

THAI CULTURE, NEW SERIES

No. 16

THAI MUSIC IN WESTERN NOTATION

by

Phra Chen Duriyanga



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The bottom half of the page is dominated by a large, ornate decorative border. This border consists of multiple layers of repeating floral and geometric motifs, including stylized flowers, leaves, and circular patterns. The central area within this border is a grid of rectangular boxes, some of which contain small square symbols with internal patterns, possibly serving as a placeholder for musical notation or a decorative element. The overall design is highly detailed and characteristic of traditional Thai art.

Phra Chen Duriyanga, Former Professor of Music, Fine Arts Department, Bangkok, is one of the most prominent figures in the Thai musical circles. He received his musical education from his father. He is eminently responsible for the tremendous strides made in Western music in this country in his capacity as instructor and conductor. Phra Chen Duriyanga's great contributions to the cause of Western music date as far back as King Vajiravudh's Reign when he was in charge of the Royal Orchestra, the first of its kind in Thailand and at that time the best in the Far East. A great music teacher, at whose feet have sat most of Thai exponents of Western music. He also made great contributions to both Thai and Western music including the notation of Thai music, which achievement alone would perpetuate his name in the history of Thai music.

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THAI MUSIC IN WESTERN NOTATION*

I

A talk on Thai Music in relation to Western Music

Demonstrating on both types of instruments the difference between the two systems in pitches and in the scale-steps.

II

The Piphat Band

III

Concert of Thai Music

to be performed in the following order:

Firstly by the Piphat Band.

Secondly by the Western instruments showing the melodic outline of the tune.

Thirdly by the Full Orchestra using Western musical technique.

The pieces to be performed are:—

1. The Pathom
2. The Phama Plaeng
3. The Ton Borades
4. The Khab Mai Bandoh
5. The Phama Rum Kwan (Burmese Ax-Dance)

IV

A set of quadrilles on Thai Airs in 5 numbers

to be performed by the Orchestra

V

Historical facts about the Maha Chai (Hymn of Victory) and the Thai National Anthem "Sanraoen Phra Barami"

N.B. Music for Orchestra will be heard on wire recorder.

* A talk given before the Siam Society on Sunday, March 12th, 1950 at 10.00 a.m.

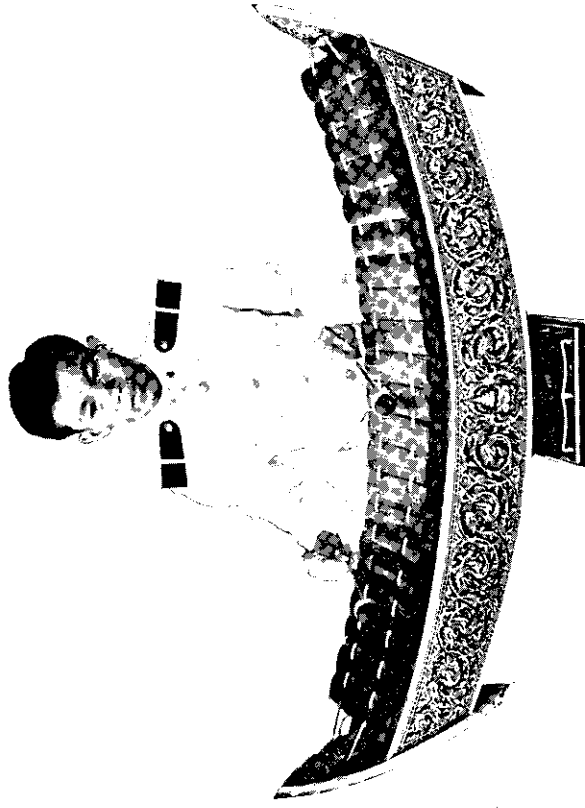
PRELIMINARY TALK

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to be here again, giving another talk on Thai Music in continuation of the one already given on August 22nd 1947. Since then, I am glad to say that some developments have taken place to the good of Thai Classical Music. Firstly, the subject of my talk given on the said date has now been published by the Fine Arts Department,* so that those interested in our art will now be able to obtain a copy for reference. Secondly, the notations of Thai Music which have been transcribed long ago and which have been gradually decaying are now at last being attended to and will soon be printed and published. For this work, the Department has already got in touch with several publishing firms in London, and should there be no unforeseen obstacles marring the way, the first issue of our Classical Music will be available for the public in the course of the current year. Each printed work will consist of a Full Score, 6 different melodic parts and 1 percussion part.** The texts will be given both in Thai and English. This printed music will be adaptable for performance either by Thai or Western musical instruments, as the musical notes will be written in such a way that either type of instruments may be played from the same notation.

