

B O U A X O U M U A

The Music of the Hmong People of Laos

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ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE PARENTS OF THE GROOM

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ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE PARENTS OF THE BRIDE

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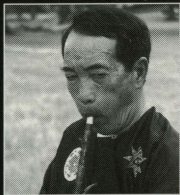
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REFUGEE SONG



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Art Direction and Design by Ann Fell.



B O U A X O U M U A

The Music of the Hmong People of Laos

DOCUMENTARY ARTS



INTRODUCTION

Boua Xou Mua is a spiritual leader and former village chief of the Hmong, a hill-tribes-people from the mountains of Southeast Asia. Among the Hmong people there are several sub-groups, and Boua is a member of the so-called *Blue* Hmong. The *Blue* Hmong have their own dialect and cultural traditions.

Boua arrived in the United States in 1978 at the age of sixty-three and currently lives in Portland, Oregon. As a refugee from the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) secret war in Laos, he joined thousands of his people in making perhaps one of the most severe cultural transitions of any group in history. Over the last sixteen years Boua has stood in proud defiance against the pressures of assimilation and has been a leader in the preservation of Hmong traditional music and culture. The music on this recording carries the listener through the Hmong life cycle, displaying Boua's artistry in the traditional genres of interpersonal and intergenerational communication.

HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY

Prior to the 1950s, the Hmong had no written language. History was transmitted primarily in an oral tradition and, to some extent, was recorded by Chinese writings from as early as the Third Century B.C. In telling the history of his people, Boua Xou Mua recalls the migration of the Hmong from unknown points north to the borders of Vietnam and Laos, and their resistance to the repressive cultural and political authority of the Chinese. Boua says that his extended family includes 150 families, and he traces their descent to a common male ancestor, who entered Laos six generations ago after a massive Hmong

rebellion in Yunnan in 1800. Boua can still recount from memory this kinship network, which he honors as the deliverer of that knowledge which so essentially defines his own life.

Around 1930, when Boua was fifteen years old, he began the formal study of the Hmong oral texts. He worked with his uncle, who, over a period of several years, taught him the music of the *gaeng* bamboo pipes for funeral rites, the traditional wedding and courtship songs, and the rituals of shamanic healing. The Mua family lived in Ban Whoi Na, a village in northeastern Laos where their ancestors had settled three generations ago. It was there that Boua raised a large family and gained status as a religious and legal practitioner for rites of passage throughout the region. In 1960 Boua became the chief of his clan, which by then consisted of 400 people.

In the 1960s, however, the political climate for the 300,000 Hmong in Laos changed dramatically. Ban Whoi Na became Chopper Port 711-I, and Boua and two of his sons were recruited into what is now well-known as the CIA's secret, but unsuccessful, war against the Pathet Lao communists in Laos. The casualty rate of Hmong soldiers was one hundred times more than that of their American counterparts, and by the time the United States pulled out of Laos in 1973, Boua himself had been wounded twice. Then, to avoid the communist reprisals that included the killing of "traitorous" Hmong clan leaders, Boua, accompanied by his wife Ying Thao, daughter Yer and son Lee, struggled to flee their homeland. Finally, on their second try in July, 1976, after trekking ten days on foot across the mountains, running out of rice and

being robbed of their money and jewelry, the Mua family crossed the border into Thailand. There they were placed in the Pua Nam refugee camp, where they lived for two years with the other Hmong people who were fortunate enough to escape from the war-torn mountains of Laos.

In the spring of 1978 the Mua family was granted permission to emigrate to the United States, where they were resettled in Portland, Oregon later that year. Life in Portland was more harsh than Boua ever imagined. Many of the Americans he met were suspicious and openly discriminated against him and his family. Boua's daughter was assaulted, and he himself got into a fight with one of his neighbors. These problems, combined with the difficulties of learning the English language and the insensitivity to Hmong culture in the schools, were almost insurmountable. In the years since, Boua, however, has persevered to deal with constraints and obstacles of American life.

I met Boua in the winter of 1980, when I was organizing a public concert of musicians and dancers from the Asian refugee communities in the Portland area. At that time, I was working with refugee children in the Portland schools and became aware of the general lack of understanding of Hmong culture. Through my encounters with Boua's children, I began to learn about the Hmong and wanted to meet Boua himself. Finally, after visiting Boua at his home, I invited him to participate in the concert program.

When Boua performed, the audience responded enthusiastically and I realized that he was a living

master of Hmong music and dance. Later, with the support of the Folk and Traditional Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts, I developed an apprenticeship program to involve Boua with other Hmong and Lao refugees in the perpetuation of their cultural traditions. In 1984, I nominated Boua for a National Heritage Fellowship, which he received the following year. Since that time Boua has continued to serve as a teacher and leader in the Hmong community in Portland.

This recording is the result of a performance given by Boua at the Meyerson Symphony Center as part of the 1991 Dallas Folk Festival. Folklorist Alan Govenar invited Boua to perform with four other National Heritage Fellows in a memorial concert for Alexander H. Moore, a Heritage Fellow from Dallas who had died in 1989.

During his five-day stay in Dallas, Boua was accompanied by his son Lee, who worked as his apprentice and translator. In addition to the performance at the Meyerson Symphony Center, Govenar presented Boua and Lee in a public program for Asian refugees at the Multicultural Community Center, where Boua was reunited with Kai Moua, a distant relative whom he had not seen since he was forced to leave Laos in 1976.

The recordings on this CD were produced by Alan Govenar at the Announcer's Booth Studio in Richardson, Texas and edited by Nancy Lamb. Additional recordings with Lee Mua I produced in Portland, where I also worked with Lee in the transcription and translation of the song texts.

