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A Taste of Vietnamese Music: Building Bridges Through Cultural Understanding

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A Taste of Vietnamese Music: Building Bridges Through
Cultural Understanding

An Honors College Thesis

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Abstract

The country of Vietnam has an incredibly rich and diverse culture that is deeply rooted in its long-standing history. The heart of its peoples can be seen through all facets of society such as rituals, religion, cultural mores, cuisine, art and dance, but especially through their music. Music plays a vital role in almost all the different parts of Vietnamese life. It can be found everywhere throughout history, from highly trained professionals in aristocratic courts to farmers in rice paddies to mega pop stars on television. Vietnam has had a long and rough history but throughout all the country's changes, music and song remain intertwined in daily life.

Growing up as an American of partial Vietnamese descent, I have had an “inside view” of how other Americans perceive Vietnam. I have noticed throughout my life that most Americans don't know much about the country except for the Vietnam War (and the occasional bowl of *phở*). In this thesis, I aim to expand an American's view of Vietnam beyond the lens of the Vietnam War. During my preliminary research, I realized – perhaps unsurprisingly – that it was difficult to find information about Vietnam from American sources that were not centered around the war. American involvement in the Vietnam War was an enormous controversy at the time of the conflict and still is today. Thousands of American lives were sacrificed for an effort that a majority still see as a pointless political game (for many reasons but mainly because of the conclusive Communist win in 1975). The immense damage the war caused for both America and Vietnam cannot be ignored, but it has been over four decades since the war ended and over two since the United States and Vietnamese governments officially normalized diplomatic relationships. Still, the first thing that comes to the mind of an average American citizen at the mention of Vietnam is the war. It is well over time for this mindset to change, and I believe that exposure to Vietnamese music is the best way to achieve this goal.

Music is at the heart of Vietnamese culture and can be used as a link to even the farthest detached societies. Every human culture in the world has its own music, making music a universal and fundamental feature of the average human experience. To introduce Vietnamese music to an American audience, I will first write a brief history of Vietnam. Music is a wholly human experience, and to even try to understand a foreign music, one must have some knowledge of its culture's background. Sometimes when approaching a completely foreign subject, it is best explained and understood through comparison. Since Vietnamese music sounds almost entirely different than Western music, I will use this strategy to explain some fundamentals about the structure, harmony, and more tangible aspects of Vietnamese music. This understanding will open a Western ear to the distant beauty of Vietnamese music.

After these background chapters, I will provide a taste of Vietnamese music through three songs chosen from varying settings, styles, and time periods throughout history. Through these explanations and the supplemental recital, I will provide a sampling of the beautiful music created by the Vietnamese people. It is my hope that this music will open the ears and hearts of my audience to change how they view Vietnam.

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Vietnam

and Neighboring Countries in Southeast Asia



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Chapter One

Vietnam at a Glance

Geography

On the eastern coast of Southeast Asia's Indochinese peninsula lies the slender country of Vietnam. The "S" – shaped country spans an area of about 128,408 square miles and is bordered by China to the north, Laos and Cambodia to the west, the Gulf of Thailand to the southwest, the Gulf of Tonkin to the northeast, and the South China Sea to the southeast. These desirable port locations along with the country's varied and fertile lands made Vietnam a frequent target of conquest throughout history.

The Vietnamese colloquially describe their country's geography as "two baskets of rice slung on a pole."¹ The Red River Delta in the north and the Mekong Delta in the south are the baskets, while the Annamite Cordillera (the Vietnamese call this Trường Sơn, meaning "Long Mountains"), a mountain chain that runs along the western border for about 1000 miles, is the pole. The country's varied geography includes low-lying plains, mountains, plateaus, terraced hills, jungles, vast green valleys, beaches, flat prairies, swamps, and even some desert. The majority of Vietnamese people live in the lowland areas near the sea because their terrain and humidity are the perfect environment for growing rice.

History

Vietnam has an extremely rich, exciting, and fascinating history. Just like many other ancient countries, Vietnam has a whimsical creation myth. According to legend, the Vietnamese

¹ Nguyen, Phong Thuyet, and Patricia Shehan Campbell. "Chapter 1. Historical and Cultural Background." *From Rice Paddies and Temple Yards: Traditional Music of Vietnam*, World Music Press, 1994, print, p. 17.

are descended from a harmonious union between dragon lord Lạc Long Quân, King of the Sea, and the fairy Âu Cơ, Princess of the Mountains, who are known as the father and mother of the Vietnamese people. Âu Cơ was a beautiful young fairy that lived in the high mountains. Because of her medicinal prowess and giving heart, she often travelled the land to heal those in need. During one fateful day of travel, she came upon a frightening monster that threatened to eat her. Luckily, Lạc Long Quân saw Âu Cơ in danger and killed the monster with a rock. When Âu Cơ turned to identify her savior, she instantly fell in love with the dragon king. Soon after, their magical union produced an egg sac that hatched one hundred human sons. Although the fairy princess and the dragon king were deeply in love, Âu Cơ pined for her home in the mountains so she took fifty sons with her to the north and the other fifty stayed with their father by the sea. Among the sons that stayed with their father was the founder of the first Vietnamese dynasty.²

The true history of Vietnam is not so fanciful. From ancient to recent times, it is characterized by an almost continuous struggle for autonomy. With an abundance of natural resources, the land offered much to be desired that other more powerful nations sought to take for themselves. Most westerners will quickly recall the American occupation during the Vietnam War and before that the prolonged period of French colonialism, but for centuries prior the Vietnamese went head-to-head with many surrounding peoples such as the Chinese and the Mongols to preserve their independence.³

The earliest human habitation of what is now northern Vietnam can be traced back to over half a million years ago.⁴ This area is home to some of the world's earliest civilizations and

² Leeming, David Adams, *Creation Myths of the World: An Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, ABC-CLIO, 2010, print, p. 270.

³ Ray, Nick, et al. "History." *Vietnam*, Lonely Planet, 2009, print, p. 27.

⁴ "Origin of Vietnamese People." *Business - Vietnamese Open Markets*, American Technologies, INC, 2004, web.

societies, making the Vietnamese one of the very first peoples to practice agriculture in Southeast Asia.⁵ Along with the development of wet-rice cultivation, bronze casting also appeared around 1000 BCE in this region. This led to the growth of the Đông Sơn culture, created by an ethnic group in the Bronze Age that were notably skilled in rice cultivation, raising pigs and water buffalo, fishing and sailing, and bronze casting. The Đông Sơn are most known for the Đông Sơn drums, bronze drums used for war and other cultural events such as mourning or celebrating at large-scale social events. These drums are characterized by their large size and intricate face designs.

Pre-dynastic Vietnam did not have any overarching management mechanism, which led to some problems caused by the natural boundaries of the Red River Delta. Soon, the many existing communities there saw the need for a single authority to oversee the prevention of potential hazards to the valley such as floods and invasions. This led to the creation of the Hồng Bàng dynasty in 2879 BCE by Lộc Tục. His unification of the Red River Valley tribes is considered the first Vietnamese state, beginning the dynastic period of Vietnamese history.

The Hồng Bàng dynasty ruled for over 2500 years. During this time, feudal Vietnam saw technological advancements such as the calculation of the lunar calendar, silk fabrication, and development of sophisticated agriculture. Other noteworthy events during this dynasty are the first celebration of Tet, the Vietnamese lunar new year, in 500 BCE, and the introduction of Buddhism in the area around 300 BCE. The Hồng Bàng epoch finally came to an end in 258 BCE with the advent of Thục Phán, a military leader that sought to conquest the Red River Delta. The Thục Dynasty saw a short reign relative to its predecessor, lasting only a little over 100 years. During this period, Confucianism reached Vietnam. The second Vietnamese dynasty was crushed by Chinese invasion. The Chinese conquered the land and established the Han Dynasty.

