

Composing a Thai Symphony – An Emblem of Victory

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Abstract

The symphonic masterpiece “Sanyalak Haeng Chaichana” (สัญลักษณ์แห่งชัยชนะ – The Emblem of Victory) was composed to honor His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. It was written as a program symphony for standard symphony orchestra, spanning 35 minutes and is split into four movements: each movement representing each symbol of the Chaipattana Foundation’s Emblem and His Majesty’s graciousness to the Thai populace. The music also reflects the variety of urban cultures in Thailand, drawing characteristics from various genres of music namely classical, marching band, jazz, and traditional Thai music.

The first movement starts off with a fast tempo, representing “Phra Saeng Khan Chaisi” (Chaisi Royal Sword) which is interpreted as “The Power of Land.” The second movement is also fast in tempo, representing “Thong Krabi Thut” (Krabi Thut Flag) which refers to “The Cherished Possession of the People.” The tempo slows down to a moderately slow pace in the third movement, representing “Dok Bua” (Lotus Blossom) which symbolizes “The Philosophy of the Sufficiency Economy.” The tempo picks up to a moderately fast pace in the last movement, representing “Sang” (Royal Conch) which is interpreted as “The Ambrosia – Rain, Salvation for the Earth.”

Keywords: *Music, Music Composition, Thai Music, Symphony, Emblem, Sufficiency Economy*

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Introduction

His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej granted the establishment of the “Chaipattana Foundation,” for which he acts as the Honorary President. He also appointed Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn to be the Executive Chairperson. Due to regulatory requirements and budget constraints faced by the government agencies, His Majesty envisaged a foundation that would serve to provide prompt, timely and necessary response to problems affecting the Thai populace through various development projects.

“Through the Chaipattana Foundation we hope to attain peace, which is the victory of this nation ... (Thailand will be) a progressive country, which will be called Chaipattana (victory of development), attaining the goals of peace, prosperity and national well-being.” *His Majesty the King’s Statement given on December 4th, 1994*

“Sanyalak Haeng Chaichana” (The Emblem of Victory) gave birth to the composer’s appreciation of His Majesty’s benevolence, the impression of the Sufficiency Economy, the national idea of supporting and promoting Thai traditional music and the composer’s participation in “The Royal Thai Air Force Concert to Benefit the Chaipattana Foundation.” As a result, the composer wishes to have this composition performed as a contribution to future research on musical compositions as well as music appreciation.

“The Emblem of Victory” was composed as a program symphony for a standard symphony orchestra. Its contents illustrate the meaning of Chaipattana Foundation’s Emblem, and His Majesty’s graciousness and dedication in developing the country.



Figure 1. Chaipattana Foundation’s Emblem which is compared to the emblem of victory, the title of this composition. The Emblem consists of four different symbols, (1) Chaisi Royal Sword, (2) Krabi Thut Flag, (3) Lotus Blossom, and (4) Royal Conch. The symbols are named for the four movements of this orchestral work.

Composition Context

“The Emblem of Victory” was inspired by various compositional ideas, which reflect the diversity of urban cultures. It draws ideas from the genres of classical, marching band, jazz and traditional Thai music. The classical music ideas include instrumentation, form, harmony and program- The idea of marching band music is presented through the marching rhythm and the use of percussion instruments. The idea of jazz appears with the feeling of swing rhythm. The idea of traditional Thai music is showcased through traditional Thai music accent and mood. In addition, the composer was also inspired by the concept of His Majesty’s honorable songs, the Sufficiency Economy’s philosophy, the Chaipattana Foundation’s Emblem and its meanings, which were interpreted musically for the first time.

Composition Ideas

First Movement - “Phra Saeng Khan Chaisi – The Power of Land”

The meaning of “Phra Saeng Khan Chaisi”

Symbolizes the augustness of royal authority and the nation’s strength to overcome difficulties in the implementation of projects, which results in the security of the kingdom.

