

SURYA NAMASKAR for Wind Orchestra

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Abstract

Contemporary music composition in the 21st century increasingly reflects cross-cultural integration, emphasizing the fusion of diverse musical elements to create works with distinctive identities. This work focuses on the composition of a contemporary piece for a standard-size wind ensemble, integrating musical elements derived from Isan cultural heritage from Northeast Thailand. Drawing on eclecticism as a guiding framework, the work investigates how diverse musical languages—both Western and Thai—can coexist within a coherent artistic structure, enabling hybridisation without compromising cultural integrity. Drawing on the conceptual frameworks of eclecticism and cross-cultural music, the work aims to reinterpret traditional musical materials in a modern creative context. The composition, approximately seven minutes in length, incorporates a broad range of musical dimensions, including melodic and rhythmic contour, structure, phrasing, timbre, harmonic texture, and regional stylistic characteristics. This creative research proposes an alternative compositional approach that integrates elements of traditional Thai identity with contemporary global musical discourse. The objective is to preserve and reinterpret cultural heritage through innovative musical expression, positioning Thai identity within a modern global context while maintaining its unique cultural essence. The work contributes to the worldwide wind ensemble literature by introducing underrepresented cultural voices and musical materials, enriching the wind ensemble's stylistic and expressive diversity. By highlighting the musical richness of the ASEAN region, the work helps elevate regional identity within the broader national and international artistic landscapes.

Keywords: Music Composition, Wind Orchestra, Eclecticism, Cross-Cultural Music, Musical Hybridization

Introduction

In the 21st century, as musical boundaries continue to dissolve, composers are increasingly exploring the fusion of diverse cultural elements to forge new, distinct artistic identities. This creative project, SURYA NAMASKAR, stands as a testament to this trend, presenting a contemporary composition for a standard wind orchestra that integrates the rich musical heritage of Thailand's Isan region. By employing eclecticism as a core guiding principle, this work seeks to demonstrate how seemingly disparate musical languages from Western classical music to traditional Isan music can not only coexist but also thrive within a coherent, modern artistic framework. This document provides a comprehensive overview of the creative process, from the initial conceptualization to the final realization of a piece that both honours cultural legacy and contributes to the global musical dialogue. The work aims to preserve and reinterpret Thai identity through innovative expression, enriching the wind orchestra repertoire with a unique and underrepresented voice from Southeast Asia.

Background and Rationale

The global landscape of contemporary music composition often reflects a tension between preserving cultural authenticity and engaging with a universal artistic discourse. Many works either adhere strictly to traditional forms, risking isolation from broader trends, or adopt a Western-centric style that may dilute their cultural roots. This project addresses this challenge by proposing an alternative compositional approach. The problem lies in the limited representation of Southeast Asian musical traditions, particularly those from Thailand's Isan region, within the international wind orchestra literature. This gap presents an opportunity to create a new work that not only introduces these unique sounds to a global audience but also demonstrates a viable method for their integration into a modern context without sacrificing cultural integrity.

The composition's central objective is to position Thai musical identity within a global framework, maintaining its essence while embracing contemporary compositional techniques. The selection of Isan music, specifically the traditions of *Jariang* (เจริญง), *Mamuad* (มะมั่ววด), and *Kantrum* (กัณฑ์รีม) from Surin Province, is deliberate. These forms are rich in musical landscape, reflecting a deeply ingrained cultural and historical narrative. The creative act of reinterpreting these elements for a wind orchestra transforms

them, breathing new life into ancient materials and ensuring their continued relevance.

Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

This composition is built upon a foundation of key theoretical concepts that guide the integration of its diverse musical elements.

