

The Doctoral Music Composition: Isan Symphonic Variations for Chorus and Orchestra

Chanant Meenanan, D.F.A Candidate¹
Prof.Dr. Weerachat Premamamda, Advisor

Abstract

The composition Isan Symphonic Variations for Chorus and Orchestra is a musical composition inspired by Isan Folk music tunes. The composer has created the well-crafted melodic variations and cultural sound character of the piece based on the Klon Lum Tang Isan Keaw (Green Isan's short poems). Meanwhile, the poetic lyric has been motivatedly recreated to bring the abundant of Northeastern Thailand region's sentiment back to life.

Moreover, the sound of Xylophone (Ponglang), the instruments of the orchestra and the chorus were blended in order to present Isan folk music's character via the Western musical idiom.

The 3 movements of this composition are divided as follows:

Movement I (Allegro), the introduction has been represented the uniqueness in Isan folk music's liveliness by expressing it through the sound of chorus and orchestra. The composer also added the melodious sound flavor by utilizing the variety of the muting sound style on trumpets and horns.

Movement II (Moderato), the aspect of the heterophonic approach music has been implied to the main idea of the entire movement whereby its formatted transformation through worked effectively through chorus and the orchestra.

Movement III (Allegretto) The harmonic chromaticism was modified and applied as the symbolic icon of the entire movement. The transparency of Isan cultural sound was perfectly designed to be the highlight of this spectacular episode.

Keywords : Isan, Symphonic Variations, Chorus, Orchestra.

¹ D.F.A Candidate, Chulalongkorn University

Introduction :

The Northeastern region of Thailand which has been generally called by Thai people as "Isan", is truly the treasonable land of traditional folk music. Its melodic tunes and musical modes are reflected the culture and character of Isan people, especially, the cultivated and harvested life style and religious believe of Thai people.

Nowadays, Western culture has been effectively influential, while the native culture is being forgotten. Many related sectors and organizations are working hand in hand to restore and bring the Thai culture back to life. In order to help promoting and preserving Thai culture. In this creative musical composition, traditional Thai music aspect has been perfectly transparent into Western musical instruments of the orchestra whereby the harmonic transformation is played a unique role in shaping the melodic movement of the composition. The Isan Symphonic Variation for Chorus and Orchestra is the composition that being inspired by the Northeastern folk tunes and Isan's rhythmical dances. This integration of Thai and Western musical combination has been one of the tactics that would raise more attention from those who admired Western music to Thai traditional folk music,

The composer was inspired by the lyrics, the utterance and the liveliness of the "Klon Lum", the short poem when he had been travelling through out Isan region. Klon Lum is the singing accompanied by Khan, the bamboo mouth organ. The singer who sings the Klon Lum is called "Mo Lum". "Mo" means a person who is practically skilful, and "Lum" means narrating a story with a beautiful melody through the Klon Lum. This Mo Lum style of singing is a music genre in Isan region influenced by Laos Boran song or Old Laos in Laos.

Scope of composition :

Isan Symphonic Variations for Chorus and Orchestra is the composition where the elements of the composition are totally transformed into colourful characteristic variations while the main melodic structuring theme is still strictly preserved. It is usually written for symphony orchestra with complete four sections of music instruments: strings, woodwinds, brass and percussions.

Explanation of composition :

The Isan Symphonic Variations for Chorus and Orchestra is the composition carrying the tunes of *Isan* folk music which is developed from the theme of *Klon Lum Isan Keaw* or Green Isan poetic lyric. The main idea of this song is about the collaboration among Isan people in developing the abundance to their region. The uniqueness of this tune which distinguishes it from other *Klon Lum* is the joy and liveliness which contented cultural tradition that reflected their way of life. The poem is also sung by utilizing the short rhythmic pattern without prolonging notes except in the prelude. The rhythm of the *Khan* is rather fast and lively whereby it is used as a main theme in *Mo Lum* music which required fast tempo. The lyric is beautifully written and well crafted shape in tonal language of Isan. Sometimes, a *Mo Lum* singer will

speak out interchangeably along with singing (*Klon Ton*). Moreover, they might answer a question, ask about their fortune, solve a mystery question or even tell historical story and folk literature through singing. In the composition, the xylophone is mainly used as a representing of *Isan* folk music instrument called "*Ponglang*", which play along with other instruments in the orchestra, in the meantime, the story is narrated by the chorus.

