

Whip of Chada

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The Princess Galyani Vadhana International Symposium 2025, Bangkok, Thailand Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

“Whip of Chada” is a contemporary musical composition of approximately nine minutes in duration, scored for a 12-player mixed chamber ensemble consisting of flute, oboe, clarinet in Bb, bass clarinet in Bb, contrabassoon, vibraphone, marimba, harp, piano, violin, viola, and cello. Inspired by the cultural symbolism of the traditional Thai headdress (chada) and the expressive freedom of drip-and-splash painting techniques, the work embodies an abstract musical narrative that fuses visual and cultural motifs through avant-garde compositional strategies. Structured in six continuous movements (I–VI), the composition develops thematic and textural ideas progressively. Movement I introduces the central “whip” motif, symbolizing the gestural fling of paint, interwoven with vertically layered sonorities that reflect the ornate tiers of the chada. Subsequent movements expand these materials, ranging from intricate rhythmic interplay and timbral dialogues in reduced instrumentation (notably harp and piano) to dense, multi-layered harmonic fields inspired by spectral techniques. The final movement transforms earlier motifs into an expansive, liberated soundscape, ending with an open resonance that resists conventional closure. By integrating spontaneous artistic gestures with structured musical form, “Whip of Chada” reflects a harmonious dialogue between tradition and innovation, aiming to reinterpret and elevate Thai cultural identity through a modern artistic lens. The composition serves as a cultural conduit, presenting the elegance and depth of Thai heritage to a global audience.

Keywords: Chada, Abstract Music, Thai Culture, Contemporary Composition, Spectral Expression

Introduction

The creative work *Whip of Chada* was conceived with the intention of bridging traditional Thai cultural ornamentation with expressive visual art techniques, specifically the dynamic methods of drip and splash painting. At the heart of this composition lies the chada, an ornate ceremonial headdress worn in Thai royal rituals and classical performance arts—rich in intricate designs and symbolic significance. These headdresses are not only emblematic of Thai heritage but also reflect a broader Southeast Asian cultural identity.

Drawing inspiration from the complexity and elegance of chada patterns, this composition reimagines their visual splendor through the medium of abstract music. This creative transformation draws upon the principles of Abstract Expressionism, particularly the painting techniques developed by Jackson Pollock, who pioneered the use of dripping and splattering paint directly onto canvas—resulting in spontaneous, emotionally charged imagery that breaks free from traditional form.

The composer discovered a compelling conceptual parallel between the ornate patterns of the chada and the energetic movements of paint in Pollock’s technique. By envisioning vibrant colors being dynamically whipped onto the elaborate surface of a chada, the idea emerged to musically translate this motion, complexity, and symbolism into sound. This vision culminated in *Whip of Chada*, an abstract musical composition that fuses cultural symbolism with avant-garde artistic expression.

Employing contemporary compositional techniques, *Whip of Chada* aims to present a unified and innovative artistic concept that honors traditional Thai aesthetics while situating them within a global artistic discourse. Through this work, the composer seeks to expand awareness of Thailand’s cultural richness and offer a fresh artistic perspective to audiences worldwide.

Literature Review

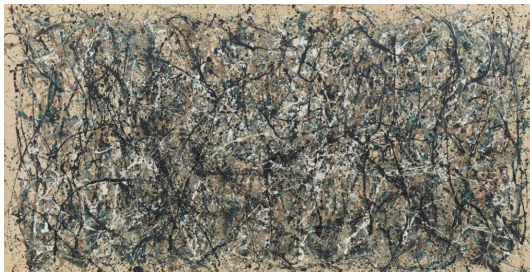
The conceptual foundation of *Whip of Chada* arises from the convergence of visual symbolism and abstract musical language, which has precedent in both twentieth-century composition and modern art. This section surveys relevant theoretical and artistic frameworks that inform the work, spanning visual arts, contemporary music aesthetics, and cross-cultural symbolic integration.

