

## การผสมผสานวัฒนธรรมอาเซียนในการประพันธ์เพลงร่วมสมัย

### Methods in Blending ASEAN Cultures in Contemporary Composition

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#### บทคัดย่อ

การอนุรักษ์วัฒนธรรมของภูมิภาคอาเซียนตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ เป็นหนึ่งในประเด็น สำคัญที่ทุกประเทศ ในภูมิภาคในอาเซียนตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ พยายามหาคุ้นเคยและวิธีการในการสืบสาน วัฒนธรรมที่เป็น เอกลักษณ์ของตนให้ดำรงค์อยู่ในยุคโลกาภิวัฒน์ งานวิจัยเรื่องวิธีการผสมผสาน วัฒนธรรมดั้นตรีอาเซียนใน บทประพันธ์เพลงร่วมสมัยนี้ มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อเสนอแนะ แนวทางในการ อนุรักษ์วัฒนธรรมด้านต่างๆ ของ ภูมิภาคอาเซียนตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ผ่านทางเทคนิค ใน การการ ประพันธ์เพลงร่วมสมัยของณรงค์ฤทธิ์ ธรรมบุตร ผลการวิจัยแสดงให้เห็นถึงการนำเสนอวิธีการใน การถ่ายทอดวัฒนธรรมทางด้านศาสนา องค์ประกอบดั้นตรี และเครื่องดนตรีประจำชาติ ดำเนินและ ความเชื่อด้านต่างๆ ของภูมิภาคอุษาคเนย์ ผ่านทางบทประพันธ์เพลง ร่วมสมัยที่บรรเลง ด้วยวง ดั้นตรีตะวันตกและบทประพันธ์เพลงร่วมสมัย ที่ผสมผสานระหว่างเครื่องดนตรี ประจำชาติ และวง ดั้นตรีตะวันตก

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## Abstract

Cultural preservation is one of the significant policies that all countries in Southeast Asia are obligated to seek strategies for maintaining it in this modern era. The research Blending ASEAN Cultures in Contemporary Composition aims to demonstrate methodologies for conserving Southeast Asian cultural identities through the contemporary composition of Narongrit Dhamabutra. The research outcome arrays techniques in transforming several ASEAN cultural aspects including religions, traditional musical materials and instruments, mythology and beliefs into a contemporary composition of western orchestra and mixed ensemble.

**Keywords:** Contemporary Composition, ASEAN, Cultural Preservation

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One of the great Southeast Asian contemporary composers and ethnomusicologist, José Macea (1917-2004) had set up a model in combining ethnomusicological research in musical cultures of the Philippines and Southeast Asia with contemporary composition techniques. Michael Tenzer wrote in *José Macea and the Paradoxes of Modern Composition in Southeast Asia* that Macea was different from other twentieth century composers who applied exoticism in their works since Macea did serious fieldwork study in Southeast Asian materials and used it in his composition.<sup>3</sup> Following his attempt in promoting Southeast Asian musical culture through contemporary composition, Narongrit Dhamabura, Thai national awarded composer, integrated ethnomusicological research in Southeast Asia and expanded further from Macea in developing new techniques in transmitted not just the Southeast Asian musical materials but the various aspects of Southeast Asian cultures including history, religions and beliefs.

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Tenzer, “José Macea and the Paradoxes of Modern Composition in Southeast Asia,” *Ethnomusicology* 47/1 (Winter, 2003), 108.

Dhamabutra is a Thai contemporary composer and nationally awarded composer whose entire life has been devoted to seeking methods in contemporary composition for conserving Thai traditional music as well as other Southeast Asian musical traditions. His compositions aim to present not only Southeast Asian musical materials, but also cultural identity, and the ancient heritages of the region. The common features and uniqueness of each Southeast Asian cultural identity are explained in the topics of religious context, indigenous instruments, and musical materials to reveal how contemporary composition is a means to display cultural identity of Southeast Asia. Therefore, this research aims to demonstrate methodologies in composition techniques of Narongrit Dhamabutra in transferring those aspects of ASEAN cultural identity in his compositions. Following to this, are the areas of cultural transmission that Dhamabutra aims to display in his compositions.

