

*The Way of Music : Phraya Phumisevin*

Pongsilp Arunrat, Slipakorn University, Thailand

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**Abstract**

The performance of “The Way of Music: Phraya Phumisevin” is produced by Associate Professor Pongsilp Arunrat to celebrate and honor the 120 year-anniversary of Phraya Phumisevin (Jit Jittasevi), the Rattanakosin Saw sam-sai master. His life and works are exhibited through lecture and multimedia presentation. The music presented in this performance, with no repetitions from the 100-year anniversary, is creatively united and generated into a modern Thai music performance, divided into 3 acts: cultivation, creation, and propagation.

Keyword : Thai traditional music, Thai Traditional song, Siamese fiddle, Sawsamsai, Thai performance, Phraya Phumisevin, Pongsilp Arunrat

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Figure 1 : Poster of The Way of Music



## Introduction

Phraya Phumisewin, also known as Chit Chittasevi, (13 June 1894-5 January 1976) was a master of Thai classical music, particularly of the saw sam sai (สามสายซอ : three-stringed fiddle), during the Rattanakosin period. He was the second son of a musician, Luang Khontuapwatee, also known as Jang Chittasevi, and began learning from his father in early childhood. Later, he studied under such well-known musicians as Praya Prasarn Suriyasap (Plaek Prasarnsub), from whom he learned kluy (ขลุ่ย), and Princess Thepkanya Buranaphim whose style and method of playing the saw sam sai originated during the reign of King Rama III.

Phraya Phumisewin's musical talent shone through from a very young age. By the age of 12, he had joined the Royal Pipat Luang and, by 15, had won a number of prestigious musical awards. He served as a page to King Rama VI, a lover of the arts, who greatly appreciated Phraya Phumisewin's talent. He was often called upon to lull His Majesty to sleep with the soothing sounds of the saw sam sai. When he was 31, King Rama VI bestowed upon Phraya Phumisewin the high rank of 'Phraya'.

Not only could Phraya Phumisewin play the saw sam sai and kluy like a master, but he was a pioneer in exploring musical theory and teaching methods. The methodology developed by Phraya Phumisewin became the standard methodology for teaching the

saw sam sai. He also composed and arranged music for players at all levels, compositions and arrangements which remain in use today.

Praya Phumisewin also conducted research which continues to be invaluable in the study of Thai classical music. Among the pieces of music rediscovered through his research, brought back to life and made famous by Phraya Phumisewin, is the beautiful Royal Lullaby, which had fallen into disuse over time.

Praya Phumisewin continued his research while working as Chief of the Text Book Section of the Music Division of the Department of Fine Arts and later became the first musician to write articles about Thai classical music, including the biographies of many famous musicians, for the cultural magazine, Wattanatam Thai Journal.

After he left the Department of Fine Arts, Praya Phumisewin was invited by Radio Thailand to promote Thai classical music on-air. He formed a small orchestra of equally talented musicians who performed live on the radio each week. Praya Phumisewin also educated listeners about the different forms of Thai music and the instruments used.

Praya Phumisewin was known for his skillful solo performances on the saw sam sai. His moving rendition of “Phrayasoke” or “Mourning for the Lord” on the occasion of the death of King Rama VI was regarded as a particularly fine and notable performance. He was also asked by the Thai Government to perform for many State Visitors, including, in 1930, for the Crown Prince of Denmark.

Aside from being a musician, composer, researcher and writer, Praya Phumisewin was also a great teacher. Among his most famous students of the saw sam sai were Professor Udom Arunrattana, Dr. Utis Naksawadi, Tuen Pathayakul, Charoenjai Sunthornwatin, Chalerm Muangpraesri , Siriphan Palakawong Na Ayudhaya and Professor Dr. Natcha Pucharoen.

## **The format of “The Way of Music”**

### Act I Cultivation

Act I of the performance presents Praya Phumisewin’s life and family, his Thai music learning from Phraya Prasarnduriyasap (Plaek Prasarnsap), his page duty to King Rama VI, and his saw sam sai study with Chaotepkanya Buranapim. A list of compositions accompanying act I include Homrong Phoomthong, klui solo on Nok-khamin, saw sam sai solo on Hok-bot song-chan, and saw sam sai solo on Ban-tom prai.