Jan DeWeese – June, 1995

I. New Year's Songs

The *gaeng* multiple free-reed mouth organ is unique to Hmong culture. It is made from six curved bamboo pipes which are inserted into a wooden wind-chest serving as a reservoir for the player's breath. The *gaeng*'s primary function is to perform the lengthy funeral texts, which are described below, but it is also heard during the December New Year's activities to accompany the player's acrobatic dance and relay secular messages of the variety Boua has composed here. This song expresses perhaps the refugee parents' most elemental feelings, those regarding the immeasurable and inevitable effects of Western education on their children's future relationship to Hmong tradition.

We begin this recording at the New Year because in the Hmong life cycle it is during this relaxed time, with the rice harvest in, that the feelings of puberty are given official sanction and release. The very first utterance of song in Hmong culture is driven by the instincts of courtship. The youthful pair converse flirtatiously through an improvised ritual language called *lu tza*, following well-honed poetic rules that employ a rhyme scheme for building suspense in anticipation of the beautiful sounding rhyming words. Drawing from a timeless repertoire of nature metaphors and mythical scenarios, this sweet serenading accompanies a game in which multiple couples stand facing each other and toss a small hand ball with each line of poetry. As the practice of exogamous marriage, that is, outside of one's clan, is common Hmong law, one village invites another to their New

Year often from mountains and days away. It is only appropriate that Boua's son Lee sings the first of these two *lu tza*, for he has just recently won the heart of a California Hmong woman who is now his wife in Portland. Boua's song is of a variety of *lu tza* that continues to provide expression of many kinds of emotion throughout life.



I. New Year's Songs

QEEJ KAWM NTAUV

Tuag Nyuj qeeg ib txhua nam tuaj txhua xyoo ib leeg twg yuav kaw ntaub?
Ib xyoo nuav, Txawj Nkag Tub Lis Txawm yuav kawm ntaub.
Ib txhua naj tuaj txhua xyoo ib leeg twg yuav kawm ntawv?
Ib xyoo nuav, Txawj Nkag Tub Lis Txawm yuav kawm ntawv.
Txawm Nkag Tub Lis Txawm yuav kawm ntawv kawm tsi txhim.
Yuav kawm ntawv kawm tsi txhua.

Txawm Nkag Tub Lis Txawm yuav kawm ntaub nqeg ntsaag maab.
Yuav kawm ntawv qeg ntsaag suav.
Txawm Nkag Tub Lis Txawm yuav kawm ntaub nrug kawm txhi.
Yuav kawm ntawv tuaj kawm txhua.

Txawj Nkag Tub Lis Txawm yuav rov quas zom yuav lug txug tej teb quas
chaw nuav quas tsi teb? Yuav lug txug tej teb quas chaw nuav, Txawj
Nkag Tub Lis Txawm yuav lug tseg ib leeg nam leeg txiv rov tom ntem.

Txawj Nkag Tub Lis Txawm yuav lug txug tej teb quas chaw nuav.
Txawj Nkag Tub Lis Txawm yuav lug tseg ib leeg kwv ib leeg tij rov to qaab su.
Txawj Nkag nam, Txawj Nkag txiv yuav lug ntshav Txawj Nkag ntahav tsi tau.
Yuav lug rhav Tub Lis Txawm los ntshav tsi txug.
Txawj Nkag nam txawj Nkag txiv xaav qos zoj xaav tu sab, tus sab ntsho.

GAENG SCHOOL SONG

Each year who is going to school?
This year *Txawj Nkaag* goes to school.

Each year who is going to school?
This year *Txawj Nkaag Tub Lis Txawj* goes to school.
Txawj Nkaag Tub Lis Txawj is unable to complete his studies here.

(continued)

He has to continue his education in another town, far away,
where Hmong language is not spoken.

Txawj Nkaag Tub Lis Txawj is able to complete his studies there.

After completed his education, *Txawj Nkaag Tub Lis Txawj* is coming
back to this country here. Whose country?

Coming back to this country. Whose country? *Txawj Nkaag Tub Lis Txawj*
is leaving his mother and father ahead.

Txawj Nkaag is coming back to this country here. Whose country?
He is leaving his older brothers and younger brothers behind.

Txawj Nkaag's mother, *Txawj Nkaag's* father are searching for
Txawj Nkaag, but cannot find him.

They are coming to search for *Txawj Nkaag*, but cannot reach him.

Txawj Nkaag's mother, *Txawj Nkaag's* father think sadly, their
hearts broken.

LUG TXAJ SIB DLEEV

Cab hauv . . . ntshais nkauj quas taab. Hli tuaj thwb thi, zaaj txig zaaj nkawm sawv vij hli.
Yuav vuag zog zaaj txig zaaj nkawg cev plaub ntsuab. Dlaaj dlee pleeg nkauj nraug nuav
has zoo zoo luaj nua. Luas leej tub nqeg tuaj txug. Koj nyob nrug tsi muaj sab los tuaj tso ca muas.
Caag yuav muaj sab tuaj lug quas ntsoo, koj puas yuav nqug rooj nqug tog tsua peb pleeg nkauj
ntsaug nuav thaam ntshuaj quas ntshog txug taag txuj nyuas kev yuav tuaj moog kib cuab.

Ntxhais nkauj quas taab. Hli tuaj thwb thi, zaaj txig zaaj nkawg sawv vij hli. Nim yuav vuag zog zaaj
txig zaj nkawg cev plaub ci. Dlaaj dlee pleeg nkauj nraug nuav has zoo zoo luaj nuav. Luas leej tub
ntoj ntexg quas laag txuj ke dleb nqeg tuaj txug. Koj tsi muaj sab tuaj lug tso ca muas. Caag yuav
muaj sab tauj quas ntsoo ce, koj puas yuav nqug rooj nqug tog nyob tsaws tsua peb pleeg nkauj
ntsaug nuav thaam ntshuaj ntshog txuj kev yuav tuaj moog kib yig.

Cab hauv . . . Pleeg nkauj ntsaug nuav, luas leej tub tas ca muab dlej ab lug tov cawv dlaw. Pleeg
nkauj nraug luas leej tub ntoj txuj kev dleb nqeg tuaj txug mej tsaab teb tuaj rooj ntug nuav. Luas
leej tub yuav pum tau nkauj coob nrug nkaujntau los ni tsi pum taag nam ib tug le kws koj u le
ntxim tau taag luas leej tub nuav plaub caug yim moog nplooj plaw.

