A Study of Indigenous North Vietnamese Ca Tru Music, and The Deities of the Kalachakra Mandala

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A STUDY OF INDIGENOUS NORTH VIETNAMESE CA TRÙ MUSIC, AND THE DEITIES OF THE KALACHAKRA MANDALA

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in The College of Music and Dramatic Arts

by

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B.M., Louisiana State University, 1970
M.M., Louisiana State University, 1972
M.M., Southeastern Louisiana University, 1976
M.M., University of New Orleans, 2020
December 2022
This is dedicated to Catherine Schultz, my wife of 53 years, who not only accepted and supported my choice to study music, but dutifully put up with thousands of hours of practice, attended concerts, recitals, and performances, listened to countless examples of music that caught my interest, critiqued my music, proof-read my papers, and patiently listened to my ideas. My appreciation for her is unbounded.
Acknowledgements

I could not be more appreciative of my teachers and my colleagues, especially in my most recent degree programs. During my M.M. program at the University of New Orleans, Drs. Kari Besharse and Yotam Haber led me back into the world of music academia after a long absence, and their guidance helped me find a “compositional voice” with which I was comfortable. Dr. Haber helped me in the fields of computer aided notation and digital production, disciplines that did not exist in my early college years.

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Dr. Gibson was my composition professor and my mentor on twentieth and twenty-first century music. Her pedagogy on modern music history has given me a proper perspective for my own music, and her encouraging approach to teaching composition helped me to write my best music. Always positive, supportive, and constructive, her suggestions never failed to improve the results of my efforts. I will forever remember to think about “space” in my compositions. She encouraged me to have my music performed, and that led to several outstanding opportunities for exposure, including a landmark performance at Carnegie Hall in
2022. I feel immense gratitude that Dr. Gibson stood for me through my application process, during my coursework, and at this last phase of my education.

My thanks also go to Professors Dr. Inessa Bazayev, Dr. Edgar Berdahl, Dr. Jacob Gran, and Dr. Blake Howe who guided me through difficult subject matter where I had little experience or knowledge.

Lastly, I would like to thank Dr. Stephen Beck and Dr. Brannon Costello (English Department) for graciously agreeing to serve along with Drs. Gibson and McFarland on my Doctoral Committee, and Ms. Paloma Gonzalez Ruiz, my graduate coordinator, who kept me out of procedural trouble.
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Abstract

This document is in two sections. Chapter I is a study on the history, instruments and performance of Vietnamese ca trù folk music. Indigenous Asian music, especially music from Vietnam, has held an almost mystical interest for me with its links to the doctrines of Buddhism and Hinduism. Ca trù’s singular style, always sung by women in fixed ensembles, is of particular interest because of its colorful history and unique performance practices. The ca trù music of Vietnam’s northern provinces, like much Asian folk music, is considered an endangered genre.

Sources for Ca trù insights are scarce, but some research is currently ongoing. Songs with authentic instruments and performances are available on recordings and are used here for analysis.

Chapter II is an overview and score of a new composition, a ten-movement cycle of songs and instrumentals for mixed ensemble with solo soprano and tenor voices on texts about a soldier’s tour of duty during the Vietnam war. The music suggests Vietnamese music styles with pentatonic scales, drones, and simulated Vietnamese instrument sounds. The songs’ libretti are from poems written by Dr. Yusef Komunyakaa, Professor of Creative Writing at New York University, about his experiences as a war correspondent in Vietnam in 1969.

The musical score is preceded by an explanation of the musical structure that is based on a Hindu symbolic representation called the Kalachakra Mandala. A brief technical summary of each of the movements with the libretti follows, and then the complete score.
Chapter I. A Study of Indigenous North Vietnamese Ca trù Folk Music

Introduction

Ba Nho holds the đàn đáy lute close to his face.... With dignity, he plays the opening phrase.... Never before had Co To heard the sound of the đàn đáy full of such misery and grief. The sound was so sullen and suppressed, as if it could not be set free into the atmosphere. ... The sound was a deep feeling that could not be expressed.... The sound was a gust of wind unable to blow through the cracks of a thin bamboo screen. ... The sound was a quivering leaf falling off a branch.... The rhythms of Co To's bamboo clappers (phách) were fast like a bird calling out for help in the midst of a storm. ... Not a single strike of the beaters was dull. The sound was sharp like the stroke of a knife. Beating the phách in that way gave glory to the bamboo and gave it a soul.... The lute and voice intertwined and soared (Nguyen Tuan, 1946).\(^1\)

Ca trù is a complex form of chamber music found in north and central Vietnam that incorporates traditional Vietnamese poetry. It has been performed by the Việt (Kinh) people since the 15th century.\(^2\) Like most Asian folk music, the genre is infused with spiritual importance and naturalist metaphors.

The opening quote, taken from the 1946 novella “Chua Dan” by Nguyen Tuan, describes a ca trù performance. It is a "singing session" called a buoi hat, a leisurely time dedicated to conversation, drinking rice wine, and making music; a time of personal interaction among musicians who acknowledge and express their appreciation for each other’s artistry.\(^3\) Ca trù music is deeply imbued with emotions and feelings, and its dignified performances are attended with reverence. The relationship established between the performers and the audience is visceral.

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\(^2\) Ibid.,28.

\(^3\) An alternative presentation would be a formal performance called trinh dien for a passive audience.
Historically, *ca trù* is the oldest form of Vietnamese chamber music. The words “*ca trù*” translate to “tally card songs”, referring to the decorated bamboo cards patrons purchased when they visited *ca trù* inns where this music was performed. The cards would be collected on a platter and given to the singer after her performance. She could then redeem them for money or gifts. *Ca trù* was respected entertainment where elite scholars, bureaucrats, and others were among the patrons. Performers were outside of the caste system, so they were allowed to entertain noble, or at least notable, clients who visited the inns. *Ca trù* singing was performed by young women who were not only trained professional singers, but also trained attendants versed in poetry, the arts, and entertaining conversation.

The musical genre was, and is, always performed by a three-piece ensemble (see figure 1). The female singer, who adds rhythm with bamboo sticks called the *phách*, is accompanied by a lutenist who plays a trapezoidal-shaped stringed instrument called a *đàn đáy*. One other person, a knowledgeable spectator or a member of the ensemble, plays a small “praise drum” or *trống chầu* in specific ways to announce the songs, or to indicate his or her pleasure or displeasure with the singer’s interpretation.

*Ca trù* is classified as “learned music” because all three members of the ensemble must adhere to certain interpretive rules for a proper performance. The poems, often written by

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5 *Ca trù* was also performed in communal houses and private homes.


influential poets and philosophers, and the songs of *ca trù* have refined literary and musical import.

**Sources**

The overall quantity of authoritative information about *ca trù* music is small. Superficial detail and general background can be found on web sites intended to attract tourism. Limited detailed subject matter about the music’s relationship to the culture and specifics about the instruments and performance techniques are found in JSTOR and WorldCat databases. Among the most useful and thorough sources are the books and articles by Dr. Barley Norton, a musicologist at Goldsmiths, University of London. Dr. Norton has been reporting and publishing information gathered in the field for the last decade and has unique insights and access to the practice and its performers.

From other academia, Bretton Dimick’s University of Michigan dissertation contains useful information about the instruments and the art of creating melody from tonal text. It also has illustrative anecdotal tales from lore and legend that are entertaining and informative. Veronica Ngoc’s thesis from the University of Long Island is a thorough historical study of both Vietnam cultural history and the history of *ca trù* including social influences on law and philosophy.

By far the most complete references are in the book “The Garland Handbook of Southeastern Asian Music”, and its online companion “The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music.” The Vietnam sections of these references were written by Dr. Phong Nguyen, a student of *ca trù* history and of current performance practices. Dr. Nguyen reports in-depth first-hand knowledge of previously unwritten theoretical details.
Liner notes from legacy recordings *Ca Trù, The Music of North Vietnam* and *Vietnam Traditional Music* have first-hand accounts and perspectives from performing artists. Both recordings are excellent collections of authentically performed music. There is surprising accord among all the sources on the details of the genre.

