

VIETNAM: Songs of Liberation

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To the American people, the war in Vietnam has become -- as did the war of the French in Algeria, of the British in Malaya, of the Portuguese in Angola and Guinea -- the "dirty war." For the people of France, Britain and the United States it has been a reluctant recognition of reality; reluctant because for so many centuries the people of these "western democracies" lived with the assorted illusions that their governments, in subjugating colonial peoples, were carrying "the white man's burden," spreading civilization and fighting for freedom.

In France, as in the United States, the main national holiday celebrates revolutionary struggle, while Britain prides herself on being the "mother of parliaments." But past glories cannot mitigate the naked aggression of the new colonialism; in fact, the paradox helps to underscore it.

Quite understandably, then, the people of the United States, increasingly sick of the killing done in their name, have developed a massive sentiment for peace. But to simply be for "peace" in a world of injustice and exploitation is, in effect, to support the very conditions which cause war.

Now that the sentiment of the American people for an end to their involvement in Southeast Asia has been made clear, it is important, we think, to understand the real nature of events in that part of the world. It is the purpose of this record of songs of liberation of the Vietnamese people to help in that process. For what is at stake in Indochina is the determination of a people to be the masters of their own destiny. The "tragedy" of

Vietnam is in the wasted lives of both the Vietnamese peoples and American young men who have been sacrificed on the altar of what these songs refer to over and over again, *giac My* -- American aggression.

But Vietnam is not only tragedy. It is, too, a story of courage and vision, of love for one's own people and land, which will outlast the mindless technology and outmoded minds of those who direct the affairs of the American people. The songs in this record are a part of that story. They are the songs of a people engaged in struggle; they are intended to inspire fighters and to provide the masses of the people with a broad vision of their place in history. Americans will listen to them, we hope, and draw from them not feelings of sympathy, or even guilt; but anger at that oppressive system of social relations -- and the men who direct its workings -- which has visited destruction of an unprecedented kind on a people of great dignity and vitality, and which at the same time has sacrificed tens of thousands of its own young men in a totally reprehensible enterprise.

Even anger, though, is not enough. A way must be found to translate that anger into struggle so that the people of the United States may themselves be liberated from those self-same aggressors. These songs, and the total experience of the Vietnamese people, may offer us some worthwhile lessons in that respect as well.

PAREDON RECORDS

VIETNAM: SONGS OF LIBERATION

The people of Vietnam, just like people everywhere, have always sung. In the dark night of feudal times, when all but the ruling class was held in the bondage of illiteracy, the peasants told of their misery, and of their hopes for the future. Satire, "more painful than the blow of a bamboo stick," was a powerful weapon against the rulers. The War of Liberation against the French gave birth to a flourishing literature of poems, songs, stories and theatre dedicated to the resistance, and composed by writers who came from the people themselves.

The fighters in today's resistance against *giac My* (American aggression) are on the average about twenty years old. Therefore, the songs speak of longing for loved ones and plans for the days when all will be reunited. Lullabies tell the infants to hurry and grow, so that they, too, can help to defend the homeland. There are songs sung during evening gatherings, while the people prepare traps, sharpen bamboo picks, repair tools and weapons for the next day's defense of the village. There are songs sung during the break from working in the fields, to inspire each other to greater and greater energy for the work necessary to support the fighting men and women.

In the same manner as the ancient story-tellers, the long suffering of the people is detailed, but it is always put in the perspective of past victories, leading to optimism about the eventual liberation of Vietnam from all outside enemies. This record is divided into A) traditional, and B) contemporary songs, but all the texts agree that Vietnam must be independent and neutral, and that no quarter can be given in the struggle for those historic goals.

Optimism, in fact, has been the dominant tone of all the expressions coming from the liberation fighters and their supporters, throughout the long struggles against first the Chinese, then the Japanese, then the French, and now the Americans, down through the centuries. When the American forces grew to over half a million ground troops, when the ground became covered with craters in the most intensive saturation bombing in the history of warfare, when the defoliation of the jungles on the pretext of making it easier to spot the "enemy" fighters escalated to ecocide which actually "killed" the land for future use in any foreseeable amount

of time, and even when the science fiction nightmare of the automated battlefield became a daily, horrifying reality, the optimism held fast and sustained a unity and dedication of unprecedented strength.

Only now, when babies in shockingly high percentages are being born with terrible deformations of the body, mongoloid characteristics, and often too weak to survive their first days, is that optimism strained to the breaking. The Vietnamese have always employed a deep knowledge of and respect for their national history of struggle, believing on the basis of experience that as long as there are Vietnamese, there will be a struggle for independence, sovereignty, and peace with honor.

