

INSTRUMENTAL & VOCAL PIECES VOLUME ONE

ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4081

COMPILED AND ANNOTATED BY CHINARY UNG



Cambodia

Traditional Music



PHLENG KHMER ENSEMBLE



PINPEAT ENSEMBLE

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4081

SIDE I:

1. SKHE-DIEV (3:10)
(monochord lute solo)
2. PHLOM SLECK (3:25)
(single leaf solo)
3. KROM PHLENG KHMER (4:10)
(ensemble/male voice)
4. KROM PHLENG KHMER (2:46)
(ensemble)
5. CHHAYAM (6:14)
(perc. ens./male voices)

SIDE II:

1. KROM PHLENG PINPEAT (2:00)
(perc. ens. & sralay)
2. MOHORI (5:14)
(ensemble/female voice)
3. KROM PHLENG PINPEAT (4:07)
(perc. ens. & sralay)
4. KROM PHLENG PINPEAT (6:48)
(perc. ens. & sralay)

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Cambodia Traditional Music

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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CAMBODIA: TRADITIONAL MUSIC #1

Compiled and Annotated by DR. CHINARY UNG

Introduction

BAMPLEI ("to ornament") is perhaps the most essential practice among Cambodian musicians.

The layout of the structured tone-attacks in most pieces provides a sufficient time span for the interpolation of personal stylistic interpretation, such as the use of quick successive neighboring tone-attacks placed in the time areas surrounding the structured tones.

Thus, while each of the many distinct lines in ensemble performance evokes its own particular elaborating "ornamentations", the timbres of the instrumental layers blend in similar mannerisms.

The essential aspect of Khmer music, in a manner similar to other Eastern concepts of music-making, involves a characteristic prolongation or sense of timelessness which brings to mind atmospheric impressions, spirituality, or has philosophical overtones. The use of ancient modes passed on through centuries of musical practice impart an aura of primitiveness and a most remarkable intuitive communication between musicians.

The concept of the "downbeat" exists only in the mind of the players-- the "beat" exists more in the sense of the listener's perceiving the total gestural pulsation than a strictly defined rhythmic interplay.

In this respect, the imprecision of the beat has a natural quality that serves to diffuse several interacting rhythmic layers and creates a

psychological sense of space and elasticity, enhancing the flow and interplay among the players, who all share a common theme in their collective mind.

Above all, it should be understood that the musicians are already tuned in to a specific ritual ceremony; this has traditionally been the common practice of numerous Khmer ensembles throughout the centuries.

side one/ band one

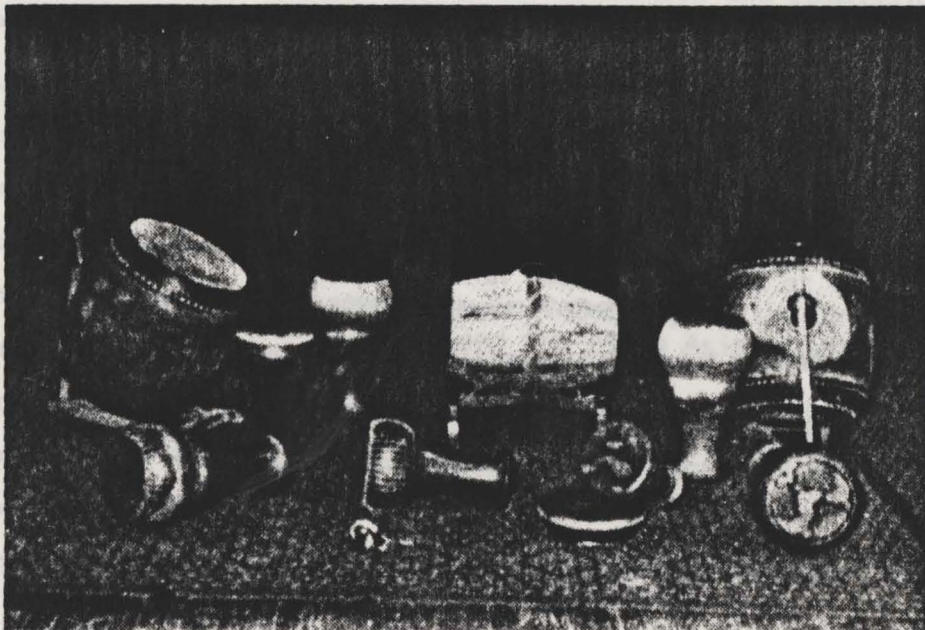
KHSE DIEV , or KHSE MUOY (literally "string single") is, most simply, a plucked, single string instrument mounted on a sound box and held like a lute. Its resonator, constructed from the shell of the KLOAK, a large, circular, tropical fruit, functions similarly to the gourd resonator of the African MBIRA; i.e. it amplifies the instrument's sound and directs it back toward the player. The KLOAK shell can be held tightly closed or partially open against the chest, according to the desire of the player.