1. Abstract Expressionism and Jackson Pollock’s Influence

Jackson Pollock’s revolutionary drip-painting technique, developed in the 1940s and 1950s, emphasized spontaneity, gesture, and emotional immediacy (Figure 1).

His works abandoned conventional representation and instead presented an immersive visual experience shaped by energy, motion, and subconscious impulse (Harrison, 2014).

This technique serves as a direct visual analogy to the musical abstraction in *Whip of Chada*, wherein the composer metaphorically “whips” sonic materials onto the canvas of sound, emulating the unpredictability and organic density of Pollock’s splashes.



*Figure 1 Jackson Pollock. One Number 31, 1950
Source: The Museum of Modern Art, in New York*

2. Chada

The chada, an ornamental headdress central to Thai court performance and ceremonial iconography, is laden with cultural significance (Figure 2). Previous studies in Southeast Asian aesthetics highlight the chada’s dual role as both decorative object and bearer of hierarchical symbolism (Property Management of the Crown Property Bureau, 2013). The composer draws on these meanings, integrating them into a musical framework that translates ornate visual designs into sonic textures—thereby extending the symbolic reach of Thai ornamentation into the realm of contemporary sound art.



*Figure 2 Chada
Source: Digital Sculpture by Surisak Ponpaipal*

3. Compositional Modernism and Structural Innovation

Works by Pierre Boulez, Gérard Grisey, and Brian Ferneyhough have expanded the limits of compositional language through techniques such as spectral analysis, micro-metric rhythm, and complex notation (Griffiths, 2011; Fitch, 2013). *Whip of Chada* resonates with these methodologies by employing progressive forms, layered timbral fields, and non-traditional structures. While not serial or spectral in strict terms, the work shares their philosophical outlook—favoring form as expression of concept, rather than constraint.

4. Cross-Modal Translation: From Visual to Sonic Domains

The interdisciplinary practice of translating visual stimuli into musical form has been explored in various works, including Pollock-inspired compositions such as *Pollock* by Jeffrey Mumford. Such synesthetic approaches validate the composer's effort to reimagine chada patterns as kinetic sonic experiences (Figure 3). The concept aligns with twenty-first-century tendencies toward multimedia hybridity and transdisciplinary expression, where composers interpret non-musical material as structural input.



Figure 3 Iannis Xenakis: *METASTASEIS*, 1953/54 (157-165)

Source: Iannis Xenakis

This review situates *Whip of Chada* within a rich tradition of artistic experimentation that bridges culture, visual abstraction, and contemporary composition. By weaving these influences into a coherent and culturally rooted musical work, the composition is an artistic output that aims to contribute theoretically to global dialogues on identity, transformation, and expressive form.

Methodology

The creative methodology behind Whip of Chada centers on the translation of visual and cultural symbolism into sonic form through a process of structured abstraction. This methodology integrates traditional cultural research, visual-art conceptualization, and contemporary compositional design, functioning not merely as a workflow but as a philosophical inquiry into the intersection of heritage and innovation.

1. Cultural and Visual Analysis of the Chada

The process began with a detailed study of the chada's historical significance, ornamental patterns, and cultural functions. Archival imagery, court dance footage, and in-person observation of ceremonial regalia were used to analyze the intricate geometry, symmetry, and symbolic layering inherent in chada design. These findings served as a conceptual map for translating visual density into musical parameters.

2. Translating Visual Elements into Musical Language

Inspired by Jackson Pollock's action painting—particularly the rhythm and randomness of his drip techniques—the composer developed a system to correlate motion, color intensity, and spatial dispersion with musical counterparts.

3. Material and Sonic Experimentation

The composition employed extended instrumental techniques and electroacoustic manipulations to achieve textures analogous to paint.

4. Formal Structure and Symbolic Architecture

Rather than adhering to traditional forms, the piece adopts a modular architectural model inspired by the layered verticality of the chada. The form evolves through successive thematic “layers,” each representing a distinct conceptual or visual motif. This form mirrors both the ascending structure of the headdress and the unpredictable flow of Pollock's canvas technique.