### 1. Displaying religious context

Southeast Asia is a land that has blended with several religious cultures since the ancient times including Animism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and others. All the religions have their own identity along with common features such as bells and the sound of chant. In Buddhism, the “temple sound” is the sound that people hear when they enter the Buddhist temple in Thailand. It involves with sound from chimes and bells of several sizes that are ringing at a different time when the wind blows.

These sounds are transferred into different types of rhythm, creating variety into each voice of different keys and tempi. The “temple sound” brings peace and tranquility to the mind when entering the temple, a perfect place for meditation. The example below displays how the piano can mimic the sound of the temple bells and hanging gong. The lower register of the piano is designated for the largest hanging gong of the temple while the small bells are imitated by the technique of tone clusters notated in triplets at the middle and high register of the piano. The sound of the little bells that typically hang under the roof of the temple is notated with box notation where the performer can select their own tempo to imitate the actual sounding of the bells. (Example 1)

**Example 1** Bells and gong in three registers of the piano in the *Quintet Spirit of ASEAN*, mvt. II, mm. 1.

Misterioso ♩ = 56  
(temple bells)

Piano

play in any order, like little bells from the distance.

Besides the sound of the temple bell, is the technique to imitate chant. The melodic characteristic and rhythmic pattern of the chant are transferred to the musical theme. The example below (music example 2) is the melody representing the chanting of Mon culture in the *Dvaravati* movement of symphonic poem, *The Empires*. The main characteristic of Mon Chant is the melismatic vocal expression. This character is imitated in contemporary composition technique through the implication of augmented second that leads to the main pitch with a half step motion to create pitch bending and applying glissando to imitate melisma. (Example 2)

**Example 2** Applying pitch bending technique to imitate “Mon chanting,” in the symphonic poem, *The Empire*, mvt. II, mm. 77-80.

## 2. Imitating the sound of indigenous instruments with western instrument

The sound of Southeast Asian instruments, including chordophone, aerophone, and idiophone, can be imitated by western instruments through new instrumental techniques. The example presented here shows the technique for imitating the sound of instruments including the mouth organ, the gourd monochord instrument, and Burmese ensemble, *hsaing waing*.

### 2.1 Imitating the sound of the mouth organ

Mouth organ is one of the popular folk instruments of Southeast Asia that circulated in the mainland of Southeast Asia. The characteristic of drone from the mouth organ is imitated by playing on the open D and A strings on the first and the second violin. The dynamic adjusts from loud to soft to imitate the breathing of the mouth organ player. The marking, *Quasi cadenza* together with the dotted bar line are assigned to create flexible rhythm. (Example 3)

**Example 3** Creating the sound of “Kaen” (mouth organ in Thailand) in the first and the second violin of *Quintet for the Spirits of ASEAN*, mvt. III, mm. 1-5

### 2.2 Gourd monochord instrument

Besides the mouth organ, the excerpt in the example 4 displays the technique in imitating the sound of a gourd monochord instrument, which is called “*khse muoy*” in Cambodia or “*pin pia*” in Thailand. The tone color of the instrument is soft and has a unique sound of vibration through the resonance created from gourd that interacts with

the chest of the player. The expression, *pizz. molto vibrato* is assigned to imitate the plucking sound of the monochord instrument and *molto vibrato* is to use human body as an amplifier of the quarter tone. (Example 4)

**Example 4** Using pizzicato and molto vibrato to imitate a gourd monochord instrument in the symphonic poem, *The Empires*, mvt. II, mm. 84-86.

The musical score consists of five staves representing different instruments: Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., Vc., and Cb. The score is divided into measures. In the first measure, Vln. I and Vln. II are marked 'mf' and 'pizz. molto vibrato'. Above the staff, the instruction 'pizz. molto vibrato' is written with a bracket under the first two measures. In the second measure, Vln. I and Vln. II are marked 'mf'. Above the staff, the instruction 'pizz. molto vibrato' is written with a bracket under the first two measures. The Vla. staff is silent. The Vc. and Cb. staves show continuous notes. Measure 3 begins with a single note on the Vc. staff, followed by a sustained note with a '3' underneath. The Cb. staff shows a series of notes with a '3' underneath. The Vln. I and Vln. II staves are silent in this measure.