Eclecticism

At its heart, SURYA NAMASKAR embodies the principle of eclecticism. This is not a haphazard mixing of styles but a deliberate and informed selection of musical elements from various traditions. The composer synthesizes Western compositional and orchestral techniques with the unique polyphonic stratification of Isan music's harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic contours, creating a cohesive whole rather than a disjointed pastiche. This framework allows for flexibility in application, prioritising artistic coherence and expressive power over rigid stylistic purity. In this work, eclecticism is not merely about pastiche but about a deep, structural synthesis. It allows for the coexistence of Western harmonic textures and instrumentation with the distinct melodic and rhythmic contours of Isan music. For example, Western harmonic progressions are sometimes derived from the scale systems of Isan music and polyphonic stratification, and the unique texture of traditional Surin folk music is used as a basis for the entire ensemble's framework.

Cross-Cultural Music

This work functions as a form of cross-cultural dialogue. It creates a space where different musical expressions can interact and inform one another, fostering intercultural understanding and appreciation. By presenting traditional Thai materials through the medium of the wind orchestra—an ensemble with deep roots in Western music—the composition invites listeners to explore the connections and contrasts between these two distinct worlds.

Musical Hybridization

The process of musical hybridization is central to this creative endeavour. It involves merging musical materials from different cultures into a coherent, meaningful artistic work. This goes beyond simple quotation or arrangement; it is a transformative process in which the source materials are reimagined and recontextualized. For example, the melodies, harmonies, textures, colours, and rhythmic pulse of *Jariang*, *Mamuad*, and *Kantrum* are not merely replicated but

reimagined through the composition, creating a new sound that is both familiar and novel.

Spectral Music

A particularly innovative aspect of this project is the conceptual integration of an ancient ritual and a modern compositional technique. The work's title, SURYA NAMASKAR (a Sanskrit term for "salutation to the sun"), and its thematic core are inspired by ancient ceremonial poems about the sun. To musically represent the sun's journey, from the ethereal light of dawn to the brilliance of high noon and the final descent, the composer employs spectral music techniques.

The central focus on the cyclical nature of celestial bodies and the earth is an enduring theme for artists across millennia. For instance, Richard Strauss's *Eine Alpensinfonie* (An Alpine Symphony, 1915), though representing a totally different sound world and scale, similarly structures its single, monumental movement around the chronology of a day, following the sun's path from night, through sunrise, to the summit, and back to darkness. This tradition of using the cosmic cycle as a fundamental structural and expressive element in music provides a powerful lineage for the present work, beautifully linking it to the ancient poems that serve as its primary inspiration.

Furthermore, the work aligns closely with contemporary spectral composers who draw inspiration from external phenomena. The fusion of ancient poetry with a modern compositional technique creates harmonies that shift and evolve, mirroring the sun's changing light and colours throughout the day. This creative approach finds a close parallel in Tristan Murail's *Treize Couleurs du soleil couchant* (Thirteen Colours of the Setting Sun, 1978). Murail's work, a key piece in the spectral repertoire, meticulously uses spectral analysis and synthesis to depict the shifting shades and light intensity of a sunset, demonstrating how the changing colour spectrum can be a powerful driver of musical structure. Both works, in their distinct ways, use rigorous contemporary techniques (spectralism) to translate a natural phenomenon (*sun's journey/changing light*) or external field (*ancient poetry/painting*) into a coherent musical form. This creative choice bridges the gap between a deeply rooted cultural concept and an intellectually rigorous contemporary compositional method.

The Creative Process

The creation of SURYA NAMASKAR followed a rigorous, multi-stage process designed to ensure both artistic integrity and structural coherence.

Research and Analysis

The first phase involved in-depth research into the musical elements of the Surin tradition. This included a detailed study of the melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic characteristics of *Jariang*, *Mamuad*, and *Kantrum*. The composer analysed the unique timbres of traditional instruments such as the *trua* (ตั่ว) and *kaen* (แคน), and studied the narrative structures of ritual songs. Particular attention was paid to the specific lyrics about the sun from ancient ceremonial poems, which provided the conceptual and emotional core of the piece.

