THE CREATIVE OF ISAN MUSIC IN SOUNDSCAPE, BATTLE OF NAGA

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This article is part of the research with the objective of creating Isan music in the soundscape, "Battle of Naga."

Methods: The researcher used a creative process in music creation, consisting of two parts. The first part is song design, where the researcher took five parts from the story of Sinxay on the Battle of Naga to use as the song structure. Isan melody was used to reinterpret and give new meaning. The melodies included Lai Thang San, Lai Thang Yao, Lai Ka Ten Gon, Lai An Nangseu, Phaya poem reading, and Sinxay melody. The second part consisted of finding the soundscape from Isan musical instruments through the process of playing and adjusting the sounds using technology. This involved capturing sounds of Naga, water, wind, atmosphere, and various situational sounds from the story, and projecting the sounds of Isan musical instruments into water, mixing them with actual instrument sounds.

Results: The sounds included the sound of Naga, water, wind, atmosphere, the sounds of situations happening in the story, and the sound projection of Isan musical instruments into the water mixed with the actual sounds of the instruments. At the same time, the sound was mixed with the blowing of wind into the microphone to create the sound of the Garuda’s wings. Additionally, the researcher used the microphone to rub against a fishtank to create sound effects for accompanying the music, such as in the battle scene.

Conclusion: The creative process used in this research successfully blended traditional Isan melodies with innovative soundscapes, creating a unique auditory experience for the "Battle of Naga." This approach not only preserved the cultural essence of Isan music but also introduced new dimensions through the use of technology, enhancing the storytelling and emotional impact of the music.

Keywords: Creation, Isan Music, Soundscape, Naga, Sinxay.

A CRIATIVIDADE DA MÚSICA ISAN EM UMA PAISAGEM SONORA, BATTLE OF NAGA

RESUMO

Objetivos: Este artigo é parte da pesquisa com o objetivo de criar música isan na paisagem sonora “Battle of Naga”.

Métodos: O pesquisador usou um processo criativo na criação musical, que consiste em duas partes. A primeira parte é o design da música, em que o pesquisador pegou cinco partes da história de Sinxay sobre a Batalha de Naga para usar como estrutura da música. A melodia isan foi usada para reinterpretar e dar um novo significado. As melodias incluíam Lai Thang San, Lai Thang Yao, Lai Ka Ten Gon, Lai An Nangseu, leitura do poema de Phaya e melodia de Sinxay. A segunda parte consistiu em encontrar a paisagem sonora dos instrumentos musicais isan por meio do processo de tocar e ajustar os sons usando tecnologia. Isso envolveu a captura de sons de Naga, água, vento, atmosfera e vários sons situacionais da história, e a projeção dos sons dos instrumentos musicais isan na água, misturando-os com os sons reais dos instrumentos.

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Resultados: Os sons incluíram o som do Naga, da água, do vento, da atmosfera, os sons das situações que acontecem na história e a projeção do som dos instrumentos musicais isan na água, misturados com os sons reais dos instrumentos. Ao mesmo tempo, o som foi misturado com o sopro do vento no microfone para criar o som das asas do Garuda. Além disso, o pesquisador usou o microfone para esfregar contra um tanque de peixes a fim de criar efeitos sonoros para acompanhar a música, como na cena da batalha.

Conclusão: O processo criativo usado nesta pesquisa combinou com sucesso as melodias tradicionais de Isan com paisagens sonoras inovadoras, criando uma experiência auditiva única para a “Batalha de Naga”. Essa abordagem não apenas preservou a essência cultural da música isan, mas também introduziu novas dimensões por meio do uso da tecnologia, aprimorando a narrativa e o impacto emocional da música.

Palavras-chave: Criação, Música Isan, Paisagem Sonora, Naga, Sinxay.

LA CREATIVIDAD DE LA MÚSICA ISLÁMICA EN EL PAISAJE SONORO, BATALLA DE NAGA

RESUMEN

Objetivos: Este artículo forma parte de la investigación con el objetivo de crear música isan en el paisaje sonoro «Batalla de Naga».