### 2.3 Folk ensemble of North Eastern Thailand and Laos

Varieties of instruments in the aerophone, chordophone, and idiophone categories are the nature of musical life along the Mae Kong river. These native instruments derive from materials used in everyday life, such as a jar, a pottery for keeping salt, marinated fish, rice liquor, etc. The jar is then modified to become a pitched percussion instrument with the rubber band tied across the mouth of the jar. The sound produces from plucking the rubber band and the size of the jar create different pitches in the bass register. Besides the jar, the plucking lute, called *pin* are another popular folk instrument functioning in the folk ensemble.

To display the sound of these native instruments, instrumentation and string techniques comprising of *col legno*, *sul ponticello*, *sul tasto*, and tapping on instrument's body are applied.

This example shows how cello and bass are assigned to tap on the instrument to imitate the sound of a North-Eastern drum. (Example 5)

**Example 5** Hand tapping on Cello and Double bass, *Lao Pan Concerto in Piano Concerto of Siam*, mm. 37-43.

37

Vc. solo

pp

pizz.

Vln. I

p

pizz.

Vln. II

pizz.

Vla.

pizz.

Vc.

\* Tap on the body of the instrument

p

pizz.

Cb.

p

The following example (Example 6), indicates the use of snap pizzicato technique by the cello to imitate the sound of north-eastern percussion.

**Example 6** Using “snap pizzicato” to imitate native percussion instrument, *Lao Pan Concerto*, mm. 401-403.

398

Presistissimo con fuoco, quasi cadenza  
pizz.

Vc. solo

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

## 2.4 Burmese *Hsaing Waing*

In this example, the goal was to present the overall sound of the Burmese *hsaing waing* ensemble that comprises the sound of drums, gongs, and percussion instruments. The sound of *chauk lon pat* (set of drums) and the cymbals are imitated in the example 7 through the sound of four timpani that are tuned with different pitches. The vibraphone represents the gongs sound of *muang hsaing* and *ci waing*. Trumpet and horn imitate the sound of *nhe*, the Burmese folk oboe. (Example 7)

**Example 7** Imitating the sound of *hsaing waing* ensemble through western percussion instruments, *The Empires*, mvt. I, mm. 65-67.

### 3. Displaying musical tradition and festival

Presenting cultural identity can be done through the creative sound that displays the atmosphere of the event as well as the music tradition itself. The example here is to present Indonesian *Gejog lesung*, the working song that imitates the life of people in grinding rice. Many wooden poles are thumping at a different time in a large hollowed piece of wood by performers to imitate the action of pounding the rice. To imitate the sound of *Gejog lesung*, the techniques of slapping on the body of the string instruments are used to represent the sound of the wooden pole. Since the poles are thumped at different times, polyrhythm and metric modulation are applied with an ostinato pattern that is placed among the strings section in a changing tempo, to represent the rice pounding that is done freely without a strict pattern.

At the beginning of the movement, the tempo is set with the quarter note at 120, then the grouping is changed to a quintuplet in which a quarter is set at 140 and keeps increasing until it reaches 150. Examples presented here (Example 8.1-8.2) are from the fourth movement of *Quintet for the Spirits of ASEAN*.

