(LYRCD 7451)

SILK, SPIRITS AND SONG
MUSIC FROM NORTH THAILAND
Produced and Recorded by Dr. Andrew Shahriari

TRACKS:
1. Salaw-Saw-Sueng: Sao Mai (5:33)
Sao mai translates as “Silk Maiden.”
2. Salaw-Saw-Sueng: Pama (4:55)
Pama translates as “Burma.”
Both examples recorded at the Khum Kaew Palace Khantoke Dinner Theatre in Chiang Mai, November 1998.

NOTES (Tracks 1 – 2):
A salaw-saw-sueng ensemble is comprised of a two-stringed spiked fiddle with a coconut shell resonator (salaw), three plucked lutes (sueng) of different sizes, a fipple flute (khlui) much like a recorder, and various percussion. A small pair of cup-shaped hand cymbals (ching) is most important of the latter as it “chings” (and “chops”) on the basic beat while the barrel drum (klawng pong pong) repeats a steady pattern and the small, flat hand cymbals (chab lek) add a syncopated rhythm. Each melody instrument plays the same melody, but in its own way. The salaw introduces the tune with occasional slides and trills as the sueng enters with a bouncy feel along with the fluttering khlui. The musicians sit on the floor and improvise throughout so that no performance is ever the same.
A common performance context is at cultural shows where patrons sit around a small-footed tray, called a khantoke, to sample northern Thai delicacies, such as curried pork,

papaya salad, and sticky rice. The musicians accompany graceful dancers who perform a variety of local styles. A singer (saw means "to sing") may also join the ensemble.

3 .Pi Saw: Solo Demonstration (1:21)
Performed by Phanutat Aphichanatong and recorded in Chiang Mai, April 1999.
4. Saw (4:24)
Recorded in Amphoe Lee outside of Chiang Mai, April 1999.

NOTES: (Tracks 3 – 4):
While saw, as noted above, means "to sing" in the northern Thai dialect, the term also describes a type of vocal repartee between male and female singers (chan saw) accompanied by a pi joom ensemble. A pi joom ensemble consists of four or five pi saw, a free-reed pipe, and a sueng (plucked lute). Each pi saw has a different melodic range (low to high) and is played with its own style. The performer in Track 3 demonstrates the "coconut leaf" style of performance. Pi saw musicians use a circular breathing technique that enables them to play continuously, sometimes for more than three hours at a time. The chan saw sing about a variety of topics, often revolving around courtship but also including practical matters with regards to house building, religious activities, historical events, and other important cultural knowledge. The lyrics for each performance are extemporized but adhere to complex poetic forms that are thought to date more than seven hundred years.

5. Tueng Nong (2:32)
6. Klawng Luang (1:20)
Recorded at Wat Pa Tung near Saen Kham Phaeng east of Chiang Mai, September 1998.
7. Klawng Buje (2:19)
8. Klawng Sabadchai (2:46)
Tracks 5, 7 & 8 recorded at the Khum Kaew Palace Khantoke Dinner Theatre, November 1998.

NOTES (Tracks 5 – 8):
Thailand has a diverse number of drums (klawng). Barrel and goblet shaped drums are the most common types. Other percussion, primarily gongs and cymbals, are common along with drum performance. Drum ensembles often accompany dancing, usually male. Drum contests are also a frequent occurrence.

The tueng nong ensemble (track 5) is so named for the sound of the klawng aew, a large goblet-shaped drum, and one of the two large bossed gongs (nong and ui) used in performance. A second smaller drum, klawng talod pod, completes the ensemble. While the klawng aew is often found in competitions, as are the ensembles themselves, the primary role of the tueng nong is to accompany the "Fingernail Dance" during religious activities associated with Buddhist temple festivals. This dance is considered the oldest in northern Thailand, dating to the 13th century, and is regarded as a sacred practice though it can be found in secular events as well.

The klawng luang (track 6) is Thailand's biggest goblet-shaped drum at more than five meters (over 16 feet) long. The drum is used almost exclusively for competitions in which prizes are awarded to the loudest and "purest" sounding drum. Unfortunately, capturing the chest-pounding rumble of these drums is difficult even with modern recording techniques. The "war-zone" atmosphere as these goliath drums battle for the pride of their representative temple communities can best be appreciated by being there. The klawng buje (track 7) and klawng sabadchai (track 8) are quite different in appearance, the former being a goblet drum roughly 2 meters (6.5 feet) long, while the latter is a shallow barrel drum roughly 1 meter (3 feet) in diameter. Performance on either of these drums is accompanied by a set of bossed gongs (mong jud) that keep a steady beat and a pair of hand cymbals (chwae) that improvise additional rhythm to complement the drum. The klawng buje most often accompanies a sword-wielding dancer who performs vigorous martial arts techniques. The klawng sabadchai musician incorporates such martial arts moves into his performance as he strikes the drum with his elbows, knees, and head along with a pair of beaters representing the swords. Such performances were used in the 13th century to send soldiers into battle and to welcome their victorious return.