⁵ Miron, Amanda. "History of Vietnam." *Asian Art Mall*, www.asianartmall.com/vietnamhistory.htm.

The Chinese ruled Vietnam for almost a century. The Vietnamese fought for their independence through several revolts with either short-lived or no success. It was not until 939 CE, when China's Tang dynasty was losing power, that the Vietnamese successfully overthrew Chinese rule under the leadership of Ngô Quyền. The Ngô Dynasty was established, followed by the Đinh, Lý, Trần, and Hồ dynasties over the next 400 years. The Mongols attempt to invade Vietnam during the Trần dynasty but are defeated. In 1407 China once again conquered Vietnam and claimed it under the rule of the Ming Dynasty, but the Vietnamese were stronger and the following year the Chinese were overthrown by Lê Lợi. He declared Vietnam independent and established the Lê Dynasty. In 1802, the Nguyễn family takes power and rules as the last dynasty of Vietnam.

Western influence in Vietnam began in the 1500s with missionaries from France, Portugal, and Spain that sought to spread Roman Catholicism throughout the world. The French established the most lasting connections in Vietnam and aided the Vietnamese in several conflicts against the Chinese in the late 1700s and early 1800s. By 1858, France had fully invaded Vietnam and declared it a French colony. Vietnam was rapidly westernized during French rule, and many Vietnamese saw this as a white-washing destruction of their own culture. Along with several confrontations between French powers and the North Vietnamese, this westernization created a hostile political atmosphere. Inspired by the success of Sun Yat-sen's communist revolt in China, Ho Chi Minh organized the Indochinese Communist Party and staged a nationalist movement against French rule in 1930.

The Japanese occupation of Vietnam during World War II severely weakened France's power over the small country. France attempted to regain power after the war, but Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh seized control of northern Vietnam in 1945 and declared it the Democratic

Republic of Vietnam, a communist state. This sparked the French-Viet War in 1946. In an effort to prevent the spread of communism, the United States began their involvement with Vietnam by aiding the French in this conflict. The French met defeat in 1954 when the communists took siege of a major French fortress through guerilla warfare. After this war, the Geneva Conference held that Vietnam would be divided into two countries at the 17th parallel: Communist Northern Vietnam and Southern Vietnam.

Five years later, the Vietnam War (also known as the Second Indochina War) erupted as Ho Chi Minh sought to unite Vietnam under communist rule. Starting in 1961, the United States continued their anti-communist efforts by supporting South Vietnam during this war, which eventually escalated in 1964 to US airstrikes and ground battles on and in North Vietnam. The US sent a staggering 550,000 troops to aid South Vietnam. In the following years, the controversial deployment of American troops in Vietnam divided the American public. This caused the US government to gradually withdraw their troops beginning in 1969. In 1973, a cease fire is negotiated and signed in Paris, but South Vietnam saw defeat at the Fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. After this defeat, more than one million Vietnamese fled the country, seeking asylum in Western countries such as France, Australia, and the United States.

After their economy and standard of living suffered dramatically during the years following the Vietnam War, the government issued a series of economic and political reforms in 1986 which started Vietnam's journey to integration in the modern world economy. These proved highly successful and Vietnam joined the World Trade Organization in 2007. Today, communism still dominates Vietnam. Officially known as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the country is run by the Communist Party of Vietnam which upholds a one-party government system.

Peoples, Customs, and Traditions

“It is difficult to be precise about the people and history of Annam⁶ (“*peaceful south*”), now known as Vietnam”⁷ because the genetic pool of the Vietnamese people was greatly influenced by the many different groups that invaded the area.⁸ The country of Vietnam is a multiethnic country that has over fifty distinct groups, each with its own unique language and culture. The largest of these ethnic groups is the Vietnamese, also known as the Kinh, which makes up over eighty percent of the country’s population. These people originate from southern China and present-day northern Vietnam. Other ethnic minorities include the Lolo, Pupeo, Lachi, Laha, and Colao. The migration of the southern Chinese around the third century BCE was the start of the prolonged influence China had over Vietnam. This influence is evident in many aspects of Vietnamese culture, including language, music, food, technology, and politics. The merge of southern Chinese culture with that of the native Vietnamese people created the culture of Vietnam that we know today.

Festivals are a staple in the traditions of Vietnam. The most ancient Vietnamese holiday still observed today is the lunar New Year, celebrated by the Tết festival. This is a time when the Vietnamese reconnect ties with their past, their ancestors, and their extended families. They pay their respects in tombs, pay off debts, recognize their errors, and wish their families well for the new year. One tradition from this holiday is the giving of little red envelopes containing *lì xì*, a small sum of “lucky money,” which are given to children by their elders. To receive the gift, the

⁶ *Annam* was the name ascribed to Vietnam by the Chinese during the Chinese rule of Vietnam, meaning “Pacified South”

⁷ Bowles, Gordon T. *The People of Asia*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1977, print, p. 194.

⁸ Chapuis, Oscar. *A History of Vietnam: From Hong Bang to Tu Duc*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1995, p. 4.

children must bestow good wishes upon their elders. Other important festivals in Vietnam are built around seasonal activities, such as the Harvest Moon Festival in autumn.

Traditional clothing in Vietnam is designed to suit the country's warm and humid climate. The *áo dài* ("long dress") is the traditional formal dress for both men and women, each version having distinct shapes and artistic designs for the respective gender. For special occasions, such as a wedding, a silk hat called the *khăn đống* is worn with the *áo dài*. Ethnic minorities generally wear brightly colored clothes that distinguish them from ethnic Vietnamese. Cone-shaped hats woven from grass are worn during field or market work for protection from the sun. Modern-day Western styles are popular for everyday wear.

Chapter 2

General Characteristics of Vietnamese Music

Influence of Language

A culture's spoken language has a large impact on its music. These influences can be found in musical qualities such as pitch and rhythm. The influence of spoken language on musical melodies is especially prevalent in cultures that use a tonal language. No language is truly monotone – even in English, which is not categorized as a tonal language, speakers use general tonal inflections for clarity of meaning in different words and statements. For example, one can say “I’m fine,” with the use of a higher pitch register and another English speaker would believe this declamation of well-being. If he were to say “I’m fine,” with a lower pitch register, the listener might question the speaker’s honesty about his feelings. However, in tonal languages, specific pitch variances can completely change the meaning of a single word.

Vietnamese is a tonal language in which “[there] are six tones placed within equal, high and low levels, making the language rich with varied pitches.”⁹ One example of this is the Vietnamese word *ma*, which has all six tonal variations indicated by differing vocalic diacritical marks that all have different meanings. The word *má* starts around A 440Hz has an upward pitch inflection and means “mother” or “cheek.” Starting on the same pitch, *mã* with a slight rise followed by a fall and a final rise in pitch means “horse.” Starting around D 294Hz, *mả* with a fall in pitch followed by a large rise (almost up to A440Hz) means “grave.” A straight tone *ma* around A 440Hz means “ghost.” A straight tone *mà* around D 294Hz means “but,” and *mạ* starting on the same pitch but with a large fall in pitch means “rice seedling.” Such fine pitch variances are

⁹ Nguyen et. al, “Chapter 2. Vietnamese Musical Form and Instruments.” *From Rice Paddies*, 27.

extremely difficult for native English speakers to comprehend and replicate because we do not have them in our own spoken language.