The philosophical concepts used in this composition are consisted of two main categories as follows:

1. Classical music concept The composition has been employed the musical forms, melodic composition, Arrangement Heterophon, orchestration and choral composition.

2. Traditional Isan folk music The adapting of the *Isan* folk tunes, theme, melody and arrangement into the composition.

The musical score for "Klon Lum" is presented in four groups, each consisting of a xylophone part and a vocal part. The lyrics are in Thai script.

โน้ตกลุ่มที่ 1

โอะ ละ เป็น เวิน เอ๋ แถ้ม อ้าย สิ้น เวิน...แล้ว บัด
 นี้ ให้ มา หัง เบ็ง เก้น สิ ว่า เรื่อง อี-सान เจียว ถ้า น้า ใจ เป็น อัน เดียว เฮา มา กลม เกลียว กั้น... สิ้น สัม

โน้ตกลุ่มที่ 2

พันธ์ กั้น สิ สิ จง เซียว ได้... กัก เน โทย เฮา เอย... โอ่ย ละ
 นอ

โน้ตกลุ่มที่ 3

ละ นวล เอย

โน้ตกลุ่มที่ 4

Figure 1. The *Isan* folk tunes "Klon Lum"

โอ้ย ละ น้อ โอ้ย ละ น้อ โอ้ย ละ น้อ
 โอ้ย ละ น้อ โอ้ย ละ น้อ โอ้ย ละ น้อ
 โอ้ย ละ น้อ โอ้ย ละ น้อ ถ้า น้ำ ใจ เป็น อัน เดียวเฮา มา ส้ม - พันธุ์ กัน
 จง เขียว ได้ คัก ไทย เน้ ไทย เฮา เอย ถ้า น้ำ ใจ เป็น อัน เดียวเฮา มา
 ส้ม - พันธุ์ กัน จง เขียว ได้ คัก ไทย เน้ ไทย เฮา เอย

Figure 2. The adapting of the *Isan* folk tune to the main theme.

Movement I: Allegro

This movement presents the uniqueness and the liveliness of Isan folk music by expressing it through the sound of chorus and orchestra. The Isan region's civilisation has been influenced by Laos and Cambodia in the *Lanna* and *Lan Chan* periods. *Isan* folk music originated from different communities and has been passed on from generations to generations, and eventually brought about the uniqueness of Thai Northeastern music. The musical character is bright and lively. The composer, therefore, brought this character to be the highlight of this movement.

The image displays a musical score for the first movement of a symphony. The score is written for a full orchestra and includes a chorus. The instruments listed are: Flute, Oboe, Clarinet (II) in B♭, Bassoon, Horn (II) in F, Trumpet (II) in B♭, Trombone (II), Timpani, Triangle, Cymbals, Snare Drum, Bass Drum, Xylophone, Harp, Chorus, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 144$. The score shows various musical notations, including dynamics such as *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *mp* (mezzo-piano), and articulation marks like accents and slurs. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

Figure 3. First Movement

Movement II: Moderato

The second movement is in a medium tempo. The Heterophony and chromatic concept were adapted within the composing process in order to integrate with *Isan* folk music. The *Isan* theme has been transformed and, presented through the chorus and orchestra.

The main motive in the second movement is in C major with a time signature of 4/4 whereby all following rhapsodic variations are still remained on the structural theme. The structure of the movement is divided into four parts : theme, variations IV, variation V and variation VI. The composer also added the introduction part and transition section where appropriate in order to adjust the musical elements to the meaning of the *Isan* culture.

The musical score is for the Second Movement, written in 4/4 time. It features a variety of instruments and a chorus. The score is divided into several systems. The first system includes Flute, Oboe, Clarinet I, II in Bb, Bassoon, Horn I, II in F, Trumpet I, II in Bb, Trombone I, II, Timpani, Triangle, Cymbals, Snare Drum, Bass Drum, and Xylophone. The second system includes Harp and Chorus. The third system includes Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The score includes dynamic markings such as *fp*, *f*, *mf*, and *ff*. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 100$. The score is written in a key signature of one sharp (F#).