The subject of my talk to-day will be a resume of what has been said before and will be based on practical musical demonstrations and performances on both Thai and Western instruments. Firstly, I will demonstrate the musical scales peculiar to Thai Music in comparison with the Western musical scale, then I shall introduce to you the Musical instruments forming the Piphat Band which is the main-stay of Thai Band work, and lastly we will let you hear an actual performance of Thai Music, first by the Piphat Band and next, the same piece rendered by an Orchestra using Western musical technique.

* Thai Music, No. 15, in this series.

** cf. The Music Book of "Evening Prelude" suite (เพลงค่ำค่ำ 154101), published on July 1, 1950, at J. Thibouville-Lamy & Co., London.



An ornamented Kanard Ek inlaid with ivory.

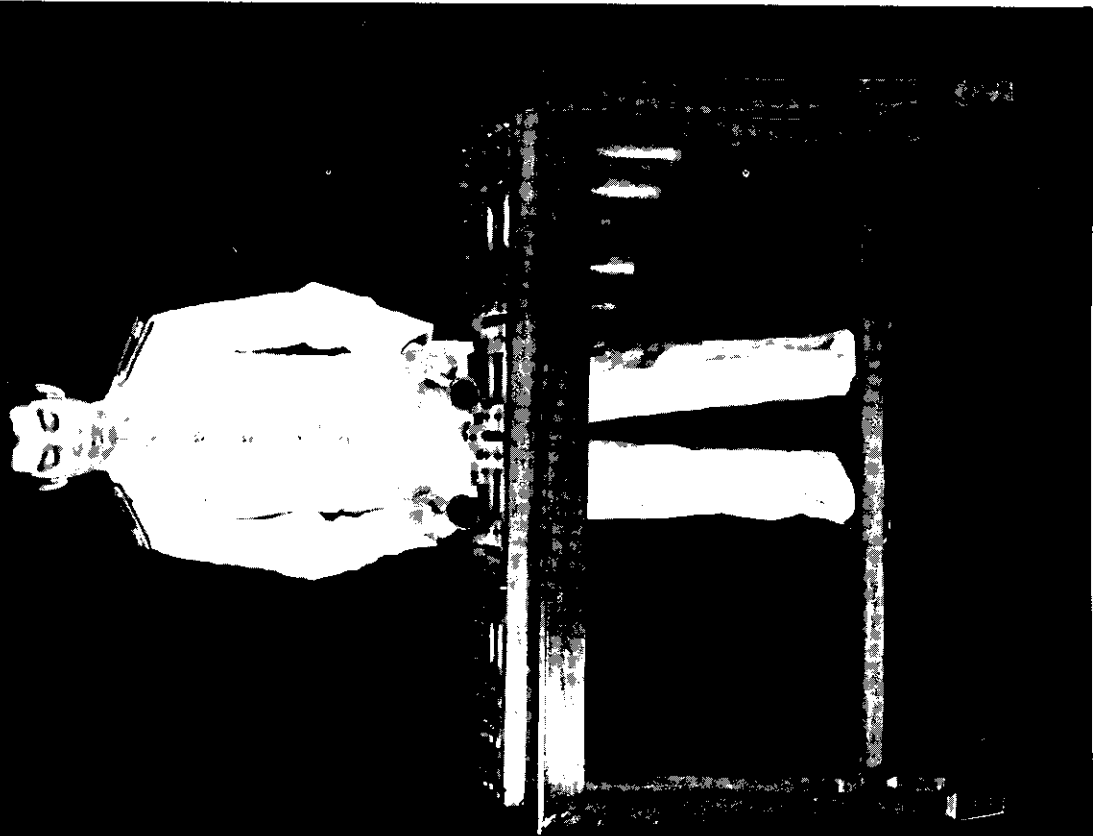
Instruments of His Majesty King Rama Sixth's Private Piphat Band

In the center of each instrument His Majesty's monogram appears within a circle under the Royal Umbrella of State. The monogram is formed by interlaced Nagas or Great Serpents representing the year of his birth.

