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**INTERRELATIONS AMONG GENRES IN KHMER
TRADITIONAL MUSIC AND THEATRE:
PHLENG KAR, PHLENG ARAK, LKHAON YIIKEE
AND LKHAON BASSAC**

FRANCESCA BILLERI

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

2019

Department of Music

SOAS, University of London

Declaration for SOAS PhD thesis

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Abstract

This dissertation focuses on the interrelation and adaptation of musical and extramusical song features among the Cambodian genres of *phleng kar*, *phleng arak*, *lkhaon yikee* and *lkhaon bassac*. My research starts from my master's study on *phleng kar*, the traditional wedding music. Through my MA research, it appeared that selected songs from the *phleng kar* repertoire share and exchange musical and ritual features. In this study I considered how these songs were used in other genres and what this could tell us about the social and musical interrelationship of these musics.

My research aims to discuss the concept of genre classification from the *emic* perspective of the Cambodian practitioners showing how they talk and think about their music; and to explore the kinds of culture-specific markers employed by Khmer musicians to distinguish their genres. Cambodian music traditions outside the iconic genre of classical dance have received little attention in scholarship. This study provides the first systematic analysis of the genres in question whose repertoire and musical features, to my knowledge, have never been studied.

Ethnographic research carried out over ten months in different provinces of Cambodia and Phnom Penh using a combination of audiovisual recording, interviews, and participant-observation provided me with three case studies which illustrate: songs sharing the same title with different tunes; songs with same title and similar tunes; and songs with a different title but similar tunes. To these case studies I then applied transcriptions, using staff notation, and analysed musical and extramusical parameters to consider the exchange of musical features and performance analysis following some scholar's model (Marett 2009; McKinley 2002; Seeger 1987) to consider the ritual context. This study shows how classification and categorization of genres, even when genres overlap, reflect sociocultural aspects and are attached to a set of musical and extramusical components.

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Data collected for this research are based on fieldwork carried out by myself in different provinces of Cambodia on a fieldwork award from SOAS. My sincere thanks also go to School of Traditional Music in Kampot province, particularly to the founder Catherine Gear for giving me the permission to meet and work with teachers and to Master Khaen Beim, teacher of *skɔɔ yiikee* drums who introduced me the *Ikhaon yiikee* troupe in Chuuk district, in Kampot province. I would like also express my gratitude to the Cambodian Living Arts (CLA) association in Phnom Penh that provided me the musicians and other informants' contacts and obtained many performances and rituals invitations for me, particularly the founder Arn Chorn-pond for his hard work and dedication to Khmer traditional music. I am also grateful to Mrs Seyma Thorn for involving me in the Khmer Magic Music Bus project and Mr Yorn Young, a talented young musicians and *yiikee* singer, involved in the ongoing process of preservation and revival of Khmer traditional music.

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Channa (voice); Reak Smey Soriya ensemble composed by Maw Yon (*ksaediew*), Hon Sun (*trɔ kmae*), Mom Phan (*skɔɔ arak*), Nop Oeun (*skɔɔ arak*), Chuon On (*capey dong weng*), Mom Phuong (*pey a*), and Nop I (voice); Man Maen's ensemble composed by Man Maen (*trɔ kmae*), Lonh Samnang (*ksaediew*), Men Pring (*pey a*), Men Supheak (*capey dong weng*), Men Borey (*skɔɔ arak*), Man Moeun (*skɔɔ arak*), and Um Chhoeun (*skɔɔ arak* and voice); Yun Theara's ensemble composed by Chhon Sam Ath (voice), Ouch Saveoun (voice, *chij*), Yun Theara (*trɔ kmae*, *trɔ sao*), Kruu Reth (*trɔ quu*), I Vanna (*capey dong weng*), Kruu Maly (*pey a*), Huon Kosal (*ksaediew*, *taakee*), Pum Sothea Kath (*skɔɔ day*); *Lkhaon Bassac* musicians from Banteay Meanchey: Nong Chak (voice), Han Chuen (singer, *krap*), Ay En (*trɔ quu*), Way Dorn (*khim*), Saron Bonrong (*trɔ sao*), Duong Tue (*taakee*) and Sem Sav (*skɔɔ bassac*).

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Guide to Khmer Transliteration, Pronunciation and Translations

Khmer script is derived from some form of Brahmi script of South India (Huffman 1970: 4). Different scholars have transliterated this script in various forms. The transliteration I have adopted in this dissertation is based on the system used by Huffman (1970). The Khmer alphabet comprises 33 consonants and 24 vowels and vowel combinations. Many Khmer words are characterized by clusters of vowels and consonants that make the transliteration difficult. However, many consonants have a corresponding sound in English, so they can be transliterated into the equivalent English symbol. For example:

d b n m y r l v s h

Other consonants have aspirated and unaspirated forms. For example:

/kh/ aspirated “k” as the word “kettle”

/k/ unaspirated “k” as the word “skull”

/ch/ aspirated “ch” as the word “chalk”

/c/ unaspirated “ch” as the word “peach”

/th/ aspirated “t” as the word “tell”

/t/ unaspirated “t” as the word “stall”

/ph/ aspirated “p” as the word “pull”

/p/ unaspirated “p” as the word “spill”

Other consonants such as:

/h/ voiceless glottal spirant. Initially like the English “hot”. In final position like the German “ch” in “Ich”.

/w/ spirantized in initial position, like the English “v” in “voodoo”. May be delabialized in final position.

/y/ like the English “you”

Consonant clusters in English are sometimes initial consonants in Khmer:

/ŋ/, as the word “sing”

/ŋ/, as the word “canyon”

These consonants appear also in the middle and at the end of words. The glottal stop is represented in Khmer by the consonant “q”.

Long and short vowels, and diphthongs can be distinguished using the International Phonetic Alphabet.

- a) Long vowels: /ii, ee, εε, ðð, əə, aa, aa, uu, oo, ɔɔ/
- b) Long diphthongs: /iə, iə, uə, ei, əi, ou, ae, əə, ao, ɔe/
- c) Short vowels: /ɪ, e, ɨ, ə, a, ɑ, u, o/
- d) Short diphthongs: /eə, uə, oə/

Since some musical terms transliterated according to Huffman’s system widely differ from the pronunciation, I have transliterated some key terms following the easier transliteration made by some scholars of Khmer music (Brunet 1979, Commission de Musique 1969, Giuriati 1988, McKinley 2002) to facilitate the reading and comprehension of these key terms. Below is the list of terms as written by the above-mentioned scholars, with Huffman’s versions presented in brackets:

- *Arak* (*qaarəəq*)
- *Bassac* (*baasaq*)
- *Kar* (*kaa*)
- *Phleng* (*pleeŋ*)

Unless otherwise noted, all interviews, song texts and song titles have been translated from the Khmer by me and Vathanak Sok.

All translations of quotations in foreign languages are my own. The quotations in their original language are placed in footnotes.

DVD Contents

1. *Srøy Kmaw* song (The black lady), Man Maen's ensemble, from *coul ruup* ceremony, 24 January 2015, Wat Rajabo village, Siem Reap province.
2. *Sampooŋ* song (Casual hairdo), Man Maen's ensemble, from *coul ruup* ceremony, 24 January 2015, Wat Rajabo village, Siem Reap province.
3. *Tummeāk Damriy* song (The Hunter with the elephant), Man Maen's ensemble, from *coul ruup* ceremony, 24 January 2015, Wat Rajabo village, Siem Reap province.
4. The entrance of giant, Ol Samang Lkhaon Bassac Phnom Penh troupe, from *Ikhaon bassac* performance "Pcuh Komaa Ciiwit", 23 May 2015, Kandaal province.
5. *Phat Ciey* song (To lift the edge of a fabric), Ol Samang Lkhaon Bassac Phnom Penh troupe, from *Ikhaon bassac* performance "Pcuh Komaa Ciiwit", 23 May 2015, Kandal province.
6. *Vong*, scene of battle, "Ol Samang Lakhnon Bassac Phnom Penh" troupe, from *Ikhaon bassac* performance "Tomñuañ Ciiwit Caw Kamsat". 21 February 2015, Phnom Penh.
7. *Naradam* song (Cambodian female name), Ol Samang Lkhaon bassac Phnom Penh troupe, from *Ikhaon bassac* performance "Pcuh Komaa Ciiwit", 23 May 2015, Kandal province.
8. *Tung Skɔɔ* (Ritual of beating the drum), Ol Samang Lkhaon Bassac Phnom Penh troupe, from *Ikhaon bassac* performance, 15 March 2015, Wat Kampong Prasat, Kampong Cham province.
9. *Haum Skɔɔ* and *ɔbam yiikee* on stage, Maan Prum's troupe, *Ikhaon yiikee* performance "Loop Pɛɛk Qantɛɛk Maccoriə", 15 January 2015, Cak Kraiy Tinj village, Kampot province.
10. *Noang Pisaraa* song, *ɔbam yiikee bouraan*, from live performance, Prom Mom's house, 08 January 2015, Chuuk district, Kampot province.
11. *Sampooŋ* song, from *Ikhaon bassac* performance "Preah Chinwoŋ", Bayon TV, 28 April 2015, Phnom Penh.
12. *Samrah Preah Pnom* (The mountain beauty), Yourn Young, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJOKQjhbM7M>.

Audio CD Contents

1. *Tummeāk Damrīy, trɔ̄ quu* by Man Maen, from lesson-interview, 10 October 2014, Wat Rajabo village, Siem Reap province.
2. *Sampoŋ arak, trɔ̄ quu* by Man Maen, from lesson-interview, 10 October 2014, Wat Rajabo village, Siem Reap province.
3. *Sampoŋ phleng kar bouraan, trɔ̄ quu* by Man Maen, from lesson-interview, 10 October 2014, Wat Rajabo village, Siem Reap province.
4. *Sampoŋ phleng kar samay kandaal, trɔ̄ quu* by Man Maen, from lesson-interview, 10 October 2014, Wat Rajabo village, Siem Reap province.
5. *Sampoŋ arak*, Reak Smey Soriya ensemble, from *coul ruup* ritual, 02 May 2015, Wɔə brɛɛŋ khom kaa haɛŋ village, Kampong Spəi province.
6. *Sampoŋ phleng kar samay kandaal*, Sovanna Phuum's ensemble, from studio recording, 11 April 2009, Phnom Penh.
7. *Sampoŋ bassac*, Nong Chak and Way Dorn's ensemble, from studio recording, 17 May 2015, Klaa Koun Tmey village, Banteay Meanchey province.
8. *Baay Khon Laəŋ Rooŋ*, Reak Smey Soriya ensemble, from *coul ruup* ceremony, 26 April 2015, Kralunch village, Kampong Spəi province.
9. *Baay Khon Caŋ Day*, Yun Theara's ensemble, from wedding ceremony, 05 March 2009, Phnom Penh.
10. *Kong Saoy phleng kar bouraan*, Yun Theara's ensemble, from wedding ceremony, 05 March 2009, Phnom Penh.
11. *Kong Saoy arak*, Reak Smey Soriya ensemble, from *coul ruup* ceremony, 26 April 2015, Kralunch village, Kampong Spəi province.
12. *Sat Tra Yaŋ*, Yun Theara's ensemble, from wedding ceremony, 20 March 2009, Phnom Penh.
13. *Srəy Kmaw*, Man Maen's ensemble, from *coul ruup* ritual, 24 January 2015, Wat Rajabo village, Siem Reap province.
14. *Haom Rooŋ*, Yun Theara's ensemble, from wedding ceremony, 20 March 2009, Phnom Penh.
15. *Haom Rooŋ*, Ieng Sitol, <www.youtube.com/watch?v=v0mdqVr-cBA>.

Introduction

I first worked in Cambodia seven years ago while I was a Master's student in Rome. During my initial fieldwork in Cambodia, I was introduced to *phleng kar* (wedding music). I subsequently embarked on doctoral research looking at the performance contexts of *phleng kar*. At that time I had no idea of the rich musical heritage of Cambodia and above all, I did not expect that my first fieldwork in Cambodia would have been the starting point of my doctoral studies.

Pithii Riep Kar (wedding ceremony) is one of the most elaborate ceremonies of the Khmers in terms of clothing, decorations, offerings and music. The ceremony consists of a succession of rituals which symbolize different aspects of the wedding and reflect the complexities of Khmer religious syncretism. Each ritual corresponds to a specific song whose song text describes or prescribes the ritual action within the overall structure of the ceremony.

Phleng kar music is infused with sacrality since it is also performed as an offering to Preah Pisnukaa, the god protector of musicians and artisans, and supernatural spirits called *arak*. It is also used in spirit possession/healing rituals known as *coul ruup* (Entering the medium) or *coul arak* (Entering the *arak* spirits), where music has the function of evoking and pleasing *arak* spirits so that they leave the body of the sick person. *Arak* spirits are recalled by *phleng arak* music. In addition, the *arak* spirits can ask musicians to play *phleng kar* songs. *Phleng kar* music also precedes popular theatre performances such as *Ikhaon yiikee* and *Ikhaon bassac* opera as an offering to supernatural spirits to ensure a good performance. In these forms of theatre, music accompanies the characters that come on the stage; it also expresses different feelings and actions as well as the general themes of the scenes such as love, battle, anger, compassion and so on.

1. Aims of the Dissertation

The primary objective of this dissertation is to document the *phleng arak*, *Ikhaon yiikee* and *Ikhaon bassac* genres which deserve more scholarly attention, since most Khmer music studies have been devoted to the classical music accompanying the Royal Ballet and the wedding music. On the contrary, there is a complete lack of sources related to a series of genres including the popular theatre music and the *phleng arak* music. While these genres are famous among the Khmers, they are not promoted abroad to the same extent as the classical dance and theatre genres primarily for historical reasons.

During the period of French colonization, the dance theatre was more accessible to French scholars as it was not spoken. The French focused on and promoted only the great traditions of Cambodia (Morotti 2010) – genres known to be of Indian origin, particularly

Sanskrit – for example, the Royal Ballet and Shadow Puppets theatre which both have UNESCO world heritage status and are considered icons of Cambodian culture worldwide.¹

Nowadays, *phleng arak* and the theatre genres are still practiced particularly in rural areas. They can be documented although some of these genres are disappearing, especially the *phleng arak* since people no longer believe in its therapeutic function. Other genres, such as the *Ikhaon bassac* and *Ikhaon yikee* popular theatre, are undergoing a process of transformation and adaptation from their traditional performance contexts to the mass-media and staged performance contexts. These popular theatre genres, which are interrelated to wedding music, developed a very different nature due to the foreign influences and are now “hybridised” with TV and staged performance. In contrast, the *arak* spirit music is similar to the wedding music, maintaining some of the oldest instruments that characterise the *phleng kar bouraan* genre (old wedding music).

During my fieldwork, I studied *phleng arak*, *Ikhaon yikee* and *Ikhaon bassac* by focusing on specific groups based in different geographic areas and selected according to their skills, their backgrounds and their “fame.” I worked with two *Ikhaon bassac* theatre troupes: one based in Banteay Meanchey province, in the north-western part of Cambodia, where the theatre troupes’ leaders used to perform the *bouraan* (old) form, and a second group who carry out the *samay* (modern) form and the televised performances of *Ikhaon bassac*.

This group, named Ol Samang Ikhaon Bassac Phnom Penh, is based in Phnom Penh and is led by a young man. In contrast, the group in Banteay Meanchey led by Nong Chak and Way Dorn was composed of older musicians. It was useful to work with two ensembles composed of musicians from different ages and background in order to compare data relating to performance practices, repertoires and ensembles. The *phleng arak* groups I worked with are based in two different parts of the country, Siem Reap and Kampong Spəi province in the north-western and southern area respectively, representing how regional differences affect the musical repertoire and the *coul ruup* ceremony in general. My key informants belonging to the two *phleng arak* groups, Man Maen from Siem Reap and Maw Yon from Kampong Spəi, are players of many *bouraan* instruments and they know very well the *phleng arak* repertoire as well as the *coul ruup* ritual changes over the years.

The study of these genres confirmed my hypothesis of an interrelation between repertoires which constitutes the second aim of my work. From the musical analysis, it appeared that repertoires interrelate in terms of musical features (melodic patterns, rhythm, performance practices and ensemble) and extramusical features (title, text, function and context of performance). For my dissertation, I planned an ethnographic account of the wedding and

¹ <https://ich.unesco.org/en/state/cambodia-KH> (accessed 16 June 2017).

healing rituals as well as theatre performances that would provide the first systematic analysis of these genres. Within this framework, I examine the movement of specific songs across the repertoires in question and demonstrate how the shared features have been adapted to the different genres in which they are performed. The overall goal of the dissertation is to provide an ethnographic map of these endangered Khmer musical genres and a consideration of how different musical and extramusical components are adapted to different genres.

2. Research Questions

Central to my ethnomusicological exploration of musical genres is the interrelation and adaptation of repertoires to different performance contexts. My dissertation aims to answer the following research questions:

- What are the various components that are understood to define each specific genre?
- Why are wedding songs performed in rituals of possession and theatre genres?
- How do the songs that are shared across multiple performance contexts interrelate?
- How are musical and extramusical features adapted to suit different genre contexts?
- Since each Khmer genre corresponds to a specific instrumental ensemble, does a combination of traditional and western instruments still fall within traditional concepts of genre?

My intent in this dissertation is to investigate the concept of genres and the classification system of Khmer traditional music and popular theatre from an *emic* perspective. To accomplish this, I re-examine and verify the validity of existing genre classifications made by foreign and Khmer scholars and compare them to the parameters that Khmer musicians adopt to classify and think about their music.

3. Literature Review: Studies on *Phleng Kmae* Music and Popular Theatre Genres

Few studies of Cambodian traditional music have been conducted due to the archaeological and historical orientation prevalent within Khmer studies. The first explorers' accounts in the 19th century and French writers at the beginning of the 20th century reflect the way in which Khmer music has been superficially described and considered as an uninteresting object of study. In a few studies, it is described in general, but no mention is made of musical analysis, ensembles and performance practices.

The main studies of Khmer rites of passage and rituals of possession have been conducted by a group of French and Cambodian scholars including Eveline Porée-Maspero, Chap Pin and Pich Sal who documented information of ceremonies collected in different parts of the country. Their work includes *Cérémonies des Douze Mois: Fêtes Annuelles Cambodgiennes* (1949), *Cérémonies Privées* (1958) and *La Vie du Paysan Khmer* (1969) which provide detailed

descriptions of the symbolism of ritual objects and the structures of the ceremonies. For example, *Cérémonies Privées* is composed of eight chapters each dedicated to a “private” ritual occasion (building a house, birth, puberty, ordination, wedding, illness and death). In the chapter on wedding, the function of music is just mentioned as “essential for the wedding and performed in each phase of the marriage ceremony” (Porée-Maspero 1958: 54); some legends and rituals preceding the ceremony are accounted.

The following chapter, *La Maladie* (Illness), briefly outlines the vital role played by the *skɔɔ arak*, the peculiar drum of *pheng arak* genre; its rhythm induces the *ruup* (medium) to fall into a trance:

A ritual of possession requires an ensemble including two *skɔɔ arākh*, tambours made from terracotta, vase-shaped with the bottom covered with snake skin. Musicians sing airs to please the spirits and soon one of them enters the *rub*, who starts to shake and stir her head faster and faster from left to right. (ibid: 70)

However, there are no music transcriptions, song titles or texts. No description of the musicians or instruments or the connection between songs and ritual scenes in both weddings and possession rituals are included. Pich provides transcriptions of a single melodic part of four *phleng kar* songs in the appendix of her book on wedding ceremony *Le Mariage Cambodgien* (1964). In this book, Pich mentions some song titles corresponding to specific wedding rituals and adds some information presented in *Cérémonies Privées* accompanied by photographs of some rituals. Another valuable historical resource on the wedding ceremony is *Kpuon Abah-Bibah, ou le livre de mariage des khmers*, published in Khmer (1965) and in French (1975), written by a Cambodian father and son, Ker Nou and Nhiek Nou, who worked in the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh. This work consists of two articles which describe the royal wedding rituals including twenty-one song texts in Khmer with a French translation in the appendix. Although music is not mentioned, this work proves the historical depth of today’s repertoire.

The Commission de Musique gives a general description of musical genres based on ensembles, instruments, music and transcriptions in *Musique Khmère* (1969). The Commission de Musique was formed by a group of Cambodian professors at the Royal University of Fine Arts of Phnom Penh who gathered useful information for the study of Khmer to classify the traditional Khmer music. Unfortunately, their study was interrupted by the advent of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1975 when they were forced to escape abroad. The section devoted to *phleng kar* music describes briefly the mythical origins of the wedding, instruments of the *phleng kar* ensemble, and some rituals connected to a *phleng kar* song. The transcriptions include a single melodic line paired with the drum part. Similarly, the section on *phleng arak* music contains a brief introduction to the healing power of *phleng arak* music, a list of the *phleng arak* instruments and a melodic and rhythmic transcription of four *phleng arak* songs. These songs

are performed for the interrogation of the spirits at the beginning of the ceremony, and for thanking them for assisting and healing the sick person.

One of the most important sources of wedding music is Brunet's article "L'orchestre de mariage cambodgien et ses instruments" (1979); it is an extract of his fieldwork conducted in different provinces of Cambodia before the coup d'état of 1970. The article is composed of seven sections (history and legends, the orchestra, the instruments, singers, musicians and their social position, apprenticeship and musical structure). The main focus of the article is the section on instruments which includes a detailed description of each instrument. However, there are no descriptions of rituals and the wedding repertoire.

Brief sections on the *phleng kmae* genre, including wedding and *arak* music, are included in Giuriati's dissertation *Khmer Traditional Music in Washington D.C.* (1988) which investigates Khmer music performed in refugee communities in Washington D.C. Giuriati describes wedding ceremonies and ensembles performed in Washington during 1983-1986, providing the vocal transcription of thirteen songs. The *phleng arak* music is described as rarely performed among the refugees. Although its function of healing is maintained, the musical genres and ensemble changed since the classical *pin piət* instruments and repertoire were adapted to the ritual context. Even though there are no detailed descriptions of the rituals and musical practices, Giuriati's study provides an ethnographic account of the Khmer wedding ceremony and music in a particular community at a given time.

While all of the sources reviewed are valuable but brief and introductory, one of the recent studies that presents both music and ceremony together in a detailed ethnography is McKinley's PhD dissertation *Ritual, Performativity and Music: Cambodian Wedding Music in Phnom Penh* (2002). McKinley analyses the vital function of music in the wedding ceremonies in Phnom Penh at the end of the 1990s. Her study sheds light on the powerful impact of music on the ritual scene since it articulates and strengthens the ceremony structure. On the other hand, McKinley examines the Khmer wedding ceremony as a performative event; she analyzes the meanings of the song texts by distinguishing two categories of songs: "descriptive" songs that describe the ritual action and "prescriptive" songs that metaphorically comment upon the ritual scene.

However, although this study provides some musical transcriptions, it focuses on an anthropological perspective of the wedding ritual structure, the social and religious symbolism of the ceremony and the performance practice within the ritual. By following McKinley's approach of categorizing the song texts as "descriptive" and "prescriptive," my Master's thesis focuses on *phleng kar* music from an ethnomusicological perspective by examining the process of improvisation and the connection between songs, texts and their function within the wedding ceremony context (Billeri 2009).

This survey of the Khmer music literature portrays the lack of research on *phleng kmae* music, in particular on the *phleng arak* genre, and on the popular theatre genres. The study of popular Khmer theatre is considered to be a niche. As a result, short paragraphs with general information are dedicated to Cambodian music and theatre performance in both Southeast Asian Theatre Studies and encyclopaedias (Brandon 1967; Miller and Williams 1998). A large number of studies concern Khmer classical music, dance and theatre in the last century. UNESCO and Cambodia's Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts have jointly published reports, mostly in Khmer, on musical instruments (Keo 1994), wedding ceremonies and performing arts. For example, *Danse classique khmère: folklore, Ikhaon, musique* (2006) provides detailed information on the performance contexts, costumes of Khmer folk dance and popular theatre genres including *Ikhaon yiikee* and *Ikhaon bassac*. Another example is *Khmer Performing Arts* (2003) by the Research Committee on Arts and Culture which gives an overview of different kinds of performing arts in Cambodia but does not include musical analysis.

Therefore, there is a clear need not only to update the research of the scholars above reviewed but also to document endangering rural rituals and popular theatre genres on which no academic research has been conducted so far.

4. About the Concept of Genre in Ethnomusicology

The concept of genre is widely used in ethnomusicology but rarely theorized in relation to oral music (Sparling 2008). It has been more studied in popular music (Fabbri 1982; Frith 1996; Holt 2009; Negus 2013). In his study *Genre in Popular Music*, Holt (2009) delineates the reasons why there is little scholarly writing about genre and why it has been marginalized despite the increasing interests in issues of identity and culture in music studies over the past couple of decades. The first reason is the greater difficulty of establishing theories of genre since genre is: a fluid concept which often owes more to social/narrative constructs than to the music per se. The second reason is that research on genres has been oriented toward the collective and the general; an emphasis on the general and the collective in culture has not always been embedded in an understanding of the individual and the particular, however culture in music discourse cannot be understood without paying attention to the individual and the particular.

In her study *On concepts and classifications of musical instruments*, Kartomi reflects the fact that:

Some ethnomusicologists consider classifying instruments as a desiccated, formalist kind of study (...) Classifications are often synopses or terse accounts of a culture's, subculture's, or individual's deep-seated ideas about music and instruments, as well as, in some cases, philosophical, religious, and social beliefs. (Kartomi 1990: 7)

Genre has implications for how, where and with whom people make and experience music. Without paying attention to genre, we would be poorly prepared to discuss a number of important issues: How do musicians communicate? What are the functions of rituals in a musical tradition? How can we think comparatively about music? (Holt 2009)

The concept of genre is a complex issue in ethnomusicology as genres are context-specific and have different kinds of markers. A group of Italian ethnomusicologists led by Diego Carpitella, referring to the Italian music oral traditions, reflected on the complexity of the concept of genre which involves not only musical aspects but also verbal texts and performance contexts (Laboratorio Edison 1993). The genres which can be gathered from Italian ethnomusicological publications derive mainly from contiguous disciplines (folklore, and history of religions) and the main function of establishing genres has been classificatory.

However, most of the taxonomic denominations described by non-specific terms designating the mode of execution (*songs* for vocal passages, *sonatas* for instrumental pieces), working circumstances, textual themes and performance practices are shaped and coined by scholars only for studying purposes. In this connection, researchers have failed to pay attention to the traditional terminologies used within the communities to which music belonged due to the difficulties of adapting indigenous denominations of a limited area onto a wider and more general classification. "There is no such thing as general music, only particular music. Music comes into being when individuals are encultured into particular musics and ways of thinking about musical difference" (Holt 2009: 2).

Research on indigenous classifications in ethnomusicology received little attention until the late 20th century. Zemp's investigation into 'Are' are concepts relating to instruments and their classification served to clarify and explain complex terms. His research shows how complex indigenous musical systems can be and the importance of understanding *emic* genre terms since they may reveal much about how music is conceived, defined and created within a particular cultural context (Zemp 1979). Genre is not only "in the music" but also in the minds and bodies of particular groups of people who share certain conventions which are created about musical texts and contexts in which they are performed and experienced. Holt uses the concept of "genre culture" as a tool for analyzing and contextualizing various notions of genre among different groups of people:

Genres are identified not only with music, but also with certain cultural values, rituals, practises, territories, traditions and groups of people. The music is embedded in all of these things, and the culture concept can help us grasp the complex whole because of its capacity to represent a large entity of connections and sharing among many people. (Holt 2009: 19)

In her study of *phleng kar* wedding music, McKinley (2002) makes a comparison of some indigenous terms used by the Thai and Khmer musicians; she shows how these two musical

traditions have different meanings and criteria of classification, although they share many musical terms and instruments. For example, the general Khmer term for music is *phleng*; the same term in Thai means “composition/piece.” The chosen characters of division among genres are culturally determined; for example, while the concept of genre in Khmer music is related to the combination of ensembles, contexts/function of performance and repertoires, in Thai music a composition can be played by any number of different ensemble types. Myers-Moro (1988) describes how, with some exceptions, repertoire and context are not tied to the three standardized ensemble types (*wong piiphat*; *wong khruang saay*; *wong mahoorii*).

In functional terms, the Khmer conceive of instruments as well as genres as being primarily religious or secular. For example, the *pin piat* classical music and the *phleng kmae* traditional music are considered as sacred while the *mahaorii* and popular theatre genres are considered as music for entertainment. Playing techniques are associated with music and therefore affect musical style. Khmer musicians classify the instruments in three general categories: *kroeng dam* (percussion instruments) which include both membranophones and idiophones; *kroeng ksae* (string instruments) which include the chordophones; and *kroeng phlum* (wind instruments) including the aerophones. Each instrument can be classified according to different parameters. For example, the aerophone *pey a* employed in *phleng arak* ensemble is categorized according to the performance technique (*kroeng phlum*), the ensemble (*kroeng phleng arak*), its role as a leading instrument (*kroeng noam*) or as a traditional instrument (*kroeng dantray bouraan*). “Whereas the Sachs-Hornbostel system is based on theory, the Khmer system is based on performance. The Khmer system was created to serve neither organology nor musicology, but only for the practical making of Khmer music. Thus, it derives from the culture, from within, instead of from without” (Miller and Williams 1998: 183).

This kind of classification is called by Kartomi as “natural” or “culture-emerging” classification and it is defined as “a reconstructed model of an ordering of data in the minds of members of the culture” (Kartomi 1990:13). “Culture-emerging” schemes express the general ideas or identity of the culture that produces them; general ideas include the performance practice, the way sounds are produced, religion, social structure and so on. In contrast, “artificial” or “observer-imposed” schemes are based on the aim of the researcher/observer and do not reflect the broad musical or symbolic base of culture. Laboratorio Edison reflects on the “prescriptive value” of indigenous terminology to classify genres which are based on specific performing contexts and performances procedures rather than on musical features:

Thus, investigations on traditional terminology reveal a prescriptive value; music is classified according to specific circumstances and performance procedures, thus separating and distinguishing them from other expressions. The features of specificity and exclusiveness attributed to the genre, differentiating it from others, are not found in the formal/structural

connotations of the musical expressions but rather in the ritual circumstances and coordinates the usage, which are both specific and exclusive. (Laboratorio Edison 1993:13)

Central to my dissertation is the overlapping and exchange of repertoires across different genres. The interrelationship of repertoires is discussed by Myers-Moro in *Music and Musicians in Contemporary Bangkok* (1988). One section of her study is devoted to compositions which cross lines between categories of repertoire. For example, a song in *saung chan* or *chan diaw* metrical level which appears in the entertainment repertoire (*sephaa mahori*) can appear in *saam chan* metrical level or a *thaw* form.² Morton (1976) mentions songs which change their names in Pali or Sanskrit when they are arranged in *thaw* form. In Thai music, the exchange of repertoire is primarily related to the changing of the metrical level of the songs while in Khmer music the interrelation of repertoires concerns not only musical but also extramusical features such as function, titles and texts.

The study of the interrelationships and exchanges of repertoires illustrates the fluidity of notions of genre. By analysing the concept of genre in folklore, Harris has defined it as “a site of contestation” in which categories of classification are blurred, merged and overlapped: “Genre served a dual purpose in that it provided a system of classification as well as a conceptual framework for articulating characteristics of the individual components or units within that classification” (Harris 1995:514). While the notion of genre is useful for classification purposes, it is clear that people tend to use it in a fluid manner, allowing items to crossover between categories.

5. Fieldwork: Methodology and Approach

My first research experience in Cambodia was in 2009 to complete my MA thesis on the relationship between wedding rituals and their corresponding songs. During a three-month visit, I attended several wedding ceremonies in Phnom Penh and recorded more than fifty-three songs. The research findings discussed in this dissertation are the result of both my first research and a ten-month fieldwork period within my doctoral programme, from September 2014 to July 2015, in the capital city Phnom Penh, Kampot, Kampong Spæi, Banteay Meanchey and Siem Reap provinces (figure 1).

² *Thaw* is a variation form based on the technique of expansion and/or contraction of a given composition and a constant doubling of tempo obtained by doubling the number of *ching* strokes per measure (Morton 1976: 186).

Figure 1: Research Areas



Since my research involves different genres, I worked with various groups and musicians of different ages, background and expertise. Currently, the only institution involved in the art sector, particularly traditional music, is the Cambodian Living Arts association (CLA) in Phnom Penh. It works to preserve and restore traditional Khmer music by providing music tuition to disadvantaged young people and promoting Khmer traditional music by selling instruments, cultural products (CDs, traditional Khmer handcrafts), and cultural performances in tourist areas of Phnom Penh and Siem Reap city. The founder of CLA, Arn Chorn-pond, is a former child-soldier who survived the Khmer Rouge genocide in the 1970s. He was adopted by an American officer working in the refugee camp in Thailand and grew up in Lowell, Massachusetts. Arn came back to Cambodia in the 1990s looking for musicians who survived the killing fields across the whole country. Supported by American institutions, he founded CLA and employed the Masters who survived the Khmer Rouge genocide as teachers. Therefore, in both my research field trips, CLA supported me and helped me to contact some of these old Masters, musicians and ensembles specialising in the genres I was studying.

For my first research on wedding music, I worked with a well-known musician, Yun Theara, who is currently teaching at the Dance and Music faculty of the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh. I followed him and his *phleng kar* ensemble in wealthy families' weddings taking place in luxurious villas at the heart of Phnom Penh; in this context, they played the ancient wedding instruments *phleng kar bouraan*. This ensemble is rarely used in urban areas but it is usually played in weddings of rich people. I also worked with the Sovanna Phum association's ensemble whose members were less well-known than Theara's ensemble; they

played the *phleng kar samay kandaal* (semi-traditional ensemble)³ in the wedding of middle-class families. Therefore, I was able to document for my thesis the relationship between wedding ceremonies and music according to the social context of the wedding.

One of the big problems I faced in the field was the language. During my first trip in Cambodia in 2009, I did not know Khmer, so I worked with a local translator, Vathanak Sok, who became my husband. During my last fieldwork, my language skills improved thanks to a one-year Khmer course at SOAS but I was still unable to conduct interviews and do translations by myself. Therefore, in both of my research experiences, my husband helped me a lot with the language and accompanied me in remote areas of the country to attend the performances.

Thanks to the support of CLA, I met two of my key informants of *phleng arak* music, Man Maen and Maw Yon. Although they mainly play *phleng arak* music, they also know the wedding repertoire, making and playing instruments from different genres. They rehearse with their respective groups and teach their students in small huts close to their houses (figure 2).

Figure 2: Man Maen's house (on the right) and his hut (on the left), Wat Rajabo village, Siem Reap Province



³ The semi-traditional ensemble is composed of ancient Khmer instruments such as the monochord (*ksaediaw*), the three-string fiddle (*tro kmae*), the long-necked lute (*capey dong weng*) and instruments of foreign influence such as the zither (*taakee*), the dulcimer (*khim*) and the two-string fiddle (*tro sao*).

Since they are retired and no longer teach in Phnom Penh, I travelled to Siem Reap and Kampong Spæi provinces where they respectively live. The musicians of the *phleng arak* genre are usually old, between seventy and ninety years old. Unfortunately, due to the advent of modern medicine and the complexity of the performance practices of *phleng arak* music, young people are discouraged from learning the repertoire, and these traditional healing practices are gradually disappearing even in rural areas. As a result, one of the main difficulties I faced in the field was to find places where the rituals are still performed. The only way of attending the ceremonies was to follow the musicians. I was able to attend only two *coul ruup* ceremonies in Siem Reap and seven ceremonies in Kampong Spæi province.

I usually visited the two Masters, Man Maen in Siem Reap and Maw Yon in Kampong Spæi, a few days before the ceremony to interview them and gain more information on the ceremonies we were going to attend. Before the start of the rituals, they introduced me to the medium who organized the ceremony asking for permission to join the ceremony. After the ceremonies, I was usually invited by the medium and the musicians to eat together, and it was a good occasion to interact with all of the members of the ensemble and the medium listening to their conversations. Sometimes I did not understand them clearly, but I recorded these conversations and, with my husband's help, I translated them later following Steven Feld's approach learning how to formulate appropriate interview questions. Firstly, Feld listened to conversations often without understanding much of what was said; later he began recording these conversations without interrupting them and then working with an assistant for their transcription and translation. "This turned out to be the best way to learn what sorts of questions could be asked and what kind of language was appropriate for asking them" (Feld 1982: 164). Sometimes, the medium evaluated the performance of the musicians; the performance was good if the music satisfied the spirits facilitating the trance.

The few days or weeks after the ceremony I usually rented a room in the provincial town of Kampong Spæi or Siem Reap nearby the Master's village so that I could meet them every day. I adopted different interview strategies with the elderly informants. In fact, question-and-answer interviews bored them so that their answers were not reliable. Therefore, I decided to interview them by taking some *trɔ̄ quu* (two-string fiddle) lessons (figure 3). I started to study the *trɔ̄ quu* during my previous fieldwork as it is an instrument that is played in both *phleng kar* and *phleng arak* music. Originally, I hoped to become proficient through these lessons to perform with them, but time and circumstances did not allow it. Therefore, I attended the rituals as a researcher.

However, learning the instrument was an effective way of interviewing them as I chose the songs to learn and asked about them. I learnt *phleng arak* songs, especially those interrelated with the wedding repertoire so that we could play the different versions of the

songs and talk about similarities and differences between the two genres. It was an efficient way to gain insights into musical aspects, terminology and the musicians' idea of genre.

Tracking down musicians of *Ikhaon yikee* and *Ikhaon bassac* was a daunting challenge. Most of the theatre musicians work as professionals at state institutions such as the Ministry of Culture and Royal University of Fine Arts. Consequently, it was difficult to interview them while they were working and to schedule further meetings; I was able to interview only the leaders of the groups individually at their home and some musicians before the performances. The *Ikhaon bassac* group was based in Phnom Penh. However, I also interviewed another group in Banteay Meanchey province. The leaders of this group, Way Dorn and Nong Chak, used to work for the CLA but they no longer perform. I visited them several times to obtain information about the *Ikhaon bassac bouraan* performance and the traditional *bassac* repertoire and to talk about the interrelation of genres as they are also *phleng kar* musicians.⁴

Since it was necessary to attend the theatre performances, I contacted the theatre group in Phnom Penh. One evening I was watching the television, and I saw the performance of a famous *bassac* troupe called Ol Samang Lkhaon Bassac Phnom Penh. Since theatre groups perform on television to promote themselves, their contact details were superimposed on the screen. The leader, Ol Samang, was the youngest of my informants (he is forty years old) and when I met him for the first time, he was proud that a foreign researcher was devoted to the study of *Ikhaon bassac*.

I followed his troupe during the performances in the neighbouring rural villages of Phnom Penh. I was also able to attend television performances on Bayon TV where he usually performed and interview the television producer. While the television performance usually lasts from twenty minutes to one hour, the performance in the villages lasts around six hours, from nine in the evening to three/four in the morning. Before each performance, I usually did informal interviews and conversations with musicians and actors backstage. I adopted the same methodology when I worked with the *Ikhaon yikee* troupe living in Chhuck district, in Kampot province. I met one of the leaders of the group, Khuen Bem, in the traditional school of music in Kampot where he teaches *yikee* drum. However, my main informant was his brother-in-law, Maan Prum, who has a deep knowledge of *yikee* theatre and music.

Attending and filming the theatre performances was very challenging. The venues of the performances, in the surrounding space of the pagodas, were dusty, crowded and above all, the quality of the sound was really poor due to the amplification system. This is the reason why I have also recorded many songs in studio, particularly with the group in Banteay Meanchey. In

⁴ It is worth noting that most of my informants are able to play wedding music since it is considered the most important and autochthonous kind of music whose knowledge is essential for playing the other genres in question.

general, I discussed and commented on the audiovisual recordings directly with the musicians and actors by showing them pictures, video and audio recordings collected during ceremonies and performances to classify the songs, ritual objects, characters' costumes, roles and names. It was also an effective way to build human relationships, interact with informants and formulate new research questions.

