**PROGRAM LYRICS AND NOTES**

**We close the village for rituals** (*Ga sakun / Gate-barring song*)

Today you come to our village, but we must bar the gate.
We use pines and firs and anything with brambles to block the way.
Let no stranger in.
If strangers get in, our ducks and chickens will surely die.

*Often the first Dong music a visitor encounters, gate-barring songs still thrive among some Dong communities during inter-village visits. For the most part, though, this thousand-year-old tradition is reserved for tourists and official guests. Festive-clad women villagers (men, if present at all, are always at the back) confront visitors with bowls of local rice wine, belying the sternness of the words they sing.*

**Mountains are beautiful** (*Ga jun / Narrative da ge*)

Mountains are beautiful: they are covered in blossoms, filled with bird calls, everywhere you can hear singing.
When people walk amidst flowers, their hearts are filled with joy.
Will you come with me?
If our friends are also here, let’s all go up to the mountain to be close to the flowers and songs.

*This polyphonic song describes and praises the natural environment, which is the essence of the Dong belief of harmony between nature and man and among mankind.*

**Cicada song** (*Ga so / Sound imitation da ge*)

Listen closely to my imitating cicadas:
In the third month, cicadas sing for spring.
But after the ninth month, their songs gradually disappear.
Where do they go?
Since I can’t see them, I can only imitate their song with my voice.
But how can my voice compare with their beautiful sound?

*This “sound imitation” song is among the classics of the Dong folk song repertory, in which singers mimic the sounds of cicadas. Cicadas are very common in Dong villages and can be heard all over the area especially in the summer months.*

**Building a pond** (*Ga lawen / Children’s da ge*)

Hey, children! We build a pond that breaks three times a day.
We use bamboo to channel the water as it flows down, learning to till the land just like the adults.

*This song is sung by children at play. It’s lighthearted and in a quick tempo. Popular in the areas of Liudong and Jiudong, it also provides a fair description of mountain farming, where terrace rice fields also serve as artificial ponds for farming fish.*

**Rice song** (*Ga lawen / Children’s da ge*)
On the hills are freshly grown rice fields. 
On the terraces are rice stalks turning lush green. 
We fill our granaries with rice. 
Later, we make rice cakes and rice wine. 
*This is a popular children’s song in many Dong villages.*

**The more we sing, the merrier our hearts** *(Ga lao / Drum tower da ge)*

Those who don’t sing will see their youth pass them by. 
Every time I sing, my heart is merry, my mind is alert, 
as if I’m getting younger by the day. 
Who can rob me of the songs I learned? 
If someone wants to learn from me, 
I’ll teach him songs as melodious as cicadas. 
*A didactic purpose is embedded here: to encourage young people to learn Dong polyphonic singing. This song lays out a simple philosophy of life. It is most often performed in the village drum tower, a Dong structure looking like a cross between a Chinese pagoda and a fir tree, providing a gathering space for singing and dancing as well as village meetings.*

**If I don’t sing, my friends say I am proud** *(Ga lao / Drum tower da ge)*

If I don’t sing, my friends say I am proud. 
If I sing at home every day, my friends say I’m open-hearted. 
I do what my friends say. How long can one live anyway? 
Even if the mountain soil doesn’t erode, stones will roll down, 
the stream will be blocked, the fields will flood, which worries me. 
When the mountain is blocked, I can search for another path. 
But if friends stand in my way, nothing can be salvaged. 
*These lyrics offer conventions of how one should act, whether toward neighbors or their natural surroundings. This song is often performed in the village drum tower.*

**Sorrow of love lost** *(Ga nya / River song)*

When did you find your new lover? 
You’ve long forgotten about us, right? 
I still remember when we met all those years ago, 
you promised a love that will last forever, 
and your words are emblazoned in my heart. 
Have you forgotten them now? 
*When young people meet each other along the riverbank or in the mountain, they might engage in such a song.*

**My mother forces me to marry** *(Ga di [Flute song] / Crying bride’s song)*

When the rice stalk turns yellow, we harvest it. 
When a girl grows up, she must marry. 
My mother forces me to marry, but I want to remain at home. 
I’m afraid when I marry I won’t have time to speak with my mother.
Chickens, ducks, pigs and geese wait for me to feed them.