The time is upon us now when the humanitarian and democratic forces of the world must make their all-out effort to see that the war is ended, the troops brought home, the airfields of the aggressor dismantled, and whatever steps possible be taken to turn back the chemical genocide. It is up to us to see that there will always be songs from Vietnam, and future Vietnamese to sing them.

Barbara Dane



TRANSLATOR'S NOTE:

Because of the inherent poetic structure of our language, alliteration is extremely natural even in the spoken word. Before the revolution, there was a dichotomy between the literary Vietnamese of the intellectual and the "vulgar" Vietnamese of the common people. Since then, our song-writers have created a poetry out of the "vulgar" or spoken Vietnamese, so that our art has been able to reach all our people, not just a privileged few. (Even in the old days there was some interchange which reinforced the power and beauty of both veins of the language.)

The difficulty of translating Vietnamese into English lies in the difference between our two cultures. Where certain expressions seem eloquent to my people, for example, "anh hung" the English translation, "heroic", may sound empty and trite to Americans. That is because

"anh hung" means and implies many more things than the English "heroic." In our history books the word is only applied to our most courageous patriots, so that the word brings back many memories to our people of events and incidents when our countrymen have been unflinchingly brave. In short, there is a historical understanding of that adjective. Furthermore, it is a combination of two words which in themselves mean separate things, but when brought together create a metaphor, and the fusion transforms both words, without denying their separate meanings. The sound created by the word "hung", for instance, evokes for us images of fierceness, force and valiant determination.

Our task has been to try to communicate in English something of the subtlety and multiplicity of the Vietnamese language. We hope we have succeeded in some measure.

All recorded material taken from Vietnamese sources. Translations and background material provided by members of the "Association of Vietnamese Patriots in Canada", Box 324, Station N, Montreal, 129, Quebec. Various publications can be obtained by writing them directly, as well as a regular news bulletin.

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THE ASSOCIATION OF VIETNAMESE PATRIOTS IN CANADA:

There are about 200 organized Vietnamese students among the 500 who have come from the South of Vietnam to study in Canada. Most of them are on scholarships supplied by the Saigon puppets, or by certain foundations created by them with the financial support of the U.S. government. Many of these students are patriotically refusing to go back to Saigon after graduating, and have organized the Association, which is dedicated to the principles of peace, independence, and neutrality in accordance with the political program of the National Liberation Front and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam. They appreciate all correspondence and support from sympathetic North Americans, and welcome requests for their newsletter and other publications. Their address is: Box 324, Station N, Montreal 129, Quebec, Canada.



Side 1, Band 1:

LY CON SAO (3:50)

The Starling

The song comes from Dong Thap and "Ho Dong Thap" refers to this type of song. The word "ly" in the title of so many songs here refers to the word "reason" and also the word "village," and both meanings apply. Dong Thap is in the southern part of Vietnam, and many songs have been written about the heroes who have come from there. It has been the scene of frequent battles, over a long period, since the people have never accepted their oppression quietly. The particular style of singing here is always used as a lullaby, and is usually sung by women. The style has been used for many generations. Here, the mother says:

Your home is in Dong Thap.
It is green, fertile, and beautiful.
The sun shines cheerfully always,
And the fields are wide.
When a starling is caged,
He struggles to free himself.
He is discontent in the cage,
And therefore he must struggle to be free.
When he is free, he is joyous,
And he flies across the river.

Side 1, Band 2:

LULLABY - Folk Instrumental (3:23)

The melody is so familiar that nearly everyone will know some sort of words for it. This is an instrumental version, played on the one-stringed lute made from the hardshell of the coconut. The non-variables in the words which one might sing are: the mother is always coaxing the child to sleep, and the father is always at the battlefront. After this one could add any number of personal variations. One version is that the mother hears the wind shaking the palm-thatching of her hut, in the winter, and this makes her miss her husband all the more. Another version also speaks of the mother's loneliness, but she says that while father is far away, and we don't know where he is, we do know that he is fighting for his homeland. The mother tells the child that he must sleep, so that he can grow up to be like his father.

Side 1, Band 3:

LY TINH TANG

Sound of the Bird Song (3:53)

You can hear the bird's song "tinh tang" all through the song. This music, from the central region, is always the same, but the words will change depending on the situation. The authors are always anonymous, and if the words are beautiful, they will be adopted by many people. If not, they will be quickly forgotten. If you are working in the fields, the words will tell one story, or if you are carrying people in a boat from one side of the river to the other, they will tell another. The song will sometimes sound sad, but there is always determination in it, to change things for the better, and to go on living. There are no defeatist songs. This is another Ho Dung Thap, from the Mekong Delta.