The KHSE DIEV player is a singer as well, who can be heard on the village streets depicting Cambodian legends or folk songs. Mastery of the instrument demands a continuing flow of poetic interpretation.

KHSE DIEV is also used in the KROM PHLENG KHMER (ensemble for wedding ceremonies) and the KROM PHLENG ARAK (ensemble for magical rites).

The instrumental solo in this recording demonstrates a mastery of the very elaborate "ornamentations" used in playing this single string instrument. The player's technique can control specific aspects of the tone-attack, making optimum use of the resonator's sustaining qualities

and the orderly decay of the tone. For example, the articulation of an attack can become a series of events such as the following: a sonorous, plosive tone-attack (with the KLOAK shell open or closed against the chest, followed by a sustained tone emphasizing the attacked tone, transforming as it decays to a fast vibrato, then to a tremolo, then to a glissando through a large sliding interval to another new tone, and still then; finger attacks on the finger board in a series of light movements, creating a fast, running, percussive effect.



PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS

side one/ band two

PHLOM SLEK ("blow leaf") refers to the leaf of a tree or a plant (SAKROM, KHNOUNG and a few others) approximately four inches long. The player curls one long edge of the leaf over, and places the arch between the lips, articulating the sound with a controlled air flow.

This instrument is often played in the rice fields by the guardians of the cattle and water buffalo, while riding on the animal's back. Sometimes hunters use the SLEK to imitate wild animal sounds. SLEK music is usually a medium for self-entertainment, but is occasionally used with other instruments as well, such as in the PHLENG KHMER ensemble.

Its characteristic "cut-off" or "release" of a sustained tone is one of the most stylized articulations in Khmer music. This type of cut-off is also found in the playing of the SRALAI (double reed instrument) and in the vocal lines of NAING SBK (music for shadow theater).

side one/ band three

KROM PHLENG KHMER (Khmer ensemble music) generally consists of PAI-AR (double reed bamboo flute), SLEK (single leaf instrument), TRO KHMER (three string fiddle), KHSE DIEV (a single string lute), CHAPEI VENG (two string lute), CHHING (one pair of antique cymbals) and SKOR ARAK (small drum). In this type of formation any of the players of KHSE DIEV, CHAPEI VENG or SKOR ARAK can be the singer for the ensemble as well.

The timbral character of this ensemble is very distinctive. The overall sonority is one of multiple lines blending and interweaving like gossamer-thin strands into a fragile, homogenous textural web. Yet each instrument and its line is still apparent, articulate in its traditional character and mannerism.

In the vocal line, the words and phonetics are improvised according to the traditional conception of the vocal event, yet the structural tones are strictly set for any given piece. Thus the vocal "improvisation" is limited to the very narrow area of phonetic interpretation of the

prescribed vocal line. In this recording the phonetic OEU in the opening line is most characteristic in vocal folk music; it is often found at the opening of various vocal phrases. OUE is usually sung in a high register with a full-bodied voice, expressing emotional impact. This stylized characteristic is found among professional singers as well as common natives, in people ranging from the palace to remote areas of Cambodia.

side one/ band four

KROM PHLANG KAR (wedding music ensemble, literally "ensemble music wedding") has an instrumental makeup similar to KROM PHLANG KHMER and KROM PHLANG ARAK (ensemble for magical rites, literally "ensemble music demon"). However, the ensembles of KAR and ARAK each have their individual repertoires.

