saisuree began composing by recording improvised piano pieces, which she shared with the author for transcription. With the assistance of a piano student and a cellist, the author further developed the pieces by adapting melodies for the cello, shaping harmonic textures, and refining the piano accompaniment. After receiving her approval, the author added dynamics and embellishments for performance. The pieces, structured into three thematic sections—*Love, Smile, and Dream*—were premiered alongside her vocal works on 15 June 2025, in celebration of her 90th birthday. This project not only honors her musical legacy but also bridges generations of Thai musicians, demonstrating the role of classical music in preserving cultural identity and fostering artistic diversity. The presentation highlights the editing process, shares excerpts from the concert, and reflects on the potential of these works to support music education and intercultural exchange on a global scale.

Keywords: *Saisuree Chutikul, Compositions for cello and piano, music expression, Thai composer, Classical music in Thailand*

Introduction

Dr Saisuree Chutikul is best known for her leadership in education reform, gender equality, and child welfare policy in Thailand and internationally. However, her background also includes a lifelong engagement with music as both performer and composer. This paper focuses on a lesser-known aspect of her career: her compositions for cello and piano.

Love, Smile, and Dream is a cycle of 15 short pieces divided into three thematic groups: *Love*, *Smile*, and *Dream*. Each group explores a different emotional landscape and reflects the lyrical, expressive quality of Dr Saisuree's musical language. This study analyzes her compositional techniques and interprets the expressive qualities of selected works within the cycle.

Educational and Musical Background

Dr Saisuree's educational and musical journeys are both wide-ranging and deeply interwoven. She studied at Wattana Wittaya Academy before pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Education at Whitworth College in the United States. During this period, she studied piano with Anna Jane Carrel and voice with Leonard Martin. Summers were spent studying composition under George Frederick McKay and John Verrall at the University of Washington, experiences that helped shape her musical voice.

Her advanced studies continued at Indiana University, where she earned a Master's degree in Educational Administration and later a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology and Guidance. While there, she studied piano with the renowned Menahem Pressler of the Beaux Arts Trio, further refining her interpretive and technical skills. These formative experiences deeply informed her later work as a composer.

Contributions to Public Service and Cultural Development

Dr Saisuree's professional career in academia and public service is well documented. She began as a lecturer at the Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University, and later served as Dean at Khon Kaen University. She played an important role as a UNICEF Consultant in Social Planning and held high-level positions in the Thai government, including Deputy Government Spokesperson and Minister attached to the Prime Minister's Office, overseeing national policy on women, children, and education. She also served as a Senator and chaired the Senate Committee on Youth, Women, and the Elderly.

Her influence extends beyond public policy into the cultural sphere. Dr Saisuree was instrumental in promoting classical music in Thailand. She co-founded the Bangkok Symphony Orchestra and founded the Thai Youth Orchestra, which later came under the royal patronage of HRH Princess Galyani Vadhana. She was also responsible for organizing Thailand's first national youth piano concerto competition and played a long-term role in the organization of the Chopin Piano Competition in Thailand. Her commitment to nurturing young musicians and fostering cross-cultural exchange across Southeast Asia, particularly through her work with the ASEAN Cultural Project, underscores her holistic approach to education and the arts.

Love, Smile, and Dream

Love, Smile, and Dream is a cycle of fifteen short pieces for cello and piano, divided into three groups of five, each reflecting a distinct emotional theme. The *Love* pieces express warmth, tenderness, and emotional intimacy. The *Smile* pieces are characterized by playfulness, charm, and rhythmic variety. The *Dream* group is more introspective and atmospheric, evoking a sense of reflection or memory.

Each piece may be described as a "song without words," where the cello assumes a vocal, lyrical role and the piano offers both harmonic support and textural contrast. Dr Saisuree's compositional voice is marked by a lyrical simplicity enriched by sophisticated harmonic details. Her music incorporates chromaticism, unexpected modulations to remote keys, use of diminished and altered chords, suspended dissonances, and occasional experimental textures. Despite their brevity, the pieces are emotionally resonant and structurally balanced.

The *Love* set explores lyrical expression and emotional clarity. For instance, *Love No. 1* in A Major presents a gentle dialogue between the cello's melodic line and descending chromatic phrases in the piano, producing a romantic and intimate mood. In contrast, *Love No. 2* in G minor features a more dramatic opening with chromatic harmonies and frequent modulations. A dolce middle section in D Major introduces syncopated rhythms and a legato cello line, before passing through several remote tonalities. The piece concludes with a calm, unexpected coda in D Major. This piece reflects Dr Saisuree's use of improvisational techniques, especially in harmonic transitions and repeated chord structures that generate emotional tension and release.

Figure 1 Opening theme of Love No. 1, bars 1-9.

Source: The author

Figure 2 Main theme excerpt from Love No. 2, bars 9-12.