Figure 3: Interview-lesson with Man Maen, Siem Reap province



6. Structure of the Dissertation

The first three chapters introduce the musical and extramusical aspects of *phleng arak* (music for *arak* spirits), *Ikhaon bassac* and *Ikhaon yiikee* theatre since no other published works have provided any of this basic information. I situate this information within religious, historical and geographical contexts since these rituals, including wedding rituals, reflect the Khmer cosmology and religious syncretism. Chapter 1 outlines the structure of the *coul ruup* ritual and the function of the *phleng arak* songs within the ritual context by focusing on specific songs recorded during rituals I attended in Siem Reap and Kampong Spə̀i provinces during my fieldwork. As a result, ethnographic excerpts (in italics) and musical transcriptions from the ceremony are juxtaposed with a more general commentary which provides additional interpretive and contextual information.

In the following two chapters, I focus on some aspects of *Ikhaon bassac* (Chapter 2) and *Ikhaon yiikee* performance (Chapter 3). The first part of both chapters concerns the origins, occasions of performance, ensemble, the *bouraan* (old) and *samay* (modern) forms and the religious syncretism of some pre-performance rituals. In the second part of Chapter 2, through the account of different performances documented in the field, I examine the connection of songs to the performance contexts, dramatic stories, characters, scenes, spirits as well as some interrelated musical aspects. These musical aspects concern song texts, vocal style, rhythm, the formal structure of the performance and songs as well as the terminology employed by the musicians and actors to describe their music. The last part of the chapter focuses on the creative process of *Ikhaon bassac* script underlying the composition of the stories and the choice of related songs.

Due to some common aspects between *Ikhaon bassac* and *Ikhaon yiikee* theatre, Chapter 3 presents a similar structure. The first part is an introduction to general characteristics of *Ikhaon yiikee* while the second part is devoted to a description of the structure of *Ikhaon yiikee* performance including the *robam yiikee* dance preceding the theatre performance, and the interrelation of songs between *Ikhaon yiikee* and *robam yiikee* repertoires by taking some songs as examples. Analytical description of the music performances (Marett 2009; McKinley 2002; Rice 1994; Seeger 1987; Sugarman 1997) is used as a tool to situate the songs within the structure of the ceremonies and performances highlighting their function, musical features and their relationship with their performance context.

The most extensive part of my dissertation is devoted to the analysis of musical and extramusical variables of some interrelated songs from the repertoires previously discussed which are taken as case-studies. Chapter 4 focuses on the interrelationships of genres. Although there are no written sources, the *phleng arak*, *Ikhaon yiikee* and *Ikhaon bassac* genres are considered to have originated in the *phleng kar* genre. However, this relationship is shown by some instruments that are used in all of the genres and the interrelation of some songs according to musical (ensemble, tune, pitch, scale, rhythm) and extramusical variables (title, text, function and performance contexts). For example, the wedding song *Sampoong* has the same title as a *phleng arak* and a *bassac* song. In the wedding context, *Sampoong* accompanies the “empty” moments of the ceremony when the bride and the groom change their ceremonial dress. During *coul ruup* ritual, it is played to evoke the spirit to possess the medium, while in the *Ikhaon bassac* context it is adapted to scenes of love and nature.

Besides the different function, the three versions of *Sampoong* share some musical traits such as the scale and the rhythm while other aspects such as the song text, the musical texture and the style are directly connected to the genre they belong to. By highlighting the shared features of the songs, I demonstrate how some components, directly linked with their genre,

modify the theatrical, ceremonial and ritual function of the piece. My discussion here is informed by ethnomusicological works that emphasize the role of music as essential in some or all stages of the wedding and healing rituals in which music marks specific points in the transition processes accompanying special ritual actions (McKinley 2002; Rice 1994; Slobin 1984; Sugarman 1997).

Another critical source of my study is Sparling's work (2008) on Cape Breton Gaelic music that aims to examine the *emic* constructions of genres and analyze them as performative processes. She defines the concept of genre in music oral tradition through eight discourses (time and place; intertextuality; interpretation of genres; genre gaps; contesting genres; social status; social action) showing how a particular song that cannot be easily categorized or is identified by more than one genre label can be the starting point for assessing cultural aesthetics, values, adaptation and change. She also highlights the difficulty of categorizing traditional songs under a specific genre label and song title. While she focuses on particular similarities and differences between the Gaelic repertoires through discourses, I also concentrate on the musical features that can be the basis of certain genres' definitions highlighted through discourse. The last part of Chapter 4 focuses on the role and the historical and sacred meanings that Khmer musicians attribute to wedding music.⁵ The sacredness and antiquity of *phleng kar* music are the reasons why it is considered the most traditional Khmer genre.

Chapter 5 discusses the patterns of changes in traditional Khmer music and popular theatre performance on television and for commercial productions (Hobart 2000; McKinley 2002). Both the wedding repertoires and the theatre songs (*camriəŋ yiikee*; *camriəŋ bassac*) are performed within television music competitions and recorded for commercial productions. Therefore, traditional music is transformed and adapted to these new contexts through the use of western instruments, new songs or texts. Firstly, I introduce the television programmes and recordings in which these genres are performed. Secondly, I provide my analysis of the transformation of the musical texture showing how the songs belonging to the genres in question are de-contextualised and the heterophonic texture of Khmer music is recreated on western instruments. This musical adaptation results in a hybridisation of music so that the boundaries between genres are blurred. In fact, in the television context the same ensemble, a combination of traditional and western instruments, is used for different genres.

⁵ See McKinley (2002) and Billeri (2009) for a detailed description of the Khmer traditional wedding ceremony and music.

The conclusions draw a sort of comparative map of these endangered Khmer musical genres focusing particularly on *phleng arak*, *lkhaon yiikee* and *lkhaon bassac*, and summarise the main findings of my research, particular regarding the following issues:

- the way in which musicians classify and think about the interrelation and movement of songs across repertoires;
- the culture-specific kinds of markers used to distinguish genres;
- the classification and concept of genre in Khmer music;
- the way in which television performances and commercial recordings hybridise and “modernise” traditional musical features and performance practices and, at the same time, allow the circulation of songs across different genres.

Chapter I

The Interactive Communication between *Arak* Spirits, Medium and Musicians in *Coul Ruup* Rituals

The medium, an old lady, sprayed perfume on the monk who was sitting on a deck chair; then she signaled the musicians to stop playing by raising her hand and asked for another song called Tummeāk Damriy (Hunter with the elephant). Tummeāk Damriy is a hunter spirit accompanied by an elephant. Once the spirit possessed the medium, she was given a wooden stick with two bunches of banana, two bottles of water and nom koom⁶ attached on its poles. She carried the wooden stick on her shoulder as the arak was hunting, sometimes she turned her ears to the musicians; the drum beats increased in tempo and the volume of the melodic plaw (roads)⁷ rose once she approached the ensemble. She threw a bottle of water to the musicians. Then the spirit checked to see if the offerings, particularly the chicken, were placed appropriately in a croonj (a rattan basket). Successively, musicians played Srøy Kmaw (The black lady) song for the second time, and a lady close to her held up a kramaa⁸ to welcome the spirit. Then she asked for the song called Sampoonj, sharing the same name as a wedding song. After a few minutes, the spirit left her body.

This first chapter is an introduction to the main features of *phleng arak* music that accompanies the ritual referred to either as *coul ruup* (Entering the medium) or *coul arak* (Entering the *arak* spirit). *Coul ruup* or *coul arak* ceremonies are still performed in various Cambodian rural areas including Siem Reap and Kampong Spəi provinces on which my research focuses. In the *coul ruup* ceremony, one or more spirits possess a *ruup* (medium) who is an intermediary between the spirits and the human spheres. The ceremonies are organized by the mediums for healing purposes, paying homage to their master spirits and reinforcing their relationship.

Mediums and musicians describe the *arak* as frivolous and nasty spirits; they enjoy eating, dancing, having fun and listening to the music. They are considered to be benevolent and, at the same time, malevolent spirits. In fact, on the one hand, they protect their followers; on the other they can harm them. Consequently, it is necessary to perform rituals of exorcism and therapy. In this context, a specific repertoire called *phleng arak* (music for *arak* spirits) has the function to evoke the *arak* spirits and to please them so that they leave the body of the sick

⁶ Traditional Khmer sweet made of sticky rice wrapped in banana leaves.

⁷ *Plaw* is an indigenous term used to explain the process of improvisation called *bamphlay* (taking different roads). The term *plaw* (roads) indicates the different versions of the melody.

⁸ *Kramaa* is a traditional Khmer scarf especially used in the countryside. It is also used as towel and hat.

person. However, music is not only a means of their identification and manifestation, but it also has the function of entertaining and amusing the spirits. In fact, the spirits can even request songs from other genres, if they like.

The chapter is structured around a performance-oriented analysis of *coul ruup* rituals. To understand the *phleng arak* music and its ritual context, at the beginning of the chapter, I briefly introduce the *arak* spirits' cult within the complex Khmer religious system and cosmology as well as the master-disciple relationship between the medium and the spirit. Successively, I describe the general structure of the *coul ruup* ceremony including the participants and their role, and the purposes of the ritual. The second part of the chapter narrows down to the repertoire, focusing on the relationship between music and spirits, and the first connection between *phleng arak* and *phleng kar* music which will be discussed in a broader scenario in Chapter 4.

The remarkable features of *phleng arak* music connected to the possession, particularly the *accelerando* of *skɔɔ arak* (drums) beats and the loud timbre of the ensemble, will be examined by analyzing some video extracts from the ceremonies I attended to show how, when and why the tempo increases and the sound rises. My intent, here, is to explore the sonic appearance of the spirits constructed within an interactive communication (Brinner 1995: 169; Norton 2000:102) between spirit, medium and musicians to show how music facilitates the possession and is connected to the ritual action.

1. *Coul Ruup* Ceremony in Context

1.1 Khmer Religious Life and the Animistic Spirits Beliefs

Cambodian rituals such as weddings and rituals of possession reflect the Khmer religious life since “the signs, symbols, and other components of the ritual act as vehicles for expressing cosmological meanings” (Tambiah 1970:87). The Khmer believe in animistic spirits, termed by some researchers as “folk” religion (Ebihara 1968:363; Shapiro 1994:65), that co-exist harmoniously with other religious practices such as Buddhism and Hinduism as described by Saveros Pou:⁹

A long-standing, happy, if not harmonious, co-existence of various religious systems (...) Most of the ancient Brahmanic gods are well present in the new religious system; they have been incorporated therein through Buddhism, literature and magic, and lexical creation. (Pou 1987–88: 340)

The official religion of Cambodia is Theravada Buddhism. In addition to Buddhism, different religious practices and beliefs, such as Hinduism and local animistic cults, co-exist.

⁹ See Gombrich (1988) for Theravada Buddhism; Porée-Maspero (1962), Ang (1986) and Forest (1992) for local animistic spirits; Bhattacharya (1961) for Brahmanism in ancient Cambodia.

Theravada Buddhism flourished at the beginning of the 15th century replacing the Mahayana Buddhism that arrived in Cambodia in the 5th century as evidenced in the most famous monument of Angkor Thom site, Bayon temple (Chandler 1983: 73–80). However, the predominant religion of the Khmer Empire was Hinduism.

The Khmers have believed in Hindu deities since the beginning of the Christian era. Hinduism flourished during the Angkorean period between the 9th and the 15th century when Khmer kings identified themselves as Hindu gods such as Shiva and Vishnu. They built enormous temples' like mountains to recall the divine Hindu realm called the *Meru* Mountain. One of these mighty temples is Angkor Wat built in the 12th century. In addition, the Khmers distinguish a multitude of supernatural beings such as *meebaa* (ancestors' spirits); *neāq ta* and *arak* (guardian and protector spirits); *kmaoc* and *priay* (ghosts); *teewadaa* (local spirits living in the forest and natural places) and *cumniang pteāh* (spirits residing in houses). Some of them are benevolent supernatural beings but most of them can harm people or a member of the family.

According to Coedès (1948), animistic beliefs are considered a peculiar trait of Southeast Asian cultures before the first contacts with Indian culture at the beginning of the Christian era. While Hinduism is only connected to ritual contexts, as evidenced by ritual objects symbolizing the *linga* of Shiva and the *yoni* of Uma in the wedding ceremonies, Buddhism and animistic spirits cults imbue Khmer everyday life:

(...) Buddhism deeply permeates the individual and social life. In parallel, and in a perfect symbiosis, traditional animistic belief has its place, as the altar of the guardian spirits finds its place in the corner of a pagoda. In general, Buddhism has always been very peaceful and tolerant towards practices incompatible with its teaching. (Ang 1986: 9)¹⁰

For example, on the occasion of Khmer New Year, *coul ruup* ceremonies are performed in the Preah Vihear building of the pagodas, to invite the *neāq ta* to protect the village.¹¹ According to Buddhist principles, the Khmers have to observe the five precepts in their everyday life by doing good actions to reach enlightenment in their next life. They must also respect the spirits related to their family's ancestors or live in natural places; for example, they must ask them permission before building a house, placing a stage, or collecting fruits as they can get angry and punish them or a member of the family even with death. Therefore, spirits as part of the natural environment play a major role in everyday life as discussed by Friedson in the context of the *Tumbuka* healing ceremonies in Northern Malawi (Friedson 1996:164). Although Buddhist and

¹⁰[Le bouddhisme imprègne profondément la vie individuelle et sociale. En parallèle, et dans une symbiose parfaite, l'animation traditionnelle trouve sa place, tout comme l'autel de l'esprit tutélaire trouve sa place dans un coin du monastère. En général, le bouddhisme a toujours montré très pacifique et tolérante de pratiques incompatibles avec son enseignement.] (Ang 1986:9)

¹¹ See Bertrand (2000) for the relationship between Buddhism, mediums and animistic cults in Cambodia.

folk religions can be distinguished, for example Buddhist ceremonies are celebrated in the pagoda while healing rituals in the mediums' house, and operate in different ritual spheres, they are not entirely separable:

Shrines for spirits are found on Buddhist temple grounds; magical practitioners are also devout Buddhists; life cycle and other ceremonies combine offerings to both spirits and monks; appeals are made to Buddha and spirits in time of trouble. (Ebihara 1968:424)

Importantly, some master spirits are considered to be Buddhist monks such as the spirit called *kruu rɔbɪən*. A medium in Kampong Spəi province told me about the curious story of *kruu rɔbɪən*:

After Buddha period, there was a powerful monk who could render himself magically invisible; therefore, people want to learn magical formulas from him. To learn it effectively, the monk asked them to prepare *slaa doung* [a ritual object made of coconut tree trunk] and some candles as an offering. The smoke of the candles rose and blew toward people around so that the knowledge and practice were passed to the next generations. As a result, the monk was called *kruu rɔbɪən*. [From the verb *rien* that means "to learn"] (Medium, from personal communication, 06 March 2015, Kampong Spəi)

The syncretism of Buddhist and animistic spirits is also reflected in one of the annual Buddhist festivals, *Pcum Bən*, to honour deceased ancestors' spirits; Buddhist components are found in symbolic objects within wedding ritual¹² and ceremonies for the spirits. For example, *kree preah thɔə* (the altar for the master spirit) and some offerings for *arak* spirits such as *slaa thɔə*¹³ and *doung thɔə*¹⁴ can also be offered to Buddha. During a *coul ruup* ceremony in Siem Reap, a Buddhist monk attended the ritual and interacted with the spirit (figure 1.1) reflecting Khmer religious syncretism. The *arak* spirits are afraid of Buddhist incantations, and the *arak* spirits are subordinated to Buddha as discussed by Lester: "Buddha, both pre- and post-enlightenment, is clearly self-sufficient, in command of all, he is constantly served by gods, spirits, and animals" (Lester 1973:39). In Cambodia, animistic spirits and different religious beliefs live together harmoniously:

For ordinary Khmer, Buddha and ghosts, prayers at the temple and invocations to spirits, monks and mediums are all part of what is essentially a single religious system, different aspects of which are called into play at different, appropriate times. (Ebihara 1968:364)¹⁵

The syncretism of Khmer beliefs is also reflected in the arts; in fact, music, dance and theatre are intrinsically connected to the celestial sphere not only because music is performed in every

¹²For wedding ritual objects see Billeri (2016); Lim (1967); Pich (1968); Porèe-Maspero (1958) and Thierry (1974).

¹³A cylindrical section of banana trunk (about 3" or 4" high) supported by several bamboo skewers set at angles in the sides.

¹⁴*Doung thɔə* is a variant of *slaa thɔə* which has a whole coconut as base.

¹⁵This syncretism is also present in other Theravada Buddhist cultures. See Brohm (1980) on the Burmese; Kaufman (1960) on the Thai.

ceremony but also because of its beauty that makes it sacred and favoured to deities and supernatural spirits (Giuriati 2003: 57).

Figure 1.1: A medium dancing for a monk during a *coul ruup* ritual, Siem Reap province



1.2 The Arak Spirit

When I asked Man Maen about the origin of the *arak* spirit he told me a curious anecdote about his role and magic powers:

He [*arak*] was well known during the Hindu era, and his story is related to Preah Pisnukaa¹⁶ the god protector of musicians and craftsmen. *Arak* was born during the Angkorian time [9th–15th century]. Angkor temples have been built thanks to Preah Pisnukaa and the *arak* spirit who was a sort of engineer. For example, he used red thread cotton to draw a kind of map of Angkor. He also organized the Riep Preah Pisnukaa, a ceremony for planning Angkor temples. At that time the *arak* was believed to be a person, but later he became a spirit because his power was no longer strong. He was in competition with Priəm, the King's advisor, who was less able to predict the future. The *arak* could see things that others cannot; for example, when the king was sick the *arak* predicted his sickness and wrote its name on a sort of slab. Since the *arak* was a potent predictor, the king destroyed the *arak*'s scripture to keep his secrets. However, the *arak*'s foreseeable power has decreased over the years, and consequently, his predictions could be inaccurate. (Man Maen, interview, 13 October 2014, Siem Reap)

The term *arak* derives from the Sanskrit *ā-rakṣa* that means protector or guardian. The *arak* is defined as a *kaac* (nasty) spirit that resides in the forest, mountains and natural places, or in the proximity of villages. The definition of the *arak* spirit is not so simple. Ang Choulean

¹⁶In the Khmer cosmology, Preah Pisnukaa corresponds to the Hindu god Visvakarman who is considered to be the "Architect of the universe" and god of craftsmen.

(1986:117) highlights the ambiguity of the term and the notion of *arak* which is often confused with that of *rāksasa* who is a kind of demon. According to Ang, the *arak* spirit belongs to both the savage *kmaoc priy* (spirits of the forest), who also embody the spirits of dead people, and to the *kmaoc srok* (spirits of the village). *Arak* spirit is also assimilated to the *yeaq* (giants), fictitious characters considered as hostile semi-deities in India.

In Cambodia, *yeaq* are often protagonists of epic poems or *Ikhaon bassac* theatre stories in which they play the role of tough and angry characters (see Chapter 2). Therefore, on the one hand, the *arak* is defined as savage and malevolent spirit who can harm people and once possessed, tell them their needs, particularly food, as the main reasons for their action is hunger. On the other hand, the *arak* is also considered to be a benevolent spirit and protector. For example, the *arak* can apparently protect a family lineage from bad spirits. In fact, it can happen that he/she is powerless against malevolent spirits; at the same time, he/she can get angry with one of their protected and cause illness. Therefore, *arak* has a dual nature as demon and protector.

My informants, both mediums and musicians, distinguish different categories of *arak* spirit: territorial spirits, ancestors' spirits and master spirits. They can be either male or female; however, *kruu thom* (master spirits) are mostly male; the "king" of the big masters is called *Samdac Preah Kruu*. Others are territorial spirits or ancestors' spirits such as *Ta Pich*, *Ta Peek*, *Ta Pang*, and *Ta Loung*.¹⁷ Each *arak* has its name, for example, *Ta kung*, an ancestor's spirit, will declare his name when being caught through the music, then he claims some offers like banana, Khmer white wine and chicken. If the *arak* likes the offerings, he will leave the sick person.

The *arak* spirits' names are the same across different geographic areas although there are some differences regarding ritual offerings and repertoires as shown in the following sections. The *arak* also explained the tools that are necessary for the next ceremony such as ritual objects, clothing, food, drink and even music. Spirits can manifest their personalities (through specific actions), simply speak to their descendants (explaining the reasons of the illness) or pass out good luck (blowing coconut juice or water). The *coul ruup* ceremony is organized for multiple reasons, and the function of the *arak* within this ritual changes accordingly.

The *arak* spirits can be recalled to ensure protection for their protected disciples, including the mediums. In this case, the ceremony does not involve healing, but the *arak* spits water or sprays perfume to purify the followers or some people who are particularly vulnerable to bad spirits. When the ceremony is for healing purposes, the *arak* spirit is interrogated to know the reasons of the illness and its remedies. The *arak* usually harms a person who does not

¹⁷The term *Ta* means grandfather but it is also used to address an old man.

observe the *arak*'s rules and does not respect the societal conventions of their environment. For example, the *arak* can harm a person who picks fruit without asking permission:

People who visit the forest and steal fruits run a high risk of being punished. Around Angkor National park, the guards frequently collect some fruits, and consequently *arak* spirits punish them. Some of them die because they have not recovered from the illness in time. So when you are walking in a place where you are not the owner you have to ask permission before taking something. (Man Maen, interview, 06 October 2014, Siem Reap)

If people do not show respect to the ancestors' spirits, the *arak* can punish them by causing illness. Consequently, a *coul ruup* ceremony is required. In some villages, the *arak* spirits are still considered as doctors and fortune-tellers.

Besides having a healing purpose, the ceremony aims to gather family members once a year to maintain or strengthen their relationships; at the same time, it is for enjoyment as well as restoring broken relationships. Once per year on a pre-fixed date, between January and May, the medium or healed people have to organize the ritual of paying homage to the *arak* called *Laang Rooj*. They set a pavilion outside the house where the ceremony takes place. Even neighbours, friends and pupils are admitted to join the ceremony. They are villagers who have been recovered by *arak*; so when the sun rises, they ask the medium to embody their healers (Porèe-Maspero 1938; Ang 1986). In the past, during the night, the medium's relatives gathered in his or her house to reaffirm the family union and their relationship with the *arak*. I did not attend this ceremony during my fieldwork but, according to the mediums I interviewed, the *Laang Rooj* ceremonies are currently celebrated in the afternoon and last a few hours.

2. The Coul Ruup Ceremony

The first coul ruup ceremony I attended was on 24 January 2015 in Siem Reap province. My husband and I went to Man Maen's house at 2:45 pm. He is the leader of the phleng arak ensemble in his village. We travelled together by motorcycle to the ceremony and after a few minutes, we reached the medium's house. The ceremony was organized for healing purposes and for celebrating Mrs Man's mediumship. When we arrived, Mrs Man and a group of old ladies, her assistants, were preparing the offerings for the spirits. Successively, they placed the ritual objects and offerings in different settings according to the spirits' preferences and the chaayam drums close to the musicians.

2.1 Participants

a) Ruup (Medium)

Arak spirits communicate with human beings by possessing the body of a *ruup* and building a sort of master-servant relationship. *Ruup* is a Khmer word from the Sanskrit *rupa* which means

“shape,” “appearance” or “representation.” The *ruup* embodies the shape in which the spirits appear. The medium “performs various actions according to the inclination of the spirit within her” (Ebihara 1968:437). In some provinces such as Kampong Spæi, the medium is called *meemut* or *snuâl meemut* meaning “one who has many followers or students.”¹⁸ The *ruup* can be male or female even though the male medium is called *kruu* (Master/ teacher)¹⁹ since the term *meemut* derives from the word *mee* that means woman. The differences between female *ruup* and male *kruu* reflects the ideal Cambodian gender system, as detailed in the moral codes for men and women, *cbap proh* and *cbap srây*, which were given literary shape in the early 19th century in the form of long poem (Oversen and Trankell 2010: 148).

Here, I adopt the term *ruup* since it is the most common term for medium. According to a medium’s account, the *arak* usually chooses a *ruup* to possess by causing a high fever. The *ruup* dreams about the *arak* who reveals them to be their shape. The spirit prescribes the ritual objects, music and food preferences.²⁰ Mediums, who have often been healed by the *arak*, consider that spirit as a master spirit (*kruu thom*) but the *arak* chooses few of them as their disciples (*koun säh*).²¹ This liaison implies a relation of strong dependence, even an obsession, based on the observation of a sort of code of behaviour called *tra naam*. Each medium compiles a manual called *kumpii*. The *kumpii* contains the *tra naam* and mantras that the medium has been taught as well as his or her remedies and ritual procedures. This code is a sort of Holy Scripture jealously kept secretly by the *ruup*; sharing it with others would be to commit an offence to the teacher (*kruu thom*) and damage the healing power of the *ruup* and his/her *ksae* (lineage).

The mediumship is transmitted from generation to generation. To acquire this power an abstinence from doing or eating something is needed. By respecting and observing the *arak*’s precepts, mediums will be under the *arak*’s protection, but a medium who does not observe the prescribed rules might be punished by death. Once the *ruup* promises obedience to his/her *kruu thom*, he/she builds a sort of altar called *asna* in a suitable place of the house. At this point, the medium is healed and can cure patients. The *ruup* can also embody other spirits which are called on behalf of sick people for consultation but only after having honoured his or her master spirit (figure 1.2). Therefore, there is a rigid hierarchy in the Khmer animistic system in which the *ruup* serves as a link between the supernatural and the human beings (Table 1).

¹⁸Bertrand uses the term *kruu boramey* to indicate a mediumship related to Buddhist practices (Bertrand 2004 cit. in Oversen and Trankell 2010: 154).

¹⁹Another term for male medium is *ta roonj* (Commission des Moeurs et Coutumes du Cambodge 1958: 69).

²⁰ See Ang (1986) for a more detailed description of the offerings.

²¹The term *seek/koun seek* (disciple) is quoted in Commission des Moeurs et Coutumes du Cambodge (1958) and Ang (1986).

The communication between *arak* and *ruup* is called *klang* meaning “to communicate”, and it involves the former telling the latter the causes of the illness – usually a wrong doing – and suggesting an appropriate remedy. In the past, *arak* spirits were considered to be doctors because they explain the causes of illness and reveal the cures. Nowadays, this belief is still alive in rural villages where health care service is less developed than in urban areas.

Figure 1.2: A medium paying homage to her *kruu thom*, Siem Reap province



b) *Medium's Assistants*

The assistants who attend to the possessed must interpret and facilitate the spirits' needs. Since assistants are usually also mediums, they have already learned to respond in particular ways to the *ruup* while possessed. They facilitate the communication between the possessed and the musicians and communicate with the spirits to ensure that the possession progresses smoothly. In the ceremonies I attended in Siem Reap province, up to four mediums were possessed in turn within the same ceremony. However, some of them played different roles at the same ceremony: ill person, medium's assistant and possessee.

The role of the assistant is to support the medium during the trance. Once they know which spirit is possessing the medium, they provide some objects related to that spirit(s) (clothing of different colours, particular ritual objects, and food). Successively, they interrogate them by asking questions about their health and economic situation, and reporting questions

from the followers who cannot speak directly to the spirits. Importantly, they also ask musicians for the songs requested by the spirits. Therefore, during the development of the ceremony, the mediums change roles, switching between patient, assistant and follower.

c) Musicians

Musicians are usually invited by the medium holding the *coul ruup* ceremony. The medium gives them money and gifts, and offers a meal before or after the ceremony. The musicians sit in a semi-circle next to the altar and the medium as they communicate with him or her during the different ritual phases. The *skɔɔ arak* (hand drum) players have the most important role of the *phleng arak* ensemble. The *skɔɔ arak* is a single-headed small goblet-shaped drum made of cobra or snake skin. A spot of tuning paste in the middle of the drum head allows playing different pitches. The rhythm of the *skɔɔ arak* facilitates the possession process by gradually increasing the tempo; Khmer musicians call this process *lieng skɔɔ* (fast *skɔɔ*). The number of *skɔɔ* ranges from two to twelve (Commission de Musique 1969) since the spirits are not only recalled by the fast rhythm but also by the *tɿɔɔn* (heavy) timbre of the instruments.

The melodic instruments contribute to making the sound louder and more pleasant to the spirits. They include a *pey a* (double reed aerophone), *capey dong weng* (long-neck lute), *trɔ sao* (two-string fiddle with a cylindrical resonating chamber, similar to the Chinese *erhu*) and *trɔ quu* (lower-pitched two-string fiddle). Either *trɔ* or *pey a* “decorates” (*taŋ*) the melody depending on the confidence of the players. Some instruments such as the *pey pok* (bamboo flute) are used as a solo instrument, especially to recall spirits coming from mountainous regions. The composition of the ensemble varies slightly across different geographical areas. For example, the ensemble Reak Smey Soriya in Kampong Spəi province used the *capey dong weng* instead of the *trɔ quu* which was employed in Siem Reap (figures 1.3–1.4).

The *phleng arak* ensemble includes a singer, usually an old man. The singer can also be a drummer, and he has the duty of recalling the spirits by proffering clear words to address each spirit. Women have never played or sung *phleng arak* songs. According to local belief, female singers are considered to bring misfortune: “the hen singing into the house is a bad thing” (Man Maen, personal communication, 06 October 2014, Siem Reap). The members of *phleng arak* ensembles I worked with had a similar background. Elderly musicians survived the Khmer Rouge genocide (1975–79) by hiding their knowledge of music and their instruments or playing propaganda songs. After the fall of the regime, they started to play *phleng arak* again. However, the repertoire was impoverished and some instruments, such as the *trɔ kmae* (three-string fiddle), omitted. The spirits can also possess some of the musicians but without music and in a different context.

The younger musicians of the ensembles in Kampong Spæi and Siem Reap were sons of the elderly members of the ensemble. They learned from their fathers. However, according to my informants, nowadays the young do not want to learn the *arak* repertoire due to economic reasons, the small number of ceremonies and the technical difficulties of *phleng arak* music. Therefore, they prefer learning wedding music which is more requested. Most of them do other jobs; performing at rituals provides an opportunity to supplement their incomes especially in the rural areas.

Figure 1.3: Man Maen's *phleng arak* ensemble, Siem Reap province



Figure 1.4: Reak Smey Sorya ensemble, Kampong Spæi province



d) *Followers/Audience*

Phleng arak musicians primarily respond to the actions of the medium, rather than the audience, and do not usually modify musical phrases or the basic structure of songs in the course of

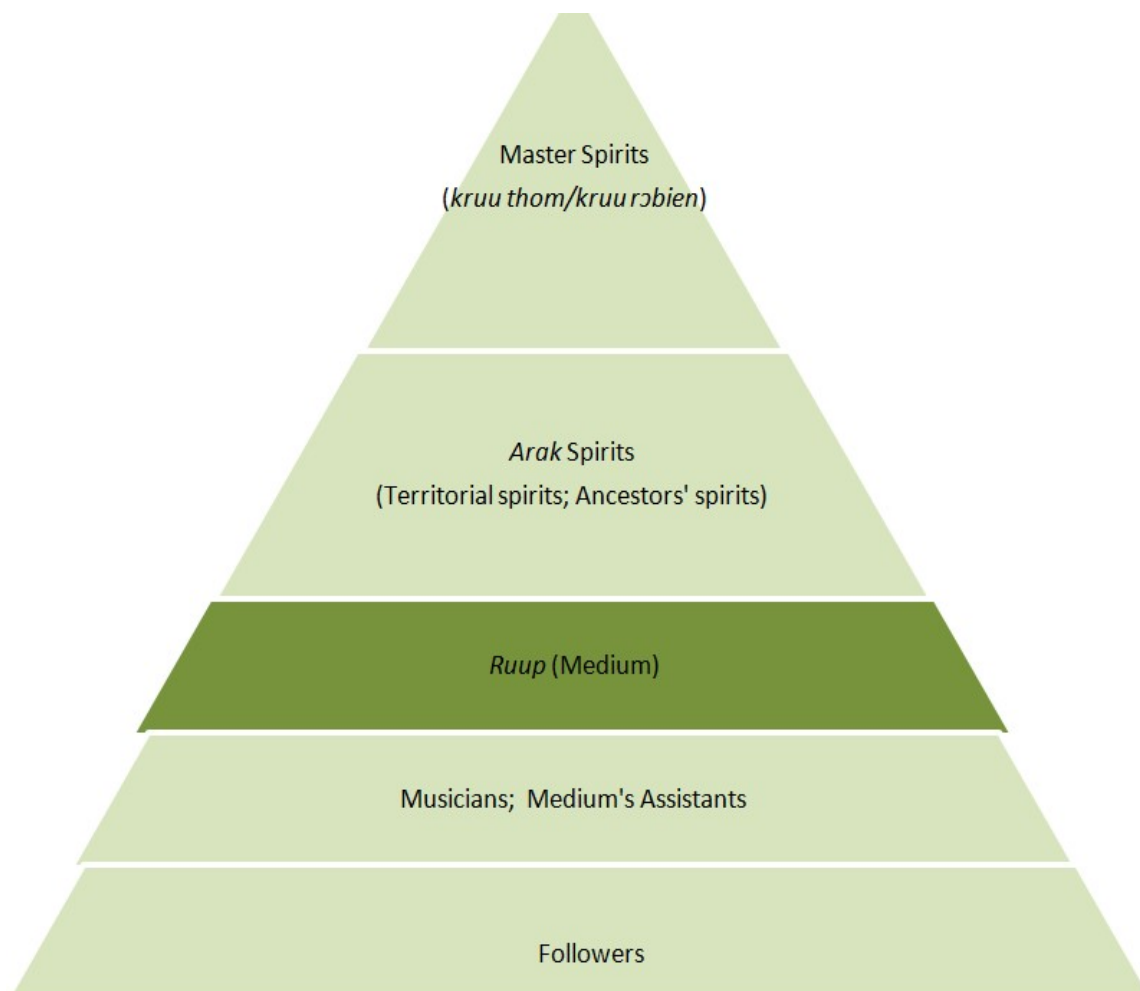
performance but only change tempo and dynamics. In addition to the human audience members, the *arak* themselves can also be considered as a type of audience – embodied by the medium and responsive to music. This aspect is shown by some actions of the *ruup* such as turning the ear to the musicians, beating the tempo, clapping to express appreciation and signalling the musicians to play a faster rhythm. But, if the music does not satisfy the spirits' expectation, the medium stands and stares at the musicians.

The human audience of *coul ruup* generally comprises family members, fellow patients and even curious or concerned outsiders who observe the communication between the healer and the patient. They sit in front of or next to the altar and behind the medium and are not allowed to interact physically or verbally with them; they simply audit the ceremony and follow its development thanks to the relationship between music and spirits which articulates the possession ritual.

According to my impression, the audience enjoyed the ritual and were amused with the funny actions of some spirits. They laughed and observed the movements, gestures and actions of the spirits. By contrast, the spirits' physical involvement in the ritual sometimes scared them. For instance, it can happen that mediums point to one of the follower as the *arak* sees evil spirits, ghosts or other *arak* around. At this point, the follower is allowed to physically approach the medium to be "purified" through different treatments such as spraying perfume or applying beeswax on the followers' neck and back according to the medium's preferences.

Some of the followers have a sort of master-servant relationship (*kruu coap snuəl*) with the master spirit. This relationship refers to a connection between the spirit and a person who recovered from an illness invoked by the spirit and then became a follower of the spirit. This relationship is hereditary and can remain so for many generations. The relationship ends when the spirit receives an offering called *coom* (see Section 2.2). From then on, the person will no longer be allowed to be blessed or cured by the spirit. However, most followers do not want to end this relationship because the spirit is considered to be their doctor.

Table 1: The hierarchical relationship between supernatural and human spheres



2.2 Purposes, Places and Structure of the Ceremony

The ceremony took place outside the medium's house. The mediums set an altar on which were placed different offerings: coom,²² baay səy pak chaang (one-level baay səy), two slaa thɔə, three bamboo skewers with betel leaves²³ affixed, three incense sticks, and a skewer with a piece of areca nut affixed to the top. A second altar called kree preah thɔə for master spirits was set outside the pavilion. Between the two altars, musicians were sitting around the croon, a bowl made of rattan containing traditional Khmer sweets, tobaccos, incense sticks, a whole roasted chicken, soft drinks and some Khmer money.

The medium is the ceremony's owner who firstly starts the *arak* possession, and there are usually three or more mediums participating in a single ceremony. Mediums organize the

²²A green coconut with a cone-shape top on which are pinned sugar palm leaves with a betel nut fixed with a bamboo stick in the middle. See Ang (1986:89) for other kinds of *coom*.

²³The leaves of a climbing plant, called betel, chewed by people in Asia.

coul ruup ceremony for different purposes. When the main objective is healing, the ritual is organized to find the reasons of the illness and its remedies.

The structure and some components of the *coul ruup* ceremony (offerings, rituals, and altar setting) as well as the repertoire and ensemble are different according to the geographic area in which the ritual is performed. For example, the ceremonies I attended in Siem Reap province were organized outdoors since they involved healing practices (figure 1.5), while in Kampong Spəi the rituals took place inside the medium's house since they were organized for recalling the medium's master or ancestors' spirits (figure 1.6). However, even when the ceremony is performed for healing purposes, the medium has to pay homage to his or her master before possessing other spirits. In some cases, there is no possession since it consists of making offerings, including music, to master spirits (a ceremony called *Pithii Twaay Phleng*) or *arak* to fulfill a vow or free oneself from one's vow (called *Pithii Liebamnan*).

In this context, *phleng arak* and *phleng kar bouraan* music are offered to the spirits along with other offerings. It can be organized on its own or soon after the *coul ruup* ceremony. In Kampong Spəi province, it was performed after the *coul ruup*. Musicians sat around a basket full of raw rice surrounded by traditional Khmer desserts placed on a banana leaf which represent happiness and sweetness. At the top of it was a bowl of cooked rice, a whole chicken covered in a banana leaf and two red crossed candles that symbolize the cow's horns. A stair made of bamboo was placed at the side of the basket to represent a way to reach the harvest and store the rice. The medium said that it represents the different harvesting phases. The basket of rice along with the music was offered to ask the spirit for protection from harmful influences.

Figure 1.5: Outdoor *coul ruup* ceremony, Siem Reap province



Figure 1.6: Indoor *coul ruup* ceremony, Kampong Spəi province



The length of the ceremony depends on the number of spirits involved. Although each medium has his or her master spirit, he/she can embody up to twenty-five more *araks*. Some *arak* spirits can take a night or even a day to enter a person. Nowadays, ceremonies occur in the early afternoon or the evening according to the musician's needs, but “in the past, they were mostly performed at night because musicians worked in the rice field during the morning from 7 am to 4 pm” (Man Maen, interview, 06 October 2014, Siem Reap). *Coul ruup* ceremonies occur between January and May before the start of the rainy season. “During these months they look for the reasons to possess a person to entertain themselves through the music and dance” (Man Maen, personal communication, 10 May 2015, Siem Reap). Recently, the number of ceremonies has decreased due to the individual economic situation. However, people never give up their sacred vow even though they cannot afford to organize ceremonies.

The *arak* ceremony is composed of entry, middle and final section. Before the start of the ceremony, musicians perform pre-rituals. In Kampong Spəi they perform the *Pithii Twaay Preah Pisnukaa* (Ritual of paying homage to Preah Pisnukaa) by playing *Haom Roonj* (The sacred pavilion) to invite the masters of music²⁴ and honor Preah Pisnukaa. This ritual is also performed before wedding ceremonies and theatre performances. In Siem Reap it is replaced by *Pithii*

²⁴ “Master of music” refers to master spirits and it is not capitalised. The word “master” is capitalised for human master musicians.

Roam Chwæel Croon (Ritual of dancing around the *Croon*)²⁵ (figure 1.7) which is accompanied by *Croon Qanlong* (the shining *croon*) and *Non Touc* (literally *non* means “(to) aid/support”; *touc* means “small”) tunes played on the aerophone *pey pok*. These songs are also played to evoke the master spirits residing in mountainous regions (figure 1.8).

Figure 1.7: The *croon*



Figure 1.8: *Pey pok* player is recalling a spirit residing in mountainous regions, Siem Reap province



²⁵ *Croon* is an offering prepared by the medium specifically for the musicians. It consists of a bowl made of rattan containing traditional Khmer sweets, a bunch of bananas, tobaccos, incense sticks, candles, a whole roasted chicken, soft drinks and money. During the ritual, musicians sit in a circle around it.