![A ca trù ensemble. From left to right, trống chầu drum, singer and bamboo phách, and đàn đáy lute. Protocol demands that the singer be lofty in presence and posture and yet maintain a sentimental attitude.](image)

**History**

*Ca trù* singing is believed to have spiritual and ceremonial religious origins. Historians have traced it back to a type of female singing known as *hat a dao*, which was widely performed as an expression of worship for guardian spirits and ancestral praise during the Lý dynasty.
Around year 1500, as it was becoming secularized, the name changed to *ca trù*, and it became a popular form of entertainment in the Northern villages and in urban Hanoi.

There are different myths and theories about the beginning of *ca trù*. One theory points to a woman named Đào Thị, a musician who was admired by the Lý Dynasty imperial court as the originator of the style. The legend is that in honor of Thị, professional women singers were referred to as *Đào nương*, meaning a female singer of prestige. That term is no longer widely used. Modern *ca trù* performers date their genre from the late Le dynasty (1428-1789). In the 15th century, *ca trù* spread through Northern Vietnam as artists were called on for celebrations and ceremonies. In the 18th and 19th centuries, *ca trù* was deemed court music for its use as entertainment for courtiers.

*Ca trù* music is tightly linked to *ca trù* poetry from the same period. At its earliest, *ca trù* poetry was sung in a chant-like fashion. It was performed in an elaborate show that had instruments, singers, dancers, and ceremonial officiants. A complete performance was required to include the following selections:

- **Giáo trống** “drumming prologue”
- **Giáo huong** “introductory song for offering incense”
- **Dâng huong** “offering of incense”
- **Thết nhạc** “presentation of music”

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10 Ibid.,249.

Later, after its position as court music had been established, ca trù performers were organized into music guilds, giao phuong. The guilds managed performances at the dinh, village communal houses. Later still, when the guilds sold their performance rights to wealthy men, ca trù became a courtesan art form.13

When the French invaded Vietnam in 1858, they brought with them an urbanized culture. During French colonization and until 1954, ca trù performers were hired to entertain at the imperial court ceremonies and at private functions held at “singing houses”. By the 1940s, the singing houses had become locales for illicit gambling, opium-smoking, and prostitution. In 1946, the Nationalist Party under Ho Chi Minh ordered the singing houses closed because of their criminal ties. After that, ca trù music was systematically suppressed for its reputational links to prostitution and the degradation of women.

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In the late 20th century, ca trù nearly disappeared. In 1976 there were just two practitioners of the form: Nguyễn Xuân Khoá and Quách Thị Hồ. Both women are now recognized for starting the current ca trù revival.\(^\text{14}\) As of 2009, extensive efforts are under way to revive the genre. Vietnam has also submitted documents to have ca trù recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH).\(^\text{15}\)

In recent years, ca trù has been rediscovered and revived by several clubs, the most infamous of which is the Hanoi Ca trù Club. To help revive the art form, the club launched an annual ca trù festival, which attracts famous practitioners. The cradle of the genre, the villages of Lo Khe in the northern Dong Anh District, stage annual ca trù festivals.

**Poetry**

Ca trù is where Vietnamese poetry and music meet. Old ca trù poetry, properly called Hat Noi (“sing-speak”) is the poetic form used in ca trù music. The poetic form has two parts. First come one or two introductory quatrains called mu'o'u of alternating six and eight syllable lines, followed by the hat noi, eleven lines in a strict form (eleven lines divided 4-4-3, and then further divided 2-2, 2-2, 2-1).\(^\text{16}\)

The poems are usually in the first person and are deeply personal. Common themes of the classic ca trù poems include ambition, patience, trauma, hedonism, nature, love, morality, irony, and humor. Poems in the early archaic language are difficult to understand, but beginning


in the 20th century, new poems are written in modern Vietnamese. This translated example (ca.1840) called “On Meeting Singers Hong and Tuyet” is illustrative.

It seems just yesterday that you knew nothing.
Fifteen years doesn’t seem that long at all.
Now you are ready to marry, and I am an old man.
We smile and speak, but we are not at ease.
Between white hair and rosy cheeks, our talk is halting
My only joy now is to go to the hat a dao house.
I become foolish, foolish with love.
Who is it playing on the lute?18

Instrumentation

Ca trù ensembles have only three performers and three instruments; a female vocalist who also plays a rhythm instrument, a lutenist, and a drummer who may be a knowledgeable member of the audience or an ensemble member.

Phách

The singer plays a phách (pronounced “fike”), a set of small wooden sticks beaten percussively on a bamboo bar while she sings.

17 Ibid., 30.
18 Ibid., 3.
Figure 2. Vietnamese phách

One stick is split lengthwise giving the instrument two distinct timbres which are used to articulate the rhythm. The phách makes a harsh, sharp “clacking” sound. The combinations of three basic types of strikes (see the section on **Performance Practices**) create five complex rhythmic patterns within irregular beats. The rhythmic patterns are used to accompany the melodies of the strings and to punctuate the singing.

**Dàn đáy**

The singer is accompanied by a man or woman (usually a man) who plays the **đàn đáy** (pronounced “jun jay”), a three-string lute invented in the 15th century\(^{20}\) that is used exclusively in *ca trù* music.

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Figure 3. Vietnamese đàn đáy

The đàn đáy has a trapezoidal backless body and a long neck with nine to twelve frets aligned to a pentatonic scale. The strings are tuned in fourths on a non-fixed “do.”

![G fundamental tuning](image)

Figure 4. đàn đáy tuning and register on a G fundamental

The instrument’s first fret is at the octave, which gives the instrument two pitch ranges that define its timbre: the low-register partials of the open strings, and the scalar melodic upper register.

The strings are plucked with a bamboo plectrum, and its notes sound similar to the short-sustain notes on a modern banjo. The strings are high off the fingerboard and are “soft” (silk or
nylon) allowing for ornamentations of wide vibratos, scoops and falls, and micro-tones that are common in Asian music and typical in Vietnamese music (see figure 5). Vibrato is used on most pitches to assist sound projection. The đàn đáy provides melodic accompaniment to the voice.

Figure 5. Picture of Vietnamese đàn đáy (instrument on the left) illustrating the neck with high frets

Trống chầu

The third instrument in the ensemble is the trống chậu (pronounced “trung chau”), a treble drum that sounds like a high bongo drum. The trống chậu is a small double-sided drum beaten with a long stick to create loud articulations. It is struck on both the head and the side for
different timbres. It is used at the start and end of the songs, for phrase articulations, and to express appreciation for the performance.\textsuperscript{21,22}

![Figure 6. Vietnamese trống chầu](image)

The Music

Scholars have admittedly not yet thoroughly explored the intricate details of Vietnamese music and its theory. It is difficult to define a single national style because of the dissimilarities of regional styles, but certain universal characteristics do apply nationally. Most Vietnamese folk styles are heterophonic. Improvisations based on common motives are shared in counterpoint among parts.\textsuperscript{23} The music is polyphonic with little harmonic motion. Ensemble musicians create improvised counterpoint with melodic fragments and rhythms derived from the modes, scales, and notes of an original song. The result is music with limited pitch and tonal variations but with rich textures and timbre variations.

\textsuperscript{21} In pre-revolutionary hat choi performances, the drummer was a male scholar or an intellectual with detailed knowledge of ca trù.

\textsuperscript{22} Tran Van Khe. “Ca Trù The Music of North Vietnam,” In liner notes.

Vietnamese musical form is complex. It is best to think of it as layered with each layer a degree more detailed in its musical elements. The array of terms is confusing, especially when terms are used in multiple layers with different meanings. Musical elements may overlap structural components, and they are all interrelated. A single change in one layer may affect multiple layers. The following visualization is a good reference (see figure 7). Note that the layers represent increased detail from the outer theoretical viewpoint to the inner detailed performance practice.

![Vietnamese music structural elements](image)

**Figure 7. Vietnamese music structural elements**

Geographical distinctions are important in Vietnam music. Theorists from different regions teach with unique systems of written and oral instruction developed on lessons passed on from their elder mentors. A regional student will follow his teacher’s interpretation of beats, measures, rhythms, pitches, and ornamentations. In this way, the informal but prevalent regional music theories stay uncorrupted. Regional teachers agree on conventions that preserve the
character of the music of their specific areas - North, Central, or South. Theories from each consider musical contexts and the codified performance rules of each region.