Source: The author

The *Smile* group shifts toward a lighter, more playful character. Rhythmic variety and quick exchanges between the instruments create a conversational tone. *Smile No. 1* in F Major, marked *Alllegro*, begins with descending arpeggiated chords in the piano, followed by a witty cello theme. The middle section introduces a lyrical passage before returning to the main material. *Smile No. 4* in F Major, marked *Andantino*, opens with a piano introduction featuring descending double intervals. This is followed by short, expressive phrases in the cello, supported by arpeggiated chords in the piano. A notable moment occurs when both instruments play ascending double thirds in unison, reaching a climax before the main theme returns with further ornamentation.

Allegro rit. Andante

Cello

Allegro rit. Andante

Piano

f *mf* *mf* *stac.* *simile* *simile*

Figure 3 Opening passage of Smile No. 1, bars 1-5.

Source: The author

Andantino

Cello

Andantino

Piano

p

6

mp *mp*

Figure 4 Introduction and beginning of the main theme from Smile No. 4, bars 1-10.

Source: The author

The final group, *Dream*, is more introspective and open-ended. *Dream No. 1* in D Minor, marked *Allegro*, features agitated interplay between cello and piano, with rising and falling figures that suggest emotional uncertainty. *Dream No. 3* in F Major, marked *Andante*, begins in a peaceful, nostalgic tone before shifting to a pentatonic section in D minor. This section may represent a moment of conflict or awakening within the dreamlike narrative. The main melody eventually reappears an octave higher, producing a delicate and shimmering atmosphere. These pieces rely less on traditional formal structures

and more on expressive pacing, open harmonic textures, and atmospheric timbres.

The image shows a musical score for Cello and Piano. The tempo is marked 'Allegro'. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 4/4. The Cello part starts with a whole rest in the first measure, followed by a half rest in the second, and then a half note G2 in the third measure. The Piano part starts with a half note G2 in the first measure, followed by a half note G2 in the second, and then a half note G2 in the third. The score includes dynamic markings 'mp' and 'dim.'.

Figure 5 Opening dialogue from *Dream No. 1*, bars 1–8.

Source: The author

The image shows a musical score for Cello and Piano. The tempo is marked 'Dramatic'. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 4/4. The Cello part starts with a half note G2 in the first measure, followed by a half note G2 in the second, and then a half note G2 in the third. The Piano part starts with a half note G2 in the first measure, followed by a half note G2 in the second, and then a half note G2 in the third. The score includes dynamic markings 'mf' and 'dim.'.

Figure 6 Excerpt from the middle section of *Dream No. 3.*, bars 20–23.

Source: The author

Diversity in Expression

Dr Saisuree Chutikul’s music stands out for its wide range of emotional expression. Each piece shows a different mood—some are warm and lyrical, others playful or thoughtful. Instead of using dramatic effects or brilliant techniques, she expresses emotion through gentle contrasts, flowing melodies, and rich harmonies.

Her compositions combine classical styles with her own personal sound. She often uses chromatic lines, surprising chord changes, and varied

textures to bring out different feelings. The pieces in *Love, Smile, and Dream* each create a unique sound world, yet they all share a clear and honest emotional quality.

This variety in expression also reflects the values that shaped her career in public service—such as empathy, understanding, and connection. Through her music, Dr Saisuree shows that expression can take many forms, and that music can communicate deep emotions in quiet but powerful ways.

Conclusion

Love, Smile, and Dream is a compelling and heartfelt contribution to the Thai classical repertoire. Each piece offers a unique perspective on human emotion, conveyed through a refined compositional language that blends tradition with personal voice. Dr Saisuree Chutikul’s musical legacy complements her extraordinary public career, embodying the same clarity, compassion, and dedication that have defined her work in education and social development.

This project seeks to preserve, promote, and share these compositions with performers, educators, and scholars. By bringing attention to this body of work, we hope to inspire further engagement with Thai contemporary music and to highlight the important cultural role of composer-performers like Dr Saisuree, whose impact extends far beyond any single field.

Reference

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Biography

Asst Prof Dr Chanyapong Thongsawang, Thai pianist and musicologist, received his PhD in musicology at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna in 2015. Parallel to his PhD studies, he was a postgraduate piano student and took part in a fortepiano class at the Anton Bruckner Private University in Linz, Austria. Currently he is a full-time lecturer at Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music. His research focuses on the piano museum in Bangkok and Thai art song arrangements. Chanyapong was a piano student of Nat Yontarak in Bangkok from 1995 to 2004. Further study followed at Bern University of the Arts in Switzerland, where he took lessons on piano, harpsichord and pianoforte. He obtained master’s degrees both in Music Performance (2008) and Music Pedagogy (2010) there. Apart from his

musical talent, he graduated with a bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering at Chulalongkorn University.

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