These intoned vocalic syllables within the language make Vietnamese sound melodic even when spoken. Naturally, these pitch variances greatly influenced traditional musical tonal structures in Vietnam. Much of traditional Vietnamese music is based on simple pentatonic scales (musical scales that contain five pitches), but these intoned syllables influence the way that singers use half-tones and quarter-tones to embellish these scales in both structured song and improvisation.¹⁰ Even instrumental music “hints at language patterns through...modal ornamentations”¹¹ played during improvisatory sections of traditional songs. Western scales use half-tones, but quarter-tones are completely foreign to the Western ear because most Western languages are non-tonal.

Features of Musical Form

Tonality of Vietnamese traditional music is derived from a variety of scales ranging from two to seven pitches. Upon hearing a traditional song, a trained listener might determine its geographic origin based on the specific scale used in the song. Some scales overlap different regions, but each region uses unique identifying ornamentations within the framework of these scales that provide further origin information. The ditonic scale, consisting of two pitches separated by a fifth (e.g. A - E), comes from Northern Vietnam and can be found in the region’s traditional folk style of antiphonal singing called *hát đúm*. The tritonic scale consists of three pitches, with a minor third between the first two and a whole step between the second and third

¹⁰ Addiss, Steve. “Additional Notes.” *Music of Viet Nam*, Folkways Records and Service Corporation, 1965, vinyl record liner notes.

¹¹ Nguyen et. al, “Chapter 2.” *From Rice Paddies*, 28.

itches (e.g. A – C – D). This scale is found in music from both Northern and Central Vietnam. The tetratonic scale consists of four pitches, the first two separated by a minor third, the third pitch a whole step away from the second pitch, and the fourth pitch a whole step away from the third (e.g. A – C – D – E). This scale is found in music across the country. Hexatonic and heptatonic scales, with six and seven notes, respectively, are found in modern Vietnamese music.

Pentatonic scales are the most prevalent scales in Vietnamese traditional music. These five-note scales are very common and have been used across the world throughout all of music history, from Gregorian chant melodies of Medieval Rome to West African traditional music to American popular songs, such as in the opening bars of “My Girl” by The Temptations. These scales’ worldly popularity is found in their relative simplicity that makes them easy to sing and play. In traditional Vietnamese music, there are five different types of pentatonic scales.¹² The one most commonly found in Vietnamese folk songs is comprised of three pitches separated by whole steps, the fourth pitch separated from the third pitch by a minor third, and ends with a whole step to the fifth pitch (i.e. C – D – E – G – A).

Much of traditional Vietnamese music is either monophonic or heterophonic. The monophonic music consists of a single, unaccompanied melody while the heterophonic music consists of one melody performed simultaneously by multiple individuals. In the heterophonic music, each individual performer adds his or her own improvised inflections and modifications to the melody. These melodic and rhythmic variations are based on the principle of *danh hoa lá*, which literally means “playing by adding flowers and leaves.” The ornamentations used in this practice include simple non-harmonic tones such as passing notes, more elaborate embellishments

¹² Tran, Quang Hai. “An Introduction to Vietnamese Music.” *Hon Que - Vietnamese Multimedia Magazine*, 2002, www.honque.com/HQ020/bKhao_tqHai.htm.

on the melody such as trills or turns, and rhythmic syncopation.¹³ In some cases, musical selections will include moments of both monophony and heterophony. Songs are generally sung in a monophonic style, sometimes with light accompaniment of percussion or a stringed instrument. Purely instrumental music is usually heterophonic. The melodic texture of instrumental music often becomes thick and complex with larger ensembles with more individuals adding their own embellishments to the melody.

Like many other cultures around the world, the rhythm of most traditional Vietnamese music is set within the framework of duple meter. In America, many children grow up playing the game “Paddy Cake” which features a rhyme and hand movements that accent the large beats of a duple meter. Similarly, Vietnamese children’s songs and song games are also generally in duple meter. The rhymes and hand movements of these songs emphasize a two-feeling as well. There is a natural feeling to the division of two that people can easily learn and internalize, especially at a young age. Vietnamese folk dances also live in duple meter, as do many American folk dances, such as the southern tradition of Square Dancing. The Vietnamese music traditions mentioned above typically involve singing and are metrically fixed. Instrumental music often begins with a metrically free improvisatory section that leads into a fixed meter. Additionally, traditional instrumental music often features an increase in speed from the beginning to the end of a piece.

Dynamics depend upon the genre, type and size of performing ensemble, the performance setting, and the general character of a specific piece. Smaller ensembles have more moderate dynamic levels than larger ensembles. For example, Vietnamese chamber music features softer overall dynamics than theatrical or ritual music because the former are significantly smaller than

¹³ Tran, Van Khe. “Some Principles of Aesthetics in the Musical Tradition of Vietnam.” *The World of Music*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1976, p. 14. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/43563516.

the latter. This is similar to how a Western string quartet's volume would compare to that of a symphony. Vietnamese chamber music is predominated by stringed instruments that naturally produce less volume than percussion or wind instruments, which are featured in theatrical and ritual music. Additionally, the performance setting for chamber music is small, intimate, and usually indoors, thus not requiring a huge sound to fill the space. Theatrical and ritual music ensembles fill a much larger space in both size and sound.

Common musical genres of Vietnam include *dân ca* (folk songs), *hát ả đào* or *ca trù* (Northern Chamber Music), *ca Huế* (Southern chamber music), *nhạc tài tử* (Northern folk theater), *hát bội* (classical theater), *hát cải lương* (Southern reformed theater), and *tân nhạc* (modernized vocal music).¹⁴

Traditional Instruments

The aesthetic of traditional Vietnamese music holds great importance in its instruments and their unique timbres. Strings and percussion are the two main instrument groups, with wind instruments being less prominent. China's heavy cultural influence on Vietnam can be seen and heard in the traditional instruments, especially in the string family.

Stringed instruments can be categorized into three types: plucked, bowed, and hammered. Lutes and zithers are plucked, fiddles are bowed, and there is a traditional dulcimer that is played with hammers. Originally, the strings themselves were made of silk but over time have been replaced by metal strings, which are more durable and produce a louder sound. The body of these instruments are made from wood or coconut shells. Other materials used may be ivory, bamboo, buffalo horn, sea shell, animal bone or skin, and horsetail hair.¹⁵ These instruments are often

¹⁴ Nguyen et. al, "Chapter 2." *From Rice Paddies*, 28.

¹⁵ Ibid., 33.

decorated with mother-of-pearl inlays that depict nature, mythological creatures, and scenes of daily life.

The *đàn bầu*, a monochord zither, is one of the only traditional instruments used in Vietnamese music that is of pure Vietnamese origin. This two thousand-year-old instrument¹⁶ was originally constructed of four simple components: a bamboo tube, a wooden rod, half of a coconut shell or small gourd, and one silk string. The rod was attached perpendicularly to the tube, across which the string was strung. The shell was attached to the wooden rod, and the string met the shell in its concave center. The shell acted as a resonator for the sound of the string. The string is plucked with a small wooden pick in the right hand while the left hand moves the rod back and forth to manipulate the pitch. Today, the bamboo tube is replaced by a rectangular wooden soundboard and the silk is replaced with an electric guitar string.

In both its ancient and modern forms, the *đàn bầu* is a naturally soft-sounding instrument because it plays in harmonics. These harmonics give the instrument a silvery, almost metaphysical timbre that makes it so unique. The *đàn bầu* is one of the most difficult Vietnamese instruments to master because of its sensitivity. The player must be firm but careful in both her plucking of the string and movement of the rod to create a clear sound. The subtleties achieved by masterful playing of the *đàn bầu* mimic the sound of the Vietnamese singing voice.¹⁷ Traditionally used in smaller settings for solo or chamber music or to accompany declamatory poetry, the *đàn bầu* can now be featured in larger spaces because of the use of electronic amplification.