Man Maen told me that during the *croog* ritual, musicians used to dance three times around the *croog* while singing a sort of call and response with the rest of the group. However, this ritual was not performed in the ritual I attended. When the ceremony's purpose is for recalling the ancestors' spirits or *Twaay Phleng* (Offering the music to the spirits), musicians perform the *Pithii Saen Ciidoun Ciitaa* (Ritual of offering to ancestors' spirits) and *Niät Mit Teang Pram Pii Sandaan*²⁶ (Inviting the extended family). These rituals aim to recall and invite the extended family of the ancestors' spirits, and to inform them that a vow has been fulfilled.

Table 2: Pre-ritual and post-ritual performances, with connected songs in Siem Reap (S.R.) and Kampong Spæi (K.S.) provinces

<i>Coul Ruup</i>	Kampong Spæi	Siem Reap
Pre-performance Ritual	<p>1) <i>Pithii Twaay Preah Pisnukaa</i> (Ritual of paying homage to Preah Pisnukaa)</p> <p>♪ = <i>Haom Rooj</i> (The sacred pavilion)</p> <p>2) <i>Pithii Saen Ciidoun Ciitaa</i> (Ritual of offering to ancestors' spirits)</p> <p>♪ = <i>Kong Saoy</i> (literally <i>kong</i>= "group"; <i>saoy</i> = "to eat")</p>	<p><i>Pithii Roəm Chwæel Croog</i> (Ritual of dancing around the <i>croog</i>)</p> <p>♪ = <i>Croog Qanlong</i> (The shining <i>croog</i>)</p> <p>♪ = <i>Non Touc</i> (literally <i>non</i>= "aid/support"; <i>touc</i> = "small")</p> <p>♪ = <i>Kok Krong</i> (The strong egret)</p>
Post-performance Ritual (not performed for healing ceremonies)	<p>1) <i>Pithii Twaay Phleng</i> (Ritual of offering music)</p> <p>♪ = <i>phleng arak</i> and <i>phleng kar</i> songs</p> <p>2) <i>Niät Mit Teang Pram Pii Sandaan</i> (Inviting the extended family)</p> <p>♪ = <i>Sampaw</i>²⁷ <i>Ciy</i> (Boat of victory)</p>	Not Performed

²⁶The extended family of the ancestors' spirits is traditionally composed of seven generations, from great-grandparents to great-grandchildren.

²⁷*Sampaw* refers to a small boat made of bamboo and leaves which represents an *arak* spirit's ritual object.

During the first stage of the ceremony, musicians “explore” with different *phleng arak* songs until they find the appropriate and favorite song(s) of the *arak* spirits, as occurs in ritual traditions such as tarantism (De Martino [1958] 2006: 138). Although the rhythm is essential to excite the *arak* spirits and to provoke the possession, the melody serves as a “musical-motto” or “sung-theme” which identifies each spirit. In tarantism also, “musical mottoes” are used as a means of identifying the spider responsible for the possession, such as the tarantula wolf spider in Italy or the scorpion in Sardinia (*argia*) which is thought to cause the patient’s illness. The treatments vary according to the different kinds of tarantula or *argia* (the widow, the nubile and the wife).

The success of this music “exploration” depended on the skill of the musicians, as did the efficacy of the cure, once the “right music” has been found (De Martino 2006: 214). Carpitella observes that “the single *tarantati* are stimulated to dance only by one of these keys [A major, D major, B minor, and A minor] while others remain indifferent to others” (Carpitella 1961: 299).²⁸ Just as each spider is believed to have its own taste in tunes, so it is with the *arak*. Consequently, the repertoire contains a traditionalized series of tunes and songs from which one must choose the one (or ones) best suited to each particular case. However, the mediums themselves understand which song should be performed to be possessed quickly.

The number of the songs normally played in a ceremony depends on places (particularly the place where the musicians are invited the first time), offerings and spirits. Once the *arak* possesses the medium, he/she declares the name so that the musicians know which songs should be subsequently performed for each type of *arak*. After the possession, the spirit can request other songs. Successively, the medium explains the reasons for the illness and answers the questions of the *arak*’s followers; they ask about health, success and even lottery numbers. Mediums can do different ritual actions to cure or bless people according to the main aim of the ceremony.

During the ceremonies in Siem Reap, mediums usually danced, ate, smoked, chewed betel leaves and slapped banana tree stems on the floor. In Kampong Spæi, except for one ceremony where the mediums embodied a monkey’s spirit, they did not dance but applied beeswax on the followers’ neck who in turn knelt down on the ground. In both provinces mediums spat coconut juice from their mouths, considered a pure liquid, and sprayed perfume from a bottle on the followers’ bodies to keep away negative influences. The musicians continued playing songs which were not specific to the possession process but serve mainly to entertain the spirits. In the last section of the ceremony, the spirit leaves the medium. Specific

²⁸ [I singoli tarantati sono stimolati alla danza solo da una di queste tonalita’, mentre restano insensibili alle altre.] (Carpitella 1961: 315)

ritual actions of the medium such as falling on the floor, shaking the *ptull*²⁹ or covering his/her face with a hand, signal the *sdah* (exit of the spirit). Then the medium looks dazed, not knowing what occurred during the possession.³⁰

The *coul ruup* ceremony ends with some rituals performed by musicians. In Siem Reap, the ceremonies ended with *Saa Rooj* (Dismantling the pavilion) or *Croam* ritual the latter of which was accompanied by the song called *Kok Krong* (The strong egret). It was followed by the *Saa Pidaan* (Ritual of rolling the ceiling)³¹ (figure 1.9) accompanied by the *Saa Sapbaay* song (literally *saa* means “to roll something up” and *sapbaay* means “happiness”). In Kampong Spæi, the final ritual was *Beh Pkaa Twaay Kruu* (Ritual of collecting the flowers) for the masters of music. This ritual was accompanied by *Beh Pkaa* (Collecting flowers), also known as *Beh Phlae Cæa* (Collecting fruit). Fruits symbolically represent happiness throughout Cambodia; one of the musicians, usually the oldest of the group, collects some fruits tied to the altar by a string, then gives the fruits to the medium on behalf of the spirit. The *Beh Phlae Cæa* ritual is performed when the ceremony is for master spirits. Both the *Saa Pidaan* and the *Beh Pkaa Twaay Kruu* rituals signal the end of the *coul ruup* ceremony.

Figure 1.9: *Saa Pidaan* ritual accompanied by the flute *pey pok*, Siem Reap province



²⁹ A small round footed silver tray for holding ritual objects used by the medium.

³⁰ See Guelden (2007: 165) for a similar process in *Nora* dance-drama performance in Southern Thailand.

³¹ *Pidaan* refers to a sort of ceiling made of a white cotton fabric from which betel leaves hang. It is set if the *arak* ceremony's purpose is to get rid of malevolent spirits.

Table 3 summarizes the succession of the rituals discussed above. The *coul ruup* ceremony is framed by rituals conducted before and after, in which the musicians are the protagonists of the ritual action. They perform some pre-*coul ruup* rituals to honor the master of music; rituals to recall and invite particular types of *arak* spirits such as ancestral family spirits and master spirits; and rituals that signal the end of the ceremony. Specific songs correspond to each of these rituals.

Table 3: General structure of *coul ruup* ceremony. The abbreviation “K.S.” is for Kompong Spæi province and “S.R.” for Siem Reap province. When the abbreviation is not specified the ritual/song is performed in both provinces.

Structure of the Ceremony	Ritual	Song
<u>Entering</u> (<i>coul</i>)	Mediums shake their body; they proclaim the name of the <i>arak</i> spirit(s).	Music “exploration” or songs requested by medium
<u>Middle Section</u> (Interrogation; healing; blessing)	Mediums can do different actions: dancing, eating, wearing clothes of different colours, smoking, chewing betel leaves, applying powder on their face, applying beeswax on the people’s neck, slapping two banana leaf stems, blowing water.	Songs to entertain the spirit(s) from <i>phleng arak</i> or other genres including the <i>phleng kar</i> repertoire
<u>Exit</u> (<i>sdah</i>)	Mediums fall; cover their face with their hand; sit down saying “I am going out.”	No specific songs
<u>Final Rituals</u> (musicians only)	1) <i>Pithii Croonj</i> or <i>Saa Rooj</i> (S.R.) (Ritual of dismantling the pavilion) 2) <i>Pithii Saa Pidaan</i> (S.R.) (Ritual of dismantling the ceiling) 3) <i>Beh Pkaa Twaay Kruu</i> (K.S.) (Ritual of collecting flowers)	♪ = <i>Kok Krong</i> (S.R.) (The strong egret) ♪ = <i>Saa Sapbaay</i> (S.R.) (literally <i>saa</i> = “to roll up” and <i>sapbaay</i> = “happiness”) ♪ = <i>Beh Pkaa</i> or <i>Beh Phlae Cæa</i> (K.S.) (Collecting flowers or collecting fruit) ♪ = <i>Saang Vaa Phleng</i> (K.S.) (Music for ending the ceremony)

3. The Repertoire

As discussed above, the *phleng arak* repertoire includes songs which are connected to preliminary and final rituals performed by the musicians. Interestingly, pre-ritual songs not only precede *coul ruup* ritual but are also performed before every wedding ceremony and theatre performance as an offering to deities and a means for recalling supernatural spirits.³²

The Khmers regard music as an offering, in the same way as an incense stick or a bouquet of flowers placed in a sanctuary. To make an offering of music to the Divinities enables one to acquire “merit” in a future life. (Brunet 1974: 219)

The music itself is considered as an offering to gods and supernatural beings; this is the reason why Khmer musicians say that music must be played “beautifully.” One of the pre-performance rituals shared among theatre and ritual contexts is the *Pithii Twaay Preah Pisnukaa* (Offering music to Preah Pisnukaa). However, only the function and some song titles such as *Haom Roon* are shared since the texts and the melodies are different, relating to each given genre (see Chapter 4). In the *coul ruup* context, pre-rituals and final rituals signal the start and end of the ceremony. Also, specific songs are played according to the different stages of the possession and each category of spirit. For each ceremony, the repertoire includes approximately ten/twelve songs that can be repeated if the same spirits are recalled. It is possible to distinguish between songs for master spirits and among them, songs for the head of the master spirits, *Somdac Preah Kruu*; songs for territorial spirits living in the forest, mountainous and natural places; songs for ancestors’ spirits residing in the house and related to a particular member of the family.

The *phleng arak* repertoire includes songs played on solo instruments such as *capey* (long-necked lute) or *pey pok* (flute). For example, *Croon Qanlong* (The shining *croon*) is played on *pey pok* solo to recall spirits residing in remote regions and mountainous areas. Only in this case a musical instrument is brought close to the medium’s ear playing solo melodies and the relation between musician and possessee operates at the individual level (Rouget 1985). In addition to a few specific solo instrumental melodies, the *phleng arak* repertoire includes songs interrelated with the wedding repertoire; some songs share the same title and melody but have different texts while others share the title but have different texts and melodies.

Khmer musicians consider *phleng arak* and *phleng kar bouraan* as the most ancient and traditional forms of Khmer music and classify them as *phleng Kmae bouraan* since they employ old instruments that cannot be found in the neighbouring countries of Khmer influence such as Thailand and Laos. The *phleng kar bouraan* ensemble, in fact, is believed to be the oldest one

³² See Chapter 2 and 3 for pre-rituals in popular theatre context.

from the earliest days of Khmer history.³³ “*Arak* is an art form, and it requires specific instruments” (Man Maen, interview, 13 October 2014, Siem Reap). Moreover, *phleng arak* and *phleng kar bouraan* repertoires share a sacred nature, being played to evoke supernatural spirits and deities. For these reasons, the *phleng kmae* genre is believed to be the only music capable of expressing the musicians’ “khmerness.” The table below lists some of the interrelated songs from the two repertoires that I recorded during *coul ruup* and wedding ceremonies; the first two columns from the left illustrate the *phleng arak* and *phleng kar* songs sharing the title or both title and text. In the third column, I report *phleng arak* songs that share the title with *phleng kar* songs which, to my knowledge, are no longer performed in wedding ceremonies but are just mentioned in old sources (Nou 1973; Pich 1964). Therefore, I cannot establish any melodic or textual relationships with the *phleng arak*-related songs since scholars do not provide musical transcriptions.

Table 4: *Phleng arak* and *phleng kar* interrelated songs

<i>Phleng Arak</i> and <i>Phleng Kar</i> Interrelated Songs		
= title/melody ≠ text	= title ≠ text/melody	= title ? text/melody
<i>Haom Rooj</i> (The sacred pavilion)	<i>Domriy Yool Day</i> (Cradling the elephant)	<i>Crooj</i> (Rattan basket)
<i>Baay Khon Caaj Day</i> (Tying of the wrists) <i>Baay Khon Laang Rooj</i> (Tying of the pavilion)	<i>Mlup Doung</i> (The coconut shadow)	<i>Niek Poen</i> (A snake’s coils)
<i>Kong Saoy</i> (literally <i>kong</i> = “group”; <i>saoy</i> = “to eat”)	<i>Phat Ciay</i> (To lift an edge of fabric)	
<i>Konsaeng Krahaam</i> (The red handkerchief)	<i>Sampoong</i> (Casual hairdo)	
<i>Loom Niəj</i> (To console the lady)		
<i>Baa Chaap</i> (Following the bird)		

³³ See Brunet (1979); Commission de Musique (1969); Keo (2003) for a detailed description of Khmer instruments.

<i>Pok Poek</i> (Knock the box)		
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The *araks* can also request additional songs; these songs are borrowed from different genres such as *chaayam*, a musical genre played for the parades and Buddhist festivals, or music accompanying traditional and modern dance such as *roəm vong*³⁴ and *saaraavan*. For example, during a ceremony in Siem Reap, the mediums requested the presence of *chaayam* instruments before the ceremony to meet the spirit’s requirement (figure 1.10). The spirit enjoyed the music very much. She danced and played the small gong. Musicians adapted the *arak* song to the *chaayam* genre. This phenomenon of adaptation is also discussed by Norton (2009) regarding the “*chau van-ization*” of songs from other genres. Two musicians, who did not belong to the *phleng arak* ensemble, played the typical *chaayam* drums. The *skɔɔ arak* players followed the *chaayam* rhythm by playing on the *arak* drums to make the sound louder while a young boy danced by playing a small gong and cymbals with the medium in the middle of the ritual scene.

The insertion of “extra-songs” in a possession ceremony is also common to other cultures such as the Korean shamanic rituals called *kut*. In the central section of the ritual, the *mudang* (ritualist) performs a miscellany of songs and dances of either secular or religious content for entertaining the clients. These songs include the performance of folksongs and songs from the *p’ansori* repertoire, popular ballads and sometimes even pop songs. Longer insertable narrative songs and comic drama episodes may be included in longer rituals (Mills 2007: 22). However, in the Korean ritual, these songs serve to entertain the clients, and they are played in the central section of the fixed structure of the ceremony, while in the Khmer *coul ruup* ritual they are played when requested by the *arak* spirits for entertaining themselves since they are not included in the ceremony structure. Therefore, not all the rituals include these additional repertoires. In other words, musicians play at the *araks’* command, and these repertoires have the function of amusing the spirit only.

The same phenomenon occurs in other Southeast Asian rituals. For example, in the Thai *phi mod* ceremony in Northern Thailand musicians switch to perform from the traditional *piphat mon* style to the modern “popular” tunes in the *dontri phuen muang* style to attract the dead spirits who are unfamiliar with the traditional style (Shahriari 2006: 72–73). Similarly, in the Burmese *nat pwe* rituals, different repertoires are performed: traditional songs are strictly related to the spirit’s (*nat*) identity and are conducted to recall them while new compositions

³⁴*Roəm vong* means “dancing in circle”. It is danced around a table decorated with flowers and fruits. This dance is still performed at wedding parties, Khmer New Year celebrations and every occasion in which family or friends gather for a party or event.

including Burmese popular music have the function of entertaining the spirits during the possession (Chiarofonte 2014: 19–20).

Figure 1.10: A medium dancing *chaayam* music, Siem Reap province



The *phleng arak* texts aim to evoke and recall the spirits by mentioning their name and their story. If the song texts are not appropriate, the *arak* is not satisfied. One of the mediums, after the possession, told me that the spirit was unhappy with the music as the song text did not mention his story. However, most of the songs I recorded in Siem Reap are instrumental since the spirits are also able to recognize the tunes very well. In the absence of texts, more attention is paid to the “quality” of the performance. “If spirits do not like the performance, they do not possess the medium” (medium, interview, 05 March 2015, Kampong Spə̄i).

Table 5 illustrates songs recorded in *coul ruup* ceremonies I attended in Kampong Spə̄i and Siem Reap provinces. The titles in red correspond to the songs having as title the name of the spirits; in blue the songs for the head of the master spirits (*Somdac Preah Kruu*). I added these further sub-divisions following the information provided by the musicians.

Table 5: Classification of *phleng arak* repertoire

<i>Phleng Arak</i> Core Repertoire		
Arak Spirits (territorial spirits)	Kruu Thom/Kruu Røbien (master spirits)	Ancestral Spirits
<i>Crooŋ Meemun</i> (literally <i>crooŋ</i> =rattan basket; <i>meemun</i> = <i>arak</i> spirit“)(K.S.)	<i>Nimun</i> (Inviting the Masters) (K.S.)	<i>Konsaeng Krahaam</i> (The red handkerchief)
<i>Srøy Kmaw</i> (The black lady)	<i>Knong Præk</i> (On the canal) (K.S.)	<i>Loom Niəŋ</i> (To console the lady)
<i>Srøy Kmaw Om Tuuk</i> (The black lady rows the boat)	<i>Cət Mun</i> (K.S.) (literally <i>cət</i> = “feeling”; <i>mun</i> = “previously”)	<i>Crooŋ</i> (K.S.) (Rattan basket)
<i>Craak Pnum</i> (Mountain pass) (K.S.)	<i>Pok Poek</i> (Knock the box)	<i>Knong Præk</i> (On the canal) (K.S.)
<i>Soreyaa</i> (Sun)	<i>Mlup Doung</i> (The coconut shadow) (S.R.)	<i>Crooŋ Prokom Phleng</i> (Performing ‘ <i>Crooŋ</i> ’ song) (K.S.)
<i>Tummeāk Damriy</i> (Hunter with the elephant) (S.R.)	<i>Taanay</i> (<i>Arak</i> spirit’s name) (S.R.)	<i>Lomong</i> (A kind of vine) (K.S.)
<i>Srøy Miəyia</i> (Pretentious woman)(S.R.)	<i>Moən rəŋjiew</i> (The cock crows) (S.R.)	<i>Roəm Smaeŋ Tuən Saay</i> (literally <i>roəm</i> = to dance; <i>smaeŋ</i> = stem/ bunch of fruit; <i>tuən say</i> = rabbit) (K.S.)
<i>Baa Chaap</i> (Following the bird) (S.R.)	<i>Baavaa</i> ³⁵ (Superior) (S.R.)	<i>Baay Khon Laəŋ Rooŋ</i> (Tying the pavilion) (K.S.)
<i>Sraaŋ Chuuk</i> (Attractive lotus) (S.R.)		

³⁵This term is usually interpreted as “Excellency”, “Precious” or “Superior” in connection with titles. In this context, it is used to address the master spirits.

<i>Damrây Yool Day</i> (Cradling the elephant) (K.S.)		
<i>Sraong</i> (A traditional Cambodian song) (K.S.)		
<i>Trut</i> (Traditional Khmer New Year dance of Siem Reap province) (S.R.)		

Solo Songs
<i>Croonj Qanlong</i> (Shining <i>croonj</i>) (S.R.)
<i>Non Touc</i> (literally <i>non</i> = aid/support; <i>touc</i> = small) (S.R.)

Additional songs not specifically connected to a spirit (<i>Phleng Riay</i>) and from <i>phleng kar</i> repertoire
<i>Niek Poen</i> (A snake's coils) (K.S.)
<i>Konsaeng Krahaam</i> (The red handkerchief)
<i>Klianj</i> (The chief) (K.S.)
<i>Loom Niäj</i> (To console the lady)
<i>Phat Ciäj</i> (To lift an edge of fabric)
<i>Sampooj</i> (Casual hairdo)

The list above gives an overview of the different kinds of *phleng arak* songs classified by the musicians according to their connection to the various spirits. It also shows the difference regarding the repertoire across different geographic areas. Referring to *phleng kar* music Brunet says:

A title can correspond to texts different from one another, as well as to musical pieces with different melodies. Also, it happens often that the same tune is given different titles according to the region and even to the village. (Brunet 1979:237)³⁶

For example, one of the most famous songs of the *phleng arak* repertoire is *Srəy Kmaw* which is played to recall the black lady spirit in both of the provinces. Although the melody of the two songs is similar, in Siem Reap, it was an instrumental melody while, in Kampong Spəi, it was sung during the ritual.

Classification of the *phleng arak* repertoire is hindered by regional differences, adaptations from other genres, songs falling into disuse and songs played for more than one spirit. I classified the core songs of the repertoire, additional songs not specifically connected to a spirit, solo songs played for particular kinds of spirits and songs interrelated and adapted from the wedding repertoire. This classification is not intended to be an exhaustive collection of the *phleng arak* repertoire but gives a first systematic analysis of it that has not been done by scholars.

4. The Main Features of *Phleng Arak* Music

4.1 *Liən Skɔɔ* (Fast Drum)

People from the village and mediums' relatives gathered around the first medium who was sitting in front of the altars. The musicians started to play Srəy Kmaw recalling the black lady spirit. The medium, a disabled old lady, was listening to the loud melody and following the fast rhythm of the skɔɔ arak by beating her hand against her leg and rhythmically shaking her head and torso until the spirit possessed her.

Phleng arak songs do not have rhythmic patterns or set sequences of songs that are specific to each particular *arak*, as is the case with the Vietnamese *chau van* songs (Norton 2000) and the Burmese *nath saing* songs (Chiarofonte 2014). Rather, the songs are chosen by mediums who usually already know which spirit will possess them. Increasing the tempo of *phleng arak* music has a key functional role in the *arak* possession. In *phleng arak* music it is relatively easy to perceive that the tempo increases significantly as soon as the spirit possesses the medium. Khmer musicians define this process of rhythm acceleration as *liən skɔɔ* (fast drum).

It is possible to use bar lines in the transcriptions since the tempo can be regularly divided into four beats. The possessee matches the musician's increase in tempo by swinging her

³⁶[Un titre peut correspondre à des textes totalement différents les uns des autres et même à des pièces musicales dont la ligne mélodique diffère. De même il arrive souvent qu'une même mélodie possède des titres différents selon les régions et même selon des villages proches les uns des autres.] (Brunet 1979:237)

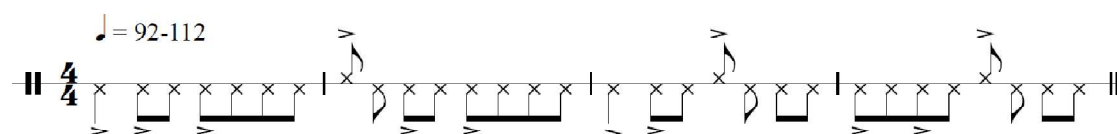
head back and forth with correspondingly faster and more vigorous movements. When the rhythm of the songs changes in response to the medium's movements, there is little or no song choice, so musicians usually know which song will be performed.

Movement is coordinated with the rhythm of music during the dance, but even when mediums are seated their bodily movements are musically regulated. They swing their arms, sway their torsos, drink, smoke, utter words and interact with the ensemble and followers in ways that are musically coordinated. "Music and dance are aesthetic forms capable of 'structuring the structure' of ritual" (Kapferer 1986:202). Musicians speed up the rhythm when the spirit possesses the medium, and it gradually increases while the medium dances, heals, blesses. The music stops when the medium sits, falls on the floor or raises her/his hand.

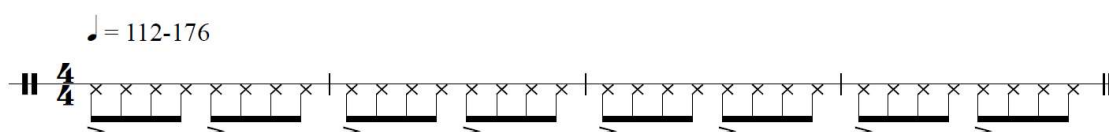
Example 1.1: Commentary on the DVD Video extract (track 1) with the transcription of the rhythmic patterns and tempi of *Srəy Kmaw*, from *coul ruup* ceremony on 24 January 2015, Siem Reap province.

Note: I have transcribed on the staff the two rhythmic patterns of the drum. The rhythm is binary. The notes with the upward beam indicate the 'chak' sound produced by beating the centre of the drum. The metronome mark provides the approximate initial and final tempo of each pattern. Also, I have selected the different ritual actions, indicating the corresponding timings on the video extract, and measured the tempo for each of them to show the connection between the tempo changes and the ritual action.

Rhythmic Pattern 1: The medium and her assistant turn to the musicians asking for *Srəy Kmaw*. The musicians immediately start to play the following rhythmic pattern:



Rhythmic Pattern 2: The medium dances and pays homage to the monk who sat on the side of the pavilion. Then she comes back in front of the altar and dances.



Tempo	Ritual Action	Video Timings
91 beats/min.	Asking for <i>Srey Kmaw</i> song and waiting for the spirit possession	00:00:02–00:01:13
125 beats/min.	Wearing red clothes connected to the black lady spirit/clapping the tempo	00:01:14–00:03:02
160–165 beats/min.	Blessing the monk	00:03:03–00:03:59
135 beats/min. (<i>rallentando</i>)	Raising the hand (music ends)	00:04:00–00:04:12

The first rhythmic pattern is played in such a way that a succession of three crotchet-duration low-pitched strokes is accented as a distinctive feature. Some *phleng arak* songs (*Mlup Doung, Sampoon and Taanay*) present micro-variations of the first rhythmic pattern while the second one is almost identical in the whole repertoire and identifies the post-possession phase. Therefore, rhythmic patterns are repeated across the whole repertoire. By contrast, Mills describes the rhythmic variants to attract the listeners in the Korean *kut* ritual:

Musicians are not merely playing a fixed pattern ad infinitum, they are selecting rhythmic variants from a mental stores reservoir, aiming to create musical interest by playing with the listeners' expectation while creating subtle fluctuations in the music's dynamic flow. (Mills 2003:238)

In the *coul ruup* context, the “addressee” of the rhythm is the spirit. It can happen that the medium signals to the ensemble to play a quicker rhythm by beating the tempo on her leg faster and faster and shaking her arms and head vigorously, for example (see Example 1.2). Jankowsky also examines the parameters of the process of acceleration to account for how musicians decide tempo changes on any given *nuba* (tune). He examines two main conditions: 1) the presence or not of a dancer 2) the place of *nuba* within a *silsila* (a sequence of *nuba*) and its rhythmic pattern (no correlation between the length of a *nuba* and the acceleration). Since the *phleng arak* tunes are not played within sequences, there is some flexibility in starting and ending the tempo while when a tune is played as a part of a sequence, such as the *nuba*, musicians must balance the process of acceleration within the sequence.

As described above, we can distinguish two rhythmic phases. During the first phase, the atmosphere is relaxed, and the rhythm is slow. This is the phase in which the spirit is recalled. In the second phase the atmosphere becomes progressively more intense, and the rhythm, which gradually accelerates, accompanies the possession dance which can be defined as a “figurative

dance” (Rouget 1985:114) since it has the function of manifesting the possession state rather than provoking the trance. However, not all the mediums dance. In Kampong Spəi, they sat in front of the altar and did not ask for specific songs since the musicians were previously informed which spirits would possess the medium, so they knew the songs to be played.

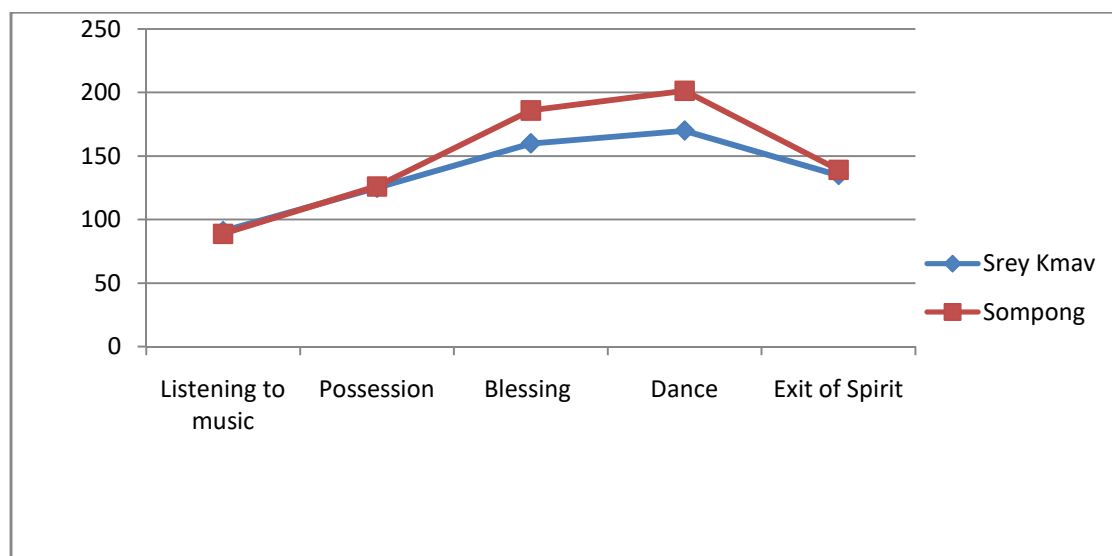
Example 1.2: Commentary on the DVD Video extract (track 2). *Sampoŋ*, from *coul ruup* ceremony on 24 January 2015, Siem Reap province.

Note: The rhythmic patterns are the same as those transcribed in the previous example. In the table below, I have reported the changes of tempo and their connection with the ritual action to show the gradual increase of the rhythm of *phleng arak* songs. The spirit possessing the medium is a master spirit, as indicated by the colour of her clothes.

Tempo	Ritual Action	Video Timings
88.9 beats/min.	Listening to music	00:00:00–00:00:22
126.2 beats/min.	Possession (medium shakes her head, torso and beats the tempo)	00:00:23–00:00:33
157 beats/min.	Dance	00:00:33–00:03:11
186–193 beats/min.	Approaching the monk/blessing the monk	00:03:12–00:04:33
201.5 beats/min.	Dance	00:04:34–00:06:07
139.2 beats/min.	Exit of the spirit (sitting down, shaking the <i>ptull</i>)	00:06:08–00:06:14

Examples 1.1 and 1.2 show how the tempo of *phleng arak* song gradually increases in the course of the ritual according to the medium’s action. The fastest part is connected to specific actions such as dancing, blessing, healing while the slowest part signals the beginning of the song, when the spirit is recalled. The rhythm decreases at the end of the song during the exit of the spirit or at the end of the possession. The graph below illustrates the gradual tempo changes related to the ritual actions of *Srəy Kmaw* and *Sampoŋ* songs analysed above. I have chosen to report these two songs as the ritual actions were similar and easier to compare. However, other *phleng arak* songs would follow the same essential pattern:

Table 6: Tempo changes of *Srey Kmav* and *Sompong* songs according to specific ritual actions



In the *phleng arak* repertoire the same drum music works for all the spirits and is impersonal in a way it does not function as a “musical motto” (ibid) as it is the case of the melody. Starting from Rouget’s idea of the temporal aspect of the possession musics, Jankowsky, in his study of *Sṭambēlī* in Tunisia, considers the ritual dynamics of musical time: “In *Sṭambēlī*, gradual and multifaceted transformations in both musical time and sonic density work synergically to create a sense of directed motion” (Jankowsky 2010: 113). This sense of musical direction evidenced by the repetitive and cyclic nature of this music can also be perceived in *phleng arak* music in terms of tempo and sound volume as discussed in the following section.

4.2 The “Heavy” Timbre of *Phleng Arak* “Roads”

The efficacy of the rhythmic pattern to induce the possession is not only due to the changing of tempo but also to a variation of timbre and volume of each sound (Mills 2003: 252). “Acceleration of tempo very often goes hand in hand with an intensification of sound” (Rouget 1985: 82). Before examining changes of timbre and volume in *phleng arak* songs performance within the ritual context, I will briefly describe the structure of these songs through the example of *Tummeāk Damriy* (Hunter with the elephant). I provide a transcription of this song as recorded during an interview-lesson rather than transcribing a ceremony recording since the former has a better sound quality which makes the tune easier to follow. Moreover, during the lesson-interview, Man Maen described the structure of *phleng arak* songs and the technique used on melodic instruments to change the volume of the song by adopting a specific lexicon.

Phleng arak tunes are divided into two main melodic phrases called *thaat* (drawers-of-spirits) that are the conduit by which the spirit enters/leaves the medium’s body. The songs are divided into two sections each with a different character and tempo: the first section is played

before the possession and is called *qah kamlang* (tired; listlessly) in a slower tempo and a softer volume obtained through playing in a lower octave; the second section is played after the possession and is called *klang* (loud) which is characterized by a faster rhythm and a louder sound called *kaac* (nasty) (Example 1.3).

Example 1.3: Transcription of *klang* and *qah kamlang* sections of *Tummeāk Damriy* (Hunter with the elephant) played by Man Maen on *trɔ̄ quu*, from interview-lesson on 10 October 2015, Siem Reap province. (Audio CD, track 1)

Note: I have made a structural analysis of the song to show the two sections. For each section there are two melodic phrases (*thaat*) indicated as A and B; each of them is repeated twice with slight variations indicated as A1 and B1; each melodic phrase is 4 bars long. The rhythm is binary. The metronome mark gives an idea of the tempo changes. The corresponding timings on CD track 1 are in brackets.

[0:01-0:34]
Klang (♩ = 140)

The musical score is presented in five staves, each containing a melodic phrase. The first staff is labeled 'A', the second 'A1', the third 'B', the fourth 'B1', and the fifth 'A2'. The music is in 2/4 time with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The tempo is marked as Klang (♩ = 140). The score shows various rhythmic patterns and articulations, including slurs and accents.

[00:35-01:03]
Qah Kamlang (♩ = 80-100)

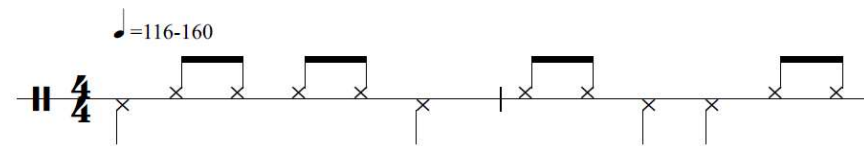
The image shows a musical score for 'Qah Kamlang' in 2/4 time, with a tempo of 80-100 beats per minute. The score is written on four staves, each containing a melodic phrase. The first staff is labeled 'A', the second 'A1', the third 'B', and the fourth 'B1'. The music is in a key with one flat (B-flat) and consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together in groups. The phrases are repeated and vary in complexity and rhythm.

Each *thaat* (melodic phrase) is repeated many times according to the duration of the phases of the possession and the ritual actions, whereas the second *thaat* is usually repeated more often, and so lasts longer, as it is played throughout and after the possession. These ongoing repetitions of the *thaat* generate continuous melodic variation. The two sections analysed above represent different variants of the A and B phrases and are played with different tempi, *klang* and *qah kamlang*, according to the different phases of the possession. In Example 1.4 I will examine the same song, *Tummeāk Damriy*, played by Man Maen's ensemble during a ceremony in Siem Reap where a medium was possessed by *Tummeāk Damriy* spirit; musicians played *Tummeāk Damriy* as required by the medium. This example shows the interaction between the medium and the musicians. The medium was very responsive to the loud volume of the song.

Example 1.4: Commentary on DVD Video Extract (track 3) and transcription of the rhythmic pattern of *Tummeāk Damriy*, from a *coul ruup* ceremony on 24 January 2015, Siem Reap province.

Note: The rhythm is binary. The metronome mark provides the approximate initial and final tempo according to the different stages of the possession described above. The corresponding timings on DVD track 3 are in brackets.

[00:00:06–00:00:29]: The medium turned her ear to the ensemble and expressed her appreciation by following the rhythm of the drums. Musicians played the following rhythm:



[00:00:29–00:01:09]: She approached the ensemble, the rhythm increased and the sound volume rose.

[00:01:10–00:01:38]: The medium expressed her enjoyment by clapping her hands following the drum beating.

In addition to the rhythm and dynamics, musicians pay attention to the aesthetic and the “quality” of the performance. For this reasons they said, “if we do not play music beautifully the *arak* does not enter.” According to Khmer musicians, “playing beautifully” means embellishing the melody by adding notes to “make the sound beautiful.” To accomplish this, they adopt a technique called *tik daam* (sweet water) that is a sort of tremolo played on melodic instruments. Each instrument has a different way of playing *tik daam*; Maw Yon, for example, showed me how to play *tik daam* on the *ksaediaw* (plucked monochord) by bouncing the sound box made of a half gourd close to his chest. This technique is defined as *rolaek* (bouncing). Sometimes *tik daam* is executed by plucking the one string according to a technique called *rum nœa* (plucking). It is a technique that every musician has to be good at since the ability of a musician is judged in accordance with his skills at embellishing the melody:

Cambodian music requires a lot of imagination, initiative and inventiveness from the musicians, because a good performance does not consist of following step-by-step and faithfully a composition, but rather to decorate, garnish, enrich, and embellish the composition with techniques, ways of playing, and styles that reveal more than the musician’s training, his personality and character. (Commission de Musique 1969:139)³⁷

“If *tik daam* is played beautifully (*tik daam piiruah*) the improvisation path will be good (*plaw lqaa*)” (Man Maen, interview, 08 October 2014, Siem Reap). Khmer musicians describe the improvisation process through the metaphor of walking or travelling or taking different roads:³⁸ “at the beginning we play normally and then we take one road (*tiw plaw muay*) but when the *arak* enters we change road (*kae*). *Tik daam* is used to take the different roads” (Man Maen, interview, 08 October 2014, Siem Reap). Other musicians employ the term *kralay damnae*

³⁷ [La musique cambodgienne requiert de la part des musiciens beaucoup d’imagination, d’initiative et d’originalité, car une bonne interprétation ne consiste pas à suivre pas à pas et fidèlement le contenu de la composition, mais plutôt à décorer, à garnir, à enrichir, à embellir la composition par des techniques, des jeux et des styles qui relèvent moins de l’apprentissage que la personnalité de l’esprit des musiciens.](Commission de Musique 1969:139)

³⁸ See Giuriati (1988) and Sam (1988) for the improvisation on the classical genre *pin piæt*.

(counterfeit walking) defining it as “a technique used by musicians to create their own *tik daam*” (Maw Yon, from personal communication, 10 June 2015, Kampong Spəi). He also defines this process as *praliy bat phleng* (distortion) to indicate the variations of the melody.

The “roads” or “distortion” of the melody consists of the variations that each musician plays (example 1.3). Scholars coined the term “polyphonic stratification” (Hood 1957:7; Morton 1976: 26) to describe the texture of many Southeast Asian ensembles (gamelan, Thai *pi phat*, Khmer *pin piət*, and so on). Due to the ambiguous meaning of the term which implies the concept of harmonic progression, Amy Catlin (1987:31) suggested the more appropriate term “functional heterophony” to express a linear musical texture based on simultaneous variations of a given melody. As a result, there is not a basic version of the melody. A skilled musician continuously “embellishes” the melody with slight or greater melodic and rhythmic variations according to the instrument’s features, the musician’s background, the performance context and his own “style.” Some scholars describe this uniqueness of each variation in other musical traditions (Sutton 1982: 246–247; Witzleben 1995: 89). As a result, during my *trə quu* lessons, Man Maen continually changed the melody I was learning from lesson to lesson since he did not want to teach me only one “road.” In Khmer music variations are embedded in the concept of melody.

5. “The Interactive System”

From the analysis of the ceremony and the musical features emerges an important aspect of *coul ruup* ritual which is the interaction between the medium and the ensemble. Starting from Brinner’s analytical concepts — interactive network, interactive system, interactive sound structure, and interactive motivation — Norton (2009) frames the discussion of the performative interactions during *len dong* ritual of possession in Vietnam. These concepts are defined by Brinner as follows: “Interactive network” concerns the roles assumed by musicians and their relationships or links; the “interactive system” refers to the means and meanings of communication and co-ordination; and the “interactive sound structure” is a constellation of concepts associated with the constraints and possibilities inherent in the ways sounds are put together (Brinner 1995:169). While Brinner’s study refers to the interaction between musicians, Norton (2000) adapts Brinner’s interaction theory to the *chau van* music, accompanying the *len dong* ritual of possession in Vietnam, by including to the analytical framework of musical interaction performers other than musicians such as the medium. This aspect of interaction is also mentioned by Brac de la Perrière relating to the *nat pwe* ritual in Burma (Brac de la Perrière 1989: 129) and it also occurs in *coul ruup* rituals in Cambodia.