#### *Homrong Phoomthong*

Homrong Phoomthong performed by large mahori ensemble of Faculty of Arts, Silpakorn University, under the direct of Associate Professor Pongsilp Arunrat

#### *Klui solo on Nok-khamin*

Passed down from Phraya Prasarnduriyasap to Praya Phumisewin are several solo pieces including Nok kamin, khaek mon bang chang, phayasok, and kheak morn.

### *Saw sam sai solo on Hok-bot song-chan*

This Saw samsai solo is a fundamental solo repertoire developed by Praya Phumisewin from the Pii-nai solo composition of Phraya Prasarn Suriyasap. For this performance, Pheem Supachalasai from Triam Udomsueksa school is the saw sam sai soloist. Pheem has studied saw sam sai with Siripan Palakawong na Ayutthaya.

### *Saw samsai solo on Ban-tom prai*

This solo piece is one of the major compositions of Praya Phumisewin which originated through the expansion of Tra Banthomprai, from the Nha-paat repertoire accompanying theatrical mask performance.

It is one of his favorite pieces and has been performed several times by his students. Occasionally, he sang the vocal part himself. Later on, he developed the piece to be a solo repertoire for saw sam sai with a remarkable characteristic of its sentiment and expressive melody. The saw sam sai soloist in this performance is Satitsataporn Sangkoranee from Piyamaharatcharomaneekate school, a student of Pongsilp Arunrat.

## **Act II Creation**

Act II presents the period of creativity, inspiration, and productivity of Praya Phumisewin's musical achievement, even though he was not well positioned in his career. Several works created in this period consist of the research in Hey-klom phrabanthom repertoire, participating in the first Siamese film, as well as several compositions for saw sam sai solo. The compositions performed in this second act are Hey-klom chang-look-luang, Mahori luang "O-rachorn," and Chaa look-luang.

These works are all compositions by Praya Phumisewin and regarded as significant Thai compositions, especially his research on Hey-klom phrabanthom, which is the functional composition for honoring the King's heir. The repertoire has disappeared since the reign of King Rama V. His research interest derived from a publication of Hay-klom repertoire book as a memoir of Prince Kromluang lopburiramet's birthday anniversary, March 7, 1929.

The prince was truly interested in Hey-klom repertoire and had requested Praya Phumisewin to perform research and bring back its performance to him.

Beginning his research from the lyrical verses collected in Hay-klom repertoire book, he conducted his research by consulting court saw sam sai musicians including Phra Ramperi, court musician for royal ceremony who inherited Chaa look-luang melody from his father, Phra Petcharakan, music teacher to court officer and surrogate mother. Another source Praya Phumisewin sought advice from was Plaak, a lady in waiting to Queen Sukumarnmorasri (Prince Boripatra's mother). Lady Plaak remembered some verses, hence, she added to Praya Phumisewin's compilation. When he finished his research, he organized a performance of Hey-klom phrabanthom for Prince Klomluang lopburi ram-mate and other royal heirs at Suan-sunantha Palace. The performance on that day received a gigantic applause and awards.

As for the occasion of *Hey-klom phra banthom* performance, the royal custom has specified the occasion of one month birthday anniversary of royal heirs. The ceremony "long phra-uu" is performed, having a Brahman religious court ceremonial master designate the ceremonial date. At the right time, the Brahman master swings

the royal cradle while reciting chants inviting Hindu Gods, Shiva and Visanu to the auspicious ceremony. The recitation of sacred chant is accompanied by saw sam sai and Ban-dau drum. When the ceremony is completed, the royal nurse sings the Hey-klom repertoire such as Jab-ra-bam, I-nao (Soonthornphu's version), and Anirut with saw sam sai accompanying the singing.

