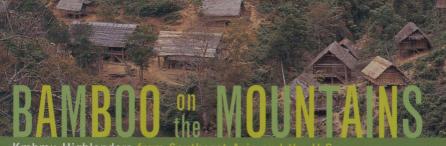
BAMBOO on MOUNTAINS



Kmhmu Highlanders from Southeast Asia and the U.S.





Kmhmu Highlanders from Southeast Asia and the U.S.

FROM LAOS: 1 Pii koon rook reedpipe 1:13 2 Teum song 1:45 3 Teum song with sngkuul mouth organ 4:00 4 Teum song with chorus 3:24 5 Toot flute 1:00 6 Hur tlaa rung blowing tube 0:23 7 Teum song with sngkuul mouth organ 3:10 FROM U.S.: 8 Sngkuul mouth organ 1:04 8 Toot flute 1:22 18 Pii reedpipe 1:58 | Teum song 3:31 | 12 Teum song with sngkuul mouth organ 5:15 | 13 Toot tiveel flute 1:00 | 14 Toot flute 0.59 16 Pii tuut ngo' reedpipe 1:03 18 Teum song with sngkuul mouth organ 3:38 17 Pii triil flute 0:46 FROM THAILAND: 18 Briing drum, rbaang gong, and ceng cymbals 1:51 19 Teum song with pii reedpipe 3:25 20 Pii reedpipe 1:36 21 Hur tlaa rung blowing tube 1:01 22 Teum song 2:05 23 Toot flute 1:43 24 Briing tube zither 0:57 25 Hroong jew's harp 1:38 28 Ritual music and song for the buffalo sacrifice 1:27 27 Teum song 3:11 FROM VIETNAM: 28 Pii ta' laen reedpipe 1:19 28 Pii rmblaang reedpipe 0.25 30 Toot teum flute 1:44 31 Day day bamboo tuning fork 2:06 32 Briing drum, rbaang gong, and ceng cymbal 1:50 33 Briing tlaa tube zither 2:13 34 Hroong jew's harp 1:40 35 Hur suul tlaa blowing pipe 0:18 36 Tnheek chordophone 1:06 37 Teum song 3:12 38 Pii teum reedpipe 1:21

BAMBOO the MOUNTAINS

Kmhmu Highlanders from Southeast Asia and the U.S.

1 Pii koon rook reedpipe 1:13

(Thongsy/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

2 Teum song 1:45

(Thongsy/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

3 Teum song with sngkuul mouth organ 4:00 (Phuy and Khamsa/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

4 Teum song with chorus 3:24

(Peung/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

5 Toot flute 1:00

(Noi/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

6 Hur tlaa rung blowing tube 0:23

(San/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

7 Teum song with sngkuul mouth organ 3:10 (Thong Phetdala and Chan/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

8 Sngkuul mouth organ 1:04

(Ngeun Khounpanya/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

9 Toot flute 1:22

(Ngeun Khounpanya/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

10 Pii reedpipe 1:58

(Ngeun Khounpanya/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

11 Teum song 3:31

(Chanh Thammala/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

12 Teum song with sngkuul mouth organ 5:15 (Chome Sisavath and Onechanh Sisavath/ Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

13 Toot tiveel flute 1:00

(Lay Sivilay/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

14 Toot flute 0:59

(En Phongsavanh/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

15 Pii tuut ngo' reedpipe 1:03

(En Phongsavanh/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

16 Teum song with sngkuul mouth organ 3:38 (Chantha Phornsavanh and Chong Santhevong/ Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

17 Pii triil flute 0:46

(Suane Khansouvong/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

18 Briing drum, rbaang gong, and ceng cymbals 1:51

(Tan Keodaeng, Vin Keodaeng, and Eh Keodaeng/ Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI) 19 Teum song with pii reedpipe 3:25

(Manh Ruamchit and Suan/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

20 Pii reedpipe 1:36

(Sang/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

21 Hur tlaa rung blowing tube 1:01 (Nuy Suanala/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

22 Teum song 2:05

(Ak Keodaeng and Seu Keodaeng/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

23 Toot flute 1:43

(Plaw/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

24 Briing tube zither 0:57

(Plaw/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

25 Hroong bamboo jew's harp 1:38 (Manh Ruamchit/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

26 Ritual music and song for the buffalo sacrifice 1/27

(Phan Saylongthoey/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

27 Teum song 3:11

(Phaek/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

28 Pii ta' laen reedpipe 1:19

(Me Van Uong/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

29 Pii rmblaang reedpipe 0:25
(Sen/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

30 Toot teum flute 1:44

(Lu Van Hue/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

31 Dav dav bamboo tuning fork 2:06 (Moong Thi Sy/Smithsonian Folkways

Publishing, BMI)

39 Briing drum rhaang gong and ceng cyn

32 Briing drum, rbaang gong, and ceng cymbal 1:50

(Moong Thi Sy, Vi Tien Hang, and Hung Thi Khong/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

33 Briing tlaa tube zither 2:13
(Oc Cong Dan/Smithsonian Folkways

Publishing, BMI)

34 Hroong jew's harp 1:40 (Moong Duc Thang/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

35 Hur suul tlaa blowing pipe 0:18 (San/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

36 Tnheek chordophone 1:06 (Me Van Uong/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

37 Teum song 3:12 (Me Thi Thoan/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)

38 Pii teum reedpipe 1:21 (Vy Vinh Ha/Smithsonian Folkways Publishing, BMI)



Plaw performs on the ring-stop *toot* flute while a friend plays the briing tube zither (track 23, 24). Ban Pa' Teung, Tha Kham Subdistrict, Viang Ken District, Chiang Rai, Thailand, May 24, 1992.

KMHMIL HIGHLANDERS

The music heard on this recording constitutes but a small sampling of the diverse musical treasures of the Kmhmu people, drawn from fifteen years of research that took me from the garden apartments of suburban California to the highlands of Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, and China, Despite the impressive variety of styles, instruments, and genres here, there remain many traditions that could not be included—genres and styles from other regions I have not yet visited. or performed only on special ritual occasions that did not coincide with my research. Nevertheless, the diversity featured here is remarkable, spanning the wide geographic range of the Kmhmu homeland and extending to the Kmhmu diaspora in the United States, Listeners can gain a sense of the deep, deep reservoir of tradition maintained today in Kmhmu communities, wherever they are found.