The composer was inspired by the interpretation of “Phra Saeng Khan Chaisi – The Power of Land,” and how it relates to His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, whose name means “The Strength of the Land, Incomparable Power” as the King has always successfully supported and looked after the country and people throughout his reign. Therefore, he is the strength and power of the country. The first movement based on Sonata Allegro form in the key of Bb major lasts for nine minutes. It is the most complex movement of the whole work with different moods and rhythmic feels within the of classical music framework. The excitement, arrogance, and power of the music mirrors the power of the land. The calm and melodious melody conveys the sense of peaceful country while the complex and intense music depicts the obstacles in Thai society.

a tempo

The image shows a musical score for Theme 1, consisting of four bars. It is written for Violin II (Vn. II) and Viola (Vla.). The tempo is marked 'a tempo'. The key signature is Bb major. The Vn. II part begins with a forte (f) dynamic and features a melodic line with slurs and accents. The Vla. part begins with a forte (f) dynamic and features a supporting line with slurs and accents. The score ends with a fortissimo (ff) dynamic.

Figure 2. Theme 1.

Theme 1 is the first theme of this movement. It is a 4-bar melodic phrase composed by using mainly the tonic and dominant notes of the Bb major key with some embellished ornaments. The use of tonic (1) and dominant (5) is a reference to the shape of the Chaisi Royal Sword, the symbol for this movement in which its body is 115 cm long and 5.5 cm wide. The theme is first introduced by the second violin choir playing an octave doubling with the violas. The solid sounds of the dominant and tonic suggests the idea of the power of land.

Figure 3. Theme 2.

Theme 2 is the second theme of the first movement, is presented by low string instruments, cellos and contrabasses. It is composed as a 5-bar melodic phrase playing with strong accents from moderately loud to very loud. This also depicts His Majesty's power, comparable to the power of land. The theme is based on octatonic scales, an 8-note scale constructed by alternating semi-tone and whole-tone intervals. The scale provides some dissonant sounds which imply the obstacles as mentioned earlier.

Second Movement - "Thong Krabi Thut" - "The Cherished Possession of the People"

Meaning of "Thong Krabi Thut"

"Leading to the achievement of victory in the struggle to protect the kingdom and the people from every danger and misfortune."

The composer compared the meaning of "Thong Krabi Thut," a symbol use as the title for this movement, with the people's love for His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej for his tireless hard work and selfless devotion to his people since he became the King of Thailand. His Majesty King Bhumibol holds a cherished place in the hearts and minds of Thais.

The second movement was written in compound ternary form in the key of Eb major and lasts 5 minutes. There are two contrasting time signatures of 4/4 and 3/4 alternately used in the movement. The music showcases gracefulness, excitement, and lively feelings reminiscent of the King's many visits to help to his people. The musical elements of this movement are a mixture of classical, marching band, jazz, and the idea of using the word "FLAG" as a main compositional material of the first theme (theme A). By setting F = fa, A = la, and G = sol, these are matched with the 1st, 3rd, and 2nd scale degrees of a tonic scale in the key of F major. By transposing the scale to the Eb major key makes the melody notes become Eb, G, and F sequentially. Triplet rhythms are applied to the melody notes in connection with the three jagged edges of the "Thong Krabi Thut," the symbol uses for the title of this movement.

Figure 4. Theme 1, the first theme of the second movement was composed as a 2-bar melodic phrase with triplet rhythms. It is first introduced by the second violin and viola choirs along with accompaniments by cello and contrabass choirs playing accented manners and rhythmic ideas of the marching band which emphasis strong beats and some syncopations. The music is aimed to make connection with the many journeys of His Majesty the King to take care of people in remote areas of the country.



Figure 4. Theme 1.



Figure 5. Theme 2.

Figure 5. Theme 2, the second theme of this movement, was set as an 8-bar melodic phrase in the key of C minor first presented by string choirs with an exclusion of the contrabass. This sweet melody refers to the graciousness of the king and is used in contrast to the marching band concepts in the first theme.

