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PRINCESS GALYANI VADHANA INSTITUTE OF MUSIC

Proceedings

dIVErSItY /N UnISoN WONDER LAND

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at Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music, Thailand

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Proceedings
The Princess Galyani Vadhana International Symposium 2025

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WONDER LAND

20th – 23rd August 2025
at Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music,
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Organized by
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The Princess Galyani Vadhana International Symposium 2025

The PGVIM International Symposium 2025: “Diversity in Unison: Wonderland” draws inspiration from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*—a tale of transformation, curiosity, and the navigation of unfamiliar territories—exploring how diverse musical traditions encounter and reshape one another. Like Alice’s journey through a world where familiar rules no longer apply, the symposium examines how musicians and musical communities venture into new artistic territories, discovering unexpected connections and possibilities.

Our ″Wonderland″ represents the creative space where musical boundaries become fluid, where genres and traditions interact in surprising ways, and where the process of transformation itself becomes a source of artistic innovation. Through concrete musical examples and case studies, we seek to understand how artists navigate the challenges and opportunities of cross-cultural collaboration while maintaining the integrity of their distinct traditions.

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WONDER LAND

We are delighted to present the Proceedings of the Princess Galyani Vadhana International Symposium, *Wonderland* 2025, a collection that illustrates the imagination, intellect, and empathy of a vibrant community of music scholars, educators, and creators. Each contribution resonates with our shared conviction that music research is a living dialogue. In this evolving space, knowledge, artistry, and humanity intertwine to shape how we hear and understand the world.

The theme *Wonderland* invites us to journey beyond the known, to dwell in curiosity, renewal, and transformation. It reminds us that wonder is a cultivated way of perception—transforming sound into knowledge and creativity into inquiry. Within these pages, we witness how music research continues to inspire both the depth of human experience and the infinite possibilities of imagination.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all contributing scholars, peer reviewers, the editorial team, and members of the PGVIM—especially Acting President Anothai Nitibhon—for their vision, inspiration, and unwavering commitment to advancing the music landscape. Their collective dedication has made this publication possible. May this volume continue to foster dialogue, reflection, and the courage to envision new horizons for music, education, and the human spirit.

Assistant Professor Dr Suppabhorn Suwanpakdee,
Editor-in-Chief
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Jumping down the Rabbit Hole – Exploring Artistic Agency by Classical Music Performers

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Abstract

It takes 10,000 hours of practice to master an instrument, it is said. In music education, we easily fill those hours—training from childhood in technical and theoretical skills to meet the highest standards. But what happens when this framework we've trained for disappears? What remains when the certainty of a score falls away? What happened to our own creative agency? It makes you wonder—we might be missing something in the way we teach. Creativity isn't reserved for composers or improvisers—it's at the core of artistry, and that includes performers. So how do we make our 10,000 hours not a straitjacket, but a wealth of knowledge, skill, curiosity, and creative potential? I invite you to embrace your inner Alice, and take a leap with me. Dare to fail, take a risk, get back up—and eventually, create something beyond expectations—not despite, but because you didn't expect it.

Keywords: Creativity, Artistic agency, Curatorship, Performativity.

Introduction

When we hear the word Wonderland, we instinctively think of Alice: a young, inquisitive girl who stumbles into a magical world full of impossibilities, simply by stepping off the trodden path and leaping into the unknown—the proverbial rabbit hole. My own introduction to Alice's adventures came at a very young age, through a cartoon series bearing the same name. What captured my imagination most at that time, however, was not so much the surreal setting, but the rabbit hole—or more precisely, the white rabbit itself. Likely because rabbits have always been my favourite animal, I found myself identifying with the young adventurer, secretly hoping that I too might encounter a curious, long-eared creature who would lead me into an unexpected journey filled with strange encounters and fantastical adventures.

It was only years later that I came to understand Alice's Adventures in Wonderland as more than a whimsical tale. Carroll's novel is a rich allegory

about navigating complexity, embracing the illogical, and developing creative thinking in the face of uncertainty—a lesson in growing up and discovering one's identity within an often-incoherent world. In Dutch, my native language, the word "wonder" translates as "miracle," suggesting a passive experience: something that happens to you. Within that context, a world filled with magical and unrealistic creatures made perfect sense. Only much later did I realize that the English verb "to wonder" contains another, more active dimension. Miracles may occur beyond our control, but "to wonder"—to ponder, question, or feel surprised—is a more conscious act: it implies reflection, curiosity, and a willingness to explore the unknown. Seen this way, Alice does not merely undergo a strange journey—she initiates it. She chooses to go beyond the familiar, and without much hesitation, to explore what else is out there—wherever that may lead her.

Remarkably, however exciting and surprising it may be, this spirit of wondering—creative, open-ended inquiry—is precisely what seems to be sidelined in parts of our contemporary artistic world, namely in domains where control, discipline, and certainty are prioritized, such as professional Western Classical Music performance and education. After all, rather than embracing the unknown, we often work to eliminate it as much as possible through rigorous practice and rehearsal, rule-based interpretation, a pursuit for authenticity and compliance, and a seemingly deep aversion to taking risks and (publicly) making mistakes.

However, in doing so, we run a different kind of risk, namely the risk of losing touch with the imaginative spirit that fuels artistic development, of the individual performer as well as the discipline itself. Why do we seem to prioritize control over surprise, certainty over possibilities, the destination over the journey? Why do we associate wondering with discomfort and taking time for exploration with unproductivity? If we as performing artists and educators indeed pride ourselves on being critical thinkers, why does the process of questioning, doubting, or deviating from the expected path so often make us uneasy when actually we should be practicing it?

In this essay, I offer reflections on our prevailing relationship with a written score and existing expectation patterns towards its performance, on the typical approach to creativity within Western Classical Music education—and why, in practice, this approach often fails to shift our perspective. I then propose a new approach for repertoire-based performative creativity, illustrating its applicability as a continuum spanning from faithful interpretation to progressive creation. Finally, I call upon educators and performers alike to rethink their roles within the broader domain and to reshape educational and concert practices in ways that encourage and empower students and professionals to explore their agency as creative performers.

Examining Performance Practice: Searching for a Rabbit Hole

The Western classical performance tradition has long prized precision, fidelity, and discipline. These values have no doubt produced extraordinary musicians and unforgettable interpretations. But they have also constrained our understanding of what it means to be a performer. Despite spending an extreme amount of time studying, rehearsing, and perfecting repertoire—the proverbial "10,000 hours"—many performers rooted in the Western classical tradition feel vulnerable without a written score in front of them. We have trained ourselves to the maximum to achieve perfection in the rendering of complex compositions, holding ourselves to standards where flawless execution is the bare minimum—to the extent that many performers struggle with a deep-seated discomfort—often even inhibition—when it comes to spontaneous or unscripted musical expression. This discomfort becomes all the more apparent when compared with musicians from other traditions. Jazz artists, pop musicians, and performers of various world and folk music traditions, for example, seem to engage with performance more fluidly. They, too, spend years developing their skills, yet many appear more at ease when spontaneously asked to "play music". Without resorting to stereotyping, it seems fair to ask: what is missing in our Western Classical Music training, or vice versa: what is there that seems to be holding us back?

At the heart of the difference lies the (attributed) role of the score. In Western classical music, the written composition has taken on an authoritative status. This is not inherently problematic—after all, the score is a powerful tool for transmitting complex musical ideas—but the way we approach it has a major impact. We often consider ourselves *performers of music* rather than *music performers.* The difference is subtle but significant: the former implies we rely on material—something to reproduce; the latter suggests a broader role, one that includes creating and esponding in the moment. Music, in this broader sense, is not simply a fixed entity to be retrieved or decoded from a score. It is ephemeral. It only truly exists when it is performed, shaped anew each time by the performer's artistic choices and actions as well as the unique performance context.

This may seem self-evident, however, in reality this is not how Western Classical Music performance is generally practiced or taught. Over time, our reverence for the score and the composed musical work has become entangled with the belief in a singular, ideal, and "authentic" interpretation —known as *Texttreue* (fidelity to the score). This perspective casts the performer more as a faithful executor than as a creative collaborator, carrying with it both expectations and limitations. It influenced concert practice and

education well into the 20th century, and is perhaps most starkly—if hyperbolically—captured by Igor Stravinsky's statement that "the secret of perfection lies above all in the performer's consciousness in the law imposed to him by the work he is performing".

Although the above is a deliberately strong statement, this attitude still pervades classical music education today. From the earliest stages of training, students are presented with a score and expected to learn the notes—precisely, meticulously, and to a high technical standard. The emphasis is on knowledge and practice, on analysis and repetition, on achieving a polished and accurate rendition of the written work. The score thereby assumes the role of a limiting frame, shaping—and at times restricting—the performer's interpretive possibilities. And yet, paradoxically, we also acknowledge that a score can never contain everything a composer intended. It is an approximation, subject to interpretation. The limitations of notation are well known: dynamics, articulation, tempo, phrasing—none of these can be notated with complete clarity or nuance.

Because of this, a performer's role necessarily extends beyond the text. They must infer, interpret, and reconstruct the composer's intentions through a web of historical, stylistic, and aesthetic knowledge. This idea, also known as Werktreue (fidelity to the work), involves not just reading the notes but researching the historical context, understanding performance practices of the time, and making informed interpretive decisions. This notion found its most rigorous expression in the Historically Informed Performance (HIP) movement, which emerged in the mid-20th century. HIP aimed to recreate the sounds and styles of earlier periods using period instruments and historically grounded techniques. It represented a shift from mere fidelity to the text toward a more nuanced fidelity to the historical work and its context. This required performers to become researchers, to investigate treatises, to analyse different editions, to study performance practices, and to apply this knowledge in their renditions. Actually, this is precisely what we now ask of our students: not only to play the notes, but to analyse, reflect, research, and contextualize. The aim is to create performances that are both technically excellent and intellectually grounded.

Yet also this approach has its challenges. The historical norms used to guide "authentic" performance are themselves reconstructions—derived from limited written sources, second-hand accounts, and modern interpretations of historical texts. Particularly for earlier works, no recordings exist to definitively confirm how something should have sounded. In this way, the HIP movement is based, in part, on a fictional norm—one shaped as much by modern ideals as by historical reality.

Take, for example, the opening of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2. The original score from 1901 includes basic elements: tempo markings, dynamics, articulation, and some expressive indications. But it leaves much unsaid. How gradually should the *crescendo* build? How strong should the accents be? What exactly does *con passione* mean in sound? We can turn to recordings for clues: let's compare for example Rachmaninoff's own *1929 version* with Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra, *Artur Rubinstein's 1956 interpretation* with Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, or *Yuja Wang's 2021 performance* with Valery Gergiev and the Mariinski Theatre Orchestra. All are based on the same score, all have exactly the same information at hand, yet each is strikingly different. Even with the composer's own recording available, there are considerable mutual interpretative inconsistencies that nevertheless might all be suitable when compared with the written version. How, then, can we speak of the "right" version—and, if we can, are the others "wrong" and thereby less valuable?

This illustrates that *Texttreue* as well as *Werktreue* are ultimately unattainable ideals. The notion of perfect compliance with the score or the composer's intentions is a fiction. And yet, this fiction continues to shape how we teach and evaluate performance in Western Classical Music today. Typically, the classical training (or practice, or rehearsal) process begins with a score, only to end with the performance of that score, as shown in Figure 1. The entire journey—from the initial reading of the notes through the stages of analysis, historical research, and countless hours of technical refinement—reinforces the idea that the primary aim is to realize that score as faithfully and flawlessly as possible. The performer's identity becomes inextricably linked to this goal: to embody the work, to interpret it with precision, and to deliver a rendition that aligns with the highest aesthetic and technical standards.

Figure 1: A conventional performance model, with the score serving as the starting point, the final goal, and the centre around which all intermediate actions revolve.

But in this well-worn process, where is the room for wonder—for unpredictability, spontaneity, or risk? Where do we let ourselves jump down a rabbit hole?

At best, the only uncertainty lies in whether the performer can meet the expected standard of excellence. But even this uncertainty is framed negatively—as a deficiency to be corrected through further practice. We devote ourselves to eliminating error, to reducing risk, to preparing so thoroughly that there is no room for surprise – negative nor positive. In doing so, we may unwittingly marginalize some of the most vital qualities of artistic expression. If we are to move forward—toward a more holistic, creative, and confident performance practice—we must re-examine our relationship to the score, to the composer, and to the very idea of musical "truth."

Identifying the Gap

In recent decades, the field of musicology has turned significant attention to the performer's role. Scholars such as Lydia Goehr, Nicholas Cook, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, and Christopher Small have advanced perspectives that challenge the traditional score-centred paradigm. They remind us that audiences do not engage with the score—they engage with the performance. Music is not a static entity enshrined in notation; it is a living act, unfolding in a particular space and time, shaped by cultural, social, and personal contexts. In this view, performance becomes a site of creation, not merely realization.

This shift invites a reconsideration of what performance is and does, rather than simply what it refers to. Drawing on J.L. Austin's concept of the "performative", musical performance can be seen not as a right-or-wrong execution of pre-determined content, but as an act that brings something into being. A performative act, in this sense, does not reproduce a fixed object; rather it creates in itself a situated, unique event that exists only through its enactment. Thus, performance becomes not *performatic*—a mere rendition or reproduction—but *performative*: a generative, creative act.

This insight has driven much of the so-called "New Musicology," which repositions performance as central to the ontology of music. Rather than viewing music as an abstract ideal that exists apart from its execution, New Musicology considers music as something that emerges through culturally and historically situated performance. Within this framework, we are invited to move away from being *performers of music* toward being *music performers*, who engage creatively, reflectively, and experimentally with their art.

However, here lies a deep-seated inconsistency. While (academic) theory has embraced this broader, more dynamic understanding of performance, Western Classical Conservatoire training continues to focus primarily on the execution of composed works. Certainly, many conservatoires

already offer improvisation classes to encourage students to move freely on their instrument, applying theory, communication, and intuition to craft harmonic or melodic material. Research, too, plays a growing role—and rightly so: it trains students to question the familiar, contribute to their discipline, and deepen their reflective practice. Similarly, courses in Entrepreneurship are designed to equip students with professional, financial, and legal tools, and to help them position themselves within the field. This fosters reflection, self-knowledge, and career agency—all based around the idea of representing a unique, reflective artistic personality.

But how deeply are these creative and critical skills embedded in core programs, teaching practices, or assessment frameworks? Do they actually impact the main courses, such as main instrument classes, orchestra practice or ensemble training—or are they mostly additions, tokens to an already filled-to-the-rim study programme? In other words: are they really contributing to a new perspective on performance practice and on repertoire, or are they training skills that will actually not be applied within our artistic practice?

When we take a deeper look at our curricula, our pedagogies and our assessment criteria we cannot but discern a consistent pattern: while the mission statements and learning outcomes of conservatoires predominantly emphasize versatility, creativity, and autonomy, in addition to technical and theoretical mastery, deep-rooted knowledge and contextual awareness and agency, final assessments remain centred on flawless repertoire performance. In other words, although we recognize the importance of these skills and attitudes which are not merely reproduction oriented, we fail to actually integrate them in our perception of what Western Classical Music (education) should be. We train our students in reflection and improvisation; we encourage them to discover their own artistic identity, but generally speaking, our final expectations remain the same. The benchmark of success remains technical mastery and interpretive fidelity to a fixed composition. A final exam or recital still typically reaffirms the older paradigm, and the impact of these skills on conventional practice—and thereby, on the repertoire that our students perform – remains peripheral.

In other words, our educational practice has not yet (fully) caught up with our theoretical insight.

If we are serious about nurturing well-rounded, creatively empowered musicians, then we must address this disconnect. We must begin to reclaim the exploratory, improvisational, and imaginative dimensions of musicianship that have been sidelined in the pursuit of technical certainty. We must cultivate curiosity, risk-taking, and play—not as extracurricular skills, but as essential components of artistic identity.

Revisiting the Rabbit Holes

What, then, would it mean to return to wondering? Not *"How should I better play what is written?"* but rather *"What happens if I don't play what is written?"* What if the performance is no longer bound by predetermined structures, but instead unfolds unpredictably—an open-ended journey rather than a prescribed path?

This kind of engagement requires courage. It may take longer to prepare; it will likely involve failure, uncertainty, and moments of confusion. But it also opens the door to something richer: surprise, delight, originality, and perhaps even moments of artistic magic. It encourages performers not only to interpret but to invent, to shape experiences that are truly of the moment. It transforms the act of performance into a site of inquiry, imagination, and creation.

In this sense, re-integrating improvisation, risk, and creative exploration into classical performance practice is not a luxury—it is a necessity. It is how we reassert our agency as performing artists, how we bridge the gap between theory and practice, and how we ensure that classical music remains a living, evolving art form rather than an "imaginary museum of musical works". Let's explore further—and try to find a rabbit hole.

A Sidestep: Thinking about Creativity

When we consider what it is we wish to reclaim—spontaneity, surprise, and the courage to venture into the unknown—we are ultimately speaking about *creativity.* While the term is ubiquitous, its use is often undefined, assumed to be self-evident. In everyday discourse, creativity is typically linked to terms such as originality, uniqueness, divergent thinking, flexibility, imagination, playfulness, and the generation of new ideas. These associations highlight different, complementary dimensions of the creative act. To bring greater conceptual clarity, Rhodes' (1961) well-known 4-P model organizes creativity into four interrelated domains: Process, Product, Person, and Place. A brief exploration of each offers insight into how creativity operates in music performance—and, more importantly, how it can be consciously cultivated within Western Classical Music education.

Product: Novelty and Usefulness

When we evaluate creativity in terms of product, the focus tends to rest on two core criteria: novelty and usefulness. For a product to be considered creative, it must be new within its field, and relevant or valuable within a specific aesthetic, functional, or cultural context. Yet these criteria are fluid, shaped

by time, taste, and disciplinary expectations. In the 1920s, Gershwin created a new, unique and distinctly American sound through his innovative fusion of classical music with the rhythms and melodies of popular American jazz, blues, and ragtime. Similarly, Schönberg's development of the dodecaphonic composition marked a radical break with the classical music tradition. Today, however, this principle is widely known and has itself become part of the musical tradition.

In other words, creativity is not absolute. What is considered novel or useful in one era or environment may be perceived as derivative or redundant in another. Creative products are always embedded within, and evaluated against, the norms of their cultural and historical moment. Moreover, although seemingly the easiest way to evaluate creativity, the final result is hardly the only aspect we should consider in education, and certainly not the most important. This is where the other P's come in.

Process: Exploration Without Guarantee

From the perspective of (artistic) processes, creativity emerges not merely as an outcome but as an unfolding exploration that may or may not lead to a concrete result. Creative processes are contextually and socially constructed; they arise from the continuous and dynamic interplay between individuals and their environment. Even an inconclusive or "unsuccessful" endeavour can be judged as creative if it demonstrates risk-taking, ideation, and a willingness to open up the mind for the unexpected.

As mentioned earlier, the outcome of a Process—ergo, the Product—is not sufficient to define it as creative. If novelty and usefulness are achieved accidentally or without intention, the result may not be considered truly creative. This leads to the proposal of a fifth 'P': Purpose: every Process leading to a Product (or not), must have had the creation of a certain outcome to begin with—without predefining its final form. For example, while practicing a scale, a young trombonist might play a melody that sounds original and aesthetically pleasing, one never before played or documented. The result may be novel and even musically useful, but it is not the product of a purposeful creative process. Without a conceptual framework or intentional process behind the act, the outcome fails to qualify as creative in the meaningful sense.

Person: Traits and Dispositions for Creativity

Another essential lens for understanding creativity is the Person—the individual whose dispositions, motivations, and experiences shape the Process and its Potential – possibly a sixth 'P'. Traits commonly associated with creative

individuals include risk-taking, humour, open-mindedness, fantasy, rebelliousness, deep focus, and emotional sensitivity. These characteristics support not only creative outcomes but also what might be called creative learning: the ability to generate, apply, and transform knowledge in original ways.

Crucially, creativity involves both capacity and willingness: the technical skill to go beyond what is known, and the courage to risk doing so. Glenn Gould's 1981 interpretation of *The Goldberg Variations*, dramatically divergent from his 1955 version, exemplifies this. It wasn't simply his virtuosity that produced a radically different result; it was his readiness to challenge prevailing conventions. Similarly, Cathy Berberian's *Stripsody* would never have emerged without her willingness to break with tradition and playfully venture into the unknown. These are not isolated cases of genius, but instances of artists jumping, as it were, into the rabbit hole—choosing curiosity and transformation over certainty and replication.

Place: Environment as Catalyst or Constraint

Still, also personal traits and internal motivation are not sufficient by themselves. Creativity takes place within a certain Place: an environment, a domain – such as Western Classical Music performance – which is regulated by the field within that domain: the social organisation of that domain that stimulates, evaluates and/or constrains the possible contributions by individuals. Therefore, one cannot be creative in a field without truly learning it. For Western Classical Music performance, this means that repertoire study remains vital. It is how we build expertise on what will always remain one of the core elements of our discipline: the material we work with, the tradition we build upon.

Equally important is the development of domain-relevant skills—technique, stylistic literacy, conceptual understanding—in order to make a meaningful contribution. Here, the much invoked "10,000 hours" of practice return as a strength: a foundation of internalized expertise that can empower risk-taking, not limit it. In Western Classical Music, mastery is not the enemy of creativity but its enabler—provided it doesn't lead to rigidity or fear of exploring the unknown. As performers operating within a field defined by two central pillars—deep technical knowledge and the centrality of repertoire—we are not in a position to discard either without redefining the field entirely. Rather than abandoning them, the opportunity lies in rebalancing them: integrating the rigour of tradition with the openness of creativity. Ideally, then, creativity in music performance involves a dynamic equilibrium between divergent thinking—the playful, open-ended exploration and generation of possibilities—and convergent thinking, which seeks to refine and focus those

possibilities into a high-quality, situated and meaningful performance outcome.

How might we cultivate a mindset and practice that supports this balance?

Reimagining Performance as Creative Mastery in Action

These developments call for a fundamental rethinking of our educational models. While mastery of repertoire and of vocal and/or instrumental skills remains essential, they should not delay or suppress the development of exploratory thoughts and actions, nor should the former overshadow the latter to the point that they have no real mutual impact. In other words, creative capacities can—and should—be cultivated from an early stage: if encouraged only after technical proficiency is achieved, they risk being restricted and constrained by an ingrained attachment to control, perfectionism, and fidelity. This conditioning—all too familiar to classically trained musicians—often results in an overreliance on established models and an underdeveloped capacity for experimentation. Moreover, the training of creative skills should not be an add-on or an extension of the core programme. On the contrary, if we want to prepare students for a future in which artistic identity, flexibility, and creativity are central, we must teach creativity as a core competence—not on the side, but integrated into our main programme and pedagogy, as well as assessment. We must not only in theory, but in practice also, change the paradigm that reproduction of the score is the main goal of being a performer. Rather, together with our students, we must explore how their own creative agency can impact and shape the material they engage with into a unique, situated performance—and thereby into a true expression of their artistic identity.

In other words, we need a clearer, more actionable way of bridging this gap: a framework that speaks to the realities of performers who operate within a field defined by expertise and repertoire—as foundational points of departure, rather than fixed limits. From here, we can explore how to balance them with a more creative mindset: one informed by openness, experimentation, and a willingness to engage risk. Our aim should not be to replace traditional practice, but to expand and rebalance it: to integrate creative actions, traits, and intentions into our work with the goal of creating a new, situated, and unique artistic event.

While these ideas may appear self-evident or even intuitive, they often remain conceptual rather than practically embedded. What remains, then, is the question of how to make this framework actionable in real-world practice.

Roads to the Holes: Exploring the Spectrum of Possibilities

To explore this question—how performers might integrate a more creative mindset, through intentional creative actions and dispositions, while remaining rooted in their discipline—I would like to build on a classification proposed by Evelyn Coussens in the context of music theatre. She identifies four different intensities of approaching existing repertoire from a creative–performative mindset, ranging from conventional reproduction to progressive and radical innovation.

The first category she identifies, *Interpretation*, represents the most traditional relationship to repertoire. The performer follows the score closely, preserving structural elements such as timing, tempo, and form. From this perspective, performance is an intrapersonal creative activity: performers assimilate material such as the score, contextual and theoretical knowledge, stylistic conventions, and technical proficiency, and make selective artistic choices. The result remains within the stylistic boundaries of established tradition. While this may provide meaningful novelty for the performer, the creative deviation perceived by the audience is limited.

A relevant example is Nigel Kennedy's 1989 performance of *The Four Seasons.* Although Kennedy's presentation—marked by a punk-y aesthetic, combat boots, and eccentric stage presence—challenged visual norms, the musical interpretation itself remained close to standard rend tions: the work is unmistakably Vivaldi's original, in line with structural and stylistic expectations.

A second category can be identified as *Adaptation* in the musical domain. Here, the score is de- and re-constructed: elements are somewhat manipulated, reordered, and blended with new material. This may involve altering musical parameters such as orchestration, rhythm, tempo, dynamics, or incorporating interdisciplinary content. Unlike interpretation, this category introduces clearly perceptible creative input, offering a more transformative listening experience for the audience.

An example is the baroque ensemble Red Priest, whose 2003 version of *The Four Seasons* creatively reimagines the work for quartet. Their version includes changes in tempo, ornamentation, instrumentation, and improvisatory elements, while remaining recognizably within the aesthetic and spirit of the baroque period—albeit in a markedly different manner than the historically informed performance (HIP) tradition.

The third category, *Transformation,* reflects an even greater degree of creative autonomy. While original source material is still referenced, it is recontextualized to such an extent that the resulting work constitutes a distinct artistic statement. This may involve free improvisation, cross-disciplinary

integration, or extensive re-composition. The original composition is no longer the only structural or conceptual centre but becomes one of many components within a newly formed musical narrative.

Kennedy's *The New Four Seasons* (2015) exemplifies this approach. This version departs from Vivaldi's original through new movement titles, additional compositions, electronic effects, and an expanded instrumentation including jazz trumpet, electric guitar, and vocal quartet. While fragments of the original remain audible, the piece as a whole exists as a hybrid, original creation.

The final category, *Creation,* represents the most autonomous form of artistic practice. Here, performers are no longer primarily interpreters but originators. Though references to existing repertoire may remain, the performer's role as a creator—through improvisation, co-composition, or collaborative creation—is foregrounded. In a repertoire-centred tradition such as classical music, this category presents the most radical shift from normative performance expectations. A paradigmatic example is Max Richter's *Recomposed: Vivaldi – The Four Seasons.* Retaining only approximately 25% of the original material, Richter combines live instruments with electronic textures, alternate tunings, and new structures, resulting in a boldly reconceptualized version that challenges conventional listening frameworks. Still, creations could go even further, and in the end be no longer audibly or conceptually connected to their original inspiration—the only limit to creative possibilities is the limit of one's own imagination. A notable example could be *The (uncertain) Four Seasons* or *For Seasons*: an algorithm-based work re-scoring Vivaldi's Four Seasons using climate data gathered from 1725 until 2019.

These four categories—Interpretation, Adaptation, Transformation, and Creation—can be perceived as a creative spectrum, offering a framework for performers to understand and expand their creative agency within Western Classical performance practice. After all, all of these interventions, manipulations, or interpretations remain rooted in repertoire and continue to require discipline-specific skills, knowledge, and attitudes. At the same time, they each incorporate varying degrees of creativity. The more creative the intervention, the more personal the result becomes—and the less it resembles other versions of the same repertoire. We might therefore understand this as a continuum, along which performers should be able to move freely and fluidly. At one end lies conventional interpretation—the least creatively transformative approach, yet still the dominant focus of our pedagogy and assessment frameworks. At the other end lie more radical forms of transformational or progressive creation, where the performer's input significantly reshapes or reimagines the original material.

Bridging the Gap: The Role of Education

While these more exploratory practices are sometimes included in curricula—improvisation classes, research projects, or elective modules—they rarely find their way onto the stage of a final exam. In other words, we do not yet offer students the environment they need to fully develop as creative performers. Or put differently, we expect students to grow into performative creators, yet we fail to offer them the conditions in which that growth can take root. The result of this is that we still send graduates into a professional world where they are likely to reproduce the same structures and expectations that uphold the current status quo—thus perpetuating the cycle of stagnation.

So perhaps we, too, must begin to wonder—as educators, leadership, educational experts, policymakers, and practitioners: What can we do—where is our rabbit hole?

Let us therefore return to the concept of *Place.* After all, this doesn't only refer to the environment or domain—Western Classical Music Performance—but also to the broader field: the ecosystem of professionals, institutions, and audiences that shape its norms and expectations. As performers, we must not only understand the domain but also recognize how the field supports—or suppresses—its evolution. A healthy field can nourish creativity, stimulate innovation, and allow new ideas to flourish. An unhealthy one can become rigid, overly conservative, and ultimately irrelevant. In such a scenario, classical performance risks becoming little more than an "imaginary museum of musical works."

Consider the infamous premiere of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*, dismissed by its first audience as *Le Massacre du Tympan.* It's hard now to imagine the outrage it provoked, given how foundational the work became. But its initial reception reminds us that true innovation is often disruptive—and that it takes time, persistence, and contextual support for a field to absorb new ideas. Importantly, *The Rite* was not discarded. It was reintroduced, reframed, and ultimately embraced.

In this sense, how a field deals with risk, experimentation, and even failure is pivotal. It determines whether ideas survive or disappear. Doubt and uncertainty are not obstacles—they are catalysts. They challenge us to reimagine, to grow, to create. They offer a way out of one-size-fits-all performance standards and into more personal, responsive forms of artistry.

Students are capable of rising to this challenge, and so are teachers—together they are the true agents of change, turning ideas into lived practice rather than leaving them as theory. At first, it may—and probably will—feel uncomfortable. It may feel like losing control, and after years of training for certainty, the experience of ambiguity is unsettling. But in a setting of

structured uncertainty—where exploration and evaluation coexist—students begin to develop a tolerance for ambiguity and a deeper, more personal connection to their artistic process. With guidance and encouragement, they discover that uncertainty can be empowering.

To support this shift, we need new forms of reflection and assessment. Creative activity doesn't lower performance standards—it reshapes them. Assessments should not only measure technical accuracy, but also risk-taking, inventiveness, and abductive reasoning: the combination of intuition, pattern recognition, and experiential knowledge that leads to artistic insight. Intuition becomes a central skill in this creative approach. It is anticipatory, embodied knowledge—built through experience, reflection, and iterative exploration. The more one works this way, the sharper that intuition becomes. But this kind of intuition must be taught and trained. It is not innate. It is our responsibility as educators to cultivate it.

Some Concluding Thoughts

Let me be clear: there is nothing wrong with traditional interpretation. The point is not to abandon the canon, nor to stop performing "what is written." The point is to recognize that we have choices—and that those choices are artistic, not merely technical. This continuum of performative possibilities, alongside the model of performative music creation outlined earlier, invites us to rethink how we educate musicians. If we truly want to prepare the next generation for the future of the discipline, we must teach more than execution. We must teach them to think with, through, and beyond the score.

That means fostering curiosity, encouraging risk-taking, and empowering creative agency. This is not about tearing down tradition. It's about shifting the emphasis—from perfection to exploration, from reproduction to creation, from reverence to dialogue.

So, here's my invitation—alongside Alice let's not be afraid to take a different route. Let yourself wonder. Ask questions. Explore. Jump into the rabbit hole and see where it leads. Yes, it will be uncomfortable. Taking risks means accepting failure—and in a world of high standards, which can feel both terrifying and liberating. But believing in yourself means stepping off the well-trodden path. It means learning, evolving, and discovering who you are as an artist—even if you can't yet name it.

Let's invite a bit of Alice into our daily practice. And if we still need a little more encouragement that it will all work out, take it from that other literary daredevil, Pippi Longstocking:

"I've never tried that before, so I think I should definitely be able to do that."

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Biography

Lies Colman is a performing pianist, soloist, chamber musician, artistic creator and pedagogue, and the Director of the Royal Conservatoire of The Hague (NL). Her artistic specialty is the romantic to the contemporary era, with a special interest in opera and music theatre, aside from performing and recording more traditional chamber music. With a Master's degree in Music, in Cultural Sciences, in Strategic Management and Leadership, and an MBA, she has a broad view on the arts, society and education, and aims to connect those both on the stage, in projects and in the classroom. Her main research areas are collaborative artistic practices: working from individual expertise in an (interdisciplinary) creative environment, and balancing tradition, creativity and innovation in practice and pedagogy.

PRESENTERS 2025

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

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

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.

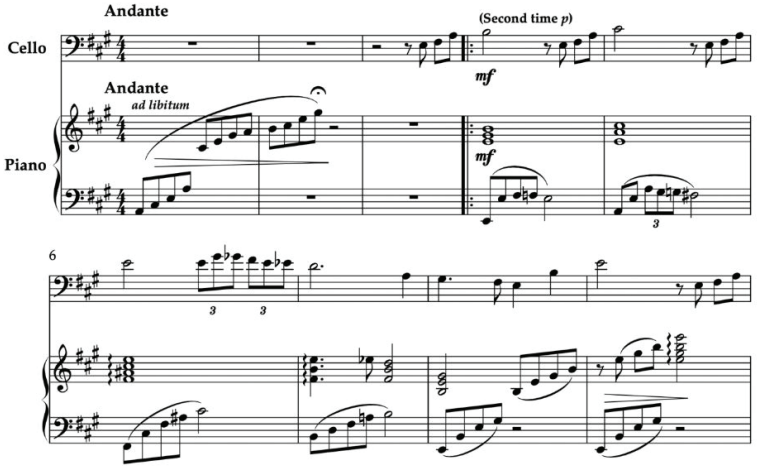

Figure 1 Opening theme of Love No. 1, bars 1–9.
Source: The author

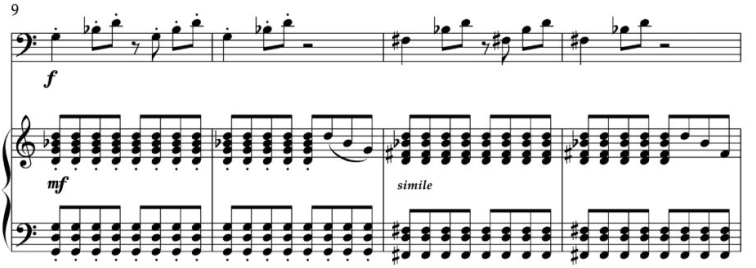

Figure 2 Main theme excerpt from Love No. 2, bars 9–12.
Source: The author

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 *Allegro,* 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.