Broadly speaking, modes are the tonal systems of the regions; bac in the North, nam in the South, and both in the Central regions. Modes, like other aspects of Vietnamese music, are difficult to define because musicians from different subcultures and regions define modes in ways meaningful only to themselves. *Ca trù* is a Northern genre, for instance, but does not follow the rules of bac.

In *ca trù* music, there are no vertical harmonies. There are only the melodic lines of the sung melody and the contrapuntal melody on the accompanying *đàn đáy*. The music is heterophonic. The *đàn đáy* and vocal melodies meld, mirror, and echo each other. Melodic and rhythmic variations are performed with ornamentations based on the principle of *danh hoa lá*, which translates to “playing by adding flowers and leaves.”

The ornaments range from simple non-harmonic passing notes to more elaborate and lengthy embellishments.

**Forms and Thê**

Melodies, which are improvisations based on the tonal inflections of the text, are in “forms” referred to as thê cách (or just thê), roughly translated to “the way”. Each thê has a unique identity that places boundaries on improvisational realizations of poetic features, performance practices, and aesthetic connotations. In technical parlance, a thê defines the pitches, tempi, strophes and singing manner. Importantly, a thê does not specify a melody. *Ca trù* currently has around fifty-six thê of which about fifteen are in the classical *ca trù* repertoire.

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24 Tran Van Khe, “*Ca Trù, The Music of Vietnam.*” In liner notes.

25 Ibid.

In his treatise *La musique Vietnamiennne Traditionelle* (1962), Tran Van Khe outlines a Vietnamese modal theory that he maintains is applicable to several types of Vietnamese traditional music. His discussion of mode highlights the hierarchy and function of scale pitches, the ornamentation used on specific pitches, distinctive melodic phrases, and aesthetic associations among these elements. According to Tran, the *bac* and the *nam* are each distinguished by slight alterations to the pitches and ornaments called *nuances.* In general, the *bac* mode and its nuances convey light-hearted sentiments, and the *nam* mode conveys tranquil, serene, or sad sentiments. The modes of *ca trù,* however, do not strictly obey either *bac* or *nam* conventions.

A comparative study of modal systems says that theoretical modal systems contrived by scholars are usually "closed" or "symmetrical" as opposed to systems of actual practice, which are "open-ended" or "non-symmetrical." Closed systems are strict, primarily used for classification purposes and limited to a single set of notes. Open systems allow for "modulations" and non-modal ornamentation.

*Ca trù* music, according to this classification, would be a closed system, hence the introduction of new modes is not allowed. However, to circumvent this restriction, most of the repertoire makes extensive use of modal modulation and ornamented scales. Naming conventions like "closed" and "open" are useful for the identifying and classifying fundamental musical principles in Vietnamese music but have little relevance to actual performance practice.


28 Tran Van Khe, “Vietnam Traditional Music.” In liner Notes.

What is ordinarily called *mode* in most Vietnamese music is called *cung* in *ca trù*. For Vietnamese modes or *cung* to be “correct”, three basic elements must be coordinated and synchronized: sentiment, scale, and ornamentation. Unlike the Western concept of modes, Vietnamese *cung* are holistic definitions of musical styles and performance characteristics, and extramusical meanings of the music. *Cung* define which parts of the music must be exact, and which parts of the scales, melodic patterns, ornamentations, tempi, vocal quality and production are allowed flexibility. A *cung* characterizes a song by its specific vocal type, rhythm, and register. It is a term used to define the structures of the music under a given *thể* of *ca trù*. Vietnamese sources list five *cung* along with a brief description of their aesthetics. Van Khe provides the following rather esoteric list:

1. *Cung nam* is *even* (*bang phang*) in a low register (*xuong thap*)
2. *Cung bac* is *solid* (*ran roi*) in a high register (*len cao*)
3. *Cung huynh* is *sticky* (*dinh*) and fast (*mau*)
4. *Cung pha* is *plaintive* (*ai oan*) and quirky (*lo lo*)
5. *Cung nao* is *oblique* (*chenh chenh*) and used to move from one *cung* to another.

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31 Note that the modes of *ca trù* are not well tempered (see figure 8). The pitch of the scale is always on the preference of the singer.

32 Bretton Dimick, “Vietnam’s *Ca Trù*: Courtesan’s Songs By Any Other Name,” 159. It is appropriate to think of *cung* as the framework for improvisation.


In the Vietnamese literature on *ca trù*, there are frequent references to *cung*, but details about them are elusive. Musicians do not often refer to them. An opposite perspective, the *Diệu*, refers to the melody or the style of a song that contains most features of a *cung*. The term *hoi* refers to the meaning of a *cung* or a specific *nuance* that distinguishes one *cung* from another by its specific ornaments. The combined term *hoi-diệu* is used more often.

**Scales**

Scales and ornamentation play a prominent role in all Vietnamese music. They vary according to the genre, subgenre, and social environment in which a song is composed and performed. The tones or number of tones used in a song may identify its cultural significance. A song may contain anywhere from two to thirteen tones, although Vietnamese song scales are almost always fewer than that. Song scales, mostly tetratonic or pentatonic, do not necessarily have the same intervalllic values. Nor are they precisely aligned in tempered scale steps. “Whole-tone” intervals may range from 165 to 175 cents, for example. Intervals of less than a quarter tone and imprecise semitone values are common during transmigrations (modulations). Finely adjusted intervals and microtones are commonly found in folk songs. The following example shows all the tones that exist in Vietnamese folk music, randomly placed on a D fundamental.

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37 Ibid., 254.

38 Some musicians interpret the five tones in the pentatonic scale as corresponding to the five material elements of Chinese philosophy: earth, metal, wood, water, and fire.

Figure 8. The relative positions of all possible notes in Vietnam scales randomly on D \(^{40}\)

In Vietnamese music, there is no such thing as absolute pitch. The fundamental tone of a scale is chosen to fit the voice of a singer or the acoustics of an instrument. Other scale tones are then derived proportionally from the chosen fundamental pitch. The diapason is always twelve or thirteen notes without “fixed do” and constitutes a tuning system.

In *ca trù* music, three types of tones make up a scale: obligatory tones that provide the “tonal” framework of the song, supplemental tones, which may be added to temporarily expand the fundamental scale (and which may lead to a transmigration), and passing tones, which are rare and mostly used to ornament otherwise unadorned pentatonic or hexatonic scales.\(^{41}\)

After a scale has been chosen for a song, its fundamental may shift to a tone a fifth higher making a phrasal tonicization before returning to the original scale. In some cases, a new scale may be superimposed on the original using the same fundamental tone, making an interesting type of polytonal counterpoint.

Theoretically, the focus is on two essential scale qualities: the non-tempered character of the scale and the transmigration of notes, and secondly, a connection between scales (common notes) related musical moods and metaphorical meanings among the genres. A trained listener can determine a song’s geographic origin based on its scale.


\(^{41}\) Ibid., 254.
Figure 9. Vietnamese scales.\textsuperscript{42} Note that Ca trù scales fall within the bac and nam types.

\textit{Ca trù} music often uses a tetratonic scale 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).\textsuperscript{43} The resultant music is in a hemitonic tetratonic scale on, in this case, an A tonal center.

\textit{Métabole}

\textit{Métabole} is a term first used by Romanian ethnomusicologist Constantin Brailoiu in his “Encyclopédie de la Musique” (1959) to describe "the succession of two different scales".\textsuperscript{44} He coined the term in his analysis of pentatonic melodies to avoid the term “modulation” with its Western connotations. \textit{Métabole} describes the succession of two different scales as the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} Tran Van Khe. “Vietnam, Socialist Republic of Vietnam (Cộng Hòa Xã Hội Chủ Nghĩa Việt Nam), Groves Music Online, section 4.i.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Phong T Nguyen. “Southeast Asia: Part 3 Music Cultures and Regions: Vietnam.” In \textit{Garland Encyclopedia of World Music}. Vol. 4, 481.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 44.
\end{itemize}
transmigration of scale steps within a song or instrumental piece creating new sentiments expressed by both singers and recognized by listeners. Songs with scales of six or more tones are more likely to have shifting tonal centers.\

While the results of *métabolet* are the same as modulation, the methods of executing the performance technique and the impact on the music are completely different. The musical introduction of a *métabolet* occurs unevenly beginning with pitches added to a chosen scale. Groups of three to five tones shift tonal centers and move back and forth between centers. For example, in the song "Con Nhện Giăng Mùng" ('The Spider Spins Its Silk Web'), two principal scales: E↑G-A↓B-D and A-B-D-E-F♯-A↓B (the upper octave has a different B), occur alternately along with smaller intervallic passing tones. The resulting combination of the scales creates melodic material of ten tones for the song. *Métabolet*, then, is a legitimate way for performers to expand ranges and add variety to a song’s strophes.

