

FOLK SONGS OF VIET NAM

Sung by **Pham Duy**

with **Phung Oanh, Pham Thuy Hoan, Quynh Hanh** and others

Recorded and annotated by **Stephen Addiss**



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Viet Nam has a rich musical heritage. Each part of the country — North, Center, and South, — has its own classical, folk, theatre, and ritual music. In fact, no one piece repeats in any two regions of Viet Nam. Sometimes the title of a song is found in more than one area, but the music in each locale will be entirely different. In addition, the many ethnic minority groups, called Montagnards, have their own distinct music. The whole adds up to a plentiful variety of song, dance, and instrumental fare.

Folk song in Viet Nam springs from poetry, even the work songs sung by those of various occupations as they labor. Included on this record are two of these — the BOAT WOMAN'S SONG of the Center and the RICE-PLANTING SONG of the South. Songs are also composed for festivals. HAT HOI, beginning this record, is such a song. Many of the others were sung at festivals as love songs or laments.

Vietnamese music has been most influenced by that of China. With few exceptions, the traditional instruments such as the 16-string *tranh* are related to Chinese precursors. One exception is the purely Vietnamese *bau*, a single-stringed instrument plucked entirely in harmonics. Its sweet, singing tone can be heard introducing the RICE-PLANTING SONG.

All Vietnamese music is based on the five-note (pentatonic) scale. In the North and Center, this follows the Chinese model of *do re fa sol la*, or the equivalent of the black keys on a piano. In the South, however, the influence of India and Polynesia is felt via the Cham people who used to rule what is now South Viet Nam. The effect of Cham music — admired by the Vietnamese — is found in the Delta, where the scale changed to *do mi fa sol la* or *do mi fa sol si*, the *si* being flattened, the *mi* either minor or major, and occasionally in between. Also, in performance, the *fa* is sometimes raised to *fa#*, with the only stable tones being *do* and *sol*.

In the more usual pentatonic scale of North and Center, any note of the five may serve as tonic, and in the classical pieces, transpositions are allowed so that *do re fa sol la* may switch to *fa sol si# do re*. With these freedoms, the Vietnamese have found a tonal richness in their music despite the simplicity of the scale. Montagnard groups have their own scales and melodic patterns, so that an experienced listener can hear a song that is new to him and, yet, immediately identify the tribe.

Nowadays folk songs continue to play an important role in Vietnamese life. In the days of the Viet Minh struggle against the French, songs were not only an expression of feeling, but also a help against discouragement or lassitude. The Viet Minh even had singers on mountain paths singing specially composed artillery-hauling songs as they brought the guns into position before Dien Bien Phu. One of Pham Duy's songs of this period, THE WOUNDED SOLDIER, has remained so popular that on song-collecting visits to small villages he has heard peasants sing him his own song as one of their own traditional pieces!

Pham Duy has been the most beloved singer-composer in Viet Nam for 20 years, not only because of his fine music, but even more for his ability to capture the feelings of people in his songs — saying for them what they want to express. From his Viet Minh days to his musicological studies in Paris, from studying Montagnard music to field trips in the Delta, Pham Duy has sought the nature of Viet Nam and put it to music. I have seen how he has encouraged student musicians to perform, compose, and teach others.

He is joined on this record by three outstanding young singers and performers, Phung Oanh, Pam Thuy Hoan, and Quynh Hanh, who come originally from the Center, the North, and the South, and are now teaching and performing in and around Saigon.

Other bands on this record were made from field recordings made during several trips to Viet Nam. Folk songs are becoming urbanized, as is happening everywhere, but one can still find people singing as they work and particularly when they gather for a wedding, feast, or festival. The last two songs on the record were recorded at a student concert in Saigon, others were recorded in the hills of the Center. I think this record can give some idea of the tremendous variety and richness of Vietnamese folk music.

