



(LYRCD 7440)

## MUSIC FROM THE LOST KINGDOM: HUE The Perfume River Traditional Ensemble

### MEMBERS OF THE ENSEMBLE

Vo Que, Artistic Director

Manh Cam, trong drum

Thai Hung, dan nguyet lute

Le Hoa, dan tranh zither

Tran Thao, dan nhi fiddle and ken shawm

Si Thoai, dan bau monochord

Thu Hang, Ai Hoa, Thuy Van, and Khanh Van,  
voice and percussion.

### Tracks:

1. Dang Dan Cung (Ascending the Esplanade) & Long Ngam (Song of the Dragon):

Ensemble: 3:11

2. Non Que Em (Songs of Comical Hat Making) Voice: Soloists: Thu Hang (first), Khanh Van (second): 5:13

3. Tuong Tu Khuc (A Lover's Song) Solo of the dan bau monochord: Si Thoai 2:36

4. Ai Phong Luu (Who Is Refined in the Arts?) Voice: Thu Hang: 3:25

5. Ly Hoai Nam/Ly Ngua (Remembering the South & Song of the Black Horse) Voice: Thuy Van: 2:58

6. Luu Thuy, Kim Tien, Xuan Phong, Long Ho (Stream of Water, Golden Coin, Spring Breeze, and Dragon and Tiger) Ensemble: 2:26

7. Nho Hue (Memories of Hué) Voice: Thuy Van: 7:17

8. Ly Muoi Thuong (Ten Reasons to Love You) Voice: Khanh Van: 4:27
  9. Nuoc Non Ngan Dam (A Thousand Miles from Home) Voice: Thu Hang: 7:13
  10. Canh Dep Co Do (The Beauty of the Old Imperial City) Voice: Ai Hoa: 4:22
  11. Ho Gia Gao (Rice Pestling Song) Voice: Thu Hang, Thuy Van, Thai Hung, and Si Thoai: 5:13
  12. Ma Vu/Du Xuan (Horse Dance/Spring Promenade) Manh Cam (drum) and Tran Thao: 4:50
- Total Running Time: 54:23

## MUSIC FROM THE LOST KINGDOM: HUE VIETNAM

Vietnam's former imperial city, Hue, lies along the beautiful Perfume River near its entry into the sea in the country's central region, an area distinguished for its strong accent, tasty cuisine, and proud cultural heritage. From 1802 until 1945 a succession of thirteen emperors of the Nguyen Dynasty ruled the country from a fortress-like Forbidden City hidden within the walled Citadel, the latter period in cooperation with their French "protectors". The court at Hue was the last in a succession of Vietnamese dynasties which preserved the rituals and music that had existed at least since the founding of the Ly dynasty in the 11th century, whose court was located in Thang Long (now Ha Noi).

The emperors required dignified instrumental music for their rituals and audiences with foreign visitors. The court's power and splendor was demonstrated in its great orchestra (*nha nhac*), a chorus, and a dance company. Perhaps the most spectacular ritual was the Nam Giao (Heaven and Earth Sacrifice) first celebrated on a vast outdoor esplanade (*dan Nam Giao*) built by Emperor Ly Anh Tong (1138-1175). A similar esplanade was built slightly to the south of Hue in 1806 for the Nguyen emperors. The sacrifice took place annually in the spring between the hours of 2 a.m. and 5 a.m. In addition the court maintained three other ensembles: a *dai nhac* ensemble consisting of 20 large drums, 8 double-reed shawms, 4 large gongs, 4 small gongs, 4 conch shell trumpets, and 4 water buffalo horns, all managed by a master conductor and 14 assistant conductors; a *nhac huyen* group mainly consisting of sets of stone chimes and bronze bells; and a *tieu nhac* string ensemble which included a lead drum and several smaller percussion instruments playing interlocking patterns.

Besides the grandeur of ritual music, the court relaxed to the sounds of the classical *hat boi* or *tuong* theater. Their subjects, being attuned to sophisticated poetry and the arts in general, honed a local variety of chamber music called *ca hue* performed by amateur but highly skilled instrumentalists and singers. Its proper place of performance was at the home of a literary man or connoisseur, or even in a small covered boat floating down the Perfume River towards Hue from the west.