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\(^{45}\) Ibid., 44
Ornamentation

Ornamentation occurs in all Vietnamese folk genres, and its use depends on musical context. Some ornaments are associated with specific scale tones. For example, vocal vibrato may be sustained or brief depending on the scale degree. Ornamentation allows each singer and musician to individualize his performance. In vocal music, where the ornamentation is the most complex, the three Vietnamese regional accents can influence the type of ornamentation because

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ca trù (north)</td>
<td>rung (vibrato)</td>
<td>huỳnh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nhân (pressing)</td>
<td>pha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mô (pincé)</td>
<td>náo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca huế (central)</td>
<td>ai</td>
<td>sorrowful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>thiên</td>
<td>religiously solemn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nhạc t&amp;t tu (south)</td>
<td>xuân</td>
<td>serene and lively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ai</td>
<td>lamentable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>đàm o</td>
<td>serene but straightforward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>oán</td>
<td>plaintive</td>
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Figure 10. Types of ornamentation.\textsuperscript{46}

Ornamentation occurs in all Vietnamese folk genres, and its use depends on musical context. Some ornaments are associated with specific scale tones. For example, vocal vibrato may be sustained or brief depending on the scale degree. Ornamentation allows each singer and musician to individualize his performance. In vocal music, where the ornamentation is the most complex, the three Vietnamese regional accents can influence the type of ornamentation because

of the difference in tonal language contours. Specific terms for ornaments (see figure 10) are defined for each geographical area and differ among vocal or instrumental practices.

**Rhythm and Meter**

Rhythm in Vietnamese music is a complex mixture of syncopation and unmeasured beats. Instrumental ensembles are not only heterophonic in melody but heterorhythmic, that is, they create motivic rhythmic counterpoint among the parts.\(^{47}\) Most traditional Vietnamese music is set within the framework of duple meter. Three beat units or ternary meter are rare.\(^{48}\) The term \(nh\,tp\) denotes the meter.

*Ca trù* music is non-metrical in terms of measures but is still organized metrically in rhythmic cycles (repeating patterns) of between one and eight beats.\(^{49}\) The last beat of each pattern is the most accented. A basic pattern, which may have a sentiment assignment (see figure 10), can be elaborated in various ways and superimposed on each of the instrumental parts to make the music heterorhythmic.

**Notation**

*Ca trù* music is an oral tradition without any traditional notation, but the demands of scholarly research and analysis have forced the adoption of notational devices, at least for the vocal melodies and *đàn đáy* parts. Notation is now used primarily by students for memorization.\(^{50}\) The Western five-line stave is used to denote the *đàn đáy* pitches and vocal lines, although exact notated pitches are suspect because of the use of improvised microtonal

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\(^{47}\) Employing unsynchronized but similar rhythms in individual parts.

\(^{48}\) Barley Norton, “Singing the Past: Vietnamese *Ca Trù*, Memory and Mode,”\(^{50}\).


melodies. The phách part is rarely notated. Duration is sometimes indicated with conventional note stems and sometimes with proportional noteheads without stems. Bar-lines are not included because phrases are irregular.

Typically, on a score, wide vibrato, which can substantially alter the pitch, is marked with a wavy line after the note head. Slides between pitches are indicated with a straight line between note heads, and the permitted direction of slides is indicated with arrows (slides in either direction with two arrows; upward slides with one arrow, downward slides with no arrows. Tonal changes may be indicated by shapes, arrows, or symbols (see figure 10 for example). If struck on the head (the tom stroke), the Trọng Châu is notated by “0”. If struck on its side (the chat stroke), it is notated by “+".

Performance Practice

Ca trù poems adhere to flexible musical modes and scales based on convention. Their musical canon are performances where the tonally inflected Vietnamese text guides improvised tetratonic or pentatonic melodies. The melodic material is in standardized phrases called khổ (strophes) that both the singer and đàn đáy accompanist know. In a performance, the singer is presented with a poem, sometimes only moments before performing. She then creates a spontaneous musical realization and interpretation of the text using the language tones as a guide to pitches within the musical mode. Her accompanist on the đàn đáy creates an appropriate musical backdrop or không gian (musical environment).

Roles are usually gendered; women

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51 Bretton Dimick, “Vietnam’s Ca Trù: Courtesan’s Songs By Any Other Name,”180.

52 Barley Norton, “Singing the Past: Vietnamese Ca Trù, Memory and Mode”,41.

53 Ibid.,180.

54 Bretton Dimick, “Vietnam’s Ca Trù: Courtesan’s Songs By Any Other Name,”130.
always perform the singing and men usually accompany. Poems (songs) are often performed in groups as a suite.

A culture’s spoken language has a large influence on its music’s pitch and rhythm. In tonal languages like Vietnamese, this can be problematic. Incorrect inflections can change the meaning of a word. In Vietnamese, six different inflections can be intoned in flat, high, and low registers. The eighteen combinations make the language sound musical even in normal speech. In music, improvised vocal lines are shaped by the inflections of the text’s words. While traditional Vietnamese music is based on simple pentatonic scales, these intoned syllables influence the way that singers use half-tones and quarter-tones to embellish the scales - both in structured melody and in improvisation. In ca trù music with poetry of fixed syllable-tone schemes, realizations can yield the same or similar melodies from one poem to the next.

Ca trù musicians make a distinction between two different performance styles: khuon and hang hoa. Khuon performances present the basic musical model with minimal embellishments. The khuon style is restrained and characterized by precise phrases based on essential musical elements. The hang hoa (“flowery”) style, is freer with elaborations on the fundamental model.

Sentiments

Sentiments are how a ca trù singer establishes a presence (mood) of the music and how she communicates it to the audience. An artfully ornamented note or an interesting motive can have a very real emotional impact on seasoned listeners. Performers mentally prepare before

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55 Ibid., 134.

56 Bretton Dimick, “Vietnam’s Ca Trù: Courtesan’s Songs By Any Other Name,” 134.

57 Ibid., 137.
playing or singing to be able to effectively convey the sentiment for the chosen mode. There is usually an improvised introduction (rao or dê) at the beginning of a song during which the singer may adjust the style as needed. Modal sentiments are felt and described according to generally accepted definitions that include those in the modal systems nam and bac.

The performance of Vietnamese music elements requires executing the modes and their nuances with subtlety and consistency. This calls for four skills; organizing tonal materials into a pattern, displaying ornamentation, using specific melodic patterns, and preparing modal sentiments.\textsuperscript{58} For accomplished musicians, the last skill is the most important. They must shape the sentiment with the appropriate expressive mode before performing it.

**Phrases**

Phrases are featured prominently in Vietnamese music. Two types are khuon and hang hoa, general aesthetic terms that are applied to a performance, and also to specific instrumental phrases (developed motives). The number of phrases used in a given song is fixed, but a hang hoa collection is longer and it uses more pitches, wider intervallic ranges, and more ornamentation. Hang hoa phrases are more "flowery" than those in the original khuon.

Ca trù instrumental phrases, its kho, are performed on the đàn đáy with phách accompaniment during luu khong (instrumental) sections. There are five principle kho: kho song dan, kho giua, kho xiet, kho doc, and kho la dau.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.,40.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.,41.
Variations on kho (see figure 11) are played at the beginning of ca trù songs in the hat noi mode. Some kho, usually kho song dan or kho doc, are also performed as interludes between vocal sections. Kho rai is played as an end phrase to conclude some musical forms, whereas kho song dan is performed as an opening phrase.