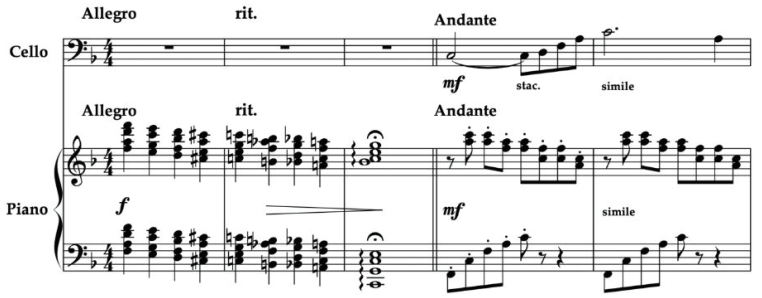

Figure 3 Opening passage of Smile No. 1, bars 1–5.
Source: The author

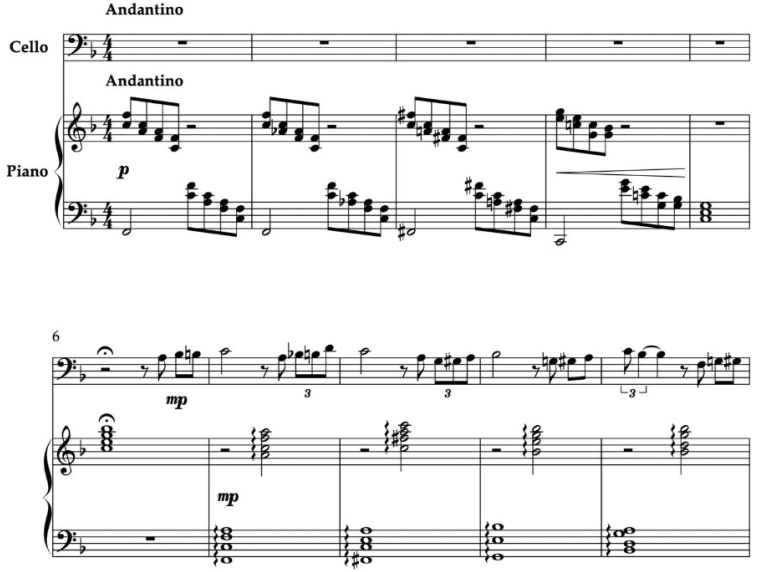

Figure 4 Introduction and beginning of the main theme from Smile No. 4, bars 1–10.
Source: The author

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.

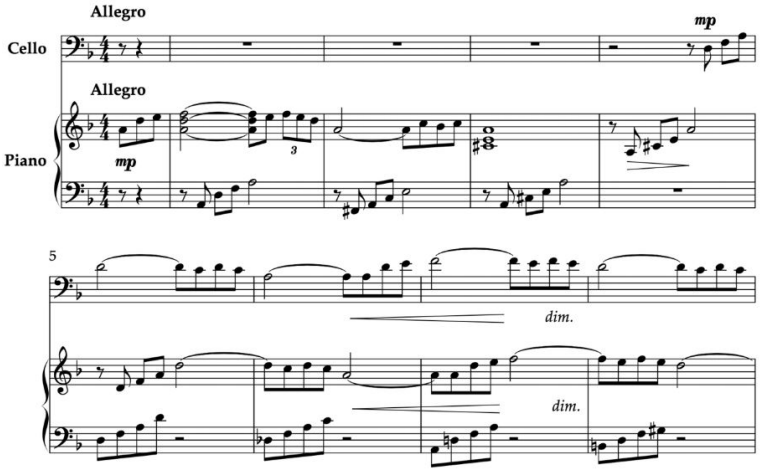

Figure 5 Opening dialogue from Dream No. 1, bars 1–8.
Source: The author

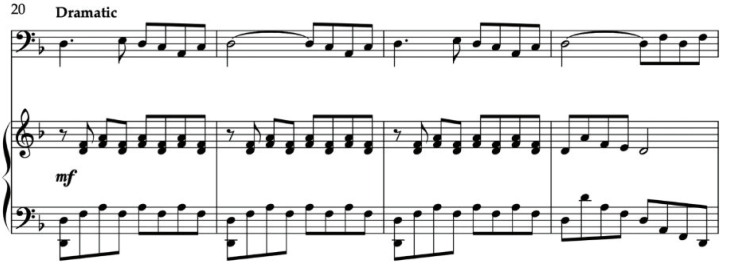

Figure 6 Excerpt from the middle section of Dream No. 3., bars 20–23.
Source: The author

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.

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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 Yontararak 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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Tuning the Future: Youth, Culture, and Orchestral Possibility in the PYO Ecosystem

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Abstract

The Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music Youth Orchestra (PYO) is a vibrant musical ecosystem that promotes youth empowerment and cultural exchange. This study explores an interdisciplinary methodology that bridges organisational anthropology and a theory-of-change framework, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The assessment examined PYO's development from 2013 to 2024. Quantitative data from PYO's records show 69 performances, 41 workshops, 18 large-scale events, and engagement with over 1,000 youth participants. Qualitative findings reveal a family-like culture where creativity blossoms and a profound sense of belonging is cultivated. Cross-generational exchanges between young musicians and parents promote social inclusion and education, reinforcing PYO's role as a creative community hub. The results reveal that PYO is a living model of a sustainable orchestra that empowers youth and bridges communities through music. Ultimately, PYO's journey highlights how diverse voices can unite in harmony, transforming a youth orchestra into a wonderland, a powerful vehicle where diversity thrives through shared learning, inspiration, and unity.

Keywords: PYO, Youth Orchestra, Youth Empowerment

Introduction

The Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music Youth Orchestra (PYO) is a flagship cultural initiative of the Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music (PGVIM), established in 2013 to support young Thai talents through international-level orchestral experience (Figure 1). The PYO project aligns with the institute's mission through PYO's nurturing of musical excellence while developing creativity, personal growth, and community connection. It promotes broader public engagement with music and advances interdisciplinary research through collaboration. Operating as a semi-professional ensemble, PYO adopts a concert season model, featuring intensive rehearsals and performances led by national and international guest conductors, and incorporating orchestral expertise. More than an orchestra, PYO serves as an evolving platform for artistic exploration and societal contribution, embodying the spirit of the *PYO Experience: Explore, Exchange, Excel.*

Figure 1 PYO Inaugural Concert was on 4 November 2013, at PGVIM.

Youth orchestras are increasingly recognised as powerful tools for musical development and social change. Youth orchestras such as Venezuela's El Sistema demonstrate how access to orchestral training can empower young people from diverse backgrounds, reduce social inequalities, and strengthen communities through artistic expression (Fundación Musical Simón Bolívar, 2024). In the Thai context, PYO represents an adaptation of this model, integrating musical excellence with cultural participation and national identity.

Scholars in organisational anthropology highlight the importance of understanding cultural practices within institutions, especially in education and the arts (Bate, 1997; Garsten, 2013). This framework provides insights into how organisational rituals, leadership patterns, and symbolic systems shape youth experience and community building within ensembles like PYO.

Jordan and Caulkins (2012) argue that such anthropological perspectives are essential in decoding how learning spaces function as cultural systems, particularly in non-Western contexts. Moreover, contemporary Theories of Change (ToC) emphasise the participatory design and systems thinking in evaluating impact (Clark & Anderson, 2024). In PYO's case, this approach illuminates not just outputs—such as concerts or workshops—but also long-term effects on youth agency, community cohesion, and cultural policy alignment.

Research in music education by Hallam (2010) and Rabinowitch et al. (2013) highlights how inclusive, ensemble-based programmes foster empathy, social confidence, and a sense of belonging among youth—outcomes that resonate strongly with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), aligning closely with the ethos of the Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music Youth Orchestra (PYO). These findings support the view of youth orchestras as socio-cultural ecosystems that can serve as transformative learning environments.

Contemporary Theories of Change (ToC), such as those proposed by Clark and Anderson (2024), further reinforce this perspective by emphasising participatory design and systems thinking to assess not only tangible outputs like concerts and workshops, but also long-term impacts on youth agency, community cohesion, and cultural policy engagement. PYO's evolution offers a compelling case study of how music, community, and shared purpose can unite and empower young people in Thailand.

This study examines (1) the evolution and impact of PYO from 2013 to 2024, and (2) proposes strategies to enhance PYO's management and operations. Adopting a qualitative approach, the study evaluates both performance activities and institutional practices, incorporating in-depth interviews with stakeholders involved with PYO in different capacities to explore the orchestra's outcomes and broader significance.

Methodology

The study was conducted by framing organisational anthropology (Bate, 1997), and a new theory of change (United Nations Development Group, 2017) to investigate the first decade of PYO's operations. The research examines the development and impact using a mixed-methods approach. In total, there were 39 participants selected by purposive sampling. These individuals fell into three groups: 1) administrators and experts, 2) alumni and current members, and 3) parents and audience members closely involved with the orchestra. Data collection tools included semi-structured interviews and document analysis forms. The analysis synthesised field and archival data

in a structured way, connecting cultural phenomena with sustainable transformation. The study was carried out in three phases: preparation, data collection, and analysis, with ethical considerations integrated throughout. All materials will be archived in the Institute's digital repository as a historical and cultural resource for future learning.

Results

The outcomes and insights from PYO's first decade, highlighting both quantitative achievements and qualitative results, are discussed in the context of relevant United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Overall, PYO's activity scope and reach have grown impressively.

Quantitative Achievements

PYO delivered 68 concerts spanning 12 annual seasons, including regular season performances and special celebratory events. Over 1,200 young musicians have participated in PYO's programmes, including orchestra members, competition participants, and workshop attendees. Each concert season holds open auditions for students from diverse schools and universities, selecting around 60–70 young musicians each year and providing them the opportunity to perform orchestral repertoire at a high level. PYO organised 41 workshops, masterclasses, and music camps featuring professional guest artists, all designed to develop musical skills, cultivate personal growth, and enhance ensemble performance techniques among the youth. PYO also hosted 18 large-scale events, including concert tours and joint programmes. It represented Thailand in high-profile cultural events, such as the celebration of 45 years of Thai–Chinese diplomatic relations in 2020 (Figure 2), participation in the Splash, Thailand Soft Power project that promoted Thailand's soft power campaign, and engagement in other international exchange and collaboration programmes (Figure 3).

Over the years, PYO has invited 37 renowned guest conductors and 37 soloists or guest artists for international collaborations and has partnered with youth ensembles abroad. For instance, the 2025 Tribute project united PYO with Germany's Studio Musikfabrik and the Lübeck University of Music, enabling a cross-cultural musical exchange that bridged the musical traditions of both countries (Figure 4). This expansion of partnerships to a global network has provided invaluable exposure to diverse musical traditions.

Figure 2 China–Thai 45th Diplomatic Relation Concert, The Dawn of Spring Concert 9 December 2020, Thai National Theatre.

Figure 3 Splash, Thailand Soft Power, 10 July 2025, at Queen Sirikit National Convention Center, Bangkok.

PYO's record underscores a focus on performance excellence and community outreach. By the end of 2024, PYO had amassed a diverse repertoire of over 200 pieces, ranging from classical masterworks to new compositions, reflecting a commitment to both tradition and innovation. Equally important, the orchestra established itself as a sustainable institution, in line with the vision of HRH Princess Galyani Vadhana to raise Thai musical youth to international standards.

Figure 4 Tribute concert was on 4 April 2025, Kunststation St. Peter, in Köln, Germany.

Qualitative Findings: Cultivating Creativity, Belonging, and Community

Insights from stakeholder interviews, including alumni, current members, parents, and staff, reveal that PYO's impact extends far beyond what can be understood from quantitative analysis. Several emergent themes characterise the PYO experience and its social significance. For creativity and musical innovation, PYO can be described as a powerful musical vehicle—a platform where young musicians are encouraged to explore new sounds and ideas through experimental programming. The orchestra not only performs standard repertoire but also premieres new works by Thai and international composers, for example, the PYO Call for Score competition, and explores contemporary pieces. This creative environment empowers youth to take artistic risks and express themselves. In later seasons, PYO placed greater emphasis on new music creation within social contexts, integrating activities such as commissioned works and site-specific performances. Such experiences spark innovation and keep the orchestral art form vibrant and relevant for participants.

Interviews revealed a strong sense of belonging and a family atmosphere among PYO members. The programme gradually nurtures an inclusive, supportive culture where every young musician feels seen, heard, and valued, regardless of background. Bringing together youth from different schools and socio-economic backgrounds, PYO breaks down social barriers and forges lasting friendships. As one inclusive music advocate notes, a diverse ensemble enables young people to form meaningful connections without the usual social divisions, instilling a sense of belonging. Many interviewes described PYO as a family. Alumni often stay in touch long after

they graduate, returning to collaborate on music or to support each other's musical journeys. *"What I really like is the feeling that PYO is a family,"* said one former administrator, noting that even after moving on, *"the kids who used to be in it still keep in touch, inviting each other to play music outside. It shows the warm relationships."* This familial culture has tangible outcomes: several PYO alumni have remained involved by taking on roles as junior staff, stage managers, or co-project coordinators with the orchestra, helping to mentor the next generation. The welcoming atmosphere undoubtedly boosts the confidence and well-being of the youths, echoing findings that inclusive musical groups encourage kindness, support, and compassion in young people.

Cross-Generational Interaction

PYO's activities have bridged generational gaps by engaging not just youngsters but also their families and the wider community. The orchestra actively welcomed family members and community audiences into its events, helping to create deeper shared musical experiences. At one outdoor riverside concert, families and community members joined a festive gathering with music and even appeared in commemorative photos that still hang in their homes. These cross-generational exchanges through music helped strengthen family bonds and community support. Parents interviewed expressed appreciation for PYO, as it provided a healthy, family-friendly activity that everyone could enjoy together, with easy accessibility. By uniting youth, parents, teachers, and community members, PYO created a broader musical community, rather than an isolated, elite group.

Community Relevance and Social Inclusion

From an organisational anthropology perspective, PYO functions as a musical ecosystem within its community. It challenges the elitist norms often associated with classical music by expanding access and participation. PYO recruits from a broad pool of young talent, including those who might not otherwise have access to advanced music training, thereby reducing inequalities in arts education. The orchestra also extended its reach through community outreach concerts in public spaces, bringing performances to parks and cultural events to engage new audiences. These efforts align with the notion that music can serve as a tool for social inclusion. Venezuela's famous El Sistema youth orchestra programme similarly utilised free classical music education to integrate at-risk youth, yielding clear social outcomes, including improved quality of life for participants and their families, and stronger communities through music (Fundación Musical Simón Bolívar, 2024).

PYO's experience mirrors this; interview data indicate improved confidence, discipline, and leadership in participating youth, as well as greater public interest in classical music in Bangkok and beyond. As one stakeholder noted, PYO has become a space where diverse young voices unite in shared learning and a spirit of harmony, demonstrating that orchestral music can blossom in an inclusive setting.

PYO as an Inclusive Musical Ecosystem

Combining the above themes, PYO is a holistic ecosystem for music education that also promotes social development. It simultaneously nurtures musical excellence and personal growth, operating with a structure that encourages youth leadership and broad participation. An analysis through an organisational anthropology lens reveals that PYO's core values and practices centre on equality, youth empowerment, and collaborative learning. The shared vision of the organisation—to develop young Thai musicians to international standards while building community—has enabled PYO to adapt and flourish in its operations.

Key factors contributing to PYO's success include:

1) a semi-professional support system in which managers, coaches, and invited conductors give young players a flavour of professional orchestral life while still in a learning environment.

2) emphasis on learning and mentoring, where older or more experienced members mentor newcomers, and faculty or orchestral experts provide guidance that flattens traditional hierarchies and empowers youth to take ownership.

3) ongoing innovation in programming and projects, which keeps the orchestra's activities fresh and engaging, ranging from standard repertoire concerts to multimedia storytelling performances and contemporary music.

4) a focus on social values, respect, teamwork, and inclusion as much as on musical technique. In PYO's inclusive culture, *"there are no rights or wrongs."* Every member is encouraged to contribute and express themselves without fear of criticism, illustrating how the environment cultivates confidence and leadership in the young musicians.

International collaborations further promote cultural exchange. Members of PYO participated in the 2025 Tribute project that partnered with Germany's Studio Musikfabrik and Lübeck University of Music, exemplifying how music bridges differences across borders. This collaborative spirit is a hallmark of PYO's ecosystem. Through projects like *Tribute,* young musicians learned to communicate across cultures and discovered "the power of music

as a unifying force that bridges all differences." Such experiences not only develop musical skills but also encourage global awareness, empathy, and partnership skills among young musicians, outcomes that traditional music training alone may not achieve.

In summary, PYO's model has transformed it into a vibrant community of practice where diversity is celebrated and young talent flourishes in unison. It serves as a working example of how a youth orchestra can function as a social programme, providing quality arts education, promoting inclusion, and engaging the broader community. This dual impact makes PYO an innovative model in the realm of music education and cultural organisations.

Alignment with Sustainable Development Goals

The analysis of PYO's first decade reveals a strong alignment with several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, underscoring the broader significance of its work. In particular, the outcomes correspond to

SDG 4: Quality Education is addressed by PYO's nurturing of holistic youth development through intensive orchestral training and creative exploration. Beyond technical skill, young musicians develop discipline, teamwork, and self-confidence—key 21st-century competencies. Research confirms that inclusive music programmes promote emotional well-being, self-esteem, and social cohesion (Hallam, 2010). PYO's outreach and free participation model make arts learning accessible, supporting SDG 4's goal of equitable, lifelong education for all.

SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities is achieved by the use of auditions and a commitment to diversity, PYO bridges socio-economic divides. Inspired by global models like *El Sistema*, the orchestra empowers underrepresented youth from both rural and urban communities. Participants from elite schools rehearse alongside peers with fewer resources, forming a shared musical community. In doing so, PYO promotes mutual respect and opportunity, advancing SDG 10's aim to reduce inequality within and among populations.

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals is reflected in the fact that collaboration lies at the heart of PYO's model. Domestically, the orchestra collaborates with schools, universities, and cultural institutions; internationally, it fosters connections with ensembles across Europe and Asia. These partnerships enable exchange, innovation, and cross-cultural dialogue. With sustained support from the government, the private sector, and community allies, PYO reflects the spirit of SDG 17, demonstrating how music can build enduring, cross-sector networks for development and diplomacy.

To ensure PYO's continued impact, five key strategies are proposed. These are now briefly explained.

1) Expand community outreach and access. PYO can deepen its community role by organising concerts in schools, provinces, and public spaces. Bringing classical music into everyday settings will engage broader audiences and inspire the next generation.

2) Enhance leadership and professional development. PYO should offer structured training in event planning, conducting, and peer mentorship to prepare youth as future cultural leaders. Integrating these practices into PGVIM's curriculum would enrich student learning and support the institute's mission of excellence in music education and real-world readiness.

3) Promote regional and international networks. To elevate its international role, PYO could initiate regional camps and collaborations with young musicians from other countries. Touring and exchange programmes would promote intercultural understanding and position PYO as a hub for international youth orchestras, aligning with SDG 17.

4) Sustain and diversify funding and support. Diversifying funding from government, private sponsors, alumni, and cultural partners will sustain PYO's mission. Strengthening community and alumni engagement will also reinforce public ownership and investment in the orchestra's future.

5) Continuous monitoring and evaluation. Using a ToC approach, PYO tracks outcomes in skill development, alumni progress, and community engagement. Regular assessment will ensure the model remains responsive to youth needs and aligned with social change goals.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the first decade of the Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music Youth Orchestra showcases a powerful model of an inclusive, creative, and socially engaged group of young people. The results reveal that PYO has successfully fulfilled its initial mission of nurturing young Thai musicians to a high standard while simultaneously delivering broader social benefits in line with sustainable development ideals. The analysis, conducted through organisational anthropology and theory-of-change frameworks, highlights that PYO's impact is both systemic and sustainable. It has built a vibrant community of practice that extends to families and society, influencing attitudes toward music and education in Thailand. With the recommended strategies for its next decade, PYO is well-positioned to be a leader in youth orchestral development. It stands out as a vibrant vehicle of creativity where diversity truly thrives in unison. PYO can serve as an inspirational model for

policymakers and music educators in reimagining the future of orchestral culture—one that champions artistic excellence, thereby creating lasting value for individuals and communities. By continuing this path, PYO is not only orchestrating music but also orchestrating positive change.

Acknowledgement

We warmly thank the PGVIM, home of PYO, and its Presidents, Khunying Wongchan Phinainitisatra, Choowit Yurayong, and Anothai Nitibhon (present), for their enduring vision and unwavering support for the PYO. Our gratitude also extends to government and private sector partners who believe in the arts as a force for human development. We especially recognise the dedication of the PYO operations team, Komsun Dilokkunanant, Tawanrat Mewongukote, Thitima Suksangjun, Nateepat Manuch, Tuchawong Sirisawat, Napim Singtoroj, Guntiga Comenaphatt and all those who have shaped PYO's journey, especially the PGVIM staff. Their efforts have empowered young musicians and shown how music can truly build inclusive, resilient communities. Appreciation goes to Christopher Ireland for English proofreading.

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Biography

The PYO project is the result of a long-standing commitment to music as a bridge between people, cultures, and communities. From 2013 to 2022, Asst Prof Dr Suppabhorn Suwanpakdee served as the founding project director, guided by a deep belief in participatory practice and the power of research to inform social change. In 2023, leadership passed to a new generation, with Dr Pongthep Jitduangprem and Siravith Kongbandalsuk now co-directing the project. Drawing on their rich experience in orchestral mentorship, youth empowerment, and creative collaboration, they continue to lead PYO. Warinart Pitukwongwan, an anthropologist from Sukhothai Thamathirat Open University, provides grounded insights through thoughtful fieldwork and ethnography. Together, the team weaves research, artistry, and stakeholders' voices into a living tapestry, one that continues to grow across Thailand's borderlands and beyond.

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Luenrit Fantasie: Sounding Diversity, Creating Unity

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

Abstract

Luenrit Fantasie is a musical composition that showcases the vibrant diversity of Thai–Chinese cultural heritage in Yaowarat, Bangkok. Created for the Luenrit Youth Wind Ensemble, the piece integrates Chinese melodies and traditional Thai music, reflecting the unique atmosphere of this historic multicultural neighborhood. The melodic and rhythmic structures highlight the distinct voices of these influences, forming a cohesive musical tapestry that celebrates cultural heritage and instills pride in one's roots. It is composed in a flexible score, featuring six different wind parts. Music encourages young musicians to engage with diverse musical voices and explore creative expression, which allows for expansive development beyond traditional rules, embodying the spirit of musical exploration and utilizing a blend of classical and contemporary techniques in composition, including imitation, sequencing, call–and–response, and syncopation, facilitating a dynamic dialogue among different cultural motifs. Luenrit Fantasie serves as a community–focused educational platform that bridges young musicians with local heritage and promotes unity through diverse musical expressions. It enhances cultural fulfillment and solidarity among performers and the broader community, positioning music as a tool for fostering connection and belonging across generations and identities.

Keywords: Luenrit Fantasie; Sounding; Diversity, Creating Unity

Introduction

The Luenrit community, nestled in a historic commercial district of Bangkok that grew alongside Sampeng Market and its surrounding areas, is a living testament to the rich tapestry of Thai, Chinese, and Indian cultures. Its diverse heritage is not just a part of its past, but a vibrant force that contiues to shape its present and future. The intricate carving on the wooden beams and the distinct roof design, among other unique architectural features, bear witness to its considerable historical value.

The Luenrit community was initially established by Khunying Leun, a figure in Thai society, and her husband, Luangrit, who sold the land to Phraya Phra Khlang. The establishment developed into a commercial building, completed during the reign of King Rama V, making it one of the earliest commercial buildings in Thailand. Initially, the building functioned as rental accommodation for travelers, complemented by a nearby teahouse. Over time, Hakka Chinese immigrants settled in the area, transforming it into a vibrant Hakka neighborhood in Bangkok, known as Xiang Hu Du. This transition began the Luenrit community's evolution into a significant and rapidly expanding industrial hub. As more Indians and other Chinese immigrants established businesses nearby, the area became increasingly multicultural.

In 2001, the Crown Property Bureau (Private Treasurer's Office) issued a letter terminating the lease agreement, with plans to convert the area into a shopping center. This process, which spanned over 11 years, prompted members of the Luenrit community to unite and negotiate with the Crown Property Bureau. Their collective efforts led to the establishment of the Luenrit Community Company Limited, which successfully renewed the lease agreement to restore and revitalize the area, ultimately transforming it into a charming walking street that preserves the character of the traditional architecture.

In 2012, residents were invited to collaborate after establishing a company and securing a lease agreement to preserve the buildings and community grounds. They reached out to the Faculty of Architecture, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, to assess the integrity of the structures, which included overlaying historical maps with contemporary ones. Archaeological excavations were conducted in two phases. The first phase, in 2013, involved excavations within the building to collect data for future renovation designs. In the second phase, from 2014 to 2015, the restoration focused on uncovering evidence of past habitation and land use. Thereafter, the Luenrit community was designated as an ancient site under the Ancient Monuments Act of 1961, as amended (No. 2) in 1992, and the Fine Arts Department was required to participate in the restoration planning process. (Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre, 2023)

From the history of the Luenrit community, it is evident that it has adapted and remained flexible in keeping up with modern times. At present, a former commercial building has been renovated into a scenic spot ideal for tourists to visit, serving as a check-in point and a visually appealing photography location in the Yaowarat area. In addition, the Luenrit community has embraced the idea of allocating space and providing opportunities for young people to engage in artistic and musical activities together, particularly through the Luenrit Youth Wind Orchestra. The community has actively promoted the establishment of a youth wind ensemble since 2024, making

Luenrit a widely recognized destination known for being an open, welcoming space where young people can come together to participate in mutually beneficial activities.

The Luenrit Youth Wind Orchestra was established to provide young musicians with the platform to develop their skills in wind orchestra performance. The first activity, the Brass Trio Workshop, took place in 2014, allowing participants to hone their abilities and practice as a three–piece brass ensemble. Over time, the group expanded to include youth playing a variety of musical instruments, ultimately evolving into a full–fledged wind orchestra with a larger membership. The activity of the Luenrit Youth Wind Orchestra is deeply rooted in cultural expansion, using music as a medium for cultural learning. For example, the repertoire includes adaptations of traditional Thai songs to promote the Orchestra's performances. Furthermore, to present them in fresh and engaging ways, flash mobs are organized. To this day, the Luenrit community consistently supports an annual event hosting the Luenrit Youth Orchestra, which has been instrumental in the event's ongoing success.

The creation of the Luenrit Youth Wind Orchestra inspired the development of a piece of community music specifically for the group, which serves as the theme song for all its performances, promoting unity and identity within the orchestra and the wider community. Developing such a piece enhances the musical repertoire and strengthens the community engagement and pride in the organization's activities. The composition, entitled *"Luenrit Fantasie,"* was composed by Natsarun Tissadikun, the orchestra's initiator and conductor, who has also worked on composing and arranging the flexible score for this wind ensemble. By playing a diverse range of compositions, the Luenrit Youth Wind Orchestra aspires to motivate young individuals, from beginners to advanced players, to enhance their skills on wind instruments through a collaborative learning process. This approach reflects the Luenrit Youth Wind Orchestra's identity of coexistence amidst diversity, promoting awareness of individual differences, enriching mutual support, and encouraging sustainable, nuanced development among youth.

In addition to being composed for the Flexible Ensemble, it is also suitable for players at a foundational or equivalent level of Grade 2, enabling them to explore and learn Chinese cultural melodies. Through the performance of contemporary wind instruments, we aim to provide a meaningful experience for young musicians, creating a positive experience for the youth and helping them develop an integrated understanding of the Luenrit community's culture.

Composition

Composed for the Luenrit Youth Wind Orchestra, *"Luenrit Fantasie"* emphsizes the integration of community cultural identity through the use of Chinese melodies and rhythms. The composition echoes the lifestyle and atmosphere of the Thai–Chinese community in the Luenrit community, which is located in Yaowarat. This diverse area has served as a significant trading and tourism hub in Thailand since its inception. The piece features six wind parts, along with percussion parts, and adopts the fantasia form for its structure. The composition techniques include imitation, sequencing, call–and–response, and syncopated rhythms, enabling the melody to unfold across multiple dimensions. This music provides students with a valuable platform and experience through community music culture. The composition details are as follows:

The arrangement of the sound for the composition *Luenrit Fantasie*:

Part 1: Flute, Clarinet, Soprano Saxophone
Part 2: Flute, Clarinet, Soprano Saxophone, B flat Trumpet
Part 3: Alto Saxophone, B flat Trumpet, French Horn, Tenor Saxophone
Part 4: Alto Saxophone, French Horn, Tenor Saxophone,
Part 5: Tenor Saxophone, Baritone Saxophone, Trombone, Euphonium
Part 6: Baritone Saxophone, Bass Trombone, Euphonium, Tuba
Optional parts: Snare Drum, Bass Drum, Cymbals

In the composition, the composer specified the types and number of instruments required for the Orchestra. The composition was then arranged to accommodate these instruments, which strives to provide individual interested in wind orchestra performance with opportunities to engage in collaborative music–making. The process supports mutual growth and self–improvement through the performance of music that proudly reflects the identities of their respective communities.

The concept behind the composition of Luenrit Fantasie

The composition concept of *Luenrit Fantasie* is that the composer envisioned and crafted a piece as a flexible score, containing six melodies, each derived from distinct themes, without specific instrumentation. Flexible Ensembles—often referred to as Flex Band, Flexible Music, or Adaptable Music—embody innovative arrangements that offer freedom in instrument selection for performances. This approach was developed to address the challenges small wind orchestras face, which often struggle to perform in mixed instrument sets, according to traditional wind orchestra scores. It is particularly beneficial in situations where there are limitations on the number of musicians, when the

precise number of players is uncertain, or when only certain types of instruments are available (Panapongpaisarn & Kanchanahud, 2024, p. 5).

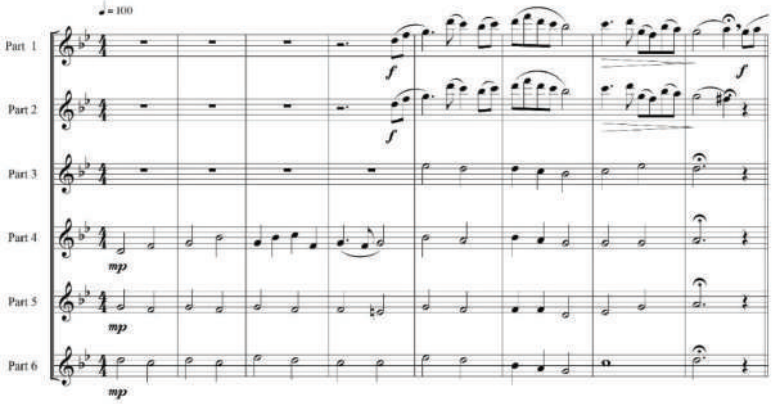

Figure 1 Luenrit Fantasie 6 parts

From Figure 1, the composer initially created a 6-part composition and subsequently categorized the instruments for each section, dividing them into fundamental groups: Part 1 features soprano, Part 2 includes soprano and alto, Part 3 is dedicated to alto, Part 4 encompasses alto and tenor, Part 5 highlights tenor, and Part 6 is designated for bassline. This takes into account the types and number of instruments, as well as the performers, and ensures that the arrangements are appropriately aligned. The dynamics of the different parts are modulated to enhance the prominence of the main melody. This flexible score challenges the composer but requires the conductor to skillfully arrange the orchestra, fine-tune the overall sound, and execute the piece with beauty and precision. In terms of the overarching concept behind the main melody, the composer has introduced a new melody as shown in Figures 2 to 4.

Figure 2: Melody 1 of Luenrit Fantasie

In Figure 2, the main melody is established on the G minor scale by the composer, utilizing the Eighth note and Quarter note groupings to impart a distinct Chinese feel. This main melody is featured throughout different sections of the piece and serves to conclude each segment.

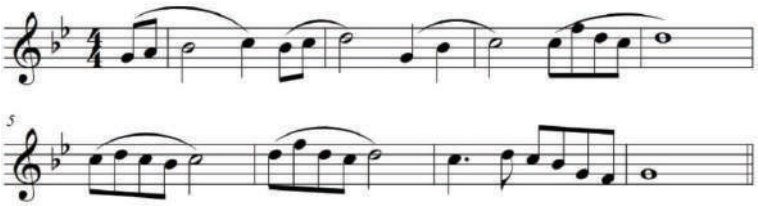

Figure 3: Melody 2 of Luenrit Fantasie

Figure 3, melody 2 serves as an expansion of the first melody introduced in the opening section. This main melody resurfaces throughout the song, concluding each section. It is further developed in various ways, utilizing changes in rhythm and chords to evoke different emotions that align with the essence of the first melodic line.

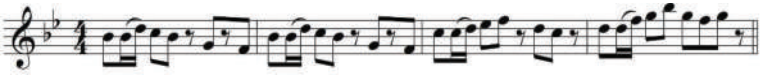

Figure 4 Melody 3 of Luenrit Fantasie

Melody 3 (see Figure 4) appears in section B, utilized by the composer to depict two distinct passages of the song, grasping the vibrant hustle and bustle of trade within the Luenrit community. Melody 3 has been recognised for its unique syncopation and sequencing, making it a standout musical element in every instance it is featured.