Métodos: El investigador utilizó un proceso creativo en la creación musical, que consta de dos partes. La primera parte es el diseño de la canción, donde el investigador tomó cinco partes de la historia de Sinxay sobre la Batalla de Naga para utilizarlas como estructura de la canción. Se utilizó la melodía isan para reinterpretarla y darle un nuevo significado. Las melodías incluían Lai Thang San, Lai Thang Yao, Lai Ka Ten Gon, Lai An Nangseu, la lectura del poema Phaya y la melodía Sinxay. La segunda parte consistió en encontrar el paisaje sonoro de los instrumentos musicales isanos mediante el proceso de tocar y ajustar los sonidos utilizando la tecnología. Para ello se capturaron los sonidos de Naga, el agua, el viento, la atmósfera y varios sonidos situacionales de la historia, y se proyectaron los sonidos de los instrumentos musicales de Isan en el agua, mezclándolos con los sonidos reales de los instrumentos.

Resultados: Los sonidos incluían el sonido de Naga, el agua, el viento, la atmósfera, los sonidos de situaciones que ocurrian en la historia, y la proyección de sonidos de instrumentos musicales de Isan en el agua mezclados con los sonidos reales de los instrumentos. Al mismo tiempo, el sonido se mezcló con el soplo del viento en el micrófono para crear el sonido de las alas del Garuda. Además, el investigador utilizó el micrófono para frotarlo contra una pecera y crear efectos de sonido para acompañar la música, como en la escena de la batalla.

Conclusiones: El proceso creativo utilizado en esta investigación mezcló con éxito melodías tradicionales de Isan con paisajes sonoros innovadores, creando una experiencia auditiva única para la «Batalla de Naga». Este enfoque no sólo preservó la esencia cultural de la música isan, sino que también introdujo nuevas dimensiones mediante el uso de la tecnología, mejorando la narración y el impacto emocional de la música.

Palabras clave: Creación, Música Isan, Paisaje Sonoro, Naga, Sinxay.

1 INTRODUCTION

Battle of Naga is one of the episodes in the Sinxay literature, Sila Viravong version. The story was about the journey of Sinxay and Sang to the Naga Kingdom to retrieve Sidachan according to Sounmountha’s order, which led to a game of Ska between Sinxay and King...
Valoonarat to see who would be the winner. Sinxay bet His Sang, arrow, and khanda. King Valoonarat bet on his kingdom. Sinxay beat King Valoonarat and asked for Sidachan instead of his kingdom. The king refused and led to the battle. Sinxay shot his arrow to call for the help of Garuda. Both of them destroyed the city and forced the naga to surrender and return Sidachan. Before returning, Sinxay taught King Valoonarat and the naga about norms and how to rule a kingdom and traveled back to the Anorat Kingdom. Viravong, 1969. Apart from an interesting story, another interesting aspect is the study of the music related to all the incidents at the underwater Naga Kingdom, with the question “What is the sound like?”

Soundscape is a concept by R. Murray Schafer, a Canadian composer, author, and environmental activist. Soundscape based on Schafer’s concepts pays attention to the society, culture, technology, and belief that affect different forms of soundscape, as opposed to only focusing on the environment, nature, and the lives of animals (Schafer, 1997, cited in Phromsupha, 2017). Schafer’s soundscape concept led people from various fields to focus on empathetic listening and try to get to know the source of those sounds. This is another musical field of study that influences the creation of various music at the current time, especially in other countries. The study and the creation of this type of work are popular. However, in Thailand, there is still less interest in the topic even though it is a study and creation that stems from their surrounding and has long existed (Erickson, 2004, cited in Chonsatian, 2023).