**Singing**

Ca trù vocal techniques create an “aural image” or a “physical feeling” of the words that transcends the thematic content. Vocal technique in the ca trù style requires extensive training. Deep breathing is key in the vocal technique known as hoi trong (inner breath). Hoi Trong produces a tense, broken vibrato (rung hat) of unique timbre and quality. It has a sustained nasal

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60 Bretton Dimick, “Vietnam’s Ca Trù: Courtesan’s Songs By Any Other Name,”149.

61 Rachel Tran, “Ca Trù Singing”.

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sound. It is sometimes ornamented with a fast yodel-like rapid alternation between head and chest voice with a closed larynx called hat do hot which means “song fall pearls”, or the sound of pearls falling on a hard surface.62

An accomplished singer must respect four criteria: tron vanh - singing the words with roundness, ro chu - enunciating the letters clearly, sac tay - hand cutting like blades to play the phách, and chac nhip - rigorously applying the proper rhythm.63 Contemplation of the poem’s words, the singer's delivery, and the phrases of the dân dầy are the essence of the performance.

**Phách**

The singer uses her phách in several ways. First, the singer must express her feelings and sentiments through the claps of the sticks. Second, she may produce spacings and tempo changes with specific strikes. She may create an initial steady rhymical ostinato so she can scan the poem to herself before singing. She may play a dotted rhythm to take a breath between phrases. She may use rhythms to slow or accelerate the tempi, or for rhythmic accentuation.64

The beating of the phách is sophisticated. It has a vocabulary of five rhythms made up of three basic strokes: a double bounce ricochet with the solid beater called a to rop, a single stroke with either beater also called a phách, and a strike with both beaters together called a chat.65 (See figure 12).

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63 Tran Van Khe. “Vietnam Traditional Music.” In liner notes.


The rhythm of the \textit{phách} provides the structure over which the singer expresses a line of poetry, and it also communicates the song’s rhythmic structure to the \textit{đàn đáy} and \textit{trống chầu} players. The \textit{phách} provides the rhythmic pattern at the beginning of a song in what is like a rhythmic prelude that the \textit{Đàn đáy} and \textit{trống chầu} adopt and follow.\footnote{Bretton Dimick, “Vietnam’s \textit{Ca Trù}: Courtesan’s Songs By Any Other Name,”164.}

\textbf{Đàn đáy}

The \textit{đàn đáy} player supports the voice through established playing conventions that are learned by ear and felt among the ensemble who try to imitate one another in melismatic imitation and ornamentation. The \textit{đàn đáy} melodies weave around the sung melody and play in short interludes between phrases, always to the rhythm of the \textit{phách}.

\textit{Đàn đáy} music is based only on the five predetermined \textit{kho} (see figure 11).\footnote{Ibid.,262.} The \textit{đàn đáy} part is improvised but also restricted to specific melodic phrases that reenforce the vocal melody with counterpoint. When learning \textit{ca trù}, \textit{đàn đáy} players memorize different versions (variations) of the fixed instrumental phrases. The amount of flexibility for variations of the \textit{kho} is limited to choosing which version to play. \textit{Đàn đáy} players do not create new versions of \textit{kho} in performance.

\textit{Đàn đáy} performers distinguish between three types of ornamentation: \textit{luyện lạy} - vibrato, \textit{rung} - glissandi or slides between pitches, and an ornament that is unique to the \textit{đàn đáy}.

\footnote{Ibid.,268.}
and *ca trù*, called *vay*. As an illustration of the complexity of some ornaments, the *vay* ornament is a plucking sequence of a downstroke, followed by a pause, followed by a quickly played upstroke, and then a final downstroke, followed by a final pause. In addition to the plucking technique, the *vay* ornament may have simultaneous slides and vibrato.

*Cа trù* music’s improvisatory nature places no restrictions on the number of beats or the number of melodic variations. Players wishing to expand on strict adherence to pentatonic scales or players wishing to use *kho* variations with notes outside of the scale have options. Ancillary pitches can be sounded by pushing on the string between the frets to get a note of higher pitch (see figure 5). Notes on any fret can be altered in this way to produce higher semi-tones, quarter-tones or in-betweens, depending on how firmly the musician presses the string.

**Trống Chậu**

The *trống chậu* player, also known as the “spectator” and often a male scholar or connoisseur of the art, strikes the *trống chậu* in rhythm, synchronous with the *phách*, to define sections of a song, or to approve or disapprove of the singer's performance. The *trống chậu* is not a rhythmic drum but a means to communicate between the audience and the singer. The *trống chậu* player has two roles: he acts as a participating member of the audience who oversees and judges the performance, and he adds to the musical performance by marking the musical structure. As the person who presides over the proceedings, the *trống chậu* player calls for the performance to begin by playing three *tom* strokes on the head of the drum. The musical

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70 Bretton Dimick, “Vietnam’s Ca Trù: Courtesan’s Songs By Any Other Name,” 180.

structure of a song is marked through standardized drum patterns that are played at the beginning and the end of a song, and at the ends of phrases.

The Trọng chầu player shows his approval or disapproval of the singer or the songs depending on how he strikes the drum. He can praise well-done moments in the performance by playing one or more chat strokes on the side of the drum in succession. If he is disappointed with the singer, he hits the drum twice. On rare occasions where the performance is unsuccessful, he will strike the face of the drum repeatedly six or seven times followed by one strike on the side. This will terminate the performance.

Conclusion

Ca trù music sounds strange to those uninitiated. Vocals are bright but placed in the back of the throat. Vowels are “spread”, and consonants are closed. The vocal and đàn đáy parts are in similar treble ranges engaged in complex counterpoint that can be confusing. There is no base part or fundamental ground, and there are no harmonic progressions. Asymmetrical clicks and clacks accompany improvisational melodies sung to, perhaps, archaic poetry that is difficult to understand. Tetratonic or pentatonic melodies are sung semi-strophically following the contours of the tonal language without any clear or regular beat. The music is texturally static with all instruments sharing the same musical space without solos or extensive interludes. The music lacks expression because its sentience is in the texts. Nevertheless, with familiarity it can be an enjoyable listening experience. Some basic knowledge of its theory and components helps demystify it.

Ca trù’s disbanded culture in the mid-20th century limited its public exposure and engagement with the music and halted its performances. Teaching and transmission of its traditions are now in the form of verbal/aural lessons from old masters or group learning at Ca trù
clubs. Institutionalized analytics and teaching methods have thus far been unsuccessful, and it is unlikely that ca trù will become a part of any academic curricula.72

Despite the impoverished state of ca trù in Vietnam today, it still holds an important place in Vietnamese culture. Increased exposure from newspaper and magazine articles, new heritage recordings released on CD, and several documentaries on ca trù produced by Vietnamese Television (VTV) have improved the situation in the last decade. Nguyen Tuan's novella Chua Dan (quoted in the introduction), for instance, was the source of a screenplay for a feature film titled The Glorious Time in Me Thao Hamlet. A thirty-five-minute documentary called A Westerner Loves Our Music (Nguoi Tay Me Nhac Ta), made by VTV about Dr. Barley Norton’s research on Ca trù and other Vietnamese music, has been shown on Vietnamese television several times since 1999.73

As the few ca trù musicians in Vietnam today struggle to reclaim the past, the future of ca trù, like the future of Vietnamese culture itself, is uncertain. In the past, teaching ca trù was closely held within artists’ families. More recently, it has been cautiously opened to the public. Ca trù artistry, however, is still under threat of extinction because of the diminishing number and aging of practitioners. A lack of commercial opportunities has dampened young people’s enthusiasm to learn and retain the genre.

As much as ca trù is about singing the past, it is also about singing for a future where pre-revolutionary traditions and sentiments have a respected place in a rapidly changing modern


73 Barley Norton, “Singing the Past: Vietnamese Ca Trù, Memory and Mode,” 49.
Vietnam. For an excellent example of authentic ca trù performance, view the video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQEzI85J6g.
Chapter II. The Deities of the Kalachakra Mandala

Introduction

“The Deities Of The Kalachakra Mandala” (“Deities”) is the result of a complex connection between my feelings during the era of the Vietnam war, and my exposure to Buddhist and Hindu religions and philosophies during my time living in Asia. The poems that I chose about the Vietnam war reflect the feelings that many people my age felt during our opposition to the war. The musical references to Buddhist tantras and meditations help to reflect on it in a peaceful way. Having lived through the Vietnam war era and knowing people who fought there and died, I have long thought about how to honor those who served there but were unglorified. My tribute here is a start, and something of a catharsis for what is certainly one of the darkest periods of U.S. history.