More than 600,000 Kmhmu live in the highlands of northern Indochina, from Chiang Mai, Thailand, in the west to Nghia Lo, Vietnam, in the east, from Chiang Hung (or Jinghong, as it is known in Chinese) in Xishuangbanna Prefecture of Yunnan Province in the north to Vientiane, Laos, in the south. From their ancestral homeland in the watersheds of the Nam Tha, Nam Ou, and Nam Beng rivers, Kmhmu have dis-

persed over the centuries, often fleeing warfare or seeking land for farming. Beginning in 1975, more than 3,000 Kmhmu from Laos have immigrated to the United States, where they have settled in a number of California cities, Seattle, Boston, Oklahoma City, and elsewhere, replanting their highland villages in the new surroundings of suburban America. Other Kmhmu refugees have settled in France, Canada, and other countries. In the highlands of Southeast Asia, the Kmhmu are swidden farmers, cultivating dry rice fields on the slopes of mountains and raising water buffalo and cattle; in the U.S. they have found employment in a wide range of skilled and unskilled occupations.

For the Kmhmu, bamboo is the mainstay of instrumental music, especially the aerophones and idiophones heard throughout this recording. Of more than twenty different species of bamboo Kmhmu can identify by name, the favored species for making instruments is *tlaa* (*Cephalostachyum virgatum*) because of its long internodes and thin walls. Where *tlaa* is plentiful, instruments are easily made and easily discarded; where it is rare, instruments are treasured and stored carefully in the rafters and thatch roofs of the traditional bamboo stilt house. For Kmhmu in the U.S., where *tlaa* can-

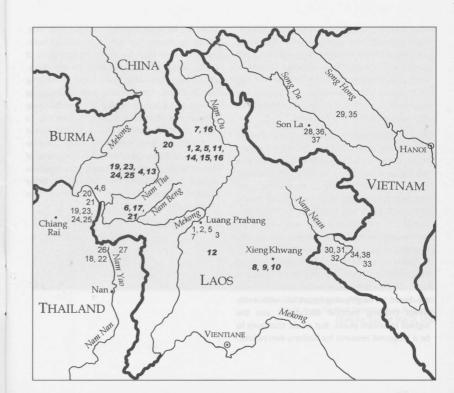
not be found, other species of bamboo or PVC plumbing pipe are pressed into service as imperfect substitutes. Other bamboo species are also used for chordophones including tube zithers (tracks 24, 33) and spike fiddles (track 36), and for the dav dav (pronounced to rhyme with "bow wow")—an idiophone that has come to serve as an emblem of Kmhmu ethnicity (track 31). Brass or bronze cymbals and gongs, wooden drums, and mouth organs are purchased at market, requiring specialized skills in manufacture. A few Kmhmu villages in remote locales still treasure their great bronze drums, using them on ritual occasions such as funerals or buffalo sacrifices.

Kmhmu song styles are as diverse as instrumental styles; in many regions, each village has its own distinctive sound and repertoire. The song texts are typically lyric descriptions and images, rather than narrative. Traditionally, antiphonal singing played an important part in courtship, and young men and women who couldn't sing well were at a disadvantage in seeking marriage partners. For the Kmhmu a skilled singer is not necessarily one with a beautiful voice, but one who knows many verses and how to combine them creatively in performance. Songs are improvised, combining traditional verses and those created by the singer. The poetic structure

of Kmhmu songs is a uniquely complex form of poetic parallelism that they call "reverse words," in which enigmatic images and metaphors (or even nonsense syllables and loan words from other languages) set out a kind of riddle. Listeners take great amusement in trying to guess, from these riddle-like verses, what will be the meaningful lines that follow. Songs make up a larger part of the Kmhmu repertoire than is reflected in the selections here. We have offered only a few styles from the much wider range of local traditions, since most songs are too lengthy to be included here and cannot easily be edited without destroying their meaning.

Another unique characteristic of Kmhmu music is the continuum between song and instrumental traditions, especially aerophones. Listen, for example, to the flutes played by female performers (tracks 5, 14), or the bamboo humming tube (tracks 6, 21). In both genres the performer may alternate segments of pure music and segments of spoken or sung verse, moving almost seamlessly from one sound-producing means to another. These instruments, along with the metal or bamboo jew's harp (tracks 25, 34), are

facing page: Numbers in roman type show the recording locations; numbers in bold italic type show the performers' birthplaces



often used in courtship to convey disguised messages between the young suitors. Presenting only some of the linguistic features of normal speech, the instruments nevertheless allow their performers to utter words and phrases that can be understood by listeners (even if parents are supposed to pretend they do not comprehend the messages of the young lovers).

Despite the dramatic social and cultural changes that Kmhmu have faced over recent decadesboth those who have immigrated to the U.S. and those who remain in the highlands of Southeast Asia—the musical traditions represented here maintain their vitality. To be sure, young people in the U.S. today may substitute electronic keyboards for the mouth organ, and even their counterparts in Asia rarely practice the age-old courtship singing and music. Kmhmu rock bands in California produce their own cassettes and CDs, which find their way back to Thailand and Laos. And Kmhmu radio broadcasts from Laos are heard in neighboring countries, with radio waves crossing national boundaries and the highest mountain peaks. But music continues to be a treasured resource for Kmhmu everywhere.

There are far more Kmhmu musical riches that, owing to space, cannot be included here. Subsequent research has taken me to regions of China, Vietnam, and Laos that are not represented here, recording many hours of exciting new traditions. Other researchers—Souksavang Simana and Elisabeth Preisig in Laos, Damrong Tayanin and Hakan Lundstrom in Sweden, To Ngoc Thanh in Vietnam—have also collected important recordings in other locations. Consider this compendium, then, as merely a sampler of the treasure-house that constitutes Kmhmu musical tradition—one that will present many pleasant surprises to Kmhmu and non-Kmhmu listeners alike.