The structure of the song Luenrit Fantasie

The composition is structured using the Fantasia form, a free-form imaginative style often infused with thoughts, dreams, and imagination (Pancharoen, 2021, pp. 126–127). The composer focuses on melodies inspired by personal imagination. In contrast, the piece maintains a consistent 4/4 time signature, the rhythmic pattern altered to evoke an engaging atmosphere.

The structure is achieved by reusing the main melody at the end of each section. Ostinato repetition is particularly prominent in the percussion and brass instruments. It is set in the G minor scale, utilising just five notes from the Pentatonic scale that compose a Chinese melody which embodies the Luenrit community. The structure of the song is as follows:

Table 1: The structure of the Luenrit Fantasie

Sections	Bar	Details
Introduction	1–8 (Introduction)	Presenting the main melody 1
A	9–12	Expansion to develop the main melody 2
	13–16	Changing the feeling to be denser in sound
	17–24	Changing the feeling to be tight and firm in rhythm
B	25–36	Presenting the main melody 3
C	37–44	Using a question–answer style sentence
D	45–52	The return of the main melody again, combined with the melody in section B, but with more strength
Coda	53–60	Repeating the main melody as the conclusion of the song

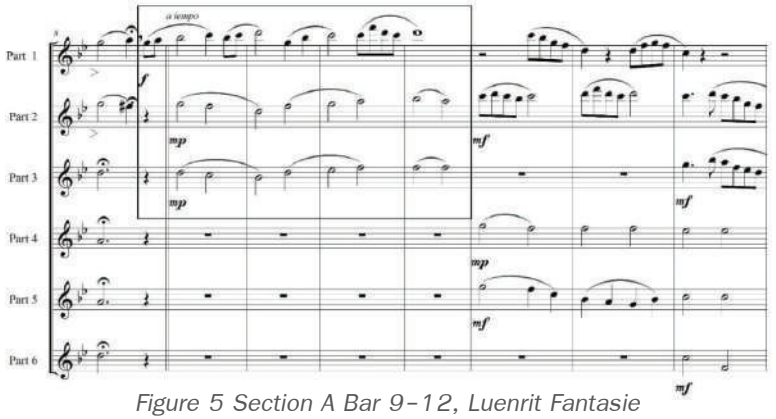

Figure 5 Section A Bar 9–12, Luenrit Fantasie

In Section A, the composer has continued to enhance and develop the main melody by utilizing Parts 1–3, which are performed softly from Bar 9–12 (see Figure 5). This choice effectively evokes the early morning atmosphere of trading, as shops begin to set up their goods and prepare to welcome customers. By employing the vocal range of Parts 1–3, the composer presents a melody that builds upon the introduction, thereby reflecting the identity of the Luenrit community through the theme that frequently appears in the composition.

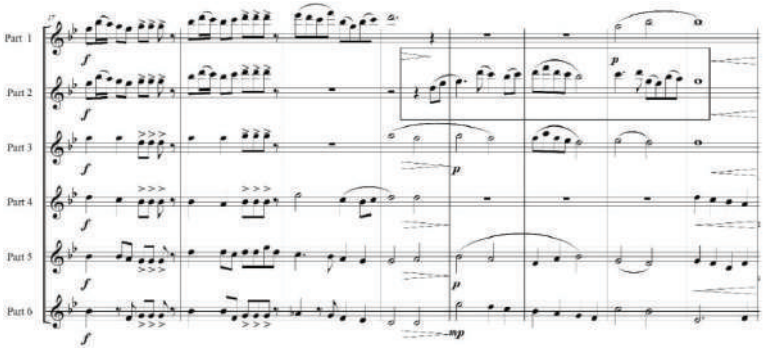

Figure 6 Section A Bar 17–24, Luenrit Fantasie

In section A (see Figure 6), bars 17–19 exhibit a textural density characterized by numerous running notes, significantly influencing the overall sound and necessitating a greater volume in that range (Pancharoen, 2020, p. 79). This section employs a more pronounced use of dynamics and accents. Following this, Bars 20–24 again introduce the main melody from the introduction, seamlessly transitioning into Section B, which features a distinct melody.

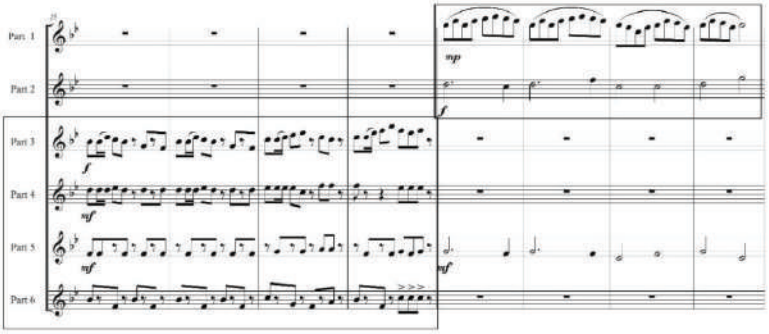

Figure 7 Section B Bar 25–32, Luenrit Fantasie

As shown in Figure 7, bars 25–28 form the transition into Section B, introducing a distinct mood that contrasts with Section A. This section evokes the vibrant hustle and bustle of commerce in the Luenrit community, driven by the sixteenth-note patterns that create a tight rhythm. The use of syncopation in Parts 3–6 contributes to a dense sound, imparting the impression of increased tempo, even though the rhythm remains unchanged. Then, in Bars 29–32, there is an immediate shift in mood, characterized by only three vocal lines, which lend a lighter quality and a more ethereal rhythm to the piece.

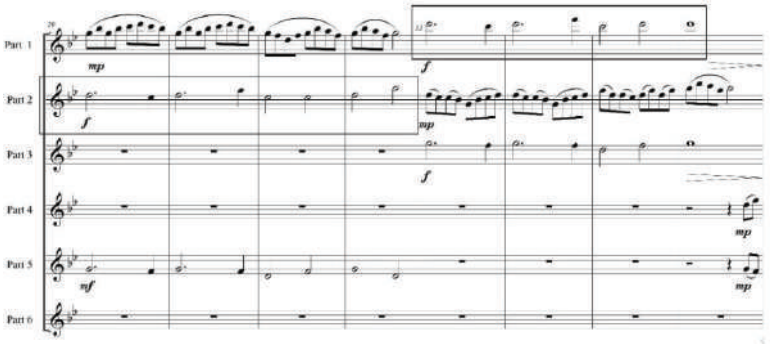

Figure 8 Section B Bar 29-36, Luenrit Fantasie

In Figure 8, Section B, Bars 29-36 employ the repetition technique between Part 1 and 2. There is an alternation between long notes and eighth notes, creating a conversational quality reminiscent of the call-and-response technique. This interplay between Part 1 (Bars 29-32) and Part 2 (Bars 33-36) conjures an atmosphere reflective of price negotiations between buyers and sellers in the Luenrit community.

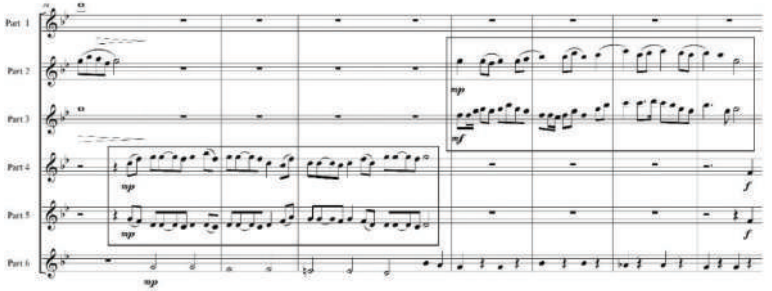

Figure 9 Section C Bar 37-44, Luenrit Fantasie

Bars 37-44 of Section C (see Figure 9) employ the Variation technique by altering the notes. The melody is introduced in the first phrase of Bars 23-40, specifically in Parts 4-5, followed by a Variation in Bars 41-44 within Parts 2-3. Additionally, the continuity in this section can be analyzed through imitation between the tones in Parts 4-5 and 2-3.

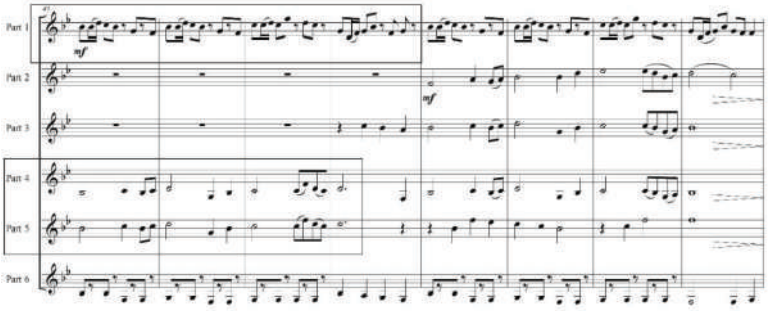

Figure 10 Section D Bar 45-52, Luenrit Fantasie

Figure 10 illustrates that section D, Bars 45-52, features a return of the melodies from Sections A and B, played simultaneously to conclude the song. Parts 4 and 5 present the main melody from Section A, which symbolises the identity of the Luenrit community amidst changing times. Following this there is a transfer of the main melody to strengthen the harmony with Parts 2 and 3. In contrast, Part 1 presents the melody from Section B, which reflects the continuous chaos of vibrant trade from the past to the present. The intertwining of melodies between Parts 1, 4 and 5 creates a rich polyphonic texture.

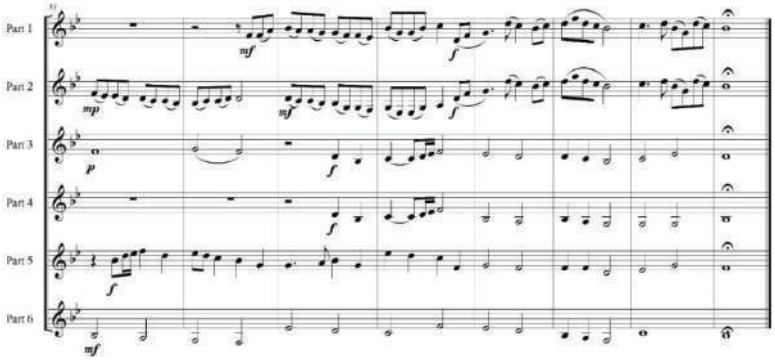

Figure 11 Coda Bar 53-60, Luenrit Fantasie

Figure 11 illustrates the Coda (bars 53–60), where the melody links back to Part 2 with a downward tempo, in contrast to the upward contrary motion of Part 5. It is a melody that moves in opposite directions, when one line moves up, the other line moves down, or vice versa, when one line moves down, the other line moves up (Trakulhun, 2021, p. 13). It also features a Fanfare style of playing in Part 5, returning to the introduction melody as the final melody of this song.

Conclusion

In summary, Luenrit Fantasie was composed as a flexible ensemble format for the Luenrit Youth Wind Orchestra. The composition offers musicians a chance to explore Chinese melodies and rhythms that reflect the multicultural identity of the Luenrit community, blending Thai and Chinese cultures. The contributions of youth in the community orchestra enhanced the song's recognition, and the performance level is well-suited to the performers' skills. The composition aligns with the objectives of the Luenrit Youth Wind Orchestra, which is to encourage collaborative performance skills among youth, thereby further elevating their wind instrumental performance potential. It reflects the community's diverse identity, serves as a catalyst for creativity through musical activity, enriches daily life, revitalises local communities, and stands as an exemplary model for other communities seeking to establish youth wind orchestras. The composition allows them to cultivate musical opportunities for young people while celebrating their community's songs.

Acknowledgements

Luenrit Fantasie is committed to serving the Luenrit community, which has developed concurrently with youth development initiatives and the revitalization efforts in Yaowarat. This community embodies a multicultural Thai-Chinese identity and is increasingly gaining recognition.

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Biography

Natsarun Tissadikun is a hornist and currently works as an Assistant Professor, taking charge as the program chair in Master of Music Education, the College of Music, Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand. Natsarun received a Ph.D. in Music from Khon Kaen University, a Master's from Mahidol University, and a Bachelor's in Western Music from Kasetsart University. A prolific contributor to academia, she has published numerous articles promoting the potential of music in various aspects that impact people. Natsarun received research funding from the National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT) in 2023 for her composition "Kudi Chin Suite." In addition to her research, she has composed and arranged flexible–score pieces for youth wind ensembles, aiming to inspire and cultivate young musical talent. Through her work, Natsarun continues to impact the field of music education and composition significantly.

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Thai-Contemporary Music Composition "The Charm of Thai Folk Music Across the West" for Violin and Cello

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

Abstract

This creative project is born from a scholarly fascination with the convergence of traditional Thai string instruments and Western classical string instruments, particularly the violin and cello. By delving into the musical characteristics and performance techniques of the *saw khmer* and *saw sam sai*—three-stringed fiddles, we have conceived a unique composition for duo violin and cello. The primary goal is to fuse traditional Thai musical idioms with Western instrumental techniques, promoting a hybrid performance practice that is both culturally informed and pedagogically valuable. These compositions, designed as instructional materials for intermediate to advanced violin and cello students, provide a platform for the exploration of Thai and Western musical aesthetics. Moreover, this project facilitates cross-cultural dialogue between Thai and Western music traditions. It provides performers with a deeper understanding of Thai folk melodies, ornamentation, and interpretative techniques. By blending these diverse elements, the study contributes to the expansion of contemporary Thai repertoire and offers innovative pedagogical approaches for string education within both academic and professional contexts.

Keywords: violin, cello, composition, saw sam sai, saw khmer

Introduction

This academic creative composition examines the saw Khmer (ซอเขมร) of Southern Isaan and the saw sam sai (ซอสามสาย), to generate new works for violin and cello performance. The study was conducted through literature review and field research with master musicians specializing in these instruments. The collected data serves both to support the preservation of Thai folk music and to inform the adaptation and development of new compositions for violin and cello. This process provides a framework for contemporary Thai composition and contributes to the advancement of violin and cello performance skills at the intermediate to advanced levels.

Purpose of the study

The study has two main purposes, which are as follows:

1) To create contemporary Thai music for violin and cello playing that can improve violin playing skills and is suitable for learning violin at intermediate to advanced levels.

2) To provide a guideline for the conservation and development of Thai folk songs in the form of application of knowledge between Thai and Western music.

Literature Review

In the Southern Isaan region, traditional bowed string instruments include the *saw Khmer*—also known as *tro* (ตรัว)—and the *saw kantrum* (ซอกันตรึม). The *saw kantrum* has long been the principal instrument in the *kantrum ensemble.* It is also incorporated into *kantrum, chreang* (เจรียง), and *aiyai* (อาไย) ensembles, as well as accompanying various dances. It is especially popular in the provinces of Sisaket, Surin, and Buriram. Performances typically take place during festive occasions, traditional celebrations, and ritual ceremonies.

Khiantongkul (1991) explained that the *saw Khmer* (also called *tro* or *saw kantrum*) is a bowed string instrument made of wood. It generally exists in three sizes: *tro chi* (ตรัวจี้)—small-sized; *tro ek* (ตรัวเอก)—medium-sized; and *tro thom* (ตรัวธม)—large-sized. Historically, the *saw kantrum* has long been used as the principal instrument in the *kantrum* ensemble. In the past, it was performed only for folk music, but later it was influenced to some extent by the Central Thai musical tradition.

During the Sukhothai period (1778–1981 B.E.) (Piyabhani, 2016), when Sukhothai was the capital, its influence expanded across the northern, central, and southern regions. The Siamese people, who already had their own

culture, came into contact and interacted with other cultural groups such as Lanna (ล้านนา), Khmer (เขมร), Mon (มอญ), and Srivijaya (ศรีวิชัย). This resulted in cultural exchange and the adoption of external influences, which were then adapted to harmonize with Thai society and culture.

According to the *Encyclopedia of Thai Music Terminology* (Royal Institute, 2002), the term *saw sam sai* refers to an ancient type of Thai fiddle, assumed to be the same as the *saw phung to* (ซอพุงตอ) from the Sukhothai period. It is considered a prestigious instrument, traditionally used in the royal court for entertainment and ceremonial purposes.

The basic performance techniques of Thai fiddles (*saw*) can be broadly categorized into two main areas: bowing techniques and left-hand fingering techniques. For the *saw duang* (ซอด้วง), *saw u* (ซออู้), and *saw sam sai,* the fundamental bowing practice requires producing a consistent sound by controlling both up-bow and down-bow strokes. A key principle is that each musical phrase, sentence, or section must conclude with an up-bow stroke. The basic bowing techniques include *kan-chak-neung* (คันชักหนึ่ง)—détaché; *kan-chak-song* (คันชักสอง)—slurred; *kan-chak-si* (คันชักสี่)—long tone in one bow, and *sabat khanchak* (สะบัดคันชัก)—fast detaché. Additionally, the *Saw sam sai* features its own distinctive bowing techniques, which are considered advanced-level skills.

Chappanrat (2016) explained that there are two types of *sabat* (สะบัด) techniques of fast passage playing on the *saw u*, the first is *sabat niao* (สะบัดนิ้ว) – mordent, which involves playing a single up-bow or down-bow stroke while the left-hand finger rapidly taps to produce three notes at a moderate speed. The second is *sabat khanchak,* which requires moving the bow in a quick sequence of "up–down–up."

Left-hand fingering techniques are primarily used to ornament the melody, enhancing its beauty and expressiveness. The fundamental techniques include *phrom* (พรม) – trill-like ornamentation and *pra* (ประ) – a grace note, both considered essential to *saw* performance. These techniques vary in complexity depending on the difficulty of the repertoire. In solo pieces which showcase the performer's virtuosity, advanced left-hand techniques are often employed and require high levels of skill. According to the *Encyclopedia of Thai Music Terminology* (Royal Institute, 2002), *phrom* is defined as a technique used on instruments controlled by the fingers, such as *saw* and *pi* (ปี่). To produce a flowing, tremulous sound, the fingertip rapidly taps the string to create alternating pitches between the original tone and a higher pitch, ending on the original tone. The resulting sound is finer and longer-lasting than that produced by *pra.*

Regarding the history of bowed string instruments in Europe, *The Cambridge Companion to the Violin* (Stowell, 1992) explains that archaeological evidence, including paintings and carvings, indicates the

presence of bowed instruments in Europe around 900 C.E. These instruments can be categorized into four major groups: (1) the *rebec,* (2) the medieval and Renaissance fiddle, (3) the *lira da braccio,* and (4) the viol. In terms of performance techniques, *Principles of Violin Playing & Teaching* by Galamian (1985) discusses violin technique in two principal areas: left-hand techniques and right-hand techniques. When these techniques are considered, it becomes evident that both Thai *saw* instruments and Western bowed strings share corresponding methods that can be adapted and applied in complementary ways.

Regarding the principles of Thai music composition, Phancharoen (2016) emphasized that the most important aspect is establishing the main structure of the piece. This structure may follow a diatonic or chromatic scale, depending on the harmonic context at that point. The notes can be arranged in ascending or descending sequences. Similarly, in *Fundamentals of Musical Composition,* Schoenberg (1988) discussed the essential foundations of composition, including the concept of form, the construction of musical phrases, and the development of motives as the basic units of a musical work.

Methodology

The creation of this work consists of two key parts: a study of *Saw sam sai* and *Khmer Tro* (fiddle) music, and the development of knowledge gained from this study into the creation of compositions for violin and cello performance. The study of *Saw sam sai* and *Khmer Tro* music was carried out through the review of documents related to musical and cultural foundations, as well as knowledge of Thai string instruments belonging to the *Saw* family, combined with fieldwork and data collection from experts. The collected information was then categorized into two main areas: musical data and other related knowledge. These data sets were analyzed both in terms of specific issues and from an overall perspective, with particular emphasis on musical aspects. The integrated findings were ultimately applied to the creation of new compositions for violin and cello, resulting in new knowledge that contributes to the development of performance skills and the advancement of Thai-Western contemporary music learning.

Composing Techniques and Song Analysis

For the composition of the *Largo* section, inspiration was drawn from the study of *Saw sam sai* repertoire and performance techniques. The piece is written in 4/4 meter and employs the B minor hexatonic scale, consisting of six pitches with the sixth degree omitted. This scale is used consistently throughout the piece without modulation. The tempo is set at Largo (quarter note = 45 BPM),

evoking a vocal-like character, and is maintained without tempo changes for the entirety of the section. At the beginning, thematic material is adapted from *Nakboriphat* (นาคบริพัตร), a traditional piece studied during the research process. In addition, the technique of modified repetitions is applied in measures 5–8, serving as a method for generating variations. In this approach, certain parts of the melody are altered while the essential identity of the main theme is preserved, as illustrated in the example shown in Figure 1.

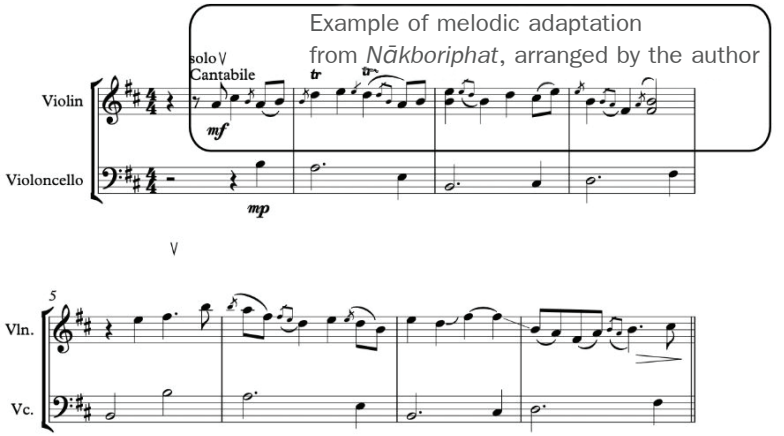

Figure 1 Largo section
Source: Sreewan Wathawathana

In Section A, an imitative technique is employed, beginning with the melodic line in the violin at the opening. This is followed by the cello, which imitates the initial melodic idea. As the imitation unfolds, the violin line is transformed into a secondary melody, performed using the technique of double stops (see Figure 2).

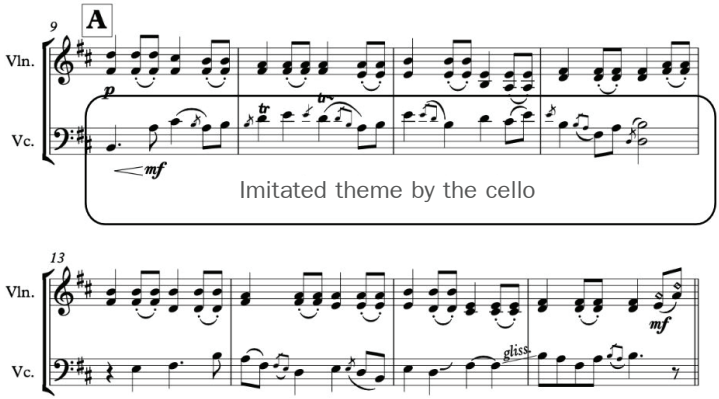

Figure 2 Section A
Source: Sreewan Wathawathana

In Section B, the violin employs the technique of harmonics, producing pitches that sound higher than the fundamental tone. This approach corresponds to the *niew kong* (นิ้วก้อง) – harmonics technique of the *Saw Sam Sai,* a distinctive and specialized playing method. Meanwhile, the cello part utilizes the pizzicato technique, in which the strings are plucked rather than bowed (see Figure 3).

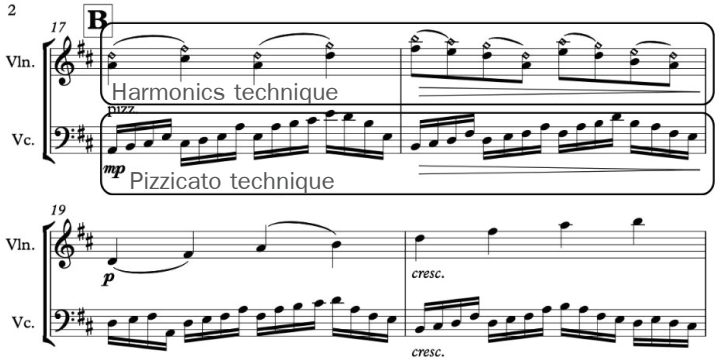

Figure 3 Section B
Source: Sreewan Wathawathana

In Section C, shown in Figure 4, the melodic material is adapted from the folk song *Nok Khamin* (นกขมิ้น), which was studied as part of the research. The melody is further developed to achieve greater clarity, closely modeled after the contour and phrasing of the vocal line, preserving the expressive nuances of the original song. In this section, the cello assumes the principal melodic role, utilizing both legato and glissando techniques to emulate the characteristic performance style of the *Saw Sam Sai.* Notably, the playing position of the cello held between the knees with the bow drawn across the strings bears a physical similarity to the posture of the *saw sam sai* player. This similarity in hand positioning and bowing angle contributes to the effectiveness of the glissando technique on the cello, allowing it to replicate the smooth, continuous slides and ornamental inflections that are distinctive to the *saw's* technique called *rood sieng* (รูดเสียง).

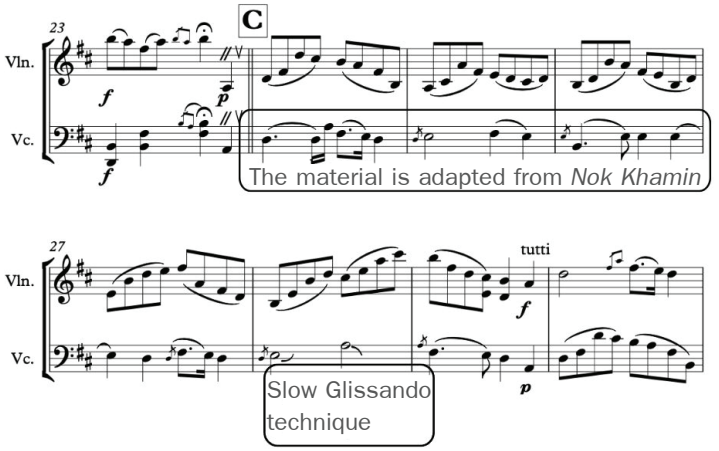

Figure 4 Section C
Source: Sreewan Wathawathana

In Section D, the opening melodic material returns, reintroducing the themes from the beginning. Section E employs a technique known in *saw sam sai* performance as double-string playing, while in the violin and cello, this corresponds to double stops, where two strings are played simultaneously. This technique is called *sai khu* (สายคู่) in *saw sam sai.* The double-stop technique requires extensive practice, particularly in controlling the bowing pressure and speed, as well as ensuring that the left hand produces accurate and in-tune pitches (Jensen & Chung, 2017). This produces a richer and more resonant sound, as illustrated in Figure 5.

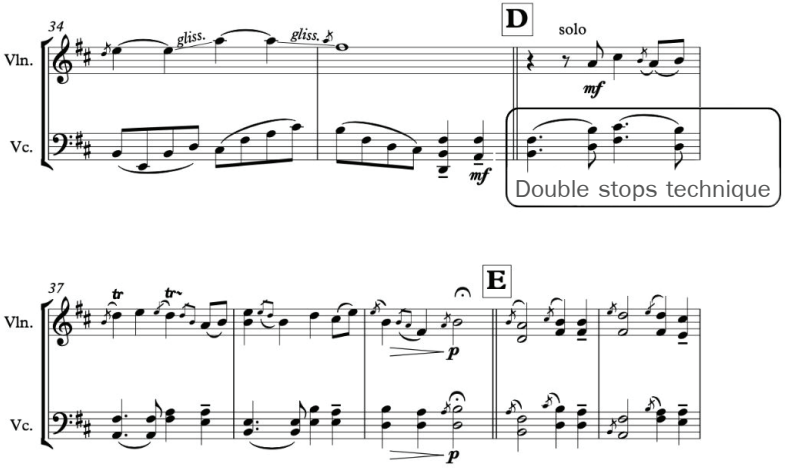

Figure 5 Section D and E
Source: Sreewan Wathawathana

The Moderato section is composed based on the study of the *Khmer Tro* repertoire and performance techniques. The piece is written in 2/4 meter and utilizes both the C Dorian mode as the primary scale and the C major pentatonic scale. C Dorian serves as the primary mode throughout the piece, while modulation occurs in Section F to C major pentatonic (see Figure 6), returning to C Dorian in Section G (see Figure 7). The tempo is Moderato (quarter note = 90 BPM) with a steady, precise rhythm (Tempo Giusto). At the end of the section, the tempo shifts to Largo. At the beginning, thematic material is adapted from a Khmer dance melody called *Rabum* (ระบำ), employing transposition to maintain the intervallic relationships while shifting the key.

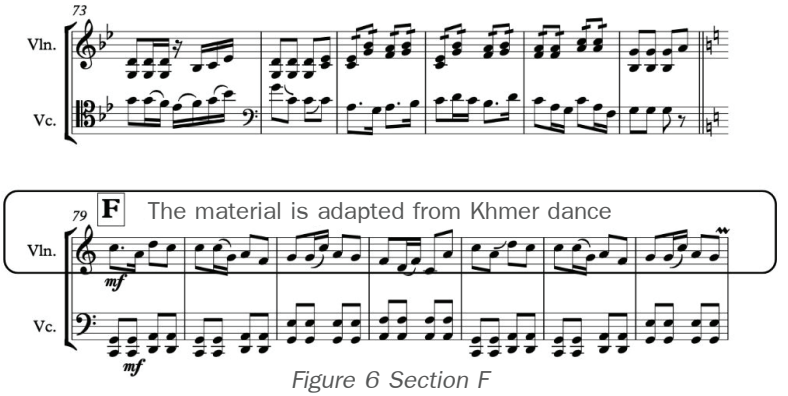

Figure 6 Section F
Source: Sreewan Wathawathana

In Section G, the mode returns to C Dorian, with the cello carrying the main melodic line. The violin employs the tremolo bowing technique, creating a sustained background texture that supports the melody. This tremolo technique is similar to the *rua kan chak* (รัวคันชัก) technique in Thai *saw* instruments.

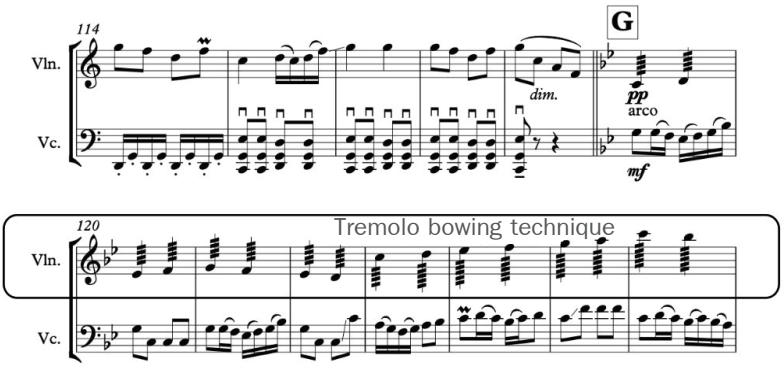

Figure 7 Section G
Source: Sreewan Wathawathana

In the ending section of the piece, the melody's ornamentation employs a trill technique, similar to the *phrom* used in Thai fiddle. The tempo changes from Moderato to a much slower Largo and further slows down near the very end with a ritardando in C Major chord (see Figure 8).

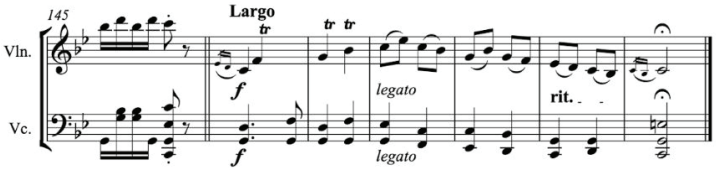

Figure 8 Ending section
Source: Sreewan Wathawathana

Results

The study resulted in a contemporary composition for violin and cello that integrates techniques from traditional Thai string instruments (*saw sam sai* and *saw Khmer*) with Western classical performance practices. Section A employs imitation, with the violin introducing the melodic line and the cello echoing it, while the violin transforms into a secondary melody using double stops. Section B demonstrates violin harmonics, corresponding to the *niew kong* (นิ้วก้อง) technique, and cello pizzicato, creating contrasting textures. Section C adapts the folk song *Nok Khamin* (นกขมิ้น), with the cello performing

the principal melody using legato and glissando, taking advantage of a playing position similar to that of *saw sam sai* players, allowing for expressive slides and ornamentation. Sections D and E reintroduce earlier themes and incorporate double-stops playing (*sai khu*), requiring precise bowing and left-hand control. The Moderato section, inspired by Khmer Tro repertoire, explores C Dorian and C major pentatonic scales, with rhythmic stability and modulation between modes, while Section G emphasizes tremolo (*rua kan chak*), trills, slides, glissandi, and grace notes, demonstrating advanced ornamentation techniques derived from Thai fiddle performance.

Discussion

The composition illustrates a successful fusion of Thai and Western string techniques, highlighting how traditional melodies and ornamentation can be adapted for violin and cello performance. The use of imitation, harmonics, and pizzicato expands the textural possibilities, while the adaptation of *Nakboriphat, Nok Khamin,* and *Rabum* melodies preserves the expressive character of Thai folk music. Techniques such as double stops and glissandi emulate the performance style of Thai fiddles, and the cello's playing posture enhances the effectiveness of these techniques. The study demonstrates that Thai performance techniques, including *sai khu, phrom, rood sieng, niew kong,* and *rua kan chak,* can be pedagogically applied to Western string instruments, providing performers with new technical and interpretative challenges. The integration of these elements supports the development of contemporary Thai-Western repertoire and enriches the educational resources available to intermediate and advanced violin and cello students.