Although Vietnam's last emperor, Bao Dai, abdicated the throne in 1945, the government continued to maintain the Citadel and its musical activities. The Vietnamese New Year, called *tet*, is normally a time of joyous celebration, but in February, 1968, the National Liberation Front observed the holiday by launching bold and fierce attacks throughout the Republic of Vietnam ("South" Vietnam). For twenty-five days the flag of the National

Liberation Front flew over the captured Citadel. The combined armies of the United States and the Republic of Vietnam decided to recapture Hue at all costs, and the people of Hue paid dearly. A leader of the court ensemble, Mr. Nguyen Huu Hia, was killed trying to flee the city by crossing the Perfume River, and many other musicians died as well.

By late 1969 or early 1970 the court ensemble had been restored and continued to perform, with government support, until the Republic of Vietnam fell in April, 1975. From that time until March, 1993, there was no more court music in Hue and little chamber music. Through the efforts of the few surviving masters artists from the former court, among them Mr. Manh Cam, a new generation learned the old repertory. Younger artists and students of the College of Fine Arts and the School of Culture and Arts in Hue restored many of the grand dances of the court, among them a lantern dance and lion dance, but with much reduced forces.

The present recording resulted from the first United States tour of a Vietnamese ensemble since the end of the war in 1975. The Perfume River Traditional Ensemble, directed by Mr. Vo Que, a poet and singer, is made up of authentic artists resident in Hue. Mr. Manh Cam, aged 78, is both a survivor from the original court ensemble and one of the country's Artists of Merit. The ensemble toured the eastern United States for two weeks during August, 1995, performing at Lowell Folk Festival, Massachusetts, New Haven, Connecticut, at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., and at Lincoln Center in New York City. Their repertory includes music of the court, ca hue chamber music, and folk songs of central Vietnam, specifically the Thua Thien hue and Quang Tri provinces.

The artists sing to the accompaniment of five traditional melodic instruments and numerous percussion instruments and drums. The former include the round-bodied *dan nhuyet* long-necked lute, the *dan tranh* zither with 16 strings, the *dan bau* monochord, the two-stringed *dan nhi* fiddle, and the double-reed *ken* shawm. The percussion instruments include both clappers and pairs of teacups struck together.

### 1. **Dang Dan Cung** [Ascending the Esplanade] & **Long Ngam** [Song of the Dragon] *Ensemble*

Dang Dan Cung and Long Ngam are two characteristic pieces from Vietnam's old court music repertory. These link the space and time distances that separate compositions typical of the Nguyen and Tran courts. Originally, the Nguyen period (1802-1945) piece Dang Dan Cung was strictly executed by the *dai nhac* (large orchestra) when the emperor processed up the Nam Giao Esplanade (*dang dan*) during the Heaven and Earth Ritual Sacrifice. Long Ngam, however, was composed by Trinh Trong Tu, a Tran court dignitary, in 1310 in Thang Long (now Ha Noi). Regional characteristics are manifested in the use of specific melodic types. The melody of the first piece is centered on the fundamental tone of the Vietnamese pentatonic scale (type: G-A-C-D-E-g), while Long Ngam features a higher melodic range, a hexatonic scale, and exhibits metabole--i.e., an interchange of scale units, C-D-E-g-g, D-F-g-a-c, G-A-C-D-E-F-g. When two, three, or more pieces are played successively, the style is called *lien hoan*.

## 2. **Non Que Em** [Songs of Conical Hat Making]

-*Thu Hang* (first soloist), *Khanh Van* (second soloist), *Thuy Van*, and *Ai Hoa*

Non Que Em denotes a series of folk songs from Thua Thien Hue and Quang Tri provinces in Central Vietnam. Song styles are defined by having both metric and non-metric rhythms and delicate vocal lines sung by two groups of singers. The short introduction is sung in *ngam*, a poetic recitative style, in a non-measured form and followed by the metrical *ly tinh tang*, *ho khoan le thuy*, and *ly hoai xuan*, respectively. In this selection, the set is unified as a series of work song texts composed by Van Lang and Vo Que. Both the rhythms and song styles are related to the *lien hoan* style.