5. Collaborative and Reflexive Process

The composition was developed iteratively, incorporating feedback from visual artists, ethnomusicologists, and contemporary performers. This cross-

disciplinary dialogue ensured that the cultural authenticity of the chada and the integrity of abstract music could co-exist in a single artistic expression.

Results and Discussion

The composition *Whip of Chada* demonstrates a synthesis of cultural imagery and contemporary musical language. With a duration of approximately 9 minutes, the work unfolds as a multi-sectional abstract narrative inspired by the ornate structure and symbolism of the traditional Thai *chada*. The musical results manifest through a layered interplay of texture, rhythm, and spatial dynamics, echoing both the physical architecture of the *chada* and the gestural freedom of abstract painting, particularly drawing influence from Jackson Pollock's action painting technique, in which spontaneity, motion, and complexity coalesce into expressive visual form.

As Pierre Boulez once declared, “All art of the past must be destroyed.” His words, often misunderstood, are less a call for erasure than an invitation to renewal. In Thai culture, the *chada* is traditionally regarded as an object of reverence—elevated, untouchable, and bound to ritual. To reinterpret such a symbol might seem almost sacrilegious. Yet *Whip of Chada* approaches this very tension as its creative impulse: not to dismantle tradition, but to release it from stillness. The work treats the *chada* as a living emblem, one that can move, transform, and speak through contemporary sound without losing its dignity.

In the Introduction section of the composition, the composer introduces a melodic motif designed to evoke the sensation of paint being flung—a sonic representation of the signature drip-and-splash technique characteristic of Jackson Pollock's action paintings. This gesture is paired with vertically layered textures, intended to sonically depict the towering elegance of the *chada* headdress. As the piece progresses, these musical elements grow increasingly intricate and intense, mirroring both the ornamental complexity of Thai ceremonial aesthetics and the dynamic chaos inherent in Pollock's visual language (Figure 4).

Delicato $\text{♩} = 60$ "Ca."
Introduction

1 4 4 3 4

Siam Chamchoy

Figure 4 Whip of Chada: the Introduction section (1-5)

Source: Score by Siam Chamchoy

In the middle section of the composition, the composer intentionally reduces the instrumentation to just two instruments—harp and piano—creating a moment of refined intimacy (Figures 5-6). This sparse texture serves to highlight the delicate interplay between two symbolic elements: the graceful structure of the chada headdress and the spontaneous energy of paint-splashing. Through subtle, interwoven melodic gestures, this passage articulates a quiet but profound dialogue between cultural formality and artistic freedom.

(Rubato)

Both instruments are performed in a "Rubato" style.
But an effort is made to maintain "tempo"
for the following section.

(Rubato)

pp arco

pp arco

pp arco

Figure 5 Whip of Chada: the middle section (56-57)

Source: Score by Siam Chamchoy



Figure 6 *Whip of Chada: the middle section (58-59)*
 Source: Score by Siam Chamchoy

In the final section of the composition, the composer revisits and develops the textural ideas introduced at the beginning, transforming them into a more expansive and liberated musical form. This passage seeks to portray an unbounded sense of beauty—fluid, organic, and ever-evolving—pushing the limits of structural freedom while simultaneously preserving the intricate complexity that defines the work as a whole. It is a culmination where abstraction meets control, and spontaneity coexists with compositional rigor (Figure 7).