Conclusion

This project successfully produced a culturally informed composition for violin and cello that integrates traditional Thai performance techniques with Western classical string practices. By incorporating ornamentation, glissandi, tremolo, double stops, and modal adaptations inspired by *saw sam sai* and *saw Khmer* repertoire, the study demonstrates how Thai folk music can be preserved and adapted within contemporary string pedagogy. The composition provides a valuable resource for intermediate and advanced students, enhancing both technical proficiency and interpretative skills while promoting cross-cultural musical understanding.

For further study, it is recommended exploring the integration of other Thai folk instruments and regional musical idioms into Western string performance, as well as the development of ensemble works that combine multiple Thai and Western instruments. Additional research could also

investigate the pedagogical effectiveness of these hybrid compositions in conservatory or classroom settings, examining how they impact the technical development, cultural awareness, and interpretative creativity of students. Such studies would contribute to expanding the contemporary repertoire and fostering continued innovation in Thai–Western musical collaboration.

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Biography

Associate Professor Dr Sreewan Wathawathana graduated with a PhD (Music) from Bangkokthonburi University, a Master's Degree in Arts (Music) from the College of Music, Mahidol University and a Bachelor's Degree in Music from Mahidol University with first-class honors in 2009. Currently, she is a full-time music instructor in the Western Music Department at the College of Music, Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University (BSRU), and a part-time music instructor at Assumption University (ABAC). She was a member of the Thailand Philharmonic Orchestra (TPO) as a first violinist from 2005–2014 and from 2018 to the present. She received five Gold Medal Prizes (Outstanding Music Performer) at the Settrade Thai Youth Musician Competition in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2006, and 2007. In 2005, she won First Prize at the International Youth Chamber Music Competition (IYCC) in

Interlaken, Switzerland, as concertmaster of the Dr Sax Chamber Orchestra. In 2008, she won Second Prize at the Second National Beethoven Competition for Young String Players (age group 18–24). Sreewan has also had numerous opportunities to attend masterclasses and perform with well-known musicians, including Midori Goto, Mischa Maisky, Lucia Aliberti, Andrea Bocelli, and Vanessa Mae.

Dr Smatya Wathawathana is a cellist, an expert in music therapy, and a renowned educator in Thailand's music industry. She completed her doctoral degree in Development Administration at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, a master's degree in Music Therapy from the College of Music, Mahidol University, and a bachelor's degree in Western Music from the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University, graduating with first-class honours and a gold medal. In her musical career, Dr Smatya has received international recognition, including First Prize at the Princess Galyani Vadhana International Ensemble Competition in 2015 and First Prize at the International Youth Chamber Music Competition in Interlaken, Switzerland, in 2005. She has performed in various countries, including the UK, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Poland, and Canada. After completing her PhD, Dr Smatya pursued specialised training in Neurologic Music Therapy and earned certification in Professional Himalayan Singing Bowl Therapy, Sound Healing, and Meditation. In her teaching career, she plays a significant role in teaching and training string instruments. In 2024, she served as a low-string tutor for the World Youth Orchestra in Vietnam, organised by the World Youth Orchestra of Italy. She also has teaching experience in cello at the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University, and in music therapy at the College of Music, Mahidol University, as well as at Assumption University (ABAC).

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TABULA RASA: Reinterpreting Sound, Space, and the Senses

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

Abstract

"Tabula Rasa," the theme of the event, takes its name from an album by Estonian composer Arvo Pärt. It is conceived as a secondary creative reinterpretation—creating new artistic expressions inspired by existing music—inviting participants to move beyond conventional performance and engage in re-creation shaped by the musical work's style and their own interpretation. The event aims to dismantle traditional barriers in music performance and encourages participants to reimagine the piece as musicians, creators, and performers in the post-COVID era. Challenging the notion that music albums are solely to be appreciated by ear, "Tabula Rasa" introduces additional performance conditions that encourage secondary creative reinterpretation and draw inspiration from each participant. Beyond auditory experience, audiences are invited to engage through visual, tactile, and environmental elements. By expanding the scope of musical performance and redefining its boundaries, "Tabula Rasa" promotes artistic interaction and cultural exchange between participants and audiences. This guided, collabrative creative approach enhances the on-site experience, extends the music's influence into the physical space, and engages both performers and participants.

Keywords: Tabula Rasa; Secondary creative reinterpretation; Music engagement

Introduction

The interpretation and re-creation of musical works have long constituted a central concern in performance studies. Traditionally, performance has been understood as a form of secondary creation—the process through which performers interpret and bring to life a composer's written score (Small, 1998). However, in the post-COVID era, conventional modes of musical performance have been challenged by the disruption of concert traditions, audience restrictions, and an increased awareness of social isolation and psychological well-being (Chmiel et al., 2022; Kiernan et al., 2021). These conditions have prompted artists and scholars alike to reconsider the relationship between performer, audience, and the sensory dimensions of musical experience.

Within this context, the project Tabula Rasa was conceived as an exploration of secondary creative reinterpretation through the reimagining of Arvo Pärt's 1977 album Tabula Rasa. Although composed decades prior, Pärt's minimalist idiom is characterized by its purity, silence, and introspective spirituality. This concept resonates profoundly with the post-pandemic desire for renewal, emotional clarity, and the reconstruction of communal and artistic bonds. By recontextualizing Pärt's work within a contemporary framework, the project sought to bridge the temporal and conceptual distance between its historical origin and the lived realities of the post-COVID era.

Implemented between September and October 2024 at the College of Music, Seoul National University, under the guidance of Professor Sngkn Kim, Tabula Rasa invited musicians, students, and audiences to engage in participatory reinterpretation extending beyond the auditory domain. Through the integration of visual, tactile, and spatial elements, the project transformed performance into a multi-sensory and collaborative experience. This paper examines the initiative as a case study in the practice of secondary creative reinterpretation, arguing that Tabula Rasa exemplifies how an existing musical work can be reimagined as a vehicle for cultural exchange, collective reflection, and aesthetic renewal in the post-COVID era.

Literature Review

Music performance can be understood as an act of secondary creation, where written compositions are reinterpreted into lived sound and meaning (Cook, 2018). Rather than transmitting a fixed score, performance constitutes a transformative event that emerges through the interaction of performers, audiences, and space (Fischer-Lichte, 2008). This perspective foregrounds the creative agency of performers and highlights the inherently relational nature of performance as an event.

Arvo Pärt's Tabula Rasa (1977), one of his earliest tintinnabuli works, provides a fertile basis for such reinterpretation. Originally composed for two solo violins, prepared piano, and string orchestra, the work consists of two contrasting movements—"Ludus" (Game) and "Silentium" (Silence). The first movement unfolds as a dialogue between the two solo violins, marked by repetitive rhythmic cells and gradual harmonic transformation, while Silentium explores extreme stillness and sustained resonance, dissolving the boundaries between sound and silence. Premiered in 1977 by violinists Gidon Kremer and Tatiana Grindenko with Alfred Schnittke on prepared piano, the work exemplifies Pärt's minimalist idiom and his pursuit of spiritual clarity through reduction and restraint.

The composition later became the title piece of Pärt's breakthrough ECM album Tabula Rasa (1984), produced by Manfred Eicher. The album marked Pärt's international emergence and introduced his tintinnabuli style to a wider audience. It features four works—Fratres, Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten, Tabula Rasa, and Fratres (for violin and piano)—performed by the ECM New Series ensemble under the artistic direction of Eicher. The album's sonic design, characterised by transparency, resonance, and contemplative pacing, reflects ECM's aesthetic of "the most beautiful sound next to silence." Beyond its musical contents, Tabula Rasa functions as a conceptual statement of renewal and purification, presenting Pärt's postmodern spirituality as a response to the crises of meaning in late twentieth-century modernism (Hillier, 1997; Nichols, 2010).

Its structural austerity and emotional economy embody both simplicity and transcendence, inviting performers and audiences alike into a shared experience of silence and renewal (Hillier, 1997; Shenton, 2012). The openness of Pärt's musical language resonates strongly with theories that conceive of performance as socially constructed. Within this framework, Small's (1998) concept of musicking underscores how performance extends beyond the sonic to encompass social relationships, emphasising the ritual and relational aspects of making music together. Turino (2008) builds on this by distinguishing between presentational and participatory performance, noting that participatory contexts dissolve traditional hierarchies between performer and listener, thereby producing social cohesion and a sense of belonging. When applied to reinterpretations of canonical works such as Tabula Rasa, these ideas suggest that the value of performance lies not only in fidelity to the score but also in the creation of new forms of shared meaning and collective experience.

In the context of the post-COVID era, these theoretical perspectives acquire renewed urgency. Traditional concert practices, reliant on fixed venues and passive audiences, were profoundly disrupted, forcing both institutions and

practitioners to experiment with alternative modes of engagement (Comunian & England, 2020). Scholars of cultural policy have observed how the pandemic underscored the precariousness of cultural labour but also catalysed innovation, with new emphasis placed on participatory, therapeutic, and multi-sensory practices (Banks, 2020). These shifts align with the broader recognition of culture's role in supporting resilience, well-being, and social cohesion during times of crisis.

The Tabula Rasa project at Seoul National University can therefore be read as a synthesis of these perspectives. It reinterprets Pärt's work not as a fixed artefact but as a living practice, extending performance into a collective, multi-sensory, and socially sustaining event. By engaging performers, audiences, and designers in acts of reinterpretation that involved sound, movement, space, and tactile elements, the project exemplifies how canonical works can be revitalised through participatory engagement. In doing so, it demonstrates the relevance of secondary creation, the ethos of tintinnabuli, and theories of musicking to the challenges and opportunities of the post-pandemic cultural landscape.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative case study approach (Yin, 2014). The data were derived from participant observation, in which the author joined as a performer in the "Fratres" section and documented the creative process; documentation analysis, through which programmes, photographs, video recordings, and exhibition pamphlets were reviewed; and autoethnographic reflection, in which the author reflected on personal experience as both performer and researcher. The analysis is informed by theories of secondary creation (Cook, 2018), participatory music (Small, 1998), and post-COVID cultural participation (Comunian & England, 2020).

Findings and Discussion

Synopsis

This series of activities focuses on the reinterpretation and creative expansion of Arvo Pärt's album Tabula Rasa. Developed collaboratively by participants from diverse disciplinary backgrounds—including students, professors, and designers—the project invites multiple cognitive and aesthetic approaches to a single musical source. Each creative group reinterprets the work through its distinct perspective, producing a multifaceted artistic dialogue. Details are summarized in Table 1.

Reinterpreting Records: From Silence to Sound

The first layer of reinterpretation centred on Pärt's Tabula Rasa album. Performances such as Fratres and Silentium drew directly on the record's tracks but extended their meanings through unconventional staging. As Henry Wood noted, "Music is written down lifeless notes that need to be given life through performance." In this project, vitality was expressed not only through sound but also through candlelight, shattered mirrors, and silence enacted through embodied gestures.

Activities and Performances

To enhance the participants' comprehension of the event's central theme, Professor Kim organized a preliminary documentary screening. This activity was designed to provide a contextual understanding of the composer and his stylistic characteristics, thereby facilitating the systematic and coherent progression of the subsequent program.

Figure 1: Documentary Screening of Arvo Pärt
Source: Professor Sngkn Kim

The project unfolded across four key performances:

Fratres: Students employed electronic improvisation, percussion, and ritual gestures (e.g., bell ringing, mirror shattering) to symbolise liberation from cognitive boundaries.

The performance began with the students extinguishing all lights in the venue, relying solely on candlelight to evoke a contemplative and enigmatic atmosphere. A bell suspended at the center of the space—symbolizing tintinnabuli—served as the connective motif between the four sections. The performer rang the bell at the opening and closing of each section to delineate transitions and establish a ritual sense of continuity.

The second and third sections reinterpreted original works from Pärt's Tabula Rasa album, while the first and fourth sections drew upon improvisational electronic performance. In the concluding section, following the interplay of electronic and percussive textures, the performer shattered a fragment of a mirror—an act signifying the release from self-imposed cognitive boundaries and the transcendence of conventional performance constraints.

Figure 2: Final performance of Fratres, titled "Break the Shadow"
Source: Professor Sngkn Kim

Silentium: Performers enacted silence through movement rather than sound, depicting architectural forms such as walls and windows.

The performance titled Silentium derives its name from the album Tabula Rasa. Embodying the notion of silence inherent in its title, the performance required all participants to remain completely silent throughout its duration. Instead of producing sound, the performers engaged in a form of physical description, using bodily gestures to interpret the spatial elements of the venue—such as the walls, windows, and mirrors—through actions they personally deemed appropriate. Each section was governed by specific performative constraints: in the first, participants were allowed free movement, whereas in the second, movement was intentionally minimized to accentuate stillness and introspection.

Figure 3: Last performance of Silentium
Source: Professor Sngkn Kim

Exhibition in Itaewon: A designer transformed a villa into an immersive installation, inviting visitors to experience Tabula Rasa through space, sight, and touch.

The exhibition, titled Tabula Rasa after Arvo Pärt's album, was staged in a private villa in Itaewon. Conceived by a designer who sought to translate the emotional and conceptual resonance of the album into spatial form, each room was arranged to reflect a distinct aspect of the music's atmosphere. The installation encouraged an immersive mode of engagement: visitors could sit or recline anywhere in the space, experiencing different compositions in separate rooms. Through this multisensory encounter, audiences were invited to perceive both the designer's interpretation and to construct their own understanding of the album's aesthetic and emotional world.

Figure 4: Pamphlet of the Exhibition "Tabula Rasa"
Source: Professor Sngkn Kim

Figure 5: Photo of the Exhibition "Tabula Rasa"
Source: Professor Sngkn Kim

Cantus: A concluding gathering blended performance with social interaction, echoing Renaissance models of music salons.

Cantus served as the concluding performance and tea reception of the Tabula Rasa series, held in Gwacheon, southern Seoul. Conceived as both a reflective gathering and a closing ceremony, the event brought together music enthusiasts, scholars, and practitioners from related disciplines to experience a program primarily devoted to the works of Arvo Pärt. One of the Silentium performances was re-presented as the final act, functioning as a symbolic gesture to mark the completion of the project.

Figure 6: Photo of the Performance "Cantus"
Source: Professor Sngkn Kim

Table 1. Overview of Tabula Rasa Performances and Exhibitions

Event	Content	Innovation
Fratres	Student co-creation with bell and candles	Improvisation, mirror ritual
Silentium	Silent movement-based performance	Soundless embodiment
Exhibition	Immersive design installation	Multi-sensory interpretation
Cantus	Final concert and tea gathering	Social-musical integration

Participant Experience and Multi-Sensory Engagement

Participants in the Tabula Rasa series acted not merely as performers but as co-creators, translating Arvo Pärt's works into diverse artistic forms through movement, design, sound, and spatial interaction. Building upon the compositions from Pärt's Tabula Rasa album, the creators reinterpreted the music through a synthesis of musical styles, bodily movement, and visual installation within enclosed environments. These reinterpretations offered audiences immersive, multi-sensory experiences that blurred the distinction between performance and participation. Rather than receiving fixed meanings, audiences were encouraged to construct their own interpretations through interaction with space, sound, and gesture, effectively becoming part of the work itself.

This multilayered engagement exemplifies Fischer-Lichte's (2008) notion of performance as transformation, where aesthetic experience arises from the fluid interplay between performers, audiences, and environment. By collapsing the boundaries between creation and reception, the project fostered a collective, embodied form of musicking (Small, 1998), in which meaning was co-constructed through sensory, social, and emotional exchange. Within the post-COVID context, such reconfigurations of performance underscore the potential of music to generate new forms of connection, presence, and shared renewal beyond the auditory domain.

Cultural Exchange and Post-COVID Well-being

By redefining performance as collaborative reinterpretation, Tabula Rasa fostered intercultural dialogue and supported participants' well-being in the lingering post-pandemic context. The project resonates with Chmiel et al. (2022), who demonstrate how creative activities enhance mental health during periods of restriction.

Conclusion

The Tabula Rasa project illustrates how secondary creative reinterpretation can expand the boundaries of music performance beyond auditory perception, creating multi-sensory and participatory practices. By reimagining Arvo Pärt's compositions, the project fostered artistic interaction, cultural exchange, and collective well-being.

The findings contribute to performance studies by presenting a case where post-COVID practices dismantled traditional performance hierarchies and fostered new forms of musicking. Nonetheless, challenges remain: reaching conservative audiences, ensuring accessibility, and sustaining resources. In sum, the COVID-19 pandemic compelled the music industry to undergo a forced 'revolution.' While it entailed profound suffering and substantial losses, it also brought about enduring transformations in the modes of music production, dissemination, and consumption. Moreover, it reaffirmed the fundamental role of music as a medium of emotional connection and social cohesion. The repercussions of these changes are likely to continue unfolding for many years to come. Future research should explore how reinterpretations of canonical works like Tabula Rasa influence audience reception, cultural policy, and music education.

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Biography

Guo Lixin is a Chinese musician who obtained a bachelor's degree in Recording Arts and a master's degree in Conducting in China. He is currently pursuing a doctoral degree at Seoul National University in South Korea. He serves as a guest conductor for the Folk Orchestra of the Xi'an University of Electronic Science and Technology Art Troupe and as a permanent conductor for the Chang'an University Folk Orchestra. He has participated in more than 20 large-scale performances, held seven concerts, and received numerous scholarships.

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Whip of Chada

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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 tranforms 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.

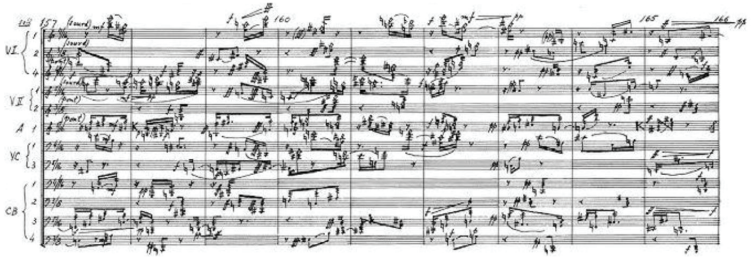

Figure 3 Iannis Xenakis: METASTASEIS, 1953/54 (157-165)
Source: Iannis Xenakis

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).

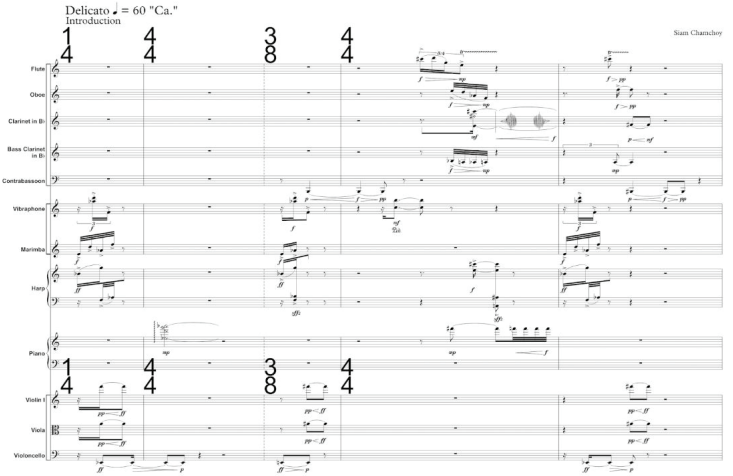

Figure 4 Whip of Chada: the Introduction section (1–5)
Source: Score by Siam Chamchoy

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.

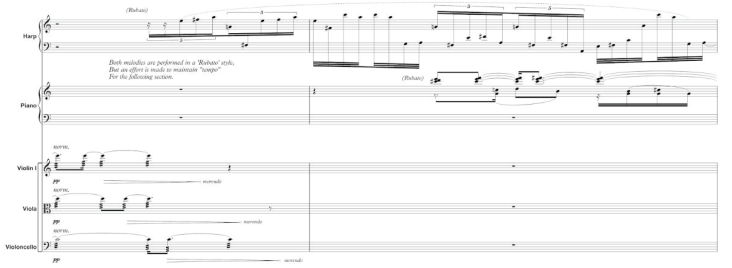

Figure 5 Whip of Chada: the middle section (56–57)
Source: Score by Siam Chamchoy

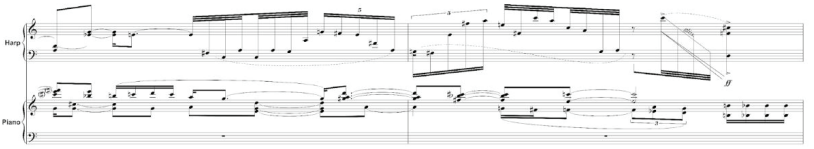

Figure 6 Whip of Chada: the middle section (58–59)
Source: Score by Siam Chamchoy

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).

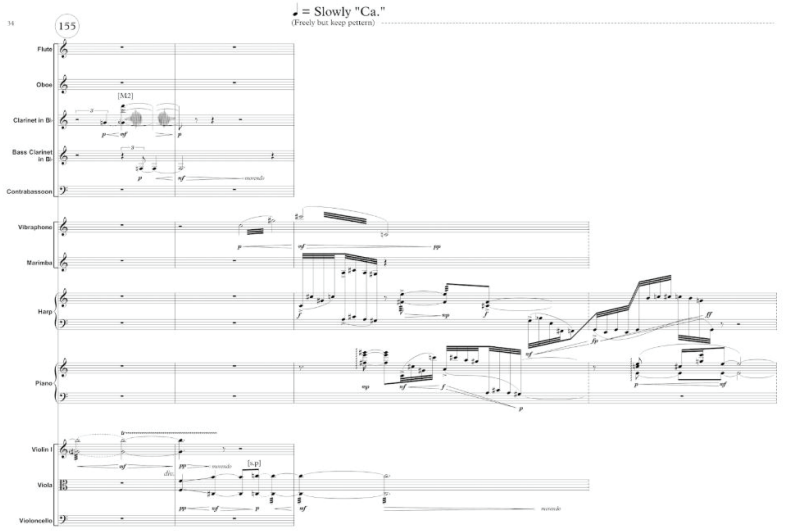

Figure 7 Whip of Chada: the final section (155)
Source: Score by Siam Chamchoy

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.

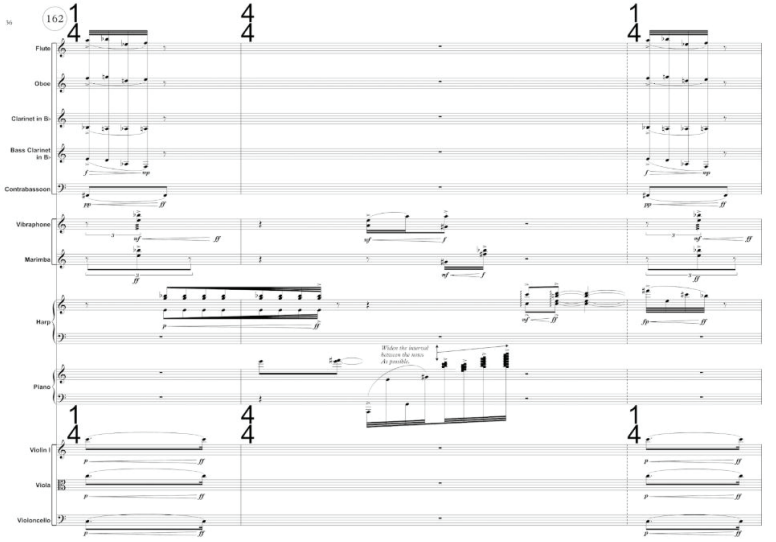

Figure 8 Whip of Chada: the final section (162-164)
Source: Score by Siam Chamchoy

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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Etudes based on Melody “Accent” for Solo Piano

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Abstract

Etudes based on Thai Melody “Accent” for Solo Piano is designed with three primary objectives in mind: 1) to explore methods of combining Thai and Western music, 2) to present an innovative approach to piano composition inspired by the Thai Melody “Accent”, and 3) to contribute new knowledge to the academic field of music composition. The composition draws its inspiration from the Thai Melody “Accent”, which is used as a connecting melody commonly found in Thai music and provides the composer with a rich source of creative material. The experience of attending Thai music concerts and seminars served as the foundation for the musical themes and motifs that characterize these piano etudes. The work reimagines the “Accent,” which traditionally incorporates influences from Burmese, Mon, Lao, Khmer, Vietnamese, Indian, Chinese, and Western. Accordingly, the composition consists of ten short etudes and blends Western musical techniques, incorporating a wide array of melodic lines, rhythmic patterns, and harmonic textures. The work highlights technically demanding aspects of piano performance, such as octaves, large leaps, and close–range intervals, as it weaves multiple independent melodies into a rich, intricate musical tapestry. This approach emphasizes the horizontal independence of each melodic line while allowing for a more flexible interpretation of vertical harmony. Given these components, it is more appropriate for the performer to have experience and knowledge of both Thai and international music to interpret the piece effectively. This will enable the performer to present the work appropriately. This study contributes to academic discourse by exploring other possibilities for combining Thai and Western music, aiming to produce several short practice

pieces for solo piano that will be useful to those interested in both piano technique and composition.

Keywords: Creative research, Contemporary music, Piano etude, Accent

Introduction

In Thai classical tradition, "Accent" refers to medley-like compositions that sequentially present melodies associated with various cultural "accents" or national styles such as Burmese, Mon and Lao. Historically, court composers combined several of these accented tunes into a continuous performance (Inthanin, 1993). Such multi-ethnic medleys suggest a natural affinity with the etude form: both are relatively short pieces that can stand alone yet also form part of a larger cycle. An etude (study) is a short instrumental composition designed primarily to develop specific technical skills (e.g. scale passages, chordal technique) (Suttachitt, 1997). Many piano etudes – by Chopin, Liszt, Debussy, and Rachmaninoff – have transcended their pedagogical purpose to become concert repertoire, owing largely to the piano's unique ability to combine melody and harmony simultaneously (Suttachitt, 1997).

Given these parallels, recomposing a Thai Accent melody as a set of piano etudes is both practical and meaningful. The piano's rich range and versatility allow it to convey Thai modal ornaments and scales alongside Western harmonic progressions. Moreover, synthesizing Thai and Western elements exemplifies broader trends in Thai music: as Thai society has modernized, musicians increasingly blend traditional Thai idioms with Western techniques, creating new works that reflect a globalized cultural context (Khantachan & Sirimukdagul, 2022; Phonchuan, 2020). The present project, therefore, explores one avenue of Thai–Western musical fusion by crafting a set of etudes that incorporate the Thai "Accent" theme. In doing so, it draws on existing pedagogy and theory while pushing compositional boundaries. The creative outcome is intended to contribute to academic knowledge in music composition by providing novel examples of cross-cultural synthesis and by expanding the body of solo piano repertoire grounded in Thai tradition.

Objectives

1) To study and apply methods for combining Thai melodic idioms with Western harmony and counterpoint in composition.

2) To create a set of technical piano etudes inspired by the Thai melody.

3) To contribute new knowledge to the academic field of music composition.

Scope of Content

This creative research centers on the composition of solo piano etudes using the Thai "Accent" melody as source material. The work focuses on integrating key elements of Thai music—such as pentatonic or modal scale fragments and ornamentation—with Western music theory, particularly functional harmony and contrapuntal texture, within advanced pianistic settings. Each etude is intended as a self-contained study that develops specific performance skills, including interval leaps, polyphony, and rhythmic complexity, while embedding motifs from Thai musical tradition. The project encompasses both the compositional process and the analysis of the resulting works.

Sources of Study

Primary research materials were obtained from specialized music collections and libraries, including Bangkokthonburi University Library, the Faculty of Music Library at Bangkokthonburi University, and the College of Music Library at Mahidol University.

These sources provided a theoretical background on Thai classical traditions and on Western piano technique. Additional references included scholarly writing on Thai-Western fusion (e.g. Khantachan & Sirimukdagul, 2022; Laokhonka et al., 2024; Phulaiyaw, 2021) and on the etude repertoire.

Creative Process

The project followed a structured creative flow:

1) Collecting and studying examples of Thai Accent melodies and their cultural context to identify characteristic scales, rhythms, and ornaments.

2) Analyzing significant solo piano etudes by Czerny, Chopin, and Debussy to understand technical challenges and forms.

3) Synthesizing knowledge by integrating insights from Thai traditional

music and Western piano composition to determine how Thai modal melodies can be harmonized or transformed through Western compositional methods.

4) Composing a set of ten short piano etudes using the "Accent" melody material, with each piece incorporating a different regional motif or style and focusing on a particular technical element.

5) Analyzing and evaluating the completed etudes by examining their tonal organization, technique, and musical elements, and documenting how Thai melodic content and Western harmonic textures interact in each piece.

Analysis of the Newly Composed Work

The completed suite comprises ten etudes for solo piano. Each etude is self-contained and can be performed independently. Collectively, the pieces reimagine the traditional "Accent" theme—including its variants named after Burmese, Mon, Lao, Khmer, Vietnamese, Indian, Chinese, and Western influences—in a piano context. The tonal plan spans diverse key centers (see Table 1).

Table 1: Key Signatures of Dialects

No.	Dialect	Key Signature
1	Theme	F Major
2	Burmese	D Major
3	Mon	E-flat Major
4	Lao	D-flat Major
5	Khmer	C Major
6	Vietnamese	E Major
7	Indian	G-flat Major
8	Chinese	G Major
9	Western	A Major

Each etude has a distinct technical and musical focus, though all unite Thai motifs with Western idioms. For instance, the first etude cultivates legato technique across both single-note lines and widely spaced chords. It employs diminished and chromatic harmonies to avoid trivial repetition of tonic-dominant progressions, enriching the tonal palette. The second etude (Burmese) features sustained parallel fifths and alternates between legato and staccato articulation over intervallic expanses, octave-to-eleventh leaps. The left hand punctuates the texture with Thai "accent" tones in the style of traditional bass patterns to reinforce rhythmic drive.

Another piece, inspired by the Mon melody, expands a theme from narrow conjunct motion into sudden wide leaps, mirroring the expressive flexibility of Romantic-era piano writing. The Lao etude emphasizes syncopation and sharp alternations of touch: it juxtaposes sudden jumps between close and distant notes and weaves chromatic scalar passages within a seventh-spanning range. In the Khmer-influenced etude, the left hand plays a syncopated accompaniment under a broad, arching right-hand melody; the same melody is repeated at contrasting dynamic levels, training the pianist to maintain control and expression under varying intensity.

The Vietnamese etude is built around rapid, abrupt dynamic contrasts, forte–piano shifts, requiring agile control to execute sudden mood changes smoothly. The Indian etude begins with stepwise, narrow-range motifs that progressively expand into wide, dramatic leaps; it employs imitative (fugato-like) counterpoint, introducing polyphonic thinking as the melody splits across hands. The Chinese etude alternates fluid legato phrases with crisp staccato chords in wide registers, using rich chromaticism to blur the sense of simple triadic harmony – an homage to the more modal and pentatonic character of Chinese-derived sections. Finally, the Western-styled etude foregrounds complex rhythm and finger technique: it uses syncopations and finger substitution to facilitate octave displacements, and inserts quintuplet figures against duplets, demanding precise polyrhythmic coordination akin to modern Western piano repertoire.

Throughout the suite, Thai melodic and rhythmic elements, such as scale fragments or ornamental figures characteristic of each regional accent, are embedded within Western forms and textures. This horizontal melody emphasises the characteristic of the traditional Accent medley, which is preserved, while vertical harmony is rendered flexibly rather than strictly functional. The result is a set of etudes that both showcase piano virtuosity and carry the distinct flavor of Thai musical accents.

Expected Benefits

The new etudes offer several artistic and educational benefits. Artistically, they bridge Thai traditional music and Western piano literature, presenting Thai melodic themes in a context accessible to global audiences. Prior research indicates that blending Western techniques with the folk musical idiom of Southeast Asia can modernize traditional music and widen its appeal (Laokhonka et al., 2024). For example, Laokhonka, Nesusin, and Pikulsri (2024) found that applying Western harmonic and formal playing methods to Isan folk songs modernized the traditional music, making it more appealing to audiences today. Likewise, Phulaiyaw (2021) observes that merging Western and Eastern musical modes in solo piano arrangements makes the work more

international in character. By this logic, the present etudes may help popularize Thai melodic heritage beyond Thailand and serve as culturally infused repertoire in international recitals and competitions.

Pedagogically, the suite presents piano teaching materials with original compositions inspired by non-Western sources. Each etude exercises specific techniques—wide leaps, contrapuntal independence, and rhythmic dexterity—in musically meaningful contexts. This offers students a dual benefit of technical development and cultural exposure. Moreover, as case studies in composition, these pieces contribute to scholarly discourse:

1) They exemplify one method of transcultural creativity, aligning with Khantachan & Sirimukdagul (2022);

2) They serve as a reference for future composers interested in fusing Thai themes with Western forms.

In summary, the work advances both artistic and academic understanding by demonstrating how a Thai "Accent" melody can be reframed through innovative compositional techniques, thereby preserving and reinterpreting Thai musical identity in a contemporary pianistic idiom.

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Biography

Dr Bhannavichaya Vadhanasiriphongs, he was born in 1985 in Bangkok, Thailand. He started learning electone when he was in primary school at Siam Music Yamaha, Ladphrao campus. In Primary 4, he started taking piano lessons with Aj. Somboon Viriyasophon until he finished his bachelor's degree in Marketing from Chulalongkorn University in 2009. He finished his junior high school at Bodindecha 2 and senior high school at Triam Udom Suksa School. During this period, he became interested in writing music. He started learning private composition with Aj. Narongrit Dhamabutra. After high school, he studied at the Faculty of Commerce and Accountancy at Chulalongkorn University. His major was marketing. During this period, he passed the LTCL Diploma in piano recital from Trinity Guildhall. After he graduated from Chulalongkorn University, he took a master's degree in music composition at Rangsit University (2011–2014). Among his music instructors were: Aj. Boonrut, Aj. Jiradej, Aj. Narong, Aj. Denny, Aj. Zurazak and Aj. Wiboon. From 2014–2023, He was a DM student in music composition at Mahidol University under the supervision of Aj. Julia Bozone, Aj. Max Keller, Aj. Tyler Capp, Aj. Arsid Kedjuntra and Aj. Wannapha Yannavut. He graduated with a dissertation titled Symphony on a "Pin-Hatai" Theme.