Frank Proschan



Manh Ruamchit playing the *hroong* bamboo jew's harp (track 25).

Ban Pa' Teung, Tha Kham Subdistrict, Viang Ken District,
Chiang Rai, Thailand, May 23, 1992.

KMHMU INSTRUMENT PITCHES



Open note heads are focal tones



The day day bamboo tuning fork is enjoyed by young and old alike. Ban Cap Na, Ta Loc Commune, Mai Son District, Son La, Vietnam, May 7, 1994.

RECORDINGS

1 Thongsy, pii koon rook orphan's reedpipe

Ban Houay Uad, Luang Prabang District, Luang Prabang, Laos, April 26, 1990

The village of Houay Uad, a few kilometers west of the ancient Lao royal capital of Luang Prabang, is one of several villages linked by close kinship ties. The ancestral homeland (where Thongsv was born in 1932) is the village of Tmbri' H'u. in the Muong La District of Oudom Xay Province, some 130 kilometers to the north; he and others now living in Houay Uad fled to the relative safety of Luang Prabang during the war years of the 1960s. Other members established a third village, Houay Phuy, 90 kilometers to the southwest in Xayabouly Province, and yet others form the core of the Kmhmu community in Stockton, California (tracks 11, 16).

2 Thongsy, teum singing

Ban Houay Uad, Luang Prabang District, Luang Prabang, Laos, April 26, 1990

The text of Thongsy's song is almost untranslatable: most of it is in the form of disguised verse the Kmhmu call "reverse words" (see above). Instead of the intended words, other rhyming words are substituted within the poetic frame, and listeners delight in guessing the singer's meaning. Like many Kmhmu songs this begins with Thongsy's disclaimers of competence: "I'm

scared and shy of you, I say, I'm shy enough to die, my face blushes, I'm shy enough to die, my eyes are black." Indeed, virtually the entire song is apologetic: "I will give you my dirty throat, my ugly throat, sounding like the billy goat or the deer buck." Despite these disclaimers, Thongsy vows to persevere in his performance.

3 Ta' Phuy, teum singing; Khamsa, sngkuul mouth organ

Ban Ber 6, Xiang Ngeun District, Luang Prabang, Laos, April 18, 1990

Like Houay Uad and Lak 8 (track 7), Ban Ber 6 (Village Number 6) was a refugee village established in the late 1960s in the relatively safe region near the ancient royal capital of Luang Prabang. The villagers came from the Phonxav District, along the Nam Khan River east of Luang Prabang. As in tracks 16 and 19 this performance illustrates the loose synchronization between a singer and an accompanying instrumentalist that is typical of many Kmhmu song styles.

4 Ta' Peung, teum singing, with antiphonal chorus

Ban Nam Phou (Om Bluu), Houay Xay District, Bokeo, Laos, May 3, 1991

I visited Houay Xay with Kmhmu researcher Damrong Tayanin and his Swedish colleague Jan-Olof Svantesson as part of a large delegation

of ambassadors, ministers, and other dignitaries from Vientiane. The governor of the province. himself Kmhmu, left the VIPs in the care of his assistant while he escorted us to several Kmhmu villages. The style of teum singing performed here is identified as the gaay sah style, after the recurrent refrain that means "tell it" or "say it." The style is popular among the Kmhmu Yuan of the Nale District of Luang Nam Tha (see track 13), including Damrong Tayanin and his relatives in Om Bluu (Betel Leaf Creek), who had resettled recently in Bokeo. The Kmhmu Yuan report that Kmhmu elsewhere sometimes make fun of the style because it reminds them of the ritual wailing for someone who has died. For the Yuan themselves, the gaav sah singing has no such solemn associations and is sung on joyous and festive occasions, such as the visit of honored guests.

5 Ya' Noi, toot flute with singing and humming Ban Houay Uad, Luang Prabang District, Luang Prabang, Laos, April 26, 1990

The continuum between speech and song and instrumental music is rarely demonstrated more clearly than in the transverse flute playing of women of the Muong La region (compare also track 14). Because the tlaa species of bamboo had blossomed and died a few years before our visit, mature bamboo was scarce, but fortunately Ya' Noi had a treasured flute she had carefully hidden in the rafters of her simple stilt house. The instrument is a side-blown flute, open at both ends; an aperture for the mouth is a few centimeters from one end, and two fingerholes are found at the other end, what the Kmhmu call the "tail." Before she began to play on the flute, Ya' Noi dedicated her performance to family members in the U.S.: "I will play so that Ya' La and Ta' Liang can listen. We are one lineage." When she finished, she laughed nervously and noted, "My heart is racing."

6 Ya' San, hur tlaa rung bamboo blowing tube

Ban Om Rvaay, Houay Xay District, Bokeo, Laos, May 3, 1991

Om Rvaay (Tiger Creek Village), a few kilometers from Houay Xay town, was inhabited by close relatives of the provincial governor who accompanied us there. The villagers had resettled in Bokeo from their ancestral home in the Phousoung region of Pak Beng District in Oudom Xav Province, where the Beng River meets the Mekong (see track 17, 21). The governor held the bottom end of a 2-meter-long bamboo tube, open at both ends, while Ya' San held the other in front of her mouth and alternately hummed, sang, and chanted into the tube. The tube served as a resonating chamber that melded the various sounds into a unified performance (compare track 21).

7 Thong Phetdala, teum singing, with Ta' Chan, sngkuul mouth organ

Ban Lak 8. Luang Prabang District, Luang Prabang, Laos, April 16, 1990

The villagers now living in Ban Lak 8 (Kilometer 8 Village) originated in Muong Khwa District in the southern part of Phongsaly Province and were part of the wartime refugee migration to Luang Prabang, arriving in 1968. The village is known nationwide for its expert singers, both in the typical style of the Muong Khwa-Muong La region (compare tracks 11 and 16), and in the borrowed style performed here by prize-winning singer Thong Phetdala, born in 1973. The singing here is in the ceem eey genre, formerly a local tradition of the Kmhmu south of Luang Prabang, popularized during the war years when it was played frequently over the radio. Kmhmu today refer to the distinctive ceem eey melody as the "Kmhmu national anthem," and it remains popular and instantly recognizable in regions far beyond its original locale. The mouth organ here has seven pairs of tubes, each with a metal reed that vibrates within a wooden chamber when the tube is stopped by the player. Like a harmonica, sound is produced when the player inhales or exhales.

