

Research Article

Contemporary Thai Southern Dance (Manora Dancing): A Story of Nakha

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Abstract

Creative research: A Story of Nakha, the purpose of this performing art was to create dancing postures with storytelling from Manora's white fingernails. This study was an action research including analytical description. The dancing was divided into three stages; Stage 1 to show the holiness of Manora's fingernails in Nora Magic Ceremony, Stage 2 to show the use of Manora's fingernails mixed with basic dancing styles including symbol creation such as trees, flowers, leaves, birds, and insects; and Stage 3 to show the use of Manora's fingernails mixed with four dancing contents that were different dancing processes but using redundant dancing styles and increasing rhythm and speed. In the last stage, communication, conversation, and response were made through the dancing process blended with using the Manora's fingernails (all eight white fingernails). There were six performers, who wore black suits with headscarves covering their faces, and danced with several dancing styles synchronized with the rhythm of Manora music that consisted of Thai flute, drum, gong, cup-shaped cymbals, and Thai shorted drum (Tub), blended with singing the eight-minute-long song of Manora including. Each was blended with the basic rhythm of Manora dancing; Sord-soy and Thong-rong in all of the three stages of the Manora dancing.

Keywords: Nakha, Contemporary Manora Dancing, Tombod

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Introduction

Manora's nails appeared in several cultures; and could be seen in folk performances organized for rituals and entertainment for both royal and citizen affairs in Thailand, such as the royal drama dancing in the central area of Thailand, Klong Toom North Eastern drum dance, which uses five artificial nails made of bamboo (Saenthawisook, 2016, p. 110), Phu Thai folk dancing in Sakon Nakhon province of Thailand, Fon Leb folk dancing in the northern area of Thailand, which uses gold colored metal nails (Boonyachai, 2016, p.121), and the Manora dancing in the south, which uses long silver cone fingers threaded with colorful beads.



Figure 1 Original nails of Manora

Source: Thamnit Nikomrat (1997).



Figure 2 Current nails of Manora

Source: Thamnit Nikomrat (2021).

Nora or Manora is a southern Thai performance that comprises of dancing, singing, drama, and ritual. The dancing must be performed with the body's organs to communicate the meaning of the dancing's postures. For example, the use of hands, arms, legs, face, fingers, and others for a rhythmic combination of the dancing. In particular, Manora dancers wear long artificial nails on their eight fingers to furnish the dancing postures, tell stories, and communicate things, so the nails are a necessary component of Manora dancing that have become an outstanding identity of Manora dancing. To create value and splendor of the performing art, Manora dancing, all Manora dancers favor to wear the nails, which are made to be long- shaped cones and thread with colorful beads for the rhythmic dancing according to inherited tradition.



Figure 3 Manora's nails
Source: Thamnit Nikomrat (2018).



Figure 4 Fon Leb's Nails
Source: Department of Cultural Promotion (2016).



Figure 5 Traditional Thai Drama's Nails
Source: Department of Cultural Promotion



Figure 6 Klong Toom Nails Dance
Source: Department of Cultural Promotion

Manora's nails in the south were used along with Manora performing art for centuries and were developed from silver sheets of metal or stainless steel, and aluminium thread with nylon strings and crystal beads, or the nails only, made of metal cones and rattans based upon popularity and convenience. However, the Manora dancing also uses the nails for performance and rituals. For instance, during the opening ceremony for Manora playhouse, three nails were used for the ritual along with bracelets and betel nuts; in addition, in the case of paying respect ceremony for Manora teachers, nine nails would be used along with candles, and bracelets.



Figure 7 Manora's nails

Source: Department of Cultural Promotion (2016).

Manora's nails were used for every episode of the Manora dancing. Manora's nails would create the beauty of the dance and communicate the meanings of the dance that would create favors in the performance, especially when the nails and fingers were curving and swaggering, including slowly moving the nails when lights touch with the silver fingernails, and the lights reflect the dancing postures on the stage. As a result, the identity of Manora dancing will shine outstandingly.

Manora dance can be created into several dancing postures; nevertheless, the dancing content of Manora is a vital part to assist the dancing styles that could be created for dancing postures, lead to beautiful dance, and reflect the meaning of the dancing postures outstandingly. The said dancing postures, such as the dancing of teaching contents of teachers, garland posture, dancing of teaching content, posture of wad wai pha yok, phan na dancing, and pleng tab pleng tone. The dance depends on specialized skills, both singing and dancing, to create the outstanding dance. The creation of dancing postures with using rapid hand movement styles and redundant and emphasizing many time of the hand movements. These methods will create the splendid and beautiful dance; for example, the content of Bot Phan na said that "Bang Seang Pha Atit Mok Pid Tiew Kwang" or "Tiew Kwang Ban Pod Soong Cha Rod Aka Nid" and the content of Pleng Tab Pleng Tone "Phan Pha Nga Ngap Rayab Yab Weaw Warb Weaw Wow Sri Koaw Phern" or "Khang Heuw Mee Hong Pen Chong Lord Nam Lai Tha Lord Long Tham Lum La Han" etc.