Other important stringed instruments include the *đàn nguyệt*, a moon-shaped two-stringed plucked lute, the *đàn tranh*, a 16- or 17-stringed zither of Chinese origin, the *đàn nhị*, a two-

¹⁶ Deschênes, Bruno. "The Music of Vietnam." *Article - The Music of Vietnam*. All Music Guide, 2004. Web. 30 Mar. 2017.

¹⁷ Vinh, Ly Hong. "Dan Bau, Mono-Cord Zither." *Dan Bau, Traditional Vietnamese String Instruments*, 2015, www.saigonstrings.com/danbau.htm.

stringed fiddle, the *dan gáo*, a two-stringed coconut shell fiddle similar to the Chinese *erhu*, and the *đàn tam thập lục*, a hammered dulcimer like that of the Eastern-European cimbola.

Percussion in Vietnamese music can function as solo instruments but are most often used as accompaniment for voice or strings. They are made of materials such as wood, bamboo, animal skin, stone, and metals such as bronze. One of the most famous Vietnamese drums is the *Đông Sơn*, a large bronze drum that features intricate mandala-like designs on its face. Common percussion instruments include the *trống*, a drum typically made of wood and cloth or animal skin, the *mộc ngư* (literally wooden fish), a wooden or bamboo bell in the shape of a fish, and the *t'rung*, a bamboo xylophone.

The most common wind instrument in Vietnamese music is the bamboo flute, of which there are two types. The *sáo* is played by blowing transversely across the instrument, like a typical Western orchestral flute, and the *tiêu* is played by blowing vertically into the flute, like a Western recorder. Both types of flutes have holes instead of keys. The *kèn*, a double reed oboe, and the *hai loa*, a conch shell, are wind instruments played by people of the Vietnamese lowlands. The *m'buat* is a mouth organ played by the *Thuong*, a highland minority people.¹⁸

¹⁸ Nguyen et al, "Chapter 2." *From Rice Paddies*, p. 35.

Chapter 3

Vietnamese Folk Singing

Man's first instrument is his voice. Like speaking, singing is a natural human experience, so it is no surprise that "song plays a principal role in Vietnamese culture,"¹⁹ just as it does in most cultures around the world. As an introduction to Vietnamese folk song, this chapter will explore three styles: *quan họ*, *ca trù*, and Vietnamese work song.

Antiphonal singing, when two parts of a choir sing alternately, one answering the other,²⁰ is a familiar performance style to both Western and Vietnamese cultures. It is closely identified with musical settings of Christian liturgical texts, such as its prominence in the tradition of Gregorian chant from the ninth century Roman Catholic Church. Antiphonal singing can also be found in American music, specifically in the form of call-and-response, in styles such as blues, African-American folk and work songs, and even in modern styles like hip-hop. In Vietnam, antiphonal singing is present in certain styles of folk singing, one of which is the famous North Vietnamese style of *quan họ*.

Quan họ

Vietnamese musician and music historian Pham Duy describes *quan họ* as an avenue through which one can "find the soul of the Vietnamese nation: peace-loving, sensitive to the beauty of things, generous, serene, not at all mystical, realistic but still with a sense of poetry."²¹ *Quan họ* or *hát quan họ* originates from the Hà Bắc (formerly Bắc Ninh) Province and has been

¹⁹ Nguyen et. al, "Chapter 2." *From Rice Paddies*, p. 28.

²⁰ Kennedy, Michael, and Joyce Bourne. "Antiphonal Singing." *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 27.

²¹ Pham, Duy. "Introduction to the Music of Viet Nam." *Music of Viet Nam*, Folkways Records and Service Corporation, 1965, vinyl record liner notes.

practiced since the 13th century. These songs are traditionally sung by teenagers and young adults and feature poems that focus on young romantic love. These songs are sometimes referred to as “festival songs” because they are sung at seasonal agrarian festivals, such as the planting festival in the spring and the harvest festival in autumn.

During these festivals, young people from nearby villages gather together in a centralized location and sing antiphonally in a challenge-and-response fashion. Standing across from each other in a place such as a Buddhist temple yard, a group of girls from one village sings a verse of a song that is answered by a group of boys from a different village who sings another verse. The content of the responding verse has either “opposing, responding, or parallel meaning”²² to the initial verse. After the initial verse, both groups will incorporate improvisation of melody, rhythm, or lyric into their performances of the successive verses. After preparing their materials ahead of time, the singers will dress in their finest traditional clothing and participate in the competitions that take place throughout the festivals. These informal cross-village competitions provide an opportunity for younger generations to meet people outside of their immediate communities and show off their own villages’ wit and musical skill. Many North Vietnamese embrace *quan họ* singing as a chance to develop new, meaningful friendships.

Quan họ was recognized as an Intangible Cultural Heritage by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2009 after years of the genre’s deterioration following the Vietnam War. This recognition increased demand for the style’s mass performance, opening a new market that led to the commercialization of the genre. Many traditional Vietnamese musicians criticize this commercialization for encouraging inaccurate and

²² Nguyen et. al, “Chapter 3. A Guide to the Music of Vietnam.” *From Rice Paddies*, p. 56.

sometimes incorrect *quan họ* performances. However, its stable presence in modern Vietnamese culture is a testament to the country's dedication to preserving its traditions.

One famous example of this genre is “Qua Cầu Gió Bay” (The Wind on the Bridge). This song is a popular selection for modern commercialized performances, but it is truly a traditional song, not one written in the style of traditional *quan họ* songs. This song tells the sweet story of a young romantic's generous gestures to his lover. He gives away his shirt, his hat, and his ring to her, but lies to his parents about it because he knows they would disapprove of his forward actions.

Lyrics and poetic translation:²³

Yêu nhau cởi áo ôi à trao nhau.

Về nhà dối rằng cha dối mẹ a ý a.

Rằng a ý a qua cầu.

Rằng a ý a qua cầu.

Chorus: Tình tình tình gió bay.

Tình tình tình gió bay.

Yêu nhau cởi nón ý à trao nhau.

Về nhà dối rằng cha dối mẹ a ý a.

Rằng a ý a qua cầu

Rằng a ý a qua cầu

Chorus

Yêu nhau cởi nhẫn ý à trao nhau.

Về nhà dối rằng cha dối mẹ a ý a.

Rằng a ý a qua cầu

Rằng a ý a qua cầu

Final Chorus: Tình tình tình đánh rơi

Tình tình tình đánh rơi

Loving you I give you my coat.

Coming back home I lie to my father and mother:

On the bridge, the wind has taken it away.

Loving you I give you my hat.

Coming back home I lie to my father and mother:

On the bridge, the wind has taken it away.

Loving you I give you my ring.

Coming back home I lie to my father and mother:

On the bridge, because of the wind, it has dropped into the river

²³ Ibid., 57.

Ca trù

Ca trù, (“literally, ‘song with little tokens’”²⁴), also known as *hát ả đào*, is a form of chamber music originating from northern Vietnam that has been performed by the Việt (Kinh) people since the 15th century. It is also considered to be court music due to its extensive use as entertainment for courtiers during the 18th and 19th centuries.²⁵ A typical *ca trù* ensemble includes three performers: a female singer who also plays the *phách* (a small bamboo slab struck with one or two bamboo sticks), a male *đàn đáy* (3-stringed lute) player, and a beater of the *trống chầu* (“praise drum” – traditionally played by a member of the audience who is knowledgeable about the *ca trù* style and the poetic content of the song). *Ca trù* is classified as “learned music” because all three members of the ensemble must adhere to certain musical rules for proper performance.