This piece, HOM RONG, is performed specifically as an overture to a wedding ceremony, which traditionally lasts for three days. The purpose of this overture is to address the attention of the genies (spiritual forces), requesting a prosperous wedding for the bride and groom and the hope for a long and lasting happiness. The guru of the village may prepare the ritual requirements, such as providing various ornamental materials, and burning incense and candles.

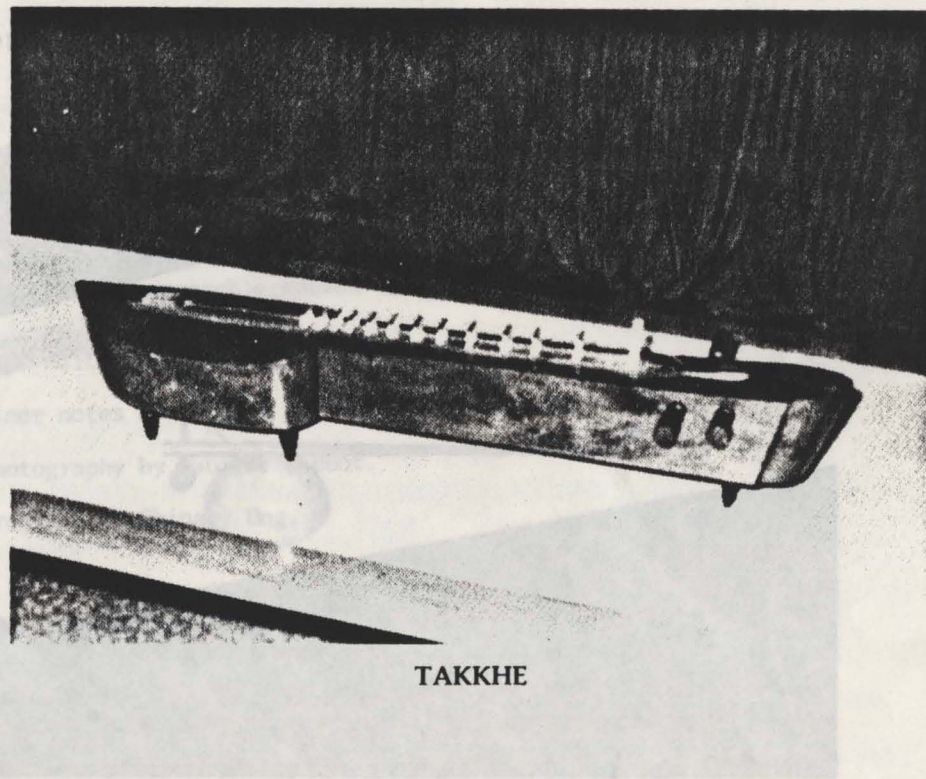
side one/ band five

CHAYAM (percussion ensemble) consists of four long drums (CHAYAM) mounted on a solid wooden shell about three feet long, KONG MUNG (a small, suspended hand gong) and CHAP (a pair of hand cymbals). Similar to this ensemble are PHLANG KHLANG KHEK (funeral music) and PHLANG KONG SKOR (music for cremation or music for the drought season), as each of

these three ensembles has only one piece in its repertoire and thus performs only on the occasion called for.

The long drums are hung from one shoulder along the side of the body, and various techniques are used to articulate the sound. Among others, the players may use either the flat side of the fingers with the hand cupped, or the base of the palm with the fingers up to hit the drum head. CHAYAM is also played with the elbows and the knees.

CHAYAM players are improvisors as well, shouting words and phonetics. The ensemble functions as one of the components (along with other ritual preparations, costumes, martial arts, chanting, etc.) of the mind-altering multi-media that is an integral part of the Buddhist ceremonial festivals, BON KATHHEN and BON PHKA.