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Rabam Klong-yao (Hae) for Jazz Orchestra

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Abstract

Rabam Klong-yao (Hae) for Jazz Orchestra is a creative composition that aims to fuse the cultural identity of Thai folk music with the stylistic elements of jazz, arranged specifically for a jazz orchestra. Inspired by the vibrant and festive rhythms of Rabam Klong-yao, a traditional Thai procession music often performed in celebratory and ceremonial contexts, this work reinterprets its characteristic drum patterns into jazz idioms such as funk and Latin. The composition integrates traditional Thai instruments, particularly the klong-yao (long drum) and ranad (Thai xylophone), within the sonic framework of a modern jazz ensemble. Through advanced harmonic layering, orchestration, and a contemporary musical structure, the piece explores new possibilities for intercultural synthesis. This work represents an innovative approach to musical hybridization, contributing to the evolution of contemporary Thai music and promoting cultural soft power by presenting a distinctly Thai identity on the global stage.

Keywords: Klong-yao, Thai Folk Music, Thai Culture, Jazz, Jazz Orchestra

Introduction

Thai folk music has long played a vital role in expressing cultural identity through its distinctive melodies, rhythmic vitality, and unique instrumentation. Among these traditions, Rabam Klong-yao (Hae) stands out as a procession music performed in celebratory and ceremonial contexts. Its dynamic drum patterns and festive atmosphere not only entertain but also reflect the social and cultural vibrancy of Thai communities.

The creative project Rabam Klong-yao (Hae) for Jazz Orchestra seeks to reinterpret and re-create these traditional rhythmic and melodic elements within the framework of contemporary jazz. By transcribing and reimagining the essence of klong-yao rhythms, the composition transforms them into idioms such as funk and Latin, thereby forging a new dialogue between Thai heritage and global jazz practices. The integration of Thai instruments, particularly the klong-yao and ranad, alongside a modern jazz orchestra, further enhances the intercultural synthesis.

This approach highlights the potential of musical hybridization, where traditional materials are not merely preserved but re-contextualized through advanced harmonic layering, orchestration techniques, and contemporary formal structures. Such reinterpretation underscores the adaptability of Thai folk music, presenting it as both a living tradition and a source of innovation. Ultimately, the work exemplifies how Thai cultural identity can be promoted on the global stage through music, contributing to cultural soft power and enriching the discourse between folk traditions and contemporary art forms.

Literature Review

Transcription of Folk Music and the Contribution of Dr Saman Noinit

Transcription is a crucial tool in the study of folk music, allowing orally transmitted knowledge to be transformed into a systematic format that can be analyzed and applied in new contexts. Dr Saman Noinit has made a significant contribution by developing transcription methods that preserve the rhythmic complexity of *klong-yao* and other Thai folk traditions without reducing their performative authenticity (see Figure 1). His work functions not only as a documentary record but also as a foundation for adapting traditional rhythms into new frameworks, such as arrangements for jazz orchestra.

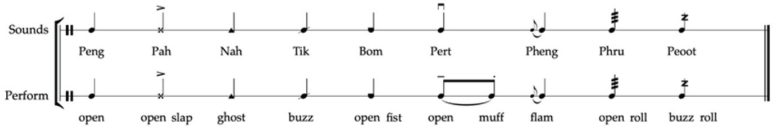

Figure 1 Notation Sound and Performing Techniques
Source: Dr Saman Noinit

Interpretation and Re-creation of Folk Models

Beyond transcription, Dr Saman has emphasized interpretative approaches that promote "continuity through re-creation." This perspective highlights the importance of reimagining transcribed melodies and rhythms so that they can be meaningfully integrated into contemporary performance practices. Scholars

such as Bohlman (2011) and Taylor (1997) argue that re-creation requires maintaining cultural roots while simultaneously opening space for artistic innovation. In the case of *Rabam Klong-yao (Hae)*, rhythmic patterns documented by Dr Saman are expanded and re-contextualized through funk, Latin grooves, and modern harmonic textures, demonstrating how traditional materials can be revitalized within jazz idioms as shown in Figure 2 (Laohverapanich 2024).

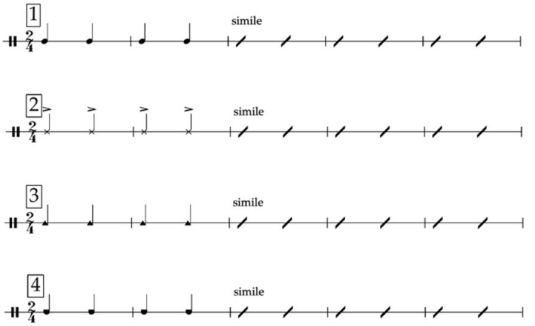

Figure 2 Rhythmic Pattern
Source: Dr Saman Noinit

Intercultural Synthesis

According to Nooshin (2003) and Tenzer (2006), intercultural musical creation is not a simple juxtaposition of cultural elements, but rather the construction of new identities through synthesis. Within this context, Dr Saman Noinit's precise transcriptions serve as a vital bridge between Thai and Western musical systems. His methodologies enable Thai instruments such as the klong-yao (see Figure 3) and ranad to be seamlessly integrated into jazz orchestration, redefining their cultural role within a global musical landscape.

Figure 3 Klong-yao
Source: Dr Nutthapol Deekum

The integration of Dr Saman Noinit's methods into creative works such as Rabam Klong-yao (Hae) for Jazz Orchestra highlights the potential of Thai music to sustain tradition while simultaneously evolving within international artistic dialogues. This process not only strengthens Thailand's cultural soft power but also exemplifies how the dual processes of transcription and interpretive re-creation can revitalize folk traditions, ensuring their relevance and vitality in contemporary music-making.

Methodology

This study adopts a creative practice-based methodology that combines traditional Thai musical materials with contemporary jazz techniques. The process can be divided into three main stages: transcription and adaptation, development and improvisation, and thematic interplay within orchestration (Table 1).

Table 1: Form Rabam Klong-yao (Hae) for Jazz Orchestra

Rehearsal Marks	Bar	Notation
Introduction	1-25	Unison Theme
A	26-33	Transition
B	34-60	Theme Section to Solo
C	61-76	Trumpet solo Theme
D	77-92	Background Theme
E	93-108	Ranad Solo Theme
F	109-124	Tenor Saxophone Solo Theme
G	125-140	Background Theme
H	141-156	Trombone Solo Theme
I	157-172	Background Theme
J	173-188	Klong-yao Solo Theme
K	189-204	Background Theme
L	205-220	Drum Set Solo Theme
M	221-236	Trading Solo Klong-yao, Drum Set Theme
N	237-267	The Final Movement Theme

Transcription and Adaptation

The initial step involved the transcription of rhythmic and melodic motifs from Rabam Klong-yao (Hae) into a notated form suitable for jazz orchestration. Particular attention was given to the distinctive klong-yao drum patterns, which were adapted into funk and Latin grooves to align with jazz idioms (Dhamabutra, 2009). This process served as the foundation upon which further musical development was built.

Development and Improvisation

Once transcribed, the original motifs were subjected to processes of expansion and transformation. Melodic ideas were extended through techniques such as harmonic layering, rhythmic variation, and call-and-response phrasing (Trakulhun, 2015). Improvisation played a central role in this stage: solo sections for trumpet, saxophone, trombone, ranad, and drums were designed to allow performers to reinterpret the traditional materials freely (Laohverapanich, 2024). This emphasis on improvisation not only reflects the essence of jazz but also resonates with the flexible and spontaneous nature of Thai folk performance practices.

Thematic Interplay and Orchestration

The composition further explored the interplay of themes between Thai and jazz instruments (see Figure 4). Melodic fragments were exchanged across instrumental sections, creating a dialogic structure that mirrors the antiphonal style found in traditional klong-yao ensembles (see Figure 5). Through orchestration, motifs introduced by Thai instruments such as the klong-yao and ranad were echoed, developed, or contrasted by sections of the jazz orchestra (see Figure 6), generating a layered texture that emphasizes intercultural synthesis (Pancharoen, 2010).

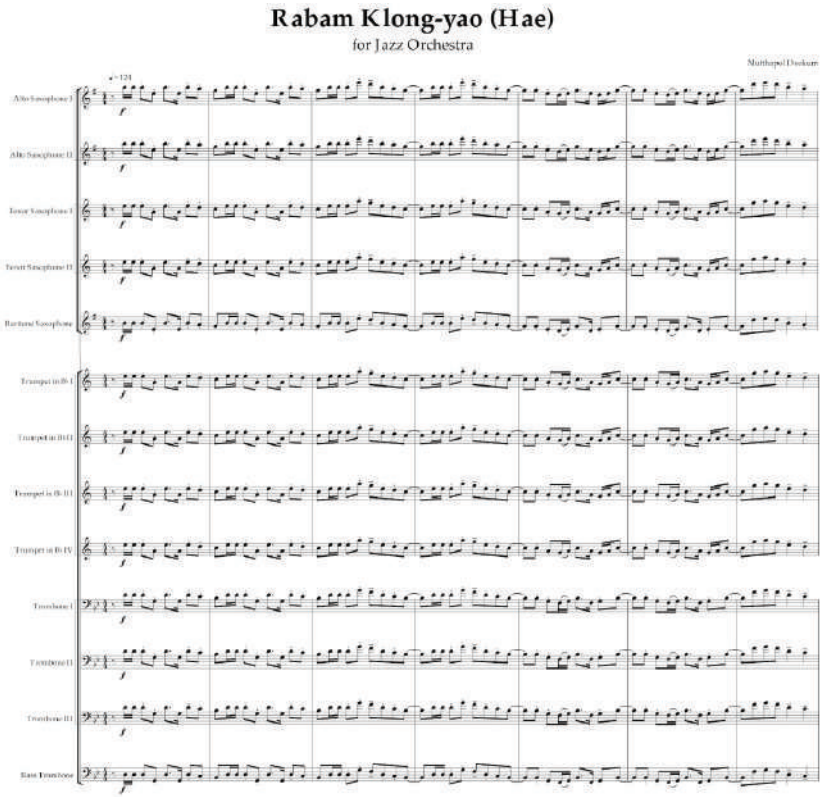

Figure 4 Rabam Klong-yao (Hae) for Jazz Orchestra (mm. 1-25)
Source: Dr Nutthapol Deekum

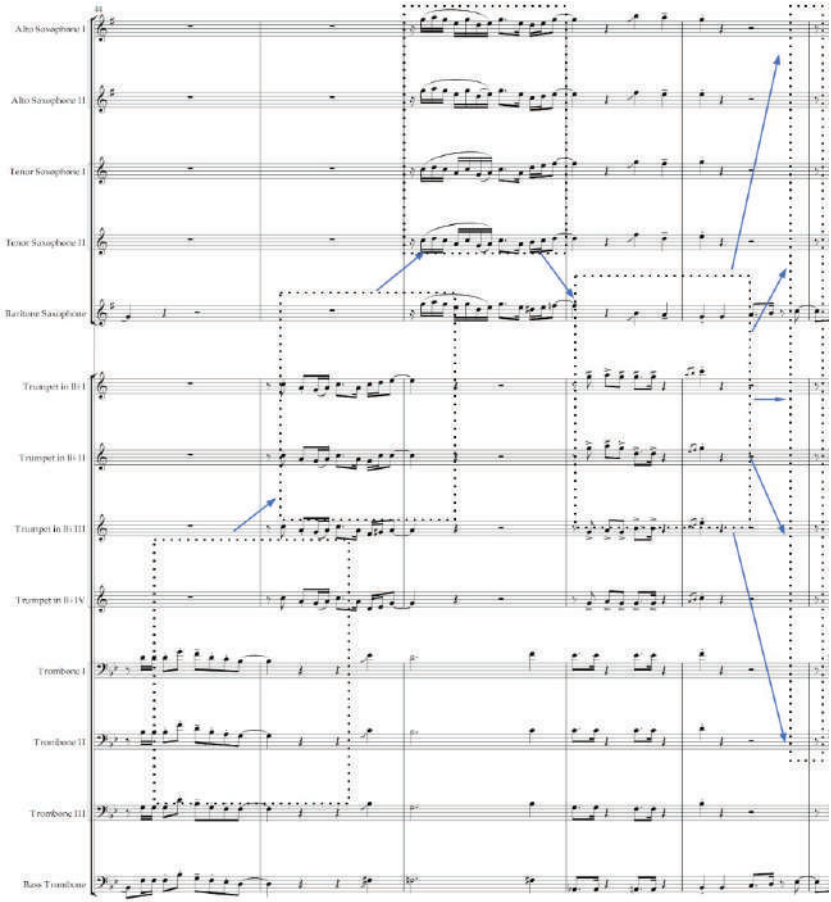

Figure 5 Melodic imitation and melodic distribution, Rabam Klong-yao (Hae) for Jazz Orchestra (mm. 44 – 49)
Source: Dr Nutthapol Deekum

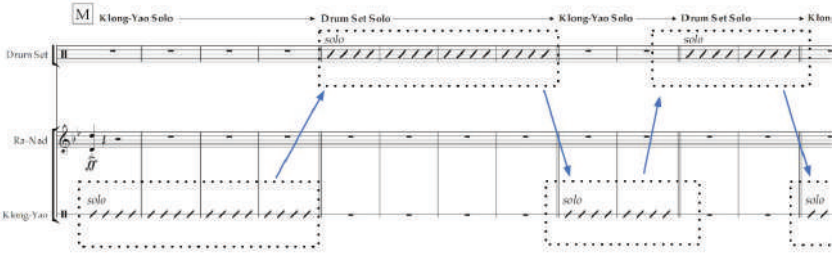

Figure 6 Trading Solo Klong-yao and Drum Set (mm. 221-235)
Source: Dr Nutthapol Deekum

Summary of Approach

This methodology demonstrates how traditional Thai motifs can be preserved, expanded, and transformed through processes of transcription, improvisation, and thematic interplay. By merging the spontaneous expressiveness of jazz with the rhythmic vitality of Thai folk traditions, *Rabam Klong-yao (Hae) for Jazz Orchestra* offers a creative model for intercultural composition that is both innovative and rooted in cultural heritage (Dhamabutra, 2009).

Recommendations

Based on the findings presented in this study, several recommendations can be made for scholars, composers, and educators interested in the transcription, adaptation, and intercultural application of Thai folk music.

Promotion of Systematic Transcription Practices

Scholars and musicians should continue to adopt and refine systematic transcription methods, such as those developed by Dr Saman Noinit, to document folk music traditions accurately. Preserving rhythmic intricacies and performative authenticity ensures that transcriptions can serve as reliable sources for both academic research and creative adaptation.

Integration of Re-creative Approaches

Encouraging interpretative re-creation of transcribed material can help bridge traditional and contemporary practices. Educators and composers are recommended to explore methods that maintain cultural integrity while allowing for artistic innovation, such as rhythmic expansion, harmonic reinterpretation, and improvisation within ensemble contexts.

Fostering Intercultural Collaboration

Musical exchange between Thai and Western idioms can be enhanced by using precise transcriptions as a foundation for intercultural synthesis. Composers should experiment with integrating traditional Thai instruments into modern orchestral or jazz frameworks, promoting cross-cultural dialogue and new musical identities.

Incorporation into Music Education

The methodologies highlighted in this study can be incorporated into higher

education curricula, especially in courses on ethnomusicology, arranging, and composition. Students should be encouraged to transcribe, analyze, and creatively reinterpret folk materials, developing both technical skill and cultural sensitivity.

Support for Documentation and Archiving Projects

Institutions and funding bodies are recommended to support projects that document, archive, and make accessible transcriptions of folk music. Such initiatives would not only safeguard intangible cultural heritage but also provide a rich resource for contemporary composers and performers.

Further Research on Cross-Genre Adaptation

Additional research should investigate how traditional Thai musical motifs can be adapted into various contemporary genres beyond jazz, including electronic music, film scoring, and experimental ensembles (Trakulhun, 2015). Understanding the dynamics of intercultural adaptation can inform best practices for both preservation and innovation.

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Biography

Dr Natthaphol Deekham is currently a lecturer at the Faculty of Music, Bangkokthonburi University, specializing in music performance, composition, and various styles of music writing. He is also a member of The Superglasses Ska Ensemble, where he plays the baritone saxophone and received an Outstanding Award in the Music Composition category at the Young Thai Artist Award, which acknowledges his creative achievements in music and composition.

Warudh Samansap, is now a lecturer at the School of Music, Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music, He graduated from Wang Klai Kangwon School under the royal patronage at the secondary level. He earned a bachelor's degree from the Faculty of Music, Silpakorn University, majoring in Music Performance with Trumpet as his primary instrument. He then pursued a Master of Music degree from the Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music, where he studied composition with Dr Jean-David Caillouët. In addition to teaching, Warudh also composes music, arranges harmonies, and serves as a special lecturer in brass instruments for wind bands. He has also written lyrics and arranged music for brass ensembles for various artists and concerts. Warudh is a member of The Superglasses Ska Ensemble (Ska), Srirajah Rockers (Reggae), and Temp. (Pop). He is also the founder of The Don (Experimental) and was a member of the Banglumpu Blues Company (Blues). He has recorded with these bands and has been responsible for recording soundtracks for several films. He previously taught music at Sarasas Witaed Bangbon School (Bangkok), where he taught music theory, basic ear training, and ensemble classes, and conducted the school's wind orchestra. He also worked at Soundspace Co., Ltd. as a manager, handling sound system rentals and working behind the scenes at various concerts.

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A Biomechanical Reading of Mario Del Monaco's Lunge Technique

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Abstract

This study explores the biomechanical and pedagogical parallels between classical fencing—particularly the sequence of En Garde, Lunge, and Recovery—and the vocal technique of Italian tenor Mario Del Monaco, renowned for his low larynx and forward-projected resonance. Inspired by Del Monaco's own description of his method as a "Lunge Technique, as in fencing" in *Marcello Del Monaco: Il Maestro dei Tenori,* the inquiry draws on his iconic photograph demonstrating a lunge-like singing posture. Comparative analysis with fencing form, combined with the author's somatic experience of inhabiting both En Garde and Lunge positions, provides an embodied basis for the study. Rather than treating the Lunge as a mere metaphor, the study emphasizes the preparatory En Garde position as the primary biomechanical model for singing. Historical context is drawn from Ridolfo Capo Ferro's 17th-century codification of fencing, revealing kinesthetic principles applicable to vocal production. Anatomical analysis shows how En Garde aligns muscular systems to enable breath detainment, diaphragmatic flexibility, and a non-rigid, naturally lowered larynx, supporting healthy resonance. The study proposes three sequential phases—elastic preparation, thrust initiation, and recovery—that serve as somatic cues for singers, paralleling the transitions from inhalation to onset to breath renewal. In addition, four pedagogical checkpoints are outlined to assess low-larynx function through breath use, muscle coordination, and structural balance. By grounding Del Monaco's "Lunge Technique" in the physical logic of fencing, the study offers singers and teachers a historically informed, somatically driven model for technique development.

Keywords: Lunge Technique, Mario Del Monaco, Biomechanics in Singing

Introduction

Mario Del Monaco (1915–1982) remains one of opera's most compelling tenors, celebrated for his heroic timbre and unyielding projection (Allegri, 1991). His sound was not only powerful but strikingly directional, as if propelled into space with the force of a physical thrust. Critics often attribute this to his low larynx and forward resonance, yet such accounts describe results rather than processes. What remains insufficiently understood is the preparation—the bodily sequence by which his vocalism was achieved.

Del Monaco himself provided an interpretive key when he described his approach as a *"Lunge Technique, as in fencing"* (Del Monaco, 2014). This statement, supported by his iconic posture in the 1961 *Otello* recording with Herbert von Karajan, suggests that fencing provided him with more than imagery. It offered a somatic framework rooted in movement, balance, and directed energy.

The analogy warrants closer investigation because fencing, particularly as codified in the seventeenth century, is itself an art of preparation and release (Capo Ferro, 2023). The En Garde stance establishes elastic readiness; the Lunge channels this readiness into linear thrust; the Recovery restores balance for renewed action. These principles map closely onto the respiratory and phonatory demands of singing: inhalatory preparation, onset of tone, and renewal of breath.

This study therefore proposes that Del Monaco's "Lunge Technique" should not be dismissed as metaphorical flourish. Instead, it represents a functional model of vocal production grounded in fencing biomechanics. By contextualizing fencing's evolution, analyzing the En Garde–Lunge–Recovery sequence, and translating these into pedagogical checkpoints, this research reframes Del Monaco's legacy as a systematic, somatically grounded approach to low-larynx singing.

More broadly, the inquiry argues for the reclamation of physicality in vocal pedagogy. Singing is often taught through abstract imagery, yet the fencing analogy insists on concrete bodily preparation. The singer, like the fencer, must become an athlete of breath—poised, elastic, and fearless in projection.

Historical Context

The evolution of fencing offers a useful frame for understanding Mario Del Monaco's "Lunge Technique." The medieval longsword, dominant between the 14th and 16th centuries, was a two-handed weapon designed for cutting arcs and circular movements. Its gestures required strength and adaptability emphasizing continuity rather than linear precision.

With the decline of armor and the rise of firearms, the longsword gave way to the rapier: a slender blade designed primarily for thrusting. The rapier demanded new bodily mechanics—direct, economical, forward-driven extensions. Ridolfo Capo Ferro's *Gran Simulacro* (1610) codified these changes, defining the En Garde stance as the foundation of fencing and the Lunge as its definitive thrust. Evangelista (1996) calls the Lunge "the most significant innovation in fencing history" because it compressed the entire body's potential energy into a single linear gesture.

Thus, by 1600, fencing had become not just combat but a discipline of posture, readiness, and controlled release—qualities strikingly applicable to singing (Gaugler, 1998).

The transition from longsword to rapier finds a parallel in vocal pedagogy. The bel canto tradition of Manuel García emphasized rounded timbre, seamless legato, and chiaroscuro balance—qualities analogous to the longsword's flowing arcs. García's singers cultivated flexibility and elegance, prioritizing the beauty of line.

By contrast, Arturo Melocchi's "low larynx" school emphasized projection, linear intensity, and penetrating resonance. His teaching, which profoundly influenced Del Monaco, parallels the rapier: direct, uncompromising, and forward-driven. Where García's voice floated, Melocchi's thrust.

This juxtaposition clarifies the historical ground on which Del Monaco stood. His artistry synthesized Melocchi's muscular school with his own refinements toward elasticity and freedom.

Del Monaco's genius lay in translating these principles into embodied imagery. His brother Marcello recalls in *Il Maestro dei Tenori* (2014) how Mario gradually abandoned rigidity, developing a more fluid approach that emphasized a consistently low larynx and lifted soft palate. Yet Mario described this not through abstract terminology but through fencing: he called his method a "Lunge."

The photograph of Del Monaco in a lunge-like posture during the 1961 *Otello* recording (see Figure 1) visually anchors this analogy. His stance resembles Luigi Barbasetti's classical fencing lunge—legs grounded, torso extended, energy thrust forward. While Del Monaco never codified his method in pedagogical writing, the parallel suggests that fencing biomechanics provide the missing structural explanation of his technique (Barbasetti, 1936).

Figure 1: Mario Del Monaco in Verdi's Otello recording session (1961), from Recording booklet of Verdi's Otello (1961).

The fencing metaphor offers a biomechanical explanation of his vocal technique. Like the fencer who channels energy through the foil while maintaining stability, Del Monaco channels breath and resonance forward while rooted in his core. The term "Lunge" distills complex physiological processes into a single, accessible image. Unlike abstract pedagogical terms such as "support" or "open throat," it conveys readiness, momentum, and recovery in physical terms that singers can immediately embody. In this way, Del Monaco's "Lunge" becomes both metaphor and functional principle, encapsulating his distinctive approach to power and projection.

Biomechanical Analysis: En Garde, Lunge, and Recovery

En Garde: Elastic Readiness

In fencing, En Garde is the essential stance of preparation. Feet are apart, knees flexed, pelvis lowered, and spine upright. Though still, the body is charged with elastic energy—ready to move in any direction.

For singers, this alignment has profound implications. The legs and quadriceps bear the body's weight, freeing the abdominal wall from compressive labor. The spine remains elongated, the rib cage widened laterally and posteriorly through eccentric intercostal stretch, and the pelvic floor remains relaxed but toned. The diaphragm hovers in suspension—neither forcibly lowered nor passively high—while the thoracic cavity is charged with elastic readiness yet free of tension (Dimon, 2018).

The result is an optimal state for inhalation: expanded but not rigid, stable but mobile. Psychologically, En Garde cultivates alertness without tension—precisely the readiness a singer needs before phonation.

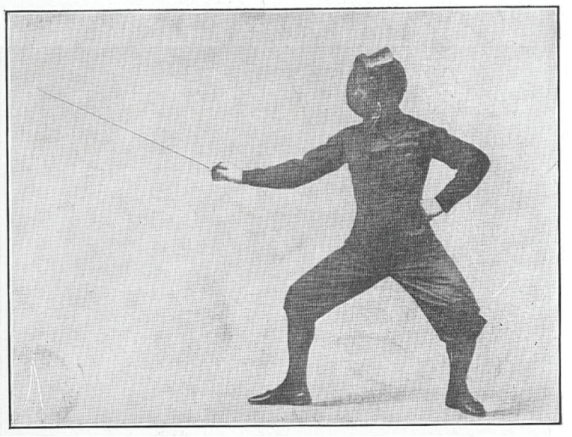

Figure 2: En Garde position in fencing, from The Art of Sabre and the Épée (Barbasetti, 1936)

Lunge: Coordinated Thrust

From En Garde, the fencer initiates the Lunge: the rear leg drives, the front leg extends, and the sword arm thrusts forward in a linear path. Crucially, the movement is whole-body, not limited to the arm.

For singers, this corresponds to phonation. Mirroring the fencing Lunge, this phase represents the controlled release of breath and tone. The quadriceps maintain weight distribution so that the torso and abdominal wall remain unburdened. The transverse abdominis engages eccentrically, guiding the diaphragm's descent through natural air pressure and spinal alignment. The larynx lowers into a settled, stable position—not by force, but by release from extrinsic elevation. The pharyngeal space opens through lifted soft palate, released tongue root, and absence of vertical neck tension. The entire thrust is directed forward: tone projects outward as an intentional thrust, never pressed vertically or forced downward.

This thrusting gesture reframes "forward resonance." Instead of an abstract placement, it becomes an embodied projection: the breath and tone moving outward with direction, as the fencer's blade extends into space.

Figure 3: Lunge position in fencing, from The Art of the Sabre and the Épée (Barbasetti, 1936).

Recovery: Poised Renewal

After the thrust, the fencer returns to En Garde. This Recovery is not collapse but recalibration—restoring balance and readiness.

The same principle applies to singing. At the end of a phrase, the body does not collapse but recoils elastically into En Garde. The quadriceps continue to carry the weight, maintaining composure while the abdominal wall, intercostals, obliques, and diaphragm remain free of unnecessary load. The ribs should remain partially expanded, avoiding collapse, while the diaphragm ascends elastically and naturally, and the pelvic floor recoils to its tonic state. The posture remains tall. Rather than letting the torso crumple, the singer preserves openness, ready for the next inhalation. Recovery ensures continuity: breath is renewed without breaking the cycle of support.

Sequential Phases

The En Garde–Lunge–Recovery cycle can be understood as three interdependent phases that mirror the biomechanics of fencing while offering singers a kinesthetic framework for vocal production.

Elastic Loading (En Garde / Preparation)

This stage corresponds to the poised readiness of En Garde. It establishes the condition of elastic expansion and psychological alertness: breath is settled low, the torso balanced, and the larynx neutral but ready to descend without manipulation.

Thrust Initiation (Lunge / Execution)

This stage corresponds to the decisive extension of the Lunge. It channels stored readiness into linear release: the rear leg drives, the torso aligns, and tone emerges from coordinated support rather than local force. The larynx descends naturally within an open pharyngeal chamber, the soft palate lifts, and the breath projects forward as a unified thrust—direct, precise, and whole-body in origin.

Recovery (Return to En Garde)

This stage corresponds to the controlled return of Recovery. Instead of collapse, the body reclaims balance: the diaphragm ascends elastically, the ribs settle into mid-expansion, and muscular bracing dissolves into renewed breath control. The singer stands ready, composure intact, prepared for the next phrase with the same alert equilibrium as the fencer resuming En Garde.

This cyclical process—elastic loading, thrust initiation, and recovery—transforms breath management from a static act into a kinetic condition. It reframes vocal technique not as the attainment of fixed positions (e.g., "drop the larynx"), but as the cultivation of dynamic, elastic states in which the larynx and diaphragm coordinate naturally. In this way, the Lunge becomes not only a metaphor for vocal support but also a biomechanical pathway toward stability, resonance, and freedom.

Anatomical Integration

The sequential phases depend on the coordination of multiple anatomical systems:

Legs and pelvis. The quadriceps and gluteals stabilize weight distribution, sparing the abdominal wall from compensatory rigidity. The pelvic floor yields elastically, working in dynamic reciprocity with the diaphragm to regulate intra-abdominal pressure.

Torso. The intercostals and obliques lengthen eccentrically, enabling rib expansion, while the transverse abdominis anchors breath without compressive force. This balance allows appoggio—support through suspension rather than pressure.

Larynx and resonance tract. With strap muscles released, the larynx descends naturally into an acoustically efficient posture. The pharyngeal chamber widens through soft palate lift and tongue root release, ensuring resonance without constriction.

By practicing in literal En Garde and Lunge positions, singers cultivate proprioceptive awareness of these alignments. Over time, the exaggerated

stance is no longer required; its conditions can be recalled in standard singing posture through neuromuscular memory (Asawadejmetakul, 2025).

Low Larynx Singing and Pedagogical Checkpoints

Having outlined the threefold cycle of En Garde, Lunge, and Recovery, we arrive at the central question of Mario Del Monaco's so-called "Lunge Technique": the low larynx. Too often this hallmark of his sound is misunderstood as an act of mechanical depression, a willful pressing down of the larynx by force. Yet the biomechanics of fencing, when read alongside Del Monaco's vocal production, reveal that the low larynx is not a goal wrestled into place but a natural consequence of balanced posture, elastic breath, and forward-driven intention. Just as the fencer does not "force" himself into the Lunge but allows it to unfold from well-prepared suspension, so the singer must arrive at laryngeal depth by physiological inevitability rather than by muscular compulsion.

To make this principle tangible, I propose four checkpoints through which singers may test whether the conditions for a low larynx and high palate are emerging as by-products of correct coordination.

Elastic Suspension

The first checkpoint is the relaxation and buoyant suspension of thoracic and abdominal musculature, initiated through the En Garde stance and its preparatory breath. Here the legs, particularly the quadriceps, assume the role of weight-bearers, liberating the abdominal wall from the burden of holding. Breath function is thus set free to operate elastically, without rigidity or collapse.

Diaphragm–Pelvic Floor Elasticity

The second checkpoint concerns the dialogue between diaphragm and pelvic floor. The diaphragm expands eccentrically, yielding in its descent, while the pelvic floor responds with reciprocal elasticity. This interplay creates a natural lowering of the larynx, achieved without any conscious pushing or downward pressure—a descent born of balance, not of force.

Postural Stabilizers

The third checkpoint engages the quadriceps and transverse abdominals as stabilizers of the whole posture. Rather than compressing or tightening, they create a grounded suspension in which the breath can remain free. In this

way, the original sense of appoggio—as suspension and poised balance rather than pressure—becomes embodied. The singer rests in stability without resorting to constriction.

Forward Intention.

Finally, the fourth checkpoint directs both breath and tone outward with clear, linear purpose. Like the fencer's thrust, this projection releases energy forward, preventing upward strain or forced placement. Resonance thus finds its path not by pushing but by intention, a directed trajectory that carries the voice into space with ease.

Together, these four checkpoints form both a diagnostic and a pedagogical map. They give singers concrete somatic markers—elastic suspension, diaphragmatic–pelvic balance, postural anchoring, and forward trajectory—through which to assess whether the low larynx is arising as a natural by-product of healthy coordination. More than conceptual ideals, they are tactile experiences, ensuring that technique is lived in the body, not merely understood in theory.

Discussion: Interdisciplinary Implications

Vocal pedagogy has long relied on metaphor, yet metaphor alone often leaves room for misinterpretation or distortion. Mario Del Monaco's invocation of fencing, when stripped of its purely figurative veneer and examined through its biomechanical underpinnings, demonstrates how imagery can be transformed into a practical method. The sequence of En Garde, Lunge, and Recovery yields repeatable physical outcomes: the expansion of the rib cage, the descent of the diaphragm, and the natural release of the larynx. What emerges is not a mystical association but a somatic framework—one in which metaphor is transmuted into method.

Misapplications of Del Monaco's teaching have historically abounded, with many imitators attempting to force the larynx downward or to exaggerate abdominal pressure in pursuit of his heroic sound. Such distortions miss the principle at the core of the fencing analogy: the thrust is never isolated, but always born of preparation and resolved through recovery. By embedding projection within this tripartite cycle, the model reframes resonance not as a product of muscular strain but as the consequence of a coordinated release. In this sense, the so-called "low larynx" is no longer a destination wrestled into place but a by-product of balance, suspension, and forward intention.

This reading situates Del Monaco's approach within a broader constellation of somatic disciplines that also emphasize readiness and release (Dimon, 2018). The Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais work, tai chi,

and even the stillness before an archer's release all share this principle of tension managed through suspension and liberated in action. Yet fencing offers a singular advantage: its linear and penetrating trajectory mirrors the sonic character of dramatic singing, in which the voice must not only bloom but project with precision and focus into space. The sword, like the voice, achieves its power not from brute force but from the clarity of its aim and the inevitability of its follow-through.

