

Composition Inspired by ASEAN Drums: Sakodai

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Abstract

This article describes the research behind a composition named Sakodai which is based on musical dialects found in Cambodia. Cambodia is one of the 10 countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This Cambodian drum inspired composition is one of a set of 11 compositions titled ASEAN Drums where representative drums from each ASEAN country were selected (2 for each drum in Singapore). The drums included are the Sakodai of Cambodia, Sabadchai of Thailand, Rebana Anak of Brunei, Pat Waing of Myanmar, Debakan of the Philippines, Rebana Ibu of Malaysia, Ping of Lao, Tay Son of Vietnam, Kendang of Indonesia and versions of Chinese drums and Indian Tablas from Singapore. Using these drums, 11 distinctive musical pieces were composed based on Thai traditional music theories and concepts. In this article, the composition inspired by rhythm patterns of the Cambodia Sakodai hand drum has been selected to be presented and discussed. The resulting piece is based on one Khmer dialect comprised of four lines with a medium tempo performed by a modified Thai Kantrum ensemble rooted in the dialect of traditional Khmer folk music from Cambodia.

Keywords: ASEAN Drum, Thai Music Composition, Dialects in Music, Sakodai Drum, ASEAN Composition, Thai-Cambodian Composition

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Introduction

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a regional grouping that promotes economic, political and security cooperation among its ten members: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Countries in Southeast Asia each have their own art and culture, especially when it comes to music. Though divided by national borders, the acculturation in music continues to progress in these countries, which today is also being influenced by Western culture. This has resulted in the perpetuation, decline, alteration and adaptation in the music culture of these countries to be compatible with changes in their economic and social environments. In the three musical instrument groups of the ASEAN countries, string, wind and percussion, many of the instruments are similar and have a common origin, though they are known by different names. Examples in the string category include the Krajub Pi of Thailand, which is called a Jubpei Dongwang in Cambodia; the Thai plucked string Ja-ke known in Cambodia as the Jara-ke or Kro-pur and the Min-juang in Myanmar; and the Gudyapi, another plucked string instrument from Indonesia and the Philippines known as the Danbao in Vietnam. Among the wind instruments, there is the Pi of Thailand called the Serunai in Brunei and Malaysia and the Hne in Myanmar, and among the percussion instruments, considered the oldest musical instruments of ASEAN, there is a metal circle gong, the Kong Wong of Thailand which is known as the Kyi Waing in Myanmar; the Ranat Ek, a Thai wooden percussion instrument called the Roniad in Cambodia, Nangnad in Laos, Pattala in Myanmar and Kambang in Indonesia and Malaysia; the Rammanna, a kind of leather head drum in Thailand, which is known as the Rebana or Kombang in Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei and the Glong Yao (long drum) of Thailand called a Sakochaiyam in Cambodia and Osi in Myanmar.

A drum is a percussion instrument that has played important roles throughout history. In addition to entertainment, drums are played in various rituals such as funeral ceremonies, praying for rain, healing and exorcising rituals as well as signaling during wartime battles. Drums have been played in Thai royal funeral processions as they proceed to the royal crematorium. In the article, "Why I Like Thai Traditional Music," in the book honoring HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn with a collection of her work (1967-77), HRH the Princess stated about the role of drums in royal funeral ceremony that there are men in red dress who during royal funerals play two different drum beats: one for high level members of the royal family and another, called "Sam Mai Nee See Mai Lai," for lower level royals (only in funerals where the king presides).

The roles of drums are also found in historical writings such as Chinese records and archives from 531-532 BC that refer to Lankasuka, a kingdom located on the Malaya Peninsula (between what is today known as the Central and Yaring districts of Pattani province in the south of Thailand, "...When the king went out of his palace, he rode on an elephant led by drummers and banners...")

Moreover, links between certain drums found in Southeast Asia are also shown in archaeological evidence found from southern China to Vietnam, eastern and western Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. One particular drum, the Frog drum or Glong Mahoratuk in Thai, appears to be a common instrument represented in the cultures of Southeast Asia. Thus, drums are musical instruments heard in musical culture everywhere. It has been found that most drums in the ASEAN countries are played only to provide a beat, or rhythm, except the Pat Waing drum of Myanmar which is used to play melodies.