The ten individual pieces in this instrumental/song cycle each represent a chronological place in the year of a soldier’s overseas tour and his return home. The title refers to a structural and spiritual representation of the mythical palace of the Kalachakra on Mount Meru, an important symbol in Hindu and Buddhist cosmology that can represent music in many metaphorical ways.

The music of “Deities” is heavily influenced by Vietnamese musical styles. Most of the motivic material is pentatonic, and modulations roughly follow the patterns outlined in métabole (see the Chapter I section The Music). Two of the movements are “mantras” that are meant to resemble the repetitive chanting of Buddhist monks at their temples. The movements have both hemitonic and anhemitonic scales in a variety of chromatic and diatonic varieties that are

described in the details of the movements. The sequence of the musical movements in “Deities” follows a sequence of “states;” innocence, loss of innocence, war and aftermath, that allude to the sentiments that are always present in ca trù and other forms of Vietnamese poetry and music. These elements are referred to as “sentiments” in discussion about the musical movements.

The single most direct suggestion of ca trù style is in the movement “Hanoi Hannah.” The solo female singer plays bamboo sticks in irregular rhythms (as she would with a phách) as she sings a tetrachordal melody, similar but less angular than an authentic ca trù melody. Pizzicato cello in a high register mimics the trống chầu although the sound is not as bright.

**Influence of Vietnamese Music on the Composition.**

It is clear now, as it was to the soldiers, that the real victims of the Vietnam war were the Vietnamese people. In memoriam to them, I have created music that references three different North Vietnamese folk idioms. The melodies in “Deities” are not indigenous, but the styles are, and there is a definite Asian flavor in each of the pieces. All of these models are considered endangered music.

1. “Xam” is a nearly extinct genre of self-accompanied song historically performed by blind minstrels who wandered among villages. Themes of Xam songs are often drawn from Vietnamese popular stories, poems, and legends that were sung to existing folk melodies. For an example, view Xẩm Singing - One of traditional folk music genre in Vietnam on YouTube.

2. “Hat Chau Van” is a style of Vietnamese folk music classified as ritual music since it is performed in the practice of “len dong”, the Vietnamese version of East Asian spirit mediumship. It is also sometimes found ceremonially. Rhythmically rich, it is usually performed with Asian instrumental ensembles with percussion. For an
example, view *Traditional Vietnamese Music: Hat Chau Van-Co Doi Cam Duong* on YouTube.

3. *Ca Trù*, the subject of Chapter I of this document, is a folk idiom with a peculiar vocal style sung exclusively by women. Performances consist of a singer who also adds rhythm with bamboo sticks, a lutenist, and a spectator/percussionist who periodically strikes a “praise drum” in specific ways to indicate his pleasure or displeasure of the singing. For an example, view *Ca Trù Singing* on YouTube.

**Musical Development**

My thoughts about this project started in 2005 when I visited a mountaintop temple near Katmandu, Nepal. I was directed to an artist who was finishing an amazingly detailed picture of an apparently auspicious mandala (see figure 13). It reminded me of pictures of fractals, and I began to wonder if it could graphically represent a musical structure of some sort. I was given a photocopy of an anonymous English language document explaining the details and meanings of the symbolism in the painting. I read this and referenced it, along with other readings, during my subsequent exposures to Buddhism and Hinduism and I kept returning to its musical prospects. In the end, it is this anonymous document and the design of the Kalachakra Mandala upon which I developed the overall theme and architecture for this music.

Besides being the metaphorical thematic basis and the real structural basis for the music, the Kalachakra Mandala is a spiritual symbol for me. Its many representations illustrate philosophies in which I believe, and many have equivalents and analogies in music that I have drawn on for inspiration.
The Kalachakra Mandala

Figure 13. Original painting of the Kalachakra Mandala by Kopeng S Zama.

Some information about the Kalachakra Mandala is from an anonymous English document given to me in Katmandu, Nepal in 2005 by the painter Kopeng S Zama.
Kalachakra is a word in Vajrayana Buddhism that means “wheel of time” or “time cycles.” It is a description of the tantra (discipline) of a superior yoga class (belief system). The concept of time, according to the tantra, is the element that originated the universe.

Traditionally, a mandala is a geometric design or pattern that represents the cosmos or deities in various heavenly worlds. “It's all about finding peace in the symmetry of the design and of the universe,” says artist Saudamini Madra. The Kalachakra tantra is divided into five sections, each of which is represented by the five circles in the design, and, by extension, the five movements in each of the musical “frames” in the music (see figure 16):

- Cosmology of the universe, the solar system, and the elements; the etherealness of music.
- The “subtle body” that includes four mind states (awake, dreaming, deep sleep, and sexual satisfaction); the visceral effects of a musical work.
- Preparation for meditation; the personal meaning of a musical performance.
- Spiritual practices including meditation and reincarnation; musical euphoria.
- The state of “gnosis” (the desired result of the practice – “the mind of immutable bliss.”); the art of musical performance.

The original spiritual Sanskrit texts of the Kalachakra appeared in the 11th century. Lore says that Kalachakra tantra was taught by Gautama Buddha himself. The Kalachakra deities (Kalachakra and his consort Visvamata who reside in the palace at the center

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79 “The Kalachakra Mandala,” Namgyal Tantric College”.

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of the mandala) represent the union of compassion and emptiness and the bliss of enlightenment which are representative of war’s aftermath.

The Kalachakra tantra is one of few that explores social and caste issues. It is critical of Indian castes and Brahmanical hierarchies that preach that the social divisions are divinely ordered and moral. Kalachakra texts warn that social discrimination contaminates the human psyche and cultural mores.

At the most superficial level, the mandala is a two-dimensional architectural drawing of a mythical five-level castle where the Kalachakra Deity lives on the summit of mythical Mount Meru, the sacred five-peaked mountain of Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist cosmology.

Figure 14. Relief drawing of the Kalachakra Mandala with the palace on top

The five circles on the mandala correspond to the five elements of the universe: space, air, fire, water, and earth. They are analogous in “Deities” to each of the five-movement “frames” (see figure 17). The “rooms” of the castle are divided into three regions representing
body, speech, and mind, or, in the music, by the three types of music: mantras, songs, and interludes. Nearly any musical element or group of elements can be assigned to one or more of the myriads of symbols and numerology within the mandala.

Figure 15. Exploded 3-D drawing of the Kalachakra Palace

The following is a partial list of mandala elements that could be represented by music:

- Cycles of time or wheels – reference reincarnation.
- Philosophical doctrines or schools of thought.
- Societal teachings including castes.
- History including the story of the Shambhala Kingdom’s holy war against the barbarians.
- The “subtle” body, representing chakra (energy) of body parts.
- Buddhist six yoga.
• Descriptions of Buddhist and Hindu religious and ceremonial practices.
• Tantric iconography.
• Numerology.

Introduction to the Score

Planning for this project’s development started with learning more about the Vietnam war as history now reflects on it. An interesting book for opposing perspectives, Portrait of the Enemy by David Chanoff, is a collection of interviews of ex-fighters that served in the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) and the Viet Cong. I learned about war tactics and specific successes and failures from Vietnam: A History by Stanley Karnow which has become the definitive text about the war. A very interesting compendium given to first-deployed soldiers, is “The U.S. Army Infantryman Vietnam Pocket Manual.” It contains instructions on cultural civility, military tactics, and weaponry. Interviews with three Vietnam war veterans exposed heart-felt feelings and thoughts about their wartime experiences and gave me first-hand perspectives.

Text and Poetry

I have chosen to set the poetry of Dr. Yusef Komunyakaa. Dr. Komunyakaa won the Pulitzer Prize in poetry in 1994 for his collection “Neon Vernacular”, and he is currently a professor of creative writing at New York University.