Cab hauv . . . Ntxhais nkauj qhuas taab pleeg nkauj nuav luas leej tub tas ca muab cawv dlaw lug tov
dlej ab. Pleeg nkauj nraug nuav luas leej tub yuav ntoj txuj kev dleb nqeg tuaj txug mej tsaab teb
tsuam rooj ntug nuav. Luas leej tub yuav pum tau nkauj coob nrug nkaujntau los luas leej tub tsi
pum tau nam ib tug le kws koj u yuav ntxim tau taag luas leej tub nuav plaub caug yim moog nplooj sab.

Ca hauv . . . Ntxhais nkauj quas taab. Lauv ncuab kau lawg toj suab. Ni yuav kau laam luj lug peg
hauv paag dlej tub. Ntxhais nkauj quas taab dlaj dlee kev pleeg nkauj nruaj nuav zoo tug luaj nua
ib ni yuav muab tug txaj saub kev seev nyob nqeg tauj moog thaam txhij nqeg tauj moog thaam
txhua los ni tsi cuag le kws kojnyob lug tau kuv es kuv nyob lub tau nkaus kob. Ib ni le noj sibqa
nyob tsov tuaj moog si hlub.

Pleeg nkauj nraug nuav ca lau ncuab kau lawg toj suab. Ni yuav kau laam luj lug peg hauv paag
dlej dlaw. Pleeg nkauj nraug nuav ib ni has zoo tug luaj nua ib ni yuav muab tug txaj saub kev seev
nyob tuaj moog thaam txhij nqeg tuaj moog thaam thoob los ni tsi cuag le kws koj nyob tau kuv es
kuv nyob lug tau koj. Ib le noj sig hlub nyob tsov qaab tuaj moog sibqa.

Ca hauv . . . ntshais nkauj quas taab, ntshe muaj hnub dlaaj dlee tuaj lug sib
tau, ce ntshe ib yuav zais tsuj zais neev tauj ntawm tab. Ib moog ua lawm
ib yig neej u nam txhab miv txhi nyob lug tsi lwj ib plaubcaug yim moog npooj sab.

Caag npleg nakuj nraug nuav, dlaaj dlee has zoo tug luaj nua. Muaj hnub
ib dlaaj dlee tuaj lug sib tau, ce ib le yuav zais tsuj zais neev tauj ntawm
taw. Ib moog ua ib yig neej nyob nam txhab miv txhis tsi lwj ib plaub
caug yim moog nplooj plaw.

Zoo nyog laaj xeeb.

LUG TXAJ SIB DLEEV
COURTSHIP SONG BY LEE MUA – LOVE SONG

The moon shines.

A pair of dragons rise and circle around the moon.

A pair of green dragon feathers are caught.

Our relationship is going so well, I travel such a long way here.

If your heart does not want it, put it away.

If your heart needs it, are you going to pull up some chairs for
us to sit down on and talk about marriage?

The moon shines.

A pair of dragons rise and circle around the moon.

A pair of dragon feathers shine.

Our relationship is going so well, I travel such a long way here.

If your heart does not want it, put it away.

If your heart needs it, are you going to pull up some chairs
for us to sit down on and talk about marriage?

This relationship, I say, let us put bitter water mixed with alcohol.

I come such a long way to your place, and I see many girls, but

I see only you are pleasing to my forty-eight livers.

This relationship, I say, let us put alcohol mixed with bitter water.

I come such a long way to your place, and I see many girls, but

I see only you are worth my forty-eight hearts.

A *Lauw Ncuab* bird sings over by the deep pond.

This relationship, we can talk as sweet and as much as we want, but
it is not as good as if we were together.

We will eat and teach together and love each other.

A *Lauw Ncuab* bird sings over by the shallow pond.

This relationship, we can talk as sweet and as much as we want, but
it is not as good as if we were together.

We will eat and love together and teach each other.

When we have each other, we will hide our footsteps under the skirt.

Life, as we live on, will not rot our forty-eight hearts.

When we have each other, we will hide our footsteps under the feet.

Life, as we live on, will not rot our forty-eight livers.

How happy I am!

LUG TXAJ UA NYAAB

Ca hauv . . ntxhais nkauj quas taab, ntshe muaj hnub dlaaj dlee tuaj lug sib tau, ce ntshe ib yuav zais
tsuj zais neev tuaj ntawm tab. Ib moog ua lawm ib yig neej nam txhab miv txhi nyob lug tsi lwj sab.

Caag npleeg nakuj nraug nuav, dlaaj dlee has zoo tug luaj nua. Muaj hnub ib dlaaj dlee tuaj sib tau, ce
ib le yuav zais tsuj zais neev tuaj ntawm taw. Ib moog ua ib yig neej nam txhab miv txhis tsi lwj ib
plaub caug yim moog nploj plaw.

Zoo nyog laaj xeeb.

Cab hauv . . ntum taag ni ntxhais nkauj quas taab has. Cab ntxhais nkauj quas taab, txuj nam ke tauj
moog ua luas nyaab, ntxhais nkauj quas taab xaav tuaj tsi ua los yog puj tshawv kaab yawm tshawv
kaab os ntxhais nkauj quas taab.

Cab txuj ke tuaj ua luas nyaab ntxhais nkauj quas taab xaav tauj tsi ua los nim yog puj tshawv kaab
yawm tshawv ke os ntxhais nkauj quas taab.

Ua ca ntxhais nkauj quas taab ua nyaab quas zoj tuaj taag quas nro txug ntsaag rooj.

Es ntxhais nkauj quas taab yuav moog pum taag puj tshawv kaab yaum tshawv kev tuaj lug quas hlo.