**Example 8.1** Ostinato pattern in a tempo of 120, *Quintet for the Spirits of ASEAN*, mvt. V, mm. 1-10.

**a Allegro molto, preciso meccanico**  $\text{♩} = 120$

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

**b Tab on the body of the instrument**

Tab on the body of the instrument

Tab on the body of the instrument

Tab on the body of the instrument

**c**

**Example 8.2** Ostinato pattern in a quintuplet setting of 144, *Quintet for the Spirits of ASEAN*, mvt. V, mm. 37-40.

36

**C c**

$\text{♩} = 144$

5:4

5:4

5:4

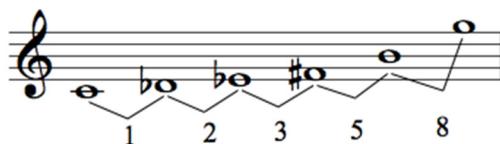
5:4

#### 4. Cultural symbolism

Symbolism in Southeast Asia involves mythical creatures, folklore, and signs. It represents feelings and emotions that are attached to culturally significant stories that have been passed down since ancient times. *Gala* or *Kirtimukha* is one of the Hindu Gods created by Shiva. Traditionally, the face of *Gala* is inscribed over the entrance of the Hindu temples in South Asia and Southeast Asia. Legend tells the story of his birth from Shiva's anger — that *Gala* came out of Shiva having the body of a giant with a lion's face. *Gala* destroyed everything, created chaos all over the place. Shiva, avoiding the doom, asked *Gala* to eat himself, in which he obeyed Shiva. Only his cruel face without the lower lip was left. In sympathy for his sacrifice, Shiva placed him at the entrance of his temple.

From the legend, *Gala* is a symbol of fierce violence, fear, and also connects to Lord Shiva himself. To present the image of *Gala* and his connection with Lord Shiva, non-traditional harmony is invented by the use of the intervals reflecting the distance of the planets to the sun, arranged from the closest one. Hence the serial number of half-step intervals produces the numbers of 1, 2, 3, 5, and 8, which results in the pitches of C, D $\flat$ , E $\flat$ , F $\sharp$ , B, and G. (Example 9)

**Example 9** The series reflecting the distance of the planets from the sun



This series represents Lord Shiva, while other musical materials, including extreme dynamic force, frequent accents, utmost contrast between lowest and highest registers, tremolo, and the techniques of *sul ponticello* that produces the high harmonic nasal sound (bowing near the bridge) and *portamento* (sliding from one note to the others) in strings instrument (see Music Example 10) express the ferocious nature of *Gala*.

**Example 10** Application of dynamic forces, tremolo, extreme contrasting register, and strings techniques to portraying *Gala, Quintet for the Spirits of ASEAN*, mvt. IV, mm. 10-17.

### 5. Traditional melody

Melody presents each culture's identity due to the characteristics of pitch sets, intervallic structure, modes, and styles. Implying traditional melody is, therefore, not only

preserving the tune, but also provides the entire composition with cultural identity. The melodies presented here are drawn from the Mon melody *Nang kruan* (woman's weeping) and the Vietnamese melody *Luu thuy* (river flows). Each presents different techniques for applying traditional melodies in contemporary compositions.

The first melody, *Nang kruan* maintains only the melodic motif, but restructured in the new rhythm and melodic inversion. (Example 11)

**Example 11** *Nang kruan* melody in triplet and its melodic inversion, *The Empires*, mvt. II, mm. 73-76.

73

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

Tpt.

*espress.*

*mp*

*espress.*

*mp*

*mp*

*molto express.*

*mp*

*p*

The second melody, *Luu thuy*, aims to keep the whole melody in its original shape and rhythm but provides a counter melody that vivifies the beautiful flowing river of its title. (Example 12)

**Example 12** Counter melody depicting river flowing in woodwinds that leads to Vietnamese melody in strings in the symphony, *The Harmony of Chimes*, mvt. VI, mm. 7-17.

**Example 12** Counter melody depicting river flowing in woodwinds that leads to Vietnamese melody in strings in the symphony, *The Harmony of Chimes*, mvt. VI, mm. 7-17. (Continue)

### Conclusion

Contemporary composition can be one of the effective ways to promote musical cultures of Southeast Asia. Through compositional techniques, along with ethnomusicological research on musical traditions, instruments, ensembles, and sound

systems, the cultural identities of Southeast Asia and their heritage can be presented in a modern ways that could attract the audience of this contemporary world. For contemporary composers, this research provides a new guideline in creating contemporary composition for the benefit of world musical heritage as well as adding new instrumental techniques to the contemporary composition methods and expanding the area of contemporary composition in promoting Southeast Asian musical cultures. By studying, learning the cultures, the right perspective in understanding cultural identity can be created. As a consequence, western contemporary composers can realize its value and significance in musical culture preservation.

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