THE THAI MUSICAL SCALE

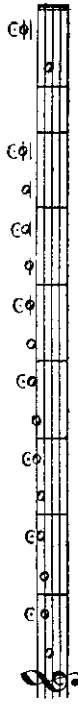
On page 40 and 42 of my little book on Thai Music, I have already given full details with the necessary diagrams explaining the differences in the arrangement of the scale-steps of both the Thai and the Western musical scales. My theory concerning the formation of the Thai scale has been corroborated in a book written by Sir Hubert Parry entitled the "Evolution of the Art of Music" published in 1931 by Kegan Paul, Trench Trubner and Co. Ltd. London, which reads as follows:—

"The Siamese (Thai) scale system is almost as extraordinary. It is not now pentatonic, though supposed to be derived originally from the Javese (Javanese) system. The scale consists of seven notes, which should by right be exactly equidistant from one another; that is, each step is a little less than a semitone and three-Quarters. So that they have neither a perfect fourth nor a true fifth in their system, and both their thirds and sixths are between major and minor; and not a single note between a starting note and its octave agrees with any of the notes of the European scale. The difficulty of ascertaining the scale used in practice lay in the fact that when the wooden harmonicon (meaning, of course, the Xylophone), which seemed to be the most trustworthy basis of analysis, was made out of tune; the Siamese set it right by putting pieces of wax on the bars, which easily dropped off. Their sense of the right relations of the notes of the scale is so highly developed that their musicians can tell by ear directly a note is not true to their singular theory. Moreover, with this scale, they have developed a kind of musical art in the highest degree complicated and extensive."



The xylophone, the western instrument most nearly corresponding

In order to prove this theory practically, we will now play the Western diatonic major scale on a Western musical instrument. Please observe each scale-step by listening attentively in order to be able to compare them with the scale-steps of the Thai diatonic scale. In the ascent, the Western musical scale consists of 2 consecutive steps of full tone followed by one step of semitone, then 3 consecutive steps of full tone followed by another step of half-tone; we now arrive at the top step which is the octave above the first step; thus :-



the reverse when descending; thus :-



Now with the Thai diatonic scale, you will hear and observe that all their scale-steps are made out of one full tone throughout when ascending; thus:- (To be played on the Gong Wong Yai, sounding one octave higher)



and exactly the same full tone when descending thus :-

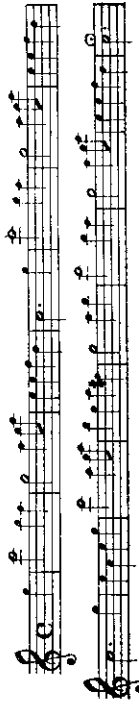


there are no semitones at all between any of these steps, they are all regular full-tone steps.

You will no doubt have observed that although the notations written on both instruments are exactly the same; this is only for the visual sense to follow the notations but the effect of the sounds is entirely different; this is, of course, for the auricular sense to decide.

Although the notations can be the same in both systems, the combination of the two types of instruments can never, never be used, on account of the difference in their sound effects.

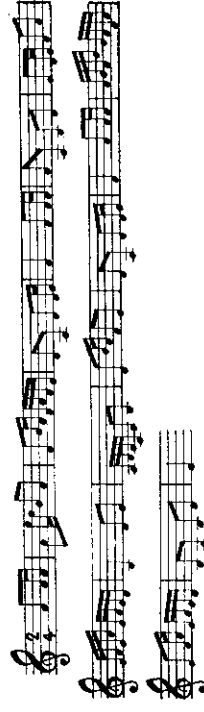
Now let us listen to a familiar tune of the "Blue Bell of Scotland" as played on a Western instrument, thus :-



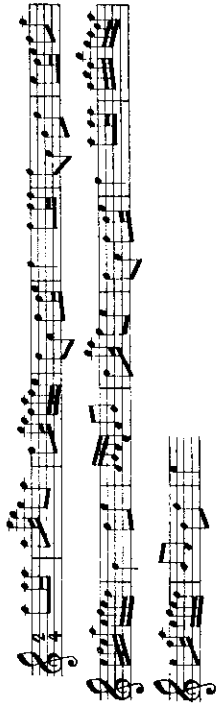
and now from the same notation, let us hear the same tune played on a Thai musical instrument the Gong Wong Yai. The effect is no doubt bad. On account of the difference and limitation in the scale steps, Thai musical instruments can never render a Western tune properly; you can easily judge now by yourselves. (To be played on the Gong Wong Yai sounding one octave higher)