Ua ca ntxhais nkauj quas taab ua nyaab quas zoj taag quas nro. Ntxhais nkauj quas taab ncu ncu leej
nam leej txiv, puab taam tau quas zoj le noob taab txheej le thau u ntxhais nkauj quas taab saww ncig
quas yeev lug ua leej nam leej txiv ib pluag mo.

(continued)

Txuj Kev tuaj moog ua luas nyaab ntshais nkauj quas taab ua nyaab quas zoj txug nraag rooj.
Es ntshais nkauj quas taab nim moog pum taag puj tshawv kaab los yawm tshawv kev tuaj quas dlhais.
Ntshais nkauj quas taab ua nyaab quas zoj taag qos nro. Ntshai nkauj quas taab xaav yuj tuaj tuab
quas ywv ncu ncu leej nam leej txiv, zoo puab taam quas zoj le thau ntshais nkauj quas taab sawv ncig
tuaj tuab quas yeev thau ua leej nam leej txiv nam ib pluag tshais.

Xyoo nuav ntshais nkauj quas taab ua nyaab quas zoj txug nraag dlhej es ntshais nkauj quas taab pum
taag suav dlhej quas su dlhwg luj tsi dlhwg lawg, dlhwg tuaj quas lug rov tuaj tsua nraag tsoob. Ntshais
nkauj quas taab ua nyaab quas zoj taag qos tsho es ntshe yuav ncu ncu ntshais nkauj quas taab leej
nam leej txiv taag nam ib txhis ntshais nkauj quas taab lub luag luaj qoob hos ntshais nkauj quas taab.

Xyoo nuav ntshais nkauj quas taab ua nyaab quas zoj txug nraag dlhej es ni yuav moog pum taag suav
dlhej yig quas su dlhwg luj tsi dlhwg lawg dlhwg tuaj quas lug tsov tuaj nraag u. ntshais nkauj quas
taab ua nyaab quas zoj taag nro es ntshais nkauj quas taab ni yuav ncu ncu leej nam leej txi nam ib
txhis ntshais nkauj quas taab lub hlig luaj nug os ntshais nkauj quas taab.

Ca hauv. . . ntshais nkauj quas taab ua nyaab quas zoj txug luas zej luas zog es ni yuav pum taag luaj
ze luas zog sawv ua taag nam ib kev. Ntshais nkauj ua nyaab tuaj taag quas ntsho los ni tsi muaj taag
nam ib leeg hu lentshais nkauj quas taab leej nam leej txiv nam lub qub npe nam ntshaim nkauj quas taab.

Xyoo nuav ntshais nkauj quas taab ua nyaab quas zoj txug luas zej luas zog es caag luas zej luas zog
sawv ua taag nam ib puab. Ntshais nkauj quas ua nyaab quas zoj taah quas nro txug luas zej luas zog
nim tsi muaj taag nam ib leeg zoo le ntshais nkauj quas taab leej nam leej txiv nam lub qub suab.

Xyoo nuav ntshais nkauj quas taab ua nyaab quas zoj tag quas nro txug rooj toj peg quas sua txuj nam
kev aav moog luaj lab. Ntshais nkauj quas taab yuav muab leej nam leej txiv tso quas pluav tseg, yuav
moog zeem taag puj maab yawm suav ua ntshais nkauj quas taab leej nam leej txiv tuaj moog tseeb ntsab.

Xyoo nuav ntshais nkauj quas taab ua nyaab quas zoj tuaj taag quas tsho es ce hlo tsoob toj peg quas
sua txuj kev aav moog luaj dlub. Xyoo nuav ntshais nkauj quas taab ua nyaab quaj taag quas nro,
ntshe yuav moog zeem taag puj maab yawm suav ua taag ntshais nkauj quas taab leej nam leej txiv
moog tseeb lub.

Tsaav chim laaj xeeb.

COURTSHIP SONG BY BOUA XOU MUA – THE WAY OF BECOMING A WIFE

The girl thought that she does not want to become a wife.
Still, the great grandmother already created the way, and the great
grandfather already created the path.

The girl thought that she does not want to become a wife.
Still, the great grandmother already created the path, and the great
grandfather already created the way.

If the girl becomes a wife and moves toward the door, she will see
the entire path that the grandparents created. When the girl becomes
a wife, she misses her parents so much and remembers when she still
lived with them and got up to cook dinner.
If the girl becomes a wife and moves toward the door, she will see
the entire path that the grandparents created. When the girl becomes a
wife, she thinks in her heart quietly that she misses her parents so much
and remembers when she still lived with them and got up to cook breakfast.

This year the girl becomes a wife and moves toward the river. She sees
the Chinese stream flow off the mountain. She becomes a wife and misses
her parents through her whole life whenever she works.
This year the girl becomes a wife and moves toward the river. She sees
the Chinese stream flow so far away. She becomes a wife and misses her
parents through her whole life whenever she labors.

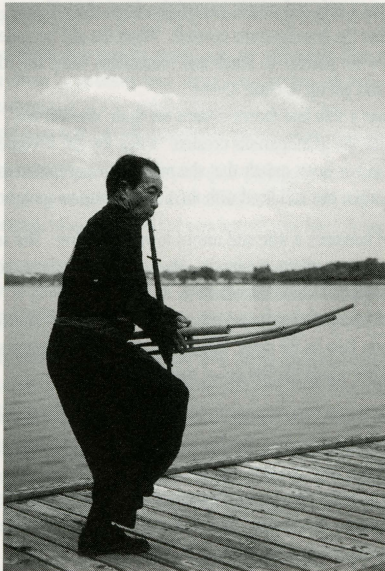
The girl becomes a wife. She moves through the village and sees the
village people standing together. She becomes a wife and she does not
hear anyone call the same name as her parents.
The girl becomes a wife. She moves through the village and sees the
village people standing in a group. She becomes a wife and she does
not hear anyone voice sound the same as her parents.

(continued)

This year the girl becomes a wife. She moves across the bare mountain on a path of red soil. She is leaving her parents and is going to accept the other people as her true parents.