In this version, some young girls are ferrying liberation fighters across the perfume River. The wind and the waves make the work very difficult for them, but they try hard because they have the same spirit, the same heart and the same goals as the liberation fighters.

Side 1, Band 4:

T'RUNG MUSIC

Vong Co from the Central Region (5:05)

The word "t'rung" means central region. This traditional melody is Vong Co. The instruments are various types of lutes, and the xylophone from the high plateau, together with some western instruments. This mixture of native and imported instruments tells a great deal about the history of Vietnam.

Side 1, Band 5:

AM HAT TAN ANH MOT CA BAI HO

For You I Sing This Song (1:40)

This is the song of a southern girl, from the Dong Thap region. She is singing to a liberation fighter from the central part of Vietnam. She speaks about the places he comes from: Binh Tri Thien and Ham Rong, which were the birthplaces of many heroes. She says:

"You walk the road of liberation, and your feet take you all over our land. Everywhere you go, even as far as Dac To, everywhere

your footsteps take you to victory. You have the courage to step into boiling oil, or fire, and every step you take warms the heart of the whole land. You have killed many enemies, as many as the straws the farmer gathers. The blood flows like the rivers. And you have turned the military camps to charcoal. Now you are in the western region, and each step you take is victorious.

“No matter how many hills you must climb, or how many mountains, and even as you lack rice, salt, and water, in spite of all you are still brave in the face of the enemy, your spirit is still strong, and you are always victorious. When you meet danger, you are always cheerful, optimistic, and fearless. That is why we admire and love you. When you go to the battlefield, with heavy equipment on your back, you are still cheerful, and every step you take is like a beautiful poem.

“With each step you take, your courage resounds throughout the hills, and over the land. Each step you take builds a future for our people. Each step you take makes our land more beautiful. You have stepped in Bau Gon, Suoi Da, Cha Boi, and the American aggressors have been scattered in hasty retreat, until they have become as nothing. You shoot down planes and tanks, and you break the neck of the American aggressor. Your victories beautify our farms and forests, and the battlefields of Dong Bac, Tay Ninh, they are all beautiful. In Sac Cong Trang, Bao Ba Dung, Cuoi Ong Hung, all these are victories of the winter. The more you sacrifice to our land, the more we hold you precious.

“You are the heroes of the T’rung region (Central), from the Song Huong (Perfume River),

from Nui Ngu (mountain), and from our beloved Quang Binh. I am a girl from the Cuu Long region, and when our country is united again we will see each other once more. With all our hopes, we promise with all our hearts that tomorrow when we have peace we will welcome you to Cuu Long.

“White rice, clear water, full moons, many clouds, coconut trees, sweet milk, and we will take you to Bien Hoa, where you will have grapefruits, both the sweet and sour kind, and mangosteen (a tropical fruit). Our mothers in the Nam (southern) region work hard, like your beloved mothers in Quang Binh. Now we say good-bye, and tell you to keep us in your hearts. Tomorrow on the battlefield, you will remember our song.”

Side 1, Band 6:
LY THUONG DU
Highland Song (1:40)

A girl from the Highland Region sings here. She says:

“If you want to go to the golden bridge,
You must hammer nails.
And the bamboo bridge is bumpy
And difficult to cross.
You will see two birds eating ripe mangos
From a tree.”

‘Cao vang’ means golden bridge, and ‘ching-chinh-chinh’ is the name of the bird. The song has a playful mood, and is, of course, metaphorical.



Side 2, Band 1:

MARCH TO THE FRONT LINE (2:35)

Words and Music by Huy Quang

Since the days we began to oppose *giac My**
They have killed our brothers, sisters, and parents
We cannot sit still.
We must march to the front lines.
We must have courage,
To protect our village homes.
Avenge the blood of our kin.
Cast off the American yolk.
Their puppet troops burn our homes,
Our granaries.
We must rise together against them,
Until victory.
Blood for blood, we'll fight till the last.
All our people, we'll work together.
After our victory,
We'll return to our village homes.
But blood will flow as long as the
Oppression is here.

**giac My* means American aggression.
Learn the words.

Side 2, Band 2:

**PESTLE THUDS RESOUND IN
BAM BO VILLAGE (3:50)**

Words and Music by Xuan Hong

Bam Bo village is in the mountains of the
central region, inhabited mainly by the national
minorities. The song speaks of how beautiful
life was in the village before *giac My*, and how
difficult now. In it, the people promise to work
as hard as they can to support the front lines
of the liberation forces.