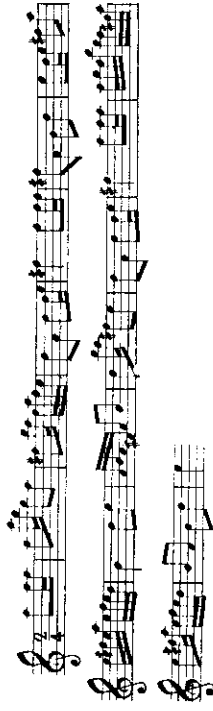
On the other hand let us now listen to a Thai tune played on a Thai musical instrument, thus:- (To be played on the Gong Wong Yai sounding one octave higher)



and now let us play it on Western instrument, using exclusively the old medieval or church scale, thus :-

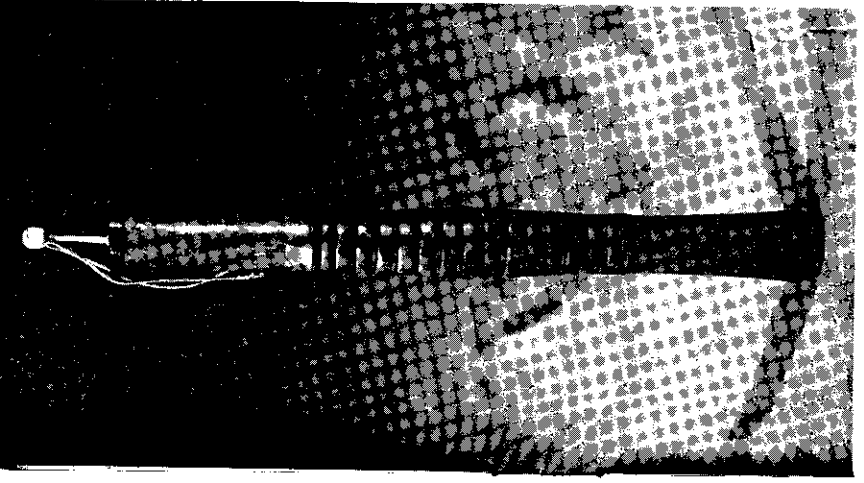


Just as bad, perhaps even worse than the Thai instrument rendering the "Blue Bell of Scotland" without the modern improvement in the Western scale; it would be an impossibility to play Thai music on Western instrument, but with the improved or tempered scale using chromatic notes which are available in the modern Western musical system; this defect can be smoothened out, thus:- (To be played on the Resonophone)



Now this effect—although much better—is not yet true Thai, and the Thai musicians will still remark that it is not quite in harmony with their singular way of tone conception, but they will admit that it is just only tolerable, and therefore not so bad. Western music lovers must rest satisfied with this remark as no other compromise is possible. It is thus really a deadlock proposition. To appreciate Thai Music played on Thai musical instruments, such as the Piphat Band, one has to accustom one's sense of hearing to it, and this is not easy, especially when one is used to the Western form of scale and Western music from early childhood.