This year the girl becomes a wife. She moves across the bare mountain on a path of black soil. She is leaving her parents and is going to accept the other people as her real parents.

There is sadness in the heart.



II. Courtship Instruments

As it is often the case that the young person is too shy to sing the love poem directly, Hmong culture has devised an elegant means for masking the raw vocal utterance. To flirt safely from a distance, the shy ones can play bamboo flutes, sending comprehensible messages due to the tonal character of the Hmong language. Each of eight tones of the spoken language can completely change the meaning of the syllable it effects, and these contours correspond to the pitches on the flutes, of which there are two varieties, the *dja njer* (with a fippled mouthpiece) and the *dja mblay* (with a single free reed). But if out in the jungle without a flute and needing to send a message, a banana leaf called *dzua blaung* can be used by curling it under the tongue to form the scale. However, there is no Hmong text or translation for the leaf. The final communications of courtship are sent on a metal Jew's harp called *nja* which resonates to the vowels of the mouth cavity and the wooings which are too intimate to translate.

TSAAJ NTSAWS

TSAAJ SIB DLEEV

Khua koj sab los tsi khua ntxhais nkau see nrug li taab.

Es . . . Khua kuv sab yuav caj los yuav tuag, koj puav yuav paub los tsi paub?

Es . . . koj yuav dleev txiv leej tub los tsi dleev nam ntxhais nkauj see nrug le taab.

Aws khua koj sab los tsi khua, aws ntxhais nkauj see nrug li taab.

Khua kuv sab yuav caj los yuav tuag, koj yuav paub los tsi paub?

Khua kuv sab yuav caj los yuav tuag, ntshe kuv yuav tuag koj yuav paub los tsi paub?

Es ntshe koj yuav dlee txiv leej tub los tsi dleev.

DJA NJER – LOVE SONG

Are you full of desire or not, girl?

I am so full of desire my heart is broken.

Do you know or not?

Do you want to speak of love with me or not, girl?

I am so full of desire my heart is broken.

Do you know or not?

(continued)

Do you long for me or not, girl?
I am so mournful, I may die, do you know or not?
Do you want to speak of love with me, or not?

TSAAJ NPLAIM

TSAAJ SIB DLEEV

Ntum taag quas ncu miv ntxhais nkauj moob.
Ntum ntum ni miv pum moob, puas yuav khua koj
sab los tsi khua hos miv ntxhais nkauj moob?
Miv pum moob, khua kuv sab yuav caj los khua kuv sab yuav tuag.
Khuav kuv yuav tuag, koj yuav moog koj, koj yuav tseg kuv ca.
Es khua kuv sab ua luaj nua es koj yuav paub los tsi paub?
Khua kuv lub sab ua luaj nua es kuv yuav moog kuv es kuv tseg koj ca.

DJA MBLAI

Hmong girl, are you feeling lonely? Maybe not as much as I do.
I am so lonely I could end up a suicide. I am so lonely I could die.
You will leave me and and leave me behind. I feel so lonely, do
you know or not? I feel so lonely, what are you going to say to me?

Music for Intergenerational Communication

III. Wedding Songs

If the courtship proves successful, the young couple's families will set into motion the highly ritualized negotiations for the traditional wedding. The Hmong laws for marriage are very strict, and all must listen now to the ancestors as they speak through the prescribed texts and actions to insure that the union be blessed. The parents of the bride and the groom each arrange for a representative to facilitate these communications leading up to (as well as formally closing) the three-day ceremony with feasts at both at the villages of both families. A third legal agent coordinates the proceedings of the ceremony itself. All of this is conducted in song. In the two pieces presented here, the gravity of the marriage commitment is relayed by the symbols of the bull and of the umbrella, representing respectively the elemental power of the instinct for procreation and the security inherent in married life and ancestral blessing.

ZAAJ TSHOOB – CEEB TOOM NAM TXIV

Ib hiv chiv yig tuaj las kuv nam kuv txiv meb tog nua.
Zoo li cuaj hnuv meb tsua phwb nyog meb txuj kaab kug.
Yim naj es meb tsua phwb li pho lawm meb txuj kaab tshoob.
Meb txiv nyuj li pwm li tawm li plawg lub hli nkuam xyoog.

Cuaj hnuv tes meb tsua phwb nyog meb txuj kaab tshoob.
Yim naj es meb li phwb li kho lawg meb txuj kaab kug. Yaus meb txiv nyuj
le pwm I i txauj le dlua lub hlis nkuaj txhig.

Es meb tsua muab tau meb txiv nyuj li pwm cob nkaus tsua lawg laaj tub laag
quas yau ib tej qub npaazab. Laaj tub laab quas yau ib le lawv tau meb txiv
nyuj li pwm tuaj moog nce kaab huas.

Ntse meb tsua muab tau meb txiv nyuj li pwm cob li nkaus tsua laaj tub laag
yau ib tej qub teg, Ib le lawv tau meb txiv nyuj li pwm moog nce kev huas.

Laaj tub laag yau ib lawv tau meb txiv nyuj li pwm moog khi nkaus tsua
kuv nam kw kuv txiv meb tog u nam tug yeeg ntaab. Ntse kuv nam kuv txiv
meh tog u tsi txais nyog laaj tub laag yau ib lub hli tsooj tshoob ce
ib le lawv tau meb txiv nyuj li pwm nrug tsov qaab hos.

Kuv nam kuv txiv meb tog u txais nyog laaj tub laag yau ib lub hli tsooj
tshoob ce wb le saws tau kuv nam kw kuv txiv meb tog nua nam ib leeg moog
zoo nyaab ni kuv nam kuv txiv yuas.

Zoo li laaj tub laag yau ib laww tau meb txiv nyuj li pwm moog khi nkaus
kuv nam kws kuv txiv meb tog u nam tug ncej tse. Ntse kuv nam kuv txiv meb
tog u tsi txais nyog laaj tub laag yau ib lub hli tsooj tshoob ce ib tsua
laww tau meb txiv nyuj li pwm rov nrug fi ke hua.