Isan music originated from the inspiration from nature and the sounds that originally came from nature. For instance, the Kaen instrument originated thousands of years ago from the sound of the Bird of Paradise (Klangprasri, 1998). Another instrument is the Pong Lang, which was developed from the Kaw Law, a wooden instrument used for chasing away birds and crows (Wongthes, 2003). Wod is another musical instrument that was adapted from a toy called Wod Kaeng, which was used during rice planting. The instrument was developed and has become a popular instrument nowadays. Not only musical instruments, but some poems explain the geography of the Isan area. Even some pieces of literature were used to tell stories, such as Deon Dong Poems (Forest Walk), Chom Nok Chom Mai Poems (Admiring Birds and Trees), and Ti Klong Nam Poems (Water Drums). This is the same for the melody in Isan music, such as Malaeng Phu Tom Dok Melody (Bumblebee Buzzing Around the Flowers), Nam Ton Taad Melody (Ton Taad Waterfall), Ka Ten Gon Melody (Crow Dancing in the Rain), Lom Pad Phai Melody (Wind Blowing the Bamboos). Therefore, Isaan music was clearly created from soundscapes but no one was interested enough to explain or try to deeply understand it. However, Isan music is created to be beautiful based on the general musical components. There was no interest in widening the perspectives and finding ways to present Isan music in various

forms to respond to the current era. The researcher found that there has never been an interest in creating Isan music based on the soundscape, the music that connects the perception of space, time, and environment that affect human emotions today.

The importance of Sinxay literature is the current cultural capital which is being supported by the government to be developed into a creative economy. Especially in transforming the literature into a piece of Isan music, which is rapidly developing and being popularized, one of which is the type of music based on soundscapes. Isan music in soundscape from Sinxay literature in the episode of the Battle of Naga prompts a question of what characteristics the music should have. Therefore, the researcher was interested in studying Sinxay literature: the Battle of Naga and creating a piece of Isan music in soundscape to help push the creation of music in soundscape within Thai and international society.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To create Isan music in soundscape: the Battle of Naga.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The creative research entitled the Creative Isan Music in Soundscape, Battle of Naga, is qualitative research that emphasize the creative music creation process through the study of the Sinxay literature, Battle of Naga, Khon Kaen version. The study involved interviews with four experts on Sinxay literature and four experts on Isan music and soundscape music to study and transform the letters into creative music soundscape, followed by the performance evaluated by two experts.

4 RESEARCH RESULT

From the analysis, it was found that the Sinxay literature, Battle of Naga consisted of five parts: 1. Sinxay travels to the underwater kingdom, 2. Sinxay plays Ska with King Valoonarat, 3. Naga war, Sinxay fought with the nagas and called on the help of the Garudas, 4. Sinxay taught King Valoonarat about how to govern a kingdom, and 5. Sinxay travels back to the land. The author paid much attention to the soundscape, which can be divided into two types: 1. The author clearly specified the sounds, the incidents, and the characters. The soundscape mentioned in the story was very important since it helped readers develop similar
emotions since the description helped elaborate readers’ emotions to the story that was taking place and made readers feel as if they were actually in the situations. Moreover, the description also helps readers to feel the atmosphere of the story. 2. Not directly specified, but inferring from the situations in the story and characters’ behaviors. The environment allows readers to know what sounds were present. Additionally, it also indicates the atmosphere and the emotions of with story. Soundscape does not specifically indicate what sound is being heard. The sounds were described through the situations taking place while expanding on the emotions of the story.

From the analysis of soundscape in the Sinxay literature, Battle of Naga, it was found that the author wanted to use sound language to expand the emotions and atmosphere of the story, both direct and indirect specification of the sounds. Without these descriptions, the experience of the story will be less intense. However, the author did not provide the characteristics of the sounds to allow room for readers to interpret based on their experience or imagination.

5 CREATION PROCESS

5.1 CHOOSING MUSICIANS

For the performance, the researcher chose musicians who are experts in Isan music and were willing to experience new methods and open to this type of work since some methods would be done in a non-traditional way in order to create new sounds. The musicians need to have various playing methods and integrations in the work. More importantly, they need to be able to improvise and be highly intelligent since they need to adjust to the work method. Another group of musicians was those who were experts in technology and the ability to integrate cultural music into modern technology without ruining one or the other.