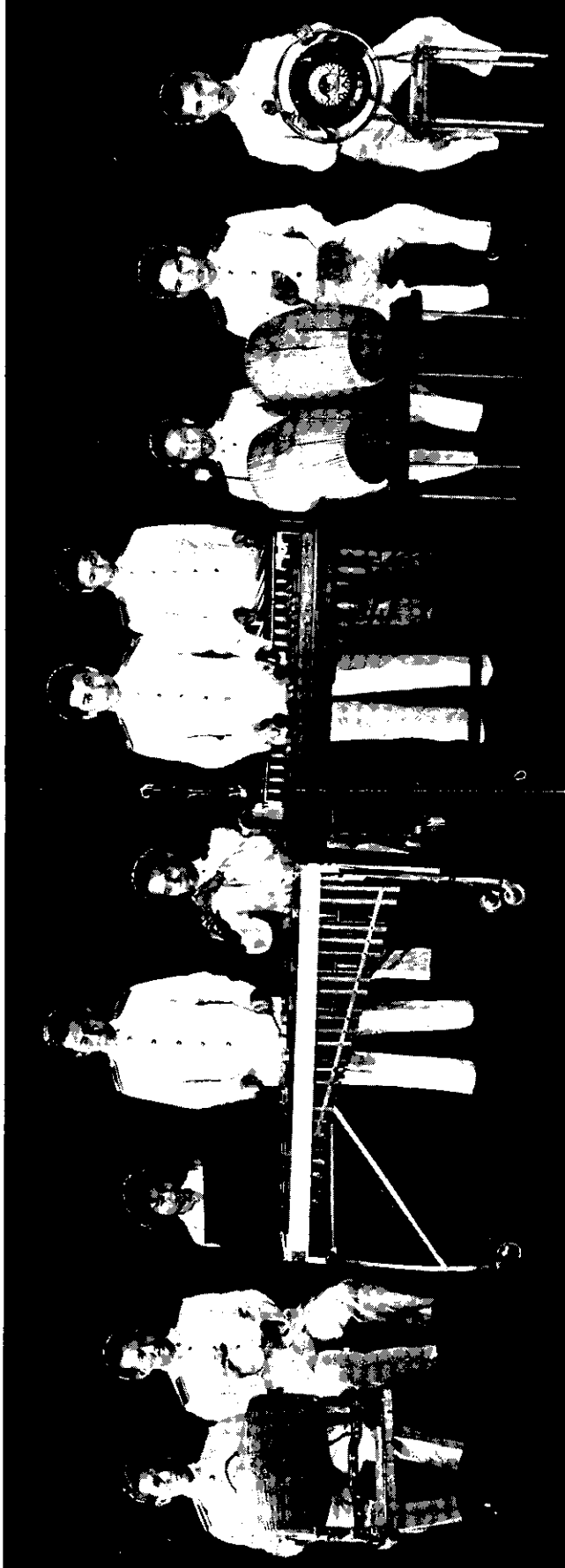
The Pi Nai





The Doubled-Piphat Band (*Medium Band*) of the Fine Arts Department during a Royal ceremonial performance.

The Piphat Band using Western musical instruments, (*Medium Band*).



THE PIPHAT BAND

Before we begin with the performance of a Thai musical programme, it is necessary for us to get acquainted with the various instruments used, composing this band.

The Piphat Band* is divided into two groups; *i.e.* one instrument of the Wood-Wind section and several instruments of the Percussion section.

The Wood-Wind section is represented by the one single instrument called the Pi Nai which corresponds to the Western instrument, "Oboe". Please listen to it! (To sound Pi Nai)

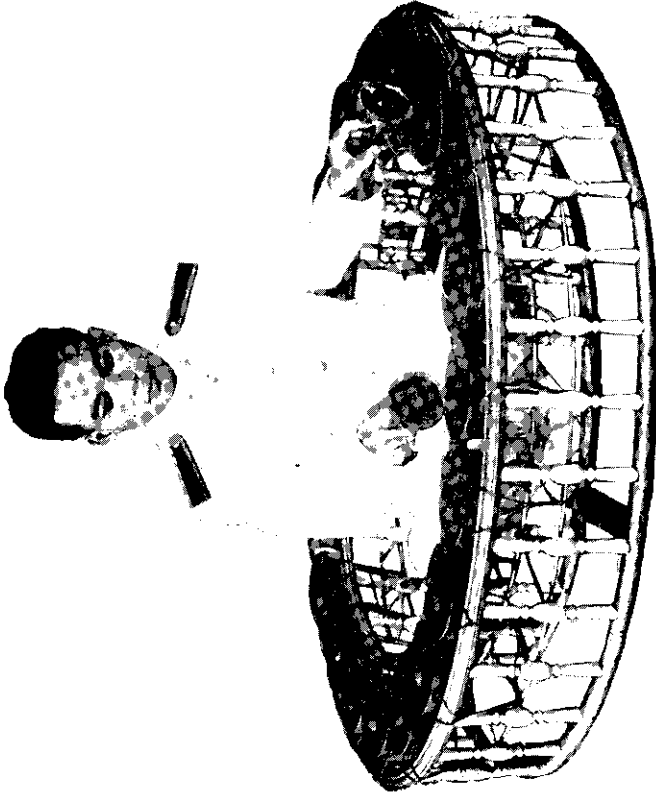
The percussion group is sub-divided into two classes:—

In the first class we have the following melodic instruments:—

- 1) The Ranard Ek, corresponding to the Western Xylophone. (To sound Ranard Ek)
- 2) The Ranard Thong Ek, corresponding to the Western Glockenspiel. (To sound Ranard Thong Ek)
- 3) The Gong Wong Yai, corresponding to the Western Resonophone or Tubaphone. (To sound Gong Wong Yai)

This last one is the instrument that is allotted the principal melody, and is therefore the most indispensable instrument of the Piphat Band.