Kuv nam kuv txiv meb tog u txais nyog laag tub laag li yau ib lub tsooj
tshoob ce laaj tub laag li yau ib saws nyog kuv nam kw kuv txiv meb tog
nua nam ig leeg moog zoo sev nua la kuv nam kuv txiv yuas.

Faam saib los tshawj txheej, see see saib los tshawj yig. Txu ka tsi
txu yis lum yeeg quas yis tsi tsu chi.

WEDDING SONG:

ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE PARENTS OF THE GROOM

Parents of the groom, in nine days you want your wedding. In eight nights you need your wedding.
At your wedding your bull will come out of the bamboo fence.

In nine days you need your wedding. In eight nights you want your marriage ceremony. Your bull
will stomp in the dirt and walk around.

You place your bull into our *Laaj Tub Laag Quas Yau* arms. We *Laaj Tub Laag Quas Yau* will
chase your bull onto the path.

You place your bull into our *Laaj Tub Laag Quas Yau* hands. We *Laaj Tub Laag Quas Yau* will
chase your bull onto the trail.

We *Laaj Tub Laag Quas Yau* will take your bull and tie it to the overhead storage space in the
house of the parents of the bride. If the parents of the bride do not accept this wedding, then we

will chase your bull back down the path. If the parents of the bride accept this wedding, then we
will have a good daughter-in-law for you.

We *Laaj Tub Laag Quas Yau* will take your bull and tie it to the center post of the house of the
parents of the bride. If the parents of the bride do not accept this marriage, then we will chase
your bull back down the trail. If the parents of the bride accept this marriage, then we will have
a good wife for your son.

Think about it and do not feel angry.

ZAAJ TSHOOB - QEB TSOOG TUAM NTSAA

Ib hiv chiv yig tuaj las kuv nam kwv kuv txiv meb tog nua os.
Laaj tub laag quas yang ib nyob ib cuaj hnuv kev tuaj tuab quas nrug,
kuv nam kws kuv txiv meb tog u xa li chiv yuav pw khu, meb tsua ntim
su li zoj tuaj ntsuab naab es ntseg cwj li tawv ceeb nrug hu txug.

Laam tub laag quas yau ib nyob taag ib yim mo kev tuaj tuab quas zaag
es kuv nam kwv kuv txiv meb tog u tsua xa li chiv yuav pw tshoob,
meb tsua ntim su li zoj tuaj ntsuab naab ntseg cwj li tawv ceeb lug hu poob hos.

Zoo li es laam tub laag quas yau ib xaav ib tsua tsi tuaj es muaj
tub li tas ce yuav muab nyaab, muaj ntshais li tag yuav muab qua.
Ib thum tsi nyog lub txheej luj tsi nyog kws lub yig es.

Laaj tub laag li yau ib nqe sua nqe tuaj txug, kuv nam kuv txiv
meb tsua tsaws nyog. Kuv txiv tsua tsaws nyog pwj caw tsua laaj
laaj twb laag li yau ib hos. Xyeeb nyog txuj kaab tshoob kev
kug tsua laag yau ib taug. Kuv nam tsua zoo sab, kuv nam tsua
tua nyog lawm puj qaab tsua laaj tub laag yau ib noj es. Xyeeb nyog laws
txuj kaab tshob kev kug tsua ib ntoj.

Kuv nam kuv txiv meb tsua muab tau lub kaus dlob kau li vuas cob

(continued)

nkaus tsua lawg laaj tub laag yau ib tej qub npaab. Ib coj tau nkauj kaus moog ntoj kaab.

Kuv nam kuv txiv meb tsua muab tau lub kaus dlub kau li vuas cob nkaus tsua lawg laaj tub laag yau ib tej qub teg. Ib tsua coj kaus moog ntoj ke.

Laaj tub laag yau ib kwv tau lub kaus dlub kaus li vuam tuaj txug ntsaag taj ni poob ntsaag tug. Muaj pug li tsi ib pum tau kuv nam kuv kws txiv meb lub rooj taag li tu ntsa nyog nam tug ntsa xyoob. Laaj tub laag li yau ib tsua lauj xwb teg quas naas nrug dlawj tsi poob.

Laaj tub laag yau ib tsua kwv tau lub kaus dlub kaus li vuam tuaj txub ntsaag taj poob ntsaag tu. Muaj pug li tsi ib pum tau kuv nam kuv kwstxiv meb lub rooj taag li tu ntsa nyog lawm nam tug phoo nyaj. Es laaj tub laag yau ib tsua lauj xwb tex quas naam dlaj.

Laaj tub laag yau ib tsua nqeg sua nqeg tuaj txug, laaj tub laag yau ib tsua tsi pum qaab vaam khom. Ib tsua cwj theeb kws sawv saas puas saas li thawv kuv nam kws kuv txiv meb tug laag nyaj laag kub le dlawj quas hawv. Laaj tub laag yau ib tsua cuj theeb kws sawv saampuas saam li tho kuv nam kuv txiv meb tug laag nyaj laag kub le dluag li hlo.

Laaj tub laag yau ib nqeg tuaj txug. Laaj tub laag yau ib tsi pum qaab vaam kho, vaam kho quas li ntsoov kuv nam kuv txiv meb muab meb tug yuv sij lug txug dwawg. Meb lub roob taag li tu le nplaam tuab li plawg.

Laaj tub laag yau ib tsi pum qaab vaam kho, vaam kho li ntsoov kuv nam kuv txiv meb muab tau meb tug yuav sij lug txug ncua es meb lub rooj taag li tu le dlaam tuaj tuab quas dlua.

Meb qeb nyog meb lub roob taag li tu quaj lig qeeg rov moog ti luav es laaj tub laag yau ib le tau nyog lawg txuj kev tuaj.