5.2 CHOOSING MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

The researcher only chose traditional instruments without any Western ones since the goal was to see if the Isan musical instrument would be able to penetrate the existing frame and create new sounds and if there were other ways to play the instruments. The instruments were the following.

1 Pin is used to create the emotional sound of the characters, and the atmosphere surrounding the situations. In some parts of the story, representing the main characters, such as
Sinxay, Siho, and Sang. Since the Pic has three strings, they could be used to represent each character by adding in the effects based on each character.

2 **Khaen** is the main instrument in driving the story forward. It was the instrument that was used to tell the story of the Garuda. Since Khaen was based on the sound of the Bird of Paradise, the researcher chose this instrument for the character that was a bird based on the literature, as well as using it to create the atmosphere for the story.

3 **Phu Tai Flute** was an instrument used for creating the atmosphere at the start of the story. Since the instrument is one of the ancient instruments within the Mekong Region, the floating character of the sound could clearly portray the Mekong civilization. An effect was added to make the sound more magical.

4 **Saw** is the main instrument for the Naga character. Saw is a highly volatile instrument with a flexible flow of sound similar to the movement of a Naga, or snake. At the same time, it can also provide different variety of sounds. In this research, the researcher took the first string off the bridge while the second string remained on the bridge to create a different sound. The first string was tuned high to represent the pain. The second string was tuned low to represent the slithering. Apart from the Saw used the create the sound of the Naga, the researcher also chose another Saw to play a song in the fourth part, tuned to D minor.

5 **Wod** was an instrument used to create the sound of a whirlpool in the last part. The researcher chose Wod since the instrument required to be turned around while paying. In this research, the emphasis wasn’t on the notes but on the characteristics of the sound. When being played, the player needs to touch their chin to the Wod to act as a base while using the hand and the arm to turn the Wod around to create the swirling sound, similar to the swinging of the Wod in ancient times.

6 **Kaw Law** is an instrument used to create the sound of the water running through the rocks in the Naga. Normally, the Kaw Law would be played to create the rhythm at the downbeat of the Pong Lang band. However, this time, the research used the instrument to create the sound of water by using a small stick to scratch the edge of the Kaw Law and hit the inner edge of the center part of the Kaw Law. An effect was added to make the sound of Kaw Law similar to the sound of water flowing through the rocks.

7 **Gong** is an instrument to create the atmosphere. The researcher chose Gong since it is a common cultural instrument in Southeast Asia. In another aspect, it is an instrument used in Buddhist ceremonies to create a feeling of sacredness. The researcher covers the stick used to hit the gong with a piece of cloth to create the atmosphere of the Southeast Asian civilization in the first part of the performance. A hand was used to rub against the edge of the Gong to
create a sound representing the darkness within the soul of the Naga in the second part. In the fourth part of the performance, the stick was once again used to create an atmosphere of sacredness and peacefulness in the part when Sinxay was teaching the Naga.

8 Taphon Drum was chosen by the researcher since it is a compact instrument but could create a sound appropriate for the performance. The instrument was a rhythmic instrument that helped create the atmosphere of being on a journey and the confrontation of the characters.

9 Tum Drum is an instrument used to create a heavy and majestic sound, used during the journey scene and the signal at the end of the battle.

10 Rammana Drum is an instrument used to create the sound of a strong current of water in the first part of the performance. Sang swam against the current to travel to the underwater Kingdom. The player used the nails on all five fingers to scratch the rough surface of the inner part of the drum. An effect was added to replicate the sound of a strong water current.

11 Mor Lum singer was the storyteller and Sinxay character.

5.3 SOUND EFFECT EQUIPMENT

Fish tank. The researcher put water in the fish tank and sent the signal of all the musical instruments into the water while using a microphone to receive the outcoming sound and then remixed it with the actual instrument. The windscreen of the microphone was hit by a hand to create a thud sound. The microphone was also lowered into the water to create the sound of water ripple. The microphone was blown into to create the sound of the Naga wings flapping. The sound of the fight between the characters was made by scratching the microphone against the side of the fish tank. At the same time, the sound of the electric current from the projector placed under the fish tank was added for aesthetics.