- 4) The Gong Wong Lek, corresponding to the Western Celesta. (To sound Gong Wong Lek)
- 5) The Ranard Thum, or the Thum Mai, corresponding to the Western Marimba. (To sound Ranard Thum)
- 6) The Ranard Thong Thum, or the Thum Lek, corresponding to the Western Vibraphone (To sound Ranard Thong Thum)



The Gong Wong Yai.

* cf. Thai Music, No. 15, Part II, and Thai Musical Instruments by Dhanit Yupho.

In the second-class we have the following rhythmic instruments:—

- 1) The Tapone, a kind of hand timpano with drum-heads covering both ends. There is no corresponding Western instrument. The Tapone is our principal rhythmic instrument. (To sound the Tapone)
 - 2) The Song Na is a smaller type of Tapone, and there is also no equivalent among Western instruments. (To sound the Song Na)
 - 3) The Klong Thad, a thick large drum, which roughly corresponding to the Western Timpani. (To sound Klong Thad)
 - 4) The Charb Lek or small cymbals. (To sound Charb Lek)
 - 5) The Charb Yai or large cymbals. (To sound Charb Yai)
 - 6) The Mông or Gong. (To sound Mông)
- and lastly the Ching. This little thick pair of Cymbals with its short, crisp tone alternating with the long, ringing sound, controls the rhythm of the music. Its player is the real Conductor of the Band. (To sound Ching)

All these instruments form a full and complete Piphat Band. So far we never had any doubling of any instrument in our Piphat Band as we find in Western Chamber Music.

Thai music is generally played quite evenly throughout, and the music is only on the simple duple time, therefore to Western ears, this music naturally sounds rather monotonous.

Having thus enumerated all the instruments forming the Piphat Band we will now begin our Concert of Thai Music.

The different pieces will be rendered in three different ways as follows:—

- First** : by the Piphat Band.
- Second** : the principal melody played again on Western instruments thus:—
- a. The Resonophone will take the part of Gong Wong Yai.
 - b. The Violin and Viola will take the part of Pi Nai.
 - c. The Ching will be added to mark the tempo.
- Third** : The same melody adjusted to Western harmony will be played by an Orchestra, making use of Western musical technique in the arrangement.

THE CONCERT

The first number is the Pathom. Pathom is an excerpt from the "Evening Overture," and is listed as tune No. 8 forming this Overture.* It is a very old piece of Thai Classical music believed to have been in use already during the Sukhothai period of the Thai history (about 650 years ago). It is a rather stirring piece of music meant to arouse the fighting spirit of our warriors (To be played according to 1st, 2nd, 3rd.).

The second number is entitled Phama Plaeng. The origin of this piece of music is said to be Mon Plaeng. Its melody came to us from Lower Burma or Mon and is believed to have already been popular during the Ayudhya period (about 200 years ago). During the 5th Reign of the present dynasty H.R.H. Prince Nara who formed a theatrical troupe, then known as the "Lakon Pridalai," used this Mon Plaeng in one of his shows but in an altered version which was made by Mom Tuan Worawan. This lady gave this altered version of the tune the name

* cf. Evening Prelude.

“Matabay” (มัทบาย), but this name never became popular and so it was finally changed into Phama Plaeng which means “Adapted Burmese Melody”. (To be played according to 1st, 2nd, 3rd.)

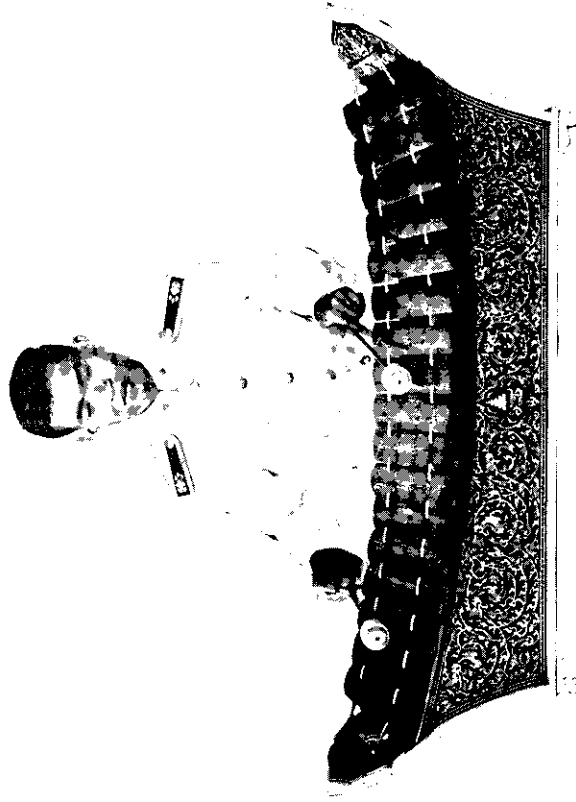
The third number is the Ton Borades and Khaek Borades which form a Suite known as “Tao Kin Phak Bung.” The Ton Borades is a prelude to the Khaek Borades. (To be played according to 1st, 2nd, 3rd.)