TAKKHE

Most of the players wear masks, and the gong player, also wearing a mask and marching in front, exhorts the ensemble in a monkey-like manner. The drummers make **mimicking** gestures and facial caricatures while shouting with enthusiastic, articulated rhythmic phonetics. This celebration is an occasion of joy among the villagers and is a colorful festivity.

side two/ band one

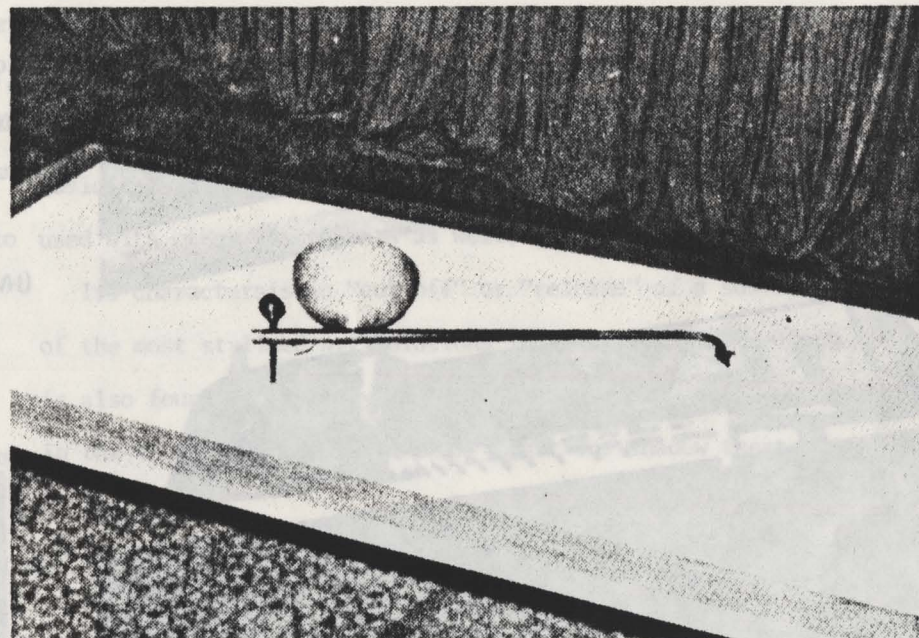
KROM PHLENG PINPEAT ensemble can be heard on feast days in the pagodas. In the palace, the ensemble is used to accompany classical dance for ritual occasions and accompany a theatrical event depicting the Khmer version of the story RAMAJANA (REAMKER).

The PINPEAT consists predominantly of percussion instruments: the RONEAT EK, a high bamboo xylophone with twenty-one keys mounted on a curved box resonator, tuned using a combination of bees-wax, rice and lead solder called PRAMOR; the RONEAT THUNG, a low bamboo xylophone with sixteen keys; the KONG VONG TOUCH and KONG VONG THOM (TOUCH and THOM meaning small and large, respectively), two sets (totalling 33) of tuned gongs suspended horizontally on circular rattan frames; the SAMPHO, a two-sided drum; the SKOR THOM, two large drums played with heavy wooden mallets; the SRALAI, a double reed instrument with reed made from latania, a rare wind instrument from the Angkorian period, which traditionally requires the application of circular breathing for its performance.

PINPEAT may be aided by the RONEAT DEK, a metal xylophone with twenty-one keys, the CHHING, a pair of antique cymbals, and KRAB, a type of claves.