*This is a song a bride-to-be would sing to express her sorrow in leaving her maternal home.*

Traditionally, young Dong girls would move into their husband’s family home after marriage.

*This song is normally accompanied on a folk bamboo flute.*

**Vine and tree entwine** *(Ga gogi / Ox-leg fiddle ballad)*

(Woman) Those green vines in the forest entwine the tree trunk.
Yet I cannot be entwined with my love.
Vines grasp the trunk, yet I cannot hold onto my love?
(Man) I come here to your home, bringing a chair to sit alongside you,
asking softly whether you miss me?
Perhaps you have a new love, you only sit here out of duty.
I can only sigh and weep alone in sorrow.
You have someone you can lean on.
You’re well provided for, living a good life.
You’ve long forgotten me.
In the beginning we were so in love and we promised to be together.
I remember both of us tilling the fields then, yet now we are separated.
I still remember what you told me a long time ago.
Perhaps in this life we’ll never be together.
Our love seems like it happened yesterday.
The elders have always said, you can’t easily renege on your promise.
So how could you forget your own words?
I really want to tell you: if you leave your lover now,
I’ll be with you again, just as when we started.

*Apart from the folk pipa, the ox-leg fiddle is another instrument often used in songs in yuetang, a gathering place where young people court each other, singing love songs. The ox-leg fiddle in the Dong language is gogi.*

**I’ll always remember the love we shared** *(Ga baijen / Mountain song)*

Lover, do you still remember our past?
We picked fruits from the mountains.
There wasn’t even grass where we sat.
The river we walked across still carries our footprints.
I’ll always remember the love we shared.

*This solo song expressing longing is sung by someone walking in the mountains, or taking a break from agrarian labor.*

**Starry sky and bright moon** *(Ga gogi / Ox-leg fiddle ballad)*

We vowed our love in the sunny second month.
Spring has passed this year and it’s soon spring the next year.
A boat needs an oar to cross the river.
People need to get along in order to maintain friendship.
I want to be with you like a pair of butterflies.
I want to be with you like a pair of swans in the sky facing the wind and rain.
I want our love to be like flowers always in bloom.
This is a love song popular in the Chejiang area. Women would accompany sotto voce, while men would accompany using pipa and/or ox-leg fiddle.

**Missing you** (Shangzhong *Ga biba* / *pipa* ballad)
I’ve missed you for a long time.
When I dream of you every night, I smile.
I remember all the words we said, but you haven’t seen me lately.
Could you have treated what we said as mere fun and games?
I’ve been waiting for you for years,
but I can’t even catch a glimpse of your shadow.
Now I’m like a fool who can’t get anything done,
thinking of you every day, hoping you’ll return.

*Shangzhong is one among 48 prominent Dong villages in Liping County, Guizhou province. The folk pipa of Shangzhong is famous in the region, and Shangzhong song repertory includes such themes as love and longing, historical epics as well as fun and satire. This song is especially moving, the lilt of the pipa almost like the soft caress of a hand.*

**My lover lives far away** (Liudong *Ga biba* / *pipa* ballad)
I don’t have a loved one now and I am anxious.
My lover lives far away, we are separated by mountains and waters.
We cannot be together.
Young lover, wherever your home is, surely you have a wife there.
Although we meet here thanks to divine providence, there is no future for us.
You are here simply to have some fun.
Your wife must be longing for you at home.

*This is one of the most famous Liudong pipa songs, a love song through which a singer tests out the other. For example, the last line questions whether the man is already married or engaged.*

**Soulmates** (Chejiang *Ga biba* / *pipa* ballad)
(Woman) We come together to sing in *yuetang*.
You make me long for you,
because you are just like a fish in the river hiding under rocks.
(Man) We come from afar to meet with you,
hoping we would fall in love and have a family.
Wishing to marry you, we even consulted a geomancer.
(Woman) When we were in love,
everything you said was like an imperial decree, and I believed all of it.
Now you have another love, I can only be alone and I miss you.