The fourth number is the Khab Mai Bando. This is a very old Northern Thai melody. (To be played according to 1st, 2nd, 3rd.)

The fifth number is the Phama Ram Kwan or the Burmese Ax-Dance.

In the days gone by it was the custom to stage exhibition dances as a prelude to a Musical Concert or a Play, especially the “Likay”. Characteristic dances and music of different nations were used on such occasions. In case a play had a Burmese background, then the dancers, ax in hand and dressed up as Burmese Warriors, would come to the stage and do their act in Burmese style to the accompaniment of Burmese music. (To be played according to 1st, 2nd, 3rd.)

The idea of rendering Thai Melodics in Western style is not a new one. It had already been in vogue long ago. I have here a “Quadrille on Siamese Airs” which was danced at the Foreign Office Ball to the strains of a Military Band as far back as the year 1890 (60 years ago) at the Gala reception of the Russian Crown Prince, (later succeeded as Nicholas II) who then came here on a visit as the guest of honour of H.M. King Chulalongkorn (Rama V). I still possess the manuscript of the score and I have made an arrangement for the Orchestra which you are going to hear presently.



An ornamented Banard Thume inlaid with ivory.

The Quadrille is an old dance, now obsolete, executed by four couples and originally invented in France. Five or six quadrilles go together and form what is termed a "Set of Quadrilles". The Quadrille is characterized by a quick tempo, and in this respect, resembles the military quick march. But it is, of course, a dance, and so the advance retreat of the couples in the different figures do not require the sharply-marked emphasis of a quick march.

The music of quadrilles is scarcely ever original, operatic and popular tunes are strung together and so is the case in this quadrille which is composed of Classical Thai airs.

The first dance-figure is entitled "Le Pantalon". It had been derived from a song which began as follows:—

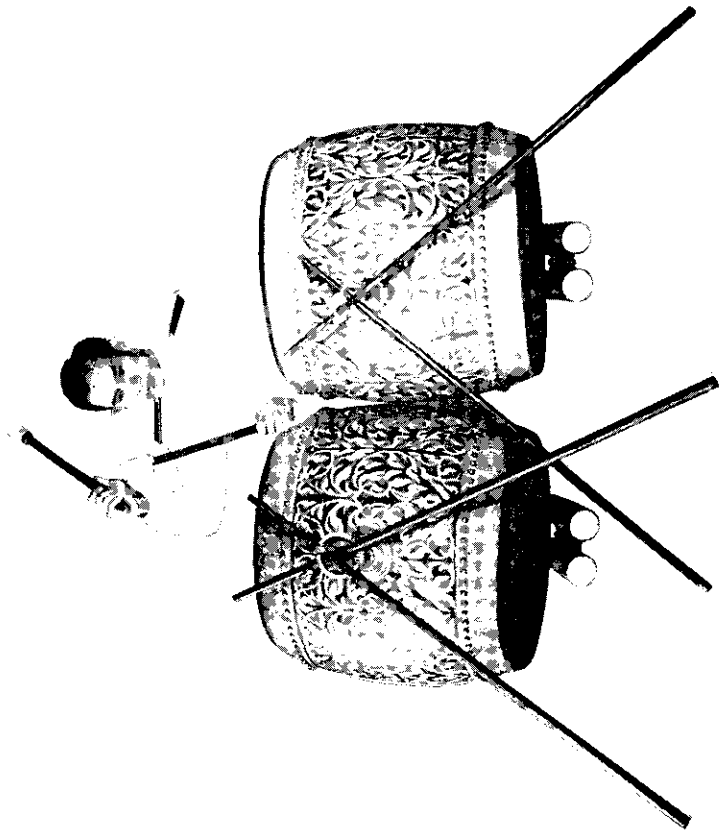
"Le Pantalon
De Madelon
N'a pas de fond".