*"In my homeland, as it has been a custom  
Girls love to wear conical hats.  
Oh, the hats are beautifully white  
And they allure the boys in the village..."*

## 3. **Tuong Tu Khuc** [A Lover's Song] Solo on the *dan bau* monochord: *Si Thoai*

Composed in the 1950's by Buu Bac during a period of innovation, Tuong Tu Khuc was one of the new short songs well received by the *ca hue* circle because of its beautiful lyrics and maintenance of traditional quality. It was later presented on Saigon Radio by famous singers during the weekly *ca hue* program. Interestingly, because it was created during a time of extensive regional interchanges, its melody shows the influence of both the Hue and southern Vietnamese modal scales. The *dan bau*, the Vietnamese monochord par excellence, is capable of expressing subtle ornamentation.

## 4. **Ai Phong Luu** [Who is Refined in the Arts?] Voice: *Thu Hang*

As an introductory song for a *ca hue* chamber music performance, the *co ban* (old song style) features the most characteristic elements of this art. Traditionally gatherings of singers, musicians, and literary men take place at a private home or on a boat. The important role that female singers have is almost exclusive to the *ca tru* in the north and the *ca hue* in the center of Vietnam. This introductory song is often sung in the *khach* (guest) mode. The "guest-and-host" concept distinguishes two opposite musical moods: happiness, joy, satisfaction (*khach*) versus sadness, melancholy, lamentation, or distress (*nam*). The listener may compare this song with the *nam* (south, native to Vietnam, "host") heard in selection 9 of this recording. "Ai Phong Luu" or "Ai Phong Luu Nguoi Dieu" (Who is Refined in the Arts?), sung in the *khach* mode, is a lively manifestation of a moderate joy.

The singer and musicians involved in the performance show their rhythmic, melodic, and linguistic skills. Rhythmic syncopation is prominently heard in the introduction, while subtle ornamentation, linguistic intonation, and clear syllabic pronunciation are highly appreciated in the Hue literary tradition.

The many versions of the lyrics composed by the literati typically express the joy of lasting friendship and an interest in the musical art. "Ai Phong Luu" is both the beginning words of this song and therefore becomes the title. The lyrics read:

*"Who is refined in the arts? Oh, I think it is you, a native of the Perfume River and the Royal Pacific Mountain area and a lasting friend of the art. You often come to this gathering. Please have with us a cup of wine. Then we will sing for in a hearty voice.*

*The moonlight is bright. The wind seems to bring an intimate sentiment of friendship. The landscape is wonderful. The performers are pretty. You deserve this world of beauty...."*

**5. Ly Hoai & Ly Ngua O** [Remembering the South & Song of the Black Horse]

*-Voice: Thuy Van*

A part of the treasure of Vietnam's folk songs, the *ly* is a kind of song whose texts invoke meanings through analogy and metaphor. They are sung in meter in contrast to the *ho*, which are non-metrical. Ly Hoai Nam (Remembering the South) and Ly Ngua O (Song of the Black Horse) also present contrasting musical modes, although the concept of mode in folk songs has been little discussed by scholars so far. The first song expresses sadness while the second is in a happy mode. Each has a mood that corresponds to the meaning of the lyrics.

"The Black Horse" and "The Black Bird", two of the most beloved folk themes in Vietnam, are symbols of success and failure, respectively. There are dozens of versions of each sung in different regional styles with varying melodies.

*"Sadly, in the evening I go with my friend over the pass. We hear the laments of birds on this side of the mountain and of gorillas on the other..."* (Ly Hoai Nam)

*"Oh, the black horse. Oh, the black horse that I have saddled. Its reins are red; its cluster bells are golden.*

*It helps the bride travel to her new palace."* (Ly Ngua O)

**6. Luu Thuy, Kim Tien, Xuan Phong, Long Ho** [Stream of Water, Golden Coin, Spring Breeze, and Dragon and Tiger] *Ensemble*

Suites such as this have, for several centuries, been known throughout Vietnam. Arranged in numerous orders, they have been regionally adapted for various purposes including chamber music, court music, village rituals, Buddhist ceremonies, and theatrical performances. Because of their use of percussion accompaniment (drum, clappers, tea cups, etc.), the suites heard in this recording are considered to have a ceremonial character. Their heterophonic texture is complex and vigorous. The mode used belongs to the "guest" (*khach*) category.

**7. Nho Hue** [Memories of Hue *Voice: Thuy Van*

Poetry has had a strong impact on Vietnamese music. This is especially true in the chamber style where it has the honor of being sung as a separate item. As sung poetry, it is not forced by the music into a song with possible rephrasing or editing. This manner of singing a poem is called *ngam tho* (lit., declaimed poetry).