The genre’s performance contexts and functions have changed many times since its inception. Its early historic functions include *hát thờ*, worship of the village guardian spirit and praise of the genre’s ancestors, *hát thi*, competitive performances within *ca trù* communities, and *hát chơi*, entertainment for the upper middle class. The popularity of *ca trù* grew tremendously over the years, flourishing at its peak during the 18th and 19th centuries. Its success during this “golden age”²⁶ was due to famous and influential poets and philosophers of the time. They contributed many poems and songs to the genre that had both great literary and musical merit. By the early 20th century, the context and function of *ca trù* gradually decreased to only *hát chơi* and *hát của đình*, ceremonial or celebratory performances by and for the aristocracy.

²⁴ Tran, Van Khe. “Traditional Music: Ca tru and Quan ho of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.” *Viet Nam: Ca Tru and Quan Ho - Traditional Music*, UNESCO Auvidis Collection, 1978, liner notes.

²⁵ Pham, *Music of Viet Nam*.

²⁶ Grant, Catherine Fiona. “Strengthening the Vitality and Viability of Endangered Music Genres: The Potential of Language Maintenance to Inform Approaches to Music Sustainability.” *Griffith University*, 2012, p. 145.

Around the same time, the French had invaded Vietnam and brought with them their own urban-emphasized culture. As the French established urban centers, more rural Vietnamese started moving to the cities seeking jobs and better living opportunities. Many of these rural Vietnamese were *ca trù* players, and the genre saw a short flourishing in these Westernized cities as various *ca trù* clubs were established. Both the Vietnamese and the French patronized these clubs, but what was first an innocent musical entrepreneurship soon became tainted by French soldiers who sought escape from reality and by Vietnamese opportunists who were willing to provide that escape. By the 1940s these clubs became bastardized by gambling, opium-smoking, and prostitution. After the end of the Franco-Vietnamese war in 1954, new President Ho Chi Minh ordered the closing of these clubs because of their illicit associations during French colonialism. For this same reason, *ca trù* saw further deprecation in the next two decades during the even more culturally-restricting period of the Vietnam War.

The years following the war saw a continuous downfall in the Vietnamese economy and general standard of living. To reverse this, the Vietnamese Communist Party initiated an official reform called *doi moi* in 1986 that would shift their economy from state-subsidized to free-market. This initiative promoted the acceptance of foreign trade and cultural interaction as well as aspects of traditional Vietnamese culture that had been previously denounced. The following year the VCP enacted a resolution that recognized freedom of artistic expression for all works that were not “anti-socialist, anti-Party, and anti-government.”²⁷ Many traditional music forms were now able to be performed publicly, including *ca trù*. The 1987 resolution led to preservation initiatives like the *Vietnamese Court Music Revitalization Plan*, funded by the Toyota Foundation and approved by UNESCO. By the 1990s, an environment that welcomed *ca trù* was once alive in Vietnam.

²⁷ Ibid., 146.

Work Song

In many traditional cultures around the world, work is often accompanied by song. “Work songs are typically sung for two reasons: to coordinate the labor of a group of people working together, which improves the efficiency of the work, and to relieve the boredom of a tedious job, which improves the lives of the workers.”²⁸ Work songs are typically simplistic and repetitive in nature, making them easy to learn and sing. American work songs developed from several different occupations such as crop harvesting, railroad construction, cattle herding, and sailing. One famous example of a traditional American work song is the sea chantey “Drunken Sailor,” which was sung to aid the rhythm and coordination of sailors pulling ropes on deck.

Similarly, Vietnamese work songs developed in Vietnam’s various traditional occupations, like planting and harvesting rice, boating, and even selling goods in open-air markets. With more than half of the country bordered by water, mariner life plays a huge role in Vietnamese culture. Just like the American sea chanty, the Vietnamese have their own style of work song specifically for boating. Not only do these songs help the rowers work more efficiently, but they can also aid in developing friendships between the boaters in a community. Rowers will sing with their own boat crew as well as with crews from passing boats.²⁹

The Mekong River Delta of South Vietnam is home to an intricate system of rivers, large and small, that carry thousands of people and their goods each day. People use small boats called *đò* for transportation throughout this area, and travel in two different directions on the same body of water. Boats going up and down the river are referred to as current flowing boats, while boats

²⁸ “Traditional Work Songs.” *The Library of Congress*, CONGRESS.GOV, www.loc.gov/collections/songs-of-america/articles-and-essays/musical-styles/traditional-and-ethnic/traditional-work-songs/.

²⁹ Nguyen et. al, “Chapter 3.” *From Rice Paddies*, 59.

going from one bank to the other are called crossing boats. Many Vietnamese boating songs feature themes of duality, perhaps because of the dualistic nature of boating in Vietnam. A common southern Vietnamese boat song is “Đò Dọc Đò Ngang” (The Boat Song), which describes dualism in a few forms: a man and a woman, two types of boats, and two different directions of rowing. However, the lyrics indicate the desire for unification of these dualities. The man and woman wish to be married even though their boats flow in different directions – “*Why shouldn’t our wish come true?*” - reflecting a basic human desire to look beyond superficial differences in order to see the ultimate good in unity. The chorus of this song, “*khoan hỏi hò khoan,*” represents the sound of water flowing around a boater’s paddle.

Lyrics and poetic translation:³⁰

Refrain/Chorus: khoan hỏi hò khoan	(The sound of water whirling about the paddle.)
Em lái con đò ngang, anh sang con đò dọc.	I row the crossing boat.
Anh lái con đò dọc	You row the current-flowing boat.
Em trở con đò ngang.	You row the current-flowing boat.
Mai ta một dòng.	I row the crossing boat.
Chorus	Tomorrow we will get together in the same stream.
Sao không đồng lòng, mang tiếng hoài trông	Why shouldn’t our wish come true?
Nghe anh một lần.	Listen to me this time:
Chorus	Tomorrow we will be dressed in pink.
Ta xe chỉ hồng. Kết nghĩa được chăng?	Why shouldn’t we be married?
Chorus	We will be husband and wife.
Ta nên vợ chồng.	We will have many children and grandchildren.
Chorus	
Mai kia đầy đàn. Con cháu thiệt đông.	
Chorus	

³⁰ Ibid., 60.

Chapter 4

Tân nhạc

With the rising influence of Western culture in the early twentieth century came a change in Vietnamese popular song. This modernized vocal music became its own genre called *tân nhạc*, literally “new music.” The style is a melding of Vietnamese and Western cultures, described by its creators as Vietnamese music based on Western musical procedures that may also include traditional vocal styles and instruments. For example, a *tân nhạc* ensemble might include a typical Western rock rhythm section – drum set, bass, and keyboard – with traditional Vietnamese instruments at the forefront of the band. The music itself consists of Vietnamese-inspired melodies over conventional Western harmonic structures. This culture combination creates a unique genre that is genuinely Vietnamese and easily accessible to the Western listener.

Like American popular song, “*tân nhạc* consists almost entirely of vocal music organized in the form of single, titled songs.”³¹ In some cases, these songs are arranged into a cohesive song cycle focused on particular themes, much like the tradition of art song in Western classical vocal music. Another similarity to America popular song is the creative collaboration involved in the making of *tân nhạc*. Generally, four individuals are involved in the process: the composer, the lyricist, the arranger, and the singer. In some cases, one person fulfills two or more roles in this collaboration. Two of the most well-known *tân nhạc* composers who also wrote the poems for their songs are Phạm Duy and Trịnh Công Sơn, both admired for their melodic invention as well as their poetic tact.