In reclaiming this physicality, the singer is reimagined not as a passive vessel for sound but as an athlete of breath and resonance. Opera's demands are not gentle; they call for stamina, courage, and projection that can fill a hall against the tide of an orchestra. Through the fencing framework, the singer embodies poise in En Garde, decisiveness in the Lunge, and renewal in Recovery. This cycle situates artistry within athletic precision, offering a pedagogy that is not only conceptual but lived in the body: precise, fearless, and dynamically renewed with every phrase.

Conclusion

Mario Del Monaco's reference to his singing as a "Lunge Technique, as in fencing" was not a theatrical flourish but a somatic truth. By reading his analogy against the codified sequence of En Garde, Lunge, and Recovery, this study has shown how fencing biomechanics illuminate vocal function. The preparatory elasticity of En Garde, the coordinated thrust of the Lunge, and the poised renewal of Recovery offer singers a model of breath and resonance grounded in readiness, action, and balance.

The proposed framework—three sequential phases and four pedagogical checkpoints—redefines the low larynx not as a forced position but as the result of healthy conditions. More broadly, this interdisciplinary reading reclaims physicality within voice pedagogy, situating the singer as both artist and athlete of breath. In Del Monaco's legacy, the voice does not merely resonate—it lunges into space with precision, elasticity, and fearless intent.

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Biography

Puntwitt Asawadejmetakul is a Thai countertenor noted for uniting vocal power with poetic sensitivity. Praised by *The Nation* as revealing "a rare HEROIC side to the countertenor voice" and hailed by the *Bangkok Post* as "the fiery one," he has established himself as one of the most compelling vocal artists of his generation. He holds a Doctor of Fine and Applied Arts in Vocal Performance and Pedagogy from Chulalongkorn University, supported by the Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music Scholarship, as well as a Master's from Chulalongkorn and a First Class Honors degree from Rangsit University. His artistry spans Baroque oratorio, contemporary opera, and Thai works, with acclaimed performances in Somtow Sucharitkul's *DASJATI* cycle. An active pedagogue, he integrates voice science and performance tradition in training Thailand's next generation of singers.

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Music Exchange between China and other Asian countries from the 7th to the 9th centuries: Eastern music cultural identity constructed by music gifting

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Abstract

Music gifting among Asian states (7th–9th centuries) was a key diplomatic practice. This study argues that such exchanges transcended mere cultural transfer, serving as strategic tools for political alliance and identity formation. Through analysis of historical records, it reveals how music gifting forged a shared Eastern musical-cultural identity, cementing a cohesive high-cultural sphere across medieval Asia beyond mere entertainment or ritual.

Keywords: Music Gifting, Cultural Identity, East Asian Music Exchange, Tang Dynasty Music

Introduction

The 7th to 9th centuries in Asia were defined by a multi-polar power structure. Major empires—including the *Tang* in the east, the *Abbasid Caliphate* in the west, the *Tibetan Empire* in the center, and the *Uyghur Khaganate* in the north—coexisted and interacted through both competition and cooperation. This era was marked by significant military contests, such as the Battle of Talas, and vibrant economic and cultural exchanges along overland and maritime Silk Roads. The growth of maritime powers like *Srivijaya* in Southeast Asia highlighted the increasing importance of sea trade networks, which began to shape a new economic and political landscape for the region.

Such a political climate directly spurred the flourishing practice of music gifting and endowed it with multifaceted significance. During this period, the act of presenting music as a gift between nations was not merely a form of artistic exchange; it carried rich implications in political diplomacy, military strategy, geographical relations, as well as cultural dissemination and identity.

Music was utilized as a diplomatic instrument while simultaneously being invested with broader ritual and ceremonial functions. The official bestowal and reception of music played a role in shaping a shared East Asian musical and cultural identity, thereby contributing to the formation of a broader East Asian cultural sphere. It should be clarified that, due to limitations in historical sources, the phenomenon of music gifting discussed in this paper primarily refers to musical exchanges between China and other Asian countries from the 7th to the 9th century. As a result, there remains considerable potential for further exploration regarding music gifting practices in ancient Asia.

Literature Review

The phenomenon of music gifting, a pivotal form of cultural diplomacy in ancient Asia, has garnered scholarly attention yet remains peripheral in mainstream musicological discourse. Existing research is predominantly empirical, focusing on isolated case studies of specific events, such as the gift of *Ni shang Yu yi Qu* (Yang, 1962) or *the music of the Pyu Kingdom* (Qin, 1989) to the *Tang* court. While valuable, this fragmented approach has left numerous music gifting events underexplored and failed to generate a comprehensive theoretical framework.

A bibliometric analysis of Chinese academic databases (CNKI) reveals the scope and limitations of current research. A thematic search for "music gifting" yields a modest corpus of approximately 39 journal articles and 14 theses. Broader searches for major related events, such as the *Nanzhao* Fengsheng Yue (32 articles, 3 theses), the Piao Guo Yue (25 articles, 6 theses), and the Nishang Yuyi Qu (68 articles, 3 theses), identify a larger body of 159 relevant publications. Trend analysis (see Figure 1) indicates that research, while intermittent since 1962, has gained slight momentum since 2009, peaking in 2018. This confirms a sustained but niche interest in the topic.

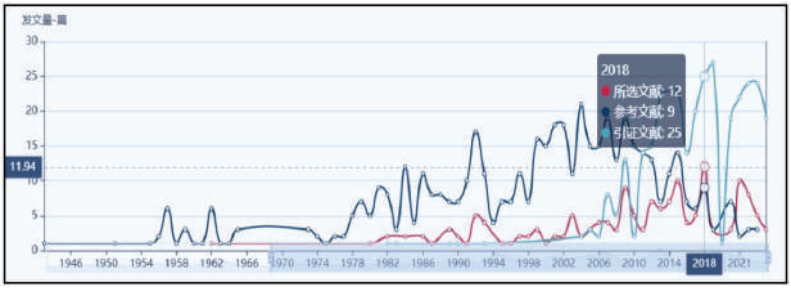

Figure 1: Research Publication Trend
Source: Generated by CNKI Visualization Analysis

The field is highly interdisciplinary, spanning musicology (65.4%), ancient Chinese history, and literature. A citation network analysis (see Figure 2) further shows that research relies heavily on canonical historical texts, such as Ouyang and Song (1975) and Wang (1955), and foundational works, including Kishibe (1973) and Hayashi, (2013). This underscores a methodological reliance on historical philology and textual criticism. Crucially, the most cited case studies are overwhelmingly conce trated in the *Tang* Dynasty (7th–9th centuries), highlighting its centrality as the peak period for music gifting and the ideal focus for this study.

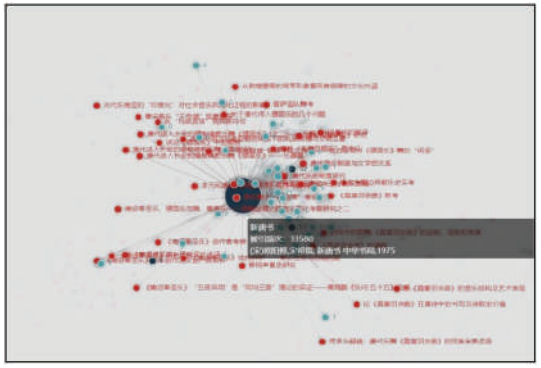

Figure 2: Citation Network Diagram
Source: Generated by CNKI Visualization Analysis

In summary, while prior scholarship provides essential empirical groundwork, it lacks a macro-level synthesis. This study addresses this gap by conducting a holistic analysis of music gifting in 7th–9th century Asia, arguing that it was a strategic political tool instrumental in constructing a shared Eastern cultural identity, moving beyond the prevailing narrative of isolated cultural exchange.

Methodology

This study employs a multi-faceted methodological approach to analyze the phenomenon of music gifting holistically, moving beyond singular case studies.

Historical Philology

The primary evidence is drawn from a critical analysis of Chinese historical texts from the 7th to 9th centuries. Key sources include official dynastic histories such as *Old Book of Tang* (Liu, 1975), *New Book of Tang* (Ouyang & Song, 1975), *Tang Huiyao* (Institutional History of *Tang*) (Wang, 1955),

and *Cefu Yuangui* (Prime Tortoise of the Record Bureau) (Wang, 2006). These texts are scrutinized to extract records of music gifting events, including the participants, the musical items gifted, and the documented diplomatic context.

Case Study Analysis

To provide depth and nuance, this research conducted a focused analysis of two seminal music gifting events that exemplify tributary relations with the *Tang* Empire: the presentation of *Nanzhao Fengsheng Yue* from the *Nanzhao* Kingdom and the gift of *Piao Guo Yue* from the Pyu Kingdom. These cases were selected for their rich documentation and their value in illustrating the diverse geopolitical and cultural motivations behind music gifting.

Result

This paper draws upon classical Chinese documents as its historical source base. To date, I have identified twenty historical records concerning musical gift-giving during this period, from sources including the *New Book of Tang, the Old Book of Tang,* the *Cefu Yuangui,* the *Yuefu Shiji,* as well as various informal notes, such as the *Duyang Zabian* (Ding, 2000), *Chaoye Qianzai* (Zhang, 1979), *Nanbu Xinshu* (Qian, 1958), and *Youxian Guchui* (Ding, 2000).

The earliest recorded instance of musical gift-giving from this period discovered so far is found in New Book of Tang (Ouyang & Song, 1975), Volume 220: "In the fifth year of the Zhenguan era [631 CE], (Silla) presented two female musicians." This event occurred in 631 CE, when the Silla Kingdom sent two court dancers as a gift to the Tang court. Subsequently, New Book of Tang, Volume 222b records: "[They] also presented two dwarves, two Zengqi female slaves, along with song and dance." This event took place between the late 7th and mid-8th centuries, when the Srivijaya Empire (in Southeast Asia) presented to the Tang court two dwarves, two Zengqi women (僧祇女), and their song and dance performances.

During the reign of Emperor *Xuanzong* of *Tang* (712–756 CE), several states from Central Asia presented music to the *Tang* court on five separate occasions. The principal states involved were *Kang, Mi, Shi*, and *Jumi,* and the gifts primarily consisted of female dancers. Subsequently, both official *Tang* histories record two grand musical gift-giving events during the reign of Emperor *Dezong.* In the early 9th century, *Nanzhao* and the *Pyu Kingdom* dispatched large song and dance troupes to the *Tang* court to perform the grand musical pieces *Nanzhao Fengsheng Yue* (南诏奉圣乐) and Pyu Kingdom Music respectively. Emperor *Dezong* personally attended the Lingde Hall to witness these two performances. These events not only introduced

Southeast Asian musical culture to the Central Plains but also reflected, on a deeper level, the harmonious ethnic relations and friendly interstate exchanges of the time.

Musical gift-giving among Asian states continued until after the mid-9th century, though it gradually declined. During the 860s and 870s, the *Heling* Kingdom (located on present-day Java, Indonesia) presented female singing and dancing performers to the *Tang* court. Although instances of musical gift-giving still occurred thereafter, their frequency decreased significantly. The historical materials collected have now been organized into the table below.

Table 1 Musical Gift-Giving Events from the 7th to the 9th Centuries

No.	Year	Source Text	Event Description
1	631 CE	**New Book of Tang*: Silla* (《新唐书·新罗》)	In the 5th year of *Zhenguan*, Silla sent two female musicians as tribute.
2	670–741 CE	**New Book of Tang*: Srivijaya* (《新唐书·室利佛逝》)	Srivijaya sent two dwarves, two *Zengqi* (僧祇) women, and performers of song and dance.
3	684–690, 710–712 CE	**New Book of Tang*: Rites and Music XII* (《新唐书·礼乐十二》)	The Brahmin Kingdom presented acrobats who danced upside-down on sharp blades, with a *bili* (觱篥) player standing on their stomachs—all unharmed.
4	713 CE	**New Book of Tang*: Kangju* (《新唐书·康国》)	Kangju sent chainmail armor, crystal cups, agate bottles, ostrich eggs, *Yuenuo* textiles, dwarves, and *Huxuan* (胡旋) dancers.
5	713–741 CE	**New Book of Tang*: Mi State* (《新唐书·米国》)	The Mi State offered jade, dance carpets, lions, and *Huxuan* dancers.
6	713–741 CE	**New Book of Tang*: Jumi* (《新唐书·俱蜜》)	Jumi presented *Huxuan* dancers.
7	727 CE	**Cefu Yuangui*: Tributes IV* (《册府元龟·朝贡第四》)	Kangju presented *Huxuan* dancers and leopards.
8	727 CE	**Cefu Yuangui*: Tributes IV* (《册府元龟·朝贡第四》)	The Shi State sent *Huxuan* dancers and grape wine.

9	727 CE	*Cefu Yuangui*: Tributes IV* (《冊府元龟·朝贡第四》)	King A-Hu-Bi-Duo of Shi State sent envoys with *Huxuan* dancers and leopards.
10	729 CE	*Cefu Yuangui*: Tributes IV* (《冊府元龟·朝贡第四》)	The Mi State sent three *Huxuan* dancers, a leopard, and a lion.
11	733 CE	*New Book of Tang*: Khuttal* (《新唐书·骨咄》)	King *Xielifa* presented female musicians, while chief envoy *Duoboledagan* paid tribute.
12	755 CE	*New Book of the South* (《南部新书·己》)	Kangju presented *Huxuan* dancers known for their spinning movements.
13	762–779 CE	*Old Book of Tang*: Emperor *Dezong** (《旧唐书·德宗上》)	Emperor Daizong ordered the release of 32 dancing elephants from Wén Dān (文单) to Jing Mountain, along with falcons and palace maids.
14	766–779 CE	**New Book of Tang*: Balhae* (《新唐书·渤海》)	Balhae sent envoys 25 times; on one occasion, they presented 11 Japanese dancers.
15	800 CE	*Old Book of Tang*: Emperor Dezong* (《旧唐书·德宗下》)	*Nanzhao* presented *Fengsheng Yue* (奉圣乐舞曲), performed at Linde Hall.
16	802 CE	*Old Book of Tang*: Emperor Dezong* (《旧唐书·德宗下》)	The Pyu Kingdom sent envoys with 12 musical pieces and 35 musicians.
17	820 CE	*New Book of Tang*: Goguryeo* (《新唐书·高丽》)	Goguryeo sent musicians as tribute.
18	847–860 CE	**Duyang Zabian* (《杜阳杂编》)	A Japanese prince brought precious instruments and music; the emperor hosted a banquet.
19	860–874 CE	*New Book of Tang*: Southern Barbarians* (《新唐书·南蛮下·诃陵》)	Heling (Kalinga) sent female musicians.

Historical records indicate that many Asian states engaged in this practice during the 7th–9th centuries. In East Asia, four states—*Silla, Balhae, Goguryeo,* and *Japan*—presented music to the *Tang* Dynasty. In Southeast Asia, musical gifts were exchanged by *Srivijaya, Wén Dān, Nanzhao,* the *Pyu Kingdom,* and *Kalinga.* Central Asia saw such diplomatic exchanges from

states like *Kang, Mi, Shi, Jumi,* and *Khuttal.* While South Asia formed a relatively isolated geographical unit, the *Brahmin Kingdom* also sent musical tributes to *Tang* China.

Musical gifts encompassed various elements, including musical instruments, compositions, musicians, dancers, and even animals used in performances—such as elephants, horses, and parrots. Notably, these musical offerings predominantly represented the native traditions of the gift-giving states, showcasing distinct regional characteristics. This deliberate selection suggests that donor states aimed to present their unique musical culture to the recipients.

Discussion

Case Study: The Dual Political-Cultural Functions of Musical Gift-Giving

The following section focuses on a specific instance of musical gift-giving that occurred in 800 CE, analyzing its political-geographical motivations, diplomatic functions, and cultural impact.

In the sixteenth year of the *Zhenyuan* era of Emperor *Dezong* of *Tang* (800 CE), a significant musical gift-giving event took place, in which the *Nanzhao* Kingdom presented the large-scale musical performance *Nanzhao Fengsheng Yue* (Music in Praise of the Sage from *Nanzhao*) to the *Tang* court. This event was recorded in numerous historical documents. Accounts appear in the Treatise on Music and the Annals of Emperor *Dezong* from the *Old Book of Tang* (Liu, 1975), as well as in the Treatise on Rites and Music and the Records of the Southern Man from the *New Book of Tang* (Ouyang & Song, 1975), with the latter providing the most detailed description. Additionally, records of this musical gift can be found in works such as the *Tang Huiyao* (P. Wang, 1955), *Yuefu Zalu* (Duan, 1985), *Tang Guoshi Bu*, *Duyang Zabian*, and *Tangyin* Guiqian, among others. The event was also described in poems by contemporary writers, indicating that it generated considerable social influence at the time.

The timing and initiator of this musical gift are clearly documented; however, the identity of the creators of *Nanzhao Fengsheng Yue* remains contested. Current academic discourse primarily includes the following views: authorship attributed to *Wei Gao,* to the *Nanzhao* Kingdom itself, or to a collaborative effort between *Wei Gao* and *Nanzhao* artists. Bai (2018) systematically reviewed these arguments in his article "A Textual Research on the Creator of '*Nanzhao Fengsheng Yue*'", which this paper will not reiterate. Bai (2018) concluded that the official musicians of *Chengdu* Prefecture in the *Jiannan* West Circuit served as the primary creators of *Nanzhao*

Fengsheng Yue. While this conclusion is reasonable, the crucial issue lies in how to define the concept of the "creator".

Nanzhao Fengsheng Yue was not a single piece of music or song, but rather a large-scale song and dance performance comprising multiple acts, involving various performers such as singers, dancers, and instrumentalists. In discussing the creators of specific musical pieces, songs, or dances, it is highly probable that they were crafted by court musicians, given that neither *Wei Gao* nor the *Nanzhao* leaders possessed sufficient musical expertise. However, decisions regarding the allegorical meaning and thematic content of the music, the overall structure of the performance, the sequence of musical pieces, and the arrangement of instruments appear unlikely to have been determined solely by the musicians themselves. These elements were more probably orchestrated by a high-ranking director. *Nanzhao Fensheng Yue* carried profound ritual-musical connotations, making it more plausible that it was choreographed under the direction of a regional authority figure, who subsequently presented it to the imperial court as a gesture of loyalty. Given the low social status of musicians at the time, it would have been inappropriate for them to determine the content and form of a musical performance so deeply embedded in ritual significance.

According to records from the Treatise on Rites and Music and the Records of the Southern Man in the *New Book of Tang,* the performance of *Nanzhao Fengsheng Yue* concluded with thunder drums being struck from the four corners while the performers knelt in a gesture symbolizing *Nanzhao*'s submission to the *Tang* Empire. The musical system employed was also highly elaborate: a modulation between the gong and zhi modes symbolized the submission of the southwestern regions, while a shift to the jue and yu modes represented the moral transformation of the western and northern tribes.

Furthermore, the performance involved the formation of Chinese characters through dance movements. Each character was accompanied by a specific song. For example, when the character "南" (*nan*) was formed, the song *Sheng zhu Wu wei Hua* was sung; for the character "奉" (*feng*), the song *Hai yu Xiu Wen hua* was performed. The five characters of "南诏奉圣乐" (*Nan Zhao Feng Sheng Yue*) thus corresponded to five distinct songs, each praising the achievements of the *Tang* Dynasty.

Additionally, elements such as the "six segments of the dance" (舞六成), the "sixty-four performers" (工六十四人), and the "twenty-eight repetitions in the prelude" (序曲二十八叠) carried profound political symbolism. Nearly every aspect of the performance—including the number and sequence of songs, dances, and musical pieces; the total number of performers; the types and arrangement of instruments; the timing of musical cues; detailed choreography; and even costumes and props—was imbued with political meaning. Even the official historians compiling the Treatise on Rites and Music

remarked that "the complexity of its symbolism makes it hardly worth recording in full" indicating the meticulous and highly intentional design behind the performance. As to who was responsible for these arrangements, this paper argues that it was more likely a high-ranking director rather than the musicians themselves.

The musical performance of *Nan Zhao Feng Sheng Yue* was renowned for its grand scale, incorporating a large ensemble of singers and dancers, a diverse and numerous array of musical instruments, and a complex structure comprising multiple songs, dance pieces, and instrumental sections, alongside numerous ritualistic actions and segments. Since many studies have already examined its performance format in detail, this paper will not elaborate further on this aspect.

It is particularly noteworthy that upon its presentation, *Nanzhao Fengsheng Yue* was personally attended by Emperor *Dezong,* who viewed its grand performance at the *Linde* Hall. Subsequently, the work was preserved and continued to be performed in later imperial banquets, as recorded in the Treatise on Rites and Music in the *New Book of Tang*; Ouyang and Song (1975) explain that Emperor *Dezong* assigned it to the musicians of the Taichang Temple, after which it was performed standing during court banquets and seated in palace settings.

Furthermore, musical exchanges between *Nanzhao* and the *Tang* court date back to the reign of Emperor *Xuanzong,* who previously presented the *Nanzhao* ruler Piluoge with "two ensembles of Hubu and Qiuci music" (Ouyang & Song, 1975). This indicates that the musical gift of *Nanzhao Fengsheng Yue* represented a meaningful cultural exchange between Southeast and East Asia, significantly contributing to harmonious ethnic relations at the time.

Influenced by *Nanzhao*'s musical gift-giving, two years later, the Pyu Kingdom presented Pyu Kingdom Music to the *Tang* court, an event that also caused considerable social reverberations. The renowned poet *Bai Juyi* specifically composed the poem "*Pyu Kingdom Music*" to commemorate this event, and *Tang* Ci, then Prefect of *Kaizhou,* presented his "Ode to the Pyu Kingdom's Musical Offering." This indicates that the impact of this musical gift was no less significant than that of the earlier offering from *Nanzhao.*

According to the research of Xu and Li, this musical gift-giving mission was led personally by Prince Shunanda of Pyu, who headed a delegation comprising musicians and attendants. They embarked on their journey between the sixth and seventh months of the seventeenth year of the *Zhenyuan* era (801 CE) (Xu & Li, 2004). During their travels, they met with *Wei Gao*, the Military Governor of *Jiannan,* in *Chengdu. Wei Gao* made certain adaptations to their songs and dances, while also commissioning illustrations of their musical instruments and documenting their dance movements and costume details, which were sent ahead as an advance tribute to the court.

Subsequently, Shunanda's delegation arrived safely in *Chang'an* in the first month of the eighteenth year of *Zhenyuan* (802 CE) and performed grandly within the imperial palace.

As for the musical form of Pyu Kingdom Music, multiple scholarly articles have already explored this topic. Here, I provide only a brief overview: Pyu Kingdom Music consisted of twelve pieces, performed by thirty-five musicians using nineteen types of instruments, totaling thirty-eight individual instruments. Both in content and musical style, it carried distinct Buddhist connotations.

An analysis of the social contexts in which these two instances of music-gifting occurred reveals that both were deeply imbued with political significance. Initially, the *Tang* Dynasty enjoyed positive relations with *Nanzhao.* In the early 8th century, Emperor *Xuanzong* gifted a musical ensemble to *Nanzhao'*s ruler. However, following internal political upheavals in *Tang* China, the *Tibetan* Empire seized *Tang'*s western territories, forcing *Nanzhao* to submit to *Tibetan* hegemony while expanding its own influence. The Pyu Kingdom, in turn, became a vassal state under *Nanzhao.*

As *Tibetan* pressure on *Nanzhao* intensified, *Nanzhao* dispatched envoys to *Tang* China, reestablishing diplomatic ties and forming a military alliance against Tubo, *the Tibetan Empire (7th-9th centuries).* After achieving a strategic victory in 800 CE, *Nanzhao* presented the grand musical performance *Nan Zhao Feng Sheng Yue* to the *Tang* court—a symbolic gesture affirming their realigned alliance. This further strengthened *Nanzhao'*s regional standing.

Still under *Nanzhao'*s suzerainty, the Pyu Kingdom sought to elevate its political status with its own musical mission to *Chang'an* in 802 CE. Following the performance, Pyu musicians instructed *Tang* court musicians in their repertoire—an act of cultural transmission that effectively placed Pyu on equal diplomatic footing with *Nanzhao* in *Tang* China.

Figure 3 Map of the Political-Geographical Context of Nanzhao's Musical Gift-Giving
Source: The Chinese Society for Geodesy, Photogrammetry and Cartography, Standard Map Service Network (n.d.)

From these two cases of musical gift exchanges, we observe that music transcended its original entertainment purpose to become a diplomatic instrument. Moreover, such "musical diplomacy" possessed significant advantages compared to conventional diplomatic methods.

Through musical gifts, *Nanzhao* restored friendly relations with the *Tang* Dynasty and established military trust. The Pyu Kingdom skillfully utilized musical offerings to elevate its political status.

Consequently, all three parties—the Pyu Kingdom, *Nanzhao,* and *Tang*—established positive diplomatic relations. This demonstrates the unique appeal of music as a diplomatic medium.

Of course, such favorable international relations were not perpetual. In subsequent historical developments, as political landscapes shifted, the strong diplomatic ties built through musical exchanges were ultimately disrupted.

Cultural Interpretation: The Shaping of East Asian Musical Cultural Identity through Musical Gift-Giving

According to the analysis above, the musical gift exchanges of the 7th–9th centuries were both shaped by and actively influenced the political-geographical dynamics of their time. Within the cultural domain, these interstate musical interactions played a pivotal role in constructing a shared East Asian musical identity.

The exchange of musical gifts between ancient Asian states at the national level represented the highest ruler's recognition of foreign musical

cultures, carrying significant cultural and political influence. Many of these musical exchanges sparked considerable social resonance at the time, with foreign music being incorporated into the recipient state's musical system—performed in both court and folk settings—and even appearing in literary works, reflecting broader societal acceptance of foreign musical traditions.

A notable example occurred from the early to mid-8th century, when Central Asian states frequently presented huxuan dancers ("Sogdian Whirl Dancers") to the *Tang* court. The music and dance of Central Asia became immensely popular in *Tang* society, with their instruments, musical styles, and choreography gradually assimilated into *Tang* China's indigenous musical culture.

Chinese rulers also presented musical gifts to Japan and the Korean Peninsula, exerting profound cultural influence. These exchanges served not only as instruments of state diplomacy but also as vital connective threads in the tapestry of Asian musical culture.

In summary, while musical gift exchanges among Asian states were primarily regarded as instruments of political diplomacy in their contemporary context, they objectively exerted profound and lasting impacts on the development of Asian musical cultures. These practices merit further scholarly examination as they represent a dual-faceted historical phenomenon: they can be analyzed both as elements of ancient geopolitical strategies and as catalysts for transnational musical syntheses that shaped Eastern musical identities.

However, the more critical question concerns whether musical gifts were truly equal or whether they implied cultural hegemony. In my view, the political status between the two parties in musical gift exchanges was inherently unequal, manifested in two forms: the more powerful side bestowing music as a reward to the other party, or the weaker side presenting music as tribute to the stronger party. Musical gifts reflected the relative political standing between the parties involved. Yet at the cultural level, both sides in musical gift exchanges were equals – in the vast majority of musical gift incidents, the recipient state adopted an accepting attitude toward the foreign music and would actively perform the gifted musical pieces.

Conclusion

The practice of musical gift-exchange among ancient Asian states functioned as a form of "soft diplomatic instrument." Through both material exchanges (instruments/musical notations) and intangible exchanges (technical skills/aesthetic concepts), it facilitated mutual learning and shared development among Asian musical cultures, collectively shaping what became the East Asian musical sphere. Notably, the win-win diplomatic outcomes achieved

through these musical exchanges embody the same core principles that underpin today's Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road initiatives.

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Declaration of Generative AI

In the preparation of this work, I used Deep Seek for translation assistance and language polishing to enhance the readability and academic tone of the manuscript. After using this tool, I reviewed and edited the content meticulously and take full responsibility for the entirety of the work.

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Biography

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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 (เจรียง)*, *Mamuad (มะม็วด)*, and *Kantrum (กันตรึม)* 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* (ตรัว) 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

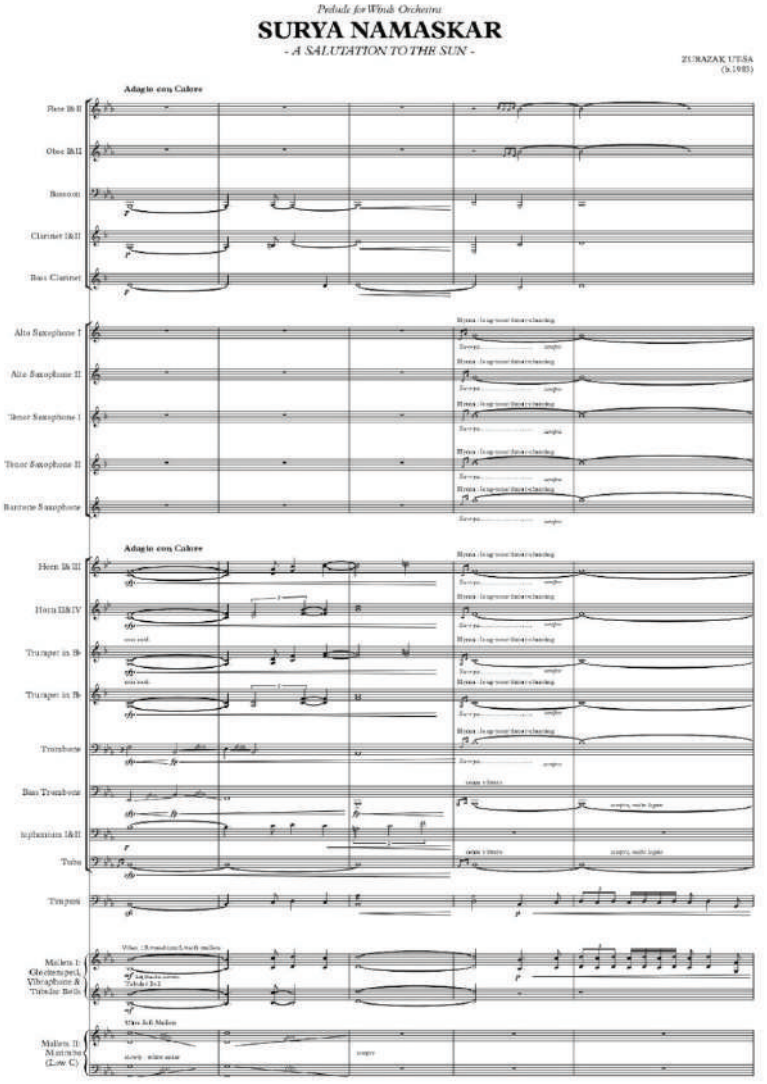
Future work could benefit from direct collaboration with traditional musicians to ensure a deeper, more authentic understanding of the source materials.