On the one hand, the interaction between musicians is based on what Brinner calls “network interaction”: “A good musician and a good performer is by Khmer standards the one

who holds musical dialogue and interacts with the other musicians of the ensemble” (Giuriati 1988: 260). On the other hand, as Norton pointed out, the interaction also occurs between the medium and the ensemble. While *chau van* music is organized in sequences of songs corresponding to specific kinds of spirits, *phleng arak* songs are chosen by the medium who usually knows which spirit will possess him/her. Therefore, the medium is a sort of conductor of the ensemble who requires specific songs. Through a system that links songs to ritual actions and spirits, different songs are performed at each stage of possession. Brinner defines a cue as “a musical, verbal, visual, or kinetic act specifically produced to initiate an interaction— that is, bringing about a change in the performance of others in the ensemble— that would not occur otherwise” (Brinner 1995:183).

The medium communicates with the ensemble by raising a hand to stop them, by beating the tempo, clapping the hands to express appreciation of the music or, on the contrary, staring at the musicians or standing to express dislikes. All of these instances of “mediation cues” (Brinner 1995: 188–189) are interesting examples of communication between the medium and musicians. Movement is coordinated with the rhythms of music during dances, but even when mediums are seated, their bodily movements are musically regulated. Similarly, in other Southeast Asian rituals such as the *Nora* ritual in Southern Thailand “the spirits use the medium’s body to answer questions about offerings (cry, hug, dance)” (Guelden 2007: 162).

Another type of interaction is that between musical instruments and the possessee. Rouget (1985) examines how the relation between musicians and possessee operates at the individual level and group level. The latter is common to the *coul ruup* ceremony since musicians do not bring their instrument close to the medium’s ears as happened in other traditions, except for some kinds of mountainous spirits who are recalled by the sound of the flute *pey pok*. Only on this occasion does a musician bring his instrument close to the medium’s ear and play melodies to facilitate the possession.

An additional peculiar aspect of the *coul ruup* ceremony is the role of the audience. In some traditions, the audience actively participates in the ceremony and interacts with the medium and musicians. Regula Qureshi describes a phenomenon she calls “music–context interaction” (Qureshi 1995 [1986]:140). Her analysis of Qawwali events focuses on the “interplay between music and audience behavior” and demonstrates how musicians change their performances in order to increase the ecstatic arousal of the audience (Qureshi 1995 [1986]:143). In the *coul ruup* context musicians primarily respond to the actions of the medium, rather than the “audience.” In fact, they do not usually modify musical phrases or the core structure of songs in the course of performance but only change tempo and sound volume. In *coul ruup* rituals, the spirits can also be considered as a type of audience – embodied by the medium, responsive to the music. This aspect is shown by some actions of the medium such as

turning the ear to musicians, beating the tempo with a hand, clapping to express his/her appreciation of the music; on the contrary, if the music does not satisfy her expectation he/she stands to stare at the musicians. Therefore, although the medium does not have any musical knowledge, he/she does interact with the ensemble, conduct it and express his/her likes and dislikes through the use of a range of cues.

Phleng arak not only “translates” into sounds and ritual actions the appearance of the spirits but also connects and conjoins the human and supernatural spheres through an interactive communication between spirits, medium and musicians. The following table summarizes the mediation cues discussed above that I have pinpointed in some *coul ruup* rituals I attended during my fieldwork.

Table 7: “Mediation cues” summary

Cues	Mediums’Actions and Their Meaning	Musicians’Action
Visual	Shaking the <i>ptull</i> = spirit possession	Changing of tempo
	Sitting down/Passing hand on face = exit of the spirit	Stop playing
	Approaching musicians = checking the offerings	Faster rhythm and louder sound volume
Verbal	Asking for the song = identification of the spirit	Playing the required song
Musical	Beating a faster tempo = recalling the spirit	Playing a faster tempo
	Turning the ear to musicians = “checking” the song	Playing louder
Kinetic	Raising the hand= stop musicians from playing	Stop playing
	Clapping hands = enjoyment of the music	Keeping a fast tempo and a loud sound
	Shaking body and head = possession	Increasing tempo and sound volume
	Dancing = possession	Increasing tempo and sound volume

6. Conclusions

In the *coul ruup* context, music is essential since it has not only the function of recalling the spirits but also amusing them and satisfying their requests. Each spirit has its identification song, dancing style, gestures and song texts which can vary slightly according to the geographic area, the singer and the ensemble (see Chapter 4). Therefore, songs are related to particular spirits but they are not structured as melodic or rhythmic sequences as occurs in other Southeast Asian

musical traditions. Each medium can be possessed by the same *arak*. Therefore, the same songs can be continually repeated. Moreover, the insertion of extra-repertoires depends on the *arak* spirit's requests and it does not always occur. Similarly, dance does not always occur since some mediums do not like dancing or cannot dance due to their physical condition. It also depends on the geographic area where the ceremony takes place. For example, mediums in Kampong Spæi province did not dance and musicians knew in advance the songs to play while in Siem Reap province mediums always danced and musicians played the songs requested by the medium or their assistants by voice or they found the "right song" through a "music exploration".

The frivolous character of the *arak* spirits is reflected in their funny gestures and actions, and it is translated into sound by the *phleng arak* music. Rhythms do not vary according to the gender, ethnicity or type of spirit as in other musical traditions, but the most remarkable features of the *phleng arak* music are the progressive intensification of the sound, acceleration of tempo and the "quality" of the performance. The faster the rhythm and the louder the sound, the easier the spirit "enters" (*coul*). The drums lead the ensemble and the melodic instruments contribute to producing an intense and loud sound by playing in their high registers. The loudness and fast tempo are two essential characteristics of this music as they not only facilitate the possession and accompany the medium's dance and gestures but also entertain and amuse the spirit possessed by the medium who, as shown in this chapter, conducts the ensemble to play faster and louder through specific visual signals. The gradual acceleration of the rhythm and *crescendo* of sound occur during and after the possession, in the healing phase; tempo increases when the medium, for example, shows her/his attention to the song by turning the ear to musicians or approaching them.

In other Asian possession rituals, musicians play songs from different repertoires which are also part of the fixed structure of the ceremony in order to entertain the medium and the audience (Chiarofonte 2014; Mills 2003; Norton 2000; Shahriari 2006), while in *coul ruup* ceremony, the only protagonist is the medium who reflects the *arak*'s enjoyment and excitement in listening to the music. The audience is not involved in the interactive communication between spirits, medium and musicians but just observes the development of the ritual. The communication between the medium and the musicians is expressed not only by musical cues (change of tempo, sound volume and songs for specific spirits) but also by verbal cues (verbally requested songs), visual cues (the medium's actions including those to express likes and dislikes) and kinetic cues (the medium's gestures, dance and movements).

This chapter constitutes a first classification and analysis of the *phleng arak* repertoire focusing on the features strictly connected to the possession stage and the nature of the *arak* spirits. I have also provided a classification of *phleng arak* song interrelated to *phleng kar* wedding songs and explained the reasons underlying this correspondence from the musicians'

perspective. In Chapter 4, I will examine the interrelation of *phleng arak* songs and *phleng kar* songs by considering other interrelated songs from the *Ikhaon bassac* and *Ikhaon yikee* popular theatre genres whose features and repertoire will be described in the following two chapters.

Chapter 2

***Lkhaon Bassac* Opera: Creative Ways of Interrelation and Adaptation of Characters, Scenes and Songs**

The most famous kind of Khmer theatre is the dance drama *Ikhaon kbac bouraan kmae* or *Ikhaon preah riæc troæp* (Royal ballet theatre) in which the dance describes episodes from the *Reamker*, the Khmer version of the Indian epic poem *Ramayana*. The performance of the Royal Ballet took place within various rites associated with the royal power and prestige of the country. Due to its fame, many studies focus on the *pin piæt* genre which accompanies the Royal Ballet (Giuriati 1995; Mâm 1972; Sam 1988). While classical drama is internationally renowned and considered an icon of Cambodian culture, other forms of theatre such as *Ikhaon bassac* and *Ikhaon yiikee* (see Chapter 3) are unknown outside the country. The *Ikhaon bassac* as well as the *Ikhaon yiikee* are very popular among the Khmers, especially in rural areas. However, the advent of mass media has increased their popularity even in urban areas and created a modern form of *Ikhaon bassac* and *Ikhaon yiikee* (see Chapter 5).

The first part of this chapter aims to provide general information relating to the origins of *Ikhaon bassac*, the *bouraan* (old) and *samay* (modern) versions of the performance, some pre-performance rituals which reflect the Khmer syncretic religious beliefs, and the opening rituals, which include performance of traditional wedding music. The performance of wedding music before the theatre performance shows the sacredness and antiquity attributed by Khmer musicians to the *phleng kar* genre. Not only is the *Ikhaon bassac* repertoire interrelated with *phleng kar* and *phleng arak* music in terms of song titles and tunes (see Chapter 4), but the interrelation of the songs also occurs within the *Ikhaon bassac* repertoire itself. Therefore, the second part of the chapter discusses the adaptation of pre-existent melodies which are labelled with literary titles and adapted to new song texts according to the general theme of the scenes and the characters' roles. This process shows the scriptwriter's creativity of combining and adapting scenes, songs and characters.

The limited literature on *Ikhaon bassac* does not address these processes of adaptation or the cross-genre interrelations of songs, scenes and characters. The few sources examining *Ikhaon bassac* theatre provide: general descriptions of the costumes and the plot of the stories (Sakhou 2006); brief accounts of the Chinese and Vietnamese opera influences (Brandon 1967; Pich Tum 1997); and a description of the origins and ensembles of *Ikhaon yiikee* and *bassac* (Sam 1998). The work of Shapiro and Thompson (2001) includes an account of the major dance and dance-drama forms and the connection between dance and drama. The antiquity and importance of dance in Khmer culture is attested by epigraphic and archaeological sources. Shapiro and Thompson show the overlap between *robam* (dance) and *Ikhaon* (theatre).

However, *Ikhaon yiikee* and *Ikhaon bassac* are not included in their study since both *Ikhaon yiikee* and *Ikhaon bassac* tend to emphasize dialogue and song over dance (Shapiro and Thompson 2001). My intent, here, is to provide a description of the *bassac* performances and an analysis of the repertoire to show, for the first time, how material has been shared across genres and adapted to suit the *Ikhaon bassac* context.

1. The Origin of *Lkhaon Bassac*

The name of *Ikhaon bassac* theatre derives from the Bassac river area in South Vietnam where it originated at the end of the nineteenth century. This type of theatre is characterised by alternating dialogues, recitatives, songs and acrobatic pantomimes as in the Chinese theatre. Because there are no written sources addressing the Chinese and Vietnamese influence, I will briefly report some legends and versions accounted by the musicians in the field, particularly in Bantey Meachey province and Phnom Penh. According to them, *Ikhaon bassac* was influenced by the Chinese Opera *Jingju*³⁹ called *hi* (*xi* in Mandarin), which was introduced in 1930 to the Bassac River region, and by the south-Vietnamese theatre *Cai Luong*.⁴⁰ *Cai Luong* is a modern form of the Vietnamese opera *Hat Boi* updating the stories, costumes, make-up and the martial art movements which arrived from China in the 14th century. One of the channels of literary and cultural penetration of the Vietnamese and Chinese in Cambodia was the Mekong delta. “This penetration undoubtedly occurred in an insidious, almost invisible way, but it never ceased to grow once political and technical conditions brought about a proliferation of contacts among the different Cambodian communities” (Nepote and Khing 1987: 333).

According to my informants in Banteay Meanchey province, *bassac* opera originated in the Tonle Bassac River where Chinese musicians illegally arrived by sea. “According to a legend, during their captivity, the Chinese played since they had nothing to do. Therefore, Khmer musicians learnt from them the art of *Ikhaon bassac*” (Nong Chak, interview, 13 October 2014, Banteay Meanchey). At the beginning of the 18th century a small group of Chinese people, mostly men who supported the Ming dynasty and were opposed to the Qing dynasty, led by Mo Jiu (Mạc Cửu), established the city of Hà Tiên, a district-level town in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam (Forest 1980: 464). The town of Hà Tiên was initially known under the Khmer name of *Piem* (“port”; “harbour”; “river mouth”). When the Chinese arrived in Đàng Trong (as southern Vietnam was called while under the rule of the Nguyễn lords), the Nguyễn lords ordered the king of Cambodia (then a vassal state of Đàng Trong) to grant land to the Chinese. These people built markets in this place and turned it into a busy business town. By the beginning of the

³⁹See Hoc Dy “Le Rayonnement Littéraire Chinois sur le Cambodge des XIXe et XXe siècles” (2008) for the Chinese influence on Khmer literature.

⁴⁰See Song Ban (1960: 26-33) for the Vietnamese theatre.

19th century this area, which had been gradually occupied by Chinese and Vietnamese communities, was under Vietnamese rule.

Therefore, the Khmers living there were surrounded by a growing Sino-Vietnamese population and subjected to the Chinese cultural influence. The Chinese influence was reflected in the appearance of the *Ikhaon bassac* theatre during the 1920s when it was brought there by wandering troupes. According to Ol Samang, the leader of the Phnom Penh troupe, *Ikhaon bassac* originated in one of the provinces belonging to the Kampucciä Kraom (lower Cambodia) called by the French Cochin-Chine, the Bassac district in Preah Trapaen province currently belonging to Vietnam (figure 2.1).⁴¹ In this area many ethnic groups met each other including the Chinese, the Vietnamese and the Khmers. According to Samang, the Chinese and Vietnamese influenced each other's theatre. They copied some elements from the Khmers during a sort of competition they organized along the Bassac River. In the past *Ikhaon bassac* was called *youkè* by the *Khmer Kraom*. Over time, the term *youkè* turned into *krien klong* and then into *bassac*.

Pich Tum describes the development of the term *bassac*. He accounts that a group of intellectuals from different backgrounds living in Kampucciä Kraom led by the monk Kruu Sour, the head of the pagoda *Woät Ksac Kandaal*, founded a group. The *Ikhaon* was performed in a pavilion made of leafs and shaped like a tree called *klong*. Therefore, they called the performance *Ikhaon traw klong* (*klong*-shaped theatre) (Pich Tum 1997: 33).

He also alludes to the increasing popularity of *Ikhaon bassac* theatre by telling a story of two brothers living in the Bassac district. After the older brother moved to France, the younger brother asked him to lend some money to help set up a business promoting Khmer culture. The older brother obliged and a *Ikhaon bassac* group was duly set up. In 1930 it gained in popularity, and he performed not only in Kampucciä Kraom but also in Phnom Penh and other provinces. However, the first performance in Phnom Penh did not have success due to the popularity of other forms of theatre such as *Ikhaon yiikee* and *Ikhaon mǎhaorii*.⁴² Therefore, he learnt new skills from those forms of theatre. Later, he had a fold-away stage manufactured, which could be set up either on a boat or on the ground. The second performance in Phnom Penh was a success. Members from other theatre groups joined the *Ikhaon bassac* troupe, and in 1937 many *Ikhaon bassac* groups spread across different districts of Phnom Penh and other parts of the country.

Pich Tum (1997) portrays the Bassac River as a multi-ethnic area where Khmer absorbed and adapted foreign influences and components to their tradition. In 1930 *Ikhaon bassac* absorbed some techniques from *Ikhaon mǎhaorii*, a type of folkloric dance accompanied by a *mahori* ensemble. *Ikhaon bassac* was also influenced by marching brass band music from the

⁴¹ During the French colonization in 1949, some provinces of Kampucciä Kraom were given to Vietnam.

⁴² See Chapter 3 for *Ikhaon yiikee* and Research Committee on Arts and Culture (2003) for *Ikhaon mǎhaorii*.

Philippines known as *phleng Manil* (“Manila music”). It was introduced into Cambodia by King Nārədam Sihanouk following his visit to Manila in 1873 (Saphan 2017:263).⁴³

From 1950 to 1955, *Ikhaon bassac* suffered a profound crisis since it was unable to compete with a new form of entertainment, the Indian cinema. From 1950 to 1960 *Ikhaon bassac* was influenced by *Ikhaon niyiay* (spoken theatre); for this reason, the Kampucciə Kraom dialect disappeared. The decline of *Ikhaon bassac* in the 1960s in the face of competition from cinema caused concern about the survival on the part of the Cambodian State, which, therefore, set up a troupe at the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh. After the Khmer Rouge, this group was partly reconstituted in France and renamed Groupe des Artistes Khmers. Other groups have been established in the USA and Phnom Penh thanks to local NGOs such as Cambodian Living Arts (CLA), which supports old Masters and their troupes.

Figure 2.1: French Indochina⁴⁴



⁴³ Nārədam Sihanouk used the brass marching band for all official receptions, to celebrate visiting dignitaries and welcome guests at the airport. Filipinos came to teach Khmer musicians the *phleng Manil* genre at the royal palace bringing with them wind instruments like clarinets, trumpets and trombones that were unknown to Cambodian musicians (Ibid).

⁴⁴ Source: <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annam>> (accessed 29 August 2017).

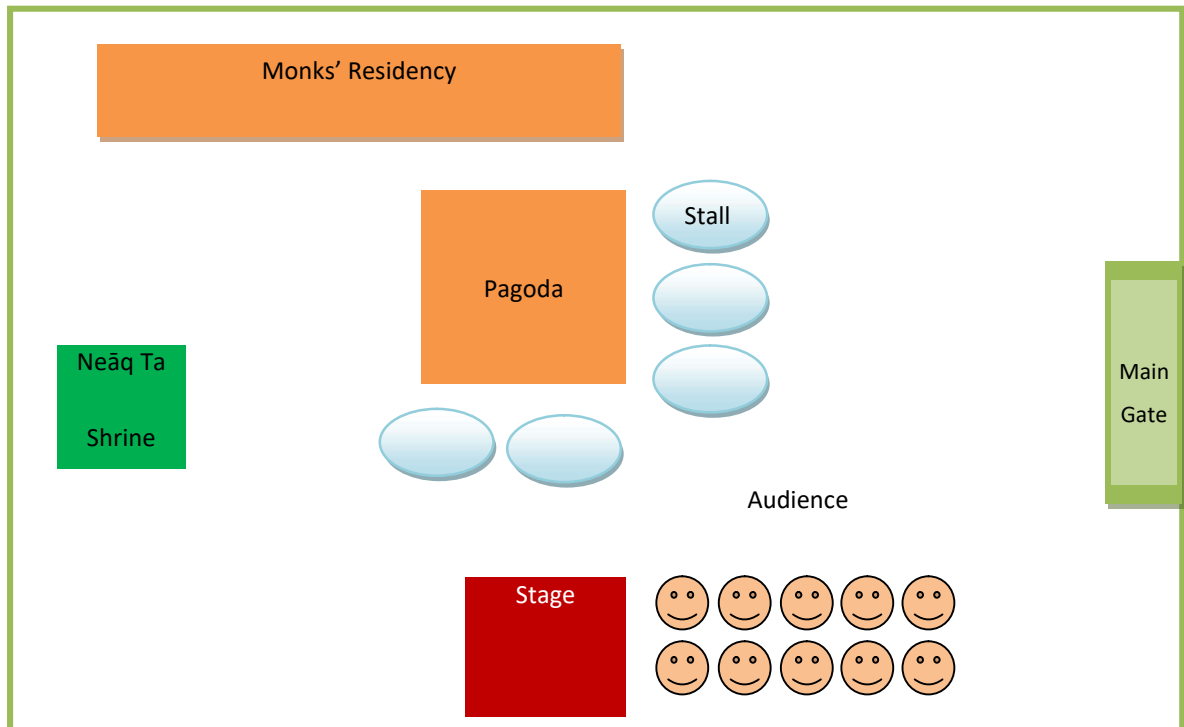
2. Occasions of Performance

Lkhaon bassac is performed whenever hosts request it, although the most frequently chosen times are following Buddhist festivities such as the following: *Bon Kathin*, in late October, in which people bring clothing and gifts to the monks; *Bon Pkaa* (Flower Festival) which is a fund-raising event for the pagoda celebrated at any time during the year; *Bon Bançoh Səymaa*, the ceremony for the construction of pagoda; *Bon Claeŋ Samethiphal*, the inauguration of a building; and *Bon Paccay Buən*, the thanksgiving to parents. A stage is built by a group of workmen, engaged and supervised by the troupe's leader, in the space surrounding the pagoda where there are traditional food stalls, dodgems and other amusements to entertain followers.

The audience is composed of followers who joined the ceremony in the temple as well as people coming from the neighbouring villages (figure 2.2). Families, relatives and friends reach the pagoda by tractors carrying bamboo mats and pillows since the performance starts around eight or nine in the evening and ends at sunrise. The stories are chosen by the group's leader or people who have requested the show, such as the pagoda's administrators, mainly according to the audience's preference. The audience brings its straw mats to sit and sleep. Plays are long and no one can be expected to sit through an eight- or nine-hour performance without talking, eating and getting up. Most of them leave after the clowns' big scene. Many who last out the night doze during less interesting scenes. Whenever there is a performance, there are temporary stalls selling food, drinks and toys in the area surrounding the temple. One can easily see that the community that holds the celebrating series is intent on displaying its wealth and the solidarity of its people, through the size of the troupe, the price of hiring the troupe and the fame of the principal actors.

To begin with, the loud sound of the percussion instruments, the colorful stage setting and costumes create a strong festive mood. The funny episodes in the plays provide entertainment. The audience laughs loudly, talks about the story and the performance, or eats. People wander around and get back to their seats in time to catch particular episodes, especially the funny ones. The moral messages conveyed by the plays such as "good is rewarded with good" reinforce their beliefs in Buddhist principles and the people's confidence in their future. Nowadays, *lkhaon bassac* performances are popular not only in rural areas for Buddhist festivities and public events but also in urban areas thanks to performances on television and the commercialization of DVDs. These new performance contexts have made the genre more well-known and popular among the young generation even in urban areas, although some "traditional" components are transformed and adapted to television and recording formats (see Chapter 5).

Figure 2.2: The stage setting in the pagoda surroundings



3. The Theatre Troupes

The *Ikhaon bassac* troupe I worked with, Ol Samang Lkhaon Bassac Phnom Penh, is composed of professional musicians and actors (figure 2.3); most of them have been trained in local institutions or by the troupe's leader, and in addition to their job of performers they work for the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts. The theatre troupes are usually composed of up to forty members, with a good proportion being related to one another. However, not all of the members are engaged for each performance: the troupe's leader usually contacts some of them in advance according to the story that the representative of the pagoda has chosen. If someone is not able to join the performance, he substitutes that person with another actor; if it is not possible, he has to modify the plot of the story accordingly. In order to attract their customers, the group's leader, Ol Samang, leaves name cards in the pagodas in different provinces near Phnom Penh. "Pagodas are my targets. Where there is a pagoda, there must be a ceremony", he said. So his business cards are handed to the main contacts or representatives of the pagoda and posted on Facebook. Additionally, he promotes his group by performing on television to get more recognition so that clients can easily reach and contact him. Every Saturday his performance is also broadcast on the local *Tonle* radio. However, recently, he has mostly been contacted via social media.

On the contrary, *Ikhaon bassac* troupes living in the provinces are not so famous and are used to perform only in rural villages. Most of them work as farmers and perform as musicians

and actors to increase their income. For example, the *Ikhaon bassac* Masters I met in Banteay Meanchey province used to work as farmers and later for the CLA association in Phnom Penh as teachers (figure 2.3). They are currently retired but still teach *Ikhaon bassac* and wedding music in Banteay Meanchey province where they live with their families. Working with Masters from different backgrounds, ages and provinces helped me to understand how *Ikhaon bassac* has transformed and developed over the years in line with broader social, cultural and political changes (see Chapter 5).

Figure 2.3: The Ol Samang Lkhaon Bassac Phnom Penh troupe and some *bassac* instruments from back left to right: the fiddles *trɔ chee* and *trɔ quu*, the dulcimer *khim touc*, another *trɔ quu*, the drum *skɔɔ bassac*, the clappers *krap* and two *trɔ quu*. In the front row: the troupe's leader, Ol Samang, and his wife (in the middle), and actors



4. The Ensemble

The most important *Ikhaon bassac* instruments are *trɔ quu* (a two-string fiddle), *skɔɔ bassac* (drum) and *lao* (a small gong made of copper or bronze). The drums are characteristic defining features of the *bassac* genre and are essential for the development of the story. “It is possible to perform *Ikhaon bassac* with these three instruments only. However, it does not sound beautiful” (Nong Chak, interview, 13 October 2014, Banteay Meanchey).

The start of the performance is signalled by the sound of two *lao*, one male and one female, today replaced by one or two *caan* (cylindrical-shaped idiophone) and a *louk skɔɔ* (small *skɔɔ bassac*) (figure 2.4). In addition to *skɔɔ bassac touc* (small *bassac* drum) called *louk skɔɔ*, which is used for the entrance and exit of the characters, there is the *skɔɔ bassac thom* (big

bassac drum) which is used for the scene of battles, wars and to reproduce onomatopoeic sounds. The cylindrical-shaped idiophone (*caan*) and a small rectangular wooden box called *taadok* are attached to the *skɔɔ thom*. They are also used to reproduce onomatopoeic sounds (figure 2.5). The main function of the drum is to make a loud and powerful sound and playing it requires much strength. Accordingly, two or three musicians play it in turn, while an additional musician plays the cylindrical-shaped idiophone using two metal sticks.

The traditional *Ikhaon bassac* ensemble also includes the wooden clappers called *krap*, which play a rhythm that complement the drums' beats. The *skɔɔ bassac*, the *caan* and the *taadok* accompany the entrance and exit of the characters as well as the opening and closing of the curtain. The percussion instruments symbolize real sounds to help the narration of the story and to create an atmosphere to highlight emotions, gestures or sound effects. They also signal the transition from one scene to another and attract the spectators' attention at the beginning of the performance. In a scene of battle the idiophone *caan* reproduces the sounds of the swords; when it accompanies the giants' entrance onto the stage, it reproduces the sounds of their footsteps or movements called *huən*.

There are two categories of *huən*: the *keriyaa thoəmmədaa* (simple movement), used for speaking and singing, and the *kanka kbac* (stylish movement) which combines Chinese and Khmer martial arts movements. The second category of *huən* can be divided into three subcategories: movements for the entrance and exit from the stage; movements for miming means of transportation (such as horses); and movements for fighting during a battle scene. *Huən* is a distinctive characteristic of *Ikhaon bassac*; it can be different according to the characters (giants, animals, humans) and the different circumstances/situations (scenes of love; scenes of compassion and sadness; comic scenes and battles). The rhythm of the *skɔɔ* is different depending on the scene and character. For example, during a scene of battle the rhythm is quicker; if the character is a giant the sound of the *caan* accompanies the acrobatic movements of the giants (*kancha kbac*) (DVD, track 4).

Figure 2.4: Way Dorn playing *louk skɔɔ* drum and Nong Chack playing the female *lao* (on the left) and male *lao* (on the right), Banteay Meanchey province



Figure 2.5: The *taadok* (rectangular wooden box) attached to the *skɔɔ bassac thom* (big *bassac* drum). On the left, the *caan* (cylindrical-shaped idiophone)



The vocal music is accompanied by *trɔ quu* (lower pitched two-stringed fiddle with a resonating chamber made from a coconut shell), *trɔ quu camhiang* (higher pitched two-string fiddle) and *trɔ chee* (highest pitched two-string fiddle, with cylindrical resonating chamber), all of which follow the melodic line of the singer. The *trɔ chee* is tuned one octave higher than the *trɔ*

quu and it is only played in *Ikhaon bassac* ensemble. One distinctive characteristic of this family of instruments is the bow hair being permanently fixed between the two strings making it impossible to remove the bow from the instrument. This feature recalls the Chinese bowed lutes called *huqin*. In the *bassac* ensemble, the *trɔ quu* is tuned to the pitch of the fifth note of the xylophone *roneat ek* (Keo 2003) (figure 2.6). The *trɔ quu* player in the *bassac* ensemble is called *trɔ ckuət* (the crazy fiddler) because it has to follow the sudden changes of the singers' vocal registry. "Sometimes the male singer also sings the female voice, so the *trɔ* has to follow this quick change. The male voice is called *samleej proh* and corresponds to the *ksae thuu* (loose string), while the female voice is called *samleej srəy* and corresponds to the *ksae təj* (tight string) of the *trɔ*" (Ruah Somart, *Ikhaon bassac* musician, interview, 15 December 2014, Phnom Penh).

The other melodic *bassac* instruments are *trɔ sao* (two-string bowed wooden fiddle with a cylindrical resonating chamber), *khim* (trapezoidal-shaped hammered dulcimer) which is in two sizes: *khim touc* (small) and *khim thom* (big) (figure 2.3). Some of the *bassac* instruments, particularly *khim*, *trɔ sao* and *trɔ quu*, are acknowledged by Khmer musicians as having been influenced by Chinese instruments that arrived in Cambodia through *Ikhaon bassac* (Miller and Sam 1995: 232).

Figure 2.6: *Trɔ quu* (above), *trɔ chee* (in the middle) and *trɔ sao* (below)



5. Bouraan and Samay

While in the wedding repertoire the dichotomy *bouraan/samay* (old/modern) is related to the ensemble and repertoire, in the *Ikhaon bassac* context it refers to the kind of story, characters, costumes and the general theme of the story. *Bouraan* stories include kings, princesses, hermits and giants (*yeaq*) while *samay* stories include *seithay* (millionaires), robbers and deal with issues of modern life, such as having free choice of marriage partners, crime, economic inequality and the conflict between the old and young generations. “*Samay* stories are usually sad” (Ol Samang, from personal communication, 10 April 2015, Phnom Penh). Right and wrong are stereotyped and their distinction is clear. In the *samay* plays, events are more realistic and the drama tends to be educational. In the *bouraan* stories, good prevails against evil through the figure of the prince-hero who is a model of good conduct through his actions.

The *bassac* stories are extracted from and inspired by history, nature, war or ancient stories such as *Preah Cinwuəŋ* or *Tum Tiəw* (a love story) or episodes from the epic poem *Reamker*. Other stories include *Nim Kaew* and *Te Cho Dom Deng*. Some stories are adaptations and translations of Chinese works such as three historical novels *Ciew Kun*, *Tik Cen* and *Say Han* and the tale of fantasy *Han Buen* (Nepote and Khing 1987: 359). The *samay* stories are based on traditional legends and stories which are adapted to different themes such as comedy, tragedy, love and war. “Classical stories such as *Preah Cinwuəŋ* are usually not performed as most people know the story and watch it on TV and DVDs. Therefore, classical and modern stories must be mixed up with a good link” (Ol Samang, interview, 09 March 2015, Phnom Penh). *Bouraan* and *samay* components are combined to satisfy both the young and the elders’ preferences. “Nevertheless, the technique and the way of performance of each writer can be different. Scenery, speech and actor have to be properly matched” (Ol Samang, interview, 09 March 2015, Phnom Penh). Stories written for television typically last for one hour but those written for performance in the countryside can take up to nine or ten hours. In the past, the *bouraan* story lasted two or three days or even several weeks or months.

Nowadays, the length of the story can be adapted according to the audience’s response; in fact, many people leave the pagoda after a few hours of performance while others sleep on the ground until the end of the performance. If there are many people at the end of the performance, the story can be prolonged by adding a scene featuring the comedians or a dialogue between characters. Therefore, the number of scenes is not fixed: scenes can be added or omitted according to the number of spectators.

In both *bouraan* and *samay* stories there are four main characters: *nam proh* (two males) and *nam srəy* (two females). One of the male characters and one of the female characters represent a bad character. “An actor can perform different characters according to

his/her talent. The most important role such as comedians, “bad” actors, main actor and main actress cannot normally be absent from the performance” (Ol Samang, interview, 09 March 2015, Phnom Penh). Male characters wear Chinese-influenced costumes and make-up (figure 2.7). By contrast, female roles are played by characters in traditional Cambodian costumes and their acting is dominated by the nostalgic and sentimental expressions characteristic of Cambodian lyricism (figure 2.8). This aspect symbolizes the “khmerization” of *lkhaon bassac*.

Both male and female *samay* characters wear contemporary Khmer dress (figure 2.9). Each actor has two or three costumes to wear for the entire story. However, due to the difficulties of changing costumes and economic reasons, a single costume can be used for different scenes. In addition to the characters of the story, in the *samay* stories, there are two or four *tlok* (comedians/clowns) who represent an element of fun and entertainment during the development of the plot of the story. They serve as educators and narrators. They improvise around a minimal plot, which must be related to the story, and are inspired by the audience and its reactions. “Sometimes at the end of the performance the audience ask them to play something else”, Samang said.

The make-up of the *bouraan* male characters and giants (*yeaq*) are influenced by the Chinese role-type *jing* which includes painted-face characters, including strongman roles such as warriors, bandits, military men and supernatural beings. The complex patterns and vivid colors of the facial paints give information on the characters’ feelings and morals. Even their husky voice reflects their force (Bonds 2008). The Chinese influence is also reflected in some movements such as *kanka kbac* (stylish movement) which combines Chinese and Khmer martial arts movements.

Figure 2.7: *Bouraan* characters from left to right: *yeaq* male, the King father, a “bad” character, the young son and *yeaq* female



Figure 2.8: Female *bouraan* costumes



Figure 2.9: *Samay* costumes



In *bouraan* performance, in addition to the costumes, characters and stories, the stage-set has also been modernized. Nowadays, the *Ikhaon bassac* stage has been influenced by western elements such as the curtain, the use of lighting effects and the amplification system. In the past, it consisted of a large table made of wood on which the characters sat surrounded by the audience. People from the countryside gathered to perform;

Today the table has been replaced by the stage with the curtain to make the performance more attractive as the characters come on the stage one by one. They give more suspense and surprise to the audience. (Ol Samang, personal communication, 09 April 2015, Phnom Penh)

The musicians are hidden in the wings of the stage (figure 2.10). The scenery consists of a system of sliding painted curtains that a person in the backstage manoeuvres from one scene to the next. Therefore, the *Ikhaon bassac samay* reflects some influence of modern drama related to the plot of the stories, the realistic scenery, costumes and the use of lighting effects which contribute to appeal to the audience. However, there are regional variations of *bouraan* performance regarding stories, performance practices and even repertoires. Unfortunately, I was not able to investigate regional variations on account of time constraints. Therefore, this issue needs further research.

Figure 2.10: The stage and the audience before a performance in Kampong Cham province



In general, scriptwriters combine *bouraan* and *samay* components following a precise fixed structure which can be slightly different for each performance according to the scriptwriter's creativity and preference. Usually, the performance starts with five or six wedding songs followed by *bassac* songs which are played backstage. These songs are offered to deities such as Preah Pisnukaa, during the ritual of *Haom Rooŋ* preceding every performance, and supernatural spirits such as *neāq ta* to bless the performers and the stage and ensure a good performance. After this, to signal the start of the performance and attract the audience's attention, the troupe's leader performs the *louk skɔɔ* ritual which consists of a succession of different rhythmic patterns played on the *louk skɔɔ* drum.

Once the curtain is opened, a giant enters the stage doing acrobatic movements following the beats of the *caan* and *skɔɔ bassac*. Then he usually sings a particular song, *Phat Ciey Yeaq* (song for the entrance of the giant), to introduce himself (DVD, track 5). After the presentation, one or two more giants come onto the stage doing acrobatic movements and introducing themselves with specific songs. At the end of the scene, there is a battle between two or three giants accompanied by the onomatopoeic sound of the *skɔɔ bassac* and *caan* called *vong* (DVD, track 6). The following scenes narrate the story; in turn, the characters introduce themselves singing their song; the singing is alternated with dialogues. At the beginning, middle and end of the performance there are some comic scenes performed by two comedians/clowns which sometimes are not related to the plot of the story as they serve as entertainment. The audience appreciates them, and the success of a performance depends on the comedians' performance. Within the story, different genres can be adapted or inserted. For example, a scene of death can be accompanied by the Buddhist chant *smot* which is sung to accompany the

soul of a dead person; a wedding song can accompany a wedding scene; pop songs can be inserted into a love scene and are usually played on CDs.

6. The Script and the “Creative Process” in *Lkhaon Bassac* Opera

Oi Samang, the leader of the group Oi Samang Lkhaon Bassac Phnom Penh, writes the script, including the song texts and the succession of the songs within each scene, in a notebook. Whereas in Western European opera a lyricist or librettist writes the text and a composer creates the music, in *lkhaon bassac* the scriptwriter produces the text, but chooses the songs from other genres or a pre-existing repertoire and gives instructions concerning stage setting, acting and singing. No musical notation is given, but the tunes’ titles provide a sort of guideline for the singers. Moreover, Samang showed me a list of instructions for the singers on how to sing “beautifully” (figures 2.11–2.12).

Figure 2.11: Instructions for singers from Samang’s script

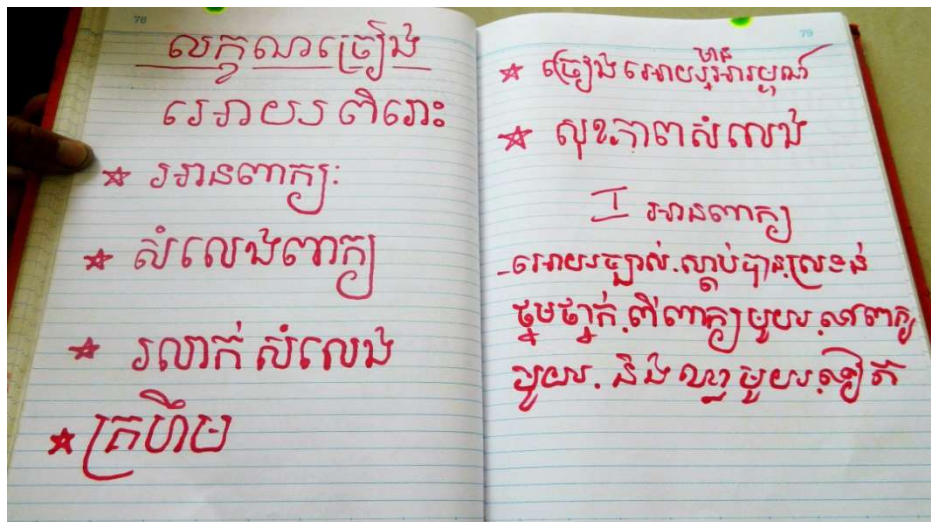


Figure 2.12: Samang’s script, English translation

Theatre Singing
How to sing beautifully

- ❖ Reading words
- ❖ Clear pronunciation
- ❖ Tremulous voice
- ❖ Roaring sound [referring to giant’s role]
- ❖ Putting yourself into the singing
- ❖ Voice health

I. Pronunciation

- Read the words clearly and listen to each word carefully.

Therefore, the musicians and actors have to follow the leader's rules and instructions. The musicians can choose the songs to play for certain scenes. Nevertheless, "to ensure the best performance, the leader should select a better song by himself as musicians tend to play easy, unattractive songs" (Ol Samang, interview, 09 March 2015, Phnom Penh). He writes the titles of the songs corresponding to the theme of the scene and their corresponding melody and lyrics. A limited number of melodies are repeated within a single performance as well as throughout the repertoire.

The scriptwriter has a sort of pre-existing vocabulary of tunes associated with specific dramatic tunes, as in Peking Opera (Guy 2005: 168) and Cantonese opera (Yung 1989). This process of combining and adapting tunes, texts and characters is examined by Yung (1989). He discusses three levels of the "creating process" in Cantonese opera: 1) the combination of different oral delivery types (aria-type, fixed-tune and narrative songs) in a dramatic situation; 2) an analysis of the speech-song spectrum according to the tonal features of the language; 3) the micro-level process in the creation of a new version of a melody. Here, I will delineate some aspects similar to those of the creative process in Chinese opera which can be applied to the *Ikhaon bassac* opera. They concern the combination of tunes and their adaptation to the dramatic situations, song titles and characters (role-type and voice) and the variation of melodies based on techniques (*tik daam* and *stiil*) underlying the process of simultaneous improvisation called *plae kaa* (taking different roads).