Notes by Stephen Addiss

Side I
Traditional Folk Songs

- Band 1 — **HAT HOI** (North) Song of the Full-Moon Festival 1:16
For many hundred years North Viet Nam has been fond of festivals, and many folk songs have been written to be sung at them. This song is for the celebration of good harvest at fall, and says "let's sing for the full moon, the banyan tree, the three-layer hat, and the grey coat" — all festival symbols.
- Band 2 — **HAI HOA** (North) Don't Pick the Flowers 1:23
"My friend, you must pick the flowers with skill, cut only those about to fade, don't pick the flower when it is blooming.
The butterfly plays with the flowers, and kisses them, the flower which shows its affection will be old the soonest, the butterfly plays and the flowers suffer.
The innocent flowers are looking for love, don't let the flower garden become empty."
- Band 3 — **DO DUA** (Center) Love Song 2:01
In this song, a girl tells a man that she loves him and wishes to marry, but that she fears the wedding night.
- Band 4 — **LY TINH-TANG** (Center) Merry Song 3:33
- Band 5 — **LY TINH-TANG** (Instrumental Version) 0:56
This tune, LY-TINH-TANG, is perhaps the best known of the Center folk songs, and it is a love song. It has been taken by the classical musicians of the Center as a chamber music piece. We have the song first, and then the played version. In the latter there is the 16-string *tranh*, the 1-string *bau*, and the 2-string *moon-lute*.
- Band 6 — **HO MAI NGHI** (Center) Boat Woman's Song 3:03
This is the song of the women who pole their boats in the "perfumed river" near the old Vietnamese capital of Hue. It is accompanied by the 2-string violin. You may compare this with an unaccompanied version on Ethnic Folkways record FE 4352 *Music of Viet Nam*. This song has also been adopted and embellished by classical musicians in Hue.
- Band 7 — **HO LO** (South) Rice-Planting Song 2:39
Accompanied by the 1-string *bau*, this work song is a dialogue-duo with chorus. The girl replies to a man's urging to love by saying she must wait for the right man. He says she may grow old and miss the joys of loving, but she says that like the flower she will find her time to bloom. This song is sung in a modern version on the Ethnic Folkways record FE 4352.
- Band 8 — **LY CON SAO** (South) Lament of the Starling 3:02
This sad love song is used in the Renovated Theater of the South. In this version, it features the 16-string *tranh*, which, with the guitar, is the most popular instrument in all parts of Viet Nam for accompanying folk songs, and is also used in Vietnamese classical music.

Side II
Traditional Folk Songs

- Band 1 — **LY CHE HUONG** (South) Song of the Rose 1:30
"When we plant the rose we must cover it, to protect it against rain and sun, so the rose may grow.
When I plant the rose I cover it with my hat, but I cut one beautiful rose, to offer to my even more beautiful girl."
- Band 2 — **LY CHIM QUYEN** (South) Song of the Nightingale 1:12
"The nightingale eats the longan-fruit, the goldfish is happy in his familiar bowl, the husband and wife get accustomed to each other."

Minority, Historical, and Modern Songs

- Band 3 — **SONG OF THE HEROES** (South) 1:32
This historical ballad tells of the brave leaders in Vietnamese history, and how they fought for their country's freedom.
- Band 4 — **THE WOUNDED SOLDIER** (North, Modern) 1:20
This song was written 20 years ago by Pham Duy. It tells of a man leaving the girl he loves, to go to war (then the Viet Minh struggle against the French), and of his finally coming home after having lost an arm. His girl, whom he marries, loves him more than before, and he is honored in his village. He and his wife work the land and long for peace.
- Band 5 — **POEM OF A BUDDHIST MONK** (South, Modern) 2:35
"Six o'clock when I wake, a friend brings me the news — my brother killed.
Now he lies slain, and yet by this house, this wall, a flower blooms.
I still breathe, feel, live — but how can I say all I wish for Viet Nam?"
This song was written recently by Pham Duy to a poem by Thich Nhat Hanh, a young monk.
- Band 6 — **MOTHER OF THE SOUTH** (Modern) 5:04
Another recent song of Pham Duy tells the story of a peasant woman who hides a government agent when she sees a Viet Cong coming. She talks to the guerrilla but soon sees a government platoon on the way. She then hides the Viet Cong in the closet holding the government man. Now who saves whom?
- Band 7 — **WHY BE SO SAD?** (South, Modern) 2:53
This song and the next were recorded in a concert by Pham Duy. In this song he chides self-pity and tells his audience to work together; they all sing.
- Band 8 — **THE RAIN ON THE LEAVES** (South, Modern) 2:17
Perhaps the most popular of current folk songs in Viet Nam, this lovely ballad of Pham Duy has also been recorded in America by Addiss and Crofut on Columbia. "The rain on the leaves is the tears of joy Of the girl whose boy returns from the war. The rain on the leaves is the bitter tears When a mother hears her son is no more."

Recorded by Stephen Addiss
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