8 Ngeun Khounpanya, sngkuul mouth organ

Santa Ana, California, U.S., July 14, 1984 Ta' Ngeun was a native of Xieng Khwang Province of northeastern Laos, A skilled raconteur of Kmhmu folktales and oral history, Ta' Ngeun was also a master singer and musician on several instruments. Although Kmhmu elsewhere also play the sngkuul mouth organ, it is the Kmhmu of Xieng Khwang who are the acknowledged masters of the instrument. The instrument, purchased from a local Lao-American market, has eight pairs of bamboo tubes. Where the Lao style of playing the mouth organ is often frenetic in pace and rigid in rhythm. Kmhmu tend to a more relaxed and rhythmically fluid style.

9 Ngeun Khounpanya, toot flute

Santa Ana, California, U.S., July 13, 1984 Like most Kmhmu instruments, Ta' Ngeun's toot was made from tlaa bamboo. The instrument is a unique kind of duct flute (a similar instrument is played in track 30, from the Vietnamese province of Nghe An, adjacent to Xieng Khwang). The body of the instrument is a bamboo tube approximately 50 cm long and 1.5 cm in diameter; three fingerholes are cut at the "tail" end, which is left open (i.e., not stopped). As mouthpiece, a smaller bamboo tube about .5

cm in diameter is attached to the body; the player blows air through this tube toward a blade at the farther end of an aperture cut into the larger tube. Ta' Ngeun liked to play when he was happy or to make himself feel happy when he would otherwise be sad. He worried that younger people preferred modern styles of music and didn't make the effort to learn the Kmhmu traditions: "If you don't learn, you are not a complete Kmhmu."

10 Ngeun Khounpanya, *pii* reedpipe

Santa Ana, California, U.S., July 13, 1984

Ta' Ngeun's ingenuity and persistence were apparent to anyone who saw his *pii*, fashioned together from a tube of bamboo, a children's wooden flute, and a bell made from the top of a plastic bottle. For Ta' Ngeun having a *pii* was vital: like water for a garden plant, without a *pii* he would wither and fade, he told us. He explained that the Kmhmu learned to make the mouth organ and *pii* from Cheuang, the legendary Kmhmu culture hero. Today, he continued, the Lao people and others can play the mouth organ and flute, but it is only the Kmhmu who can master the *pii*.

11 Chanh Thammala, teum singing

Stockton, California, U.S., July 23, 1982

The refugee experience and the years of war and turmoil that preceded it brought together Kmhmu from different regions of Laos when they resettled in the U.S. The Stockton community includes two main groups: half are from the region of Luang Prabang, the ancient Lao royal capital (track 12), while the remainder—including Ta' Chanh—are from farther north, in the region of Muong La (compare tracks 1, 2, 5, 14, 15, 16). In addition to being an expert singer, Ta' Chanh (born in 1925) is a skilled blacksmith and bamboo worker as well as a master of traditional medicine and the spirit world.

12 Chome Sisavath, teum singing, and Onechanh Sisavath, sngkuul mouth organ

Stockton, California, U.S., August 13, 1984
This couple is from Kiu Kacham, south of Luang
Prabang city, where Onechanh was born in 1949
and Chome in 1951. They are expert performers
in various styles and are often asked to play in
the ceem eey style (track 7) for Kmhmu parties
and when young people present dances at public events. Here they perform the teum vaang
"long song." Chome knows dozens and dozens of
verses in the complicated poetic style of hrlo'
prgap, or "reverse words" (see above), and

Kmhmu listeners delight in hearing how she combines them in a song like this. Kmhmu identify good singers both by the quality of their voice and by their use of language—their mastery of the complicated poetics as well as their quick wit and ability to improvise.

13 Ta' Lay Sivilay, toot tiveel flute

El Cerrito, California, U.S., July 23, 1984 To enter Ta' Lay's two-bedroom apartment in a suburban neighborhood of El Cerrito, California. was to step into a museum of Kmhmu traditions. Originally from the Nale District of Luang Nam Tha, Ta' Lay was a member of the Kmhmu Yuan (like his cousin, the eminent scholar of Kmhmu folklore, Damrong Tayanin). When he came to the U.S., Ta' Lav was concerned that his children and neighbors not grow up in ignorance of their traditional inheritance, so he made great efforts to craft baskets and fish traps, models of houses, implements and utensils, and other elements of Kmhmu material culture. To get the bamboo for baskets he purchased rice-steamers at local Asian groceries and disassembled them, refashioning the bamboo strips into finely crafted examples of Kmhmu basketry. The musicrepeated cycles of descending contours-is similar in timbre to the duet singing of Yuan women (compare the slightly different style of track 22).

14 En Phongsavanh, *toot* flute with singing and humming

Stockton, California, U.S., July 20, 1984 There is a continuum of style, timbre, and melodic contours linking Kmhmu singing and aerophones, with the voice often approximating an instrument during sustained melismatic passages, and the flute or reedpipe emulating the singing voice. Here a single player combines both flute and voice in a regional style of unique beauty (compare track 5). En Phongsavanh was born in 1949 in the Long Ya-Muong La region of Luang Prabang (like others now living in Stockton) and learned to play the toot flute and pii reedpipe (track 15) as a teenager. Traditionally a young man would court his lover with a jew's harp (track 25, 34), and she would answer him by playing on the side-blown flute, with mouth-hole and two fingerholes. Too shy to sing her words of love out loud, she might hum or whisper a few words or phrases while playing the flute, removing her lips briefly from the aperture but continuing to use the body of the flute as a resonating chamber.