Figure 4. Second Movement

Movement III: Allegretto

The third movement is the adaptation of a pentatonic mode, melodic chromatic, and Isan rhythmic pattern. These arrangement techniques are formed as a distinguishing feature of the entire movement. The implication of the thematic sound of *Isan* culture are perfectly designed to conform to the movement, and created a final impression before the end of the whole composition.



Figure 5. The Isan rhythmic pattern

The variation in the third movement is in C major with a time signature of 4/4. The variation structure of the movement is divided into four parts: variation VII, variation VIII, variation IX and variation X. The composer also added the introduction and transition in some specifically designed connection.

The musical score for the Third Movement is presented in a standard orchestral layout. It begins with a 4/4 time signature. The woodwind section (Flute, Oboe, Clarinet I, II in Bb, Bassoon) and strings (Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Violoncello, Double Bass) play a melodic line starting with a forte-piano (*fp*) dynamic, which builds to a forte (*f*) dynamic. The brass section (Horn I, II in F, Trumpet I, II in Bb, Trombone I, II) provides harmonic support with sustained notes. The percussion section (Timpani, Triangle, Cymbals, Snare Drum, Bass Drum, Xylophone) adds rhythmic texture. The Harp and Chorus enter later in the movement, with the Chorus singing a melodic line. The score includes various dynamic markings such as *fp*, *f*, *mf*, and *ff*, as well as articulation marks like accents and slurs. A tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 100$ is indicated above the Violin 1 part.

Figure 6. Third Movement

Discussion :

The limitations of this composition includes the complication of musical forms, numbers of chorus singer, numbers of orchestra music players, the different melismatic singing styles of the singers, rehearsal time consuming and unstable rehearsal schedule, limitation of the performing stage and the budget.

Conclusion :

The Isan Symphonic Variations for Chorus and Orchestra is complete within the scope of composition: musical variations for chorus and orchestra, and the sound of *Isan* folk music which is about the collaboration among Isan people to bring the abundance to their homeland. Nevertheless, this composition has been presented as one of the musical creations which could be an alternative for those who want to understand music that is different from the main stream and other Western music. The integration of Western classical music concept and *Isan* folk music brings about the musical uniqueness which benefits the promotion and preservation of *Isan* folk music and encourages the power to bring the green environment and abundance to the treasury land of *Isan*, the homeland that perfectly unites us with love and harmony.

Public Concert Performance :

The Isan Symphonic Variations for Chorus and Orchestra was held in the 3rd Chula International New Music Festival and Conference 2013 at Maha Chulalongkorn Building, Recital Hall 111, on March 31st, 2014 with 200 audiences. And this concert has been recorded in DVD for a new composer who had interesting.



Figure 20. Public Concert

Acknowledgement :

This composition is successfully composed according support from many people. I would like to express my appreciation to Prof. Dr. Weerachat Prammananda, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Rajabhat Sounsunandha University Chorus and Thammasat University chorus.



Reference

- Ades, Hawley. *Choral Arranging*. Expanded Edition. n.p.: Shawnee Press, Inc., 1966.
- Adler, Samuel. *The Study of Orchestration*. 3rd ed. New York: W.W.Norton, 2002.
- Bach, Johann Sebastian. *371 Harmonized Chorales and 69 Chorale Melodies with Figured Bass*.
London: Lowe and Brydone Limited, 1941.
- Beethoven, Ludwig Van. *Symphonies Nos. 5, 6 and 7 in Full Score*. New York: Doner Publications, Inc.,
1989.
- Burkhart, Charles. *Anthology for Musical Analysis*. 4th ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winson, 1986.
- Green, Douglass M. *Form in Tonal Music; An Introduction to Analysis*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and
Winson, 1965.
- Piston, Walter. *Counterpoint*. 11th ed. New York: W.W. Norton Company, Inc., 1984.