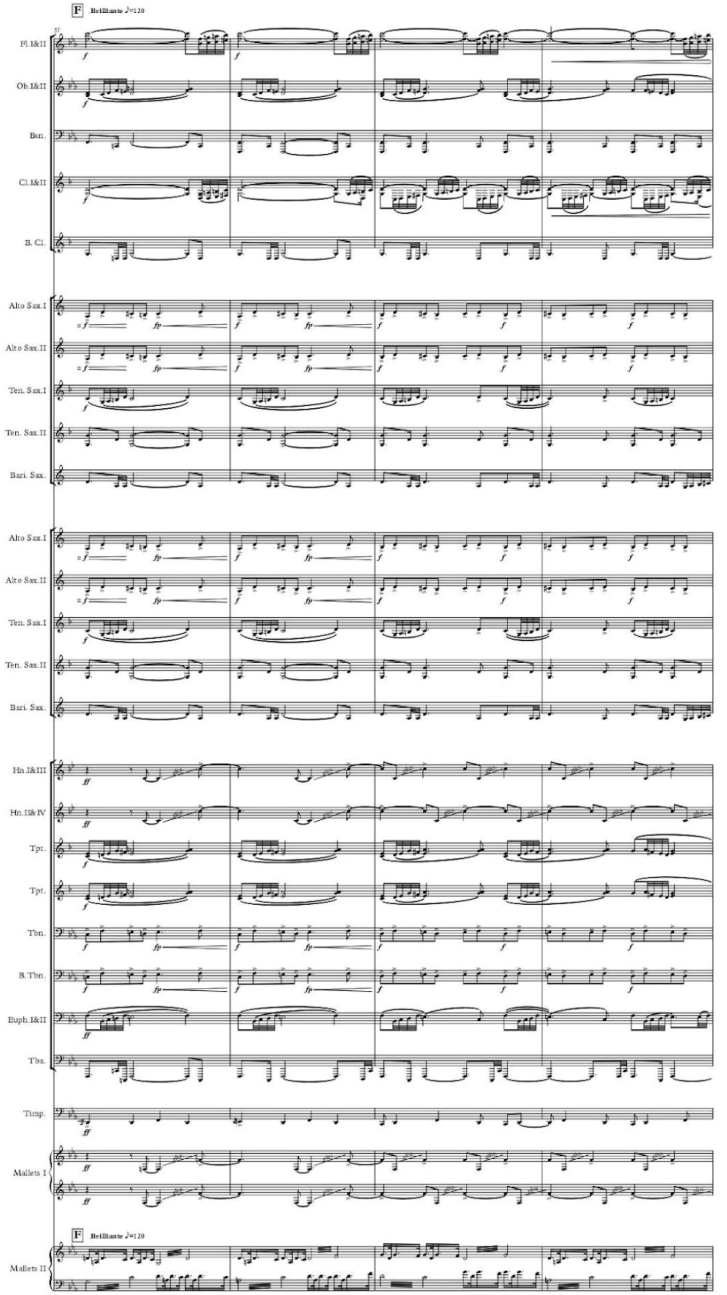
Educational Initiatives

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




F Brilliante ♩=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
Bari. Sax.
Alto Sax. I
Alto Sax. II
Ten. Sax. I
Ten. Sax. II
Bari. Sax.
Hn. I&III
Hn. II&IV
Tpt.
Tpt.
Tbn.
B. Tbn.
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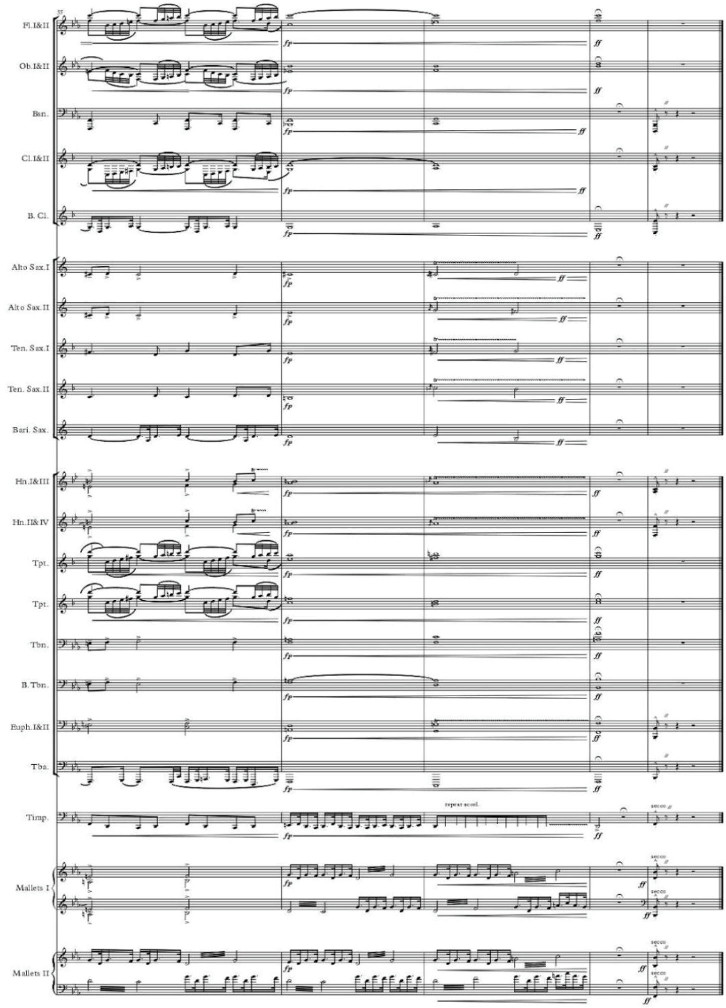
Fl.I&II
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Biography

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Reviving Silk Road Soundscapes: Iconographic Transformations of Pipa Instruments (Northern Wei to Sui) and the Prospects of AI-Aided Musical Reconstruction

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

Abstract

Building on the author's doctoral research that systematically classified and interpreted pipa imagery in Shanxi Province from the Northern Wei to Tang Dynasties using archaeological typology, this comprehensive study examines two representative iconographies: one from Cave 12 of the Yungang Grottoes ("Cave of Music") and another from the Tomb of Yu Hong, a Sogdian noble of the Sui Dynasty. Through these case studies, the paper examines how cross-cultural exchanges between agrarian Han society and nomadic steppe cultures led to structural innovations and the evolution of performance aesthetics in pipa instruments. Additionally, the study takes the 14th piece from the Dunhuang pipa manuscripts, You Man Quzi, as a case study to explore its potential for reconstruction and adaptation in contemporary pipa performance. It further presents a preliminary inquiry into the potential role of artificial intelligence in assisting with the revival and creative interpretation of ancient Chinese scores for modern contexts.

Keywords: Pipa iconography, Yungang Grottoes, Yu Hong Tomb, archaeological typology, cross-cultural exchange, Dunhuang pipa manuscripts, AI music reconstruction

Introduction

The pipa, a lute-like instrument, occupies a pivotal position in the history of Chinese music. Its development from the Northern Wei (386–534 CE) to the Sui Dynasty (581–618 CE) reflects complex processes of cultural exchange along the Silk Road, where Han agricultural society interacted with nomadic

steppe peoples and Central Asian merchants, including the Sogdians and Persians. These interactions shaped not only the physical form of the instrument but also its performance practices and aesthetic presentation.

This study aims to address the following questions:

1) How did pipa form and playing technique evolve under the influence of cross-cultural exchanges in Shanxi during the Northern Wei to Sui periods?

2) How can archaeological typology and iconographic analysis reveal patterns in the historical development of the pipa?

3) What is the potential role of artificial intelligence in the reconstruction and creative adaptation of ancient pipa scores for contemporary performance?

By situating iconographic analysis within a broader framework of cultural interaction and digital experimentation, this paper contributes to an integrated understanding of musical instruments as both material and performative cultural artifacts.

Literature Review

Research on the pipa has long been a subject of interest in Chinese musicology, archaeology, and iconography. Previous studies have examined the instrument's evolution in terms of physical form, musical function, and symbolic representation. Scholars have conducted research on the history of the pipa, with main concentrations in China and Japan. In the research on the history of the pipa in the 20th century, the representative achievements in China include the monograph "History of Chinese Music" by Wang (2015), in which he mainly discussed the history of the pipa in terms of its shape, origin, evolution, and tuning. Through the study of tuning, he established connections and comparisons between the Arabian pipa (which Wang interpreted as the Persian oud based on its pronunciation) and the four-stringed curved-necked pipa, five-stringed pipa, and the pipa intr duced to Japan from the Tang Dynasty. He believed that these pipas were all related and inherited from one another. Through the comparison of tuning, Wang believed that the predecessor of the four-stringed curved-necked pipa in China was actually the Suyiwa pipa mentioned in the literature that came from Kucha, and that the five-stringed pipa developed by adding strings to the four-stringed curved-neck pipa on this basis. Based on the records in Du You's "Tongdian" from the Tang Dynasty and the "History of the Liang Dynasty", Wang believed that the round-bodied, straight-necked pipa (also known as the ruanxian) had already appeared in China during the Chen and Sui Dynasties. The Suyiwa pipa was just a Hu instrument with a sinicized name.

From the perspective of the academic materials and viewpoints at that time, Wang's use of tuning research to establish connections between different types of pipa-like instruments from other regions was an academically advanced and valuable approach.

The cross-cultural context of the Silk Road has also been emphsized. Research indicates that the pipa was influenced by Central Asian and West Asian musical traditions. Japanese scholars Hayashi (1962) and Kishibe (1962) in their relevant works, hold a relatively consistent view that the pear-shaped lute instruments (a category that includes the pipa) which appeared in China originated in West Asia, were also popular in regions like Central Asia, and spread into China via the Silk Road. When discussing specific types, these two scholars argue that the four-stringed, curved-necked lute (quxiang pipa) completed its formation and development in the Iranian region. In contrast, the five-stringed pipa originated from India. This is also a widely recognized viewpoint in the academic community regarding the study of the Chinese pipa's history. In particular, the discussions on the evolution of instruments such as the ruanxian and huobusi in Hayashi's Study of East Asian Musical Instruments have exerted an influence on the subsequent research of Chinese scholars. Meanwhile, the viewpoints put forward by scholar Tanabe (2015) in his History of Chinese Music can be summarized into two aspects:

1) The pipa in Japan was introduced from China. In contrast, the pipa in China should have emerged no later than the Han Dynasty (with its origin possibly tracing back to the Qin Dynasty), and was an instrument imported from the West.

2) He draws on comparative organological evidence to trace the possible predecessors of the ruanxian. Early examples include the bow-shaped harp (harpu) from Mesopotamia, which featured a sheepskin-covered soundbox and later developed into a three-stringed instrument. After its transmission to Egypt, this instrument type evolved into the nalfe, a lute characterized by a round soundbox covered with sheepskin. The instrument subsequently spread to Persia, where related lute forms became widespread. The viewpoint held by Tanabe (2015) aligns closely with that of Chinese scholar Shen (1982)—both believed that the ruanxian was merely a foreign-origin instrument that adopted a localized Chinese name. Tanabe further supported his argument by quoting records from Wenxian Tongkao (Comprehensive Examination of Literature and Documents) and historical accounts stating that the musical instruments unearthed from an ancient tomb during the reign of Empress Wu Zetian of the Tang Dynasty were identical to those used by Ruan Xian, one of the "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove."

Xie (2015), briefly outlined the forms of pipa-type instruments during the Tang Dynasty from the perspective of a contemporary pipa performer, mainly using the dual evidence method that combines music

iconography with philology for mutual verification. However, she did not conduct in-depth research in this regard.

With regard to material aspects of Tang Dynasty pipa-type instruments, including string construction, Xie Yazhu (2015) offers a relatively detailed discussion, especially concerning the transition from animal-based strings to silk strings and their impact on timbre and performance practice. This aspect of her study receives more focused attention than in many earlier works, which tend to treat such materials only briefly.

Nevertheless, the music scores cited and used by her to illustrate aspects such as performance and musical interpretation of Tang Dynasty pipa music are actually pipa scores that have been handed down in modern and contemporary times. These scores cannot serve as rigorous academic supporting materials for explaining the original appearance of Tang Dynasty pipa music.

Research findings on the imagery of pipa-type instruments also primarily focus on the Han and Tang Dynasties, as well as the regions along the Silk Road, for elaboration. A representative work in this field is "Sinicization and Classification: A Study on the Typological Characteristics, Performance Methods and Humanistic Existence of Pipa in the Han and Tang Dynasties" by Chen (2015). In this work, Chen put forward the term "humanistic existence" for the first time, which is used to describe the approach of situating the specific research object within a specific historical and humanistic context to investigate the cultural behaviors underlying the research object. He confined his study to pipa-type instruments of the Han and Tang Dynasties, which are also the dynasties that have attracted relatively concentrated attention in the academic research on pipa-type instruments. His research comprehensively covers various aspects of pipa-type instruments during this specific period, including different structural forms, diverse performance methods, the social and living status of pipa players, and the pipa music of this era. This type of research enables the study of pipa-type instruments to break free from the constraints of focusing only on superficial aspects, as seen in the structural forms depicted in images. Instead, it conducts in-depth research on the social and humanistic environment of that time.

Methodology

Data Collection

The researcher's doctoral dissertation research comprises all extant pipa-related imagery found in Shanxi Province, dating from the Northern Wei to the Tang Dynasties, comprising a total of 132 images. Sources include grotto wall paintings, tomb murals, sculptures, steles, and figurines. Each image was carefully documented to preserve key visual features, considering potential deterioration from environmental exposure. She employed the fieldwork method to conduct on-site investigations, identifying and counting all pipa images, providing preliminary descriptions of their characteristics, and compiling the findings into statistical tables.

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework employed in this study integrates archaeological, iconographic, comparative, and technological methodologies to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the pipa's evolution. Archaeological typology was applied to systematically code and classify each instrument according to three structural and performative criteria—neck configuration, soundbox morphology, and right-hand technique—thus generating stable digital records that contribute to the long-term preservation of cultural heritage threatened by material decay. Iconographic analysis involved a close examination of visual details, such as hand positions, plucking gestures, and performer attributes, to infer historical performance practices. Through cross-comparison, depictions from the Yungang Grottoes served as the typological benchmark for examining related instruments across Shanxi, revealing continuities and regional adaptations. Finally, AI-assisted reconstruction was employed to process selected Dunhuang pipa scores, exploring how artificial intelligence might facilitate the creative reimagining of ancient music within contemporary performance contexts.

Research Scope

The study focuses on the researcher's hometown, Shanxi Province in China, which has been a meeting point of nomadic civilization and agricultural civilization since ancient times, and a place where diverse cultures converge. Therefore, transmission routes and origins of pipa types outside this region are beyond its scope. However, observed patterns reflect broader Silk Road influences and regional cultural integration.

Case Studies

1. Yungang Grottoes (Cave 12, "Cave of Music")

Archaeological Context: Located on the east side of the ceiling in the antechamber of Cave 12, as recorded in Yungang Grottoes Complete Works: Volume 10, this mural presents one of the earliest known depictions of the pipa in Northern Wei Buddhist art. The musician is identified as a Yaksha performer, a mythical guardian figure often associated with divine music and celestial celebration. This image provides a valuable insight into early pipa morphology and performance techniques, serving as a foundational reference for later iconographic comparisons (Instrument Identification Code: 12-6-Qwll, see Table 1).

Instrument Form and Structure: As shown in Figure 1, the instrument features a curved neck, a long and wide neck shaft, and a pear-shaped resonance chamber with a slightly rounded profile. Although five white strings are visible in the image, the published plate caption in Yungang Grottoes Complete Works, Volume 10, Cave 12, notes that these strings were added during later color restoration by Qing Dynasty painters (1636–1912) and do not belong to the original sculptural design (Editorial Board of Yungang Grottoes Complete Works, 2019, p. 334). Accordingly, this instrument should be classified as a four-string curved-necked pipa, consistent with Persian-influenced forms prevalent along the Silk Road during the Northern Wei period.

Pipa-Holding Posture: The pipa is held with its headstock pointing downward to the left, positioned in front of the musician's chest. The chin does not touch the soundbox, indicating an inverted holding posture, where the instrument is played upside down relative to later conventional methods. This suggests an early stage of experimentation in performance practice.

Right-Hand Technique: The right wrist is pressed tightly against the edge of the resonance chamber, and the forearm is drawn close to the body. This compact motion may have facilitated a powerful and resonant tone, suitable for vigorous and rhythmically dynamic melodies. The slightly open "tiger's mouth" between the thumb and index finger and the outward "kicked" index finger indicate a hook-plucking motion, analogous to the mo (抹) technique in modern pipa playing, in which the index finger bends inward to pluck the string (Wang, 2012).

Left-Hand Technique: The left thumb supports the neck while the remaining four fingers press sequentially along the same string. The final pitch corresponds to the note pressed by the little finger, and the position—at the upper end of the neck—suggests performance in the lower tonal range, emphasizing depth and weight in tone production.

Representation of the Musician: The Yaksha musician has a tufted hairstyle, a joyful, upward-curving mouth, and is adorned with armlets, bracelets, and a beaded yingluo necklace. The figure wears trousers and exhibits a strong, athletic physique, reflecting the Central Asian (Hu) influence in physiognomy and costume. The twisted torso, bent left leg, and extended right leg give a sense of suspension and movement, symbolizing spiritual vitality and the dynamic energy of Buddhist sound imagery.

Accompanying Instruments: Though the pipa dominates the composition, surrounding fragments in the same cave indicate the presence of wind and percussion instruments, suggesting a proto-ensemble setting. This configuration provides the "Yungang model", later used as a typological reference for comparative analysis across Shanxi sites.

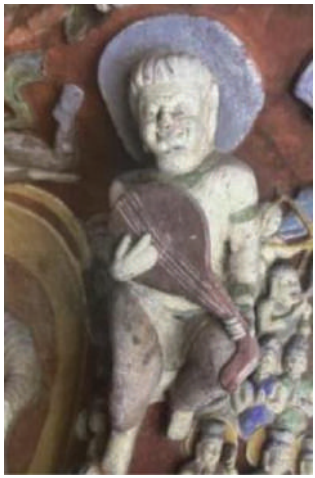

Figure 1: Pulse cover photo
Source: Editorial Board of Yungang Grottoes Complete Works.

2. Yu Hong Tomb (Sui Dynasty, Sogdian Nobleman)

Archaeological Context: The Yu Hong Tomb, excavated in 1999 and located south of Wangguo Village in Taiyuan City, Shanxi Province, dates back to the Sui Dynasty. According to Zhang (2010), Yu Hong, a nobleman from the Yu State, served as an envoy for the Rouran Khaganate and Persia from an early age and later held administrative positions under the Northern Qi, Northern Zhou, and Sui Dynasties. During the Northern Zhou period, he oversaw the Sabao Office, an institution managing foreign merchants and ethnic affairs. His epitaph and mural program together testify to his Central Asian heritage and the cosmopolitan identity of the period.

Instrument Form and Structure: The musical mural features a Qsl-type curved-necked pipa, a five-string variant with a droplet-shaped resonator, a smooth soundboard without sound holes, and no visible frets. These features demonstrate continuity with Persian and Sogdian instrument-making traditions observed earlier in the Yungang Grottoes, indicating the sustained influence of Silk Road aesthetics into the Sui Dynasty.

Pipa-Holding Posture: The performer holds the instrument with the pegbox angled slightly downward to the left, and the chin positioned close to the soundbox. The pipa rests lightly against the body, suggesting controlled balance and an ergonomic approach conducive to refined execution.

Right-Hand Technique: The right hand plucks the strings while only a small portion of the forearm touches the soundboard, providing flexibility and precision. The gesture indicates that the instrument was relatively lightweight and adaptable to intricate melodic playing, consistent with Central Asian plucked-lute performance styles.

Left-Hand Technique: The left hand presses directly onto the strings without frets, producing pitch variations through finger pressure and subtle sliding motions. The absence of frets implies a glissando-based tonal system, characteristic of Persian and Sogdian musical idioms, allowing expressive microtonal transitions.

Representation of the Musician: The musician exhibits a distinct foreign physiognomy—a high nasal bridge, deep-set eyes, and elaborate Sogdian attire. Such iconography affirms the representation of cross-cultural performers within the tomb's visual narrative, reflecting the artistic and social hybridity of the Sui court culture.

Accompanying Instruments: The ensemble includes a flute, depicted adjacent to the pipa player, symbolizing the blending of string and wind timbres. This pairing further underscores the integration of Central Asian and Chinese musical elements, embodying the transcultural dialogue that shaped Sui Dynasty performance practice.

Source: Photographed by the author at Shanxi Museum in April 2023

3. Dunhuang Pipa Manuscripts: "You Man Quzi"

Archaeological Context: The Dunhuang pipa manuscripts, discovered among the cache of ancient scores from the Mogao Caves, represent one of the earliest extant collections of Chinese plucked-lute notation. The fourteenth piece, titled You Man Quzi, was selected for reconstruction as part of this study to explore the potential for reviving lost performance practices through contemporary technological mediation.

Instrument Form and Structure: Although the manuscripts do not depict instruments directly, notational and rhythmic indicators suggest compatibility with the four- or five-string curved-necked pipa, a form consistent with those identified in Shanxi iconographies. The structure reflects a transitional phase between the Northern and Tang Dynasties.

Pipa-Holding Posture and Technique: Drawing on comparative iconographic evidence from Yungang and Yu Hong, the presumed playing posture aligns with the inverted or semi-vertical position, supporting alternating plucking motions similar to early mo and tiao gestures in modern terminology.

Reconstruction and AI Application: The musical reconstruction of You Man Quzi was realized using AI-assisted music generation tools such as Suno, which processed melodic fragments to create auditory renderings. These reconstructions aimed to blend historical tunings and rhythms with contemporary interpretive sensibilities, offering a speculative yet insightful reanimation of ancient soundscapes.

Interpretive Implications: This experiment demonstrates the potential of AI-assisted interpretation as both an analytical and creative tool. By combining historical sources with digital modeling, it bridges the gap between archaeological evidence and performative realization, proposing new ways to engage with the living heritage of Silk Road music.

Conclusion

The evolution of the pipa from the Northern Wei to the Sui Dynasty reflects a profound process of cultural integration along the Silk Road. Its transformation embodies the fusion of Han agrarian traditions with the artistic and technological influences of steppe nomadic and Central Asian cultures, illustrating how musical instruments can serve as living records of intercultural exchange.

The Persian-derived Qsl-type, introduced through Sogdian intermediaries, became the dominant model that persisted from the Northern Wei through the Tang Dynasty. Beyond the Yungang region, however, gradual regional adaptation took place as local artisans assimilated Han aesthetic

values while preserving distinctive foreign structural features. This duality—between adaptation and inheritance—characterizes the broader trajectory of pipa development in early medieval China.

The study's comparative typological and iconographic analyses clarify how cross-cultural contact shaped not only the morphology of the pipa but also its performative techniques and expressive possibilities. Furthermore, the experimental use of AI-assisted musical reconstruction demonstrates the potential of digital tools to bridge archaeological evidence with contemporary interpretation. Such approaches invite new dialogues between historical scholarship and modern creative practice, though the question of cultural authenticity must be addressed with critical sensitivity (see Table 1).

Table 1: Typological Classification and Cultural Origins of Early Pipa-Type and Lute Instruments across Eurasia

Region/ Cultural Sphere	**Instrument Type**	**Typological Code**	**Cultural Origin and Influence**
Persian Region	curved-necked pipa	Qs type (esp.QsI)	Originating in Persia, it was transmitted to China through Sogdian intermediaries. Served as the dominant type in Shanxi and adjacent regions throughout the Northern Wei–Tang periods.
Mesopotamia	curved-necked lute	Qw type (esp.QwI)	Derives from Mesopotamian lute traditions; reflects early West Asian influence in the formation of curved-necked instruments.
Indian Subcontinent	Straight-neck lute	Zs type (esp.ZsII)	Formed under Indian musical influence, emphasizing melodic ornamentation and the linear neck structure typical of South Asian lutes.
Greek Region	Straight-neck lute	Zs type (esp.ZsII)	Influenced by Hellenistic instruments such as the pandoura, this contributed to early prototypes of straight-neck designs through cross-Mediterranean exchange.

In summary, this research highlights three key contributions: A systematic methodology that combines typological classification with iconographic interpretation to trace the pipa's evolution in Shanxi during the Northern Wei–Sui periods; evidence that cross-cultural exchange along the Silk Road was a driving force in shaping instrument design, performance practice, and artistic identity; and the innovative application of AI technology as a means to revive ancient soundscapes and reimagine historical music in modern contexts. Future studies should extend this framework to broader Silk Road regions, refining AI-based methodologies to ensure historical accuracy and cultural sensitivity in the reconstruction of early music traditions.

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Biography

Dr Yang Yani holds a Ph.D. in Musicology and is a full-time lecturer at the International College of Arts, Krirk University, Thailand. Her research focuses on music archaeology, iconography, and ethnomusicology, with a particular interest in pipa imagery from Northern Wei to Tang Dynasty grottoes and tombs. She has received the university's "Outstanding Graduate Student" award and has performed in numerous cross-cultural concerts. She also teaches interdisciplinary AIGC-based creative courses combining music, visual arts, and film.

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252 Kilometers through Eastern Thailand: A Suite for Acoustic Guitar Quartet

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Abstract

This creative research presents the conceptual framework and compositional process of "252 Kilometers through Eastern Thailand: A Suite for Acoustic Guitar Quartet", aiming to generate new knowledge in contemporary music and to disseminate the work through live performance. The composition draws inspiration from the 252-kilometer highway linking five provinces in Eastern Thailand—Trat, Chanthaburi, Rayong, Chonburi, and Chachoengsao. This route provides the structural foundation for melodic and harmonic development, organized into four movements (A–D), each portraying the atmosphere, motion, and cultural identity of its respective region.

The first movement (Trat–Chanthaburi) blends coastal folk melodies with flowing arpeggios and bright pentatonic tones, evoking the gentle rhythm of the sea. The second movement (Chanthaburi–Rayong) merges folk dance motifs with industrial rhythmic patterns, representing the coexistence of tradition and modernity. The third movement (Rayong–Chonburi) captures the joyful energy of coastal life through lively tempos and layered textures, reflecting the vibrancy of seaside festivals. The final movement (Chonburi– Chachoengsao) transitions toward inner tranquility, using sustained harmonics and soft pentatonic lines inspired by the serene flow of the Bang Pakong River.

Performed by an acoustic guitar quartet, the piece employs diverse techniques such as fingerstyle, percussive tapping, and textural layering to express emotional depth and depict the evolving landscape along the route. Ultimately, this composition offers a contemporary interpretation that unites sound, geography, and culture, symbolizing the spirit of travel through Thailand's Eastern region.

Keywords: Eastern Thailand, Acoustic Guitar Quartet, Suite for Guitar

Introduction

Travel is not merely a change of location but a pathway to learning and creativity, offering artists opportunities to engage with diverse landscapes and cultures. Experiences gained through travel can be transformed into artistic inspiration, profoundly reflecting the images of communities and local environments. Such journeys are often perceived as catalysts for artistic creation, as they open new perspectives and allow the reinterpretation of cultural and geographical contexts through the medium of music and other art forms.

The Eastern region of Thailand encompasses diverse geographical and cultural settings, ranging from coastal landscapes, fruit orchards, and trading traditions to industrial areas and religious heritage. All of these are interconnected through a primary highway route that stretches across the region. From the perspective of creative tourism, which emphasizes participation and cultural experiences, it has been observed that designing experiences rooted in local culture—such as dance, music, or community workshops—can enhance cultural values, reinforce cultural identity, and sustainably contribute to the local economy (Suwannavej et al., 2025). Thus, the Eastern region serves not only as a geographical area but also as a cultural corridor rich in traditions, histories, and lived experiences.

Folk music in Eastern Thailand demonstrates this richness through its diverse forms, which reflect community life and local customs (Rattanaseth, 2016). Examples range from ritualistic ram khanong performances to narrative songs that tell stories of everyday life. As Rattanaseth (2019) noted, in Trat Province, Ram Suad performed by the Anek Sarnnetra troupe functions both as ritual practice and as a reflection of communal beliefs and traditions. More broadly, the Thailand Foundation emphasizes that Thai music as a whole is complex and multifaceted, utilizing plucked, bowed, struck, and blown instruments. Folk music, in particular, is not only entertainment but also a vehicle of intergenerational cultural tran mission, acting as a valuable repository of intangible cultural heritage (Mongkolrat, 2025). Thus, folk music in Eastern Thailand may be understood as a living heritage that embodies cultural memory, spirituality, and social expression.

The integration of Thai and Western musical traditions has a long history, dating back to the reign of King Rama V, when Mahori ensembles were established under Western operatic influences. In contemporary contexts, this cross-cultural synthesis has evolved into new approaches in modern music composition. Scholars have argued that such fusion expands the audience while preserving Thai identity, thereby creating sonic landscapes that can communicate globally. Furthermore, research on arranging folk music from the

four regions of Thailand into solo or duet guitar formats has demo strated that the integration of Thai idioms with Western instruments not only opens new artistic dimensions but also reveals the commercial potential of cultural creative works (Netpakdee & Amaro, 2024).

From this background—marked by the inspiration of travel, the cultural richness of Eastern Thailand, the vitality of its folk music, and the conceptual framework of Thai–Western musical fusion—the composer created "252 Kilometers through Eastern Thailand: A Suite for Acoustic Guitar Quartet." This creative work consists of four movements corresponding to provinces in the Eastern region and employs a variety of acoustic guitar quartet techniques, such as fingerstyle, percussive tapping, and layered textures, to represent the emotions, landscapes, and cultural atmospheres of each locale. Ultimately, this suite functions as a "sound map," guiding listeners through the cultural landscapes, geographical terrains, and musical narratives of the region, while simultaneously contributing new knowledge to the field of contemporary music.

Objectives of the Research

The objectives of the research are threefold:

1) present the conceptual framework and compositional process of the musical work entitled "252 Kilometers through Eastern Thailand: A Suite for Acoustic Guitar Quartet"
2) generate new knowledge in the field of contemporary music
3) disseminate the creative work to the public

Theoretical Concepts

In preparing this creative work, the composer reviewed relevant literature and theoretical frameworks to establish a solid academic foundation for the development of the composition. The review can be categorized into three main areas:

Programmatic Composition

Programmatic music refers to instrumental compositions that carry an extra-musical narrative or depict images and scenes. In contrast to "absolute" music, which is purely abstract, programmatic works are explicitly inspired by literary ideas, legends, scenic descriptions, or personal stories (Britannica, n.d.). For example, Britannica defines program music as "instrumental music that carries some extramusical meaning, some 'program' of literary idea, legend, scenic description, or personal drama." Such compositions often aim to evoke specific places, narratives or cultural imagery through musical

themes and motifs. In an academic context, Batubara (2017) explored how instrumental music can portray a story, using scenes from Hans Christian Andersen's The Little Mermaid as inspiration for a programmatic piece. Likewise, she provides a concrete example of programmatic composition combined with cross-cultural elements: her piece *Story of Tjong A Fie* musically narrates the life of a historical figure by blending Chinese penttonic modes, Indonesian Malay folk rhythms, and Western techniques. This demonstrates how composers use musical material to represent extra- musical content—in this case, reflecting a specific cultural narrative through music. Programmatic composition thus serves as a creative method to reflect places, stories or images by encoding them into musical storytelling, a practice well-documented in musicology and exemplified by many Romantic-era tone poems and contemporary works.

Integration of Folk Music into Contemporary/Classical Composition

In current scholarship, Puerta (2016) observes that leading guitar compose -performers Ernesto Cordero, Leo Brouwer, and Sérgio Assad *"share a knowledge of popular, folkloric and classical music"* and are committed to *"bridging these realms in their compositions in the classical tradition."* This statement underlines how folk and popular idioms can be woven into contemporary classical repertoire, enriching it with new colors and cultural references. Academic journals also document many cases of folk integration: for example, Junita Batubara's programmatic composition (cited earlier) combines Chinese and Malay musical elements with Western form, illustrating cross-cultural fusion. In the Thai context, researchers actively explore folk-classical synthesis as well. Chaumklang (2019) arranged Northeastern Thai (Isan) folk songs in a classical chamber music style, demonstrating that local melodies can be reharmonized and orchestrated for Western instruments without losing their identity. His study notes that successful arrangement required understanding the folk tunes' cultural context (ethnomusicology) alongside classical harmony and counterpoint techniques (Chaumklang, 2019).

Acoustic Guitar Quartet Writing Techniques

Writing for an acoustic guitar quartet presents unique challenges and techniques, which are discussed in both performance guides and composition research. Unlike orchestral writing with diverse instruments, a guitar quartet is a homogeneous ensemble—all four voices share a similar timbre and pitch range. Noble and Cowan (2023) argue that orchestrating for such homogeneous ensembles follows the same perceptual principles as for mixed

instrumentation, but effects based on contrast "require greater attention to detail" from the composer in order to be effective. This means composers must carefully manage texture and balance so that important voices are audible and the parts do not blend indistinctly. One technique is to exploit the timbral possibilities of the guitars: scordatura (alternate tunings), natural harmonics, open-string drones, and varied attack articulations can differentiate voices even when all instruments are guitars (Noble & Cowan, 2023).

Process of Creation

The creative process of the project "252 Kilometers through Eastern Thailand: A Suite for Acoustic Guitar Quartet" was systematically designed and carried out in seven stages as follows:

1) The composer conducted an in-depth review of the literature related to Eastern Thai folk music, local traditions, and instrumental practices, as well as academic works in music composition and acoustic guitar performance. Emphasis was placed on understanding the region's cultural and musical identity to form a conceptual foundation for integrating folk elements with contemporary compositional techniques. Additionally, relevant musical works were examined—such as folk-inspired guitar quartets, programmatic suites, and region-based compositions—to contextualize the project and demonstrate its expansion upon prior creative developments. For example, Netpakdee and Amaro (2024) arranged Thai regional folk songs for a classical guitar duet that blended Lisu tribal melodies from Northern Thailand into a chamber composition for guitar and string quartet.

2) A geographical survey of the five provinces—Trat, Chanthaburi, Rayong, Chonburi, and Chachoengsao—was undertaken through the use of digital tools and online media (Figure 1). The 252-kilometer route served as a conceptual framework, enabling the composer to associate musical material with the unique cultural and geographical characteristics of each province. Resources such as Google Maps, travel documentaries, enviro mental sound recordings, and videos of local traditions were employed to develop a sound-based representation of each location. This approach draws on digital ethnographic methods that emphasize "virtual walking" and site exploration through online interfaces (Svašek, 2023; Hsu, 2014; Suwanpakdee, 2018; Duangwises, 2023).

Figure 1

Map of Eastern Thailand

3) The composer proceeded to draft, notate, and refine the musical materials, focusing on the expressive interplay between folk sensibilities and acoustic guitar writing. Techniques involving harmony, rhythm, melodic development, and ensemble texture were applied to ensure that each movement conveyed both narrative depth and regional atmosphere.

4) The composition was rehearsed and recorded to a professional standard, ensuring that performance quality and sonic detail were preserved for both artistic presentation and scholarly analysis. The recording process also served as a medium for evaluating interpretive fidelity and musical coherence.

5) Structural and stylistic analysis was carried out using Western analytical frameworks, alongside examination of folk-inspired elements such as pentatonic harmony, motivic design, and textural layering. The aim was to highlight the synthesis of traditional folk aesthetics and modern compositional language, drawing on Noble and Cowan (2023).

6) Upon completion of the composition, the composer summarized the creative findings, reflecting on the artistic, theoretical, and cultural insights gained throughout the process. This included consideration of the challenges and outcomes associated with translating regional identity into contemporary ensemble writing.

7) Finally, the completed work was prepared for academic presentation and public dissemination through conference performance and publication. This enabled interested audiences to experience the music, engage with its conceptual foundation, and contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding culturally rooted composition in the modern era.

Conclusion

The creative outcome of "*252* Kilometers through Eastern Thailand: A Suite for Acoustic Guitar Quartet" consists of four sections (A–D), corresponding to the journey across five provinces from Trat to Chachoengsao, covering a total distance of *252* kilometers. Each section musically reflects the landscapes, cultures, and atmospheres of the region, combining local folk elements with Western compositional techniques.

Section A: Trat–Chanthaburi

The composition in Section A draws inspiration from the geographical route connecting Trat to Chanthaburi, as illustrated in the map. This route serves as the structural basis for the principal theme, symbolizing the commencement of a coastal journey that interlinks the two provinces.