Our southern region is very strong.
We oppose *giac My*.
Our revolutionaries in the south fight
Invaders from America,
And our people from Bam Bo, with firm hands,
And with love for our homeland strong
In our hearts, struggle every day.
Once our life in Bam Bo was free, was beautiful,
Rice and cloth were plentiful, thanks to
Giai phong (National Liberation),
Our people's lives are wretched now,
Our work exhausting,
But our patriots fight on, suffering hardships,
So that our people may live.
When the battle is victorious,
Every one here is jubilant.
You can see it in our eyes, in our merry talk.
And when our liberation fighters pass by,
We welcome them into our homes.

In this spirit of brotherly warmth,
Under the moonlight, we sift the grains,
And grind them with mortar and pestle,
For our soldiers to eat.
We pestle them white,
To put into our soldiers packs.
We pestle them fragrant, from the
Spirit of our soldiers,
Fragrant from our people, fragrant from the
Spirit of our land.
At sunrise, when the sky breaks open,
And the birds fly out, we are still at work,
Our pestles in motion.
Our love is in the rice we grind,
So much rice, so much love.
Hearing gunshots in the distance,
We await the news of another victorious battle.
And we grind our rice grains with even greater
vigor.



Side 2, Band 3:

THE TONE OF UNCLE HO (3:15)

Words and Music by Phan Chi Thanh

Our land in the southern region is lovely,
And the sound of Uncle Ho
Warms the hearts of our people.
It makes our faith in him stronger
Because his voice is the voice of our village homes,
That lie deep in the soul of our Vietnamese people
Our people of Vietnam resolve to rise,
To defend our land.
Our bones may be in pieces,
But we will struggle on,
Under the yellow star, until victory.
Because tomorrow we will all stand
Under the flag of liberty!

Side 2, Band 4:

WREST BACK POWER TO THE PEOPLE (1:50)

Words and music by Tan Nam

This is a song of the National Liberation Front.

March quickly to the defense of our land!
Seize power from the puppets,
For the liberation of our nation,
For the freedom of our village homes.
Under the flag of the yellow star,
We'll scatter the American invaders,
We will flatten all the puppets!

Side 2, Band 5:

MARCH INTO SAIGON (2:40)

Words and Music by Huynh Minh Sieng

A song made during the Tet offensive, when the NLF was marching to Saigon, asking the citizens to join them, rise up, and take power.

In the town, there's light and laughter,
While misery rides through the slums.
Soldiers! Liberate Saigon!
Your village home calls you! Liberate Saigon!
At sunrise, you arrive in town,
And you wipe out the American invaders.
The foreigners will be beaten down,
When we liberate the town.
We'll hear the call of our mothers,
Our countrymen,
Come downtown! We must fight harder!
March forward into town!
Our people in Saigon will let out their hatred,
Giai phong will smash down class barriers,
And call the people, march forward! To victory!
Liberate the city!
Our people, from city and village,
Rise up, celebrate our victory.
From Hue to Saigon, Nha Trang to Qui Nhon,
Stand forward, our people,
From Binh Tri Thien to Ca Mau,
Rise! Avenge ourselves!
From Hue to Saigon, from Ban Me Thuot to
Nha Trang,
The enemy suffers, and runs around in circles.
Oh, liberation fighters, for your victory,
We sing with greater vigor!

Side 2, Band 6:

CHANTING YOUR VICTORY (5:20)

Words and Music by Hong Nam

This song was made after the Tet Offensive, when 60 cities rose up, and the victory was very close.

Sixty cities rise up like the hurricane winds,
Our families spurn hunger, our doors blast open.
Ten stormy years of hidden guns and bitterness,
From Ca Mau to Ben Hai,
From Thanh Thi to Thon Que,
Rise up in battle!
How many years of our kinsmen dead in prisons?
How many families destroyed?
For what? For whom? Who has done this?
My hatred and my vengeance fall on him!
How much has already been destroyed?
The size of our anger and hate
Is as great as the mountains.
Giac My must pay blood for this.
Stand up against *giac My*.
Liberate our village homes!
Listen to the cry of our soil!
Giai Phong! (National Liberation)
Together, our people will free our village homes.
We'll march forward together.

Side 2, Band 7:

MARCH FORWARD TO TOTAL VICTORY

Words and Music by Nguyen Thanh

Sung by a group of young women, addressing the Liberation Fighters of the NLF.

You fight to avenge our land,
And we await your message of victory.
Victory for our people!
Victory that resounds from the sea,
Up to the mountain top!
Victory that is greater day by day.
And by the day,
Our enemies are driven mad with fear.

You put your heart and soul into our victory.
You are good and beautiful, and you fight well.
You are strong, like our proud mountain,
Truong Son.
We gather in the sheave, and we sing in joy with
you
Our victorious song is flung out far and wide.