side two/ band two

The MOHORI ensemble is wind, string, percussion, plucked instruments

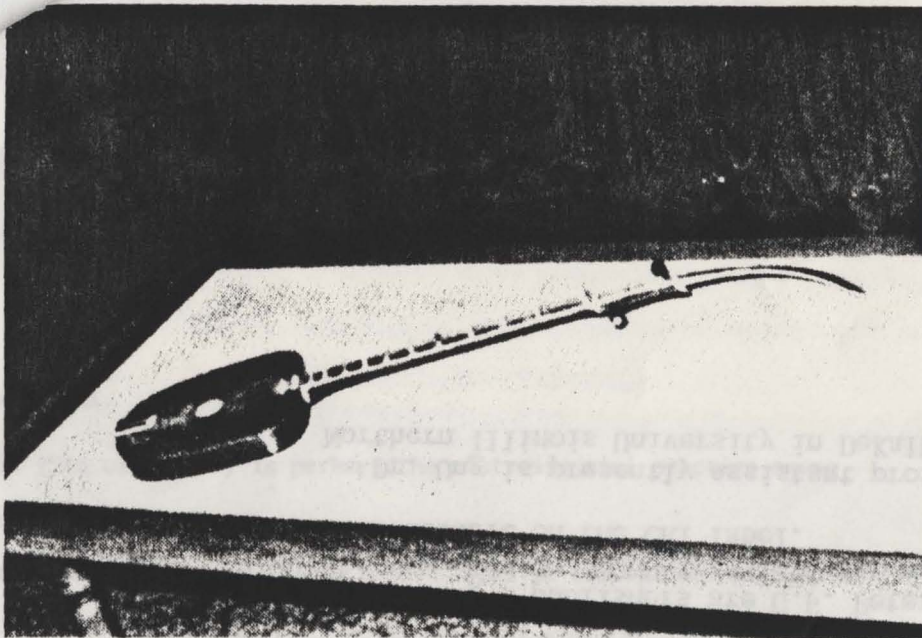


KHSE DIEV

and voice. In contrast to the majority of Cambodian ensembles, which play only for ceremonies, this ensemble performs mainly popular music.

The instruments normally used are: the KHLOY, a bamboo flute which can be made from several types of bamboo, such as DAKMAY, PING-PUONG, and POK; KRAPEU (TAKKHE in Thai) meaning "crocodile", a plucked string instrument; TRO CHHE, TRO SO and TRO OU, **two**-stringed fiddles; CHHING, a pair of antique cymbals and SKOR ROMONEA, a small flat drum. The player of the ROMONEA also plays another small drum similar to the SKOR ARAK.

The phonetic NAI-NA, heard in this recording, is one of the very few phonetic phrases practiced by the Khmer singers. In long transitional sections between lyric clauses, there is a free application of this phonetic. NAI-NA is also used by a teacher to imitate certain rhythmic patterns for students of traditional instruments.



CHAPEI VENG

side two/ band three

KROM PHLENG PINPEAT, in the opening sections, is most often begun by the RONEAT EK (high bamboo xylophone), at its preferred rhythmic speed. Gradually, as the other instruments enter, the ensemble falls into a common tempo.

This practice is also common in the final section of a number of pieces and the transitional sections (interludes between compositional episodes) while accompanying either the court dance or the NANG SBEK, shadow theatre depicting the Khmer RAMAYANA (REAMKER).

These time spans encompass what is perhaps the most free-form improvisation that can exist in the traditional PINPEAT: all instrumental lines are gradually yet completely shifting from "strict" pulsation to a loosely held elasticity.

side two/ band four

KROM PHLENG PINPEAT, the same ensemble here is reduced in size during the long section of the piece, which exhibits the virtuosity of a limited number of players.

The closing section of this ensemble ("tutti" section) conveys very sonorous sounds and has a gradual display of repetitive notes in shifting rhythmic layers.

Heard on side two in PINPEAT and MOHORI are the musicians of the Royal Palace.

acknowledgements

Special thanks to a team conducted by Kim Say in 1970 at the University of Fine Arts, Phnom Penh, Cambodia for its cooperation in collecting these recordings; grateful acknowledgement also to Professor Maurice Liebot for his extensive documents, and to the Ford Foundation for providing a research grant on the Cambodian music project.

Tape editing by Chinary Ung.

Liner notes by Chinary Ung, edited by Charles D. Adkins

Photography by Maurice Liebot.

Produced by Chinary Ung.

This album is dedicated to the memory of the Cambodian people who have suffered senselessly and lost their lives in war.

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 Koussevitsky 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.