Third Movement - “Dok Bua”- “The Philosophy of the Sufficiency Economy”

Meaning of “Dok Bua”

“Represents dignity, beauty, coolness, and prosperity that will lead to the well-being, peace, and happiness of all Thais.”

The composer was inspired by the meaning of “Dok Bua” which represents dignity, beauty, coolness and prosperity, and compares it to King Bhumibol’s philosophy of the Sufficiency Economy which leads to well-being, sustainable growth, peace and happiness of all the Thais. The third movement was written in theme and variation form in the key of G major and set at a moderately slow tempo with some tempo changes, in order to sound delicate, peaceful and less intense. The whole movement would take approximately 9 minutes to perform. The composer mixed the ideas of classical, jazz, and traditional Thai music into this movement in order to reflect various cultures in Thai society with many nationalities living tighter in harmony. He sought to depict the concept of the Sufficiency Economy’s philosophy through the sense of peacefulness, happiness and sufficient living.

Figure 6. The theme is a 4-bar melodic phrase in the key of G major first presented by the oboes and flutes respectively. It was composed by utilizing the ideas of traditional Thai music based on pentatonic scales in which these musical elements represent the sufficient life styles in ancient Thai culture. The theme was

developed into five variations throughout the movement with some different musical elements for each variation, such as melodic embellishments, harmonies, instrument combinations, tempos, meters, tonalities, and musical styles. The use of theme and variations form is making connection with traditional Thai music which is traditionally composed in this musical form. Beside, European musical instruments that play Thai sound, distinguish this movement from the others and provides a unique sound.



Figure 6. Theme of the third movement.

Fourth Movement – “Sang” – “Ambrosia – Rain, Salvation for the Earth”

Meaning of “Sang”

“Symbolizes water that refreshes the land and bestows upon it fertility, peace and abundance in agricultural production and natural resources.”



Figure 7. Theme 1.

This movement was inspired by the meaning of “Sang” and the artificial rain making project. The music mainly depicts natural phenomenon such as the atmosphere of dryness, rain storms, joyfulness, abundance, and peacefulness. Like the

first movement, the last movement was also written in Sonata form, tonality of D major, and a 4/4 time signature. It is approximately 9 minutes long with a moderately fast tempo and employs musical elements such as dissonant harmonies, imitating natural sounds by using musical instruments, chromatic scales, and a number of tremolos and glissandi. The fourth movement begins in a quiet and depressive mood which depicts atmosphere of drought, winds, and rain cloud that gradually form a thunder storm before the coming rain storm.

Theme 1, the first theme of this movement, is a 3-bar melodic phrase which is derived from the word “RAIN”- R = re (D), RA = ra (Db or C#), and A = la (A). The melodic line is set in sequence of D, C#, and A respectively, therefore its motion is downward by minor second and major third intervals. It is first introduced by string choirs followed by woodwinds and brass respectively. The theme is aimed at making connection with atmosphere of rain and narrating the waiting for rain, particularly the king’s artificial rain making project, in the drought affecting Thai farmers.

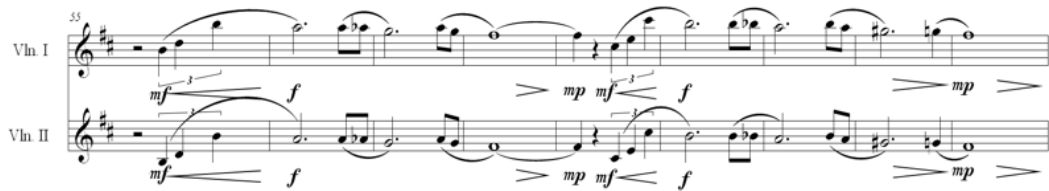


Figure 8. Theme 2.

Theme 2 as the second theme of this movement is initially presented by first and second violin choirs playing in octave. It is an 8-bar melodic phrase which is made up of upward skips and leaps, followed by stepwise downward motion, both whole-tone and semi-tone intervals. This downward direction in the melody is once again depicts the falling movement of raindrops which is similar in nature to the first theme.

