

**Murut Music of North Borneo**  
Recorded in Borneo by Ivan Polunin  
Ethnic Folkways Library

Folkways Records FE 4459







KULINTANGAN—brass gong (solo)  
KULINTANGAN—several gongs  
KULINTANGAN—several gongs  
DANGULAD NAKALAI KADILLO (song)  
MINUM RAMAI-RAI (drinking song)  
AMUBUS PERAWAN (played on Sumpotan)  
ALEYUL (song) sung by Muruts of the Tagai tribe  
KALIGNATU (pantun song) sung by Tagai Muruts of Penlangen  
MANTISAN (pantun song) sung by Tagai Muruts of Penlangen  
SINGKOKOTAN (dance game)  
KANADAI (song) sung by Baokan Murut tribe from Tulid  
BYE-A-BYE (pantun song) sung by Peluan (Daiti) tribe from Malaiang  
TIMPUN (chant) sung on the lansaran by Muruts of Semambi tribe  
GONGS played by Timogun tribe of Muruts

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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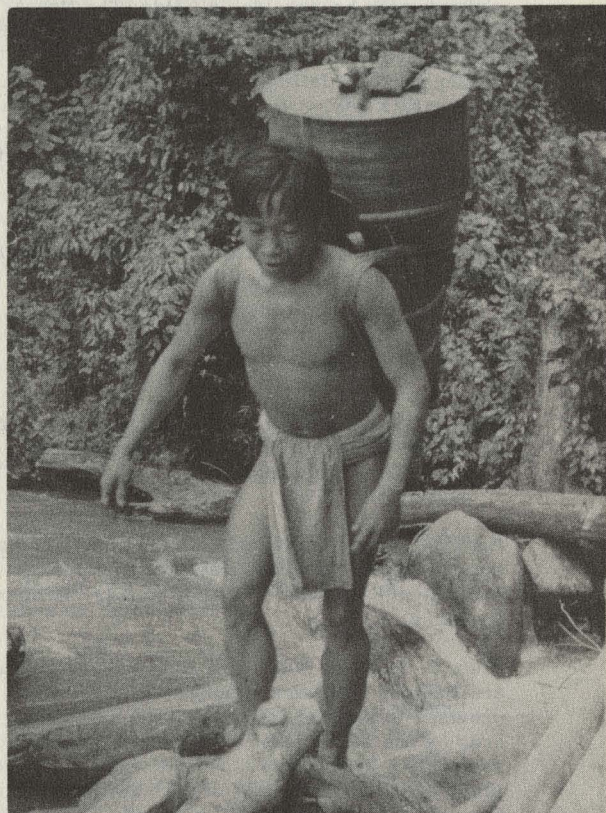
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## THE MURUTS OF NORTH BORNEO

### General Description

The Muruts are a group of related peoples who inhabit the interior of British North Borneo and the neighbouring parts of Indonesian Borneo. They are all shifting agriculturalists except for the Nabai Muruts who are wet padi (rice) farmers.

The typical Murut is a short stocky little man only five feet high, who lives in a large house with several other families of his kinsmen. In the centre of the house in the common hall there is often a Lansaran or spring dancing floor. This consists of a platform mounted on flexible saplings which spring up and down when it is danced on, with loud rhythmic crashes as the floor hits its base supports. Lansaran dancing is a slow and monotonous affair to watch, the dancers moving round their ever moving floor at a snail's pace, but at a celebration the Muruts will dance all night. The house is built on stilts and the ground is reached by climbing down the rather hazardous notched tree trunk ladder. This is a relic of head-hunting days, as the ladders were withdrawn into the house to guard against attack by night. Nowadays, turning the log over so that the notches face downwards will make the house dogproof. The Muruts were headhunters till the beginning of the century, and the practice had some of the elements of a religious cult, the blood feud and the search for prestige. Headhunting was revived during the Japanese occupation. Beautiful headhunting knives are now family heirlooms and form part of the bride price which a young man has to pay for his wife. The Muruts are remarkable for their hospitality. They will receive strangers for an indefinite period and entertain them. The evening of the visitors' arrival will be the occasion for drinking, singing and dancing which usually lasts the whole night through. Beer is brewed from rice or the tapioca root in huge Chinese jars which are greatly valued by the Muruts. Each guest has to drink through a narrow bamboo tube, until a sufficient amount has been drunk, as shown by a marker which shows the fluid level in the jar. When the host has been honoured thus, the level in the jar is topped up with water, and next guest drinks. In front of the drinker there will be appetisers in the form of jungle pork or fish which has been fermented by mixing with rice and "bottem" in a bamboo tube and storing for days or months in a cool dark place till it tastes like very ripe cheese. To help the drinker, gongs are played and



the hunting dogs often take up the refrain in a prolonged and harmonious howl. When the traveller takes his leave, the hosts give him a heartening send-off by gong play.