Figure 2

Map of Trat–Chanthaburi

Figure 3

Example of the melody for Trat–Chanthaburi Route

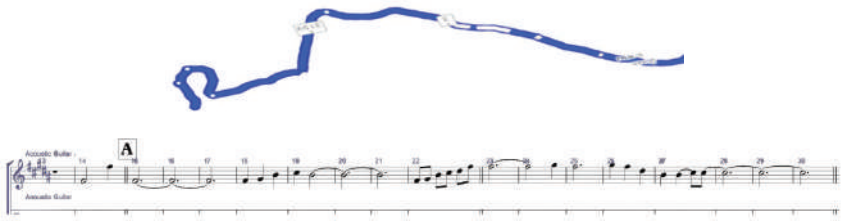


Figure 3 illustrates a secondary melody that rises and falls in correspondence with the map route from Trat to Chanthaburi. It begins in the key of B Major, set in 3/4 time at a tempo of 120 bpm. The composer employs the pentatonic scale in developing this melodic progression.

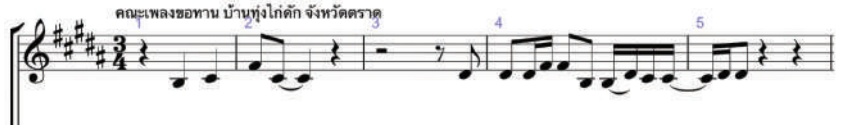
The composer transcribed segments of the "Khothan" melody performed by the Ban Thung Kaidak Khon troupe of Trat Province and adapted them for the second guitar part. The key was adjusted to align with the principal theme, as illustrated in the example below.

Figure 4

Beggar Song, Bantungkaidug Ensemble, Trat Province

Figure 5

Excerpts from the Khothan melody, Ban Thung Kaidak Khon troupe, Trat Province



Section B: Chanthaburi–Rayong

The composition in Section B is inspired by the geographical route linking Chanthaburi and Rayong, as represented on the map.

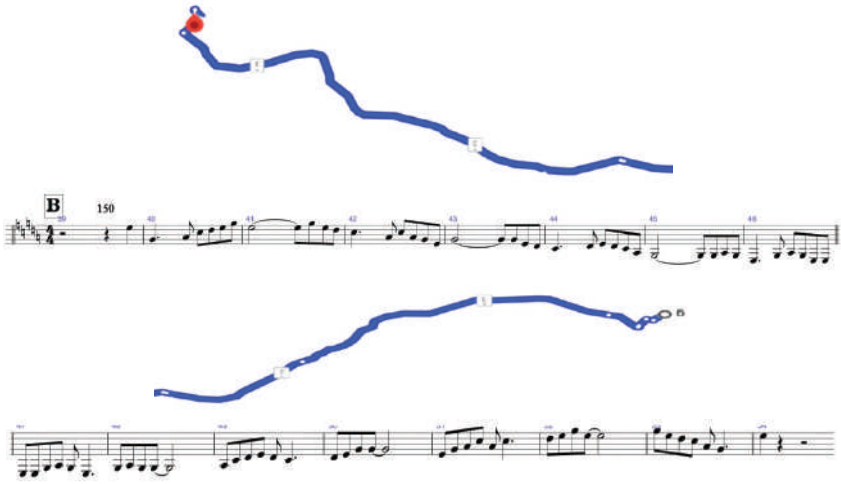
Figure 6

Map of the Chanthaburi–Rayong Route

Figure 6 illustrates a secondary melody that ascends and descends following the mapped route from Chanthaburi to Rayong. The composer modulates from the key of B Major to C Major, employing a 4/4 time signature at a tempo of 150 bpm. The pentatonic scale is also used in the development of this melodic line.

Figure 7

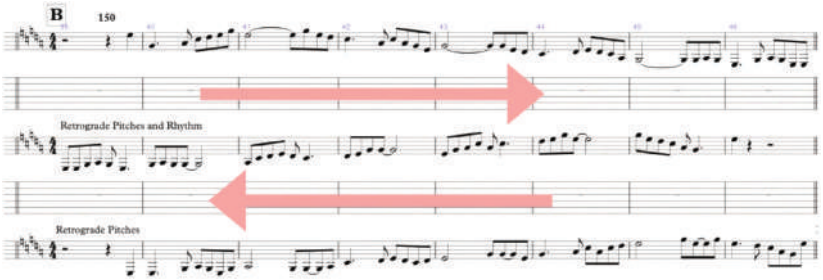
Melody of the Chanthaburi–Rayong Route



Additionally, the composition employs contrapuntal movement between individual guitar lines to reflect the overlapping pathways within the marketplace (see Figure 7). The composer utilizes retrograde pitches and rhythm in the second guitar part, and retrograde pitches in the third guitar part, to portray the interactions of daily life. This contrapuntal texture also represents the transition from the bustling atmosphere of Chanthaburi's markets (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

Retrograde pitches and rhythm technique was applied.



Section C: Rayong–Chonburi

The composition in Section C is inspired by the geographical route between Rayong and Chonburi, as illustrated on the map. It seeks to portray the image of Rayong as an industrial city that coexists with traditional ways of life (Figure 9).

Figure 9

Map of the Rayong–Chonburi Route

Figure 10

Example of the melody for Rayong–Chonburi Route

Figure 10 illustrates a melodic contour that rises and falls along the mapped route from Rayong to Chonburi. The composer adopts this as the principal theme, modulating from C Major to E Major, using a 4/4 time signature at a tempo of 120 bpm. Images of industrial factories and shipping ports highlight the dynamic nature of the region as an economic hub. In response to this context, the composition employs steady and forceful rhythmic patterns to reflect the sound of machinery and industrial labor, further enhanced by percussive guitar tapping techniques that emulate production and transportation sounds.

The composer also incorporates the melody of "Rayong Khwaen Thai Ngam" by Eua Sunthornsanan (Weawwuthinan, 2022), reinterpreted through harmonic development to create a cultural resonance within the industrial setting (Figure 11). As the journey continues into Chonburi, the music transitions to more vibrant melodies and lively rhythms, symbolizing the bustling character of this coastal province, which serves as both an economic center and a contemporary tourist destination.

Figure 11

Eua Sunthornsanan

Section D: Chonburi–Chachoengsao

The composer employs the A chord, the dominant (V) of D major in the introduction of this section (Figure 12), to symbolize the radiant light of a new day, leading smoothly into Section D which follows (Figure 13).

Figure 12

Example of the introductory melody

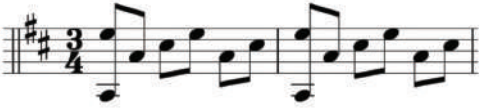


Figure 13

Map of the Chonburi–Chachoengsao Route

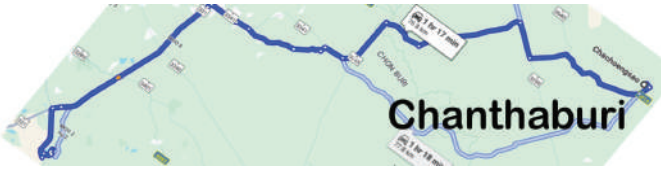


Figure 14

Example of the melody for Chonburi–Chachoengsao Route

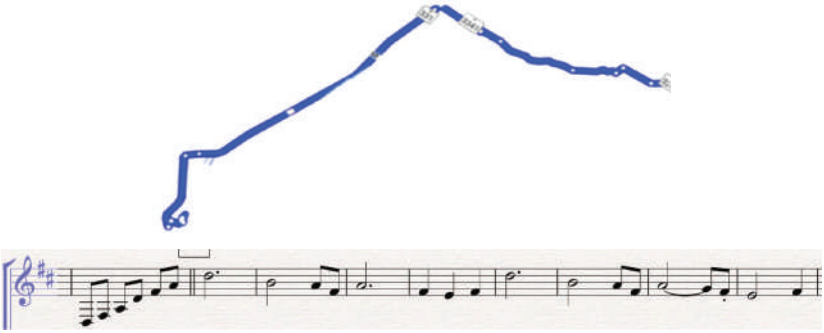


Figure 14 illustrates a secondary melody that rises and falls in correspondence with the map route from Chonburi to Chachoengsao. It begins in the key of D Major, set in 3/4 time at a tempo of 120 bpm. The composer employs the pentatonic scale to develop this melodic sequence, using a descending chord progression of Dmaj7, C#m7, Bm7, and A7.

Figure 15

The addition of delay and reverberation effects

As the journey continues into Chachoengsao, symbolic references to batik crafts and the riverside environment are introduced. The music gradually shifts in tone toward tranquility, employing harmonics and gentle melodic figures to convey serenity and spirituality.

Overall, Section D encapsulates a cultural and emotional transition—from the liveliness and excitement of Chonburi to the calmness and sacredness of Chachoengsao—achieved through the layering of textures and multidimensional musical structures.

The creative work *"252 Kilometers through Eastern Thailand: A Suite for Acoustic Guitar Quartet"* represents more than a musical composition; it embodies a cultural and geographical journey. Each section—Trat to Chanthaburi, Chanthaburi to Rayong, Rayong to Chonburi, and Chonburi to Chachoengsao—captures the essence of place through sound, blending local traditions with contemporary guitar quartet techniques. From the tranquil seashores of Trat and the bustling marketplaces of Chanthaburi, to the industrial resonance of Rayong and the spiritual calm of Chachoengsao, the composition functions as a soundscape map that guides listeners across landscapes, histories, and identities. By weaving together folk motifs, rhythmic vitality, harmonic layering, and modern effects (Figure 15), the suite not only illustrates the cultural richness of Eastern Thailand but also contributes to the broader field of contemporary music by bridging tradition and innovation

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Biography

Krittavit Bhumithavara, Ph.D. is the Head of the Bachelor of Arts Program at the Institute of Science, Innovation, and Culture, Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep. He earned his doctoral degree from the Graduate School of Philosophy, College of Music, Mahidol University, where he also completed his master's degree in Musicology and his bachelor's degree in Jazz Studies. Dr Bhumithavara's expertise spans across multiple areas of music. As a jazz electric guitarist and composer, he specializes in jazz and contemporary music while also maintaining strong academic grounding in musicology and ethnomusicology. His scholarly and creative pursuits encompass Western

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Developing an Assessment Framework for the Major Skill Course to Enhance Student Competency in the Context of Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music

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Abstract

The Major Skill course is a core component of undergraduate music curricula, playing a central role in developing students' technical performance, artistic expression, and professional readiness. This development project aims to design an assessment approach that is clear, transparent, and aligned with students' competence levels at each academic year—encompassing technical proficiency, artistic interpretation, and learning that responds to individual contexts. The process comprised a review of the institute's existing assessment system, benchmarking against international standards (e.g., ABRSM, Trinity, LCM), and collaborative workshops with faculty members. These steps led to a new structure that integrates pedagogical and andragogical principles to support participatory learning and development-oriented assessment. The outcomes are: criteria that define year-specific expectations; a context-appropriate evaluator weighting system; a Centralised Rubric System that uses *qualitative descriptors* to create a shared language among evaluators; and a four-year Learning Development Plan that can be practically applied both in teaching and in systematic quality development at the Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music.

Keywords: Course Assessment; Centralised Rubric System; Year-Specific Expectations; Learning Development Plan; Participatory Learning; PGVIM

Introduction

Within the B.Mus. programme at the Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music (PGVIM), the Major Skill sequence is the curriculum's spine: a four-year, highest-credit component where practical musicianship, artistic capacity, and professional readiness are formed. More than a single course, it is the principal mechanism shaping students' growth—advancing technique, the craft of sound, and the transition to professional practice—and it articulates PGVIM's conception of the "musician." Instruction therefore concerns identity formation as much as examination (Suttachitt, 2023).

Despite its central role, the existing assessment is overly broad, weakly differentiated across years, and loosely aligned with learning outcomes. Descriptors such as "has technical ability" do not specify how expectations for Year 1 meaningfully differ from Year 4. Ambiguity blurs students' long-term goals, deprives teachers of a robust tool to evidence qualitative growth, and risks both graduate quality and institutional credibility. In Thailand's higher-education context, reform is not a matter of importing ABRSM/Trinity/LCM models—which privilege time-bounded tests of technical competence—but of calibrating assessment to PGVIM's mission values (Passionate, Growth, Visionary, Integration, Mastery). Assessment should operate as a learning process for self-reflection and for charting developmental direction, rather than merely as a pass/fail gatekeeper.

This central question leads to a more specific inquiry: what precisely should be assessed across the learning projection? PGVIM has responded by re-examining assessment's role as integral to learning and artistic growth and by constructing a transparent framework with year-differentiated expectations (Year Mapping) and a cross-instrument rubric, grounded in pedagogical and andragogical principles. In this model, assessment simultaneously serves learning and development, enabling students to build technical facility, deepen interpretation, and use assessment as a tool for growth, identity formation, and a sustainable professional pathway.

Rationale for Redesigning the Major Skill Assessment Framework

In conservatoire-based higher music education, Major Skill/Principal Study is the curricular spine linking studio teaching, practice, public performance, and assessment that evidences continuous development. Research shows assessment in specialist institutions functions not only as measurement but also as a catalyst orienting learning (Boud & Falchikov, 2007; Gaunt & Westerlund, 2016). Leading models position it at the centre: at The Juilliard

School, instructional vision spans Performance Opportunities, Classroom Studies, Liberal Arts, and Entrepreneurship, with Major Studies carrying up to 40 credits in total (10 credits of individual lessons per year) (The Juilliard School, n.d.); at the Royal Academy of Music (RAM), the "ABC" model—Artistry, Belonging, Challenge—places Principal Study at 45 credits (Royal Academy of Music, 2024–2025).

Within PGVIM's B.Mus. programme, Major Skill sits at the core of Specialised Courses—48 credits within a ≥86-credit specialisation block toward 130 credits overall. The practical-skills cluster comprises eight courses (Major Skill I–VIII) at 3 credits each (24 credits total), alongside ensemble/performance-hour requirements. Aligned with PGVIM's mission values (Passionate, Growth, Visionary, Integration, Mastery), the curriculum integrates musical practice, research, and social engagement, conceiving graduates not only as performers but as practitioners who mobilise music for inquiry and tangible social value.

Table 1 Comparative objectives and curricular organisation of Major Skill/ Principal Study across The Juilliard School (USA), the Royal Academy of Music (UK), and the Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music (Thailand).

	The Juilliard School	**Royal Academy of Music (RAM)**	**Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music (PGVIM)**
Curricular objectives / vision	1) Performance Opportunities 2) Classroom Studies 3) Liberal Arts 4) Entrepreneurship	'ABC' 1) Artistry: Creative Listening 2) Belonging:Professional Development 3) Challenge: Music Leadership	1) Produce graduates with deep knowledge and skill in classical music 2) Develop research and creative capacities in classical music 3) Enable graduates to apply knowledge beneficially and ppropriately to societal contexts
Course classification / strands	1) Major Studies 2) Performance Ensemble 3) Music Department 4) Liberal Arts	Not explicitly divided into fixed "blocks"; commonly understood as: • Principal Study • Academic Study • Artist Development (activities)	1) General Education 2) Specialised Courses 3) Free Electives
Placement of major skill / principal study	Housed in Major Studies as Major Instrumental Lesson for all four years (10 credits per year; 40 credits total).	Housed in Principal Study with Individual Study components integrating related practical skills (45 credits total).	Housed in Specialised Studies → Practical Skills: Major Skill I–VIII, 3 credits each (24 credits). *(Practical Skills totals 48 credits within ≥86 credits of Specialised Studies.)*

Table 1 reveals a shared centrality of Major/Principal Study and distinct emphases: Juilliard foregrounds performative impact and societal inspiration; RAM prioritises leadership and professional formation; PGVIM stresses integration of practice with research and social responsibility. Hence PGVIM cannot import a single external model; assessment must be purpose-built to reflect institutional values and context. The legacy criteria were broad and ambiguous, lacked year-by-year differentiation, and used indicators that failed to evidence progress, creating misalignment between desired identity and assessment signals. Consequently, students then struggle to see a growth trajectory, and teachers lack a robust instrument for targeted qualitative feedback (Biggs, 1996). A transparent, year-mapped, cross-instrument rubric is therefore essential to establish a shared language, reduce bias, and enhance the reliability and credibility of standards.

From a teaching-and-learning standpoint, integrating pedagogy and andragogy is central. In Years 1–2, teacher-centred structures consolidate technique through scales, études, and foundational repertoire, with learning outcomes emphasising accuracy and consistency; assessment relies on concrete, verifiable technical indicators (Vygotsky, 1978). In Years 3–4, andragogical principles become salient: students exercise autonomy in repertoire aligned to artistic or professional goals while teachers shift to mentor/facilitator roles, using reflective questioning. Assessment correspondingly extends from correctness to analytical reasoning, independence, and artistic identity—for instance, justifying interpretive choices or relating repertoire to social questions or research to generate new value (Knowles, 1980). Systematic integration of these modes charts technical progress and makes visible the transition from scaffolded guidance to independent, creative artistry (Biggs, 1996; Boud & Falchikov, 2007). In the redesigned model, assessment functions as a growth map, aligning each year's pathway with intended learning outcomes, positioning assessment as part of learning and identity-formation rather than mere summative judgement, and reflecting contemporary musical value that spans performance, research, creation, and social engagement (Suttachitt, 2023).

Assessment Design Process

Designing assessment for the Major Skill sequence is a multi-level, interconnected task—not a tweak to a single rubric. The framework must balance external reference standards with PGVIM's values and identity, while taking seriously the lived feedback of students and faculty who work with the course week by week. If Major Skill is where musical identity is forged, assessment is the instrument that catalyses that growth. Hence, the design draws on the Thai Qualifications Framework (TQF) issued by the Ministry of

Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation (2022), PGVIM's mission values (Passionate, Growth, Visionary, Integration, Mastery), programme-level learning outcomes, regional/international benchmarks (e.g., AEC, CALOHEx), and—crucially—evidence from real assessment practice. Robust criteria must work in studios, rehearsals, and juries, not only read well on paper.

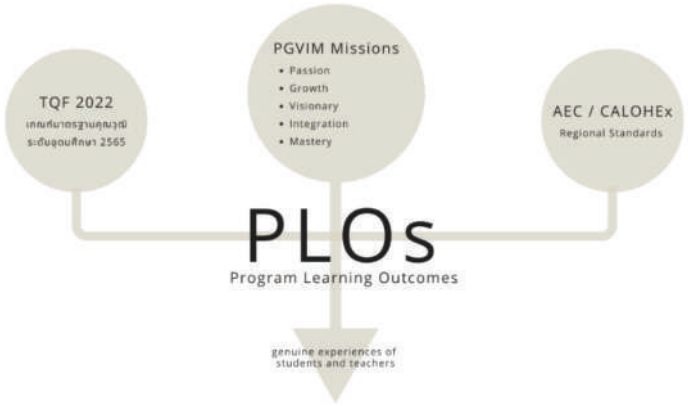

Figure 1 Framework of Assessment Design

Several layers inform the redesign; each brings its own expectations and pressures, and together they give the framework traction for learning:

Thai Qualifications Framework (TQF)

Establishes national minima; course assessment must map explicitly to TQF domains (knowledge, skills, attributes) to ensure quality and degree credibility.

PGVIM Missions

Criteria should evidence capacities aligned with Passionate/Growth/Visionary/Integration/Mastery—not only technical proficiency (e.g., respect, intellectual development, connection of practice to society/knowledge).

Regional and International Standards

References such as AEC and CALOHEx help anchor verifiable, internationally comparable competences through field-specific descriptors and quality-assurance expectations—strengthening rigour and contemporaneity.

Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs)

Clear mapping from course criteria to PLOs evidences Major Skill's advancement of artistic identity, critical/reflective thinking, and collaboration; alignment must be explicit and auditable.

Genuine Experiences of Students and Teachers

Systematic attention to lived experience ensures criteria remain tools in practice rather than policy on paper, revealing value, fairness, and priorities for improvement across studio, rehearsal, and jury contexts.

Key Components of the Framework

This redesign delivers criteria engineered for real use—across studio teaching and juried performance at every year level, including guest lecturers—prioritising immediate legibility, shared understanding, and ease of use. Five components underpin the framework:

Clarity of Descriptors

Ambiguous wording is replaced by plain, targeted language. Each score band is defined by observable, verifiable qualitative descriptors, enabling faster, more consistent judgements pre-jury and in-jury.

Consistency Across Faculty

A common assessment language applies across instruments and panels, reducing score variance and supporting systematic post-jury moderation.

Alignment with Practice

Criteria mirror real workflows—repertoire selection, practice, rehearsal, performance—so the rubric functions as a facilitator of teaching and assessment, not an administrative layer.

Institutional Fit

The scheme is purpose-built to PGVIM's values and pedagogy (wording, weightings, focal emphases), yet broad enough to work across instrument areas.

Faculty usability (User Experience / User Interface)

Clear scoring visuals and compact checklists lower cognitive load, making the tool immediately legible for full-time and guest lecturers and improving efficiency and feedback quality.

Beyond these components, the framework is made actionable through practice-based artefacts: a four-year Roadmap Table (Foundations → Growth → Expansion → Artistic Mastery) that sets year-specific targets and supports continuous tracking; and a common rubric system with concise, observable descriptors at each score band (e.g., *Resonant, Rich, Unstable* for tone/intonation). Together, these artefacts bind teaching and assessment into a single coherent process; assessment then operates as both a measurement mechanism and a compass for growth.

Results of the Redesign

Weighting the Major Skill assessment across four years

PGVIM's redesign is grounded in both educational principles and the lived realities of musical practice. It proceeds from the view that higher music study is not merely the accumulation of technique but the gradual formation of identity—from learner to professional artist; accordingly, assessment must mirror instructional outcomes and a continuous developmental pathway.

To serve this purpose, assessor weightings are tiered by year of study: Year 1: 60:40 (Major Skill teacher: panel) to foreground within-semester process indicators (technical development, practice consistency, professional discipline); Year 2: 50:50 balancing lesson-based growth with performance outputs; Year 3: 40:60; and Year 4: 30:70, giving primacy to public-performance quality under real-world conditions (time management, pressure, audience communication, responsibility for the artistic work). Table 2 summarises assessor groups, weights, and criteria used in juries.

This tiering mitigates individual-assessor bias by increasing the contribution of the rotating panel as students' progress, and is paired with post-jury moderation to calibrate standards. Publishing year-specific weights in advance and tying scoring to the Centralised Rubric System and Year Mapping makes annual targets visible: Years 1–2 prioritise accuracy and consistency of execution; Years 3–4 extend expectations to depth of communication, interpretive quality, and the calibre of creative work presented in performance. The result integrates longitudinal development with public-performance quality. The Major Skill teacher tracks growth across the semester, while panel voices—internal faculty and external examiners—carry increasing weight year by year. This arrangement increases continuity,

broadens perspectives, and strengthens credibility; it also reduces bias and enhances transparency, enabling students to chart growth aligned with their goals.

Table 2 Weighting structure and criteria across the four years

Assessor Group	Weight (Years 1 → 4)	Criteria
Major Skill Teacher	60/50/40/30 (%)	– Progress during the semester – Technical Skills – Interpretative Skills – Professional Discipline – Commitment & Attendance – Live Performance Assessment
Instrumental Teacher (PGVIM or External)	40/50/60/70 (%)	– Live Performance Assessment (Performance Quality / Stage Presence / Communication / +2 additional criteria) (defined by teacher)
PGVIM Faculty	40/50/60/70 (%)	– Live Performance Assessment (Performance Quality / Stage Presence / Communication / +2 additional criteria) (defined by teacher) – Alignment with PGVIM Values

Centralised Rubric System

Beyond year-tiered assessor weightings, PGVIM establishes a Centralised Rubric System—a single, shared assessment language across faculty, instruments, and year levels. This institute-wide tool integrates technical dimensions, artistic/interpretive capacity, and developmental progress within one coherent scheme. Standardised levels and qualitative descriptors signal consistent assessment programme-wide, support transparent, defensible judgements, and convert feedback into actionable guidance for studios and juries.

The previous rubric showed structural limitations: ambiguous wording (e.g., "appropriate technical ability") that enabled divergent interpretations; absence of year-specific objectives; lack of verifiable qualitative descriptors at each score band (inviting reliance on personal standards); and weak alignment with programme PLOs. Consequently, it functioned as a scoring form rather than a framework that organises and supports learning.

Design of the New Rubric

The rubric was redesigned around 3 objectives: *Transparency* (clear, observable descriptors that enable teachers and students to identify the current level and next steps for improvement); *Consistency* (a common assessment language across instrument families to reduce interpretive drift and idiosyncratic bias); and *Authenticity* (descriptors anchored in what students actually do in rehearsal and on stage, rather than box-ticking aimed merely at passing). Structurally, Key Indicators define musical dimensions, paired with criteria and guiding questions; each criterion is described across five levels (*Outstanding* → *Needs Improvement*) using plain, observable statements. Figure 2 illustrates the scheme and sample descriptors (e.g., *Resonant, Rich, Clear, Unstable, Poor*).

Main Key Indicator	Criteria	Guide Question	Satisfactory (S)	Unsatisfactory (U)
Student presents at least one work from an instrumental style not previously studied in the course.	Repertoire Collected	"Has the student selected and prepared at least one piece in a new instrumental style not previously explored?"	Student has selected and prepared a piece that represents a new and distinct style compared to prior coursework.	No new stylistic direction is evident; repertoire remains within previously covered style.

Main Key Indicator	Criteria	Guide Question	5 Outstanding	4	3	2	1 Needs Improvement
Tone	Tone Quality & Intonation	"Is the tone consistent, resonant, and well-supported across the full range, with accurate intonation?"	**Resonant** Resonant tone across full range; precise intonation.	**Rich** Rich tone with minor pitch lapses.	**Clear** Clear tone; occasional pitch inaccuracies.	**Unstable** Tone inconsistent; intonation affects phrasing.	**Poor** Poor tone; unstable intonation hinders musical line.
Execution in time	Technical Accuracy & Precision	"Are the notes and rhythms executed accurately and clearly with control and precision throughout?"	**Flawless** Flawless note & rhythm execution; effortless technique.	**Accurate** Predominantly accurate; minor slips.	**Noticeable** Noticeable errors but not disruptive.	**Irregular** Frequent inaccuracies; lapses affect flow.	**Pervasive** Pervasive technical failures hinder performance.
Emotion, dynamics, intention	Musical Interpretation & Expression	"Does the performer demonstrate clear musical intent through expressive choices in dynamics, articulation, and tempo?"	**Expressive** Deeply expressive phrasing with clear intent and refined nuance.	**Convincing** Phrasing shows strong sense of intention and direction.	**Clear** Some expressive elements; intent present but not fully convincing.	**Flat** Limited expressive direction; unclear intent.	**Mechanical** Lacks interpretation or clear intent.
Stylistic phrasing, structural logic	Phrasing, Communication & Stylistic Interpretations	"Does the phrasing reflect stylistic understanding and effectively guide the listener through tension, release, and musical direction?"	**Stylistically Refined** Reflects deep stylistic understanding; skillfully creates/fulfills expectations.	**Stylistically Aware** Mostly authentic phrasing; some lapses in direction and resolution.	**Understandable** Ideas generally grouped; less control over shaping tension/release.	**Fragmented** Incoherent phrasing; listener loses sense of direction.	**Disconnected** Disjointed, inappropriate phrasing; fails to communicate ideas or structure.
Presence	Stage Presence & Professionalism	"Does the performer present themselves with confidence, poise, and engaging stage presence that supports the musical performance?"	**Commanding** Powerful, confident body language; fully engaging.	**Assured** Steady, controlled presence; minor lapses.	**Competent** Generally solid; occasional stiffness.	**Unsteady** Hesitant movements; lacks confidence.	**Unconvincing** Distracting gestures; fails to engage.

Figure 2 Redesigned rubric and qualitative descriptors

Six Key Indicators span technique, artistry, and professional communication:

1. Tone Quality and Intonation: control of tone colour and pitch (from *Resonant/precise* to *Poor/unstable*), giving concrete targets by register/phrase;
2. Technical Accuracy and Precision: accuracy/clarity of notes and rhythms (from *Flawless* to whole-affecting inaccuracies);
3. Musical Interpretation and Expression: shaping of dynamics/colour/affect (from *Deeply expressive with clear intent* to *Flat/unclear intent*);
4. Phrasing, Communication and Stylistic Interpretation: narrative flow and stylistic understanding (from *Stylistically refined* to *Fragmented*);
5. Stage Presence and Professionalism: confidence, physical control, audience engagement (from *Commanding* to *Unconvincing*);
6. Repertoire Collected: breadth/depth via at least one new stylistic/idiomatic area each cycle to widen range and understanding.

A shared language between teachers and students reduces inter-rater variability and supports post-jury moderation (e.g., why level 3 vs level 4 anchored to published descriptors). Across the semester the rubric also functions as a communication tool: targets can be set (e.g., move phrasing from *Fragmented* → *Clear*), and feedback becomes *feed-forward* (e.g., specify where pitch control undermines phrase shape). Indicators are mapped to Programme Learning Outcomes—for example, *Stage Presence & Professionalism* aligns with effective communication with audiences, and *Repertoire Collected* aligns with extending knowledge and repertoire-based inquiry. This alignment makes progress in Major Skill contribute visibly to programme-level graduate attributes rather than merely to a jury mark.

Three Core Innovations

The redesign reframes assessment from a skills checklist into a strategic mechanism aligned with PGVIM's values and contemporary musical practice. Through this redesign, the structure of assessment itself is transformed from a single-evaluator model into a multi-evaluator system, from isolated rubrics into an institute-wide standardised process, and from short-term grading into a longitudinal roadmap for artistic and professional development. Each of the three core innovations elaborates this transition in practice.

Multi-Evaluator System

Three assessor groups share responsibility: (i) Major Skill Teacher (tracks within-semester progress and formative development), (ii) Instrumental

Teacher / External Panel (specialist/professional perspective), and (iii) PGVIM Faculty (institutional standards and values). Together they balance perspectives, reduce bias, and broaden feedback across development, technique, and identity. Their influence is aligned by year through tiered weightings, making roles progressively appropriate to students' stage of study.

Centralised Rubric System and Process

A faculty-endorsed, institute-wide rubric operates end-to-end—from drafting descriptors and academic approval to classroom use, jury implementation, and post-jury moderation—establishing a common language and standard across studios and years. Beyond scoring, it functions as a learning compass: students set concrete goals against descriptors; teachers give feedback that tracks those goals while staying aligned with programme aims and PGVIM's mission.

Learning and Assessment Roadmap

A four-year roadmap makes the developmental trajectory explicit. It croswalks PLOs with rubric criteria and qualitative descriptors at each stage, showing how first-year practices lead coherently to final-year artistic and professional capabilities. It strengthens student ownership (self-audit) and supports strategic advising (e.g., repertoire choices aligned to intended pathways). Integrated with the two mechanisms above, it enhances fairness, clarity, direction of travel, and fidelity to PGVIM's artistic values.

Conclusion

The redesign of PGVIM's Major Skill assessment marks a substantive structural shift. While the previous system relied on broad and uneven criteria, the new framework ensures clarity, fairness, and longitudinal coherence. Its strength lies in the integration of three components—a multi-evaluator system, a centralised rubric and process, and a four-year learning and assessment roadmap. This integration aligns teaching, assessment, and programme-level outcomes, enabling students and faculty to share targets and monitor progress continuously.

The significance of these changes is in their enactment. The system has been implemented across all instruments from the first semester, establishing immediate consistency and equity. The four-year roadmap operates as a compass: students see a guided progression toward professional artistry, while teachers evidence qualitative learning and adjust strategies with precision and pedagogical salience calibrated to each stage of

study. These directions can be projected forward into semester-by-semester plans—repertoire pathways, technique targets, juried benchmarks, and outreach/research tasks. In turn, advising, rehearsal scheduling, and resource allocation become anticipatory rather than reactive.

Strategically, assessment is reframed from a terminal end-of-semester event into a continuous learning process. It moves beyond pass/ fail to a development-oriented approach that measures outcomes, sets learning direction, and supports the sustained creation of art.

Future Directions and Development

The new system is a foundation, not an end-state. As musical values evolve, the rubric must remain flexible rather than prescriptive, ensuring that clarity does not become a constraint on creativity. Given students' diverse backgrounds and interests, over-specification can feel limiting; standards should be clear while preserving sufficient latitude for students to project artistic identity.

Sustaining inter-rater coherence is critical. PGVIM should prioritise regular calibration (norming), post-jury moderation, periodic descriptor reviews informed by student/faculty feedback, and exemplar/anchor materials (e.g., annotated recordings) to stabilise interpretations. These practices maintain responsiveness and credibility—supporting consistency where it matters while leaving room for individual artistry and growth.

With growing attention to community-based practice, assessment should also value students' capacity to connect artistic work to social issues, design and deliver projects, collaborate through outreach, and generate tangible impact. Criteria may therefore include indicators for project design, stakeholder engagement, ethical practice, and evidence of impact, alongside technical excellence.

Digital technologies—including AI—are increasingly woven into learning (tone/intonation monitoring, rhythm checking, co-creation). Policy should clarify AI's role as assistant, not proxy, and set guardrails that preserve human judgement and artistic value: human-led, AI-assisted evaluation; brief reflective notes when AI informs a judgement; auditable traces of AI suggestions; and periodic checks for bias/drift. Implemented well, AI can enhance objectivity and transparency without flattening nuance. Looking ahead, Major Skill assessment should braid academic rigour with artistic and social practice, evaluating technical command, creative thinking, community connection, and adaptability to a changing landscape.

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Biography

Trained as a flutist, Sethapong Janyarayachon earned his Doctor of Fine and Applied Arts in Music Performance from Chulalongkorn University. His performing career spans chamber music, orchestral and band experiences, as well as recording projects and collaborations with distinguished artists across Thailand and abroad. These engagements reflect his versatility as a musician and his commitment to connecting performance with broader artistic communities. As a researcher, his work centers on music education in higher education, with particular attention to the ways performance and pedagogy intersect. His studies have been presented at both national and international conferences, contributing to ongoing dialogues about music education.

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