I admire the imagery and the rhythm of Dr. Komunyakaa’s poems, and I am particularly drawn to his poems about his personal experiences in Vietnam as an Army war correspondent in 1969-1970. The poems I have chosen are from Dr. Komunyakaa’s collections Dien Cai Dau and Toys in the Field, both published in his anthology Pleasure Dome.80

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Structure

The structure of the movements in total is an overall arch of two five-movement “frames” with two related four-movement segments of vocal and instrumental movements. Ignoring the book-ending prelude and postlude, the structure of the first segment is $V V I V$ where $I$ indicates an instrumental movement, and $V$ indicates a vocal movement. The second segment is in retrograde.

Figure 16. Overall structure. $I = \text{Instrumental, } Vx = \text{Vocal with the number of singing voices in the movement}$

As mentioned before, the combination and sequence of frames and segments produces a progression from one sentiment to another; innocence, to loss of innocence, to war, to aftermath follow chronologically with the poetry.\(^81\)

Pentatonic scales are used in every movement except for the final movement. Various types are used, including those that have only whole steps, those that are diatonic with both whole and half steps, and those that have chromatics. Some movements have elements of each

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\(^81\) I have adopted the word “sentiment” from ca trù poetry to refer to the characters’ emotional states.
type. The notes that are outside of the pentatonic schemes are usually used for emphasis or for variation as they usually stand out. An Asian “flavor” is maintained with the frequent use of parallel fifths and octaves, and open harmonies.

Mantras are short phrases and texts used in Buddhist rituals. Teaching mantras is part of musical training for monks in the temples. In “Deities”, the two mantras are for contemplation to prepare for the following dramatic song. They share characteristics with Buddhist mantras, short repetitive motives, small ranges, percussive instrumental sounds, and subtle accompaniment.

The two instrumental interludes are repose from pairs of dramatic songs. The titles for the interludes come from poems in Komunyakaa’s collections that are not otherwise used in the work.

Four of the movements contain musical references to popular songs of the war era. In some cases, their presence is obvious, in others they are disguised in the accompaniment or harmonies. The following list identifies the songs and the movements in which they are used.

- Ambush – “Ruby Tuesday” and “For What It’s Worth”
- Water Buffalo – “We Gotta’ Get Out Of This Place”
- Nothing Big – “Susan On The West Coast Waiting”
- Confessing My Ignorance – “Ohio”

**Descriptions of the Movements**

The following section contains descriptions of each movement with its “home” theme. The themes are not limited to a single movement, and there are motivic snippets of most themes found throughout the entire set.
Prelude “Dien Cai Dau (Crazy)” (3:56).

This is an energetic instrumental piece using the complete instrumental ensemble. After an opening pentatonic ostinato based on the pentatonic scale A C♯ D E F♯, three of the principal themes (Le Xuan, Ambush, and Confessing My Ignorance) are presented in abridged instrumental form before closing again with the ostinato pattern. It is through-composed with a codetta in the form of A B C D A, and it has mixed tonal centers ending on unison D. Its style is ostinato/lyrical. The “scoops” in the clarinet and violin are meant to emulate indigenous bird-call sounds of the Asian Koel and are used to set a tone of an Asian environment. This is the first movement of the “Innocence” sentiment.

Song 1 “Le Xuan” (Beautiful Spring) (3:16)

This is a melodic and lyrical soprano and tenor duet where the soprano is a narrator, and the tenor is a fresh soldier enamored with the exoticism of the environment and the ladies. He is cautious because he senses danger in the beauty. The theme, which recurs throughout this work, is based on the pentatonic scale B♭ C E♭ F G. The movement’s form is variation with a coda – A A’ A” B. It uses the entire ensemble except for the bass clarinet. Its style is diatonic (pentatonic) lyrical on an Eb tonal center. It is the last movement of the “Innocence” sentiment.

Figure 17. Principal theme of “Le Xuan”

Libretto:

Narrator (Soprano):

There is a photo, folded inside Sons and Lovers
One hand on hip, the other aiming a revolver,
Flanked by a cadre of women
Dares the sun to penetrate her ao dai.

Fresh Soldier (Tenor):
    We let our eyes travel over silk
    As we pushed pins into maps
    Under a dead sky.

Narrator:
    Shadows crawl from her feet.
    Does she know the soldiers undress her?
    She’s delicate as a reed against a river,
    Weighing the gun, a blood-tipped lotus in the air.

Soldier (Tenor):
    Another kind of lust blooms, ominous as the photo –
    A coffin waiting to be lost.
    It still hurts when a pistol plays with the heart this way.

Song 2 “Ambush” (2:51)

This piece is also a duet, but this time with dark ominous undertones. The soprano is once again the narrator, and the tenor is a soldier in the field for the first time. He is nervous as he interprets each strange sound as the start of a firefight.
This movement has anxious minor harmonies and dissonant punctuations based on the pentatonic scale D Eb G Ab B (add C) with chromatic modulations. Its form is through-composed on a C tonal center. It uses the entire ensemble and is the first movement of the “Loss of Innocence” sentiment.

Figure 18. Principal theme of “Ambush”

Libretto:

Narrator (Soprano):

So, quiet birds start singing again.

Lizards bring a touch of light.

Soldier (Tenor):

Leaders count bullets three times.

Stars glint off gun barrels

We can almost hear a leaf drop.

For Chrissake, please!

Raw opium intoxicates a blaze of insects.

Narrator:

Buddhist monks on a hill

Burn twelve red lanterns.

Soldier:
The trees play games.

A tiger circles us between sky and human.

They must come this way,

And when they do,

Not even God can help them.

Narrator:

Headless shadows skirt the hedge rows.

A crossroad for the birds calling for the dead.

**Interlude I “Somewhere Near Phu Bai” (2:01)**

This is a sad and expressive instrumental movement using the full instrumental ensemble except for the bass clarinet. It is based on the pentatonic scale C E♭ F G B♭ with chromatic modulations, and it is in the form of A A’ on a tonal center E. This movement is in the Loss of Innocence sentiment.

![Figure 19. Principal theme from “Somewhere Near Phu Bai”](image)

**Mantra I “Camouflage the Chimera” (1:38)**

This meditative mantra is an accompanied tenor solo in the role of a soldier hiding in the jungle. It has a recurring musical theme with text from couplets and fragments of the poem. It is through-composed in minimalist style using pentatonic and tetratonic scales on a tonal center of A♭. The accompaniment is the instrumental ensemble without piano. It is the first movement of the “War” sentiment.
Libretto:

Soldier (Tenor):

Branches on our helmets,
Mud-painted faces,
Bamboo breezes,
Rivers with ghosts,
Animals’ refuge,
We hold our breath.

Song 3 “Water Buffalo” (3:30)

A water buffalo is the character singing in the first person in this piece. He fears all the noise and distractions, he charges at a helicopter and is eventually viewed as a danger and shot.

This movement, using the entire ensemble except soprano, and is in extended variations with coda form (A A’ A” A‴ B). It is based on the pentatonic scale G A C D E on an A tonal center. It is in the “War” sentiment. Below is the characteristic motive of “Water Buffalo” although it does not occur in the vocal part.
Libretto:

Water Buffalo (tenor):

My God, this mud
Fear’s habit.
This red-caped dusk,
The iron bird rattles overhead again with stars falling
The green man in its door hole.
I drop my head and charge.
The vulture’s shadow hanging over a rice paddy,
Hung belly, hooves, and ass,
I bellow like a grass foghorn.
Away from my holler
The whirlwind machine returns.
I’m but a target.
I plant my feet,
The day caves in.
Bullheaded dynamo,
I am no match for that fire.

Interlude II “One More Loss to Count” (1:27)

This introspective movement is an instrumental-only recapitulation of “Le Xuan” with the same principal theme. Its style is lyrical in a diatonic pentatonic on a B♭ tonal center. It is through-composed.
Mantra II “Hanoi Hannah” (1:56)

This is an accompanied solo soprano movement in the style of a mantra. Hanoi Hannah was a siren-like temptress who broadcasted propaganda to homesick soldiers with disturbing messages of infidelity, memories of home, and threats.

This movement is in a minimalist pentatonic style in five strophic verses on a tonal center of G. Instrumentation is the ensemble without tenor or piano. The soprano plays ideophone bamboo sticks in addition to singing. It is the last of the movements in the “War” sentiment.

Figure 22. Principal theme of “Hanoi Hannah”

Libretto:

Hannah (Soprano):

Hello, soul brothers,

Yeah, Georgia’s also on my mind.