6.1. Interrelation and Adaptation: Characters, Scenes, Titles and Songs

In *Ikhaon bassac* theatre, some tunes have quite specific functions such as self-introduction, dialogue, etc. After the opening of the curtains, characters introduce themselves by saying "I am..." followed by a brief account of their intention and their character. For example, specific songs are sung by female characters to introduce themselves, such as *Naradam* song from the story *Preah Kammaa Ciiwit* (The sacred actions of life) written by Ol Samang (DVD, track 7). The core of a scene comprises sung dialogues, songs and speeches. Sometimes their speech is accompanied on the *tro quu*.

Songs are adapted to the characters' nature, the extension of their voices, their feelings and actions. For example, the song *Phat Ciay* (lifting the edge of the fabric) can be played for a scene of anger, or for naughty and vigorous characters such as giants (the song *Phat Ciay Yeaq*). Other songs also describe the feelings and emotions of the characters, such as *Qarjwaa* (to beg),

Loom smaa (to be impartial), or actions such as *Samləj* (staring at), *Tooc Yum* (the bird cries) and *Vong*.⁴⁵

Songs are also adapted to the theme of the scenes. There are four main theme categories: love, sadness, comic/happy and battle. Each of these themes has subcategories; for instance, love scenes require different songs according to the type of relationship such as a loving relationship or courtship. Table 8 summarizes some themes and their related songs. These songs are the most famous and frequently performed. However, there are many other *bassac* songs which share the same melodies with those listed below.

Table 8: Themes used in scenes, with associated songs

Theme	Song
Anger	♪ = <i>Phat Ciəy</i> (Lifting the edge of a fabric)
Death	♪ = <i>Angkor Riec</i> (The Royal Angkor)
Happiness	♪ = <i>Loom Tuu</i> (literally <i>loom</i> = “to console” and <i>tuu</i> = “to be loose”) ♪ = <i>Loom Njoab</i> (<i>Loom</i> song performed “faster”)
Love (pure love; falling in love; courting)	♪ = <i>Sampooŋ</i> (Casual hairdo) ♪ = <i>Soriyon</i> (title untranslatable)
Sadness/Compassion	♪ = <i>Loom</i> (To console) ♪ = <i>Norkor Riec</i> (The royal temple)

The *Ikhaon bassac* repertoire includes songs which are interrelated in terms of titles and tunes; sometimes the song title describes the scene or the action while the melody corresponds to another song. For example, a song titled *Snae Baarisot* (Pure love) is played to the melody of the song *Soriyon*; *Loom Tuu* is played to the *Sampooŋ* melody (see Example 2.1), usually played for scenes expressing “the beauty of a lady from the countryside.” A comparison of the melodies of *Sampooŋ* and that of *Loom Tuu* shows a similar melodic contour, although differences occur due to the individual style of the singers and the structure of the text and the lyrics.

⁴⁵ *Vong* means “circle”; it is played before battle scenes.

Example 2.1: Transcription of a) *Loom Tuu* and b) *Sampoong* melodies.

Note: Different singers sing the two melodies in various performance contexts. The original vocal registry of the two versions is different. Here, I have transposed the two melodies to the same “key” to make easier the comparison between the two.



“A singer exercises a certain degree of freedom in the performance; his version of a tune can vary from the same tune performed either by other singers or by him, either in the same performance or in different plays” (Yung 1989: 54). One melody can be repeated in various dramas or within the same scene/drama. The repetition is not the same but changes according to the structure of the text, character, dramatic situation, lyrics and individual style of the singer. It is possible to identify a core set of fundamental tunes which are varied and adapted across the *Ikhaon bassac* genre. Therefore, a ‘happy’ song and a ‘love’ song are two versions of one melody. However, in *Ikhaon bassac* songs more importance is given to the rhythmic and melodic micro-variations and the lyrics rather than the emotion they convey, whereas in Chinese opera music expresses emotions through descriptive and narrative titles and subtitles:

Due to the poetic nature and anti-scientific attitude toward analysis, they just explain a work according to its title and subtitles in whatever manner they prefer as long as it sounds poetic or narrative. There is no better example to reveal the poetic and emotional nature of the Chinese people than in the writing of program notes (...) People are more concerned with the ‘correct’ understanding of the musical content or message. Sound-for-sound's sake may not serve their purposes. (Han 1978: 35)

The process of adapting one tune to different texts also occurs in other genres such as the wedding music *phleng kar*. For example, the tune of a famous wedding song, *Sat Tra Yaan* (The Ibis bird), is frequently adapted to the text of another wedding song, *Trapenag Piey*, which is performed during the Haircutting ritual (see Chapter 4). However, the composition of a new song by combining two different *bassac* tunes is specific to the *bassac* genre. For instance, the combination of *Angkor Riec klaay Loom Tuu* is *Angkor Riec* mixed with *Loom Tuu*, and the combination of *Sampoong Coul Loom Tuu* is *Sampoong* mixed with *Loom Tuu*. These melodies are adapted to song titles relating to the theme of the scene. For example, in the script, the storywriter indicates the melody of the song (*Sampoong Coul Loom Tuu*) and the title of the song

(“I miss my village” or “The name of my village”). Pre-existent melodies are adapted to literary titles related to the scene. Table 9 shows some titles associated with pre-existing tunes from a performance I attended in Phnom Penh.

Table 9: Adaptation of pre-existing melodies to literary titles

Literary Title	Tune
“The Beauty of Girls from Countryside”	<i>Loom Camhiang</i>
“Love Following the Tradition”	<i>Loom</i>
“Pure Love”	<i>Soryion</i>
“Missing Very Much”	<i>Norkor Reac</i>
“Sun House”	<i>Loom Snae</i>
“Valley and Forest”	<i>Phat Ciay</i>
“Secret Love”	<i>Sampooj</i>

Labelled tunes are set to a variety of texts. They are selected for their appropriateness in a given dramatic situation. A similar process occurs in Peking opera:

Labeled tunes are distinct melodic units with titles. Most of the labeled tunes used in Peking opera have been borrowed from *kunqu*, while others have their sources in folk music or other regional Chinese opera forms. (Guy 2005: 175)

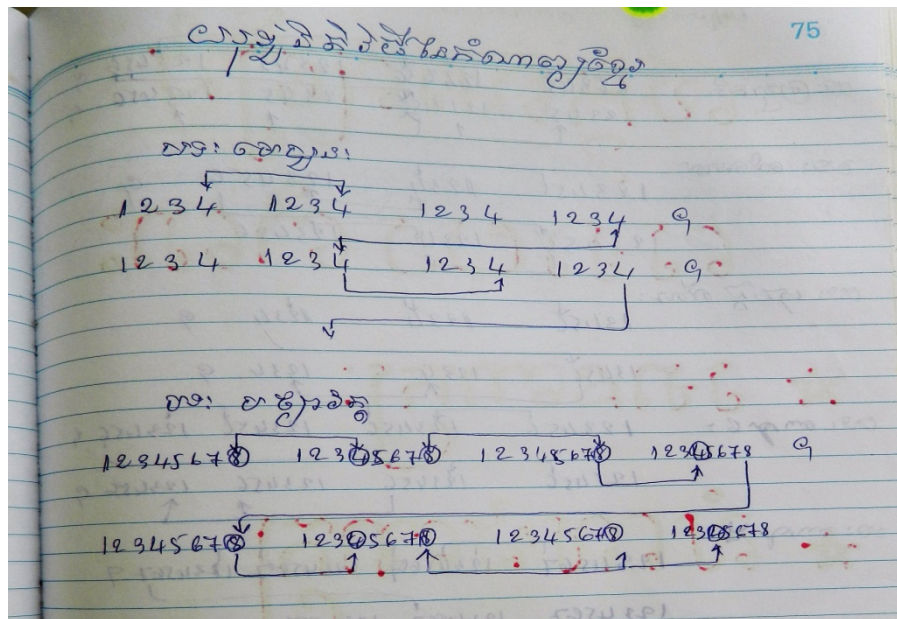
Other songs are borrowed from different Khmer traditional genres and adapted to the theatre context, such as *phleng kar* songs for a wedding scene or *smout*, which is a chant accompanying the soul of the dead, in a scene of death. For example, “*phleng kar bouraan* is also played in a particular scene such as a scene of a girl who leaves her boyfriend for a rich boy. The boyfriend sings *Konsaeng Krahaam* (The red handkerchief) or *Loom Niəj* (To console the lady)” (Ol Samang, personal communication, 23 May 2015, Phnom Penh). Other songs are considered of foreign origin, such as *Phit Naay* (Thai), *Vong Cen* (Chinese) and *Tumnuəj Bouraan* (French lament). Samang said, “Since the *bassac* theatre is the youngest form of Khmer popular theatre, different genres are adapted and mixed up (...) even popular music such as Sinn Sisamouth’s⁴⁶ songs can be played in the *bassac* theatre according to the scene. However, it is adapted to the *bassac* rules” (Ol Samang, personal communication, 09 April 2015, Phnom Penh).

⁴⁶ Sinn Sisamouth was one of the most famous singers of Khmer pop music in the 1950s/60s.

6.2. Lyrics, Voice and “The Art of Improvisation”

In *Ikhaon bassac* theatre, the scriptwriter chooses a titled tune for dramatic and structural reasons. Then he composes the text. The tunes and the texts are both matched to the scenes. The lyrics are poems (*kamnaap*) with specific structures and features. Therefore, there are precise rules to follow in terms of rhymes, poetic words, and style (figure 2.13).

Figure 2.13: Rhymes of the lyrics, from Ol Samang’s script



The choice of the words is another important aspect: since stories can be addressed to kings or monks, an appropriate language is needed. However, “nowadays, some words for the king or monks are used in a wrong way. In the past, if someone made a mistake, musicians were jailed and their instruments were destroyed” (Nong Chak, interview, 13 October 2014, Banteay Meanchey). Ol Samang highlighted the importance of improvising text and music on the part of the performers in the context of the “creative process”:

It is a very good idea that a *Ikhaon* leader writes and provides the entire theme of each scene for the actors. However, personal speeches or expression of the actors [improvisation of words] should be encouraged to ensure a better performance. Nevertheless, only experienced actors are allowed to do so [but if they don’t improvise on the theme of the scene, the performance could become awkward]. The leader has to manage this with great understanding. (Ol Samang, personal communication, 09 April 2015, Phnom Penh)

He explains the process of improvisation of the singers/actors by using the French words *improviser* (to improvise) and *parole* (word) and explains the importance of improvising in order to act well. Text and music can be improvised according to the dramatic situation. Students learn the *parole* for each scene first, and then they improvise. When they follow the *parole*, the

Each song is sung in a different *stiil*⁴⁸ (style) based on the kind of voice. “*Stiil* consists of how fast and slow, and loud and quiet they sing” (Nong Chak, interview, 13 October 2014, Banteay Meanchey). A tune is adapted to a particular scene by adjusting its tempo and varying the melody. Tempo differences are indicated by adding the prefix *njoab* (fast) to the title of the song. For example, *Loom Tuu* can be played with a fast rhythm; in this case, it is called *Loom Tuu Njoab*. The tune remains unchanged. “Style is different from *tik daam* which is about using or treating voice to produce beautiful sounds” (Ol Samang, interview, 10 June 2015, Phnom Penh). Style concerns rhythmic and textual features, while *tik daam* is a tool “to make the sound beautiful” (*plae kaa*) and refers to the process of improvisation. The same melody improvised upon by different singers will vary according to the singer’s personal style of melodic embellishments and adaptations that make the melody, in the words of Khmer musicians, “beautiful”. During an interview, Nong Chak sang the melody of *Phat Ciay bassac* to explain the concept of *plae kaa* defined as “the process of embellishing the melody by adding/changing notes” (Nong Chak, interview, 13 October 2014, Banteay Meanchey). However, the vocal line reveals slight melodic and rhythmic variations which are more consistent in the instrumental parts (Example 2.3).

Example 2.3: Transcription of vocal line of a) *Phat Ciay bassac* (with *plae kaa*) and b) *Phat Ciay thəamtaa* (without *plae kaa*)

Note: Sung approximately a semitone higher than shown. The passages in the boxes indicate melodic and rhythmic variations between the two versions.



In the vocal part, the improvisation is more related to the song text which is extemporized according to the scenes and the melodic phrases. In the instrumental part, the process of improvisation produces an increase or decrease in the density of embellishments/variations, but there is no change of tempo as occurs in Chinese music including Cantonese theatre (Yung 1989: 155). *Lkhaon bassac* Masters use the term *plae kaa* which means

⁴⁸ The term “*stiil*” is a Khmer adaptation of the French word “*style*”.

“to make the sound beautiful” to explain the concept of improvisation. The more a musician can do *plae kaa*, the more talented he is:

A group of musicians needs to find the way of embellishing the melody as they play as a group. One group turns to the right and another to the left to reach the same destination. Musicians have different choices depending on their talent and skills. If they pick the wrong form of improvisation they will not play beautifully but if they choose the right kind of improvisation they will play beautifully (Nong Chak, interview, 13 October 2014, Banteay Meanchey)

Therefore, the process of improvisation is explained by Khmer musicians as “taking different ways to make the sound beautiful.” This is accomplished by adding notes (*tik daam*) to embellish the melody. This process is not a unique feature of *Ikhaon bassac* music but occurs in different genres including *pheng Kmae* music, the classical *pin piat* and the modern *mchaorii* genres. However, it is explained by musicians through different metaphors and adjectives across the different genres, such as taking different roads, travelling on different routes, counterfeiting or distorting the melody and so on.

The process of simultaneous variation of the melody which results in the heterophonic texture of Khmer music is common to many genres of Khmer traditional music and theatre. Not only has improvisation occurred in the music but also in the text. In *Ikhaon bassac* the text is improvised according to the main theme of the scene by using appropriate and elaborate words following specific rhyming rules. In *phleng arak* music the singer improvises the text by choosing words that describe the spirits and narrates their stories so that they are recalled and invited to possess the medium. In *phleng kar* music the singer improvises according to the ritual scene by listing the offerings that have been made; the singer describes the ritual and portrays the qualities of the spouses and their families.

7. Religious Syncretism and the Co-existence of Genres

Before every performance, *Ikhaon bassac* musicians and actors perform some rituals for deities and supernatural beings. During a performance in Kampong Cham province, Ol Samang’s group gathered around a shrine dedicated to the guardian spirits (*neāq ta*) placed on the pagoda ground near the stage. Ol Samang knelt inside the shrine while the musicians and the rest of the group sat behind him. They offered four *bassac* songs to the spirits in order to ask permission to build the stage and ensure a good performance (figure 2.14). They played: 1) *Haom Rooj* (*bassac*); 2) *Lækhat Banjcum* (raising the hands to salute); 3) *Saaraayan* (untranslatable); 4)

Saathukaa.⁴⁹ Later, they played the same songs inside the pagoda to pay homage to Buddha (figure 2.15).

This practice reflects the Khmer religious syncretism in which different beliefs co-exist peacefully; in this context music is an offering to Buddha, deities and animistic spirits as mentioned in the previous chapter on the *arak* spirits beliefs. Other rituals are performed backstage. Some of them are carried out without any specific musical accompaniment, such as the *Coan Tii* ritual which is carried out by old Masters to help actors not to get worried or nervous on the stage (*Tvæa Qaoy Cañ Craap*). The Master applies beeswax on the actors' hairline and eyebrows to make their faces charming and on lips and throat to make their voice beautiful (*Laek Tik Muk*). The subsequent ritual is the *Pithii Praset Kamlaŋ Kruu* ritual in which one of the Masters sprays water or blows betel leaves on the actors, who in turn stand in front of the *asna* (a tray fixed on the wall on which are placed some offerings) and light incense sticks. This ritual is to invite all holy spirits to bless and protect a performer from any bad influence.

Figure 2.14: Ritual of offering *bassac* music to the guardian spirits, Kampong Cham province



⁴⁹ It can be translated as “song for the blessing ritual and the presentation of offerings.” It is also performed by the *pin piät* ensemble within the suite for the *Sampeah Kruu* ritual (Giuriati 1999: 89-106).

Figure 2.15: Ol Samang and his troupe offering *bassac* music in a pagoda, Kampong Cham province



Backstage, before the performance, musicians play *phleng kar* wedding music as an offering to the supernatural spirits, specifically Masters of music. “*Phleng kar* is played because it is the most autochthonous music; it is related to *phleng arak* music which is played to invite *arak* spirits and the Masters of music” (Ol Samang, interview, 10 June 2015, Phnom Penh). They usually play traditional wedding songs chosen by the musicians on *phleng kar samay kandaal* instruments (semi-traditional wedding ensemble) including a *trɔ̄ quu*, *khim touc*, *skɔ̄ day* (hand drum) and *khloy*. During one of the performances I attended, they played four wedding songs: *Haom Rooŋ* (*Phleng kar*); *Konsaeng Khahom* (The red handkerchief); *Sarei Andaet* (The seaweeds float on the water); *Kat Traoy* (Passing the river bank) and *Sampooŋ* (Casual hairdo).

Rituals of *Twaay Phleng* (Offering the music) are also performed to worship instruments, in particular the drum which is considered as a deity. In fact, the Khmers believe that a spiritual Master protects every instrument. This ritual is called *Tuuy Skɔ̄* (Beating the drum) or *Dah Skɔ̄* (Exciting the drum); a Master lights incense sticks attached to the *skɔ̄ bassac* while a musician/actor plays it to invite Preah Pisnukaa and territorial spirits (*neāq ta*) to bless and protect the actors and ensure them a good performance (figure 2.16). The *skɔ̄ bassac* and the idiophone *caan* play different rhythmic patterns before the beginning of the performance and for the entrance and exit of the characters from the stage. The transition from one rhythmic pattern to another is signalled by the *taadok*, a small wooden square attached on the top of the *skɔ̄ bassac* (see Example 2.4). The *skɔ̄ bassac* is played by two wooden sticks reproducing a rapid succession of sounds or a rapid alternation of the two hands. The *skɔ̄ bassac* and the *caan* play different rhythmic patterns while the *taadok* usually plays at the end of each rhythmic

pattern to signal the transition from one pattern to the other. In the performances I attended five patterns were played (DVD track 8). Example 2.4 provides the transcription of the first two patterns as they are also played to accompany the entrance and exit of the characters from the stage.

Example 2.4: Transcription of the *taadok* (T), *skɔɔ bassac* (SB) and two *caaj* (C1; C2) rhythmic patterns for the *Tuuj Skɔɔ* ritual (beating the drum) or *Dah Skɔɔ* ritual (exciting the drum) (DVD, track 8).

Note: Only the first two patterns are transcribed below. The drum roll rhythms are approximate. The first three bars of pattern 2 are repeated approximately four times; pattern 2 ends in bar 4. The corresponding timings on DVD track 8 are in brackets.

Pattern 1 [00:00:01–00:00:09]

Tempo rubato

Pattern 1 transcription showing four staves: T, SB, C1, and C2. The notation includes various rhythmic symbols like vertical lines, 'x' marks, and slanted lines, indicating drum beats and patterns.

Pattern 2 [00:00:10–00:00:47]

Pattern 2 transcription showing four staves: T, SB, C1, and C2. The notation includes various rhythmic symbols like vertical lines, 'x' marks, and slanted lines, indicating drum beats and patterns.

The drum *skɔɔ bassac* and the idiophone *caaj* serve to communicate with the actors as well as the audience. They signal the start of the performance, a battle, movements of characters and transition from one scene to another. To make the sound louder two *caaj* are played. The *Tuuj Skɔɔ* ritual is followed by the *Pithii Saen Preah Pisnukaa*. “The *Pithii Saen Preah Pisnukaa* or *Pithii Haom Rooj* ritual is to open the door to the holy spirits of masters and

ancestors” (Ol Samang, interview, 07 April 2015). Along with the drum, a group of women backstage sing *Haom Rooᅇ (bassac)*. “In the past, *Haom Rooᅇ* was performed on the stage. Nowadays, it is performed backstage because the actors do not want to reveal their characters to the audience before the start of the performance” (Ol Samang, interview, 07 April 2015). *Haom Rooᅇ (bassac)* has a different melody, song text and rhythm to *Haom Rooᅇ (phleng kar)*. In fact, musicians specify the name of the genre in the song title to avoid confusion, as discussed in Chapter 4. The following table illustrates the succession of pre-performance rituals and their corresponding songs.

Table 10: *Lkhaon bassac* pre-performance rituals

Pre-performance Rituals	Song
“Offering <i>Bassac</i> Music to the Guardian Spirits”	<p>♪ = <i>Haom Rooᅇ Bassac</i> (The Sacred Pavillion)</p> <p>♪ = <i>Ləəkaahat Banᅇum</i> (Raising the Hands to Salute the masters)</p> <p>♪ = <i>Saaraayan</i> (title untranslatable)</p> <p>♪ = <i>Saathukaa</i> (Song of blessing)</p>
<i>Coan Tii</i> (Ritual of applying beeswax on the actors’ eyebrows, lips and throat)	No music
<i>Pithii Praset Kamlanᅇ Kruu</i> (Ritual of decorating the Master)	No music
<i>Pithii Twaay Phleng</i> (Offering <i>phleng kar</i> music)	♪ = <i>Phleng kar</i> wedding songs
<i>Tuunᅇ Skᅇᅇ</i> (Beating the drum) or <i>Dah Skᅇᅇ</i> ritual (Exciting the drum)	♪ = <i>Lam skᅇᅇ</i> (Fast rhythm of the drum)
<i>Pithii Saen Preah Pisnukaa</i> (Offering Music to Preah Pisnukaa)	♪ = <i>Haom Rooᅇ (bassac)</i>

In addition to the religious syncretism in which Buddha and animistic spirits live together harmoniously, the succession of *bassac* and *phleng kar* songs shows the interrelationship and co-existence of genres within the same theatre performance context. However, *phleng kar* music is played not only as an offering to deities and spirits but can also be adapted for use in particular scenes such as wedding scenes, as discussed above.

Figure 2.16: *Tuuŋ Skoo* ritual (Beating the drum)



8. Conclusions

Analysis of the structure of performances reveals a strong relationship among songs, scenes and characters. The storywriter chooses and adapts songs to each scene and character. A melody of a given song can be adapted to different song titles which relate to the performing action or to the character. Alternatively, two separate tunes can be combined to create a new song. This process of song adaptation, including use of songs from other genres, is a process by which the music is connected to the development of the story.

Since the main function of *Ikhaon bassac* is to entertain the masses, both via television and performance in the villages, the audience's reception influences the development of the performance as well as the choice of the story, its length and the selection of the songs. The troupe adjusts its repertoire to suit the tastes of different audiences by mixing *bouraan* and *samay* stories, repertoires, costumes, characters and even different musical genres. The leader has the duty of correcting the mistakes of actors in order to improve their performance. Reactions on the part of the audience and troupe members often affect the performances. The audience does not concentrate on each word or gesture but on the general feeling of the scene. Consequently, "each song can be played twice, especially when the theme is love or compassion since the audience is emotionally moved" (Ol Samang, personal communication, 10 April 2015, Phnom Penh).

It is possible to distinguish *bouraan* and *samay* stories. While *bouran* stories are related to Khmer folk tales and legends, the modern ones reflect social, cultural and moral values. The storywriters, who are also the troupes' leaders, combine old and modern stories, characters and costumes and construct a narrative sequence designed to appeal to the audience:

The audience is the ocean and theatre troupes are the fish that swim therein. Without the ocean, the fish will die; without the audience, the troupe will die. When a troupe is functioning successfully, theatre and audience are complementary halves of the total theatre situation. The theatre reflects the audience and the audience is a kind of mirror image of the theatre. (Brandon 1967: 255)

They know too well they have to convince and seduce the audience on television and in the villages to gain popularity and prestige. My analysis of the *bassac* repertoire, as encountered in the performances I documented in the field, reveals various types of song interrelation and exchange:

- 1) Pre-existing melodies are labelled with the theme/scene's name;
- 2) Two melodies can be mixed to create a new song;
- 3) Song texts and melodic "styles" are adapted to the singer's voice, the role-type and theme of the scenes;
- 4) Texts are improvised according to the scenes and the characters' type. However, only experienced actors and musicians have this skill;
- 5) Songs from different genres are borrowed and adapted to the theatre context (scenes of wedding, funerals, rituals of possession, etc.);
- 6) The performance of wedding music as an offering to deities and masters of music reinforces its importance and authenticity postulated by Khmer musicians.

Chapter 3

The Interrelations of *Lkhaon Yiikee* Theatre and *Rɔbam Yiikee* Dance Repertoires

This chapter introduces the *lkhaon yiikee* genre whose repertoire presents some musical and extramusical interrelations with the *phleng kar*, *phleng arak* and *lkhaon bassac* genres examined in the previous chapters. Although *lkhaon yiikee* has some aspects in common with the *lkhaon bassac* genre (occasions of performance, stories, the composition of the script and foreign influences), the *yiikee* is considered to be a “less foreign” genre than *lkhaon bassac* since it recalls some aspects of Khmer classical dance in terms of costumes and dance movements.

Originally it consisted of a dance performance (*rɔbam yiikee*) accompanied by big drums called *skɔɔ yiikee* from which the genre’s name is derived. Later, the theatre performance called *lkhaon yiikee* (*yiikee* theatre) was added to *rɔbam yiikee*. Nowadays, the dance is performed by six female dancers at the beginning of the theatre performance for the ritual of paying homage to the masters (*Pithii Haom Roŋ*). In the past it was performed in the palace for the king, his family and their guests. Today, it has lost its prestige and royal patronage and is confined to villages and the Royal University of Fine Arts. *Lkhaon yiikee* is undergoing a process of modernization, with impact from the television medium and socio-cultural changes (see Chapter 5). It is performed for Buddhist festivities or public events in rural areas as well as on television. Therefore, we can distinguish a *bouraan* (ancient) and a *samay* (modern) form in terms of stories, costumes, characters and ensemble.

The first part of the chapter discusses origins, occasions of performance, provides general information about the differences between *lkhaon yiikee* and *rɔbam yiikee* and the main aspects of the *bouraan* and *samay* forms; the second part is devoted to a classification of the *yiikee* dance and theatre repertoires and their interrelation in terms of song titles and function including some musical features such as the structure of the songs, the process of adaptation of the songs to theatre context and the borrowing from other genres, particularly from the wedding repertoire (*phleng kar*). The literature on *lkhaon yiikee* discusses general descriptions of its origins (Morotti 2010; Pich Tum 2008; Sam 1998), costumes, characters, story plots and ensemble relating to performances of the last century (Research Committee 2003; Sakhou 2006; Thiounn 1956). There are no musical analyses or transcriptions of the songs, and no discussions of how particular musical passages relate to specific scenes. A few studies, such as Phim’s and Thompson’s study (2001), which focus on different kinds of classical dance-drama do not include *lkhaon yiikee*.

Although *lkhaon yiikee* was performed for the Royal entertainment in the past, it is not considered as an icon of Khmer performing arts primarily due to its foreign origins; in fact, it is deemed to be influenced by the Thai *likay*. Therefore, there are no studies that investigate the

repertoire of *lkhaon yiikee* and its interrelation with other genres which is the purpose of this work. Here, I will delineate some aspects similar to those of the creative process in *lkhaon bassac* (see Chapter 2) which can be applied to the *lkhaon yiikee* opera; they concern the combination of tunes and their adaptation to the dramatic situations, song titles and characters (role-type and voice). The aim of this chapter is to answer the following questions: How are *yiikee* songs selected and adapted to the theatre context? What is the function of the borrowed songs? Why has the theatre performance been added to the original dance performance?

1. The Origins

There are different interpretations of the unclear origin of *lkhaon yiikee*. Its name recalls the drums (*skɔɔ yiikee*) which characterize this genre. After the Angkorean period, the *skɔɔ yiikee* were played by the Cham, the Islamic minority currently living in some provinces of Cambodia (Kampong Thom, Kampong Cham, Kandaal, Kampong Chnang), in wedding ceremonies. Consequently, the Khmers have adopted the *skɔɔ yiikee* to create a new genre of entertainment; it arrived in Cambodia through Muslim merchants from Java or Malaysia. As a result, it has some common elements with the Malay *Jikey* and the Thai *likay* (Thiounn 1956 [1930]:32). According to some Khmer scholars, King Jayavarman II (802–850 AC) brought the *skɔɔ yiikee* to Cambodia from the Kingdom of Sryjava where he was exiled (ibid.)

Others believe that *lkhaon yiikee* probably originated in Malaysia where it was called *yiikee* and crossed the border to Thailand changing its name to *lyke* and finally arrived in Cambodia where it was re-called *yiikee*. The findings of a group of researchers from the Department of Fine Arts of the Ministry of Culture in 1980 reveal that some chants employed by the Cham at a mosque in Kampong Chnang province correspond to *yiikee* songs such as *Maariyan* (title untranslatable). Cham people sit in a circle playing *skɔɔ* and chanting, which perhaps resembles the original form of the *yiikee* theatre (Sam 1998). In the past, in fact, *lkhaon yiikee* was performed in the villages for local celebrations on a mat where actors and musicians sat in a circle.

Yiikee theatre is known in Cambodia since 1876, under the reign of King Nārədam. However, the *skɔɔ yiikee* was used in Cambodia before the Angkorean era when it was employed as a sacred instrument for weddings and Brahmanic ceremonies (Morotti 2010: 319). In 1177 the Cham defeated and invaded Angkor under Jayavarman VII. Therefore, Khmer started to know *yiikee* and adapted it to their culture. In the 19th century another foreign theatre of Siamese origin called *Ay-Pé* flourished. *Ay-Pé* was characterized by simple dialogues between a group of women and a group of men; the songs consisted of the alternation of solo and chorus without

any musical accompaniment. It seems that *Ay-Pé* was a Siamese adaptation of the original *yikee* which was considered of Javanese and Muslim origins:

The Javanese *Liké*, far from being an entertainment like the *Ay-Pé*, had become the Siamese *Liké*. It was essentially religious: dervishes formed a circle, chanting prayers; sometimes these prayers were interspersed with solos sung by one of the dervishes; afterwards [following the introduction of the music to Malaysia], the irreverence of the Malays introduced phrases, which did not belong to the prayers, into these solos and transformed them into jokes. The Siamese, seduced by this unexpected comedy, saw in the *Liké* only an opportunity to laugh. (Thiounn 1956: 32)⁵⁰

During the first decades of the 20th century, the *yikee* was also performed before the classical dance-drama at the Royal court as *divertimento*, becoming a theatre genre that assimilated some choreographic movements of the court dance. During the Sihanouk period (1953–60), the Cham participated in some parades playing the *skɔɔ yikee* and singing *yikee* songs (Pich Tum 2008). The Cham origin of *Ikhaon yikee* is also attested by the relationship between the legendary first ruler of Cambodia (Preah Thaon) and the first king of the Cham (Sok Chairey) in the 1st century. In the 7th century the Khmer king Indravoroman I married the princess of Cham. So they brought to Cambodia their tradition and culture, including *yikee*. At the beginning of the 19th century, *Ikhaon yikee* disappeared until independence from French rule, gained in 1954–55, following which new troupes evolved, especially in the Mekong River area. The old form of *yikee* was a dance performance, but the advent of mass media, cultural tourism and social changes have shaped a mixed form of *yikee* (see Chapter 5).

2. Occasions of Performance

In the past, *Ikhaon yikee* was performed at the end of the rice harvesting. Pich Sal recounts the original function of *yikee* in the villages:

It is this distraction [*yikee* performance] which, during traditional festivals taking place at the temple at the end of the rice season, delights the inhabitants eager for entertainment. The first beats of the *Yikee* drum gather inhabitants from more than ten kilometres around. (Sal 1970; cit in Samouth 2006: 72)⁵¹

Performers sat in a circle and got up to perform when their turn came; on finishing, they went back and sat down in their original places. Initially, the audience simply sat around the

⁵⁰ [Le *Liké* javanais, loin d'être un divertissement comme le *Ay-Pé* et comme l'est devenu le *Liké* siamois. Etait essentiellement religieux: des derviches formaient un cercle et psalmodaient en chœur des prières ; parfois, ces prières étaient entrecoupées de soli que chantaient un des derviches ; par la suite, l'irrévérence des Malais introduisit dans ces soli des phrases tout-à-fait étrangères à la prière et les transformèrent en véritables plaisanteries. Les Siamois, séduits par ce comique inattendu, ne virent dans le *Liké* qu'une occasion de rire.] (Thiounn 1956: 32)

⁵¹ [C'est cette distraction qui, pendant les fêtes traditionnelles se déroulant au monastère dès la fin de la saison du riz, réjouit les habitants avides de divertissements. Les premiers coups du tambour de *Yikee* rassemblent les habitants à plus de dix kilomètres à la ronde.] (Sal 1970; cit in Samouth 2006: 72)

performers. Later, performers added a curtain for a backdrop, and after a character had finished performing, he or she went behind it. Eventually, the event became a fully staged dramatic performance, including several scenery cloths (Sam 1998). Nowadays, a stage with a curtain is placed in the ground surrounding the pagodas on the occasion of important Buddhist celebrations and festivals – as with *Ikhaon bassac* theatre. It is built by a group of workmen, engaged and supervised by the troupe’s leader. In the past, the stage was hired by people who required the performance, while today the troupe owns its stage (fig. 3.1).

Figure 3.1: *Lkhaon yiikee* stage, Tani district, Kampot province



The most renowned troupes of the villages are engaged to perform for Buddhist celebrations such as: *Bonn Kathin*, in late October, in which people bring gifts to the monks; *Bon Phuum* (village festival), the ceremony of cremation of the pagoda’s chief and other small ceremonies of the village; *Bonn Pkaa* (flower festival), a fund-raising event for the pagoda; *Bon Bançoh Səymaa* (ceremony for the construction of pagoda); and *Bon Paccay Buen* (thanksgiving to parents).

People gathered at the pagoda in the evening bringing food, bamboo mats and blankets to spend the night on the floor to see the performance. *Lkhaon yiikee* is very popular in rural areas while it is rarely performed in urban contexts except for some tourist performances by CLA’s students (see Chapter 5) and by the University of Fine Arts. A modern form of *Ikhaon yiikee* theatre and the songs called *camriəŋ yiikee* (*yiikee* singing) extracted from the theatre performance are performed in television competitions that aim to promote the theatre troupes

and promote the *yiikee* genre among the young. The Khmers, especially in the countryside, love both *Ikhaon yiikee* and *Ikhaon bassac* for their stories, characters and music. For this reason, sometimes, the troupes' leaders mix the two theatre genres regarding costumes and stories, although the repertoire remains distinct.

3. Theatre Troupes

The theatre troupes can be composed of up to forty people including actors, musicians and workmen. A remarkable feature of *Ikhaon yiikee* is that the performers accompany their singing and acting with dance. Therefore, students must know how to dance and sing to perform *yiikee* theatre. They must spend at least one or two years to learn to dance; some of them take three years or more due to living conditions and time constraints.

The leader is the person responsible for organizing the performance and contacting the actors and musicians according to the performed story. He is also the scriptwriter who knows very well the stories, the songs and the performance practices. The troupe is usually contacted by a representative of pagodas around the village or the province where the troupe is based. The troupe I worked with live in Ang Kley village, Chuuk district, in Kampot province, a southern coastal area of Cambodia.

The leader Maan Prum is also the mayor of his village. Due to his political involvement, he is engaged to perform in many pagodas and events in the nearby villages. He has been a *yiikee* singer and drum player for twenty years and has been teaching students for five years. He learnt *yiikee* from his father Mouth who was a *yiikee* performer and teacher. The troupe is composed of relatives including Master Khuen Bem, Maan Prum's brother-in-law, who is also a scriptwriter and a teacher of *Ikhaon yiikee* drums at the Kampot School of traditional music which supported part of my fieldwork. Maan Prum's troupe also performed a mixed form of *Ikhaon yiikee* and *Ikhaon bassac* theatre according to the organizers' preference. Therefore, the actors are trained to carry out both kinds of theatre which mainly differ in regards to vocal style, repertoire, gestures and acting movements.

The *yiikee* opera arrived in the Chuuk district in 1909 during King Sisowath's reign. It was introduced by Master Kong Ayk. In 1934 he was succeeded by Master Chim Aum. Both Kong Ayk and Chim Aum taught only male students since it was only after 1954 that women were allowed to perform the *yiikee*. In the 1960s, Chim Aum began to perform *Ikhaon yiikee bouraan*. He followed the *Ikhaon khaol* (masked theatre) style in which people backstage dubbed performers. Chim Aum died in 1964, and his student Prum Muth, Maan Prum's father, continued to lead the group. After Prum Muth died in 1999, his daughter, son and son-in-law led the group. The theatre troupe was awarded some certificates of achievement by the Ministry of Culture, and

Master Khuen Bem won a gold medal as the best writer of *yiikee* story, presented by the Prime Minister Hun Sen at Chatomuk theatre in Phnom Penh.

Maan Prum's group used to perform on Southeast Asia TV; his group was allowed to perform only for two hours, one hour for dancing and another hour for the story. However, he stopped performing on TV due to the pay being too low.

4. The *Skɔɔ Yiikee* and the Ensemble's Evolution

"Performances will not be called *yiikee* without the *skɔɔ yiikee* drum. The *yiikee* drum is the leading instrument of the *yiikee* performance. People recognize a *yiikee* performance by the presence of *skɔɔ yiikee*" (Maan Prum, interview, 08 July 2015, Kampot). In *ɔɔbam yiikee* the rhythm of *skɔɔ yiikee* accompanies the dance performance, while in *lkhaon yiikee* theatre it is used before and after the entrance and exit of the actors from the stage (*ceiñ coul domnae skɔɔ*).

The *skɔɔ yiikee* is a large drum made of hardwood and covered with cowskin. It is beaten with the musician's hands. The number of drums varies from two to thirteen according to the size and resources of the ensemble. Keo (2003) and Pich Tum (2008) distinguish *skɔɔ mee* (drum mother) which is the lead instrument usually played by a Master; *skɔɔ koun* (drum child) following the leader; *skɔɔ ñii* (female drum) and *skɔɔ cmoool* (male drum). However, only two or three *skɔɔ mee* were played in the performances I attended.

In the past, the Master served as narrator (*neāq pool*); he sang the stories and gave instructions to the musicians, dancers and actors. Nevertheless, over the years the role of the actors has expanded from dance to include acting and singing to attract the audience's attention, thereby rendering the role of the narrator less essential. An important feature of *lkhaon yiikee* is the presence of the chorus called *neāq camriəŋ bantɔɔ*. Maan Prum explains the difference between the chorus in *lkhaon yiikee* and *lkhaon bassac*: "in *lkhaon yiikee* after music starts, the actor narrates part of the story or introduces himself/herself. The actor's narrations alternate with the chorus entries in each scene, and end with the chorus. In *lkhaon bassac* the chorus only has the function of accompanying" (Maan Prum, interview, 09 July 2015, Kampot).

The performance starts with the beating of the largest drum *skɔɔ me* followed by the other *skɔɔ yiikee* types. The *Haum Skɔɔ* ritual is performed to invite the master spirits before the *ɔɔbam yiikee* dance. In addition to the *skɔɔ me*, *tro quu camhieŋ* is another important instrument in *lkhaon yiikee*. Over time, because the singers find it difficult to follow just the rhythm of the *skɔɔ*, various melodic instruments have been added to the ensemble, including the *tro quu camhieŋ* (two-string fiddle) as a leading instrument – making it easier for the singers and chorus to coordinate with one another and to follow the accompaniment (figure 3.2). The modern ensemble *yiikee samay* also includes *tro sao* (a two-string fiddle) and *khim* (trapezoidal-shaped

hammered dulcimer) which are also employed in the wedding ensemble. This evolution of the *yikee* ensemble reflects the influence of the wedding genre *phleng kar samay kandaal* considered by musicians as the most traditional Khmer music.

Figure 3.2: Traditional *yikee* ensemble



5. *Yikee Bouraan* and *Yikee Samay*

According to my informants, in 1964 the ancient form *yikee bouraan* was adapted to a modern form called *yikee samay*. As mentioned in the previous chapter on *Ikhaon bassac*, the differences between *bouraan* and *samay* stories depend on characters, costumes and the story rather than the repertoire. *Yikee* stories were traditionally inspired by the *jataka* (Buddha's birth stories), traditional myths, legends and stories such as *Preah Cinwong*, *Tum Tiew* (a story like that of Romeo and Juliet), *Mak Thæang* etc. Hermits, giants, kings, queens and wealthy men are the protagonists of ancient stories. In these stories, *robam yikee* dance dominated the whole performance. However, today the audience is more attracted by the story than the dance, so only two or three dances are performed.