As a result, Manora dance is a splendid wisdom of beautiful nails performing art. When the outstanding identity of the dance is brought to create splendid and interesting performing art, so

Manora's nails skill can be applied for other performing art as well.

Objectives and Purposes

1. To study the art of Manora's nails using skill in several dancing styles.
2. To create the contemporary Thai Southern Dance (Manora Dance): A Story of Nakha.

Research Methodology

This study was done with action research and descriptive analysis along with original dancing process and creative Manora dance that developed together with storytelling and light design for dramatic performance according to following ways:

Selection of the study field

Finding initial data and topic selection with relevant data collection.

1. Data collection

1.1 The Data that related to music and performing arts, was collected from the following documents:

1.1.1 Paramet Boonyachai (2016) Fon Leb Performing Art. Cultural Wisdom Heritage of Thai Nation, Department of Cultural Promotion. Bangkok: Printing Office of War Veterans Organization under Royal Patronage.

1.1.2 Piyapunt Saenthaweesook (2016) Fon Klong Toom Drum Dance. Performing Art. Cultural Wisdom Heritage of Thai Nation, Department of Cultural Promotion. Bangkok: Printing Office of War Veterans Organization under Royal Patronage.

1.1.3 Thanachphon Kittikong (2020) Performance. Introduction to Performing Arts. Khon Kaen: Khon Kaen University Press.

1.1.4 Thamnit Nikomrat (2018) Fundamental of Manora dance from the lineage of Khun Oopatham Narakorn (Phumthewa) Petchaburi: Petphumi Publishing Co, Ltd.

1.1.5 Wiradet Thongkam (2020) Manora Music Course. The Performance of Basic Manora Dance for Youths, Department of Culture, Walailak University, Nakhon Sri Thammarat: Department of Culture Walailak

1.1.6 Sinapa Sarasat (2019) Hom Rong Sam Prasan Kham Sart Kham Vela. Research of Performing Arts on the Way of Culture. Bangkok: PhapPim Printing Co., Ltd.

1.1.7 Suraphol Wiroonrak (2004) Natthasilp Parithad. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press.

1.1.8 Sirimongkol Natthayakul (2008) Dancing Art, Principle of Physico- Anatomy and Motion. Bangkok: Odean Store.

1.1.9 Udom Noothong (1993) Nora. Srinakharinwirot University Songkhla.

1.2 Study on Audio Visual Lighting Design from the TV program “Sing, Dance & Music”, Channel 11 Television, Bangkok, Moderator Phatharavadee Mechuchon.

From studying information on documents and videos made known that the importance of the nails as a show will appear in all regions of Thailand, but there is a difference from the nail artifact material. Nora southern nail making developed and brought the benefits of the nails to be used for the dance the most. It created the beauty of using nails to perform many forms of rituals and performances and communicate in sign language through the process of interpreting the dance from the nails. Nora artists and audiences appreciate the beauty of Nora's nails art as an integral part of nora's iconic dress when it brings the beauty of nora's nails into the story and composition of nora. Placement, movement, use of light, and the creation of new music make it a way to create work according to the theory of invention that makes it possible to see the beauty of nails in a new creation.

2. Data Processing

The theory of Choreography was applied for the creation of performing art. The steps are as follows: (Wiroonrak, 2004, p.85) Literature review and data collection

- Building inspiration
- Innovative design and creation
- Determination of Theme, Content, and Pattern
- Development of Postures Design and Motion
- Music and Rhythm Analysis
- Relationship of Scenes and Performance
- Costume, Light, Sound, and Devices

Details of the steps are as follows:

2.1 Study on initial data of dancing postures, teaching content, dancing content, introduction, and Pleng Co dancing posture, including a selection of dancing postures, face motion, and Pleng Tab Pleng

Tone related to natures that communicated clear dancing postures. In addition, study on the nails' shape used in the opening ceremony of the stage in order to determine the style of Manora's nails, focusing on curve and length of the nails.



Figure 8 Nail shape

Source: Wiradet Thongkam (2020)

2.2 Building inspiration from beauty of Manora's nails used in the ceremony, and used for the splendid dance according to customary dance of Manora, and generating beauty and interesting finger language that focuses on the style of Manora's nails.

2.3 Innovative design and creation

2.3.1 Six female performers whose Manora dancing skill, singing skill, dancing contents came from consistent experience.

2.3.2 Six Manora musicians played a Tab, three drums, Trae, Mong, small cup-shaped cymbals, Thai flute, and row bells in the basic rhythm of Manora music in patterns of orchestra, solo, and duet; for instance, Thai flute and Mong, drum and Tab, row bells and cup-shaped cymbals.