5.4 SONG DESIGN

The researcher paid out the content structure of the literature based on the literature’s storyline. In this step, the research laid out the frame in Logic Pro X as guidance for the work and for the musicians to understand the overview of the song and an initial sound design. The song was divided into five parts, 1. Visiting the Underwater Kingdom, 2. Ska bet, 3. Naga War, 4. Sinxay teaching Naga, and 5. Journey back.
First Verse, Visiting the Underwater Kingdom, the researcher divided into three following sub parts:

1.1 Wai Khru is a belief of Isan people that before performing, one needs to think about their teachers. The Wai Khru part in the Sinxay literature describes the paying of respect to Lord Buddha and describes the author of the literature, Thao Pang Khamm using the Phaya Poem and a Gong, which was a symbolic instrument of Lord Buddha, accompanied by the Phu Tai Flute, a traditional musical instrument in the Mekong culture.

Figure 1

Example of the 1.1 verse.

1.2 Introduction to the story. A description of the story before Sinxay and Sang decided to travel to the underwater Kingdom. The researcher used the script to sing in the Sinxay tune. In this verse, the researcher added the sound of the Khaen playing. For verses one and two, the researcher wanted to create an atmosphere of the Mekong River, where the sounds were carried by the wind to tell the story.

Figure 2

Example of the song in verse 1.2
1.3 Visiting the Underwater Kingdom used the Lai Thang Yao melody to create a feeling of diving towards the underwater kingdom. The frustration built up until arriving at the Naga Kingdom (the music continues until arriving at the Naga Cave, part water and part cave).

**Figure 3**
*Example of verse 1.3*

![Example of verse 1.3](Source: Prepared by Authors (2024))

**Verse 2 Ska betting.** The music applied the Ka Ten Gon melody to create a feeling of pressure while betting on the Ska, testing the water to find the advantages in the game. The Saw was used to show the anger of the Naga who was about to lose. The Pin was used to show the advantage Sinxay had in the game.

**Figure 4**
*Example of the music in verse 2, Pin and Saw.*

![Example of the music in verse 2, Pin and Saw.](Source: Prepared by Authors (2024))

**Verse 3, Battle of Naga.** The music switched between the Lai Than San and Lai Thang Yao. Some parts were played out of key but created a feeling of the greatness of the war. The switching of the melody and the out-of-key playing were used to communicate the chaos and uncertainty of the fight.
Figure 5

*Example of the music in verse 3.*

Source: Prepared by Authors (2024)

**Verse 4, Sinxay teaching King Valoonarat.** The music applied the Lai An Nangseu to convey the teaching of governing a kingdom to Naga. The music created a magical feeling and peace.

Figure 6

*The score for verse 4.*

Source: Prepared by Authors (2024)

**Verse 5, Journey back.** The music applied the Lai Toey to represent the travel back to land.
Figure 7

*Music Score for verse 5.*

5.5 DESIGN THE PERFORMING SPACE

The researcher chose the Performing Art Studio 1, which is a small and dark room designed for plays. The performance space was arranged in an Arena Stage with four factors, 1. the small band and the seats were arranged in a new circular form, 2. The audience can watch the play at a closer distance. Normal music shows have a longer distance between the audience and the musicians, which is too much space. The seats were arranged in a way that the audience could observe the situations at a close distance, 3. Allowing the audience to listen to various sounds, 4. The set and lighting follow the context of the story. This story was set underwater and the details of the set and lighting are as follows.

The set portrays the Naga Cave under the Mekong River to create an atmosphere while watching the performance. Long white cloths were hung from above in different lengths. White cotton was weaved as lanterns and hung in the middle of the room in a circle form to signify the river navel, which is the deepest part. Light was projected in the middle to clearly affirm the central part of the area.

The light design consisted of a brown tone, which was the main tone of the Mekong River. Other colors were used to add the atmosphere to the song. For instance, verse 1 starts off dark and the lights slowly fade in following the performing cue of the musical instruments, consisting of Gong, flute, singing, Kaen, and the rest of the ensemble. Another example was
the underwater kingdom where the green color was used to convey the color of Naga and the use of red in verse 3 conveys the battle.

