Cambodia | Traditional Music

VOLUME TWO
SIDE I
1. PEI POK (2:26)
   (single-reed bamboo flute solo)
2. CHAPEL VENG (2:27)
   (long-neck lute solo)
3. PHLOM SNENG (3:08)
   (single-reed animal horn solo)
4. KHMER LEOU (6:34)
   (gong ensemble)
5. KHMER LEOU (3:15)
   (gong ensemble)

SIDE II
1. KROM PHLENG MOHORI (3:50)
   (style of the AyaH dance ensemble)
2. KROM PHLENG KAR (3:23)
   (wedding ensemble)
3. KROM PHLENG KAR (3:23)
   (wedding ensemble)
4. RABAM KRAGOAK (3:20)
   (peacock dance with ensemble and Sralay)
5. RABAM TRALOAK (4:44)
   (coconut dance with ensemble and male voice)

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Throughout several centuries, music has been an essential component in the Khmer culture. From court music to folk music and the various musics of native tribes in remote areas of Cambodia, most types of music are performed only when a specific cultural occasion calls for it.

It was only two decades ago that music and instruments from the remote areas of the country arrived in the capital city of Phnom Penh. Also, there is still a large number of folk and tribal instruments which are unknown outside their particular villages, perhaps because of the rarity of the ritual event which calls for the performance of that particular instrument or music. It is entirely probable that with the advent of modernization, many kinds of Cambodian music will disappear along with the cultural conditions which nurtured them.

Angkor Wat, the Khmer center of culture and the capital city during the 12th century, displays not only the high level of architectural achievement of that period, but also the refined bas-relief sculptures depicting numerous important historical events and numerous art forms.
Aside from the use of various types of drones, the use of rhythmic patterns emphasizing only a few notes (in either instrumental, vocal or percussion) is an essential element. Any given pattern can be repeated continuously for long periods of time throughout a piece. In a vocal piece, a simple steady time beater like a bamboo block may be added—in the case of an instrumental piece, tribes may add hand-clapping or foot-tapping for rhythmic articulations.

A note-set used in a rhythmic pattern usually consists of a very limited number of “notes”. For example, a vocal piece may be based on the use of two notes set approximately a perfect fourth apart. The notes are sung in the context of a rhythmic pattern which moderately repeats and alternates between the two notes, forming a phrase. The vocalist shifts the note-set gradually upward by half-steps (by emphasizing microtonal fluctuations of the two-note set) to another transposed interval. The ascending parallel chromatic motion is not rigorous, nor is it necessarily obvious during a performance, due to the very slow movement upward, the constant repetition of phrases and the atmospheric sense of infinity which the vocal line evokes. It may perhaps be said that the use of what we call a perfect fourth rising in constant parallel chromatic steps is not compositionally purposive, but an intuitive, natural, traditional practice. It should also be made clear that many vocal pieces do not function as "songs", but in various cultural aspects such as incantations, invocations to the spirits and prayer.

The terms folk music and tribal music have much in common, as a study of Cambodian instruments and practices of music-making can be traced to a few tribes. It appears that many types of music, in Cambodia as well as neighboring areas of Southeast Asia, shared similar experiences or cultural attitudes, at one time or another. This perhaps can be traced to the time when the KHMER empire (descendants of the MON-KHMER tribe) were the predominant race in most of the regions of Southeast Asia.

Side one/band one

PEI POK is a single-reed wind instrument similar to the native bamboo flute. This instrument is occasionally interchanged with PEI AR (also called PEI PRABOS) in the ritual event of trance mediums in villages. Both of the PEI are used principally with the KROM PHLENG ARAK (ritual rites ensemble).
TAKKHE

Side two/band one

KROM PHLENG MOHORI is similar to the MOHORI ensemble of the Royal Palace only in their instrumentation. Here the ensemble consists of the Crapeu or TAKKHE, literally "crocodile," a plucked string instrument, the TRO SO, a high-pitched, two-string fiddle; the TRO OU, a low-pitched two-string fiddle; the Khloy, a bamboo or (rarely) brass flute; the SKOR ARAK, a drum with a pottery or wooden base and a snakeskin head, and the KHRAB, slap sticks made of bamboo or wood.

The ensemble usually accompanies a number of dancers in the performance of popular dances. On other occasions it can be accompanied in the AYAIL ensemble, usually two singers who are experts in improvisational rhyme and prose. The use of flutter-tonguing, slidings and shoutings by the dancers here is also found in the CHAYAM, TROT and other popular dances.