Figure 9 Musicians and Musical Instruments

Source: Wiradet Thongkam (2020).

2.3.3 Light design was done with light shooting from a black backdrop made of black fabric for shadow play, and also stage folds were built for doorways; in and out, in addition, black boxes were provided for performers' seats, and the sitting area for musicians was elevated and covered with black fabric. All musicians were in black suits and white light shot to the area of the Manora's nails used for the dance. In the last period of the performance, the light was designed for shining over the whole area of the stage then the performers would show their faces at the last part of the performance.



Figure 10 Area and Backdrop of the performing stage

Figure

Source: Wiradet Thongkam (2020).



Figure 11 Area and Costume of Musicians

Source: Wiradet Thongkam (2020).

2.4 Determination of Theme, Content, and Pattern for the performance, the Manora performance was divided into three periods:

Period 1: Lights and shadows show the beauty of the nails and a sacred ritual for the nails in the Manora's performance. Especially ceremony about Wai Kru of Nora bring the nails put on the Long drum and the drum.



Figure 12 Manora's nails used for ceremony and sacred ritual

Source: Wiradet Thongkam (2020).

Period 2: Dancing postures show to reflect the beauty of the nails by performing as a group dance to communicate and provide waver, beautiful, and splendid of the nails by moving as white curves in synchronized directions according to the content that describe about birds, pigs, and insects in a forest.



Figure 13 Creation of Dancing Postures Relating to Insects

Source: Wiradet Thongkam (2020).

Period 3: Show of finger language that uses nails as main components for singing and dancing to communicate the beautiful power of the Manora's nails. Examples of this position:

1. Pan pa (Sheet rock)
2. Weaw wow (Glitter)
3. Ma (Come)



Figure 14 Creation of Dancing Postures Relating to Nature

Source: Wiradet Thongkam (2020).



Figure 15 Creation of Dancing Postures in Rapid Rhythms

Source: Wiradet Thongkam (2020).

2.5 Development of Postures Design and Motion. This contemporary Manora performance was applied with identity of Manora's nails for a new design and development, but also specialist

skill of the dance could be seen. The area on the stage was designed to be a dark space, but there were white and yellow lights shot to the shape of Manora's nails on which illumination was about ten percent. Nail shape was designed with static posture for the proceeding ritual ceremony. On the other hand, motion postures were designed in the following way:

2.5.1 Using Manora's postures mixed with other postures to show the splendor of the dance; for example, buffalo's horn posture, cross fingers pleat, both same level and waist level.

2.5.2 Dancing posture design mixing postures and lyrics to be a joint dancing process; such as posture of Nok Kaek Tao Kao Rang, Hong Thong posture, posture of Kratai Chom Chantra (Nikomrat, 2018, p.83).

2.5.3. Dancing posture design with dance and song, turning face, and song of Pleng Tab Pleng Tone for creation of the following postures:

- Posture of Mountain Lines or Tuew Kan Ban Pot.
- Posture of Pisamai Ruam Reang Sen Sai Plai Nern.
- Posture of Pan Pa Nga Ngab Rayab Yab Waew Warb Waew Wow Sri Kao Pern.
- Posture of Kang Hew Mee Hong Pen Chong Lord Nam Lai Ta Lord Long Tham Lam La Harn (Noothong, 1993, p.196).

2.5.4 Creative design, Turning Face Style and Pleng Tab Pleng Tone in Item 5.3 above were applied to recreate more rapid dancing postures for conversations and dialogs including movement in several directions, such as circle, straight line, bias line, zig-zag, and row. In addition, the body's motion was used to reflect the body's strength and blandness interestingly and excitingly (Nathayakul, 2008, p.105).

2.6 Musical Analysis

The contemporary Manora performance, a story of Nakha, is a performance that uses Nora music mixed along with row bells or lined bells of modern music. So, music design and analysis were done, then both solo and orchestra music were applied, including drum lateral knocking (Thongkam, 2019, p.93), and musicians created content from their music instruments with new sounds from the existing musical instruments for building atmosphere and emotion from the songs as well (Sarasart, 2019, p.128). For instance, Thai flute was used in depressive emotions, three drums were used for building high and low rhythms leading to

joyful emotions, and drum beating was done for hot-tempered emotions.

2.7 Relationship of Scenes and Performance, the contemporary Manora performance would emphasize on scenes and performance because the Manora performance necessarily consisting of three parts of scene structure:

2.7.1 Shadow play behind the scene that needs a black fabric made for the backdrop of the stage in order to let light shine through the fabric and the shadow of the finger nails appear on the black fabric backdrop.