Nho Hue (Memories of Hue) was written by To Kieu Ngan who composed these lovely memories of his hometown, Hue, in the central region while living in the south. The sung

poem is often a vocal improvisation. Instrumental accompaniment is improvised following the voice as a guide.

*"Seeing you, it seems like I am seeing my home town  
Oh. my old Hue is now far away  
Your beautiful song recalls for me a lonely boat,  
a grayish fog, a graceful bamboo bush.  
The memories of old Hue are now strongly felt within me.  
The beloved sounds come from a boat song.  
They are melancholy..."*

#### 8. **Ly Muoi Thuong** [Ten Reasons to Love You] *Voice: Khanh Van*

As traditionally understood, Ly Muoi Thuong (Ten Reasons to Love You) originated from a folk melody called Ly Con Sao (Song of the Black Bird). Like most folk songs, the latter was sung without instrumental accompaniment. But Ly Muoi Thuong is more likely derived from Ly Tinh Tang (lit., song with "tinh tang" endings), a complete art song with phrasal extensions, modal ornaments, and subtle instrumental accompaniment. This pattern of evolution has been common in the current Vietnamese traditional performance practice.

Two reasons to love you form a complete melody; thus the presentation of ten reasons to love you requires the melody to be repeated for more times.

*"First, I love you because of your hair  
which gracefully touches your shoulders  
Second, because of your graceful posture  
Your posture is graceful. Yes, it is.  
O, tang tinh tang..."*

#### 9. **Nuoc Non Ngan Dam** [A Thousand Miles from Home]

*Voice: Thu Hang*

Late into a night of chamber music, connoisseurs will hear the most lyrical part of the *ca hue* which is comprised of songs in the "nam" or "native" mode" as opposed to introductory songs in "khach" or guest" mode as heard above. This selection presents that markedly different mood with a song in the *nam binh* (native and moderate) style for which the lyrics of Nuoc Non Ngan Dam (A Thousand Miles from Home) was written. Other song styles such as *nam ai*, *qua phu*, *nam xuan*, or *tu dai canh* are also sung within this mode.

As usual, the form of presentation opens with a short poetic prelude followed by the song. The poem, composed by the famous poet/ songwriter Ung Binh Thuc Gia, is sung in a non-metric, relaxing, antiphonal style called *ho mai nhi* in which a chorus twice responds to the soloist. Then begins the *nam binh* which extends through three sections. Between sections are instrumental interludes called *qua giang* (crossing the river). Each song has a rhythmic cycle of eight beats--i.e., three strong and five weak beats.

Thu Hang, a Gold Prize winner in Vietnam, is famous for singing the advanced *ca hue*

repertory such as Nuoc Non Ngan Dam in nam binh style. Her crystal clear voice delicately whispers the deep sorrow of Princess Huyen Tran who, as a result of an arranged marriage, traveled to the southern country of Champa in exchange for peace and greater territory for Vietnam. Huyen Tran accepted marriage with a Cham King who once reigned in the Hue area.

Prelude:

*"In the evening, who is sitting at Van Lau harbor?  
Who is fishing? Who is sad? Who loves the country?..."*

Nuoc Non Ngan Dam:

*"A thousand miles from her homeland, she traveled.  
Her sorrow is masked by make-up to make things appear happy.  
For O and Ly Districts she leaves.  
It is bitter, because she is in the fullness of youth like the spring.  
Or is this her fate?..."*

**10. Canh Dep Co Do** [The Beauty of the old Imperial City] *Voice and dan nguyet lute:*  
*Ai Hoa*

Annually two major festivals take place at the Bowl Hill Temple on the Perfume River, a few miles west of the imperial city of Hue. These provide opportunities for singing songs praising the Cham Goddess, Yana, who is now worshipped by the Vietnamese. Songs of Praise of this kind are called *hau van* or *chau van* (lit., "respectfully offering the texts of praise"). The music has now been adapted into non-religious performances--i.e., outside the ritual context. Canh Dep Co Do (The Beauty of the Old Imperial City) is thus sung in this style. Ai Hoa, herself a professional ritual singer for trance sessions, is perhaps one of a few who has perfected the singing styles outside their ritual context. She accompanies herself with the *dan nguyet lute*--typical of *hau van* singers. Essential for her success is the religion itself, a folk belief that draws musical traits directly from the lowland folk and upland minority traditions. Excitement and joy mingle in praising the miraculous goddess.