Figure 2 : Hey-klom “Chaa look-luang and O-rachorn”



The most popular song in Hey-klom repertoire is Chaa look-luang in which Praya Phumisewin had received its remarkably beautiful melodies, both the vocal melody and Saw samsai melody, from Phra Ramperi. Praya Phumisewin included the technique of “New-chang,” and advanced bowing techniques of 16 and 32, making “Chaa look-luang” an extraordinary composition, valued for its theory and practice.

In this recording, “Chaa look-luang” is chosen as the main composition representing Hey-klom repertoire with additional Hey-klom compositions at the ending, following the royal norm and regulations that, if the Hey-klom song has already ended but the royal heir is still awake, a royal baby sister has to keep singing until the heir falls asleep. These additional songs include of Padcha, Kam-hwan, Nok-jaak, etc.

In addition to “Chaa look-luang,” “O-rachorn,” one of the songs in “Tab” Mahori Aytthaya repertoire with the same title “O-rachorn” is chosen. Tab “O-rachorn” is comprised of 8 songs: O-rachorn, Kuu O-rachorn, Sai-samorn, Pa-tong oad, Pa-tong pan, Pa-tong rueay, Pa-tong lakorn, and Pa-tong huan. The song “O-rachorn” is constructed in one section. Jang-wang Tua Patayakosol (1881-1938) had enriched the performance of this song to the students in his cult through oral transmission, until it was passed down to one of his students, Samran Kerdpol who notated the melody and handed it to Professor Udom Arunrat (1935-2006). O-rachorn is considered one of the Thai ancient songs that barely known to Thai people; therefore, it is important to record this significant song. The following are the lyrics of both “Chaa look-luang” and “O-rachorn.”

*Hey-klom “Chaa look-luang”*

Suam cheep bang-kom ba-at  
pu-chong wong pra-yoon  
Phra yod yao-wa yu-pin  
chern sa-dej kuen sai-ya

Phra yao-wa-rat ti-ben soon  
i-sa-ra rat rueang dey-cha  
nhor puu-min maen am-ma-ra  
ban-tom sook sam-ra-an-rom

*“O-rachorn”*

Phra uu e-ek ae-em sa-ad  
phra-soot rood bang-lom  
kha no-oi nang a-nong  
ban-leng pleng o-od pan

yii-puu la-ad so-od sii-som  
luad-lai tong krong kruea-wan  
pro-om fao oung phra chern kwan  
ni-pon kab glom glao ga-an

“*Saen sa-nau*” is a solo saw sam sai composition Praya Phumisewin had modified from the song “*Saen sa-nau*” sam-chan of master Bua, originally composed for singing and performing in *Sa-ga-waa* performance. Its lyric is famous for its beauty as well as its instrumental response marked with clearness, sharp and playful techniques and ornamentation. Praya Phumisewin intended to add “*Saen sa-nau*” as a new song to the solo saw sam-sai repertoire, rather than basing his composition on two popular melodies — “*Khaek morn*” and “*Surintarahuu*” — as other contemporary composers preferred to do. More over, he has changed the character of the piece by adjusting the cadential pitch (look tok) to be performed with “oad loi” finger (the index finger played on ‘sai ek’ meaning main string, similar to the index finger of ‘pii-nai’). As a result, “*Saen sa-nau*” is unique in its character and has become the most important composition inherited within Phumisewin’s saw sam sai cult.



Figure 3 : “*Saen sa-nau*”

For this performance, Associate Professor Pongsilp Arunrat has created a new arrangement combining Thai and western instruments using 2 saw sam sai of different sizes (saw sam sai and saw sam sai lib), cello interpolating the bass line, and piano providing harmony in the accompaniment. Traditional techniques of Saw sam sai,

“look lor” and “look khad,” are used in the “keb” section to add a joyous character to the performance.

### Act III Propagation

The third act aims to present Phraya Phumisewin’s teaching in several institutions. He had standardized saw sam-sai teaching methodology, including saw sam-sai position and bowing, and establishing saw sam-sai repertoire for beginner, intermediate, and advanced level. His pedagogy and repertoire are preserved and are being practiced within his cult until the present. Compositions performed in the third act are “Khaek morn bang-chaeng” sam-chan with “Pad-cha” and “Ta-yoi deo.”