RELABITIONS

15 En Phongsavanh, pii tuut ngo' reedpipe Stockton, California, U.S., July 20, 1984

When we asked En Phongsavanh to play the flute and reedpipe, she went to the refrigerator and retrieved her carefully treasured *pii tuut ngo'* "rice stalk pipe," a thin piece of bamboo approximately 15 cm long (about the same dimensions as a pencil). Its name derives from its diminutive size, barely larger than the stalk of a rice plant. This delicate instrument is nevertheless able to produce quite loud music (compare the similar instrument used on track 19). In En's home region this two-holed *pii tuut ngo'* is played only by women, while the larger *pii koon rook* (track 1) is played only by men.

16 Chantha Phornsavanh, teum singing, and Ta' Chong Santheyong, sngkuul mouth organ

Stockton, California, U.S., January 4, 1982
Like most of the Kmhmu in Stockton, Ta' Chong was born in Muong La. Chantha was born in 1949, a little farther north. Ta' Chong's virtuosity on the mouth organ was belied by his quiet manner and gentle playing. When Kmhmu sing (as here) to the accompaniment of a musical instrument, the music and voice are typically linked very loosely, their melodies simultaneous without being closely synchronized (compare tracks 3, 19). Singers prefer having a musical

accompaniment rather than singing in the style of *teum ploh* "empty song" or "bare song," and musicians are happy to oblige, even if they often run out of breath during the song. The mouth organ here has seven pairs of tubes.

17 Ta' Suane Khansouvong, pii triil flute

Richmond, California, U.S., August 11, 1984 Ta' Suane (born in 1925) and many of his neighhors in the Richmond and San Pablo area came from the Phousoung region of Pak Beng District in what is now Oudom Xay Province of Laos (compare tracks 6, 21). When the French arrived in Laos in the late 19th century, the Kmhmu chief of Pak Beng was a man of great authority, and the region was populated almost entirely by Kmhmu. The dialect spoken by Ta' Suane and those from Phousoung is similar to several of the dialects spoken by Kmhmu in Thailand (tracks 18-27), but not identical to them. The people of Phousoung are strong traditionalists, but many have also risen to prominence within Laos and in the Kmhmu-American community. Resembling the instrument the Kmhmu call the pii triil, this flute, with six fingerholes and one thumbhole, is one he purchased from a music store in San Francisco's Chinatown.

18 Tan Keodaeng, *briing* long goblet drum; Vin Keodaeng, *rbaang* bossed gong; and Eh Keodaeng, *ceng* cymbals

Ban Huai Klaen, Chon Den Subdistrict, Song Khwae District, Nan. Thailand, January 24, 1992 In the headwaters of the Nam Yao River, just south of the border with Xavabouly Province of Laos two dozen villages are home to the Kmhmu Threual (tracks 22, 26, 27), a subgroup of Kmhmu who have been resident within Thailand for many generations. The Kmhmu Threual remain staunch adherents of their cultural, musical, and religious traditions. Music on the drum, gong, and cymbals like that performed here was the necessary accompaniment of every ritual celebration-for the new year, for the harvest, for weddings and funerals. The instruments in use today are purchased in local markets, but Kmhmu recount how in the past they themselves had expert craftsmen in bronze and brass (compare track 32).

19 Ta' Manh Ruamchit, *teum* singing, and Ta' Suan, *pii* reedpipe

Ban Pa' Teung (Kwak Neua), Tha Kham Subdistrict, Viang Ken District, Chiang Rai, Thailand, May 22, 1992

Ta' Manh was born in 1936 in the Viang Phou Kha District of Luang Nam Tha, Laos, among the Kmhmu Khwaen (who make up a large part of the Kmhmu community in the San Francisco Bay area and Seattle). His father was Kmhmu and his mother was Rmeet (Lamet), and he himself speaks both languages and can sing in either. Recently retired as headman of the village of Ban Pa' Teung when we met, he maintained the respect of his own villagers and residents of neighboring villages, interrupting our interview to mediate a dispute between a Hmong man from one nearby village and a Kmhmu man from Pa' Teung, who both laid claim to the same ricefield. In his song, accompanied by a small pii similar to that used in track 20, he uses reverse parallel verses that ask listeners to forgive him for his mistakes, comparing himself to a small child under his grandmother's breast, who is thus ignorant of the proper way to sing. Ta' Suan was born in 1934 in Om Phaav village in Oudom Xay, Laos, near Pak Beng.

20 Ta' Sang, pii reedpipe

Ban Huai Yen, Rim Khong Subdistrict, Chiang Khong District, Chiang Rai, Thailand, June 29, 1992

Like Ban Pa' Teung, Huai Yen village has members whose ancestors have lived in Thailand for several generations as well as others who immigrated from Laos at some time in their own lives.

Ta' Sang was born in 1925 in Ban Nam Thong, northeast of the town of Luang Nam Tha, Laos. Like many Kmhmu men over the last century or so he came to northern Thailand as a young man to work in the teak fields or urban areas with the intention of returning home after a few years to marry and establish a family. Also, like many, Ta' Sang chose to settle within a Kmhmu village in Thailand rather than returning home. The pii he plays here is slightly larger than the pii tuut ngo' (track 15)-approximately 20 cm long and less than a centimeter in diameter. The "tongue" end is stopped with the node of the bamboo; an upcut percussion reed is cut near the stopped end, with a thumbhole and four fingerholes near the open "tail" end.

21 Nuy Suanala, hur tlaa rung bamboo blowing tube and singing

Ban Huai Kok, Viang Subdistrict, Chiang Khong District, Chiang Rai, Thailand, July 1, 1992 Nuy Suanala is a newer migrant to Thailand and a native of the Chomleng area of Pak Beng District, Oudom Xay, Laos, where she was born in 1965. The instrument here is identical to that used by Ya' San (track 6). The performer holds one open end of the tube in front of her mouth and sets the air tube in motion by humming, singing, or chanting.