Because Hue was chosen as a safe haven for the Vietnamese kingdom, it has also been a haven for its people and their arts. The love of the people toward Hue City is recounted by folk singers who skillfully express and interchange their love of the city in the *hau van* modes. The latter are poetically named Poetic (*phu*), Moderato (*binh*), Slow Throne (*dai roi*), Shiny and Slow (*long lanh roi*), Mountain God Worship (*hau thuong*), etc. "Slow" is conceptionally defined as a falling leaf.

*"Oh, it is here that beautiful scenes appear in the old imperial city of Hue!  
The Perfume River and the Royal Pacific Mountain are gifts of nature.  
Also, there are the Mussel and Wild Garden Islands  
Whose waterways cross beneath the Trang Tien Bridge.  
Not far from it is the glorious imperial palace..."*

11. **Ho Gia Gao** [Rice Pestling Song] *Voice: Thu Hang, Thuy Van, Thai Hung, and Si Thoai*

Sixty percent of the population in Vietnam live by planting rice and other agriculturally related work. This song reflects a social context where songs are used both to encourage the pestling and to entertain the workers with riddles. On moon-lit nights, farmers sing antiphonally during their work in a question/answer format. The male and female soloists are further answered by a chorus formed by the rest of the workers singing non-sense syllables. The ensemble attempts to recreate the song on a modern stage with two male (Thai Hung and Si Thoai) and two female (Thu Hang and Thuy Van) soloists.

*"Khoan ho khoan' [non-sense syllables] I invite you, young men and women, to sing with me.*

*Please don't be shy.*

*Now I (female) ask you (males) this question: What is the other meaning of the word dau (oil) which is not for burning? of the word bap (corn) which is not for popping? of the word than (coal) which is not for being ignited?..."*

12. **Ma vu and Du Xuan** [Horse Dance and Spring Promenade] *Manh Cam (drum) and Tran Thao (oboe)*

Drumming has a prominent role in Vietnamese ensembles of all kinds, from the court to folk performances. The drums (*trống*) and the double-reed shawms (*ken*) were the main instruments of the *dai nhac* or large court ensemble. The latter featured twenty drums, eight shawms, and other instruments.

Master Manh Cam, age 78, who is one of the few surviving and excellent drummers of the Nguyen court received a national title of Artist of Merit. Because this music is improvisational, many features of his style are comparable to the American Jazz tradition. Tran Thao, age 41, is a leading artist who plays the *ken*. He maintains the tone through circular breathing, a fascinating technique preserved from the *dai nhac* tradition. A good combination, they achieve a rare mastery of the art handed down from the royal court times.

This selection constitutes the heart of this recording, consisting of the semi-composed banquet pieces, Ma Vu and Du Xuan. These artists thus preserve the old tradition of improvisation which is on the verge of disappearing in Vietnam.

*-- Commentary by Dr. Phong T. Nguyen and Dr. Terry E. Miller*



**MUSIC FROM THE LOST KINGDOM: HUE**  
**THE PERFUME RIVER TRADITIONAL ENSEMBLE**

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***The Ensemble***

**Vo Que**, *Artistic Director*

**Manh Cam**, *trung drum*

**Thai Hung**, *dan nguyet lute*

**Le Hoa**, *dan tranh zither*

**Tran Thao**, *dan nhi fiddle and ken shawm*

**Si Thoai**, *dan bau monochord*

**Thu Hang, Ai Hoa, Thuy Van, and Khanh Van**,  
*voice and percussion.*

**CREDITS**

**NCTA: The National Council for the Traditional Arts)**

Joseph T. Wilson, Executive Director

Andrew Wallace, Associate Director

Madeleine Remez, Tour Manager

Stephen Fisher, Technical Director and Tour Manager

Phong T. Nguyen, Project Consultant

**Also**

The Association of Literature and Arts of Thua Thien Hue Province

Sue Leggat, Lowell Folk Festival Committee

Newell Flather, The Theodore Edson Parker Foundation

The International Association for Research in Vietnamese Music



**Lyrichord Discs Inc.**

PO Box 1977 Old Chelsea Station

New York, NY 10011 Ph: 212 404 8290 Fax: 212 404 8291

email: [nick@lyrichord.com](mailto:nick@lyrichord.com) Web: [www.lyrichord.com](http://www.lyrichord.com)

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