*“Khaek morn bang-chaeng” sam-chan with “Pad-cha”*

“Khaek morn bang-chaeng” sam-chan with “Pad-cha” is performed with mixed string ensemble by music students of the *Pau-chang* school, having Suporn Chanapan direct the ensemble. Accompanying the performance is the crayon painting by Somyot Khamsaeng.



Figure 4 : “Khaek morn bang-chaeng” sam-chan with “Pad-cha”

*“Ta-yoi deo”*

“Ta-yoi deo” (deo refers to “solo”) is a composition written by Phra Praditpairau (Mii Duriyangkul), developed from “Ta-yoi nai,” a composition for solo pui-nai because Phra Praditpairau is a virtuosic pui-nai player. This acclaim is evidenced in the ‘Wai khru sepha’ chant by Thailand’s most renowned poet, Soonthornphu: “The master Khaek is excellent in his Pii performance.” “To-yoi deo” has been acknowledged as a highly advanced solo composition which is rarely heard in the society. Phra Praditpairau created the saw sam sai solo of this song and passed it down to Lady Sud (one of the King’s concubines) during the time when he was a court saw sam-sai teacher.

Phraya Phumisewin learned this composition from Chao Thepkanya Buuranapim and passed it down to his students, Professor Udom Arunrat, Tuean Patayakul, and Siripan Palakawong. In his teaching, he has reinforced Phra Praditpairau’s curse that “Whoever attempts to modify this song, may the person be doomed in life and have no success and glory in the art of Thai music.”

Hence, none of his students and later generations dare to challenge his master's word and whenever the song is passed down to any of the students, the ceremony of *wai khru* has to be conducted first.

Typically, in performing "Ta-yoi deao" on saw sam sai, the *Cherd-nok* techniques are applied along with a saw sam sai's notably difficult technique of "New chang," on the 16 bow. In order to acquire this technique, Phraya Phumisewin had to pay 1 chang (80 bahts) as a study fee (part of wai-khru) to Chaochom Prakong; hence, the technique was named according to the amount of the payment. Besides "New chang," other advanced techniques are "New aae," "New-pra new-prom," and "New nark sa-dung." These techniques requires a highly skilled musician since its bowing techniques are extraordinarily difficult such as "Nguu leoy," and "Kan chak jab kra-tua taeng kra-tua," which are considered as advanced as Pii-nai's technique. Any saw sam sai soloist who performs this piece has to master all saw sam sai skills at a remarkable level in order to present the correct structure of the composition, which is similar to the structure of "Thao" that begins the piece from slow to fast, along with the retarding passage. Thus, the retarding passage has to finely blend with the designated tempo to create a sublime flow to the overall piece. The soloist in this performance is Siripan Palakawong Na Ayutthaya, a direct niece to Phraya Phumisewin.

## **Conclusions**

The performance of "The Way of Music: Phraya Phumisevin" is produced by Associate Professor Pongsilp Arunrat to celebrate and honor the 120 year-anniversary of Phraya Phumisevin (Jit Jittasevi), the Rattanakosin Saw sam-sai master. His life and works are exhibited through lecture and multimedia presentation. By divided into 3 acts: Cultivation : Homrong Phoomthong, Klui solo on Nok-khamin, Hok-bot song-chan and Ban-tom prai. Another is Creation : Hey-klom "Chaa look-luang" and "O-rachorn" and "Saen sa-nau" which created a new arrangement combining Thai and western instruments. At last is Propagation : "Khaek morn bang-chaeng" sam-chan with "Pad-cha" is performed with mixed string ensemble and accompanying the performance is the crayon painting, "Ta-yoi deo" which a saw sam sai's notably difficult technique. This presentation is creatively united and generated into a modern Thai music performance.

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Contact e-mail : [Sawsamsai@yahoo.com](mailto:Sawsamsai@yahoo.com)