9. Phin Pia: Lawng Mae Ping (1:58)
Lawng Mae Ping translates as "Along the Ping River."

10. Phin Pia: Sao Mai (1:50)
Sao Mai translates as "Silk Maiden."
Both examples performed by Bringkop Vora-urai and recorded in DeKalb, Illinois, April 1998.

NOTES (Tracks 9 – 10):
The phin pia is one of the world's few chest-resonated stick zithers. Though the phin pia was used primarily as a courting instrument, evidence suggests its use for royal occasions as early as the 12th century. The instrument thrived for several centuries until it was banned in Thailand during the 1930s primarily due to its standard performance practice of playing bare-chested, considered "vulgar" by the government elite of the period. By the 1980s, phin pia performance had nearly vanished. Fortunately, a surge of attention towards Thailand's regional cultural traditions during the 1990s revived interest in the phin pia. The instrument is today regarded as a vital part of northern Thailand's musical heritage.

The pole, resonator connector, and tuning pegs of the phin pia are made of wood, often teak, but preferably of harder woods such as mahogany or ebony. The resonator is made of a half coconut shell that is buffed to a smooth texture. The strings were formerly made of twined silk and later bicycle brake wires. Modern phin pia strings are made of either dulcimer or guitar strings. The pia head is the most important part of the instrument. It is made of metal, usually silver, iron or bronze, the latter being the most common. A unique metal mixture akin to bronze, known as samrit, is also sometimes used, though this material is usually reserved for Buddha images and other religious artifacts. Most pia

heads are fashioned in the shape of an elephant head, considered a spiritually powerful animal.

The phin pia is considered the most difficult of all the northern Thai instruments to play. The instrument is held diagonally across the chest with the left hand supporting the upper end of the instrument. The pole rests in the crux between the first finger and thumb of the right hand, so it is free to slide up and down the pole to sound the overtones of the main melody string. The side of the first finger lightly touches the string at a harmonic node while the second or third finger plucks the string. The first finger is immediately lifted to allow the string to vibrate freely and produce the greatest volume. This technique, known as pok, is used to sound the first four harmonic nodes of the string, though higher overtones may be played if the instrument is long.
The overtones of the other strings are not normally sounded. Instead these strings are plucked with the second, third, or fourth fingers of the left hand. The first finger of the left hand is used to press the pok string against the pole in order to produce different pitches. The other string of the two-stringed phin pia is almost always played open, but phin pia with more than two strings may be played open or with fingering.
This recording was made at a conference in the United States of Bringkop Vora-urai, one of the most important academics and performers promoting the local music traditions of northern Thailand.

11.Piphat Mon: Funeral (5:52)
Recorded in Saen Kham Paeng outside of Chiang Mai, November 1998
12. Piphat Mon: Spirit Dance (5:00)
13. Dontri Phuen Muang: Spirit Dance (4:11)
Tracks 12 – 13 were recorded in Lampang, February 1999.

NOTES (Tracks 11 – 13):
The piphat mon (pronounced “beepaht mawn”) ensemble is widely known throughout Thailand for its association with funeral rituals. The northern version typically includes one or two vertical gong circles (khawng wong mon), two xylophones (ranad ek and ranad thum), and two double-reed aerophones (nae luang and nae noi). Rhythmic percussion includes the small cup-shaped hand cymbals (ching), large flat-shaped cymbals (chab yai), and a pair of barrel-shaped drums (klawng terng thing and klawng pong pong). These latter instruments provide an underlying rhythmic framework while the melodic percussion and aerophones play idiomatic versions of a basic melody. Track 11 highlights the different melodic instruments as they play within the ensemble.
A specifically northern regional performance context for the piphat mon ensemble is for spirit dances (faun phi). A spirit dance can be either private or public. The participants are primarily ancestral spirits (phi, pronounced “pee”) who have taken on physical form by possessing human hosts, thought of as “horses.” While in this physical form they can converse with other “spirits” and non-possessed individuals. The main activity is to socialize, so the musician’s role is to provide entertainment. An increase in tempo and change in melody indicates that a “royal” spirit is joining the party. The “horse” swings on a red rope or scarf hanging from the ceiling as the possession occurs. Track 12 reveals two such possessions. (This example only includes the larger nae, a common occurrence,

amplified through loudspeakers to help attract more “spirit” participants.) The dontri phuen muang ensemble heard on track 13 is a modern derivative of the piphat mon ensemble. An electric bass, synthesizer, drum set, and occasionally saxophone and electric guitar, are added to the traditional melodic instruments to form a “pop” band that plays more modern music. This music is intended to attract “younger” spirits who may not find the older traditional music as appealing.

Notes by Andrew Shahriari

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