Synthesis and Integration

Utilizing the eclectic framework, the composer merged and refined diverse musical materials into a cohesive whole. Traditional melodic fragments were not merely replicated but transformed into extended melodic lines and thematic progressions. The distinctive melodic shapes, vibrant harmonies, and mesmerizing rhythmic patterns of Surin's folk music were reinterpreted through layers of heterophonic and polyphonic textures. Inspiration drawn from sun-themed poetry served as the core creative stimulus, while the application of spectral techniques to reflect the sun's radiance and colour, combined with ancient poetic imagery, exemplifies the composition's eclectic methodology.

Iterative Development

The composition was developed through an iterative process of writing, revising, and critical listening. This involved creating drafts of various sections, performing them on a digital audio workstation, and refining the orchestration to ensure that the individual voices of the wind instruments effectively conveyed the desired timbres and textures. The orchestration was planned to highlight the unique sonic qualities of each instrument, from the reedy sounds of the woodwinds mimicking the *kaen* to the powerful resonance of the brass representing the sun's brilliance.

Finalization

The final phase involved completing the musical score, including dynamic markings, articulations, and specific performance instructions to capture the

work's intended expressive qualities. The score was then prepared for public presentation and performance.

The Completed Work and Its Impact

The result of this creative process is SURYA NAMASKAR, a dynamic, approximately seven-minute piece for wind orchestra. The composition is a rich tapestry of sound, moving from moments of quiet introspection to powerful, celebratory climaxes. It transforms the essence of Isan musical heritage into a modern orchestral language. The work's structure follows a narrative arc inspired by the sun's journey, with sections representing dawn, high noon, and dusk, all underpinned by the thematic material derived from traditional sources. The listener can hear the rhythmic drive of *Kantrum* in the fast-paced sections, and the meditative, ritualistic qualities of *Mamuad* in the more contemplative passages. The application of spectral harmony creates a unique sound world that feels both contemporary and timeless, reflecting the ancient reverence for the sun. The multifaceted benefits of this project are now explained.

A New Composition

The creation of SURYA NAMASKAR introduces a new, original work to the wind orchestra repertoire, one that bridges a significant cultural gap.

A Documented Creative Model

The documented process provides a replicable model for other composers interested in cross-cultural creative work, offering a methodology for respectful and effective integration.

Increased Awareness

The performance of this piece will help increase global awareness and appreciation of Southeast Asian music, particularly the underrepresented traditions of Isan.

Preservation and Transformation

The work contributes to the preservation of Isan cultural heritage by reinterpreting it for a new generation and a global audience, ensuring its vitality.

Expansion of Repertoire

The composition expands the stylistic diversity of the international wind ensemble literature, challenging the traditional repertoire and encouraging future exploration.

Cultural Representation

The composition gives a voice to regional cultural traditions within the broader national and international artistic landscapes, affirming their value and importance.

Discussion and Conclusion

The composition of SURYA NAMASKAR demonstrates that musical identity is not a static concept but a fluid, dynamic one that can be enriched through cross-cultural engagement. The use of an eclectic framework proved to be an effective strategy for integrating the distinct musical languages of Isan and Western traditions. The essence of the work lies in its ability to avoid mere imitation, instead transforming the source materials into something new and expressive. The application of spectral music to a concept rooted in ancient poetry is particularly noteworthy, as it creates a powerful and evocative soundscape that is both intellectually rigorous and emotionally resonant.

The composition was realized with the initial hypothesis in mind: that traditional cultural materials could be reinterpreted within a contemporary global musical discourse while maintaining their unique essence. The composer believes the piece serves as a vibrant example of how music can act as a bridge between cultures, promoting understanding and celebrating diversity.

Summary and Recommendations

In summary, SURYA NAMASKAR is a significant contribution to both the wind orchestra repertoire and the discourse on cross-cultural composition. It showcases a viable and effective method for integrating diverse musical traditions. Based on the outcomes of this project, the recommendations that follow are offered for future creative endeavours.

Further Exploration

Composers should continue to explore underrepresented musical traditions from around the world as sources of inspiration and material for new compositions.