Vaam kho li ntsoov kuv nam kuv txiv meb muab tau meb lub rooj taag li tu qheb quaj lis qeeg nrug moog ti haav. Laaj tub laag yau ib le tau txuj ke laag.

Faaj saib li tag los tshawv txheej, see see saib los tshawv yim. Txus ka tsi tsus xaa luj yeeq qo yig tsi tsu chi. Nua las kuv nam kuv txiv meb tog nua.

WEDDING SONG:

ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE PARENTS OF THE BRIDE

Parents of the bride, we *Laaj Tub Laag Yau* live nine days away from the parents of the groom. They prepared lunch and came to us. We live eight nights away from the parents of the groom. They prepared lunch and walked to our place and asked us for help.

We *Laaj Tub Laag Yau* think that we do not want to come. but if there is a son, he is going to have a wife, and if there is a daughter, she is going to have a husband. This being so, we cannot hold back this tradition of marriage.

We *Laaj Tub Laag Yau* went to the house of the parents of the groom. The father was so happy in his life, he brought his alcohol for us to drink. He entrusts us with the rules for walking through the wedding ceremony.

We *Laaj Tub Laag Yau* went to the house of the parents of the groom. The mother was so happy inside her heart, she killed a chicken for us to eat. She will have us take charge of the seeding ceremony. The parents of the groom put an umbrella into our arms.

We *Laaj Tub Laag Yau* took the umbrella across the land. We say the door of the parents of the bride's house tied shut with a long piece of bamboo. We used our hands to shake it, but it did not drop.

We *Laaj Tub Laag Yau* took the umbrella across the land. We saw the door of the parents of the bride's house shut tight with nails. We used our hands to try to open it, but could not.

We *Laaj Tub Laag Yau* did not know where to get help, so we hope that your long piece of bamboo will drop and the nails will come out. We also await your bringing the keys, so the door can open. When the door swings open, it will be heard way up the canyon. Then we can walk though.

Please consider this and do not be angry.

IV. Funeral Music

Like that for the wedding, the music that accompanies continuously the three to six day funeral rite is also strictly memorized. In addition to eulogizing the deceased, these texts provide a timely recharging of the Hmong cosmology into the hearts and minds of the surviving generation, helping heal the wound of death by opening channels of support from the great lineage of those who lived before. As relayed above, the songs are blown on the *gaeng* bamboo pipes, encoded in a mesh of drones which makes comprehensible to the soul of the deceased the guidance they offer through the celestial world. The player's spinning dance is designed to confuse any evil spirits chasing the soul on its horseback journey up into the ancestral abode.

QEEJ NQUG ROOJ

Taug nyuj qeeg tuag nyuj qeeg
Yuav tsaus ntuj moog taav nuav, tsau zua moog taav nuav.
Piv yuav huav, piv yuav huav. Puj quas nag npauj kaab ntsais
lis tsab yuav dlua toj, los nraug kaab ntsai ntsai li tsab yuav dlua peg.

Puj quas na Tub Li Txu Coj Li Thawv teg quas lawm yuav lug taw lub
teb loom coj teb tsaab kaaj quas lug pum quas nam leej tub tuag tej
hauv muag ncoo su.

Pum quas na Tub Li Txu Coj Li Thawv teg quas laum yuav lug nqug lub
li rooj los plaub txhais ceg la tsua to taag. Yuav lug nqug lub li rooj las
plaub txhais tau tsua ntsuab tsev.

Pum quas na Tub Lis Txu Coj Li Thawv teg yuas laum yuav moog hu leej
txiv coj dlaab zau quas ncua tuaj peg rooj. Los yuav moog hu yawm
txiv laug zau dlua tuaj sau tog ho . . . Puj quas na yuav moog hu leeg txiv
xaiv tuaj txiv lug sawv quas ntsai tuaj ntsaag taug.

Qaaj li rooj qos tsi txawb? Qaab li rooj ib nti ntsaab nti txhuv lug txawb.
Sau li rooj qos tsi txawb? Sau li rooj ib nti ntsab nti txhuv lug txawb.
Qaab li rooj quas tsi pua? Qaab li rooj las cuaj laav tsuj las yiv

laav npuag ib yuav lug puab.

Sau li rooj quas tsi puab? Sau li rooj cuaj laav tsuj las yiv laav npuag.

Ib yuav lug puab puj quas na Tu Li Txu Coj li Thawv yuav moog hu leeg
txiv coj dlaab zau quas dluav tuaj peg rooj. Yuav moog hu yawm txi
laug zau qua dlua tuaj sau tog.

Yuav moog hu leeg txiv xaiv tuaj txiv lug sawv quas ntsai tauj ntsaag taug.

Yuav lug txi puj nam leej nyaab hlub tsaam qaab nkuag tsoo qaab phaa.

Leej nyab hlub txaws tsi muaj los leej nyab hlub seev quas yeeg quaj

quas ntsauv kua muag poob, kua mus si.

GAENG EVENING SONG: PULL THE TABLE

The evening is here, the darkness has come.

The lights of the female fireflies flash and pass out of sight. The lights of the male fireflies flash and disappear.

The hands of the directors of the funeral ceremony are going to light the oil lamp. It shines on the head of the deceased person.

The hands of the directors of the funeral ceremony are going to pull the table with four legs over next to the deceased person, are going to pull the table with four feet over into the middle of the room.

The hands of the directors of the funeral ceremony will place the person who will serve food and alcohol to the deceased person at the first chair. They will place the person who will perform the legal rites at the second chair.

The hands of the directors of the funeral ceremony will place the two persons who will ask the questions about the deceased person across the table from the first and second chairs.

Under the table, what is sitting there? Under the table, there is a bowl with rice.

On top of the table, what is sitting there? On top of the table, there is a bowl with rice.

Under the table, what is sitting there? Under the table, there is alcohol.

(continued)

On top of the table, what is sitting there? On top of the table, there is alcohol.

The directors of the funeral ceremony now place the person who will serve food and alcohol to the deceased person at the first chair. They now place the person who will perform the legal rites at the second chair.