2.7.2 Use of stage folds: stage folds were built on the right and left of the stage and colored with black fabric or other black material for covering the performers before dance. Moreover, the stage folds were also used for backdrop during the finger nail shadows.

2.7.3 Use of black chairs as part of the scene and backdrop: the chairs were shaped like black podiums. Their black color harmonized with the scene and performer costumes. The performance was designed so that performers could sing several songs clearly while they move to the stage front and gather as a group to sing with loud and clear sounds because they do not have microphones. So, performers and the audience were closer together so that they could listen to the sound and watch the Manora dance comfortably and clearly.

2.8 Performers' costume: the costume was a vital thing for this Manora dance because the costume design was done with all black fabric to dress all six female performers. The black costume consisted of black long-arm T-shirt, black trousers, folded sarong, and head- covered fabric. The performers' faces were covered with a triangle of thin fabric that they could see through and also open rapidly. In addition, all performers wore Manora's nails made of stainless and rattan painted with white color. The nails have a special long shape without bead decoration, and the nails were longer than artificial nails of general dance in order to emphasize on structure of the beautiful long-curved nails, and to boost convenience and beauty of the dance posture creation.



Figure 16 Black Costume of Manora Performers
Source: Wiradet Thongkam (2020).



Figure 17 White Finger Nails, and Nails Worn for the Manora Dance
Source: Wiradet Thongkam (2020).

3. Data Analysis

The contemporary Manora dance: a story of Nakha was a creative Manora performance that provided audiences with value and splendid identity of Manora's nails. As a result, relevantly initial data should be analyzed to create structure and content of the Manora dance in order to make audiences understand the nature and benefit of using Manora's nails. Moreover, standard dancing postures and proceeding should be studied to select for clear communication to audiences, and dancing processes done with specialized skill of Manora's nails applied for dancing posture creation that provides excitement and amazement in the whole period of Manora dance. However, the producer would not focus on the beauty of Manora performers, but the producer emphasized on all eight white nails of the performers, therefore, the performers would put on black costumes to cover their body. Consequently, the eight white nails of Manora dance would create splendid amazement for audiences so that they could acknowledge the proficient skill of the performers from basic to specialist in dancing and singing. All performers were female because there was a purpose to communicate the splendid strength of the female performers. Audiences were amazing due to the fact that they could see the performers' face during dancing period three before end of the Manora performance. The contemporary Manora dance: A story of Nakha, performed with traditional Nora music, in which the musicians had specialized skills on Nora musical instruments and could interpret and create music content and the pattern of music sounds that built according to the style and dancing content. In addition, new and interesting sounds were added for more echo in accordance with the rhythm of music in each performing period. Stage and backdrop arrangement harmonized with the black costume of the Manora dancers. As a result, the music sound emerged from the dark shadow, which the audiences had chance to listen to the musical skill of the musicians, and they could view the musicians appearing with their leader when technicians turned on lamps of the stage during the final period of the Manora dance. The

musicians were able to communicate emotion of music through music interaction and relation.

Result Discussion

The contemporary Manora dance: A story of Nakha, was a Manora performance to communicate musical emotion and splendid style of dance through interaction among music, dance and the finger nail style of Manora dance along with rhythms of the music in all four episodes. The communication was designed according to the dancers' skill in finger language, and creative thinking in order to harmonize with dancing postures and movements, which divided into three periods of the Manora performance over eight minutes. The Manora dance was performed by six dancers, and six musicians that trained and created performing art together. Moreover, the audiences could not forecast the content of the Manora dance, so they could watch the performance excitingly and amazingly in all periods of the Manora dance.

Conclusion and Suggestion

The contemporary Manora dance: A story of Nakha, is a performance that still maintains the identity of Manora dance in modern style. This contemporary Manora dance was created to bring the splendid of traditional Manora's nails according to the standards of Manora dance to create new dance processes with dancers that are all female Manora dancers dressed in black costume and artificial long white nails. As a result, the performers were able to dance conveniently harmonized with music in a dark performing room with lamps illuminating about ten percent and shot at the moving white nails. Consequently, audiences could watch the eight-minute long Manora dance in full in the darkness of the performing room. However, the Manora dance still maintains its new style of communication from traditional style of Manora dance; when we watched a traditional Manora dance we would see the identity of all components of the traditional Manora dance in clear view. However, in the case of the contemporary Manora dance: A story of Nakha, the area of performance would be a dark performing room or dark

performing stage that would build the audiences' emotion and concentration for watching the Manora dance very well. For that reason, the place or area of the Manora dance was important for creating splendid dance through the Manora's nails according to purpose, which composed of performers, musicians, and light designers. On the other hand, if the performing place or stage was not located in a dark room or dark meeting hall, the new amazement of the Manora dance would not happen.

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