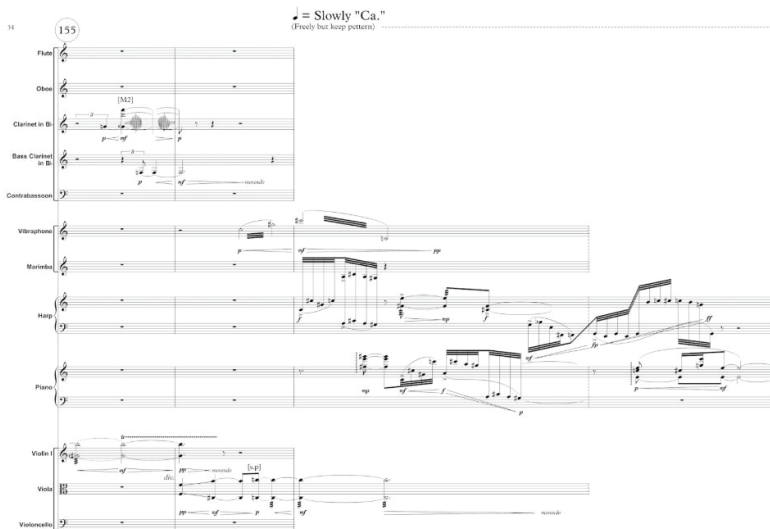


Figure 7 *Whip of Chada: the final section (155)*
 Source: Score by Siam Chamchoy

In the final moments of *Whip of Chada*, the composer intentionally avoids a conventional resolution, allowing the piece to conclude with a lingering sense of openness and emotional suspension. This artistic choice—eschewing closure—serves as a profound expression of the boundless, uncontainable nature of beauty and freedom in art. Rather than offering a conclusive end, the music invites continuous reflection, mirroring the infinite possibilities of

creativity itself. Through this gesture, the composer affirms a personal and cultural aspiration: to share a vision of Thai-inspired abstraction with the world. *Whip of Chada* is not merely a musical composition but also a reflection on the transformative potential of artistic imagination. It represents an effort to reinterpret Thai cultural identity through contemporary sound, sharing this perspective within the broader context of global artistic dialogue.

Figure 8 *Whip of Chada: the final section (162–164)*
 Source: Score by Siam Chamchoy

Conclusion

Whip of Chada is a contemporary musical composition that reimagines Thai cultural heritage through the refined lens of abstract sound. Drawing inspiration from the intricate symbolism of the traditional Thai headdress (*chada*) and the expressive freedom of Jackson Pollock’s drip painting technique, the work embodies a seamless synthesis of visual art and music. Over the course of its approximately 9-minute duration, the piece transitions through richly layered orchestral textures, and delicate instrumental dialogue developments that reject conventional resolution.

This composition serves as both a personal expression and a cultural offering—merging tradition with innovation and structure with spontaneity. The deliberate choice to end the work with emotional suspension rather than closure reflects the composer’s belief in the boundless, unfinished nature of art itself.

Whip of Chada is not merely a musical work; it is a philosophical and artistic statement that aspires to communicate the timeless beauty and limitless spirit of Thai identity to the global stage. In doing so, it exemplifies the power of contemporary music to bridge cultures, challenge forms, and elevate the human imagination.

Recommendations

Based on the outcomes of *Whip of Chada*, it is recommended that further explorations in contemporary music composition continue to embrace interdisciplinary approaches that bridge cultural symbolism with modern artistic techniques. This work demonstrates the potential of integrating visual art concepts—such as abstract expressionism—with traditional cultural elements to create new forms of sonic expression that resonate across cultural boundaries.

Institutions and creators are encouraged to support and develop cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary artistic collaborations, particularly those that reinterpret local heritage in globally accessible formats. Additionally, this composition underscores the value of abstract music as a powerful medium for cultural dialogue and artistic innovation. Future research and creative practice may expand upon this methodology, applying similar principles to other cultural motifs and media, thereby enriching the global landscape of contemporary composition.

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Biography

Born in November 1996, Siam Chamchoy earned his Bachelor of Education in Western Music from Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi, and later completed a Master of Fine and Applied Arts in Western Music Composition from Chulalongkorn University. He currently serves as a lecturer at the Faculty of Music, Bangkokthonburi University. His compositional achievements have been recognized with the Young Thai Artist Award in Music Composition in 2018, 2019, and 2021. His academic and creative works have been featured at prominent events, including The 6th National Creative Work Presentation of Fine Arts: VRU Contemporary Folk Festival 2024, and The 6th International Symposium on Creative Fine Arts (ISCFA) 2025, held at Prem Music Auditorium, Thaksin University.

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