Storywriters compose new stories exploring themes related to everyday Khmer social life to attract the young generations. Therefore, farmers, millionaires and other modern figures are added to the traditional characters. Scenes and stories are performed by three roles: a narrator, clowns and dancers who sing and dance. Clowns or comedians perform comic interludes that are inserted into the stories. Originally, in *yikee bouraan* the comedians introduced a character and narrated the plot of the story or a scene through satirical speech (figure 3.3).

The comedians play a major role since the success of the performance is largely judged according to their abilities. Now, *bouraan* stories have lost much of their popularity: “in my village, *yikee bouraan* is no longer performed because people [in the village] do not want to hear [*bouraan* stories] again but outside the village we still perform *bouraan*” (Maan Prum, interview, 08 January 2015, Kampot). In addition to the old stories, the audience does not like the long duration of the performance that could last up to a week; the current performances have been shortened to six or seven hours. One scene can last up to three hours; in some contexts, such as the television shows, only one scene is played; University performances, however, last only two hours, presenting only the key elements of the plot.

The transformation of *yikee* performance has negatively affected people’s assessment of its “authenticity”, as Maan Prum emphasized: “The stories are shortened and consequently performed in a wrong way as the *yikee* traditional features are not respected” (Maan Prum, interview, 09 July 2015, Kampot). *Yikee bouraan* is usually performed in official performances, but in the countryside the two types of story are mixed up depending on the requests of the organizers of the events and the audience. Sometimes the audience asks the troupes to mix the two theatre genres to make the performance more appealing so that it is possible to find *bassac* characters/costumes in *yikee* performance and vice versa. Another difference between the old and modern form of *lkhaon yikee* and *rbam yikee* concerns the costumes and the dancing style.

The *bouraan* dresses consist of the *kbən* (a rectangular piece of cloth rolled together and passed back between the legs where it is tucked in), worn by elderly people, children of rich men and kings, and the *sampoət* (a wrap-around skirt), worn by female characters (figure 3.4). Today some young actors wear modern trousers. According to my informants, the jewellery and costumes resemble the decorations of the Kings of Cham. *Yikee* costumes have been also influenced by the court dances; in fact, the *bouraan* style includes golden hats and long nails which nowadays are only worn by the *yikee* dancers during the dance (*rbam yikee*) before the start of the theatre performance. Crowns, nails, *caŋwaa* (scarf crossed on the breast), *qaiəm* (collar) and *slaap haŋ* (wings of a swan) are used for the ancient (*bouraan*) *yikee* dancing (figure 3.4).

The stage has evolved over time. In the past, performers sat in a circle on a mat; “at first, a bedlike riser was placed on stage to symbolize a house, a palace, a mountain, or a forest, depending on the situation. Later, a door was added to symbolize the house or a pillar for a palace” (Sam 1998: 222). Nowadays it has curtains that serve as scenery. Lighting has also evolved, starting with torches and finally modern fluorescent lighting. King Nərədam introduced a style of scenery that mixed Khmer and western conventions representing, for example, a mountain or forest, or simply a cloudy sky (ibid).

Not only the costumes but also the *yiikee bouraan* dancing style is different from the modern one: “Only one hand is used to dance in *rbam yiikee samay* while both hands and feet are used for *yiikee bouraan*. Moreover, the dancing and the rhythm of *yiikee samay* are faster” (Maan Prum, interview, 09 July 2015, Kampot). Although the melodies and song titles of the *bouraan* and *samay* performances are the same, it is possible to distinguish two repertoires: one for *rbam yiikee* and one for *lkhaon yiikee*; the latter includes some songs interrelated to the *phleng kar* genre. Section 6 examines the structure of *yiikee* theatre which is preceded by *rbam yiikee* dance and pre-performance rituals and their corresponding songs, their function within the theatre scene, and their connection to wedding music.

The table below summarizes the *lkhaon yiikee* components relating to the *bouraan* and *samay* forms so far examined.

Table 11: *Bouraan* and *samay* features

	<i>Bouraan</i>	<i>Samay</i>
1. Performance Contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Villages • Buddhist festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Villages • Buddhist festivals • Official events • TV/Radio programmes • Tourist shows • Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA)
2. Ensemble	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to thirteen <i>skɔɔ yiikee</i> • Narrator (singer) • Chorus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two <i>Skɔɔ Yiikee</i> • <i>Trɔ quu Camhiɛŋ</i> • <i>Trɔ sao</i> • <i>Khim</i> • Chorus
3. Stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Jataka</i> • Traditional myths and legends • Old stories (<i>Preah Cinwong, Tum Tɨaw, Mak Thəang</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New stories (themes related to social and everyday life) • Mix of <i>bouraan</i> and <i>samay</i> stories
4. Characters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hermits • Giants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers • Millionaires

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kings and queens • Wealthy men 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clowns and other modern figures
5. Length	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to a week or month 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six/seven hours (villages) • One/three hours (TV) • Two hours (RUFA)
6. Costumes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Kb̄an</i> (traditional trousers) • <i>Sampōat</i> (wrap-around skirt) • Court dance costumes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modern trousers • Traditional Khmer dresses
7. Dancing Styles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only one hand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both hands and feet
8. Stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A mat on the floor surrounded by nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage with curtain and lighting effects erected near a pagoda

Figure 3.3: Comedians during a performance



Figure 3.4: *Bouraan* characters



6. The Performance Structure

6.1 Pre-performance Rituals and Khmer Animistic Beliefs

A *Ikhaon yikee* performance is preceded by pre-performance rituals which reflect the Khmer beliefs in supernatural spirits (Table 12). Some of these pre-performance rituals are also performed in *Ikhaon bassac* – for instance, the ritual of asking permission to *neāq ta* spirits for building the stage and the *Coən Tii* ritual (applying beeswax on the actors' eyebrows, lips and throat) to ensure a good performance and keep away the bad spirits (figure 3.5). Specific to *Ikhaon yikee* is the *Pithii Krong Piəlii*.

This ritual refers to the mythical serpent which supports the earth, invoked at the beginning of the construction of a building. “Since this ritual requires many offerings and resources in terms of money and time, it is only organized when a pavilion is built for the first time, otherwise it is organized only for the ritual for the master spirit and for Preah Pisnukaa or *Pithii Haom Rooŋ*” (Maan Prum, interview, 08 July 2015, Kampot).⁵² There are several songs for *Pithii Haom Rooŋ*, for example, *Saathukaa*, *Qao Ronao*, *Chaa Yiv Lee*, *Qari Chei* and *Tik Hou Rim Rim*.⁵³ However, before the beginning of the *Ikhaon yikee* performance, only three songs of *Haom Rooŋ* are played to recall the spirits. These songs have different functions: some songs have the function of inviting the masters (*qancəəŋ kruu*) or asking the master's favour (*Rumlik Kun Kruu*) and ensuring a good performance; others, such as *Pkə Loān Daəm Cham*, are played for *Qaoy Camnəy Tiv Kruu* (Ritual of offering to the masters).

After the *Haum Skə* ritual, in which the rhythm of the *skə yikee* is played to invite the spirits and signal the beginning of the performance, three songs from *Haom Rooŋ* suite are played once again to accompany the *rbam yikee* dance (DVD, track 9). *Haom Rooŋ* consists of a suite of pieces. Wong and Lysloff (1991) define the Thai *Haom Rooŋ* as an “overture” to sacralise an area with sound: “The music of the overture, then, creates not only the ritual frame but constitutes an opening between dimensions: a threshold, a channel between alternate realities” (Wong and Lysloff 1991: 316). The Khmer *Haom Rooŋ* has the same function: music and dance are offered to deities and masters of music conjoining the supernatural and human spheres.

While in the *Ikhaon bassac* context the *Pithii Haom Rooŋ* is performed backstage, in *Ikhaon yikee* six female dancers perform it for the *yikee* dance (*rbam yikee*). In this context, Maan Prum called this ritual *Pithii Twaay Kruu* (Offering to the masters).⁵⁴ In fact, the *Pithii*

⁵² See Porée-Maspero (1961), for a detailed description of the *Krong Piəlii* ritual.

⁵³ All of these titles are untranslatable as they are a combination of foreign words. Khmer musicians do not know their meaning.

⁵⁴ This ritual is also performed in Thailand where it is called *Wai Khruu*. See Yupho (1961: 9); Wong and Lysloff (1991: 331).

Haom Roøj has different names according to the performance contexts: *Sompeah Kruu* (Ceremony to honour the teachers); *Pithii Twaay Banjkum* (Ritual of raising the hands); and *Pithii Haom Roøj* (Sacralisation of the pavilion). During the *Pithii Haom Roøj*, the female animistic spirits called *pray* are evoked with different names such as Preah Indra, and Preah Pisnukaa (Visvakarman). Ang Choulean describes the *pray* who “possess” the actors. Specific social groups such as the artists worship these spirits (Ang 1986: 145). They are a sort of angel, and they ensure that the actors appear beautiful and perform well. They are called *pray lkhaon* (*pray* of the theatre). “In the preliminary song known as *hom roñ* (encirclement or magic delimitation of the performance pavilion) performed at the beginning of each theatrical performance, all kinds of *brāy* [*pray*] are solemnly invited to come and live in the theatre” (ibid).⁵⁵

As in the *lkhaon bassac*, wedding music can also be played before the *rojam yiikee* performance as a means of obtaining further blessings. Musicians play on *phleng kar samay* instruments five or six songs from the *phleng kar* repertoire. Therefore, even in the *lkhaon yiikee* context, wedding music is considered as sacred music.

Table 12: *Lkhaon yiikee* pre-performance rituals

Pre-performance Rituals' Name	Song
Offering <i>Yiikee</i> Music to the Guardian Spirits	♪ = <i>Haom Roøj</i> (The sacred pavilion)
<i>Coan Tii</i> (Ritual of applying beeswax on the actors' eyebrows, lips and throat)	No music
<i>Pithii Krong Piālii</i> (Ritual of evoking the mythical serpent supporting the earth for the construction of a building)	No music
<i>Pithii Twaay Phleng</i> (Offering [<i>phleng kar</i>] music)	♪ = <i>Phleng kar</i> wedding songs
<i>Pithii Haom Roøj</i> ⁵⁶	♪ = <i>Saathukaa</i> , <i>Ao Ronao</i> , <i>Chaa Yiv Lee</i> , <i>Ari Chei</i> and <i>Tik Hoo Rim Rim</i>

⁵⁵ [Dans le chant préliminaire dit *hom roñ* (« encerclement ou délimitation magique du pavillon du spectacle ») qu'on exécute au début de chaque représentation théâtrale, toutes sortes de *brāy* sont invitées solennellement à venir habiter la salle, le temps du spectacle.] (Ang 1986: 145)

⁵⁶ It is composed of a sequence of pieces. See Giuriati (1999:89) for the description of this ritual in the *pin piət* genre.

<i>Haum Skɔɔ</i> (Beating <i>skɔɔ yiikee</i>)	♪ = <i>Lam skɔɔ</i> (Fast rhythm of the drum)
<i>Pithii Saen Preah Pisnukaa</i> (Offering Music to Preah Pisnukaa) performed by <i>ɔɔbam yiikee</i> dancers.	♪ = 1) <i>Thuŋ Yiv Lee</i> ; 2) <i>Qari Chei</i> ; 3) <i>Noang Pisaraa</i>

Figure 3.5: *Coən Tii* ritual, Kampot province



6.2 *ɔɔbam Yiikee* Dance and *Lkhaon Yiikee* Theatre

As mentioned earlier, *lkhaon yiikee* was originally a danced and sung genre comprising just the *skɔɔ yiikee* drums and five or six dancers. The court dance influenced this dance as well as the costumes except for the long nails and the particular hat. In the past it was performed on its own while in the present day it is performed on the stage before the theatre performance accompanied by lighting and special sound effects. I was lucky to document a performance in the village. During an interview, Maan Prum asked her daughter and her nephew, members of his troupe, to perform *ɔɔbam yiikee*. He explained that in the past they used to perform in the village without any stage or special lighting and sound effects; the audience sat around the performers accompanied by up to twelve drums.

In the performance that Maan Prum arranged for me, two *yiikee* drums and a fiddle (*tro camhieng*) accompanied two dancers just in front of Maan Prum's house on a green mat surrounded by nature as they used to do in the past (figure 3.6). They performed three songs from the *Haom Rooŋ* "suite" to evoke Preah Pisnukaa. Each song corresponds with a different

style of dance: 1) *Thuṅ Yiv Lee*⁵⁷ song features *Kbac Niak* (dragon movement) dance; 2) *Ari Chei* song features *Kbac Tik Rɔɔɔk* (water waves movement) dance; 3) *Noang Pisaraa* song features *Kbac Tik Rɔɔɔk* (water waves movement) dance. The accompanying video (DVD, track 10) gives an idea of the structure of the songs and the different dancing styles which are related to “a legend of a king who visited the seaside. Since there was nothing to visit he was bored, so his officers entertained him by dancing. The movements of their hands followed the waves of the sea, in fact, the *yikee* dance recalls those movements” (Maan Prum, personal communication, 10 July 2015, Kampot). These songs can precede the *Ikhaon yikee samay* theatre on the stage (figure 3.7), but the rhythm of the songs is faster. In fact, many audience members say that they preferred a faster version.

After the *ɔɔbam yikee* dance, *Ikhaon yikee samay* starts with the narration of the story followed by a song in which the actors introduce themselves. The peculiarity of *Ikhaon yikee* theatre is the movements of the characters’ hands while acting or singing. There are four kinds of stage movements:

- 1) Invocation movements (*kbac Haom Rooṅ*)
- 2) Walking movements (*kbac daə*) which vary according to whether a character or group is good or evil
- 3) Movements giving way to the song (*kbac bañ choən cumriəng*)
- 4) Fighting or combat movements (*kbac chbaing*) for scenes of war mostly influenced by Khmer martial arts. The movements for the *Pithii Haom Rooṅ* ritual, for example, are used for the *ɔɔbam yikee* dance.

The performance structure consists of the entrance of a character on the stage followed by a second character, each of them introducing themselves with an introductory song and accompanied by the rhythm of the *skɔɔ yikee* called *lam* (fast rhythm). After the *lam*, the main actor enters the stage improvising a speech called *Niyéy Liən Caak*. The introduction of the actor is followed by his/her song of presentation while a second actor dances and sings in alternation with the chorus (DVD, track 11). There is no fixed number of scenes and songs since they are adapted to the dramatic situation, the characters’ role and audience preferences. The scenery changes for each scene, with new backing curtains being slid across for each scene transition. The repertoire of *Ikhaon yikee* and *ɔɔbam yikee* is the same, but there are some songs which are peculiar to each context as discussed below.

The *Ikhaon yikee* repertoire differs from the *ɔɔbam yikee* one: the songs used for recalling the masters of music and dance are not used in *Ikhaon yikee*. Their movements and

⁵⁷ Most of the *yikee* song titles are untranslatable since they include foreign words, especially Thai and Malay. This character reflects the *yikee*’s foreign origin.

costumes recall those of the *apsara* classical dancers.⁵⁸ As a result, these pieces are only performed for the *rbam yiikee* dance and not for the *lkhaon* theatre performance. Although some songs are played in both *rbam yiikee* and *lkhaon yiikee*, others can vary according to the dancing style and melody. For example, there are two different melodies for *Noang Pisaraa*: *Noang Pisaraa Yiə*, sung and danced with a slow rhythm by female dancers, and *Noang Pisaraa Kaac*, danced with a faster rhythm by male characters.

Yiikee songs are characterized by an alternation between solo passage – usually sung by the troupe’s leader – and chorus (*bantəə*) sung by the dancers in *rbam yiikee* and by a group of women located backstage in *lkhaon yiikee*. “Chorus sings backstage. It has the function to lead the singer or performer on the stage and to signal the start of the performance. For example, the chorus signals to performers to sing a song by saying *cha*” (Maan Prum, interview, 09 July 2015, Kampot). The titles of *yiikee* songs usually indicates the movement of the dancers, while the text of the chorus consists of a mixture of different languages such as Lao, Thai, and Malay whose meaning is unknown to the singers themselves. In the past three sentences (stanzas) were performed, however now the length of the solo texts is shortened to one sentence with one dancing style.

Originally, the leading vocalist began the song. A commonly used poetic meter used in *yiikee* songs is *patya vatt* (sixteen syllables). This meter is the same as that associated with scripts employed by the Cham for chanting and praying (Sam 1998). Singers/actors improvise the song texts/speeches according to the theme of the scene by following the scriptwriter’s guidelines in terms of use of the voice, words and poetic meter. According to musicians and actors I worked with, there are forty-four *yiikee* songs with dancing style and sixty-four without dancing style. However, “not all of the forty-four songs are used because the audience get bored owing to extensive repetitions of the dancing style and the lengthy performance time (Maan Prum, interview, 09 July 2015, Kampot).

⁵⁸ See Phim and Thompson (1999) for a general description of the major genres of Khmer classical and folk dance and dance-drama.

Figure 3.6: *Rɔbam Yiikee Bouraan*, Chuuk District, Kampot province



Figure 3.7: *Rɔbam Yiikee Samay* during the *Pithii Haom Roonj* ritual, Kampot provincial town



7. The Script and the Process of Adaptation and Interrelations of Repertoires

The scriptwriter, usually the troupe's teacher/leader, composes the text and selects the songs from a specific repertoire; a song title corresponds to a theme. He also chooses songs from other genres that supply instructions on the stage setting, and the acting and singing. For example, in the story *Loop Paek Qantaek Macchoriach* (Greedy people trapped in hell) the king is also a judge who punishes the prisoners. In this scene, he sings *Bo Boha* (title untranslatable) to express his anger. The same song can be adapted to another scene of anger but with a different

text. Therefore, it can happen that a song can be used for more than one scene if the general theme of the story is the same; or for different characters such as *Thuṅ Yiv Lee Rooṅ Thaeṅ*⁵⁹ for royal characters and *Thuṅ Yiv Lee Kaac* (*Thuṅ Yiv Lee* song “nasty”) for nasty characters.

In the script, no musical notation is given but the titles of the tunes provide a sort of guideline for the actors. The number of songs used in each scene varies according to the story plot and the length of the scene. Each song has a drum accompaniment pattern called *lam* meaning “fast rhythm.” The choir introduces the *lam* by singing the first stanza of each song. For example, the *lam* of *Thuṅ Yiv Lee* is preceded by the following words:

*Euy yiv yiv lee pissamay soriya lnjec tṅay,
Cantriə reah ching! ching!*

The lyrics include nonsense words (“Ching! Ching!”) and foreign words (“Euy yiv yiv lee”) and evoke the lovely sunset (“Soriya lnjec tṅay”) and the shining moon (“Cantriə reah”). The *lam* is followed by the entrance onto the stage of a character who improvises words called *krĭə*. In the past, the *lam* not only had the function of introducing and accompanying the songs but also suggested the actor’s actions.

In both *Ikhaon yikee* and *Ikhaon bassac* theatre, music accompanies the characters on the stage and specific songs are adapted to the different themes of the scenes such as love, battle, anger, compassion and so on. Since these song titles are in Thai and Malay rather than Khmer, the Khmer song titles denoting character and scene categories does not apply. *Yikee* songs are adapted to the general theme of the scene or the characters. Table 13 lists some songs from the *samay* story *Loop Paek Qantaek Macchoriəch* (Greedy people trapped in hell) performed by Maan Prum’s troupe in Takeo province and written by his brother-in-law Khuen Bem. The story is about two brothers, Cantriə and Kosal, who were born in a poor family but fell in love with rich girls. At the end of the story, the two girls are rejected by their families and become poor.

⁵⁹ Literally “Rooṅ Thaeṅ” refers to a long covered hall divided into compartments surrounding a royal palace.

Table 13: Classification of song titles with corresponding theme, scene and/or character from the story *Loop Paek Qantaek Macchoriach* (Greedy people trapped in hell)

Song Title	Theme	Scene/Characters
<i>Thuṅ Yiv Lee Roṅṅ Thaev</i>		Royal Characters
<i>Thuṅ Yiv Lee Kaac</i>		Nasty Characters
<i>Thuṅ Yiv Lee Cao (Thuṅ Yiv Lee for thieves)</i>		Thieves
<i>Tik Hoo Rim Rim</i> (Water flows rapidly)	Sadness	Separation from mother or lover
<i>Kontae</i>	Sadness	
<i>Yuan Saa</i> (Magic drawing)		Visiting parents/Going to work
<i>Sampiv Rosat</i> (The ship floats)	Separation	
<i>Saripan</i>	Courtship	
<i>Baa Hao</i>	Anger	
<i>Mayo</i>	Hunting	
<i>Saarikaa Lowai Lowam</i>		Describing nature

The table above illustrates the adaptation of songs to specific themes, scenes and characters. For each theme or character, the storyteller chooses specific songs. However, more than one song for each theme and character can be performed in order to avoid song repetitions that might annoy the audience.

“Because in ancient times *ayay*⁶⁰ groups performed *yikee*, some scenes are still accompanied by *ayay* songs as well as by wedding songs, particularly for wedding scenes” (Uy Laudavan, *yikee* actress, personal communication, 05 April 2014). For example, in the scene of a couple who are forcibly separated and reunited, a marriage ceremony is organized and a *phleng kar* song such as *Baay Khon Caṅ Day* (Tying the spouses’ wrists) is performed. Another example is the scene of the king travelling that can be adapted to the wedding song *Sdac Yieng* (The king walks); the king embodies the groom in the wedding context. The melody is similar, but the text is related to the *yikee* story. However, because some *yikee* instruments such as the *skɔɔ yikee* are unsuited to playing the wedding music, they are replaced by instruments from the wedding ensemble such as the *taakee* zither.

During a performance in Phnom Penh, the wedding song *Mlup Doung* (The coconut shadow) was played for a scene from the traditional love story *Mak Thəəng*. The song was played when Mak Thəəng, the protagonist of the story, reassures his wife about her dream of a

⁶⁰ *Ayay* is a satirical sung dialogue between a male and a female singer. It is performed during the wedding ceremony as well as in TV shows.

dragon, symbol of seduction from a high ranking person. In the wedding context, this song is played to express the bride's gratitude towards her parents. Although they share a similar melody, the function and the song text are different as they are connected to their performance contexts. Therefore, the storywriter adapts a song from the *yikee* or from the wedding repertoire to the scene according to the preferences of the audience, who also play a vital role in the modernization of *Ikhaon yikee* (see Chapter 5).

8. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have described the peculiar characteristics of the *Ikhaon yikee* theatre and *robam yikee* dance and the repertoire including the way in which the songs are selected and adapted to the theatre scenes. Over the years, the theatre performance *Ikhaon yikee* has been added to the dance which nowadays is performed only at the beginning of the performance for the *Pithii Haom Roong*, the ritual offering to the masters of music, thus highlighting the sacred value attributed to the dance. The *Pithii Haom Roong* also reflects the Southeast Asian beliefs in supernatural spirits related to music and dance.

The changes of the original *yikee* performance are primarily due to social changes; storywriters are influenced by the audience's preferences so that the mixture of different genres, types of stories, characters and rituals serves to appeal to and amuse the audience. *Ikhaon yikee* and *robam yikee* have different repertoires although they share some songs with different dance styles, melodies and functions. Since songs are chosen by the leader/storywriter according to the scenes' theme, some melodies are borrowed from other genres, particularly the traditional wedding repertoire *phleng kar*. The melodies of *phleng kar* and *yikee* songs are similar although they present melodic and rhythmic variations due to the peculiar characteristics of each genre including ensemble, performance practice and singing style.

To sum up, the *yikee* repertoire consists of songs accompanying the *robam yikee* dance whose function is to start the performance by paying homage to the masters of music and dance. For this ritual, called *Pithii Haom Roong*, there is a specific sequence of songs. Some *robam yikee* songs are adapted to theatre performance. Others are only performed according to the general theme of the scene (love, courtship, anger, sadness, separation, death, etc.), the dramatic action (coming back from working; separation from parents/lover, describing nature, and hunting) or specific characters (nasty characters, thieves, and hermits). Some of these songs share the same melodies with wedding songs, but they have different texts and titles, for example the *yikee* song *Noang Pisaraa* and the wedding song *Sot Troyong* (see Chapter 4). However, the function of these songs is different since it is related to the performance contexts.

Similarly, the common repertoire of *Ikhaon yikee* and *robam yikee* differs in the function of the songs since *robam yikee* songs are related to the dance movements while *Ikhaon*

yikee songs are related to the scenes/characters. The musical features and the dynamics of the interrelation of *yikee* songs, wedding songs as well as songs from the other genres previously examined will be discussed in the next chapter.

The notable features of *lkhaon yikee* are:

- The singing style and the dancing movements;
- The *rɔbam yikee* dance;
- The use of *skɔɔ yikee*;
- The song titles and texts which combine Khmer and foreign words.

Table 14 illustrates the *lkhaon yikee*, *rɔbam yikee* and wedding songs which share the melody but have different titles and functions. Songs belonging to different repertoires but sharing a similar melody are grouped into braces and highlighted by the same colour.

Table 14: The interrelation of *lkhaon yikee*, *rɔbam yikee* and *phleng kar* repertoires

Songs sharing a similar melody	Repertoires		
	<i>Lkhaon</i>	<i>Rɔbam</i>	<i>Phleng kar</i>
<i>Noang Pisaraa</i>	X		
<i>Noang Pisaraa Yie</i>		X	
<i>Sat Tra Yaaj</i>			X
<i>Thuŋ Yiv Lee</i>	X		
<i>Thuŋ Yiv Lee Kaac/ Thuŋ Yiv Lee Thaev</i>		X	
<i>Saarikaa Swaay</i>	X		
<i>Sarikakaew</i>			X
<i>Sowan Təy</i>	X		
<i>Cab Daa Daa</i>			X

Chapter 4

Interrelationships between Genres

Interrelationships and exchange of songs occur in terms of the song title, verbal text, function, performance contexts and musical features. From the standpoint of musical and textual analysis, a comparative study of these parameters sheds light on the stylistic differences and consistency among genres as well as performance structure and cultural context. In this chapter, I provide comparative transcriptions of some interrelated songs from each examined genre that I collected during my fieldwork. Through these comparative transcriptions, I hope to show how the songs crossing the genre boundaries are adapted to new performance practices, contexts, and functions and to provide some evidence for the Khmer musicians' claim that the roots of the *phleng arak*, *Ikhaon bassac* and *Ikhaon yiikee* genres lie in *phleng kar* wedding music.

The comparison of the songs is based on live recordings from rituals and theatre performances since there are no written and historical sources to compare – a predicament that contrasts with other musical forms elsewhere, such as certain Chinese traditions, where different versions of labelled tunes can be compared to historical sources and old scores (Jones 1989; Harris 2004). These tunes are not traditionally notated since Khmer musicians have no system of notation. Brunet refers to a cipher notation used in the '60s and gives an example of it (Brunet 1979:235), but it is not precise about the rhythm and duration. Recently, the advent of technology has spread the use of software circulating among musicians, especially those living in urban areas, mainly for teaching purposes (Dyer 2018). However, I have chosen the staff notation because it is more widely read within the discipline following other scholars of Khmer music (Brunet 1979; Giuriati 1988; McKinley 2002; Sam 1988). Obviously, it requires adaptation to specific characteristics of Khmer music such as pitch, rhythm and formal structure since there is no direct connection between western and Khmer scales.

The process of interrelation and exchange of repertoires illustrates how a given genre is not a rigid categorization of songs. Although Khmer musicians recognize the fluidity of genres negotiated by the exchanges between genres, they categorize each of the interrelated songs as connected to a specific ensemble, repertoire and performance context. As a result, they postulate the antiquity and sacredness of *phleng kar bouraan*, the old form of wedding music, which they are aware of as being performed across different repertoires.

The first two sections of the chapter examines the interrelation and adaptation of the songs in different performance contexts regarding extramusical features (titles; texts; functions; the occasions of performance) and musical aspects (ensemble; tune/scale; rhythm and performance practices). Here, I refer to the “culture-emerging” or “natural” classification theorized by Kartomi in classifying instruments. Kartomi distinguishes the culture-emerging

classifications that “emerge naturally from a culture over time” and the artificial classifications that “are imposed artificially or manipulated intellectually by the observer for a specific purpose” (Kartomi 1997: 16). I adopt the “culture-emerging” or *emic* methodology of classification since it reflects the identity of the culture taking into account a broad semantic domain or musical concepts (Feld 1982; Zemp 1979) which are essential to understand and examine the way in which songs across different repertoires interrelate.

The shared characteristics and the particular aspects of the genres in question are described through analysis of songs performed across different performance contexts by various ensembles and in different areas of Cambodia. I consider the same songs as case-studies throughout the chapter to make more consistent the discussion of the dynamics of the genres’ interrelations. The primary source is a series of interviews conducted in the field, over one year’s time, with different key informants. Some of their opinions are to some degree in line with printed sources. The last part of the chapter is devoted to the historical, cultural and sacred aspects of *phleng kar* music as represented through the perspectives of Khmer musicians from different backgrounds and expertise. From the musicians’ accounts emerge the Khmer-ness of *phleng kar bouraan* wedding music; they assume that the *phleng arak* genre has its origin in *phleng kar bouraan* (old wedding music) while the *Ikhaon yikee* and *Ikhaon bassac* theatre have their roots in *phleng kar samay kandaal* (a combination of Khmer ancient instruments and foreign-influenced instruments).

In the previous chapters, I have been addressing some of the larger characteristics of wedding and healing music as well as *Ikhaon yikee* and *Ikhaon bassac* music relating to general aspects of the repertoire, the songs’ structure and the performance contexts including the interrelation of songs within each of the examined repertoires. From this background, we can now consider how these genres are interrelated and how repertoires are exchanged between these genres.

1. Extramusical Features

1.1 Song Titles (*Bat Camriəŋ* / *Bat Phleng*)

Khmer song titles evoke Khmer flowers, fruits, dramatic scenes, mythological characters, magic animals, supernatural spirits or the function related to the song. Khmer musicians use two different terms for song title (*bat*): *bat phleng* for instrumental music (*phleng*) and *bat camriəŋ* for vocal music (*camriəŋ*). However, there is no recognized musical or musicological way of naming a tune. The limited ethnomusicological literature on song titles shows that ethnomusicologists have made different attempts to establish the criteria for naming a song, especially in popular music. These criteria consist in naming the piece according to the verbal text and the composer/group (Nettl 2005:114); considering “a word or group of words, often as not

selected from the words of the song” (Seeger 1966:2), or a web of circumstances, a storyboard which are connected to places of performances and reminiscence of the performers (Carson 1996:8).

In oral music traditions, the title is not always related to a specific verbal text and tune as one title can correspond to different verbal texts and/or tunes. Morton found examples of Thai songs with two different names which are the same composition or a reworking of the original, with a translated name. He concludes: “This technique for duplicating with other words an existing title is frequently found among Thai compositions” (Morton 1976: 196/215). Moreover, in other cases, some songs crossing different repertoires change their metric levels in *Thaw* form (labelled as "thaw" in the title),⁶¹ receiving new names in Pali or Sanskrit form (ibid: 214–15). In Khmer music there is also a changing of metric levels (*choan*) and musical styles according to the different genres but not a corresponding changing of titles as in Thai music.

The limited Khmer music literature shows endless song title lists (Porée-Maspero 1958; Pich 1964; Brunet 1979) which are not examined in connection with a specific performance context, function and musical feature. This kind of classification cannot be considered reliable for recognizing or identifying a tune, as “the same tune may be given several titles for different reasons: different function, historical period, song text, or geographic area” (Giuriati 1988:148). For example, *Kong Saoy*⁶² corresponds to a specific tune in both *phleng kar* and *phleng arak* repertoires with a similar function but the respective song texts are different due to their direct connection to the ritual context. In this case “the title of a song simply justifies its function in a given ritual, since certain rituals must be accompanied by a tune with a specific title” (Brunet 1979:237).⁶³

Other songs, such as the wedding song *Baay Khon Caaj Day* (Tying of the wrists) and the *phleng arak* song *Baay Khon Laaj Roonj* (Dismantling the pavilion), have a similar title and tune but different function, rhythm and texts. However, it can also happen that two different texts and tunes are labelled under the same title, such as *Trapeang Piey*;⁶⁴ one version of the song refers to the ritual bath of the bride and the groom. Today this ritual is no longer performed but has been replaced by the ritual act of spraying perfume on the couple’s head. The ritual action of washing

⁶¹ Thai music is based on binary formulas marked by drum patterns and *ching* strokes. Within the binary structure it can be distinguished three metric levels in which each tune is performed. Each level has its own pattern with different durations and formulas. These three patterns can be played together as one unit, a kind of variation form (A A1 A2), called *thaw* (Morton 1976: 18).

⁶² The translation in English of the title is problematic. *Kong* means “group” and *saoy* is the verb “to eat” referred to the ancestors’ spirits. For more details on the translations of song titles, see below.

⁶³ [Le titre du chant ne justifie que sa fonction dans la cérémonie car certains rites doivent nécessairement être accompagnés de mélodies au titre précis.]

⁶⁴ The term *trapeang* means “pond” and *piey* is a poetic word that means “wind.” It expresses the poetic image of the wind blowing on the water of the pond.

the body symbolizes a spiritual purification to express essential qualities such as tranquillity, dignity and magnanimity that the bride and the groom should have to live together in harmony. The title *Tropeng Piey* also refers to a song text that evokes a couple of grey-black ibis birds (*tro yong*) crying on the treetop as the male is leaving his love. The theme of *tro yong* birds occurs in other wedding song texts such as *Sat Tra Yaaj* whose melody recalls *Noang Pisaraa* performed for the *rbam yiikee* dance before the start of *Ikhaon yiikee* theatre performances. In this case, different titles correspond to a similar tune.

Another problematic aspect concerning song titles is their meaning which is unknown to the musicians due to the use of poetic or unused words; consequently, their translation into English is complicated. Scholars attempt to translate them according to the verbal text and performance context. For instance, the song title *Sampooj*⁶⁵ is translated in different ways. It can be titled in English as “Casual Hairdo” referring to a “girl’s hair tied casually into a bun on her head” (Giuriati 1988: 166).⁶⁶ Another translation might be “Flower Blossoms” since the song text evokes a kind of large red flower *pkaa char* (flame of the forest) floating in a “sacred pond” where the groom invites his wife to a ritual bath (Billeri 2016: 31). In the theatre context, it is connected to scenes of love and musicians do not have a translation for it. Similarly, *phleng arak* musicians do not translate the title *Sampooj*.

In fact, sometimes the title is not known to the musicians themselves, either because the words of the title are ancient or because the words are borrowed from foreign languages, as in *yiikee* songs whose titles and even the chorus employ a combination of Thai and Malay words. An example of such as song is *Kong Saoy* (the term *kong* means “group”; *saoy* is an ancient term meaning “to eat” and it is used to address the king).⁶⁷ *Kong Saoy* is played for the *Pithii Saen Ciidoun Ciitaa* (Ritual of inviting the ancestors), the ritual presentation of food offerings to the ancestral spirits (*mee baa*) to ensure the bride and the groom magic protection and prosperity. *Kong Saoy* is also performed for the ritual of offering music to the master spirits (*kruu thom*) and ancestral spirits (*cidon cita*) during *coul ruup* rituals.⁶⁸ The song title is evoked in the verbal texts of both *phleng kar* and the *phleng arak* song since the song itself is offered to the ancestors’ spirits. Thus, the song title serves as a tag, label and referent for musicians.

In *coul ruup* rituals, sometimes the spirit’s name corresponds to the song title to facilitate the trance, as is the case, for example, with *Sray Kmaw* (The black lady) and *Tummeāk Damriy*

⁶⁵The song is performed as a wedding song on *phleng kar* ensemble, in a ritual of possession on *phleng arak* ensemble and in *Ikhaon bassac* theatre.

⁶⁶The song title could refer to the fact that in the past this song was also performed for the *Pithi Kat Saq* (Haircutting ritual) as mentioned by Brunet (1974).

⁶⁷This verb is used to address ancestral spirits *mee baa* and supernatural beings called *teewadaa*.

⁶⁸The name *coul ruup*, here, refers to the ceremony of *arak* spirits which are different from the *coul ruup* ceremonies organized for the Khmer New Year in April accompanied by the *pin piat* ensemble. For this ritual see Giuriati (2003).

(The hunter with the elephant). The tune or the song title can change according to the different geographic areas such as *Srəy Kmaw* whose tune is different in Kampong Spəi and Siem Reap provinces although the title is the same (see Chapter 1). In the theatre context, titles always refer to the dramatic situation such as “The Beauty of a Girl from the Countryside” or a specific character such as Noradom (Khmer name).

In addition, some songs are directly connected to specific rituals, such as the above mentioned *Baay Khon Laəng Rong*, performed during the *Pithii Laəng Roon*, or *Saa Pidaan* (Ritual of dismantling the ceiling) performed in healing ceremonies. Also, in many other wedding songs there is a close relationship between ritual name, function, song title and text. In this case, the song title specifies the function of the song. Khmer musicians also add the genre’s name to the song title (for example *Sampooŋ arak*, *Sampooŋ phleng kar* and so forth) as a label in order to help them to identify the tune and “avoid confusion” as Maw Yon said. Therefore, any association of words, tunes, and titles is related to the function of the song. The title serves to specify the genre’s name, the ritual’s name or, in theatrical contexts, the scene or character’s name.

1.2 Song Texts (*Tumnuk Crien*)

Song texts cannot be considered as fixed since they are improvised according to the ritual/theatre scenes. In the wedding context, singers improvise the text being inspired by the ritual action and the bride’s and the groom’s beauty, names, family and social status. For example, in the first part of *Kong Saoy* text, the male singer lists the offerings for the ancestors’ spirits offered by the bride’s and groom’s families in a particular ceremony that I recorded during my fieldwork in 2009:

(...) There are food and dessert,

There is some rice wrapped in banana leaves,

betel leaves and cigarettes

The quantity and quality of the offerings such as food, meat, and drinks vary according to the economic condition of the families. So for every wedding ceremony, verbal texts are extemporised according to the ritual context. McKinley (2002) defines that kind of wedding song text as “descriptive” since it describes the ritual actions. She also distinguishes “metaphorical” texts such as *Sarikakaew* (The black bird) or *Sat Tra Yaaj* (The ibis bird) in which the bride and groom are described metaphorically by poetical images and magic animals; and “prescriptive” texts which prescribe the ritual actions (for example, by giving instructions on how to perform a particular ritual such as *Phat Ciay* or *Baay Khon* song) (McKinley 2002: 221–241). The prescriptive and descriptive nature of song texts also emerges from the *phleng arak* songs. For example, *Baay*

Khon Laəŋ Roəŋ (Dismantling the pavilion) describes the ritual of *Laəŋ Roəŋ* (Dismantling the pavilion) within *coul ruup* ceremonies. Therefore, in both versions of *Baay Khon* song there are some parallels which prescribe the ritual scene of tying a piece of cotton thread around the wrists of the Master in the *coul ruup* context, and the spouses, addressed as “children,” in the wedding context:

- 1) *Phleng arak: Baay khon* tie the wrists [of the Master] with three cotton threads (Billeri, from ceremony 2015)
- 2) *Phleng kar: Baay khon* tie the wrists of our children (Billeri, from ceremony 2009)

Sometimes song texts express poetical images or mythological episodes such as *Preah Thaəŋ taəŋ sbay Niəŋ Niək* (Preah Thaəŋ holds the edge of Niəŋ Niək’s scarf) (McKinley 2002: 238) that evokes the mythical origins of the wedding related to the episode of the legendary couple, Niəŋ Niək and the Brahmin Preah Thaəŋ, considered to be the first rulers of Cambodia. Other song texts express socio-cultural values such as the duties of the bride toward the groom. For example, the text of *Om Tuuk* song (Rowing the boat) evokes the poetic image of the bride rowing the boat to find some food for her husband (Billeri 2016: 30).