22 Ya' Ak Keodaeng and Ya' Seu Keodaeng. teum singing

Ban Huai Klaep, Chon Den Subdistrict, Song Khwae District, Nan, Thailand, January 21, 1992 The singing styles of the Kmhmu Threual (compare track 27) are typical of the Kmhmu living southwest of the Mekong River, in the Thai province of Nan or the Lao province of Xayabouly. but would also be familiar to Kmhmu listeners much farther afield. Here, Ya' Ak and Ya' Seu sing together during a celebration following the completion of a new house. Gathered together around the ceremonial jar of rice wine, villagers sang and played flutes, reedpipes, and jew's harps. Like all Kmhmu singing the duet singing is improvised rather than memorized, with the singers selecting and arranging stock lines and verses in a unique performance. In a duet one singer takes the lead, and the other singer must listen carefully, anticipating what lines the leader will choose, so that she can fall in closely behind.

23 Plaw, toot flute

Ban Pa' Teung (Kwak Neua), Tha Kham Subdistrict, Viang Ken District, Chiang Rai. Thailand, May 24, 1992 Plaw was born in 1960, in Mngkeur village,

Viang Phou Kha District, Luang Nam Tha, Laos.

A member of the Kmhmu Khwaen group, he

chose to settle in Thailand after 1975 rather than trying to immigrate to the U.S. with some of his friends and neighbors. Pa' Teung village was already home to people from Viang Phou Kha, who had migrated to Thailand decades before, and he was welcomed there. The instrument here is a ring-stop flute—a length of bamboo approximately 80 cm long and 3 cm in diameter, with both ends open but an intermediary node about 10 cm from the mouth end. A duct is cut straddling the node, and then pitch or beeswax is used to cover most of the opening, so that the air passes through the short tube end. over the remaining node wall, and is then directed toward a blade cut at the farther end of the aperture. Plaw achieves remarkable virtuosity in the techniques of overblowing (to play notes an octave above the instrument's regular scale) and in his breath control, which allows him to play true tones at a very low sound level. Maintaining true tones while playing so quietly is exceedingly difficult—as is recording music that is so quiet as to be almost drowned out by chirping birds ten or twenty meters away.

24 Plaw, briing tube zither

Ban Pa' Teung (Kwak Neua), Tha Kham Subdistrict, Viang Ken District, Chiang Rai, Thailand, May 24, 1992

Kmhmu in each region have a different style of bamboo tube zither (briing rhaang, briing tnaec, or briing tlaa, according to which species of bamboo is used). A single internode of freshly cut bamboo, approximately 30-40 cm long and 5-9 cm in diameter, is used for the body of the instrument; it is open at both ends. A 2-3 cm square aperture is cut midway along the length, and two or more strings are carefully cut from the skin of the bamboo on both sides of the aperture, remaining connected at both ends near the nodes. Bridges are inserted to raise the strings above the body, increasing their tension and allowing them to be tuned, and a membrane is inserted between the two strings above the airhole. Plaw plays the instrument by striking the strings with a thin bamboo beater, causing both the string and the membrane to resonate above the main airhole. Holding the instrument with one opened end toward his chest, Plaw stops and opens it against his chest, creating the rich resonance heard here (compare the very different instrument used in track 33, where both nodes are left intact).

25 Ta' Manh Ruamchit, *hroong* bamboo jew's harp

Ban Pa' Teung (Kwak Neua), Tha Kham Subdistrict, Viang Ken District, Chiang Rai, Thailand, May 23, 1992

The hroong jew's harp, made of brass or-as here-bamboo, is used in courtship to convey speech messages from a young man to his beloved. The lamella of the instrument, set in motion by the player's hand, serves like the vocal chords to set air into vibration inside his mouth. By shaping his tongue and cheeks the player can choose which vowel sounds to produce, allowing him to speak in disguised form. The boy visits his girlfriend in the evening, uttering endearments on the jew's harp that her eavesdropping parents can pretend not to understand. At the same time she may need to snuggle close to him to hear the delicate sounds of the instrument, competing with the sounds of cicadas chirping in the night. Throughout the highlands of Southeast Asia bamboo or metal jew's harps play a similar role in courtship.

26 Villagers of Mai Chay Den, ritual music and singing for the buffalo sacrifice with *toot* flute and *dong* bamboo stamping tubes

Ran Mai Chay Den, Chon Den Subdistrict, Song Khwae District, Nan, Thailand, January 25, 1996
Once a prominent feature of Kmhmu ritual life.

the buffalo sacrifice is rarely performed today. On the occasion of building a new house, this ceremony was sponsored by Ta' Phan Saylangthoey, a shaman and spirit master who had been in ill health. Within Ta' Phan's house villagers from Mai Chav Den and neighboring villages gathered for various ritual acts and for the juun music heard here. Before the ceremony began, dozens of simple side-blown bamboo flutes were prepared. Made from an internode of tlaa bamboo 65 cm long and 2.5 cm in diameter, they were closed at both ends. Two holes were cut, each four fingerwidths (7 cm) from the two stopped ends-either could be used for blowing through the mouth or the nose. The villagers also prepared dozens of dong bamboo stamping tubes approximately 1.5 meters long and 6-8 cm in diameter. One node was left near the bottom of the tube, and others were knocked out (in everyday life, tubes identical to these are used to carry and store water). Groups of three to six people, usually but not always all of the same gender, lifted the tubes and let them fall in loose synchronization onto the wooden floor of the stilt house. The excerpt here begins with the sound of water being poured from a bamboo water-tube into the ceremonial wine-jar. Singing, playing flutes, and the unending stamping of the tubes continued like this for three nights and days (see front and back cover photos).

27 Naay Phaek, teum singing

Ban Huai Sateng, Ngop Subdistrict, Thung Chang District, Nan. Thailand, February 2, 1992 Wedding ceremonies during the dry season offer the opportunity for villagers to join together in celebration at a time of year when their hardest agricultural work is behind them or lies in the future. Villages may be separated by a few kilometers but united by kinship ties that extend beyond a single village. Here, Phaek (born in 1960) had come from his home in Ban Sop Phang to his wife's village of Huai Sateng to join in the festivities. A master singer, he had to compete with the sound of Thai pop music booming from a cassette player-music that is increasingly taking the place of traditional song. But Phaek and others in Sop Phang had also gotten cassettes of Kmhmu pop music from California. and they enjoyed singing pop songs in Thai or Kmhmu in addition to more traditional teum. He sings here to his beloved, telling her not to expect someone better to come along but to settle for him.