*The Chejiang area is in Rongjiang County of Guizhou. Chejiang pipa songs are accompanied not only by a medium-sized pipa but also a small ox-leg fiddle. Normally, women use falsetto while men use their natural voices. This song is another example of yuetang repertory.*

**When elders live long, families are harmonious** (Hongzhou *Ga biba* / *pipa* ballad)
Please listen quietly to my song:
When a family has meat and liquor, serve the elders first.
When you have sweet wine, exchange it for bitter wines from your friends.
The elders stay at home with the grandchildren.
When grandchildren learn to take care of themselves, the elders get to enjoy life.
After the autumn harvest, wild fruits hang high up on the trees.
After serving the elders the best pickings,
take the rest, whether sweet, sour, bitter or spicy.

_Hongzhou pipa songs are popular in the area around Pingjia, where people also make their own folk pipas. This is a song about family values and each generation’s respective position in the household._

---

**A river flows quietly in a Dong village** (*Ga jun / Narrative da ge*)

I walked along the river but didn’t see my love,
just as Long’e and Guiyang rivers never meet.
It’s getting dark. I miss you so much I couldn’t even tell day from night.
I pine for you every day, but still you don’t return.
Our relationship is just a river crab longing for a bird in the sky.

_This is about longing for love, using analogies of river, crab, and bird to represent love and admiration._

**I use a blue cloth to hide my heart** (*Ga jun / Narrative da ge*)

If I marry someone I don’t love, I’d rather play dumb—
I’d search for indigo in the mountains and hide my heart.
A happy couple, even if they till fields far apart,
will still try to speak with each other.
A couple that has no love, even if working side by side,
will have nothing to say.
If a man treats his wife badly,
village elders will chastise him.
If a woman treats her husband badly,
it’s like falling off a cliff and never climbing up again.
Ah! Sixty years is not a long time.
Why can’t we just get along?

_This lighthearted song from the Liudong-Jiudong area offers a flexible springboard for this dazzling arrangement. Particularly notable in this colorful text-painting is the polyphonic sounds of the “happy couple” shouting to each other across the fields._

**Cicadas are crying** (*Ga so / Sound imitation da ge*)

During the day in the mountains, I hear cicadas crying,
as if lamenting their mothers who have passed.
They cry while perched on trees, and I think to myself:
I’m older than these cicadas.
They cry for their lost youth, yet I’m more brokenhearted than they are.

_Whether because of their association with springtime, or their use of sound as a mating call, cicadas figure prominently in Dong folklore and their call has inspired the distinctive vocal technique featured here._

---
Little goat (Ga lawen / Children’s da ge)
Kids search for food in the slopes.
After they’ve filled their stomach, they sing.
Parental love is noble like the mountain.
With tears we kneel before our parents in gratitude of their nurture and love.
*This is a popular children’s song in many Dong villages.*

Visiting granny (Ga lawen / Children’s da ge)
Rowing a boat along the river to visit granny’s house,
our smiling faces are like flowers in bloom.
*This is a popular children’s song in many Dong villages.*

Cuckoos heralding spring (Ga so / Sound imitation da ge)
In the third month, the sun creates a shimmer on the leaves,
and the calls of cuckoos are constantly in the air.
The willow tree by the river is about to bloom
as cuckoos herald the arrival of spring: it is time for seed planting.
The time hasn’t come for transplanting yet,
so we can enjoy each other’s company.
When time comes for transplanting rice seedlings,
we’ll all be busy and can’t spend time together anymore.
*Around the seed planting season (Mang Zhong in the Chinese solar subseasons), cuckoo calls are heard all over Dong villages, sounding similar to the phrase “bo gu” (plant seeds).*