Collaborative Projects

Future work could benefit from direct collaboration with traditional musicians to ensure a deeper, more authentic understanding of the source materials.

Educational Initiatives

The score and creative process could be used as an educational tool in university composition programs to teach students about cross-cultural composition and eclecticism. By continuing to create works that bridge traditional and modern musical creativity, we can ensure that cultural heritage remains a vibrant and essential part of the global artistic landscape.

Appendix

Example pages from the full score of SURYA NAMASKAR for Wind Orchestra

Prelude for Wind Orchestra
SURYA NAMASKAR
- A SALUTATION TO THE SUN -

ZURAZAK ULISA
(b. 1983)

Adagio con Calore

Flute I&II
Oboe I&II
Bassoon
Clarinet I&II
Bass Clarinet
Alto Saxophone I
Alto Saxophone II
Tenor Saxophone I
Tenor Saxophone II
Baritone Saxophone
Horn I&II
Horn III&IV
Trumpet in Bb
Trumpet in Bb
Trombone
Bass Trombone
Euphonium I&II
Tuba
Timpani
Mallets I: Glockenspiel, Vibraphone & Tubular Bells
Mallets II: Maracas (Low C)

[F] Brillante ♩=120

Fl. I & II
Ob. I & II
Bsn.
Cl. I & II
B. Cl.
Alto Sax. I
Alto Sax. II
Ten. Sax. I
Ten. Sax. II
Barit. Sax.
Alto Sax. I
Alto Sax. II
Ten. Sax. I
Ten. Sax. II
Barit. Sax.
Hn. I & II
Hn. I & II
Tpt.
Tpt.
Tbn.
B. Tbn.
Euph. I & II
Tbn.
Timp.
Mallets I
Mallets II

[F] Brillante ♩=120



The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with multiple staves. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- Flutes:** Fl. I & II (top two staves), playing a melodic line with grace notes.
- Oboes:** Ob. I & II (third and fourth staves), playing a similar melodic line.
- Clarinets:** Cl. I & II (fifth and sixth staves), playing a rhythmic accompaniment.
- Saxophones:** Alto Sax. I & II (seventh and eighth staves), Tenor Sax. I & II (ninth and tenth staves), and Bari Sax. (eleventh staff), all playing rhythmic accompaniment.
- Trumpets:** Trp. I & II (twelfth and thirteenth staves), playing rhythmic accompaniment.
- Trombones:** Tbn. I & II (fourteenth and fifteenth staves), playing rhythmic accompaniment.
- Percussion:** Euph. I & II (sixteenth and seventeenth staves), Tuba (eighteenth staff), and Timpani (nineteenth staff), providing the rhythmic foundation.
- Mallets:** Mallets I & II (twentieth and twenty-first staves), playing a complex rhythmic pattern.

The score includes dynamic markings such as *ff* (fortissimo) and *sfz* (sforzando), and articulation marks like accents and slurs. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the time signature is 4/4.

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Biography

Zurazak Ut-sa graduated with a Bachelor of Music (Composition) with First-Class Honors (Gold Medal) from the Conservatory of Music, Rangsit University, where he studied composition under Professor Dr Wiboon Trakulhun. He later obtained a Master of Fine Arts in Western Music (Composition) from the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University, studying composition under Professor Dr Narongrit Dhamabuttra and Professor Dr Weerachart Premananda. Zurazak Ut-sa has composed and arranged music across a wide range of genres. His compositions have received several prestigious awards, such as: Young Thai Artist Award 2008 (Grand Prize), The Goethe Asian Young Composer Award 2009 (Finalist) and 3rd Prize Composition Award from The Universal Marimba Academy. He was also awarded a scholarship by the Goethe-Institut to participate in a summer course in Music Composition at the Darmstadt Musikinstitut (IMD), Germany. He is currently working as a full-time lecturer at Faculty of Music, Bangkokkthonburi University

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