Side two/band two

PHLENG KAR (wedding music) ensemble has a number of pieces in its repertoire, usually performed according to the directions of a guru (ACHHA) conducting the three-day wedding ceremony. For example, the HOME RONG begins the ceremony at the first sundown, addressing the attention of the genies or spiritual forces. PHLENG KAT SAR is played the second day, while PREAH THONG is played while the bride and groom have slim cotton threads tied around their wrists and are showered with flowers. SAR KANTEL (rolling the straw mat) is performed during the ceremonial event of REAM SA KANTEL.

The instruments in this ensemble are; TRO SO, high-pitched, two-string fiddle; TRO OU, low-pitched, two-string fiddle; KSE DIEV, monochord lute; and SKOR ARAK, drum.

Side two/band three

PHLENG KAR (wedding music) in this piece is the same ensemble as in band two with the addition of PEI PRABOS (or PEI AR), a double-reed attached to a bamboo flute. The rhythmic pattern of the ARAK here is used to accompany a male dancer for a particular event in the ceremony.

Side two/band four

The piece is performed by students at the University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh. The group was the first in the country to explore various kinds of folk, popular and tribal music. In RABAM KRAKOAK (peacock dance), the SRALAI, a double-reed wind instrument, carries the melody.

Side two/band five

Also performed by the students at the University of Fine Arts, the RABAM TRALOK (coconut dance) is a popular dance and song which displays feelings of unity and nationalism of the KHMER people, the peaceful nation, at one time. The text here, however, is improvised by the singer, who adds certain phonemes to create rhymes and various phrase contours.

Generally, the use of phonemes is found in almost every song in many diverse ensembles. On certain occasions, such as in the ensemble of the Royal Palace, the singer inserts phonemes to such an extent that the total vocal line can be transformed from words with specific meanings to sounds which perhaps represent gestural atmosphere and feelings. In this recording, the instrumentation consists of the TRO SO (a high-pitched, two-string fiddle); the Crapeu or TAKKHE, meaning crocodile, a plucked-string instrument; the CHOP CHHING, a pair of antique cymbals; SKOR ARAK, drums; and a male singer and dancers who use coconut shells as percussive instruments and shouting of articulated phonemes.

CHAPEI VENG

CHINARY UNG (b. Cambodia, 1942) came to the United States in 1964, studied at the Manhattan School of Music and received a doctorate with distinction in Composition from Columbia University. Dr. Ung has studied with Bulent Arel, Jack Beeson, Chou Wen-chung, George Crumb, Mario Davidovsky and Vladimir Ussechevsky.

His numerous awards and commissions include the John D. Rockefeller 3rd Fund, National Endowment for the Arts, the Koussevitzky Music Foundation, the Creative Artist Public Service Award and the Guggenheim Fellowship Award. In 1975 the Ford Foundation awarded him an Indochina Fellowship to undertake a research project on the music of his native Cambodia.
His recently published articles focus on East/West music, both traditional and contemporary. "More Than Pitch and Rythmn" and "The Root of Musical Expression" were presented at the 20th conference of the International Musicological Society at the University of California at Berkeley (USA, 1977), and the Fifth Asian Composers League conference in Bangkok (Thailand, 1978), respectively.

Dr. Ung's publishers are C.F. Peters Corp. and Paul Price Publications. His composition, MOHORI (1974), for mezzo-soprano and chamber ensemble, is available on the CRI label.

Dr. Ung is presently assistant professor of theory and composition at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois.

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Produced by Chinary Ung.

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Cambodia
Traditional Music
INSTRUMENTAL & VOCAL PIECES VOLUME ONE
COMPILED AND ANNOTATED BY CHINARY UNG

SIDE I:
1. SKHE-DIEV
   (monochord lute solo)
2. PHLOM SLECK
   (single leaf solo)
3. KROM PHLENG KHMER
   (ensemble/male voice)
4. KROM PHLENG KHMER
   (ensemble)
5. CHHAYAM
   (perc. ens./male voices)

SIDE II:
1. KROM PHLENG PINPEAT
   (perc. ens. & sralay)
2. MOHORI
   (ensemble/female voice)
3. KROM PHLENG PINPEAT
   (perc. ens. & sralay)
4. KROM PHLENG PINPEAT
   (perc. ens. & sralay)