**Figure 8**

*The design of the space representing the Naga cave by Krajangsree, A., 2024.*

**Figure 9**

*Simulation space of Naga Cave by Krajangsree, A., 2024.*
5.6 SOUND SYSTEM DESIGN

For the sound system design, the researcher used four speakers, two per set. The first set was the sound recorded underwater and the second set was the sound of the actual instrument. The speakers were set on the side facing the middle of the room. The reason for doing this was for the different sound sources. The audience could walk around while watching the performance. The audience would hear the sound from three different sources, including

1. the live sound from each instrument. The audiences who heard the clearest sound were the ones closest to the musicians;
2. the sound from the first set of speakers from the microphone in the fish tank. The audience in this area would hear the underwater sound the clearest;
3. the sound from the second set of speakers was the musical instruments that passed through the mixer. The audience in this area would hear the sound from the mixer the clearest.

Figure 10
Sound system design

Source: Prepared by Authors (2024)
6 CONCLUSION

From the previous conclusion and discussion, this research was an experimental research to explore new ways to work with Isan music from the effort of providing Isan music with new characteristics. Additionally, it was also an effort to find new sounds that had never been produced for the Isan music to convey new meanings and connect with people today. These new sounds can also connect to the current environment. For instance, in one era, flutes were created from an agosociety dynamic. After the harvesting, rice stocks were made into musical instruments where the sound came directly from the stocks. Later on, Khaem was created by bundling up the bamboo together. Pieces of bronze were flattened out to make reeds.
The sound of Khaen was from the combination of wood and bronze. At a later time, Isan music became a popular entertainment, along with the need for spaces for new artists. Pin, traditionally made with jackfruit wood was added with a guitar pickup to amplify the sound through speakers for more people at a longer distance to hear. Reverbs and delays were added in to add dynamics and beauty to the sound. It could be seen clearly that Isan music had also gone through development in its physical (instrument) and abstract (sound) aspects through the methods available at the time to achieve new forms of creativity.

7 DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

In the process of creating this new type of music, this work was not recorded at the performing space and no synthesizer was used directly. The process involved the use of Isan musical instruments with new playing styles and computer technology to create new sounds to Isan music while maintaining the original sound. This is in line with Phromsupha (2017) who stated that soundscape can be categorized into three types.

1. geophony (geo means land and phony means sound), area sounds created by natural phenomena such as rain, thunder, flowing water, ocean wind, or waves hitting the beach;
2. biophony (bio means biology and phony means sound) are sounds from all living things, including cries and movements of body parts, such as the rattling sound of rattlesnakes, bird’s wings flapping, the sound of bees’ buzzing, sounds of crickets, as well as all the other activities of the animals, such as woodpeckers pecking trees;
3. anthrophony (anthro means human and phony means sound). Krause separated the sounds that human produces into their own category (although human is part of living things). This could be because humans have a complex sound culture (especially in music) and create a beauty that can effectively be communicated to other humans, including the use of synthesizers to help create the soundscape.

8 SUGGESTIONS

This research provides knowledge on the importance and aesthetic of Sinxay literature, as well as the creative process in creating Isan music in the soundscape, which was a type of work that required an understanding of sounds of the surroundings, space, and situations. If narration is involved, an understanding of the characters’ context is also needed. Not all music has to be beautiful, but they must communicate. At the same time, to achieve creative work or
find new ways or new sounds, one must look beyond the existing and traditional musical instruments. One must cross the boundary of limitation of the musical instruments. In other words, thinking about how the existing instruments can create new sounds, such as taking the Kaw Law, a simple rhythmic instrument, and using it to create new meanings for the song, such as the sound of water or other effects. Moreover, think about how the things in one’s surroundings can be used as musical instruments. In the research, this was done by using the fish tank as one of the instruments to create new methods and sounds for Isan music. However, this research only focuses on Sinxay, Battle of the Naga. There are still many things that are waiting to be explored in the future.

REFERENCES