This research creation of ASEAN Drums composition, eleven types of drums were studied: 1. The hand drum Sadokai from Cambodia, 2. Sabadchhai drum from Thailand, 3. Rebana Anak drum from Brunei, 4. Pat Waing drum from Myanmar, 5. Debakan drum from the Philippines, 6. Rebana Ibu drum from Malaysia, 7. Ping drum from Laos, 8. Tay Son drum from Vietnam, 9. Kendang drum from Indonesia and 10 & 11 the Chinese drum and Indian Tabla from Singapore (see figures 1-11 below).

Various Types of Drums from ASEAN Countries



Figure 1. Sakodai drum, Cambodia.



Figure 2. Sabadchai drum, Thailand.



Figure 3. Rebana Anak drum, Brunei.



Figure 4. Pat Waing ring drum set (instructor & student), Myanmar.



Figure 5. Debakan drum, Philippines.



Figure 6. Rebana Ibu drum, Malaysia.



Figure 7. Ping drum, Laos.



Figure 8. Tay Son drum, Vietnam.



Figure 9. Chinese drums, left and Indian Tabla drums, right, Singapore.



Figure 10. Kendang drums, Indonesia

Inspired by these instruments, the researcher has composed eleven pieces of music with different musical dialects. The researcher was inspired by the rhythmic patterns of these drums to reflect the art and cultural significance as well as identity of each ASEAN country's music. The research can also be used as a guideline for further studies and the composition of pieces in different linguistic dialects.

In this article, researchers presents a detailed examination of the composition titled Sakodai as an example of one of the pieces inspired by the Sakodai drums of Cambodia, to represent the ASEAN set of eleven.

The Sakodai Drum and Analysis of the Composition

The Sakodai hand drum is a percussion instrument played in various performances such as Arak, Ayai, Vivah, Ram Wong or other performances including dance bands in Cambodia. In the past, the hand drum was made of clay, the same type

used to be made out of bricks; however, to prevent easy breakage, it is today crafted from Jackfruit wood. The head of the Sakodai is round, like a pumpkin, and its body curved like a gourd. The drum head is stretched with skin from an elephant trunk snake, monitor lizard or rabbit, all of which produce good quality sounds. The end of the drum tapers like a wicker water container. Its length is 0.40 m and its head width is 0.15 m. Sometimes, its neck, its middle and its end are decorated with carved flower designs, reflecting the elegance of Cambodian art .

Mr. Sonankavie Keo, a Cambodian musician explained about Sakodai's rhythmic pattern that:

The Sakodai drum is played in folk music bands and Cambodian traditional orchestras. In a slow musical dance piece, it is played with the Malobdong rhythm, which means under a coconut tree. The beat sounds like /Pa - TengTeng -Teng/ /Pa-TengTeng-Teng/Pa-TengTen-Teng/TengTeng-TengTengTengTeng/. This hand drum is lightweight and can be placed on the drummer's lap. To play the drum, one uses his palms and four fingers to beat it, and the thumb to thump it .

The rhythmic pattern of Sakodai in Malobdong rhythm appears in Figure 12.

| | | | | | | | |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| - - - P | T T - T | - - - P | T T - T | - - - P | T T - T | - T T - | T T T T |
| - - - X | X X - X | - - - X | X X - X | - - - X | X X - X | - X X - | X X X X |

Figure 12 Malobdong rhythm of Sakodai drums.

For this research, Thai musical theory was applied in the music composition and analysis as follows:

1. The notation shown below in figure 13 represents notes of the Khong Wong Yai (gong circle) which is an instrument that often provides the basic melody in Thai musical ensembles. Most Thai music composers draft their basic melody on this foundation. Consequently in working on the Sakodai composition, the composers referenced the below set of notes.



Figure 13 Diagram of alphabet note placement in a set of gongs.

2. The seven Thai traditional music scales is called *Thang* and the pentatonic scales are set as follows. (X symbol is the sound which is not commonly used in each scale or *Thang*).