In the context of *coul ruup*, *phleng arak* song texts evoke and recall different kinds of *arak* spirits (territorial spirits, ancestors’ spirits and master spirits), evoking their stories and personal characteristics. For example, the *phleng arak* and *phleng kar* texts of *Kong Saoy* evoke the ancestors’ spirits, in particular, the “head” of masters spirits (*kruu thom*) called *Samdac Preah Kruu* which is addressed as *look* to join the ceremony. The two texts have a similar function of recalling supernatural spirits asking for an apology within their respective ritual contexts:

- 1) *Phleng kar: If I get lost, be indulgent* (Tricon 1921: 113–14)
- 2) *Phleng arak: If I have done something wrong, do not be angry* (Billeri, from ceremony, 2015)

The two texts express the Khmer beliefs in animistic spirits and the tradition of offering music to spirits and deities as shown by the only sentence that the two song texts share: “We are offering *Kong Saoy*.” Stylistic differences emerge in the two texts. These concern the use of the term *look* to address the master spirit (*Samdac Preah Kruu*) in the *coul ruup* context while in the wedding context it is common to use fancy words such as *oun/ouna* (my dear/ my love) since the singer embodies the groom’s voice.

Moreover, singers adapt the words to the music by adding nonsense words (*aeoy, heouy*) at the end or the beginning of musical phrases to fill the “empty” moment of the music. They also use synonyms, such as *don ta* and *cidon cita* to address ancestors’ spirits, according to the length of the musical phrases. According to Jacob’s dictionary (1974), the term *aeoy* stands for the exclamation “oh”; Huffman (1970) translates it as a supplicatory particle (“really”; “believe me”; “please”). However, musicians consider them as a “technical tool” used to embellish the

melody.⁶⁹ The table below illustrates the two examined texts of *Kong Saoy* that I recorded during a *coul ruup* ceremony in Kampong Spæi in 2015 and a wedding ceremony in Phnom Penh in 2009. The sentences in red indicate some parallels between the two texts in terms of words and general meaning.

Table 15: Comparison of *Kong Saoy (phleng arak)* and *Kong Saoy (phleng kar bouraan)* texts

Song Text	
<i>Kong Saoy Arak</i>	<i>Kong Saoy Phleng Kar Bouraan</i>
Today, today is a good day [aeoy]	[Heouy eouy] Ancestors' spirits all of you are here [heouy aeoy]
Look [aeoy] Look this day is important Raise our hand up to welcome (the spirits)	We offer Kong Saoy there are food and dessert
We offer Kong Saoy [aeoy] Kong Saoy	There are some rice wrapped in banana leaves, betel leaves and cigarettes [heouy]
Aeoy ancestors' spirits [don ta] ancestors' spirits stay in front of us aeoy	Invite the ancestors' spirits [cidon cita] Even though near or far
Stay in front of us we, sons and daughters, stay behind	Look [heouy] please come and eat [Aeoy] Look [heouy] Look
We offer <i>Kong Saoy</i> so that you bless us [heouy]	When you have already eaten [Aeoy heouy] Look [heouy]
[Aeoy] We call your help Look, you are very thin and weak	Please turn your face back [heouy] Send blessing to my love
King of big master, My mighty master [aeoy]	Please bless both your grandchildren [aeoy]
If I have done something wrong [aeoy],	My master [heouy]

⁶⁹Similarly, in Thai classical singing, wordless vocalisations (*ýyan*) do not have any linguistic meaning but contain aesthetic values. A musical phrase can either begin with *ýyan* and end with a word, or contain only *ýyan* (Swangviboonpong 2003).

do not be angry [heouy]	the parents of bride and groom are behind
[Aeoy] <i>Samdac Preah Kruu,</i> <i>Samdac Preah Kruu</i> with the metal stick [heouy]	Please bless them [heouy]
The metal stick, the metal stick, <i>Look</i> , you can go beneath the surface of the ground and water	Please my dear <i>[oun]</i> May the bride and groom be happy
Mighty <i>Look</i> You are mighty to solve the problems every time	

Unlike *Kong Saoy* and *Baay Khon* song, *Sampoone phleng kar* and *Sampoone phleng arak* texts are not relating to a specific function. In fact, in the *coul ruup* context, *Sampoone* is played after the trance in both of the two versions recorded in two different rituals and provinces (Kampong Spæi and Siem Reap provinces). In the wedding context it is played for entertaining the guests during the empty moments of the ceremony although in the past, according to Giuriati (1988), it was connected to the ritual of “the arrangement of the areca flowers.” The betel nuts are mentioned in both of the versions:

- 1) *Phleng arak*: My dear, please stay by me so that I can give you the fruit of betel nut
- 2) *Phleng kar*: She walks jerkily to bring the betel nut for me

They share a common subject which is a girl (the bride) bringing a betel nut, one of the main offerings in the wedding ceremony. Other versions refer to the bride’s chignon (Tricon 1921). Both Tricon’s version and the *phleng arak* song I have recorded in Kampong Spæi province express the impossibility of marrying for different reasons:

- 1) *Phleng arak*: You do love me but your father does not allow us to marry
- 2) *Phleng kar*: I want you but you are married (Tricon 1921)

Although musicians postulate that *phleng arak* songs cannot be played in the wedding contexts, we cannot establish whether the wedding text is adapted to the *phleng arak* song text or vice versa. By comparing *Sampoone phleng arak* and *phleng kar* song texts with those of *Sampoone* performed for *Ikhaon bassac* theatre, love emerges as a common general theme although there are no parallels in terms of words and sentences. *Lkhaon bassac* and *Ikhaon yikee*

texts are related to the scenes or characters. The text is improvised by the actor/singer according to the plot of the story and the theme of the scene so that it can have different song texts according to the creativity of the actors/singers. For example, I recorded *Sampoong* during a *Ikhaon bassac* performance on Bayon television played on traditional instruments for a scene of the story *Preah Puthii Ciy Komaa* as well as in a studio recording in Banteay Meanchey province (see Table 16).

Table 16: Comparison of *Sampoong phleng arak*, *Sampoong phleng kar samay kandaal* and *Sampoong bassac* texts

Song Texts		
<i>Sampoong Arak</i>	<i>Sampoong phleng kar samay</i>	<i>Sampoong Bassac</i>
Oh! My blossoming flower of betel palm,	The white-skinny girl	I have not seen you today;
You walked in the evening	She walks jerkily out of the hall (...)	Do you miss me, my dear?
My dear, please stay by me so that I can give you the fruit of betel palm.	She holds the tobacco with the left hand and the betel nut with the right hand (...) She walks jerkily	Now I miss you and do you miss me or not? Do you pity me, my dear? If I die, will you miss me?

It can also happen that different texts and titles correspond to a similar tune, such as the wedding song *Sat Tra Yaaj* (The ibis bird) and the *yikee* song *Noang Pisaraa*. The wedding song's text evokes a poetic image of a couple of ibis crying above a tree since they must leave each other while the *yikee* song *Noang Pisaraa* is performed for the *robam yikee* dance (see Chapter 3). In the *robam yikee* context, the text expresses nationalistic and patriotic images of the Khmers who proudly evoke the cultural heritage of the "Kingdom of Wonder" (see Table 17). The chorus pronounces foreign words, perhaps Malay and Thai whose meaning is unknown to the singers themselves. This aspect shows the foreign and unclear origin of *Ikhaon yikee* theatre. The singer improvises the wedding song text and it does not follow a specific poetic meter, but he uses poetic images.

Table 17: Comparison of *Sat Tra Yaaj* and *Noang Pisaraa* texts

Song Text	
<i>Sat Tro Yong</i>	<i>Noang Pisaraa</i>
I miss <i>tro yong</i> bird	The cultural heritage
My dear I miss <i>tro yong</i>	The builder's achievement of the Kingdom of wonder [Cambodia]
We cry my dear,	[Chorus]
We cry my dear on the tree	That I rely on and sacrifice myself for
Hold my hand my dear	[Chorus]
tell me that you truly love me	(from performance, January 2015, Kampot province)
Whisper that you love me	
I am waiting for you	
(...)	
(from ceremony, April 2009, Phnom Penh)	

Sometimes, titles and texts have opposite meanings; during a wedding ceremony I attended in Phnom Penh during my previous fieldwork, the singer adapted the text of *Sat Tra Yaaj* to another popular wedding song *Trapeang Piey*. This song is performed for the *Pithii Kat Saq* (Hair-cutting ritual); the text evokes the ritual bath of the groom and the bride. However, there was no connection between the title of the song, *Trapeang Piey*, which refers to the wind blowing on the sacred water of the pond, and the text which evokes the dramatic scene of the ibis bird couple. The ibis bird couple recalls the text of *Sat Tra Yaaj* transcribed above. This example shows that different texts are adapted and improvised on the same tune which corresponds to the same title. Therefore, the mutual exchange of texts does not only occur across different genres but also within the same genre such as in the specific case of *phleng kar* repertoire. In summary, the interrelation between *phleng kar*, *phleng arak*, *Ikhaon bassac* and *Ikhaon yiikee* song texts presents:

- 1) Parallels of sentences and expressions (e.g. *Kong Saoy*);
- 2) The same general theme and subject (e.g. *Sampoong*);

- 3) The same title corresponding to the improvisation of different texts (e.g. *Trapeang Piey*);
- 4) Different poetic metres and styles (e.g. *Noang Pisaraa* and *Sat Tra Yaaj*).

1.3 Function/Occasion of performance

The Khmers consider the genres as a set of values and functions connected to extramusical aspects. Khmer musicians express their concept of genre by saying: “Names [of the genre] change according to the period and their occasion of performance. For example, *pin piat* is music for Buddha; *phleng kar* for the wedding; *phleng arak* for the *arak* spirits” (Man Maen, interview, 10 October 2014, Siem Reap). The occasions and functions of performance are some of the variables used by musicians to classify and talk about their music. For example, *phleng kar* music is played for wedding rituals, *phleng arak* for the ritual of possession called *coul ruup*, and *lkhaon yiikee* and *lkhaon bassac* during Buddhist festivities in the surrounding area of the pagoda in rural villages. Nowadays, the most famous *lkhaon* troupes are also engaged in national festivals and events (see Chapter 5). Some *phleng kar* songs are played as an offering to the spirits before theatre performances and in healing ceremonies to amuse the spirits; they are also played to accompany love or wedding scenes in the *lkhaon* performance context.

Giuriati distinguishes “pieces with a particular function” and “pieces with general function” in the classical genre called *pin piat* (Giuriati 1988: 153/156). In the *pin piat* genre some songs are strictly related to a function while others have no specific connection with the ritual action/scene. This distinction can be applied to the wedding music repertoire. In the former category the function is linked to the formal structure of the performance rather than to the narration. Some pieces played to introduce or conclude a given performance/ritual fall into this category, such as *Buaj Suaj* (Dance of prayer) that is used as an offering to deities before the beginning of a dance performance such as *rbam yiikee*. The second category includes pieces that have different texts, such as *Sampooj*, which are not connected to a specific function. Another group of songs include those pieces performed in both *phleng arak* and *phleng kar* genres.

There is a frequent exchange between these repertoires, both considered as “traditional” and “ancient” belonging to the *phleng kmae* genre. However, their function is distinct: the *phleng arak* songs have the function of recalling and inviting the *arak* spirits in order to possess the medium, while in the wedding ceremony, music plays a vital role since it structures the ceremony which consists of a succession of rituals. Each ritual corresponds to a specific song whose song text describes and prescribes the ritual scene (McKinley 2002; Billeri 2016). An example from this category of songs is *Baay Khon Caaj Day* song. In the wedding context, the song is played during the *Pithii Caaj Day* (Ritual of tying the wrists); all of the guests tie a red cotton thread around the bride’s and groom’s wrists in turn, symbolizing eternal union. In *coul ruup* rituals, the same tune is titled as *Baay Khon Laang Rooj* played for the ritual of *Laang Rooj*

or *Caang Rooŋ* (Paying homage to ancestral family spirits).⁷⁰ During this ritual, a red or white string, sometimes a *kramaa*,⁷¹ is tied upon the pavilion (*rooŋ*) before the start of the ceremony. It is a traditional practice of the mediums or the owners of the ceremony. At the end of the ceremony, during the *Pithii Beh Pkaa* (Ritual of collecting the flowers) the pavilion is tied up with a red string after tying up the medium's hand.

Other *phleng arak* songs are connected to different kinds of spirits (territorial, master spirits, and ancestral spirits), and some of them serve to facilitate the trance. For example, *Kong Saoy* song is played to recall either the ancestors' spirits or master spirits. This song also has a similar function within the wedding ceremony context where it is played for the ritual of inviting the ancestors' spirits *Pithii Saen Ciidoun Ciitaa*. However, in some *coul ruup* rituals I attended, *Kong Saoy* song was played at the end of the ceremony for the *Pithii Twaay Phleng* (ritual of offering music) in which music was requested by the elders of the family to bless the rice harvest. Therefore, in some cases *phleng arak* songs are not functional to the possession process; it is possible to distinguish a repertoire related to songs that help the trance and songs which are not essential to the possession process. "Only some songs are offered if the possession does not take place" (Maw Yon, interview, 23 June 2015, Kampong Spəi). Some songs are required by the spirits on behalf of the medium to amuse themselves after the interrogation phase. These songs can even be borrowed from other repertoires, especially the *phleng kar*.

In the theatre context, the function of the *phleng kar* songs is preserved since some *phleng kar* songs are played on *phleng kar* instruments during the *bassac* and *yiikee* opera wedding scenes. However, *phleng kar bouraan* (old wedding music) is also played in particular scenes, such as when a girl leaves her boyfriend for a wealthy boy. The boyfriend sings *Konsaeng Krahaam* (The red handkerchief) or *Loom Niaŋ* (Consoling the lady). In the *Ikhaon yiikee* context, "phleng kar music and song texts can be adapted to a scene of a couple who are forcibly separated and reunited. Then a wedding ceremony is organized and *phleng kar* songs such as *Baay Khon Caan Day* are performed" (Maan Prum, personal communication, 09 July 2015, Kampot province).

Other wedding songs, for example, *Sampoŋ*,⁷² are not specifically connected to rituals but played as entertainment during the changing of the bride's and groom's dress and the offerings setting. A song with the same title is also played in *Ikhaon bassac* performances for love scenes or to describe nature and in *coul ruup* rituals to recall ancestors' spirits. Other songs with

⁷⁰ The *Laang Rooŋ* is also the annual ceremony in which the families gathered at the medium's house to pay homage to the *arak* spirits in order to ensure good health (Commission des Moeurs et Coutumes du Cambodge 1958: 71).

⁷¹ Traditional Khmer scarf. This practice is called *Baŋ Kruu* or *Loom Kruu* (Decorating the master).

⁷² According to Nou and Nou (1973), the song was played to accompany the *pithi dot pkaa slaa* (Ritual of arrangement of areca flowers).

different titles but similar melodic contours have various functions related to their performance contexts, such as the wedding song *Sat Tra Yaaj* (The giant ibis) played soon after the hair-cutting ritual and *Noang Pisaraa* song accompanying the *yikee* dance preceding the theatre performance. Therefore, wedding songs have the function of:

- 1) Being offerings for deities and supernatural spirits in various performance contexts such as healing ceremonies and theatre performances;
- 2) Accompanying wedding scenes in theatre performances;
- 3) Satisfying the *arak* spirits' musical requests in healing rituals (*coul ruup*).

According to Khmer musicians, the relationship between the *phleng kar* repertoire and the other genres in question is unidirectional as “*phleng kar* music can be performed in *coul arak* ceremonies and theatre performances but *phleng arak* music and *yikee* and *bassac* music cannot be performed during wedding rituals” (Maw Yon, personal communication, 23 June 2015, Kampong Spæi). But, Man Maen said that “in the past, *phleng arak* was also performed during wedding rituals” (Man Maen, personal communication, 10 October 2014, Siem Reap). Consequently, due to the absence of reliable sources, it is not possible to prove that *phleng kar* Khmer traditional music originated from the *phleng kar* genre as postulated by musicians. Therefore, we can talk about an exchange of repertoires, titles, texts and functions of the examined genres.

2. Musical Features

So far, I have described some extramusical features used by Khmer musicians to classify and describe their interrelated songs. Now, I will consider the musical components of these interrelated songs. This information is based on accounts of the musicians collected during interview-lessons and ceremonies, and through personal communication. The *emic* data I add here do not challenge the studies of Khmer music scholars (Brunet 1979; Giuriati 1988; Sam 1988; Commission de Musique 1969) but rather complement them with details. In particular, my investigation focuses on the terminology employed by musicians to talk about the songs from different repertoires sharing musical traits and the way in which they categorize them within their system of classification.

2.1 Ensembles/Instruments (*Krom Phleng/Qobakaa*)

Musicians often contextualize the wedding ensembles *phleng kar bouraan* and *phleng kar samay kandaal* historically, referring to the antiquity of the older wedding ensemble. In general, genres identified as *bouraan* are perceived to be ancient and not to have undergone significant changes

over the years – as is the case, for example, with *pin piət* and *phleng arak*. The term is also used in connection with older and rarer ensembles such as *phleng kar bouraan*. They use the term *prapəynii* referring to all the genres perceived to have a historical value and to be authentically Khmer such as *pin piət*, *phleng kar*, *phleng arak*, *phleng mchaorii* and *phleng ayay* (McKinley 2002).

The Khmer classification system conceived by musicians is based on performance. It was created to serve neither organology nor musicology, but only for the practical making of Khmer music. Musicians distinguish two different wedding ensembles: the ancient *phleng kar bouraan* and the semi-traditional *phleng kar samay kandaal*.⁷³ The difference between the two ensembles concerns the instruments and the musical texture. An additional type of ensemble is the *samay* (modern) composed of semi-traditional and western instruments (guitar, electric bass, mandolin-banjo and drum set) which are occasionally employed in rural areas, for recordings and television performances. Musicians consider the *samay* form as a “modernization” of the traditional *Ikhaon yikee*, *bassac* and wedding songs (*phleng kar samay kandaal*) due to the introduction of western instruments as well as the themes of the theatre stories which reflect contemporary socio-cultural issues (see Chapter 5).⁷⁴ The dichotomy *bouraan/samay* (ancient/modern) is also applied to the theatre context and it is related to the types of stories, costumes, characters, set design, and the stage but it does not concern the repertoire and the instruments (see Chapters 2 and 3).

Although there are no sources to prove the historical relationship between the wedding genre and the other genres in question, my informants consider traditional wedding music (*phleng kar bouraan*) to be the most traditional Khmer music which gave origin to the music for *arak* spirits (*phleng arak*). Regarding the repertoire, musicians assume that the *phleng kar samay kandaal* genre derives from the *ayay* genre, a satirical sung dialogue between two singers, a man and a woman, that is performed before the hair cutting ritual, during the wedding ceremony, as well as on stage and television. Similarly, musicians of *Ikhaon bassac* and *yikee* assume that their music has its origins in the semi-traditional wedding genre. These relationships are evidenced by the presence of some instruments that are common to the theatre, *phleng arak* and wedding ensembles. However, that does not provide evidence for the relationships between the repertoires since it is problematic to establish the origin of a song and its circulation among other genres without any reliable source.

The *phleng kar bouraan* is still played in rural areas or to accompany weddings of wealthy families while the semi-traditional wedding ensemble is, nowadays, most common in urban

⁷³ For Khmer musical instruments see Daniélou (1957); Commission de Musique (1969); Sam (1998); Keo (2003). For wedding ensemble see Brunet (1979); McKinley (2002).

⁷⁴ There are different interpretations of the ensemble *samay kandaal* and *samay* among scholars. Brunet (1979) and McKinley (2002) distinguish between *samay kandaal* and *samay*; Giuriati (1988) mentions *samay* only. Here, I follow the terminology adopted by my informants.

areas; the two ensembles share Khmer ancient musical instruments with the *phleng arak* ensemble (figures 4.1–4.2). These include:

- *Trɔ̄ Kmae*⁷⁵ (three-string spike fiddle)
- *Capey dong weng* (long-necked lute)
- *Pey a* (double reed aerophone)
- *Pey pok* (bamboo flute)
- Two or four *skɔ̄ arak* (single headed, goblet shaped hand drums)⁷⁶

Figure 4.1: *Phleng arak* ensemble, Kampong Spæi province



⁷⁵ Nowadays, *tro kmae* is replaced by *trɔ̄ sao* and *trɔ̄ quu*.

⁷⁶ According to Maw Yon, four *arak* hanging upside-down from a frame made of rattan (*saŋraek*) were used. They were called *cɨy* (drums of the victory). Nowadays, they are no longer used but symbolically replaced by small drums (*skɔ̄*) hanging from the altars of some mediums.

Figure 4.2: *Phleng kar bouraan* ensemble, Phnom Penh



Nowadays, the semi-traditional *phleng kar samay kandaal* ensemble, whose name, according to my informants, was coined in 1965 by a group of musicians working for the Ministry of Culture, has replaced some *bouraan* instruments (figure 4.3). The semi-traditional *phleng kar samay kandaal* ensemble includes:

- *Khloy* (bamboo flute)
- *Taakee* (plucked, fretted three-stringed zither)
- *Khim* (trapezoidal hammered dulcimer)
- *Trɔ̄ sao* (high pitched two-stringed fiddle)
- *Trɔ̄ quu* (lower pitched two-stringed fiddle)
- *Skɔ̄ arak* (hand-drum)

“The ancient instruments used in both *phleng arak* and *phleng kar bouraan* are the monochord *ksaediaw*, the three-stringed fiddle *trɔ̄ kmae* or *ksae bay* and the long-necked lute *capey dong weng*. Instruments for traditional music called *phleng prapəynii* are the dulcimer *khim*⁷⁷ and the zither *taakee*” (Maw Yon, interview, 26 March 2015, Kampong Spəi). The *khim* and *taakee* belong to the *Ikhaon bassac* and *Ikhaon yiikee* ensemble respectively.

⁷⁷ This small dulcimer is trapezoidal in shape, similar to the Chinese *Chao Zhou yang* or *yao qin* (McKinley 2002:44).

Figure 4.3: *Phleng kar samay kandaal* ensemble, Phnom Penh



According to the musicians, the *phleng kar samay kandaal* ensemble has influenced the *lkhaon yikee* and *lkhaon bassac* theatre. The *lkhaon yikee* ensemble includes some of the *phleng kar samay kandaal* instruments except for the flute (*khloy*), the zither (*taakee*) and the drums (figure 4.4) that are of a kind specific to this genre; the *lkhaon bassac* ensemble shares its instruments with the semi-traditional wedding instruments. In addition, it includes some particular instruments such as the *trɔ̄ chee* (middle pitched two-string fiddle), *krap* (wooden clappers), *skɔ̄ bassac* (drums) and some idiophones (*lao*, *caan*, *taadok*) (figure 4.5).

Figure 4.4: *Lkhaon yikee* ensemble, Chuk District, Kampot province



Figure 4.5: *Lkhaon bassac* ensemble, Banteay Meanchey province



The instruments unique to each genre identify that genre. These instruments are: the drums (*skow arak*; *skow yikee* and *skow bassac*), the idiophones (*chhi*, *chnang* and *lao*) and other percussion such as the clappers (*krap*) used in the *Lkhaon bassac* genre.

2.2 Tunes (*Tumnuk Phleng*)

Despite the exchange and interrelation of songs, in Khmer music, it is possible to establish a stable association of repertoires and ensembles. Each “interrelated” piece presents specific musical traits and instruments which identify the genre it belongs to. This process occurs also in other Southeast Asian musical traditions of Khmer influence such as in Thai music in which, with some exceptions, repertoire and context are also tied to the standard three ensemble types (*wong piiphat*, *wong khruang say*, *wong mahoorii*), while, similarly, some compositions can be played by any number of different ensemble types (Myers-Moro 1988). Khmer musicians connect the specific ensembles for wedding, healing ceremonies and popular theatre with specific repertoires, although some songs cross over into different genres. As a result, three different cases emerge: 1) different tunes corresponding to the same title such as *Sampoon* song; 2) similar tunes corresponding to the same title, such as *Baay khon* and *Kong Saoy* song; 3) different titles corresponding to similar tunes such as *Sat Tra Yaan* and *Noang Pisaraa*. I use the adjective “similar” instead of “same” because they present slight variations regarding notes, ornaments and stylistic aspects primarily related to the singers’ voice and genre’s features.

I will examine each of these case-studies by taking the above mentioned songs as examples. The selected songs derive from two sources: a) live recordings of *coul ruup* rituals and theatre performances from my PhD fieldwork (2014/2015); b) live recordings from my previous fieldwork in 2009 on *phleng kar* wedding songs.

1) Case study 1: Similar title and different tune

Nettl (2005) explores the concept of tune families within one genre and the way in which tunes cross geographic, linguistic and cultural borders in European folk music:

[Some “songs” or “pieces”] behave as if they had lives of their own, moving across national boundaries, rivers, mountain ranges, oceans, across language and culture areas, stimulating one of their earliest observers, Wilhelm Tappert (1890: 5), to nominate them as ‘the most indefatigable tourists of the earth’. As they move, they usually change, but not beyond recognition, retaining their integrity and this justifies their existence as units in musicological conceptualization. However, their culture may interpret them. (Nettl 2005: 113)

He also acknowledges the difficulty of establishing an “original” version of a song so that his first model of tune family, which consists of a transmission of a piece on intact, is unreal. My intent here is not to establish an original tune family of songs from different repertoires because there are no written sources to draw from – as scholars of Chinese music have been able to do, for example Jones (1995) and Witzleben (1995). Rather, I want to show how shared musical and extramusical aspects between songs from different genres recur and how Khmer musicians perceive them. Allan Marret (2009) summarizes some of the musical conventions (text, melody and rhythmic mode) of the *Wangga*, a musical and ceremonial genre of Aboriginal people of the Daly Region of Northern Australia, that are shared across four repertoires discussed in his book showing that there is a web of understandings that are shared across the whole Daly region and activated by the performance of *Wangga*. In a society without writing, it is not a score or an original version that constrains a performance, but a set of musical conventions. Therefore, here I will examine some musical traits that are shared among these genres.

To shed light on the interrelation of songs across different repertoires, I try to analyze the content and the style of a piece, although sometimes their boundaries are blurred, by following the distinction used in folklore and applied to folk music by Bruno Nettel (2005:115). According to Nettel, content refers to the musical aspects. In the study of the interrelation of Khmer music, the content could coincide with the shared musical features (cadences, scales, modes) while the style is the way in which a piece is performed reflecting the genre it belongs to (use of the voice, particular formulas, the length of melodic/rhythmic phrases). Both 'style' and 'genre' are terms concerned with ways of erecting categorical distinctions, of identifying the similarity between different pieces (songs, objects, performances and 'texts'). The sharing of musical techniques would perhaps encourage a musicologist to declare similarity of style, while the distinction in subject matter calls attention to a difference of genre (Moore 2001: 432). Many attempts have been made to define a difference between genre and style; the most common one is to identify genre as a category or type of music (the what), while style is defined as a way of making music or a manner of articulation (the how) (ibid: 441).

By following this distinction, this section aims to answer some questions: How are shared contents adapted to different styles? Which components related to the style and contents identify a genre according to Khmer musicians? I start my discussion by analysing the tune of *Sampoong* song. As showed previously, Khmer musicians consider *Sampoong arak*, *Sampoong phleng kar* and *Sampoong bassac* as three different songs regarding function, ensemble and text. This difference is also explained in terms of tune in both the instrumental and vocal versions, and rhythm (*cajwak*) (see the following section).

I will firstly examine the instrumental version of the song played by Man Maen on *trɔ quu* during a lesson-interview. When I asked him the difference between *Sampoong arak* and *Sampoong phleng kar*, he answered my question by playing three tunes corresponding to the title *Sampoong*. He distinguished a tune belonging to the *phleng arak* repertoire, a second tune belonging to the *phleng kar bouraan* and a third tune belonging to the semi-traditional *phleng kar samay kandaal* ensemble. “Although they share the same title, they have a different meaning, song text, rhythm and tune” (Man Maen, lesson-interview, 10 October 2014, Siem Reap). From a comparative analysis of the content of the three pieces (melodic and rhythmic contour, scale, and formulas) some similarities emerge. They also share the performance style evidenced by changes of octave and ornaments throughout the three pieces. It could be considered as the musician’s style and a way to show his skill of virtuoso as discussed by Sam in his PhD dissertation on *pin piat* classical music:

A musician shows off his skill, plays his instrument according to his style, provides proper octave displacements conforming to its range, and interprets the piece according to its proper characteristics i.e., descriptive or sentimental. (Sam 1988:170)

It should be pointed out that the different versions of *Sampoong* share some passages that recur in a different order throughout the pieces in particular between the two *phleng kar* songs. When Man Maen played the three versions of *Sampoong* song during my *trɔ quu* lesson, he explicitly considered them as different in terms of rhythm and song texts although he used the same melodic material for each version of the song. Example 4.1 shows a section from *Sampoong phleng kar bouraan* as a variation of a section from *Sampoong phleng kar samay* (in the red boxes) and vice versa, a section from *phleng kar bouraan* has a similar melodic contour to a section from *phleng kar samay kandaal* (in the black boxes).

Example 4.1: Transcription of the first melodic phrase of a) *Sampoong phleng kar bouraan* and b) *Sampoong phleng kar samay kandaal* played on *trɔ quu* (a two-string fiddle) by Man Maen (lesson-interview, 10 October 2015, Siem Reap province). Audio CD, tracks 3 [0:01–0:21]; 4 [0:01–0:27].

Note: In b) Man Maen is playing with the tuning of a particular degree (D), sometimes playing it flatter and sometimes closer to natural. The use of key signatures in this example is not intended to imply western concepts of key and tonality, but to facilitate reading. The example is arhythmic reflecting metric flexibility in performance.



The two versions of *Sampoon phleng kar* seem different *plaw* (roads) or variations of the “abstract melody.” In fact, in Khmer music, there is no a fixed melody performed by a specific group of instruments of the ensemble, as in Java (Hood 1954), or Bali, not always explicitly performed, but recognized by Balinese musicians (McPhee 1949). This process in Khmer music remains implicit both in performance and performers. Each instrument and human voice gives its own rendition of the tune, according to its specific characteristics. The collective melody is a sort of guideline for all musicians to follow throughout the piece and is the basis of their interaction. Each musician plays his line, and these lines run together simultaneously to create a dense texture, expanding and contracting the melody. The same process occurs in *pin piat* music as described by Sam Ang Sam:

When a melodic line becomes more and more intricate, it increases its density level; more pitch and rhythmic variations are exhibited. However, the length of the piece remains constant. They all play together at the same tempo, starting and ending at the same time. (Sam 1988:142–143)

The notion of *bamphlay* which means “to cheat; to alter; to change; to embellish” expresses the improvisation process which is “to make things appear different from their original forms”, as Maw Yon said “a distortion.” Variation of the melody and creativity are remarkable components

of the process of improvisation in Khmer music. There is a considerable degree of variability in each performance of a tune; the vocal part is different from the instrumental ones; each instrument improvises different variations at each repetition of the tune; the instrumentation of the tune can also vary. Therefore, the formal structure of the transcriptions given here must be considered only one version of the several “roads.”

Each vocal section is in turn made up of some melodic sections. As the two *phleng kar* songs belong to the same genre, they share the same scale. In contrast, the *phleng arak* song differs as it has two *thaat* (melodic phrases), which are repeated at the lower octave in the second part of the piece on a different scale as shown in Chapter 1. Before leaving the melody, I will briefly address the question of pitch and mode.

Giuriati (1988) examines how Khmer musicians use different tone centres (“pitch levels”) for each ensemble. He examines *phleng kar* music, *pin piat* (classical genre) and *mchaorii* (modern genre) and highlights how “the different pitch level in a non-equidistant tuning gives each genre a particular melodic flavour and intervallic structure” (Giuriati 1988:211). “The distinction in function and occasion can be considered as a distinction in “mood” expressed by the difference in instrumental ensembles and pitch levels” (ibid: 207). The choice of an instrument or ensemble and the selection of a given pitch level is determined by genre. For example, the *phleng arak* version of *Sampoong* has a different tune, pitch level and scale from the *phleng kar bouraan* and *phleng kar samay kandaal* versions. However, the interrelationship between the two *phleng kar* versions is mainly because both of them belong to the *phleng kar* genre and are built on the same scales and pitch levels (see Example 4.2).

Example 4.2: Transcription of the first melodic phrase of a) *Sampoong arak*, b) *Sampoong phleng kar bouraan* and c) *Sampoong phleng kar samay kandaal* played on *trɔ̌ quu* by Man Maen (lesson-interview, 10 October 2015, Siem Reap province)

Note: The first pitch corresponding to the tonal centre of each version is circled. The example is arhythmic reflecting metric ambiguity in performance. Audio CD, tracks 2 [0:01–0:22]; 3 [0:01–0:21]; 4 [0:01–0:27].

The image displays three musical examples, labeled a), b), and c), each consisting of two staves of music. Example a) is in D major (one sharp) and features a complex, fast-paced melody with many sixteenth notes. A red circle highlights the first note, D4. Example b) is in B-flat major (two flats) and features a slower, more melodic line. A red circle highlights the first note, B-flat4. Example c) is also in B-flat major and features a similar tempo and melodic style to b). A red circle highlights the first note, B-flat4. A dashed line with the number '8' above it spans the first staff of example a) and the first staff of example b).

In popular music, scholars try to group ballad-tunes in “tune-families” regardless of their associations with specific texts (Bronson and Bayard 1954; Nettl 1983; Seeger 1966). Bruno Nettl (2005) identifies four types of tune family and defines a piece as “a group of tunes derived from one original” and the variants as “performances of the same songs.” However, in the absence of written sources, the identification of the original tune among its variants is problematic since the measurement of similarity and difference is culturally determined. The identity of a repertoire depends on “assessment or even measurement of degrees of similarity between musics and among their components” (Nettl 2005:118). However, if there is no standard technique for establishing degrees of similarity, Nettl discusses some methods that suggest ways in which one could proceed further such as the comparative study of repertoires.

So far, I have analysed the instrumental version of *Sampoong* song played by the same performer. Now I will compare the vocal line of *Sampoong arak*, *Sampoong phleng kar* and *Sampoong bassac*, performed by different singers during ritual and theatre contexts. The difference among musicians’ renditions of a piece can be referred to as “individual variation.” Sutton has used this term in his studies of Javanese *gamelan* music and defines it to include “variation within a single performance by one individual”, “variation between performances by

one individual”, and “variation between performances by different individuals” (Sutton 1982: 246–47). Here, I have considered examples from various performers.

The vocal line is usually less embellished than the instrumental parts. From examining the three vocal lines, one can identify the characteristic features that define the styles of the three genres. The comparison of three vocal lines of *Sampooŋ* song reveals a similar melodic contour which is adapted to the different genres. The *phleng arak* melody is fragmented by several rests and instrumental interludes; the singer is calling the spirit to join the ritual of *coul ruup* by listing his characteristics and story. The *phleng kar samay kandaal* version has a more ornamented melody as the singer is describing the arrangement of the areca flowers ritual. The *Ikhaon bassac* version consists of a repetition of short melodic phrases based on the pentatonic scale; the *bassac* vocal style has a higher registry and a syncopated rhythm than *phleng arak* and *phleng kar* songs.

Man Maen distinguishes three *thaat* (melodic phrases) in *phleng kar samay kandaal* and two *thaat* in *phleng arak* and *phleng kar bouraan*. We can distinguish some cadences that are shared among the three songs. For example, the three vocal versions of *Sampooŋ* share a cadence (5 6 3 2 1) at the end of melodic phrases; the cadence constitutes the anhemitonic pentatonic scale on which the three pieces are based (Example 4.3). The vast majority of Khmer scales are anhemitonic pentatonic. Within this large group we can distinguish pieces using only the five pitches of the scale, pieces using also pitches 4 and 7 as passing tones, and those using pitches 4 and 7 coincident with *chij* strokes.

Example 4.3: Vocal line of a) *Sampoong arak*; b) *Sampoong phleng kar samay kandaal*; c) *Sampoong bassac*. Audio CD, tracks 5 [0:10–1:03]; 6 [0:10–0:57]; 7 [0:05–0:20].

Note: The green boxes show the shared cadences at the end of the first melodic phrase of each version.

The image displays three musical staves, each representing a different version of the 'Sampoong' genre. Staff (a) is for 'Sampoong arak' in 2/4 time, showing a melodic line with a green box highlighting the cadence '1 5 6 3 2 1'. Staff (b) is for 'Sampoong phleng kar samay kandaal' in 6/8 time, with a green box highlighting the cadence '5 6 3 2 1'. Staff (c) is for 'Sampoong bassac' in 4/4 time, with a green box highlighting the cadence '1 (3) 5 6 3 2 1'. The notes are written in treble clef, and the key signatures are D major for (a) and B-flat major for (b).

The stylistic traits of each tune delineate their consistency within the repertoire they belong to. The *phleng arak* tune does not present ornamentation and consists of a repetition of notes, rests and instrumental interludes; the *phleng kar samay kandaal* vocal line is divided into two melodic phrases, each of them repeated twice. Another important feature of the *phleng kar* genre is the opening pattern which is repeated throughout the piece at the beginning of each melodic phrase. The *bassac* version has not much ornamentation, but it is composed by the repetition of a cadence which is slightly varied in each repetition. The three *Sampoong* vocal lines are remarkably different; the musicians consider them as three different tunes despite the vocal lines sharing a title. They associate the label *Sampoong* to a specific ensemble, performance context and function rather than to musical features. Nettl acknowledges that musicians sometimes do not think analytically about songs, breaking them down into constituent units:

There are shorter sections, lines, motifs, rhythmic formulas, which are the constituent members of the songs or pieces. They cannot normally be reproduced by informants and, sung in isolation, they do not properly constitute music. But in analysis they too may be treated individually as units of musical thoughts that have variants, individual origins, and their own life stories. (Nettl 2005: 111)

The first case study above examined shows how Khmer musicians label a tune and title under a specific function, ensemble and performance context.

2) Case study 2: Same title and similar tune

The second case study concerns songs sharing both the tune and the title but differing in terms of text, rhythm, ensemble and performance context. Even when two tunes seem to be identical, musicians do not recognize that similarity since a specific function, ensemble and performance context is attached to each tune. I will examine the interrelation between *Baay Khon* song played in both *coul ruup* and wedding rituals showing how the shared melodic patterns reveal, at the same time, stylistic differences related to the genre and the singers' individual style.

During a *coul arak* ceremony in Kampong Spəi province, I recognized the tune of a famous wedding song *Baay Khon Caəŋ Day* (Tying of the wrists) played during *Pithii Baay Khon* ritual (Ritual of tying the spouses' wrists). When I interviewed Maw Yon, I told him that the wedding song *Baay Khon Caəŋ Day* was played during the ceremony and he did not immediately understand the song I was referring to. Then I sang the melody and he said: "Oh, this is not *Baay Khon Caəŋ Day*, this is *Baay Khon Laəng Rooŋ* (Tying of the pavilion), it is similar, but it is not the same song" (Maw Yon, interview, 05 April 2015, Kampong Spəi). The two songs have the same melody. *Baay Khon Laəng Rooŋ* is played in Kampong Spəi province only, during the ritual of paying homage to the *arak* called *Pithii Laəng Rooŋ*. To distinguish the *phleng kar* and the *phleng arak* songs they add to the title, *Baay Khon*, the function of the song in each respective ritual context: *Baay Khon Caəŋ Day* (*Baay Khon* song for tying of the wrists) and *Baay Khon Laəng Rooŋ* (*Baay Khon* song for tying the pavilion).

Since some *phleng kar* songs, for instance, *Sampoəŋ*, *Konsaeng Krahaam* and *Angkor Riee* are played in *coul ruup* ceremonies when requested by the *ruup* [medium], people mix up *phleng kar* with *phleng arak*. However, these songs are unrelated since the melody, rhythm and song texts are different. (Maw Yon, personal communication, 05 April 2015, Kampong Spəi province)

There are micro-variations in terms of rhythm; the registry of the singers is different. The wedding song is sung by a female voice while an old male singer sings the *phleng arak* version. The embellished melody and the lyrical style of the text of the *phleng kar* song differ from the repeated notes which characterize the fragmented style of the *phleng arak* songs.

Example 4.4: First melodic phrase of a) *Baay Khon Laəŋ Rooŋ* (from *coul ruup* ceremony, 26 April 2015, Kampong Spəi); b) *Baay Khon Caəŋ Day* (from wedding ceremony, 5 March 2009, Phnom Penh). Audio CD, tracks 8 [0:11–0:41]; 9 [0:13–0:30].

Note: The boxes with the same colour correspond to the shared melodic patterns.