³¹ Henry, Eric. “Tân Nhạc: Notes Toward a Social History of Vietnamese Music in the Twentieth Century.” *Michigan Quarterly Review*, University of Michigan, 2005, web.

Like most Vietnamese vocal music styles, the genre of *tân nhạc* has deep connections in poetic literature and places great emphasis on thematic content. The three themes most common in the genre are “(1) songs that express a cosmic yearning for a homeland that is tragically inaccessible, (2) songs that express a cosmic yearning for a love relationship that is tragically inaccessible, (3) songs that express a cosmic yearning for a beautiful time in the past that is tragically inaccessible.”³² These popular themes provide an interesting insight into the general Vietnamese psyche – one can infer that their struggle-dominated history, as a culture and a country, provides the psychological background to create such tragedy laden art even in a less serious genre like *tân nhạc*. However, the Vietnamese are not completely tragedy-focused. Smaller thematic categories of *tân nhạc* exist, such as *nhạc vui*, or fun music. Examples of this subcategory include humorous songs, festival songs, and party music.

The history of *tân nhạc* begins in 1911, with “*Nửa Đêm Mừng Chúa Ra Đời*,” or “Feelings of Gratitude in the Middle of the Night at Our Lord's Appearance in the World,” the very first *tân nhạc* song ever written by Đoàn Quang Đạt, a Vietnamese Catholic priest. This song is now often played at Christmas time. Although this song was written in 1911, the genre did not fully take off until about twenty years later, when the advent of the radio provided Vietnamese urban communities with increasingly more French musical influence than ever before. It quickly became fashionable to perform covers of French popular songs with Vietnamese translated lyrics. However, many Vietnamese traditionalists were afraid that this newfound popularity of French music would turn Vietnam into nothing more than a “cultural appendage of the west,”³³ so they

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

called upon Vietnamese composers to create truly Vietnamese music in this new popular style. Thus was the true birth of *tân nhạc*.

During the ages of the various wars that followed the birth of *tân nhạc*, Vietnamese composers would write war songs, both for and against the different conflicts. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam saw music as a cultural weapon, and its Ministry of Culture quickly began to censor any songs they found went against the political party, many of which were in the genre of *tân nhạc*. Trịnh Công Sơn is notable as a cultural enemy of the party, as he wrote many anti-war songs throughout the 1950's and 1960's. A famous example of his provocative work is “*Hát trên những xác người*” (Singing on the corpses), a powerful song which “describes corpses strewn around after the battle and the confused reaction of bereaved women... The final lines are as follows:

Afternoon by the mulberry groves,
Singing on the corpses.
I have seen, I have seen,
Trenches filled with corpses.

A mother claps to welcome war,
A sister cheers for peace.
Some people clap for more hatred,
Some clap to repent.”³⁴

Vietnamese *tân nhạc* musicians fought for artistic freedom throughout this period and still face some censorship from the state today.

However, most *tân nhạc* songs are love songs. One famous example of a love song from the genre is “*Ngâm Ngùi*” (Compassion) by famous Vietnamese musician and music historian

³⁴ Norton, Barley. “Vietnam: Popular Music and Censorship.” *Freemuse*, ArtsFreedom, 27 Sept. 2016, artsfreedom.freemuse.org/news/vietnam-popular-music-and-censorship/.

Phạm Duy. Written in 1956, this song is an interesting example of the composer's "lifelong determination to behave as if political divisions did not exist among Vietnamese."³⁵ The poem was written in 1930 by Huy Cận, who was an active member of the Viet Minh. As a South Vietnamese, Phạm Duy's use of a North Vietnamese's creation in his music was at the least unconventional, but ultimately demonstrated his desire for the unification of Vietnam. The poem itself is a beautiful dedication of love that uses aspects of nature to symbolize the speaker's feelings towards his beloved. All the speaker wants is to show his lover compassion, and to relieve her of her troublesome life.

Lyrics and translation:

Nắng chia nửa bai chiều rồi
Vườn hoang trinh nữ xếp đôi lá sầu.

Sợi buồn con nhện giăng mau;
Em ơi! Hãy ngủ, anh hầu quạt đây.
Lòng anh mờ với quạt này;
Trăm con chim mộng về bay đầu giường.
Ngủ đi em, mộng bình thường!
Ru em sẵn tiếng thùy dương mấy bờ
Ngủ đi em, Ngủ đi em!
Ngủ đi, mộng vẫn bình thường!

À ơ, có tiếng thùy dương mấy bờ
Cây dài bóng xế ngắn ngơ...
Hồn em đã chín mấy mùa buồn đau
Tay anh em hãy tựa đầu,
Cho anh nghe nặng trái sầu rụng rơi...

Daylight is falling
In the virgin garden the leaves have closed

The spider quickly spins its web
Sleep my love, my fan will keep you cool
Like this fan, my heart opens
A hundred birds of dreams come to the bed's end
Sleep my love, have peaceful dreams
For you the willows are singing a lullaby
Sleep my love, have peaceful dreams
In a daze the trees cast long shadows

Your soul has been through some seasons of sorrow
Rest your head on my arm, my love
So I can hear fruit from the tree of sadness falling...

Today, *tân nhạc* exists in many forms in both Vietnam and America. This musical genre is a great example of the beauty that can come from true cultural collaboration.

³⁵ Henry, Eric. "Phạm Duy and Modern Vietnamese History." *Southeast Conference of the Association of the Association of Asian Studies*, University of Kentucky, 2005, www.uky.edu/Centers/Asia/SECAAS/Seras/2005/Henry.htm.

Conclusion

The music of Vietnam is a treasure to human history not only for its beauty and cultural richness, but also because it is a perfect example of how music can showcase intercultural connection. As an inextricable feature of the human experience, music allows for special interpersonal connections to be made through its creation and enjoyment. Vietnamese music creates connections on an even larger scale, as it is syncretic in both its traditional and modern forms. The traditional music is influenced by nearby foreign cultures, while the modern music highlights Western influence on Vietnam. Vietnamese music demonstrates how a culture can create something that is both a product of outside influence yet at the same time uniquely its own. Vietnamese music undeniably features foreign influence, but it is wholly Vietnamese.

Although I have only scratched the surface of the incredible history of Vietnamese music in this thesis, I hope that my readers will now go forward with a changed view of Vietnam. I have learned so much more than I ever thought I would about a part of my own heritage through this work that has opened my own eyes to see Vietnam differently. No culture should be defined by a war, especially not as Vietnam is defined by most Americans today. I do not ask Americans to forget the Vietnam War and its consequences, but instead to realize that the country of Vietnam is much more than that unfortunate conflict. Vietnamese and Americans are more similar to each other than some might realize, so I hope that my readers can now see those similarities and understand that the people of Vietnam are just that – people.

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*A Taste of Vietnamese Music:
Building Bridges Through
Cultural Understanding*

An LIU Post Honors College Thesis Lecture

By

Veronica Linh Ngọc Nguyen

November 21, 2017, 5:30 PM

Great Hall

Long Island University Post



Thank you for joining me in the culmination of my Senior Thesis. This work has given me an opportunity to explore a side of my own heritage that I knew little about. In the process I also realized how little other Americans might know about Vietnam. Through this lecture recital, I aim to expand an American's view of Vietnam beyond the lens of the Vietnam War. With explanations and performances of both traditional and modern Vietnamese songs, I hope to educate an American audience on the beauty of Vietnamese culture. Below are the songs I will be performing along with their lyrics and English translations. Please follow along during the performance to better understand the Vietnamese songs.