Thang Pheang Or Lang, which uses the pentatonic scale of G A B X D E X
 Thang Nai, which uses the pentatonic scale of A B C X E F X
 Thang Glang, which uses the pentatonic scale of B C D X F G X
 Thang Pheang Or Bon, which uses the pentatonic scale of C D E X G A X
 Thang Nog, which uses the pentatonic scale of D E F X A B X
 Thang Glang Hab, which uses the pentatonic scale of E F G X B C X
 Thang Java, which uses the pentatonic scale of F G A X C D X

3. For clarity, when analyzing the dialect of each piece of music composed by the researcher, a combination of melodies was considered as follows:

- Do scale (CDE X GA X), which is often used in songs with Lao dialect, Chinese dialect, Thai dialect and Indian dialect.
- Re scale (DEF X AB X), which is often used in songs with Indian dialect.
- Fa scale (FGA X CD X), which is mostly used in songs with Khmer dialect and sometimes in songs with Mon dialect.
- Sol scale (GAB X DE X), which is mostly used in songs with Indian dialect as well as in some songs with Thai dialect.
- La scale (ABC X EF X), which is mostly used in songs with Mon dialect as well as in some songs with Khmer dialect.

4. The researcher has set the last note of every bar to reflect the main melody so the movement of the melody can be recognized.

The Sakodai music has been composed based on the Malobdong, a drum rhythmic pattern (see figure 12). Its structure is a one section song with Khmer dialect at medium speed (Song Chan) four lines long. The pentatonic scale used is G A B X D E X in Thang Pheang Or Lang and F G A X C D X in Thang Java. The two scale combinations are frequently found in Thai traditional music, when playing in Khmer dialect.

The Structure of the Ensemble

The composed pieces of music in this research are played with Thai traditional instruments (see figure 14) complemented by a Kantrum fiddle and Or oboe, instruments unique to a Kantrum band¹¹. The band is composed of a Kantrum fiddle, Ja-khe, Or oboe, Pheang Or flute, Sor Duang (soprano fiddle), Sor U (alto fiddle), Sakodai (hand drum), small cymbals, Grub (Thai clappers) and Mong (gong)¹². This arranged Thai mix with Khmer instruments corresponds to the instruments played in folk bands in Cambodia that comprise a Or flute, Kro-pur (Thai Ja-khe /a zither), Jubpei (Thai Krajubpi /a kind of vina), Kha-sae-deo (Thai Phin Namtao /a gourd vina), Trua Khmer (Thai Sor Samsai /a three string fiddle), Trua Sothom (Thai Sor Duang / a soprano fiddle) and Trua U (Thai Sor U /an alto fiddle).



Figure 14 Thai ensemble performing the Sakodai composition.

Musical Form

To analyse the musical form, the composers have compared the melodies which mirrored the Sakodai drum rhythmic pattern (Line 1-4) with its main melody which has each note has fallen in to the forth position of each musical bar.

The composers have defined the performance format by beginning with the Sakodai drum playing its rhythm pattern twice. The band then plays the composed music once after which the entire performance is repeated as presented in the chart below:

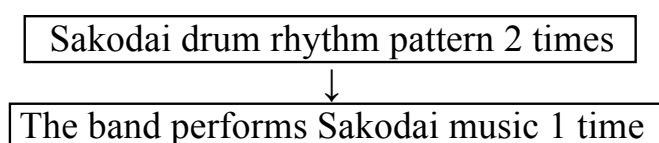


Figure 15. Musical Performance of Sakodai- drum started 2 times before performing Sakodai melody once.

Below is an example of the composition and analysis of the Sakodai music with the hand drum rhythm pattern (Malobdonḡ).

| | | | | | | | |
|-------|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|---------|---------|
| --- P | T T T T | --- P | T T T T | --- P | T T T T | - T T - | T T T T |
| --- X | X X X X | --- X | X X X X | --- X | X X X X | - X X - | X X X X |

Figure 16. Rhythm pattern of Sakodai drum.

P is for the Pa sound, T is for the Teng sound and X is for the drum rhythm pattern.

Sakodai Music

| | | | | | | | |
|-------|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|---------|---------|
| --- D | E G E A | --- G | A B D A | --- D | D B A G | - E G - | A B G A |
| --- G | A G E G | --- G | A B G A | --- D | E G E A | - D B - | D B A G |
| --- A | C A G F | --- F | D C G A | --- A | C A G F | - C A - | G F E D |
| -- fG | fGfGfGD | --- D | fGDfGfG | --- G | D E F G | - C F - | E F G A |

Figure 17. Sakodai Melody.