The Muruts fell and burn the jungle before dibbing in their first crop of hill (dryland) rice. This is a very capricious crop but it is most important in preparing ceremonial food (and drink). Following this, the tapioca (Marioc or Cassava) root is planted. This forms the staple food of those whose padi crop is poor. The tapioca starch is mixed with hot water, until it is like a rather stiff glue. It is picked up by twirling it on one-piece forked chopsticks, and it is dipped into soup to prevent it from sticking in the throat. It tastes of nothing with a rather faint almond flavour due to the pressic acid it contains.

Besides this, there may be the strong rich hill rice, and the meat of forest animals such as pig and deer, which are hunted by the men with spears and hounds.



## SIDE 1

Band 1: Played on the Kulintangan (solo) by one person. Nabai Murut Tribe, Kampong Dangulad, near Keningau, North Borneo.

The Kulintangan consists of a series of small brass gongs tuned to play a scale. The gongs are mounted in a row on a long frame. Each gong rests on two parallel ropes running the length of the frame, and having the effect of slightly damping the sound.

The occasion for the music of cuts 1-5 was a party given to the neighbours and kinsfolk of the householder to thank them for coming to work in ploughing the householder's fields (The Nabai are wet padi cultivators). Most of the work which is too extensive to be performed by a single family, such as felling jungle and planting padi, is done in this way. \* It certainly makes for social solidarity, but the parties may go on all night with drinking and feasting, and may seriously interfere with the amount of work that can be done.

Band 2: Same as (1) but several gongs are also played.

Band 3: Same as 2.

Band 4: Song, Dangulad nakalaid kadilo. A song about the old days of Kampong Dangulad Nabai Muruts, Kampong Dangulad.

Band 5: A drinking song. Minum ramai-ramai; the opening words are Malay for "Drink many many people together". Nabai Muruts, Kampong Dangulad.

(Cuts 5, 7, 8, on Side 1 and Cuts 1 and 4 on Side 2) are Pantuns. These are songs with words improvised to suit the occasion. The new words are sung by one singer, and repeated by the whole assembly. There may also be a word, words or jingle added on to the end of each verse, such as the word "Aleeyui" in 1-7 or in 2-4.

"Tukay tukay sa rantai, tamba-ing satu batu" which is Malay, and means, "turn turn a chain (22 yards), add on another mile". This refers to the work of Muruts in maintaining and building bridle paths. The word Pantun is Malay for a quatrain, but is here used for a social song with

improvised words. As the words are always topical, they usually refer to the visitor and are always kind and most complimentary. Several times they refer to the recording machine.

\* By most Murut tribes.

Band 6: Sumpotan, played by a Peluan (Dalit) girl. The Sumpotan is a small calabash gourd with a mouthpiece. Bamboo tubes issue in a bundle from the side of the gourd. Some of these act as drones, and some of them have stops on which a melody is played.

The Melody is called "Ambubus Perawan" which means, "going on board a dugout canoe".

Band 7: Aleeyui, sung by Muruts of the Tagal (Semambu) tribe from Pensiangan. Recorded on the Lansaran at Sapong Rubber estate, Tenom.

The girl singer is called Yansila, the man is Limpaiung. Some of the words are translatable as follows, but they may not correspond exactly with the cut selected.

The First man singer is (Mandoy) LIMPAIUNG who sings

"We are singing with empty stomachs, with no drink inside us" (This is a reference to the fact that Aleerui is a drinking song). "In the middle of the night we come together in a big crowd".

(Yansila, the girl, sings) "At the time that you (the visitor) come - Aleerui.

(Then there is an interval of laughter)

(Limpaiung sings) "Let all the people come to Sapong Estate"

(Then there is an interval of laughter).

(Binamban /Yamban/, another woman sings)

"For how long a time have we been around, and never met with such a thing" (Referring to the Recording Machine)

(Followed by over modulation and laughter for a long time)

(Followed by the man Limpaiung)





"We are only having fun this time, there is nothing else (such as food and drink) today".

Woman takes over

"For how long from childhood up to our present age did we not see or hear such a thing as this (the recording machine). I've been on Sapong for a long time but it's only now that I come upon such a thing, and somebody who is so clever at capturing voices"

Men join in again and respond.

"I say that there you are, he is a white man. We like him to record these songs  
This is one of the songs of our people, from Pensiangan".

The girl Yansila (with the clear voice) answers

"When we gathered together at Sapong and worked for wages tapping rubber, We all come together in a crowd with the white man to record the songs of our people".

Note: White man in Tagal Murut is Ulun no Kanowai.



"The Padi Egret People". The Kanowai is a snow white egret which follows the herds of water buffaloes in South East Asia.