— Veronica

Program

Qua Cầu Gió Bay (The Wind on the Bridge)

traditional quan họ folk song

Yêu nhau cởi áo ối à trao nhau.	Loving you I give you my coat.
Về nhà dối rằng cha dối mẹ a ý a.	Coming back home I lie to my father
Rằng a ý a qua cầu.	and mother:
Rằng a ý a qua cầu.	
<i>Chorus:</i> Tình tình tình gió bay.	On the bridge, the wind has taken it
Tình tình tình gió bay.	away.
Yêu nhau cởi nón ý à trao nhau.	Loving you I give you my hat.
Về nhà dối rằng cha dối mẹ a ý a.	Coming back home I lie to my father
Rằng a ý a qua cầu	and mother:
Rằng a ý a qua cầu	On the bridge, the wind has taken it
<i>Chorus</i>	away.
Yêu nhau cởi nhẫn ý à trao nhau.	Loving you I give you my ring.
Về nhà dối rằng cha dối mẹ a ý a.	Coming back home I lie to my father
Rằng a ý a qua cầu	and mother:
Rằng a ý a qua cầu	
<i>Final Chorus:</i> Tình tình tình đánh rơi	On the bridge, because of the wind, it
Tình tình tình đánh rơi	has dropped into the river

Bèo Dạt Mây Trôi (Drifting Blossoms, Floating Clouds)

traditional folk song

Dale Stuckenbruck, *Đàn bầu*

Đò Dọc Đò Ngang (The Boat Song)

traditional work song from the Mekong Delta

Refrain/Chorus: khoan hời hò khoan (*The sound of water whirling about the paddle.*)

Em lái con đò ngang, anh sang con đò dọc.	I row the crossing boat. You row the current-flowing boat.
Anh lái con đò dọc	You row the current-flowing boat.
Em trở con đò ngang.	I row the crossing boat.
Mai ta một dòng.	Tomorrow we will get together in the same stream.
<i>Chorus</i>	
Sao không đồng lòng, mang tiếng hoài trông	Why shouldn't our wish come true?
Nghe anh một lần.	Listen to me this time: Tomorrow we will be dressed in pink.
<i>Chorus</i>	
Ta xe chỉ hồng. Kết nghĩa được chăng?	Why shouldn't we be married?
<i>Chorus</i>	
Ta nên vợ chồng.	We will be husband and wife.
<i>Chorus</i>	
Mai kia đầy đàn. Con cháu thiệt đông.	We will have many children and grandchildren
<i>Chorus</i>	

Ngâm Ngủ (Compassion) (1954)

music by Phạm Duy (1921-2013)

poem by Huy Cận (1919-2005)

Nắng chia nửa bai chiều rồi Vườn hoang trinh nữ xếp đôi lá sầu.	Daylight is falling In the virgin garden the leaves have closed
Sợi buồn con nhện giăng mau; Em ơi! Hãy ngủ, anh hầu quạt đây.	The spider quickly spins its web Sleep my love, my fan will keep you cool
Lòng anh mở với quạt này; Trăm con chim mộng về bay đầu giường.	Like this fan, my heart opens A hundred birds of dreams come to the bed's end
Ngủ đi em, mộng bình thường!	Sleep my love, have peaceful dreams
Ru em sẵn tiếng thùy dương mấy bờ Ngủ đi em, Ngủ đi em! Ngủ đi, mộng vẫn bình thường!	For you the willows are singing a lulla- by Sleep my love, have peaceful dreams
À ơ, có tiếng thùy dương mấy bờ Cây dài bóng xế ngấn ngơ... Hồn em đã chín mấy mùa buồn đau	In a daze the trees cast long shadows Your soul has been through some sea- sons of sorrow
Tay anh em hãy tựa đầu, Cho anh nghe nặng trái sầu rụng rơi...	Rest your head on my arm, my love So I can hear fruit from the tree of sadness falling...

Performer Biographies

Stephanie Watt

World-renowned pianist Jörg Demus often referred to her as “the silent giant” and “richly gifted.” Since her studies at his home in Gastof, Austria, Stephanie D. Watt has become one of the most sought-after performers and teachers in the Long Island and metropolitan New York areas.

As a soloist and as a collaborative and chamber artist, she has performed with the Kennedy Center Chamber Players, the Long Island Philharmonic, the C.W. Post and West Islip Orchestras, Masterworks Choir, Atlantic Wind Symphony, Camerata Pro Musica of Hungary, Musica Mundi, DuoLeo, the highly acclaimed Musica Viva of New York and many others. Her performances have taken her throughout the United States, Argentina, Europe, Korea and North Africa.

She has toured Hungary and conducted master classes in the Sávár and Szombathely Music Conservatories and has performed with the Comunidad de Palermo Symphony Orchestra with renowned Argentinean conductor Jaime Braude. She will be performing and conducting master classes in China in 2010 through their international cultural exchange arranged by Mr. Tate Chen. Her most recent CD recording of Allen Brings’s “Duo for Cello & Piano” has been released on Capstone Records, and her biography has been published in the prestigious Marquis Who’s Who in America, Who’s Who in American Women and Who’s Who in the World.

She is the pianist for the Long Island Philharmonic and Masterworks Choruses and concertizes regularly with these organizations as well as with the LeoDuo and Duo con Fuego. As an accomplished competitive ballroom dancer, Professor Watt performs and lectures frequently throughout the tri-state area with her partner, Barry Masten. She is professor of music and director of piano and theory studies at the C.W. Post Campus. Professor Watt served as chair of C.W. Post’s Department of Music from 2007-2009.

Dale Stuckenbruck

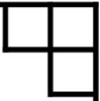
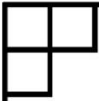
Dale Stuckenbruck, Grammy-nominated artist, is immersed in the diverse musical life in New York as a soloist, concertmaster, chamber musician and teacher. His mentor of three decades was the great violinist Erick Friedman, with whom he has appeared as soloist in recording and in chamber music. He has performed as soloist/concertmaster with the Brooklyn Philharmonic, Philharmonia Virtuosi, New York Virtuosi, New York String Ensemble, Tchaikovsky Chamber Orchestra, Taipei City Symphony Orchestra, Music at St. Ignatius, Dance Theater of Harlem, Queens Symphony, Masterworks, and the Long Island Philharmonic. He recorded the "Concerto for Violin and String Choir" for Opus One by Louis Pelosi, with Erick Friedman on Kultur Video, and for countless commercial recordings and films.

He has been featured in Strings Magazine, Wuolgang Umak (Korea), Newsday, Sarasate (Japan) and the New York Times. He has been a guest lecturer for the Juilliard School of Music (musical saw and Baroque violin), and the Long Island Guitar Festival. Recognized as one of the premier artist of the musical saw, receiving international acclaim for "Sawing to New Heights", "Ancient Voices of Children" by George Crumb on Bridge Records, and for his performances of the "Divination by Mirrors" by Michael Levine with the New Century Chamber Orchestra and the New York Virtuosi. He has performed the saw in chamber music with Lincoln Center Chamber Music Society and with the New York Philharmonic.

As a mandolinist he has appeared at the Metropolitan Opera, New York City Opera, ABT, and with Paula Robison at the Metropolitan Museum and in a recording with her and the Charleston Symphony. As an erhu player he has appeared as soloist with the Queens Philharmonic. He created the music for the films "Shadows" and "Fresh," featured at the Whitney Museum and the Israeli Museum. He and Heawon Kim are founders of unique string ensemble for young talent, Kammermusik, the ECO orchestra of the Waldorf School of Garden City, and the Long Island Vegetable Orchestra. He is the violinist the chamber groups L'Ensemble and the Pierrot Consort and in chamber ensembles such as the Clarion Concerts, Leaf Peeper Concerts, and at the Caramoor Festival. Since 1975 he has toured with Heawon Kim, pianist, in recitals in Asia, Europe and South America. Adjunct full professor at LIU since 1986. Music Director at the Waldorf School of Garden City since 2011; Assistant Director of the LIU Post Chamber Music Festival; Faculty: Oyster Bay Music Festival and Songe d'Été en Musique. D.M.A. from MSM, 1984.