In Figure 17 the fourth line; the notes with lower case f are played using the technique of finger swiping by dragging the ring finger from F to G as if they are one note without an emphasis on the F note.

Sakodai Music Analysis

Line 1

| | | | | | | | |
|-------|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|---------|---------|
| --- D | E G E A | --- G | A B D A | --- D | D B A G | - E G - | A B G A |
|-------|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|---------|---------|

Figure 18. Sakodai Melody Line 1.

Main Melody

| | | | | | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| --- D | --- A | --- G | --- A | --- D | --- G | --- G | --- A |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|

Figure 19. Sakodai Main Melody Line 1.

Line 2

| | | | | | | | |
|-------|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|---------|---------|
| --- G | A G E G | --- G | A B G A | --- D | E G E A | - D B - | D B A G |
|-------|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|---------|---------|

Figure 20. Sakodai Melody Line 2.

Main Melody

| | | | | | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| --- G | --- G | --- G | --- A | --- D | --- A | --- B | --- G |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|

Figure 21. Sakodai Main Melody Line 2.

Notes in line 1 (Figure 18) and line 2 (Figure 20) bar 1 to bar 8 are in Thang Pheang Or Lang scale with the pentatonic scale of G A B X D E X. The character of the melody movement is repeated from the start as in the essence of melody line 1 bar 2, bar 4, bar 8 and line 4 bar 6. This kind of melody creates a character of Khmer dialect songs, which is stronger than the Lao dialect but softer than the European dialect.¹¹

Line 3

| | | | | | | | |
|-------|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|---------|---------|
| --- A | C A G F | --- F | D C G A | --- A | C A G F | - C A - | G F E D |
|-------|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|---------|---------|

Figure 22. Sakodai Melody Line 3.

Main Melody

| | | | | | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| --- A | --- F | --- F | --- A | --- A | --- F | --- A | --- D |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|

Figure 23. Sakodai Main Melody Line 3.

Line 3 (Figure 22), notes a single step down in scale from Thang Pheang Or Lang to Thang Java with the pentatonic scale of F G A X C D X while notes in bar 1 to bar 4 link the melody when changing the scale and the note E in bar 8 enhances the completion of the melody of this piece. This note combination is often found in Thai songs with Khmer dialect, such as Khmer Saiyok, Khmer Phuang etc .

Line 4

| | | | | | | | |
|--------|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|---------|---------|
| --- fG | fGfGfGD | --- D | fGDfGfG | --- G | D E F G | - C F - | E F G A |
|--------|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|---------|---------|

Figure 24. Sakodai Melody Line 4.

Main Melody

| | | | | | | | |
|-------|-------|---------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| --- G | --- D | - - - D | --- G | --- G | --- G | --- F | --- A |
|-------|-------|---------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|

Figure 25. Sakodai Main Melody Line 4.

Notes in bar 1 to bar 4 stay in G to allow for the finger swiping technique. This is a unique technique of Kantrum fiddle for which one drags their ring finger from F to G as if they are one note without emphasizing the note F. In this line, the note E in bar 6 and bar 8 enhances the completion of the piece's melody. From the composition of Sakodai music inspired by the Malobdong rhythmic pattern of the Sakodai hand drum, notes in the composition's four lines were similar to the drum's rhythms.

Conclusion

The Sakodai song is an example of a musical composition inspired by Sakodai drum which is one of the drums of ASEAN countries. Its composition is based on the Malobdong rhythmic pattern of the Cambodian Sakodai hand drum, resulting in a Thai composition with Khmer dialect, and the notes corresponding to the rhythmic pattern of the drum. This article shows how different musical cultures and dialects can be incorporated into a composition in creative ways. This type of composition can help to find ways to equally value and incorporate different musical cultures in the spirit of creating mutual understanding and benefit among members of the ASEAN community.

This research can also serve as a guideline for the composition of other musical pieces based on the rhythm patterns of other drums. The music composed by the researchers can be further refined to be played in international festivals to promote friendly relations between countries and as an inspiration for dance choreography.

Endnotes

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