Band 8: A pantun sung by Tagal Muruts of Pensiangan district, called Kalignatu.

## SIDE II

Band 1: Mantisian, a pantun sung by Tagal Muruts of Pensiangan district, who are dancing on the lansaran, the sprung dance floor, whose rhythmic crashing can be heard from time to time. The lansaran crashes are out of time with the singing.

Band 2: Pensiangan Muruts. Singkokotan, a game played on the lansaran. A prize such as a carved representation (lalapisun) of a head-hunting knife, or a hornbill, which seems to have some totemic significance, or a sum of money, is hung from the roof so that it is about ten feet above the sprung dance floor.

The contestants, who are usually young men, get the floor springing and at the right moment bounce into space and attempt to snatch down the lalapisun.

Band 3: Kanadai, a song sung by the Baokan Murut tribe from Tulid.

Band 4: Bye-a-bye. A pantun sung by people of the Peluan (Dalit) tribe of Muruts from the region of Malaing. Bye-a-bye is derived from the colloquial English farewell "bye bye".

Band 5: Description of the monotone chant on the lansaran. Timpun, sung on the lansaran by Muruts of the Semambu tribe from the River on the Indonesian border. The crashing of the lansaran can be heard most clearly here. The dances will continue this monotonous chant without a halt, all through the night.

Band 6: Gongs. Played by members of the Timogun tribe of Muruts, who live in the alluvial plain of the Padas river.

The first melody is called Kosenangan Hati which in Malay means "The easy heart", which I would call "The happy carefree heart". These Timogun Muruts are the best gong players I have ever heard.

The song in Side II, Band 1 is sung by people who are standing on the lansaran and springing up and down, but not dancing.

In Timpun (Side II, Band 5), the men dance in a circle with hands linked, and are surrounded by a circle of men. The dancers move round very slowly, taking about a minute to make a complete circle.

I could not find any specifically religious or ritual reason for this dance. This dancing was extremely monotonous and sometimes continues throughout the night. Although one suspects a ritual or magical significance to this dance, I was unable to find any.



DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE LANSARAN,  
OR PAPAN,

THE MURUT SPRUNG DANCE FLOOR

(It can be heard in Side II, Bands 1, 2, 3)

The Lansaran (there is a photograph of a Lansaran, in Man Vol. 52 facing p. 17) is the Murut's greatest engineering achievement. It is a small dance floor measuring about eight feet square. It will carry up to forty people, and will spring up and down eighteen inches or more to the rhythm of the dancers.

The Lansaran is usually built in the centre of the communal part of a Murut Long-house (A), but sometimes a lansaran is made and covered with a roof at a place where an important gathering (*tamu*) is held. Important *tamus* are held once or twice yearly in most Murut areas on Government initiative. Jungle produce, such as *damar* (resin from dipterocarp trees) and rattan is sold, or exchanged for store goods. Offences against tribal custom are settled by Native Courts and Officials from various Government departments are usually present.

Method of construction of the Lansaran

There is a square opening in the floor (B), and the space within this opening is floored with a second floor (C), one or two feet below the level of main floor made of rough hewn planks or basketwork.

The houses of the Muruts, like those of most peoples of South East Asia, are built on wooden piles, and raised several feet above ground level. The lansaran is built in the space below the floor. Just be-

low the level of the floor there are two stout horizontal beams (D), parallel to each other and about 25 feet apart. These beams are strongly supported by sharpened poles (E) driven into the ground at oblique angles, and lashed to the crossbeams by rattan. Rattan is the inner core of the stem of climbing forest palms of the genus *Calamus* \*. It is a very flexible material and can resist enormous tensile strains. It is very important to the Muruts, and is used to lash together the framework of Murut houses.

The supports of the crossbeams are driven into the ground in all directions, so that they can take strains in any direction.

About twenty parallel poles (F) stretch between the cross beams (D). They are about three inches in diameter and are made of a tough springy wood such as billian (Borneo Ironwood), and cover the floor (C).

Underneath this is a small number of stouter poles (G) at right angles to poles (F) above and anchored by similar means. These act as shock absorbers, and prevent everybody from dropping through the floor when the lansaran gives way. The regular crashing sound of these two groups of poles C & G striking together can be heard in all the recordings made on the lansaran.

Just above the ground and parallel to the top poles (C) of the lansaran is a second shock absorber, a single stout tree-trunk (H) which carries the load when the floor has sunk too low.

If the lansaran is only little used it may last about two years, but according to Clarke the Muruts try to break the supports of the lansaran by vigorous dancing, as it is considered that if this is done, the highest hospitality has been shown to a guest.

LITHOGRAPHED IN U.S.A.

Diagram of Lansaran, seen in side view.  
Drawn from memory, not to scale, but fairly accurate.  
- Ivan Polunin