It’s Saturday in the states,

Guess what your girl is doing tonight.

You know you’re all dead men, don’t you?

You’re dead as the king today in Memphis.

Soul brother, what are you dying for?

Song 4 “Nothing Big”

This is the first movement of the “Aftermath” sentiment. It is a vocal due with full ensemble accompaniment, and the first movement where the voices sing mostly together. The text is abstract recollections (perhaps in a dream state) of their experiences in Vietnam after
returning home. The movement style is lyrical pentatonic on F# in the form A A’ A” B on a cello obligato.

Figure 23. Principal theme from “Nothing Big”

Libretto:

Narrators (Soprano and Tenor)

The hummingbird’s rainbow lands among the red geraniums.

God’s little hell-raising helicopter flies away.

Soldiers (Soprano and Tenor):

I’m back in Danang

Have I been trying to return to this hard night of mahogany trees,

Shadowing men back from a firefight.

The sun strikes broken glass on the ground and

Triggers dancing lights in my head.

The sky’s flesh wound.

I’m back at the Blue Dahlia.

I’m lying beside someone I can’t remember.

I can’t forget.

Inside me, a flurry of wings,

And I’m lifting off.

Retrospective “Please” / “Confessing My Ignorance”

This final movement is an anomaly to the rest of the work. The text begins with prose of a soldier wishing forgiveness for sending a comrade into harm. It is recited over a violin solo.
At the end of the recitation, there is a full-ensemble pointillistic section interspersed with short vocal duets. The cello and bass clarinet provide an obligato duet under the melodies. This movement is through-composed and is not pentatonic. The chaotic coda ends on a dissonant tonal center B.

Libretto:

Soldier (Tenor reading over music):

Forgive me, soldier. Forgive my right hand for pointing you to the tree line now outlined in my head. There was so much blood-sky at daybreak in Plleike (‘ply - ca), but I won't say those infernal guns blinded me on that hell. Sometimes I try to retrace my mistakes, running fingers down the map. We followed the grid coordinates in some battalion commander's mind. If I could unsay those orders, I'd holler "don't move a muscle. Stay put." You were a greenhorn, so fearless, even foolish, and when I said go, Henry, you went dancing on a read string of bullets from that tree line as it moved from a low cloud.

Soldiers (Soprano and Tenor singing):

I don’t know what this is
That begs to heal the earth,
Under each foot-step,
Or what pulls me back
To innocence.
Mistress of common sense,
Perhaps it's meant for me to swing open night’s door
And catch you naked at the mirror.

Trying to shake hands with yourself.

**Instrumentation and Player Notes**

- Soprano Voice
- Tenor Voice
- Clarinet in B♭
- Bass Clarinet
- Piano
- Violin
- Cello

- **Piano**: the piano playing in high registers is meant to emulate the Asian hammered dulcimer called "Dan tam thay luc" in Vietnam. The notes should be soft to medium in dynamics and slightly percussive.

- **Violin and Clarinet**: the "scoops" in the prelude are to emulate the Asian *koel* bird calls. They may be played as indicated or (more accurately) taper off lower at the decay.

- **Vocal qualities**: should be lyrical to blend with the texture of the ensemble.

- **The vocal parts in these pieces** have equal melodic and harmonic importance to the instrumental parts and so should stand out only as much as required to make the text intelligible. Mostly, the text-to-music is monosyllabic. There are odd word breaks in the text that give it a modern interpretation matching the rhythms of the poetry. It is asked that the singers be as animated as possible moving around the stage and using broad gestures and expressions.
Score

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The Deities of the Kalachakra Mandala

For Tenor and Soprano Solo Voices and Mixed Instrumental Ensemble

Music by Dan Schultz

Poetry by Yusef Konumyakaa

2022

Score in C  Duration 31’13”
The Deities of the Kalachakra Mandala

Y. Komunyakaa

1. Prelude, Dien Cai Dau (Crazy)

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61
Prelude, Diên Cái Dâu (Crazy)
2. Le Xuan (Beautiful Spring)
Flanked by a cadre of women

dares the sun to penetrate her so da...

Le Xuan (Beautiful Spring)
Hm it still hurts when a pistol plays with
the heart this way.

rit.
3. Ambush
Ambush
Ambush

S.  

T.  
three times
Stars glint off gun barrels.

CL.

B CL.

Pno.

VA.

Vc.

mp

mp

mp

mp
"For chrissake, please." Row opium into...
The trees play games A tiger circles us between sky and human. They must come this way, this way, this way.
And when they do, Headless
not even God can help them.
Ambush

Shadows skirt the hedge-rows. A cross-road for the birds.

molto rit.

calling for the dead.
4. Interlude I (Somewhere Near Phu Bai)
Interlude I (Somewhere Near Phu Bai)
Interlude I (Somewhere Near Phu Bai)
5. Mantra I (Camouflage the Chimera)
Mantra I (Camouflage the Chimera)
Mantra I (Camouflage the Chimera)

We hold our breath.
6. Water Buffalo
Water Buffalo

The iron bird rattles over.

The green man

head again, with stars falling.
in its door - hole

Water Buffalo
Water Buffalo

Cl. molto ris.

Pno. mp

Vln

Vc.
7. Interlude II (One More Loss to Count)
8. Mantra II (Hanoi Hannah)
Mantra II (Hanoi Hannah)

Grace what your girl is driv ing to night.
You know you're all dead men, don't you? Ah...

You're dead as the King today in Memphis.
Mantra II (Hanoï Hannah)
Mantra II (Hanoi Hannah)

S. 4

what are you dying for? Ah.

CL

B CL

Vc.

hold as long as possible

S.

B CL

Vc.

[Musical notation of the piece is shown]
9. Nothing Big

Soprano
Tenor
Clarinet in B♭
Bass Clarinet
Piano
Violin
Violoncello

The humming bird's rainbow lands among the red
Nothing Big

Have I been trying to return...

mf

Have I been trying to return...

mp

pp

p

pf
Nothing Big

S.  

T.  

CL.  

B CL.  

Pno.  

Vln.  

Vc.  

back from a fire-fight

back from a fire-fight.
sun strikes broken glass on the ground

and triggers dancing lights in my head
10. Confessing My Ignorance

Tenor: dramatic reading during violin melody.

Forgive me, soldier. Forgive my right hand for pointing you to the tree line now outlined in my head. There was so much blood-sky at daybreak in Pileike (ply - ca), but I won't say those infernal guns blinded me on that hell. Sometimes I try to retrace my mistakes, running fingers down the map. We followed the grid coordinates in some battalion commander's mind. If I could unseat those orders, I'd holler "don't move a muscle. Stay put." You were a greenhorn, so fearless, even foolish, and when I said go, Henry, you went dancing on a read string of bullets from that tree line as it moved from a low cloud.

127
Confessing My Ignorance

\( \text{A}^\text{+} = 100 \)

Detached and percussive

\text{Cl.}

\text{B. Cl.}

\text{Pno.}

\text{Vln}

\text{Vc.}
Confessing My Ignorance

S. (soprano)

T. (tenor)

B CL (bass clarinet)

Pno (piano)

Vln (violin)

Vc (viola)

Under each foot... or what pulls me back...
-haps it's meant for me to swing o

meant for me

pen night's door and catch you na-ked at the mir-or
catch... you

Confessing My Ignorance
Confessing My Ignorance

D. 113
Codetta

trying to shake hands with yourself.

mf
Appendix: Permission

Dr. Komunyakaa has graciously granted permission via email to use his poetry in this work. A permission contract from his publisher, Wesleyan University Press is below.
Bibliography


Vita

Mr. Schultz was born in Wilmington, Delaware and moved to Baton Rouge in his early school years. He was an active student musician during high school and majored in music composition and classical guitar during college. His interest was diverted to computer work following college and he spent a thirty-five-year career in banking technology. During that time as he relocated frequently throughout the U.S. and overseas, he remained committed to music performing locally both on guitar and in vocal ensembles. Upon retirement, Mr. Schultz returned to his music education where he received an additional M.M. in Composition at The University of New Orleans and enrolled in the Doctoral Program in music composition at Louisiana State University. After graduation, Mr. Schultz will continue with ensemble performances and musical activities and engage in further education and research on subject matter not yet explored.