Swallows return in the first and second months (Ga so / Sound imitation da ge)
Swallows return in the first and second months.
During the third and fourth months, cicadas appear.
Cicadas fly around and their cries make us restless,
luring us to follow them up the hill.
After spring comes summer, but by then the cicada cries fade away.
*This song embodies many traits of Dong vocalism: nature as a metaphor for love, vocal techniques colorfully imitating the text (listen to “cicadas fly around nonstop” from voice part to voice part), and the pervasive “ai jiu,” a Dong expression without literal meaning that serves as a cadential exclamation point. Though ga lao were traditionally sung by women, this version reflects a trend from the late 1950s of professional troupes performing arrangements for mixed voices—a trend that has filtered back to local, amateur singers.*

Zhulang and Niangmei (Ga jun / Narrative pipa ballad)
Synopsis: Zhulang and Niangmei met at yuetang and fell in love. According to Dong customs, they could not marry, since Niangmei was betrothed to her cousin. The two lovers eloped to Guandong village in Congjiang county, but the rich man Yin Yi was attracted to Niangmei’s beauty and wanted to take her as his own. He bribed his way and accused Zhulang of plotting with enemies to attack Guandong, a crime for which Zhulang was put to death. Fortunately, two young girls divulged the truth to Niangmei. Niangmei devised a plot: she carried Zhulang’s corpse on her back and beat at the drum tower announcing she would marry
whoever was willing to help her bury Zhulang. Yin Yi agreed, so Niangmei brought him to Changjianpo and killed him, thus avenging her husband’s death. After that, she escaped into the mountains.

*This is an adaptation from a Dong opera, of a real love story that took place in the Dong area more than two centuries ago. The story was even made into a Chinese film in 1962.*

---

**Offering wine** *(Ga kao / Drinking song)*

We are here to offer you wine, just as raindrops fall from the sky, and rainwater flows down the leaves. 
This cup of wine is like water that flows down the leaf. 
Please finish it to the last drop.

_A song that is sung as wine is offered to a guest, popular in the Zhaoxing area._

**We’ll meet again despite a thousand-mile distance** *(Ga kao / Drinking song)*

We are happy that we could meet today. 
We admire your youth and beauty. 
How fortunate we would be if we all share such youth and beauty.

*This song, popular in the Sanlong area, is sung while wine is offered to a guest.*

**Finish this cup, then another** *(Ga kao / Drinking song)*

We come offering wine. Please finish this first cup, then a second. 
We haven’t started with the third and fourth yet, and the fifth and sixth await you. 
Friends from afar, you can’t refuse us.

*This song, popular in the Zhaoxing area, is sung while wine is offered to a guest.*

**Sing and dance together, enjoying peace** *(Do ye / Caitang song)*

Banyan trees by the river are beautifully green. 
Flower, grass and trees all enjoy their youthful prime. 
Dong and Miao people belong to one family, living in harmony, enjoying good fortune, just like chickens living together atop a hill. 
Our songs resound in all four directions. 
All people join together in union. 
Let our peaceful country prosper.

_A legacy of harvest festivals and ritual celebrations, where such songs are generally performed as large circle dances (with or without lusheng), do ye have meshed easily with the unification agenda of New China. Although the Dong people have at times had uneasy relations with the Miao and other minority neighbors, interaction is generally harmonious, occasionally to the point of intermarriage._
MEMBERS OF THE DIMEN DONG FOLK CHORUS

(Children’s chorus)
Wu Guiliang
Wu Kanglian
Wu Nuli
Wu Rongsheng
Wu Xin
Wu Yezhu
Wu Yuanli

(Adult singers/musicians)
Wu Chuanzhi
Wu Guoying
Wu Tao’ai
Wu Taonan
Wu Xinglian
Wu Yuanliang

Wu Zhangshi, Project Director, “100 Dong Songs Program”

Du Kexin, Tour leader and translator
Ren Hexin, Director, Dimen Dong Culture Eco-Museum &
Secretary-General, Western China Cultural Ecology Research Workshop

For more information on the Western China Cultural Ecology Research Workshop/
Dimen Dong Culture Eco-Museum: http://workshop.ffmm.com/

Special thanks to Ren Hexin, Joanna C. Lee, and Ken Smith for compiling
these translations and notes.

This performance is a preview of the 2014 Folklife Festival program focusing on China,
a partnership with the Ministry of Culture of the People’s Republic of China.