The directors of the funeral ceremony now place the two persons who will ask the questions about the deceased person across the table from the first and second chairs.

QEEJ TAAG MO

Tuag nyuj qeeg, tuag nyuj qeeg, ntuj ntuj rhi, ntuj ntsaab rhi.
Ib teb rhi ntuj ntsaab rhi, piv yuav huav, piv yuav huav.

Puj quas nam yuav lub pw, yawm quas txiv yuav lug dlub.
Puj quas nam yuav lug pw txug ntuj rhi, ntuj ntsaab rhi.
Yawm quas txiv lug pw ib teb rhi tej taag mo.

Puj quas nam tsaag lis dleev txug qab caij qab tsi quaj, txug dlev caij dlev tsi tum suv.
Pum quas nam tsaag lis dleev loob nyua qua, sawv li tseeg loob nyua qw.

Pum quas nam yuav moog has yawm quas txiv ib loob nyua quaj.
Pum quas nam yuav moog has yawm quas txiv ib loob nyua qw.
Yawm quas txiv yuav lug has yog luas teb luas le quaj, yog luas chaw luas le qw.

Puj quas nam xaav quas zom sab tsi tuag, plawv tsi kheev.
Puj quas nam, teg quas laum yuav coj xyaab, teg quas naa yuav coj ntawv.
Yuav ntsooj neeb tuaj ntuv yai, ntuv li tsawv txug ntsaag taj.
Leej txiv neeb txiv quas yai, yuav ntsooj neeb tuaj ntuv yai ntshi
li twb li tawg puj quas nam xaav quas ntsoov txuj keb pluj qa quas
nrug lug yuav tawm tuaj. Txuj kev tuag qa quas nrug yuav tawm lug.
Pum quas xaav quas ntsoov, txuj kev pluj yuav lug poob, txuj kev tuag yuav lug ti su.

Pum quas nam nyav quas lawg kua muag poob, nyav quas lawg kua muag si,
kua muag si.

GAENG: MIDNIGHT SONG

"Tuag Nyuj Qeeg, Tuag Nyuj Qeeg", late at midnight, "Piv Yuav Huav,
Piv Yuav Huav".

The wife goes to bed, the husband is coming to sleep.
The wife goes to bed at midnight, the husband is going to sleep.

At midnight, the wife awakens.
It is the chicken's time, the chicken does not sing.
It is the dog's time, the dog does not bark.

At midnight, the wife awakens.
The "Loob Nyua" bird cries.
Awake, the "Loob Nyua" bird screams.

The wife goes to tell the husband that the bird cries and screams.
The husband says it is their country, they cry, it is their land, they scream.

The wife thinks, the heart does not want to die, the liver does not
agree with death.
The wife takes her sacred incense and paper to the shaman.

The shaman performs his ceremony out into the land.
The shaman performs his ceremony and speaks.
The wife thinks that the loss of life is coming out, the way of death
is getting nearer.
The wife thinks that the loss of life is arriving, the way of death is getting closer.

The wife is crying and tears are falling .
Crying out, the tears are falling like raindrops.

V. Song of the Refugee

The awful rip in the fabric of Hmong traditional life here from their fateful involvement in the Vietnam War has pushed one genre *of lu tza* into the front. The sadness of love lost that abounds in natural human relationships is now amplified to refer to a whole past, to family missing, to a place never to be returned to, to a whole way of being never to be known again. Boua Xou Mua refuses to forsake his people's cultural investment in that way of being and has spent his life here acting on that belief. We are proud of him and embrace his heart as he bids, with this closing song, his beautiful Laos a final farewell.

TSI TEB TSAWS CHAW

Awv . . . awv awv. Vim lub teb coj lub chaw tuaj lug
tsi zoo.

Es kuv yuav tsiv teb tsaws chaw taag qos ntso txug
lawm tsooj teb nua. Kuv yuav tseg kuv leej nam leej
txiv, leej kwv leej tig, tuaj tsua ib tsaab teb es . . .

Kuv yuav ncu kuv leej kwv leej tig ua luaj nua, leej twg
yuavpaub los tsi paub?

Es ntshe kuv yuav tuag es kuv yuav tseg kuv leej nam
leejtxiv, leej kwv leej tig tsua ib tsaab teb. Leej twg
yuavpaub los tsi paub?

REFUGEE SONG

Because of the country becoming unpeaceful, I have
toescape to another country.

To this country I leave my parents and cousins in
another part of the world.

I miss them so much, is there anyone who will
know or not?

Maybe I will die and leave my parents and cousins
in another part of the world. Is there anyone who
will know or not?



Suggested Reading

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B O U A X O U M U A

The Music of the Hmong People of Laos

I. New Year's Songs

QEEJ KAWM NTAUV

GAENG SCHOOL SONG

LUG TXAJ SIB DLEEV

COURTSHIP SONG BY LEE MUA – LOVE SONG

LUG TXAJ UA NYAAB

COURTSHIP SONG BY BOUA XOU MUA – THE WAY OF BECOMING A WIFE

II. Courtship Instruments

TSAAJ NTSAWS

DJA NJER – LOVE SONG (Fipple Flute)

TSAAJ NPLAIM

DJA MBLAI (Free Reed Flute)

TSNUAB NPLOOJ

DZUA BLAUNG (Leaf)

NCAAS

NJA (Jew's Harp)

III. Wedding Songs

ZAAJ TSHOOB – CEEB TOOM NAM TXIV

ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE PARENTS OF THE GROOM

ZAAJ TSHOOB – QEB TSOOG TUAM NTSAA

ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE PARENTS OF THE BRIDE

IV. Funeral Music

QEEJ NQUG ROOJ

GAENG EVENING SONG: PULL THE TABLE

QEEJ TAAG MO

GAENG MIDNIGHT SONG

V. Song of the Refugee

TSAAJ NTSAWS – TSI TEB TSAWS CHAW

REFUGEE SONG



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