28 Me Van Uong, pii ta' laen reedpipe

Ban Cap Na, Ta Loc Commune, Mai Son District, Son La, Vietnam, May 6, 1994

After more than a decade of research with Kmhmu. I encountered traditions in Cap Na vil-

lage that I had only heard about for years, including the thheek chordophone (track 36) and the antiphonal courtship singing that Me Van Uong and Me Thi Thoan (track 37) demonstrated for me. In the hills overlooking the Song Da River, Uong and his neighbors live in a tiny village of fewer than twenty households, an hour's walk from the nearest road. The villagers were poor in material goods but rich in cultural traditions. Although still young (born in 1967), Uong was knowledgeable in making and playing the pii (in this track), the toot flute, briing tube zither, and thheek chordophone (track 36), as well as being an excellent singer and storyteller. As he made each instrument and demonstrated it for us. Uong also looked on proudly as his young son tried his own hand, making a serviceable pii and playing on it. The distinctive style here is produced by the player beginning each phrase with the instrument inserted as far into his mouth as it will fit; as he begins sounding the first note, he gradually pulls the pipe outward until its reed is held just inside his lips. The instrument is a single tube, approximately 1 cm in diameter. stopped at the "tongue" end, with an up-cut percussion reed cut into it. Uong made a separate resonator from a piece of bamboo about 5 cm long and 2.5 cm in diameter, with one node remaining intact. When he played, he inserted

the "tail" of the pipe into a hole in the side of the larger bamboo, with the resulting appearance of a corncob pipe.

29 Ta' Sen, pii rmblaang reedpipe

Ban Nam Thok, Nghia Son Commune, Van Chan District, Yen Bai, Vietnam, June 9, 1990 The Kmhmu in Nghia Son arrived there more than a century ago, and have lived since in relative isolation from other Kmhmu communities. Ta' Sen was born in 1920 in Nam Thok and has lived there his entire life. The pii rmblaang that he performs here was 70-80 cm long; like the pii in track 38 it has a conical bore, with numerous short lengths of bamboo fitted into pieces of larger diameter. The "tongue" end is stopped, with an up-cut percussion reed; its diameter is about .5 cm, and progressively larger pieces (koon "children") are assembled until the body of the instrument (ma "mother") is about 2 cm in diameter. It has three fingerholes and a rich resonance.

30 Lu Van Hue, toot teum flute

Ban Xop Pot, Kim Da Commune, Tuong Duong District, Nghe An, Vietnam, April 15, 1994 Xop Pot village, an hour's walk up a tiny stream from the Nam Neun River, is now inhabited mostly by Kmhmu, but it was the ancestral homeland of a now-tiny ethnic group, the Iduh or Tay Hat, a few of whom still live in Xop Pot

and Kim Hoa (track 38). A century ago millenarian ethnic rebellions swept through the region, and most of the Iduh fled to Xiang Khwang province of Laos, where some 200 remain today. Xop Pot villagers remain staunchly traditional, with vibrant musical and ceremonial traditions. vet the village has also seen its members rise to leadership positions in the province, and some have recently completed college studies (still a rarity among Kmhmu in Vietnam). Lu Van Hue. born in Xop Pot in 1960, performs here on a ring-stop flute with three fingerholes (similar in design to the instrument played by Plaw in track 23, but smaller).

31 Moong Thi Sy, day day bamboo tuning fork Ban Xop Pot, Kim Da Commune, Tuong Duong

District, Nghe An, Vietnam, April 14, 1994 The day day bamboo fork is found in several parts of insular Southeast Asia (especially the Indonesian islands of Celebes, Nias, and Borneo, and in the northern Philippines), but among mainland Southeast Asians it is the Kmhmu alone who are its masters. As a symbol of Kmhmu ethnicity it is found in one or another form among Kmhmu in every region. The instrument combines the character of an idiophone and that of an aerophone. A piece of bamboo approximately 50-70 cm long is carefully trimmed, with the bottom end about 10-15 cm below a node. Starting an equal length above the node, two blades or arms are cut and trimmed until the desired sound is achieved. A small split extends down from the juncture of the two blades toward the node, and a thread of cotton or bamboo is inserted for tuning. Varying from region to region, the node may be open or closed: typically, but not always, a thumbhole and fingerhole are cut on opposite sides of the tube. By opening or closing the thumbhole and fingerhole and by stopping the bottom of the tube against the player's thigh or chest, the player changes the length of the resonating chamber and the resulting overtones. In most regions the instrument is made from freshly cut bamboo, played by women (on this track) or children, and discarded after use. Moong Thi Sy performs here with masterful control of rhythm and the overtones of the instrument.

32 Moong Thi Sv. briing drum: Vi Tien Hang, rbaang bossed gong; and Hung Thi Khong, ceng cymbals

Ban Xop Pot, Kim Da Commune, Tuong Duong District, Nghe An, Vietnam, April 16, 1994 Music on the drum, gong, and cymbals plays an important part in every Kmhmu celebration (compare track 18). The drum here is a twoheaded barrel drum purchased locally, and the brass or bronze gong and cymbals are also bought at market. Gongs traditionally came in pairs—a mother gong and a father gong—but they can also be played singly with the drum and cymbals. Vi Tien Hang was born in Xop Pot in 1947, Hung Thi Khong in 1980, and Moong Thi Sy in 1977. In some Kmhmu regions these instruments are played exclusively by men, but in Xop Pot girls such as Sy and Khong were also encouraged to play.

33 Oc Cong Dan, briing tlaa tube zither

Ban Xop Phu, Yen Na Commune, Tuong Duong District, Nghe An, Vietnam, April 20, 1994 When I asked people in Xop Phu about the tube zither. I was confused when they responded that they had the briing rbaang "drum and gongs" (track 32)—a confusion that was only cleared up when Oc Cong Dan (born in 1957) began to play the instrument he made for me. In size it resembled the instrument played by Plaw in Chiang Rai (track 24), but both ends were closed, and, in addition to the two strings adjacent to the aperture, two more strings were lifted out of the body of the instrument parallel to the primary strings. Dan played by using a beater on the membrane (where Plaw beat the strings themselves, causing the membrane to vibrate) or on the body of the zither and by plucking the additional strings with his thumbnail and fingernails. By plucking the two tuned strings Dan was able to imitate the music of the brass gong and cymbals, respectively, and by beating alternately on the tube zither's membrane and body he imitated the sound of beating the drum's head and rim.