Veronica Nguyen

Veronica Nguyen, mezzo-soprano, is a senior undergraduate music major studying Vocal Performance at LIU Post. Fortunate to have been born into a musically inclined family, she was given the opportunity to study piano and cello at a very young age with singing being secondary for most of her life. However, she discovered her passion for classical singing during her sophomore year of high school when she began taking private voice lessons. Hailing all the way from Fort Worth, Texas, she has come to New York to pursue a career in performance, focusing on classical and operatic repertoire. She is currently a member of the LIU Post Chorus, LIU Post Chamber Singers, and Long Island Sound Vocal Jazz. In addition to these ensembles, Veronica has also performed as a soloist in multiple Hillwood Recitals, Student Performance Convocations, with the LIU Post Percussion Ensemble and the LIU Post Jazz Ensemble, and she gave a Junior Degree Recital last spring and a Sophomore Recital in Spring 2016. Most recently, she is a grateful winner of the LIU Post 2016-17 Concerto Competition. This past summer she studied at the Newburgh Summer Music Festival in Newburgh, NY and at Midsummer Music Dream Festival in Quebec, Canada. Veronica is in the studio of Professor Barbara Fusco. She is an Assistant House Manager at the Tilles Center for the Performing Arts and a Choral Scholar at St. John's of Lattingtown Episcopal Church.



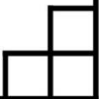

Cảm ơn—Thank you!

A huge thank you to everyone who made this journey possible for me. Dad, I'm so happy I chose this project – I feel I've grown closer to you through this work. Thank you Bà Nội for helping me better understand the language and culture, and for the beautiful áo dài I'm wearing tonight. Mom and Julian, thank you for your support and encouragement of me throughout this work. Zack, I could not have done this without you. Thank you for being my voice of reason and my rock. I love you all.

Endless thanks to Professor Watt. Your knowledge and guidance carried me through my thesis work. Learning with you and working on this music has been such a treat! I am so glad I was able to work with you in this way.

Thank you Professor Stuckenbruck for sharing your music with us today!

Thank you to all of my friends and family who came to support me tonight— it means the world! I am truly blessed and grateful.



A Taste of Vietnamese Music: Building Bridges Through Cultural Understanding

An LIU Post Honors College Thesis Lecture

By

Veronica Linh Ngọc Nguyen







Phở

Egg rolls (Chả giò)



"Music is the universal language... it brings people closer together."
– Ella Fitzgerald



"Two baskets of rice slung on a pole"





History

- Earliest human habitation over 500,000 years ago
 - Vietnam was one of the first cultures in Southeast Asia to practice agriculture
- First dynasty established in 2879 BCE
 - Hồng Bàng Dynasty ruled for over 2500 years
- Chinese conquer the land in 111 BCE, beginning Vietnam's continuous struggle for autonomy until 1976
 - Vietnam was an extremely desirable location throughout history
 - Fertile lands, abundance of natural resources
 - multiple major ports, strategic location

Major Invaders

- **China**
 - 111 BCE – 40 CE
 - 43 – 544 CE
 - 602 – 938 CE
 - Unsuccessful invasion in 981
 - 1407-1428
- **Mongols**
 - Unsuccessful invasion in 1258
- **France**
 - 1858 – 1945 – French colonialism period in Vietnam
 - 1940 – French control is weakened during WWII when **Japan** invades Vietnam and takes the country from France
 - 1945 – After WWII, France reoccupies South Vietnam, provoking the French-Viet Minh war in 1946

- **United States of America**

- 1946 – US supports French in French-Viet Minh War to prevent the spread of communism
- 1961 – US government advisors start to take a direct role in the Vietnam War
- 1965 – First US troops deployed in Vietnam
- 1969 – US begins to withdraw troops, completely leaving in 1973 after a cease fire is negotiated

Important Dates

- 1954 – Geneva Conference divides Vietnam into two countries: the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North, communist) and the State of Vietnam (south, democracy)
- 1959 – Ho Chi Minh declares war in an effort to unite Vietnam, starting the Vietnam War (Second Indochina War)
- 1968 – DRV launches the Tet Offensive, which was instrumental in their win
- 1975 – Southern Vietnam surrenders to DRV after the Fall of Saigon on April 30
- 1976 – the Republic of Vietnam is declared, and North and South Vietnam are united under communist rule
- 1995 – US and Vietnam establish full diplomatic relations

Ethnic Groups

- Vietnam is home to over 50 distinct ethnic groups
- Largest ethnic group is the Kinh (Viet)
 - Makes up 86% of the population
 - Originates from present day northern Vietnam



Traditional Clothing



Wedding party wearing áo dài (long dress)



khăn đóng





General Characteristics of Vietnamese Music

- Influence of spoken language
 - Melodic ornaments often based on pitch variance in speech
- Prominence of pentatonic scales
- Improvisation an important aspect of traditional music
 - *Danh hoa lá* – “playing by adding flowers and leaves”
- Duple meter is most common in traditional music – just like in many Western traditions

Common Genres

- ***Dân ca*** (folk songs)
- ***Hát ả đào*** or ***Ca trù*** (Northern Chamber Music)
- ***Ca Huế*** (Southern chamber music)
- ***Nhạc tài tử*** (Northern folk theater)
- ***Hát bội*** (classical theater)
- ***Hát Cải Lương*** (Southern reformed theater)
- ***Tân nhạc*** (modernized vocal music)

Quan họ

- From the Ha Bac (formerly Bac Ninh) province of North Vietnam
- Originated in the 13th century
- Antiphonal performance style
- Typically sung by teenagers or young adults
- Features poems on the topic of romantic love
- Sung at friendly competitions during spring and autumn festivals
- Song: *Qua Cầu Gió Bay* (The wind on the Bridge)



Traditional Instruments



Dong son drums

- Large bronze cast drums
- Made by the Dong Son people
- Originated in the Bronze Age (around 1000 BCE)
- Used for war and celebration



Đàn bầu

- Monochord
- Unique to Vietnam
- Has been around for 2,000 years
- Plays in harmonics
- Song: Bèo Dạt Mây Trôi – Drifting Blossoms, Floating Clouds



Ca trù

- Literally “song with little tokens”
- Chamber music from the North
 - Traditional ensemble: a female singer who also plays the *phách* (bamboo stick), a male *đàn đáy* (3-stringed lute) player, and a beater of the *trống châu* (praise drum)
- Learned style with deep roots in literature and poetry
- Golden age – 18th and 19th centuries



Work Song

- Common in most cultures
- Coordinate labor
- Relieve boredom
- Song: *Đò Dọc Đò Ngang* (The Boat Song)
 - From the Mekong River Delta of southern Vietnam



Tân nhạc

- “New Music”
- Increased influence and exposure to Western culture brought a change to Vietnamese popular song
- Melding of Vietnamese and Western music
 - Vietnamese melodies over Western harmonies
 - Combination of Vietnamese and Western instruments
- Song: Ngâm Ngủi by Phạm Duy



Now it's your turn!

Join me in singing

Rước Đèn Tháng Tám

“The Lantern Song” – a children’s song
from the Mid-Autumn Festival





Cảm ơn
Thank you