The Thai air used in this number is entitled "Sam Sao". (Orchestra to play No. 1)

The second dance-figure is entitled "L'Ete", the name of a very complicated "contredanse" popular in the year 1800. The two Thai airs used in this number are "Kim Lek" and "Ngio." (Orchestra to play No. 2)

The third dance-figure is entitled "La Poule" which dates from the year 1802. The Thai air used in this number is Nok Khamin, transformed however from the common time into a compound time, which is essential for this particular number. (Orchestra to play No. 3.)

The fourth dance-figure is entitled "La Trenise". Two figures are danced in this number. *i.e.* "La Trenise" named after the celebrated dancer "Trenitz", and "La Pastorelle", perhaps a survival of the old "Pastorale".



Ornamented Klong Thad inlaid with mother-of-pearl.

This instrument is from the private Piphat Band of H.R.H. Prince Asadanga or Nakorn Rasasima, the younger brother of H.M. King Rama VI.

The Thai air used in this number was taken from a Ballet Suite entitled "Sri Nuan". (Orchestra to play No. 4)

The fifth dance-figure is entitled "Finale", the last number of the set. The various Thai airs used in this number are Mon Plaeng, Nang Nark, Phama Ram Kwan and Ngio. (Orchestra to play No. 5)

THE THAI HYMN OF VICTORY

"MAHA CHAI"

It was in the early nineties of last century that the Thai Hymn of Victory came into existence. This melody was composed by His late Royal Highness Prince Naris who created a variation of a traditional melody of same name. This melody is listed as tune No. 5 forming the Suite known as "Ruang Tham Kwan." (ระบำพญายักษ์)*

Please listen first to the traditional melody played by the Piphat Band. (Piphat Band to play)

Now please listen to the plain melody played by the Gong Wong Yai and Pi Nai, the two melodic instruments. (Gong Wong Yai and Pi Nai to play)

Now comes the same melody played by Western instruments. (Western instruments to play)

And now please listen to the variation of the traditional melody by the late Prince, which is now known as the Hymn of Victory. Please notice the synchronization between the original melody and the new melody on the first beat of each bar and the clever use of the Western Musical Scale, perhaps you will agree with me that here "The East meets the West quite nicely". (Resonophone and Violins to play the following)

* cf. Musical suite to be performed during a ceremony for invoking spiritual bliss published by the Department of Fine Arts, 1954.

This had made possible in the harmonization and instrumentation of the tune for performance by an Orchestra. (Orchestra to play Maha Chai)

THE SANRASOEN PHRA BARAMI

Before concluding today's talk and Concert, I wish to say a few words about our National Anthem known as "Sanrasoen Phra Barami".

Among the national hymns of the world the Thai National Anthem is one of the most effective and impressive musical compositions. Listening to it played by a full Military Band outside the Throne Hall of the Amarindr Palace in days gone by while a state ceremony was in progress within the Hall, we never failed to be

deeply moved by the strains of this Anthem in the atmosphere of serene solemnity.

Who was the composer of this Anthem?

This question was answered by His late Royal Highness Prince Naris; he said:—

“Regarding the National Anthem, the Samrasoen Phra Barami, it was stated that His Majesty King Chulalongkorn, on his first Royal visit to India in 1871, when arriving in Singapore, had come to know that all nations possessed an appropriate National Hymn of their own, but our Nation was then still without one, so His Majesty wished that our nation should also possess one. This Royal wish was made known to a European Bandmaster in Singapore, who made several compositions in European style with European wordings and offered them to His Majesty. It is not known whether this Bandmaster composed the music himself or he had obtained same from some other sources, and his name is also unknown. His Majesty the King then made a choice of the different compositions offered him and bought one for which he then ordered Siamese wordings to be made; these wordings were later on corrected and altered several times until the sixth Reign, when His Majesty King Maha Vajravudh at last made the final alteration which was sung in his presence on several official functions to the accompaniment of an Orchestra and which has remained in use until now.”

The harmonization and instrumentation of the tune were done by my father who was then the Bandmaster of the Siamese Army, and the original scores are still in my possession.

Let us now close our Concert by listening to this Anthem; and in so doing let us try to prepare our hearts for the forthcoming auspicious return and grand reception of His Majesty, our King.*

* H.M. the King was returning from residence in Switzerland.