Discussion

Being a Thai composer who has lived in Thailand for a long time and seen various events in Thai society, such as poverty, natural disasters, drug abuse, different political opinions, and so on, the author believes that the great power that makes Thai people to be able to survive until today is His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej’s dedications including the use of his property in establishing various foundations and the Royal Initiative Projects for helping those who have been suffering from difficulties over a long period. Among these organizations is the Chaipattana Foundation with which the author has cooperated for many years through the “The Royal Thai Air Force Concert to Benefit the Chaipattana Foundation” given by the Royal Thai Air Force Symphony Orchestra. With sense of divine grace a song was composed to honor His Majesty the King and performed in this concert, becoming the origin of the symphonic composition, Symphony “The Emblem of Victory.”

His Majesty the King is an accomplished jazz musician and composer. As a school boy in Switzerland, he read books about music and received private lessons in reading and writing classical music. When he was ten, he began studying the clarinet, graduated to the saxophone, and later the piano. At the age of 32, he was awarded honorary membership of the Vienna Institute of Music and Arts. He used to play jazz music on air on the Aw Saw Radio Station earlier in his reign. His songs can often be heard at social gatherings and are performed in concerts. His first work in 1946, entitled 'Saeng Tien' or Candlelight Blues, sparked his love for composing music and to date, has written a total of 78 songs over a period of five decades. The Emblem of Victory Symphony is making connection with the music legacy of His Majesty the King, as a testimony to his musical talents.

As evident in the composition plans, this orchestral work is not art for art's sake, it connects to not just the cultures, but also to the social progress and cultural continuity. It is an expressive cultural idiom, because it tells stories, expresses ideas and emotions, offers opinions and share life's experiences. Thus it can be compared to the Big Band Era and its grand sound and patriotic lyrics in which it reflects the American Culture of patriotism and the era of World War Two. Jazz and Blues, born in America, captures the flavors of New Orleans, of the down-trodden as a result of hard economic times. Slave songs reflect America's history of slavery, the toil it took on African American families, the pain, hardship and strong faith in God. The Emblem of Victory Symphony also did the same thing as the American music did. In other word, the music ties cultures and generations together.

There are few symphonies composed in Thailand especially program symphonies which pay tribute to His Majesty the King. For example, "Phra Mahajanaka" Symphony, a five-movement symphony, composed by Simon Wallace in 1986 commissioned by the Bangkok Symphony Orchestra to celebrate the King's 60th birthday. A further commission Fanfare and Rhapsody was performed in 2006 as part of the celebrations for His Majesty the King's 86th Jubilee. The Emblem of Victory Symphony is making connection the way that Wallace and composers in Europe did, such as the program music of Franz Liszt, Richard Strauss, Hector Berlioz, and Gustav Mahler. Moreover, this will encourage and give inspiration for other composers, and will also contribute to orchestras in Thailand needing new compositions to perform.

Some difficulties were encountered during the compositional process For example, applying musical forms with descriptive stories to traditional sonata form, a musical structure consisting of three sections, the exposition, development, and recapitulation, which are characteristic of the first movement in a symphony. This is really unusual because sonata form is frequently associated with absolute music, music for music's sake, because it is about the form only-the development of motives or key relationships, not a poem or something outside of the music. To solve this problem, the composer had to adjust both the form and stories to fit into each other. For instance, he loosely applied the form by moving away from a Theme 1 and Theme 2 to a group of themes for Theme 1 and a group of themes for Theme

2 while also attempting to present only atmosphere not specific events. Instrumental music, since there are no words, requires the listener to have patience and concentrate in order to follow the form and conceive the implied stories.

The Symphony “The Emblem of Victory” is a music that describes diverse stories. The first movement evokes the atmosphere of political tension arising from social conflicts. The second movement brings out the atmosphere of His Majesty’s proceeding to work for solving difficulties of the people. The third movement depicts the social life of Thailand and the philosophy of the Sufficiency Economy. The last movement recreates the atmosphere of rainstorm resulting from the Royal Rain Project. To commemorate His Majesty the King’s music intelligence, various genres of music and composition materials are used coherent with the content of the stories. Jazz music conveys His Majesty’s Jazz music intelligence. Thai music expresses living in harmony with the philosophy of the Sufficiency Economy according to Thai’s traditional lifestyle. Marching music conveys the spirit of a royal procession whereas Classical music forms the basis of the composition as a whole.