34 Moong Duc Thang, hroong jew's harp

Ban Xop Pot, Kim Da Commune, Tuong Duong District, Nghe An, Vietnam, April 14, 1994 Moong Duc Thang is a resident of Ban Kim Hoa on the banks of the Nam Neun River, but he accompanied us to Xop Pot on our first visit, and it was there at a party on our first evening that he performed on the metal hroong jew's harp. Born in 1948 and already the father of several children, he was past the age when the jew's harp would be used for courtship, and he no longer needed to use it to utter words of endearment to a prospective wife. And he wasn't the shy type anyway, encouraging the other villagers in Xop Pot and Kim Hoa to perform for us by trying his own hand first, where his humorous attempts to perform induced someone else to take up the instrument and show us how it really should sound.

35 Ya' San, hur suul tlaa bamboo blowing pipe

Ban Nong Quang, Nghia Son Commune, Van Chan District, Yen Bai, Vietnam, June 10, 1990 Ya' San was born in Nghia Son in 1925 and has lived there except for a time in the late 1960s. when villagers, fleeing their permanent homes to escape American B-52s, lived in improvised shelters in the forest. The Vietnamese researcher who accompanied me to Nghia Son, Professor Dang Nghiem Van, had last been there in 1968, when villagers were living in the forest shelters. At that time nobody could have imagined that 22 years later a Vietnamese researcher and his American colleague would return to learn about Kmhmu folktales and musical traditions. Ya' San here plays on a small tube of bamboo about 15 cm long and 1.5 cm in diameter, open at both ends, with no fingerholes. The top end is cut from opposite sides to form two points with a 45° angle and two cup-shaped edges (ethnomusicologists might describe it as a cupped rimblown flute, or endblown notched flute, or unstopped panpipe). Ya' San holds the instrument vertically with one cup-shaped edge against her lower lip, blowing a stream of air against the blade of the opposite edge. At the same time she uses her vocal cords to hum intermittently, combining the sound of her humming with the sound of the flute.

36. Me Van Uong, tnheek chordophone

Ban Cap Na. Ta Loc Commune, Mai Son District, Son La. Vietnam, May 6, 1994

The tnheek is a bowed one-string spike fiddle whose delicate sound is hard to hear in the typical soundscape of a village, where it is easily drowned out by barking dogs, crowing cocks, and laughing children. The body of the instrument is a short bamboo tube, about 10 cm long and 5 cm in diameter, with a wooden neck about 45 cm long inserted diametrically through the walls of the tube leaving a short nub protruding at the bottom. The face of the instrument is made from thin wood or the dried sheath of a banana leaf. A single string is stretched from the nub, across a small wooden bridge, and fastened to a tuning peg at the end of the neck. A cord is attached along the neck near the tuning peg to hold the string parallel to the neck. It is played with a small bow of hair or bamboo fibers stretched between two ends of a piece of bamboo. The tnheek can be played solo (as on this track), or to accompany singing.

37. Me Thi Thoan, teum singing

Ban Cap Na. Ta Loc Commune, Mai Son District, Son La, Vietnam, May 6, 1994

The youngest performer in this collection, Thoan (born in 1982) was only 12 when we recorded her singing antiphonal courtship songs with Uong and singing solo as here. The village boys her age had mostly gone off to boarding school in the provincial seat. Son La, but parents were hesitant to send young girls so far from home. Before she began each song, she made a "ritual disclaimer" of competence to excuse any mistakes she might make and to calm her nerves. "Little sister Thoan will sing one bit, it's not pretty," she says here before beginning to sing-her song belving her claimed inability.

38 Vy Vinh Ha, pii teum reedpipe

Ban Kim Hoa, Kim Da Commune, Tuong Duong District, Nghe An, Vietnam, April 17, 1994 In recent decades, as population pressures grow and environmental awareness increases, national governments increasingly discourage the traditional swidden cultivation of the Kmhmu and other highlanders. Instead of living in small and remote villages like Cap Na, people are encouraged to settle in larger villages, where governments may more easily provide health and education and other services. The Kmhmu in Kim Hoa village have moved in the last twenty years from smaller villages at higher elevations to the already established Thai Meuy village of Kim Hoa, perched on the steep banks of the Nam Neun River. Today the village is half Kmhmu and

half Thai Meuv (with a few Iduh). Vv Vinh Ha (born in 1955) grew up in a monolingual Kmhmu-speaking village, but whether his children and grandchildren will value Kmhmu traditions as he does remains to be seen. Here he plays a three-hole conical-bore reedpipe similar in design to the instrument used on track 29. but with a very different sound and playing style.

The following tracks have been edited for length: 5, 9, 10, 13, 15, 17, 18, 20, 23-30, 32, 34, 36, 38. The original versions can be heard on the Folkways web page [www.si.edu/folkways/ 40456.htm] for comparison. Selected song texts and translations may also be read at the Folkways web page.

CREDITS

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Notes by Frank Proschan

Photographs and map by Frank Proschan

Musical transcriptions by Guy Hardy

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Recordings from 1982-91 were made on cassette, and those from 1992-96 were made on DAT. Copies of field recordings are archived at the Smithsonian Institution Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (1982-96 recordings) and the Library of Congress Recorded Sound Section (1982-84 recordings). Recordings from Laos are also archived at the Institute for Cultural Research, Ministry of Information and Culture, Vientiane. Laos, and those from Vietnam are also archived at the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology and Institute of Ethnology, both at the National Center for Social Sciences and Humanities in Hanoi, Vietnam.

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Front and back cover photos: Villagers in northern Nan, Thailand, during the three-day buffalo sacrifice. Ban Mai Chay Den, Chon Den Subdistrict, Song Khwae District, Nan, Thailand, January 26, 1996.

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