Drawing together various musical genres in a composition may affect the unity of the song. In order to create unity, the author tied each movement together by composing the musical themes for each movement harmoniously. It is tied together by some common characteristic of melodic fragments such as using of three-note groups, triplet rhythms, and direction of melodic motion in the similar manners. The musical themes develop in line with standard techniques including repetitions, sequences, inversions, augmentations, diminutions and transformations.

The researcher aims to explore concepts of several musical genres applied together in the compositional process so that the music is harmoniously combined, unified, and consistent with the literature. This is a great challenge since each musical genre has a different musical style. Classical and Jazz music are obviously different in rhythms expression. While Jazz music uses the basis of swing rhythm consistently Classical music mostly evolves in a contrary way, while Thai music has a unique accent of its own. When musical genres are mixed within the same composition, the uniqueness of each genre stands out quite clearly.

However, Thai music and Jazz music appears only in the third movement; while the first, the second, and the forth movement still follow the fundamental concepts of Classical music. The author would like to use these musical concepts to reflect the cultural diversity of society in Thailand where people of different races, religions and cultures live together despite the somewhat different ways of thinking, though they can live together peacefully under Royal protection of His Majesty the King who is ‘The Soul of all Thai People.’

Conclusion

The findings are based on the defined scope of research. The result of this research is a new composition - a program symphony for a standard symphony orchestra. The composition is divided into 4 movements including the first movement

- Chaisri Royal Sword - “The Power of the Land” in Sonata form, the second movement – Krabi Thut Flag - “The Cherished Possession of the People” in Ternary form, the third movement - a Lotus Blossom - “The Philosophy of the Sufficiency Economy” in Theme and Variations form, and the last movement - a Royal Conch - “The Ambrosia – Rain, Salvation for the Earth” in Sonata form. The whole composition’s spanning time is approximately 32 minutes. It could be classified as music of the late Romantic style with the characteristics of romantic music including concept of program music, ethnic music, chromaticism, dissonant harmonies, use of 9, 11, 13 chords, octatonic scales, sweet and intense cantilena, as well as rhythmic vitality. This symphony especially the second movement is also influenced by twentieth century music represented by Jazz ideas, significant in twentieth century music.

The remarkable identity of The Emblem of Victory Symphony is that it is a classical music composition in a program symphony form with the content associated with the Chaipattana Foundation’s Emblem for the first time. In addition, it reflects the benevolence of His Majesty the King, promoting the love of the monarchy and sustainable living in Thailand, as well as the composer’s own musical identity. Therefore it is a new Thai creation and the true individual style of the author’s work. Furthermore, it is also a guideline for studying music composition and an alternative for listeners who want to experience the pleasure of advanced music, especially a rare new work written by a Thai composer composers that will also support the development of music in general.

Public Concert Performances

The first movement was first performed in Auksara King Power Theater, Bangkok, Thailand on June 18 and 19, 2012 by 60 members of the Royal Thai Air Force Symphony Orchestra on “The Royal Thai Air Force Concert to Benefit the Chaipattana Foundation” conducted by Flg. Off. Pirun Jewong. See: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysS0q6cGKnE.

The complete work was performed in the Music Hall, of the Art and Culture building of, Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand on January 31, 2013 by 40 members of the Royal Thai Air Force Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sqn. Ldr. Likhit Boonya. Both performances received admiration from and astonished the audience of over a thousand people. See: www.youtube.com/watch?v=9HYgpW6AoEY, www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8_ZTAhEKbM, www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVvSIViXlpg, and www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvWA6Udmy2U

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Figure 9. A permission letter from the Chaipattana Foundation allowing the composer to compose music based on the meaning and symbolism of the foundation’s emblem.

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