A second example is *Kong Saoy* which is played only in Kampong Spəi province to recall ancestors' spirits in *coul ruup* ceremonies. The song has a similar function within wedding ceremonies when the ancestors' spirits are recalled to bless the bride and the groom. From the comparison of *Kong Saoy phleng kar* and *Kong Saoy phleng arak*'s tunes emerges a similar melodic contour and cadences which mostly coincide with the nonsense words "aeoy"/ "heouy"⁷⁸ that singers add to the verses to fill the beginning, middle or the end of the musical phrases as shown in the example below.

⁷⁸Aeoy is "a vocal fluctuation (...) which is used only at the musical level and not in everyday conversation" (Sam 1988: 212).

Example 4.5: The first section (A) of the vocal line of a) *Kong Saoy phleng kar bouraan* and b) *Kong Saoy phleng arak*. Audio CD, tracks 10 [0:07–0:52]; 11 [0:48–1:23].

Note: The boxes indicate the shared melodic patterns.

The image displays two musical staves, labeled a) and b), representing the first section (A) of two different songs. Staff a) is for 'Kong Saoy phleng kar bouraan' and staff b) is for 'Kong Saoy phleng arak'. Both staves are in 4/4 time and feature a treble clef. The first section (A) is indicated by a box labeled 'A' at the beginning of each staff. In staff a), a box highlights a melodic pattern with the syllable 'heo-uy' underneath. In staff b), a box highlights a similar melodic pattern with the syllable 'a - e - oy' underneath. Below the first staff, there are two more musical staves, labeled a) and b), which show further examples of shared melodic patterns. The first of these lower staves has two boxes, each containing a melodic pattern with the syllable 'ae-oy' underneath. The second of these lower staves has two boxes, each containing a melodic pattern with the syllable 'a - e - oy' underneath.

The example of *Kong Saoy* and *Baay Khon* shows how the similar melody labelled under the same title is adapted to different genres assuming different musical features such as melodic and rhythmic micro-variations.

3) Case study 3: Different title and similar tune

The third case of the interrelation of songs concerns similar tunes having different titles such as the *yikee* song *Noang Pisaraa* and the *phleng kar* song *Sat Tra Yaaj*. The two songs have two sections (A–B) and share a similar melodic contour with slight rhythmic micro-variations due to the personal style of the singers, the text and the different ensembles. In the wedding context, *Sat Tra Yaaj* song is not related to a specific ritual or function while the *yikee* song is related to the dance movements and it has a slower tempo since it is played for *rbam yikee* which precedes the theatre performance.

Example 4.6: Section A and B of the vocal line of a) *Noang Pisaraa* (DVD, track 10 [00:00:42–00:01:19]) and b) *Sat Tra Yaaj* (Audio CD, track 12 [0:12–0:55])

Note: These transcriptions are simplified representations of the vocal line of the two songs. The *yikee* vocal line has been transposed for ease of comparison (the original pitch of *Noang Pisaraa* was F#). The *yikee* song vocal line is alternated with the chorus (*totuel*) which is not transcribed.

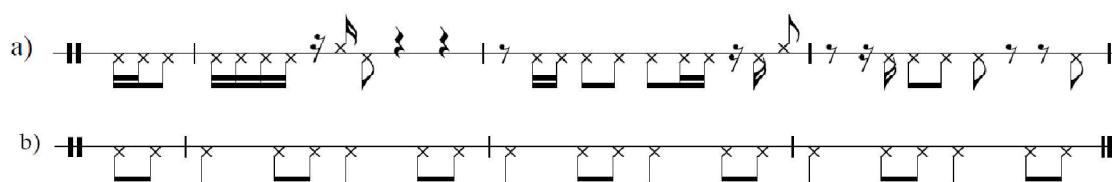
The image displays musical notation for two songs, labeled a) and b). Each song has two sections, A and B, transcribed in 4/4 time. Section A for both songs starts with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and includes a 'Chorus' label. Section B for both songs is in the same key signature. The notation uses treble clefs and includes various rhythmic values such as quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, as well as rests and repeat signs.

According to my informants, the melody is the same but the song text is different according to the stories. The two vocal lines look to be variants of the same song which is adapted to different ensembles, contexts and functions. The title is not always the same. In fact, sometimes two songs share the same melody but they have different song texts and titles. The remarkable difference between *Sat Tra Yaaj* and *Noang Pisaraa* is related to the rhythmic patterns and the various types of drums, such as the *yikee* drums, which are linked to the dancers' movements as discussed in the following section (see Example 4.8).

2.3 Rhythm (*Caŋwak Bat*)

The rhythm of *phleng kar* music (*caŋwak bat*) is based on binary formulas marked by *chij* (small cymbals) strokes and drum patterns. It is possible to transcribe the songs using bar signs as the tempo can be divided into four beats. The strong beat corresponds to the damped stroke of the *chij*. The weak beat usually corresponds to the first beat of the bar in western transcription; in fact, many transcribed pieces start on the weak beat. The *phleng arak* and *phleng kar* music use the same drums, called *skɔɔ arak* or *skɔɔ day* (hand-drum), and rhythm although the *phleng arak*

Example 4.8: Rhythmic patterns of a) *Sat Tra Yaaj* (CD, track 12 [0:12–0:25]) and b) *Noang Pisaraa* (DVD, track 10)



In *Ikhaon yiikee*, the function of the drums is to provide rhythmic accompaniment to the *rbam yiikee*. In the *Ikhaon bassac* context, the predominant function of the drums is to provide onomatopoeic accompaniment to the characters or scenes. Therefore, the musical function of the drums serves to identify the popular theatre genres as does the naming of the drum as either an *Ikhaon yiikee* or *Ikhaon bassac* drum. The rhythm of the *skɔɔ* is different depending on the scene and character. The *skɔɔ* play different rhythms to reproduce the sound of the scene. As a result, the function of the songs justifies their rhythms and the interrelationship of them occurs only between *phleng arak* and *phleng kar* due to their common roots.

3. Postulating the Antiquity and Sacredness of *Phleng kar Bouraan* Music and *Phleng Arak* Music

The wedding genre (*phleng kar bouraan*) can be considered as the “thread of union” of the repertoires in question although it shares many aspects with the *phleng arak* genre in terms of repertoires and ensemble. Musicians distinguish two different kinds of the ensemble; one is called *phleng kar bouraan* and the other *phleng kar samay kandaal*. Both vocal and instrumental wedding songs can be heard in various performance contexts such as at the beginning of *Ikhaon yiikee* and *Ikhaon bassac* performances (figure 4.6). Since Khmer performers believe in a multitude of spirits and ghosts living on the stage, they perform *phleng kar* music for the ritual of saluting and invoking the master of music (*Pithii Saen Preah Pisnukaa* or *Pithii Haom Roog*). It also signals the start of the performance and serves as warm up to the performers. In addition, wedding music is played to accompany scenes whose main theme is love. In healing rituals context, *phleng kar* music is played as an offering to supernatural beings for the *Pithii Twaay Phleng* (Ritual of making music) or simply to satisfy the spirits’ requests. Some songs common to the *phleng arak* repertoire share the same function of amusing *arak* spirits.

Figure 4.6: *Lkhaon bassac* musicians play *phleng kar* wedding music on *phleng kar samay kandaal* instruments before the beginning of the theatre performance



Therefore, the antiquity and divine nature attributed to *phleng kar* and *phleng arak* music are the reasons why they are performed across different genres and performance contexts. Although it is difficult to establish which genre is the most ancient due to the absence of sources, my informants postulate that *phleng kar bouraan* is the oldest form of Khmer music. However, they classify both the *phleng kar* and *phleng arak* genres as *phleng kmae* (Khmer music) or *phleng kmae propiynii* (Khmer traditional music). Khmer musicians have defined these genres as “Khmer music” to express their autochthonous and intimate character which accompanies their "private" ceremonies (Porée-Maspero 1958) including weddings and rural ceremonies related to the cult of animistic spirits such as the *coul ruup* or *coul arak* healing ceremonies. Importantly, the term *phleng kmae* is adopted to distinguish Cambodian traditional music from the neighbouring countries of Khmer influence such as Thailand and Laos⁸⁰ whose musical tradition does not employ specific ensembles for wedding and healing rituals.

Although there are no historical sources to attest the authenticity of *phleng kmae* genre, Brunet, in his study of *phleng kar* music “L’orchestre de Mariage Cambodgien et ses instruments” (1979), collects some legends referring to the ancient, mythical and sacred nature of *phleng kar* instruments and repertoires in different provinces of Cambodia. According to some legends, the *phleng kar bouraan* ensemble dates from the time when Hindu gods created the world:

Cambodians trace their music to either the mythological time of the creation of the world by the Hindu gods either to a more recent world that touches closely the autochthonous

⁸⁰The classical genre *pin piät* is very similar to the Thai *pi phat* due to the historical relations and reciprocal influences of the two countries. See Silapabanleng (1975); Miller and Sam (1995). See Miller (1998:335-362) for a description of Lao ensembles.

tradition. So Cambodia and the well-known legend of the 'Shiva Dance' said that the wife of Brahma, Saraswati, played the monochord. (Brunet 1979:206)

The Angkorean iconography also attests the antiquity of the *phleng kmae* ensemble; in fact, the monochord *ksaediaw* and the cymbals (*chij*) are depicted on a sixteenth-century bas-relief of Angkor Wat⁸¹ and Angkor Thom temples. Another reason why *phleng kar bouraan* music is performed across different genres is related to its sacredness. However, not all the Khmer musical genres have a "divine" nature; only the classical genre *pin piat* and the wedding music *phleng kar* are infused with a sacred sphere (Giuriati 2003). The *pin piat* genre is connected to Buddhist celebrations and royal ceremonies, and has a strong Thai influence; the *phleng kmae* music has the function of recalling and amusing animistic spirits. Moreover, it is considered the only kind of art capable of expressing poetical images related to the theme of love, nature, mythological episodes and figures, expressing historical and socio-cultural values.

However, it is difficult to classify the two genres chronologically and postulate their mutual influence since they share many aspects. On the contrary, although we do not also have any evidence, the theatre forms *Ikhaon yiikee* and *Ikhaon bassac* can certainly be considered less ancient than *phleng arak* and *phleng kar* music and they are not considered autochthonous due to their foreign origins.

4. Some Reflections on the Interrelation of Genres

The concept of genre in Khmer music is related to a combination of ensembles, occasions and functions of performance, rhythms and performance contexts. It is not possible to categorize Khmer music as court/popular or rural/urban music. For example, a classical piece played on *pin piat* classical ensemble can be played at the Royal Palace as well as in rural villages. As a result, there are differences concerned the size of the ensemble, the performance practice, the style of the music and the function of the song (Giuriati 2003). The elements identifying a genre in Khmer music are:

- Ensembles;
- Occasions/Functions of song;
- Rhythms;
- Performance contexts.

Because some songs belonging to different genres have the same melody and title, melody and title signify relationships between occasions of performance, ensembles and functions which identify the genre each melody belongs to. Therefore, although there is a

⁸¹See Groslier (1921) for the iconography of musical instruments during the Angkorean period.

movement of repertoires, a stable association between ensembles, the function and occasion of performance can be made. Song titles are also attached to a specific role/ritual as a sort of label. When songs share the same title musicians add the genre's name to it to distinguish them. The association between a title, a tune and a text is very flexible since the same text can correspond to different tunes and titles. It is likely that all the shared melodies were composed for one genre and afterwards were also used for the other one. According to Khmer musicians, all of the genres in question have common roots regarding instruments and repertoire with the traditional wedding music *phleng kar bouraan* and the semi-traditional form *phleng kar samay kandaal*. The shared musical contents are adapted to:

- Different vocal registries specific to each genre;
- Musicians' styles;
- Rhythmic and melodic features;
- Verbal texts (nonsense words).

Songs sharing the same title can also have the same function (e.g. *Kong Saoy* song); different tunes according to the geographic area (*Sray Kmaw*). Additionally, titles can specify the genre's name (*Sampoon arak*) and the ritual's name (*Baay Khon Caan Day*). A song with different titles can share the same tune (*Noang Pisaraa* and *Sat Tra Yaan*) or the same text (*Sat Tra Yaan and Trapeang Piey*). The interrelations of texts occur in terms of words and sentences, general theme, subject of the text, poetic metres aspects and improvisation. The rhythm is also linked to the dance such as in *Ikhaon yikee* theatre and it interrelates, especially in *phleng arak* and *phleng kar* where the rhythm shares similar patterns due to the similar ensembles and performance practices. Ensembles are also connected to specific repertoires although crossover occurs between ensembles as we have seen in the previous chapters.

When presenting their music to outsiders, Khmer musicians list ensemble type's *krom phleng pin piat* (classical ensemble), *krom phleng mahori* (entertainment music), *krom phleng arak* (music for spirits), *krom phleng kar* (wedding music), *krom phleng samay* (modern/pop music). These ensembles are defined according to the context/function (*pin piat* as music for Buddha, royal ceremonies and classical dance-drama; *mchaorii* at parties;⁸² and *phleng kmae* for accompanying rites of passage and rural ceremonies).

Some of these ensembles can be grouped under the label *phleng prapaynii* (traditional) or *phleng bouraan* (ancient). The term *prapaynii* refers to all the genres that are considered to have a historical value and be authentically Khmer such as *pin piat*, *phleng kar*, *phleng arak*, *phleng mchaorii* and *phleng ayay*. Genres grouped together under the *bouraan* label are

⁸² See Saveros Pou (1995), cit. in Giuriati (2003), *Mahori: etude culturelle* for the origin of the etymology of the term *mchaorii* and the development of the musical genre *mchaorii* from court music to modern music.

considered to be ancient since they have not undergone significant changes over the years; this category encompasses *pin piät*, *phleng arak* and older and rarer ensembles such as *phleng kar bouraan*. As evidenced by the iconography, the *phleng kar bouraan* instruments are shared with the *phleng arak* ensemble while the *phleng kar samay kandaal* are shared with the theatre ensembles except for the drums which identify each genre. However, there is not evidence of the influence of *phleng kar* music on the *phleng arak*, *Ikhaon yikee* and *Ikhaon bassac* repertoires.

In this chapter, I have reported the information gathered by the Khmer musicians during my fieldwork. These data contribute to give an *emic* approach followed by some scholars (Feld 1982, Kartomi 1990, Zemp 1979) to my research which reflects how musicians conceive and talk about their music. The *phleng kar bouraan* and the *phleng arak* have a lot of common components since they belong to the so-called *phleng kmae* genre considered by the musicians the most traditional genre. Their similarities occur regarding tunes, rhythm, ensembles, titles and function.

The movement of tunes/texts between genres is also supported by the fact that most of the *phleng arak* and *Ikhaon* musicians I worked with have knowledge of wedding music and play across different genres. Therefore, Khmer musicians of *phleng arak* and *Ikhaon* know very well the wedding repertoire and its features. Particularly, *phleng arak* musicians perform the wedding genre *phleng kar* both for the traditional value attributed to this music and the similar features shared with the music for the *arak* spirits as well as for economic reasons since the high numbers of wedding ceremonies allow them to earn an extra income. Here, the account of musical conventions and their significance is not intended to be exhaustive. My intention is, however, to give a general sense of the musical and extramusical variables of the interrelated genres and how they are manipulated by musicians in their related performance contexts.

In the final chapter, I will investigate what happens to the texts and the musical texture of traditional music performed outside its original contexts and on western instruments. The recording productions for tourists as well as the “popularization” of traditional music are some of the factors that also facilitate the circulation and exchange of songs across genres. I will reconsider the concept of genre according to the contemporary musical and extramusical patterns of change that traditional genres and popular theatre are facing due to the modern technologies, mass media, cultural and socio-economic trends. By considering which aspects of the traditional song conventions endure, and which collapse, in the new contexts, and by reflecting on the factors that contribute to these changes, we will gain an understanding of the processes by which the songs are adapted when they are traded outside their original contexts.

Chapter 5

The Adaptation of Traditional Wedding and Theatre Genres to New Performance Contexts

Traditional Cambodian music and popular theatre are currently undergoing significant changes and transformations. On the one hand, televised theatre performances, tourist shows and the commercialization of traditional music are altering performance practices, instrumentation, functions and the musical texture of Khmer traditional music. On the other hand, these processes act as means of preservation, promotion and revival fostering new ways of making music and economic growth.

The current situation of some kinds of Khmer ritual music such as wedding music (*phleng kar*), music for healing ceremonies (*phleng arak*), and some kinds of popular theatre (*Ikhaon yiikee* and *Ikhaon bassac*) are a clear illustration of the current state of traditional music. Many of these practices are highly endangered due to the ongoing socio-economic and political changes since the Khmer Rouge's era in the 1970s when 90% of Khmer artists were killed (Sam 1990:209).

During the bloody regime of the Khmer Rouge (1975–79), wedding music (*phleng kar*), music for *arak* spirits (*phleng arak*) and any form of theatrical performances were banned since traditional music was considered as a reflection of Buddhism and pro-monarchy values (Chandler 2008; Ebihara et al. 1994; Kiernan 2008). A vivid account of the wedding rituals during the Khmer Rouge regime is given by Daran Kravanh's story (Lafreniere 2000: 82-83) and the ethno-psychologist Le Vine in *Love and Dread in Cambodia* (2010). Although Le Vine's study does not include music, it describes how group marriages have contributed to the dissolution of the country's ritual practices.

Some musicians hid their instruments and pretended to be farmers to avoid the risk of being killed. Others survived by playing propaganda songs as shown by Arn Chorn-pond's story, the founder of Cambodian Living Arts (CLA) association (McCormick 2012); others secretly played traditional songs to encourage their companions in misfortune (Lafreniere 2000). Some of my informants also survived the Khmer Rouge genocide thanks to music:

Many musicians survived thanks to music. However, others have been killed. It was related to the area where they were imprisoned. In some places, the Khmer Rouge liked music so they did not kill musicians, in other places they did. (Way Dorn, interview, 13 October 2014, Banteay Meanchey)

The revolutionary music adopted either new songs or traditional melodies whose texts were arranged for the regime ideologies. Some kinds of popular theatre such as *Ikhaon bassac* were performed to promote the Khmer Rouge's regime, also during official meetings organized by Pol Pot:

During Pol Pot regime we performed *bassac* but we had to change the stories according to the rules of Pol Pot's regime. For example, he asked us to talk about the story of that time and sing to the farmers in the rice fields to work hard, to not talk each other, no kidding. (Nang Chak, interview, 13 October 2014, Banteay Meanchey)

One of the negative consequences of the Khmer Rouge regime was the loss of the supporting role of traditional music in the ceremonial and communal life of Cambodians (Grant 2016; Kallio and Westerlund 2016). This dramatic period of Cambodia's history not only affected the preservation of Khmer arts but also the generation gap (Sam 1990: 47). The process of reconstructing Cambodian musical heritage started in the early 1980s, soon after the massive cultural and social disruption of Pol Pot's regime. Nowadays, socio-cultural and economic trends are affecting traditional music and popular theatre performances in terms of instrumentation, function, performance practice. This ongoing process is connected to issues of preservation, "patrimonization" and revival operated by mass media, governmental institutions, local and international NGOs.

In this chapter I will examine how this set of changing practices is affecting traditional music, in particular, wedding music (*phleng kar*), *Ikhaon yiikee* and *Ikhaon bassac* theatre which are transformed and adapted to new and "modern" performance contexts. All of the genres discussed in this study are performed within musical competitions on national TV channels, as tourist attractions and marketed through a flourishing CD and DVD market operated by local NGOs and record companies. What stylistic changes occur in specific contexts? Do recordings and television performances facilitate the movement of melodies across traditional genres? If the set of musical and extramusical features characterising a genre are hybridised and standardised to appear "modern" and "appealing" to the audience/listeners, is it still possible to make a distinction between these "transformed" musical genres according to the parameters adopted by traditional musicians? To answer these questions, I consider different case-studies: a musical competition programme, *Khmer Cultural Heritage*, broadcast on the national Bayon TV channel and some initiatives operated by Cambodian Living Arts (CLA) in collaboration with the Cambodian government related to the promotion and valorization of Khmer traditional musical heritage.

1. Background

Last year during my fieldwork in Cambodia, I came across performances of popular theatre and traditional songs on television; Ol Samang's *Ikhaon bassac* troupe, as well as other famous Khmer musicians specialized in wedding music I worked with, perform on television. Some of them have a close connection with the government and collaborate with CLA. Therefore, television, non-governmental associations and government are interconnected and involved in the process of

preserving and promoting traditional music and theatre. Through a sort of cyclical process, political forces control television, CLA seeks operational and financial support from the government to promote its projects, and the government encourages CLA's projects in "exchange" for sharing profits from cultural initiatives such as tourism performances and the sale of "cultural products."⁸³

In order to examine the current changes and transformation of traditional music and theatre, it is necessary to bear in mind the "cultural gap" created by the Khmer Rouge period (1975–1979). It is reflected in the small number of old Masters who still keep alive traditional music and the poverty of the country that has limited funds for projects and initiatives of cultural development and reconstruction. After the downfall of the Khmer Rouge regime, Cambodian authorities attempted to reconstruct the classical dance and music; the troupe of the National Theatre was re-established giving a strong influence on the process of cultural reconstruction of the principal traditional genres (Giuriati 2003). In fact, many classical and traditional art forms, including the *Ikhaon bassac* opera, were performed.

The difficulties in reconstructing an "original" version of a music genre suggest that such attempts will lead to a transformation, a "(re-)invention" rather than a "restoration" of musical heritage. "The Khmer, of course, have experienced centuries of sociocultural transformations, and what is considered to be 'traditional' may really be historically recent 'inventions of tradition'"(Hobsbawm and Ranger: 1983).

During the 1980s the advent of television and radio led to flourishing production, and, in the following decade, the cultural reconstruction has been strengthened by the international cultural cooperation agreements. In the late 1990s, Arn Chorn-pond gathered few Masters who survived the genocide to teach and pass their knowledge to the young generations through the foundation of CLA in Phnom Penh funded by American institutions. Some cultural-sector NGOs offer training programmes in traditional and contemporary performing arts in Phnom Penh (Champey Arts Academy, Apsara Art Association, Amrita Performing Arts and Cambodian Living Arts) as well as in the provinces such as Kampot (Traditional School of Music) and Battambang (Phare Ponleu Selpak). These NGOs, groups and individuals are exploring ways to find new function and contexts for "old" traditions for culture sustainability (Grant 2014; Grant 2017; Titon 2009; Marett 2010; Schippers 2015). However, the lack of funds and initiatives from the government to restore and maintain traditional arts and create industries and cultural sustainability encourage and "force" young people to devote to other fields to have more

⁸³ On the CLA website, CDs of traditional Khmer music are categorized as "cultural products." Therefore, here I adopt this definition to refer to CDs as the term clearly expresses the commercialization and commoditisation of traditional music.

opportunity of employment and it also leads to endangering traditional performing arts (Grant 2016a).

Using the botanical metaphor proposed by Titon, it is important to “feed the cultural soil, [rather than] target the individual plant. In other words, encourage the music culture, not individual musical genres. If the cultural soil is nurtured, the musical genres will develop and thrive. An endangered music will not thrive if the cultural soil is not working in its favor, no matter how much it is aided” (Titon 2008–2005, 26 April 2017).

In rural areas, artists find it hard to make a living from their performing skills. Consequently, the viability and vitality of traditional genres are threatened. In urban areas, although the growing middle class is financially able to support traditional arts, they do not appreciate its values and the young consider traditional genres as old-fashioned, being influenced by foreign music and entertainment.

During the present day, the spread of mass media, technologies and cultural tourism is making ritual music such as wedding music, *Ikhaon yiikee* and *Ikhaon bassac* theatre, popular and “modern” due to the introduction of western instruments, for example, in order to appeal to young generations, tourists and to promote Cambodian national identity. The adaptation of traditional music and theatre to these new performance contexts reflects new economic and political trends. Television programmes are politically controlled; unsurprisingly the Bayon TV channel’s owner is the Prime Minister’s daughter.

In the television context, particular attention is paid to the dramatic stories’ contents that must respect Khmer cultural, political and social values. “Each scene is carefully checked; every word is checked to make sure that everything is appropriate to the television context and not criticized by the government” (Bayon TV producer, Sou Chamraun, interview, 09 December 2014, Phnom Penh). For example, in *Preah Can Kourop* story (Respecting the moon) the scriptwriter titled a scene “Manoria [the protagonist] betrays her husband.” Sou Chamraun decided not to broadcast this title because it was morally inappropriate and the government could have criticized this kind of information. So he changed the title to *Koh Bandam Kruu* (Do not follow the Master's precept). In order to conform to the political ideologies, cultural programmes may be treated as texts susceptible to trans-cultural assumptions which are taken out from their traditional representation of context as discussed by Felicia Hughes-Freeland (1997) in her study of the Balinese "Arja" representation in television.

Moreover, musicians and theatre troupes working for the government, particularly for the Ministry of Culture, are invited to perform on television. Consequently, they have the opportunity to promote themselves and acquire more popularity and recognition so that clients can easily reach and contact them. But musicians from rural areas who do not have any contact with the government cannot promote their theatre companies on television. In contemporary

Cambodia, the situation of traditional music reflects the paradox of maintaining traditional music and, at the same time, transforming it (Grant 2017; Winter and Ollier 2016):

Cambodia stands encapsulated within two dominant, and somewhat contradictory, narratives. On the one hand, it is commonly suggested that an era of civil war and genocide inflicted irrevocable damage and that Pol Pot's attempts to return to 'year zero' annihilated, even erased, the country's culture, whereas for others, Cambodian culture is being successfully restored, rejuvenated and, perhaps, even enjoying a renaissance (...) the coexistence of these two narratives has paired feelings of hope, despair, optimism with anguish. (Winter and Ollier 2006: 1)

However, there is also the awareness and fear, at least among the old Masters and musicians, of the potential for "contamination" and "corruption" of traditional Cambodian genres (Grant 2017:438). The following section examines the impact of television performances on traditional Khmer music and popular theatre.

2. Televised Performances versus Live Performances

a) *Lkhaon Bassac Opera*

I did not usually watch Cambodian television during my fieldwork until one evening I thought to test my knowledge of Khmer language by watching some programmes. While I was channel-hopping, I stopped on Bayon TV since I immediately recognized the *lkhaon bassac* troupe I was working with called Ol Samang Lkhaon Bassac Phnom Penh (see Chapter 2). After a short performance (about 10 minutes), a musical competition started. Young people coming from different provinces of Cambodia sang traditional songs for a jury composed of well-known local artists, professors from the Royal University of Fine Arts and famous musicians.

A few days later, I attended the recording of a *lkhaon bassac* performance at Bayon TV studio, one of the most important national channels, located at the periphery of Phnom Penh. It was the first time I attended a television studio. Once there, the troupe's leader Ol Samang introduced me to the producer and director Sou Chamraun. He nicely welcomed me and my husband, who was helping me with the language. He was pleased to know that a Westerner researcher was interested in TV performances. *Lkhaon bassac* and *lkhaon yiikee* theatres are broadcast either on their own in recorded performances or live within musical competition programmes. On that day, Ol Samang's troupe was going to record a *lkhaon bassac* performance based on the story of *Preah Puthy Ciy Komar* (The understanding of child's victory) which is a modern (*samay*) story written by Ol Samang.⁸⁴ The story is combined with *bouraan* stories according to the audience's preferences.

⁸⁴Other TV channels such as TVK pre-check the story to ensure that it is written by a known writer and book; whilst the CTN and Bayon channels set the troupe's leader free to choose the story to perform. However, in any case the plot is carefully checked and conformed to political and socio-cultural aspects.

In the “original” performance context of *Ikhaon bassac* theatre, the audience interacts with the characters, particularly the comedians. The interaction between the audiences and the performers is common to other Southeast Asian theatrical performance such as the Balinese *Derama* where comedians “warm up” the audience before the beginning of the performance:

The problems of performing in television become obvious. You know little of your audience, nor have any means of gauging their receptiveness. Not only is there no script to rely on, or blame; but Balinese audiences require to be wooed into becoming engaged. (Hobart 2000: 187)

The Cambodian audience, as well as the Balinese audience, needs to be engaged and “warmed up” by the characters. If people like the comedians and the story, they will invite their friends and relatives to attend the performance. Consequently, the troupe’s leader extends the length of the performance according to the audience’s reaction and the number of people who remain until the end of the performance. “Television inhibits this dialogue but does not eradicate it: the addressee is still there, but under different discursive conditions” (ibid: 202).

In the villages, *Ikhaon basac* performances start around eight or nine in the evening and last for nine hours.⁸⁵ In the television context, the stories are shortened to one hour and a half to fit the short time frame:

Time is very limited. So if the story is very long no one will watch it and also may change channel. So each story has to be divided into eight scenes. Each scene must last no more than twelve minutes. They [the troupe] have to select the scenes carefully since the audience should be able to understand the entire story. The length of the story is one hour and a half in total. There are eight scenes; each scene is performed on a different day for two weeks. If the length of each scene is too long the related song is omitted. (Sou Chamraun, interview, 09 December 2014, Phnom Penh)

OI Samang’s troupe, composed by forty performers, was reduced to fifteen characters for recording eight scenes of *Preah Puthy Chey Komar* story. The number of the songs was shortened accordingly. The director gave detailed instructions to the performers on their position on the stage, the structure and length of the scenes and the corresponding songs; sometimes, musicians are asked to play “quickly” to respect the time frame.

In TV we [musicians] have to play carefully and perform to get the audience’s attention so that we can be invited to play frequently. We have to follow the director’s instructions. The songs are chosen by the TV director who has to follow the time frame. For example, one song can be sung by one actor but when we play in the villages the troupe’s leader chooses the songs. The actors can sing two or three songs in one scene or even more because we have lots of time. (Ruah Somart, *bassac* player, personal communication, 15 December 2014, Phnom Penh)

⁸⁵ In the past the story lasted a week or even several months.

The presenters of the programme read the plot of each scene, which is written by the director, “to avoid any mistake, to make sure that people understand and to promote Khmer literature as well as theatre”, Sou Chamraun said. “The title of the scene and the story’s name is shown on the TV screen” (interview, 09 April 2015, Phnom Penh).

A few days later, I attended the live programme *Khmer Cultural Heritage*, which is a music competition between young people who come from different provinces in Cambodia. They perform different kinds of traditional Khmer songs including the wedding repertoire *phleng kar*, *camriəŋ yiikee* (*yiikee* singing) and *camriəŋ bassac* (*bassac* singing). *Camriəŋ yiikee* and *camriəŋ bassac* songs are extracted from *Ikhaon yiikee* and *Ikhaon bassac* opera repertoire but are performed for entertainment outside the opera context. Likewise, Myers-Moro mentions that the music for *lakhaun* (non-masked drama) and *phleeng kret* (“songs from *Ikhaon*”) and *khoon* (masked-drama) may be performed outside the drama context: “these pieces are not confined to drama, and may be performed in other contexts. Therefore, with some alterations, these songs can easily be placed into other song categories” (Myers-Moro 1988: 146). The distinction between the *Ikhaon bassac* and *camriəŋ bassac* repertoires as well as *Ikhaon yiikee* and *camriəŋ yiikee* repertoires is only relevant in Khmer classificatory system since, in practice, the songs share the same musical features and repertoire.

Between the two sections of the competition, there are also short performances of *Ikhaon yiikee* and *Ikhaon bassac* theatre with a function of entertainment and “advertisement” of the theatre troupes. The table below illustrates a sample of the screenplay of the programme carefully written by the TV producer.

Table 18: *Khmer Cultural Heritage* screenplay

<i>Khmer Cultural Heritage</i>	
Traditional Songs, <i>Yiikee</i> songs and <i>Bassac</i> Songs Contest	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presenters open the programme accompanied by traditional⁸⁶ songs and <i>mchaorii</i>⁸⁷ songs. 2. Presenters introduce the judges. 3. The program presenter introduces the candidates for the traditional song contest. 4. Judges evaluate and vote. 	
Break	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. The presenters introduce the candidates for <i>yiikee</i> song contest 6. Judges evaluate and vote. 	
<i>Bassac</i> or <i>Yiikee</i> theatre performance (10 minutes)	
Break	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. The presenters introduce the candidates for <i>bassac</i> song contest. 8. Judges evaluate and vote. 9. A guest is invited to sing a traditional song. 10. Final Result 	
End of the Contest	

During the episode of *Khmer Cultural Heritage* on 28 April 2015, a *Ikhaon bassac* troupe performed a short scene, *Psong Snae Kbae Chongkom Yeaq* (Finding love near the giant’s teeth), extracted from an old and famous Khmer story, *Preah Cinwuəŋ*. The *Ikhaon bassac* ensemble was composed of melodic traditional Khmer instruments: a *trə quu* (lower-pitched two-stringed fiddle); *trə chee* (two-string fiddle); *khloy* (bamboo flute); *khim* (hammered dulcimer). The traditional rhythmic instruments, the drum (*skəə bassac*) and the cylindrical-shaped idiophone (*caəŋ*), were replaced by a drum set and a keyboard:

Western instruments can be used for introducing the show by playing modern music while the actors prepare themselves. However, these instruments can also be employed in the story. For example, the special effects of the keyboard are used for reproducing the wind or the storm. (Ruah Somart, interview, 15 December 2014, Phnom Penh)

The main character, *Preah Cinwuəŋ*, introduced himself by singing *Sampoəŋ* song (figure 5.1) (DVD, track 11).

⁸⁶ The term “traditional” refers to wedding music.

⁸⁷ Khmer modern musical genre.

Figure 5.1: The introduction of the protagonist of the *Ikhaon bassac* story *Preah Cinwuan*, *Khmer Cultural Heritage* programme 2015, Bayon TV



The *skɔ bassac* is one of the most characteristic defining features of the *Ikhaon bassac* genre; the replacement of its sound with that of the drum set and keyboard therefore transforms the nature of *bassac* music in a fundamental way. However, the use of western instruments is also related to economic limitations. Although they could possibly be used for performances in rural areas, I have never observed a village performance where western instruments were employed. They can be added to Khmer instruments according to the leader's preference:

If they sound good, I use them. The number of the instruments employed depends on the economic availability of the group. Sometimes the western instruments can replace the Khmer ones. For example, the keyboard can replace the sound of the *skɔ bassac* and *caan* [which are played by two different people] and other instruments so that one person can replace three by playing only a single instrument. (Ol Samang, personal communication, 23 May 2015)

Western instruments are also considered by the musicians as a form of "modernization" of the *Ikhaon bassac* music to appeal to the audience, especially the young. The Bayon TV producer said:

The aim of performing these kinds of popular theatre as part of the competition is to preserve these art forms and remind people of the disappearing theatre. So that the next generations will be aware of these performances and the audience love the Khmer popular theatre. (Sou Chamraun, interview, 09 April 2015, Phnom Penh)

These genres have adapted in response to new audiences and performance contexts through use of new musical instruments, and the introduction of new characters and storylines. The modernization of these traditional genres is considered by Khmer musicians and TV producers as a way of promoting and preserving these art forms especially among the Cambodian youth.

b) *Phleng Kar and Camriəŋ Yiikee*

During another episode of *Khmer Cultural Heritage*, I attended the performance of some famous wedding songs (*phleng kar*). The ensemble was composed of Khmer semi-traditional instruments (*phleng kar samay kandaal*) and western instruments including an electric bass, a guitar, a mandolin-banjo,⁸⁸ a drum set and a keyboard.⁸⁹ One of the wedding songs presented at the competition was *Haom Rooŋ* (The sacred pavilion). This song is played for the ritual of offering the music to the masters, *Pithii Haom Rooŋ*, which is performed before the beginning of the wedding ceremony to evoke their protector Preah Pisnukaa.

By comparing the televised version of *Haom Rooŋ* (figure 5.2) with the live one performed during a wedding ceremony (figure 5.3), one can identify some changes; in the wedding ceremony the song is played on traditional (*bouraan*) or semi-traditional (*samay*) instruments. In the television performance, the heterophonic texture of Khmer traditional music, expressed through the simultaneous improvisation of the melodic instruments on a rhythmic pattern, is reproduced through the use of western instruments. Another important factor is the de-contextualisation of the song; in its original wedding context it is infused with a sacred aura since it is offered to the musicians' god and the masters' spirits. The sacred function of this specific song and the intimate character of wedding music, in general, are lost in the competition performance context.

Figure 5.2: A participant in the musical competition singing a *phleng kar* song during the *Khmer Cultural Heritage* programme on Bayon TV



⁸⁸The mandolin-banjo is a hybrid instrument, combining a banjo body with the neck and tuning of a mandolin. It has four pairs of strings. The movable bridge stands on a resonant banjo-like head usually made of plastic. It has a resonator made of aluminium.

⁸⁹The ensemble including semi-traditional and western instruments is called *phleng samay* (modern).

Figure 5.3: *Pithii Haom Rooj* (Ritual of the sacred pavilion), ceremony on 06 April 2009, Phnom Penh



However, television performances foster creativity and new ways of making music. Young artists have the opportunity to show their talent and to invent new compositions being inspired by traditional genres. Within the same programme, other musical genres are performed including songs extracted from another kind of popular theatre, the *Ikhaon yiikee*, called *camriaj yiikee* (*yiikee* singing). Some of the young performers participating in the competition compose new songs based on traditional genres.

The process of composing new songs being inspired by traditional songs allows a crossover of genres; tunes of traditional songs are adapted to new lyrics, title and performance style. For example, a famous young artist, Yorn Young,⁹⁰ who won the competition in 2012, was invited to sing. He wrote the lyrics on a famous *yiikee* tune called *Noang Pisaraa* which accompanies the *yiikee* dancing (*rojbam yiikee*) (see Chapter 3). The title of Yorn's version is *Somros Preah Pnum* (The mountain beauty); the song text refers to a poetical image of the beauty of Khmer nature (DVD, track 12). "I am mostly inspired by *bouraan* stories. I sit down and think about the story first and how to transform the story through the music" (Yorn Young, from interview, 09 February 2015, Phnom Penh). Although the melody of *Noang Pisaraa* and the vocal style is maintained, the heterophonic texture of the music is mixed with hints of functional harmony, mirroring the instrumental changes instigated within the recontextualised *Ikhaon yiikee*.

⁹⁰ Yorn Young wrote four *yiikee* stories and was awarded by the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts in 2003 and 2007. Currently, he is touring around the United States and Australia as a member and former student of CLA.

During an interview with the *Ikhaon yikee* group in Kampot province, they performed *Noang Pisaraa* at the front of the troupe's leader Prom Mom's house (DVD, track 10). From watching this video, one can easily see the prominent musical role played by the drums (*skoo yikee*). Their rhythm accompanies the movement of the dancers' hands and their timbre identifies the genre as *Ikhaon yikee*. Similarly, the wedding and *phleng arak* song *Kong Saoy* is performed as a *camriaj bassac* song in TV context as shown in a video posted on Facebook by Ol Samang.⁹¹ The function of the song, to invite the ancestors' spirits to join the wedding banquet or the *coul ruup* ceremony, is lost in the TV performance. The rhythm of wedding music is changed due to the use of the drum kit and the bass, and the original wedding vocal style is adapted to the *bassac* vocal style.

3. The Commercialization of Khmer Traditional Music

Walking through the narrow aisles of tourist markets in Phnom Penh or even in the local markets of provincial towns, one can find many music stalls selling a variety of Khmer popular music, Korean and Chinese-influenced pop music, and "popularized" traditional music for both locals and tourist consumers. Nowadays, Khmer traditional wedding music, as well as popular theatre performances and songs, are marketed through a huge production of CDs and DVDs operated by local NGOs (in particular CLA) and records companies for tourist purposes and local consumption.

Tuchman-Rosta (2018) shows how slow transition of the Cambodian classical dance from ritual to secular global commodity has allowed the development of classical dance to continue in the decades after the civil war making its practice a viable, though challenging, option for dancers to attain financial stability and enhance their social standing. Although commoditising the traditional arts may be an appropriate strategy towards cultural sustainability and supporting the artists who perform them, it could affect important musical and extramusical features of traditional music. For example, the introduction of western instruments has changed the musical performance practices of traditional Khmer genres and the adaptation to new performance contexts has de-contextualised ritual songs and theatre performances as discussed previously.

To highlight changes of performance practices and de-contextualization, I provide two versions of one of the most popular wedding songs, *Haom Rooj*, as an example of wedding songs performed on TV and CD recordings (CD tracks 14–15). In track 14, the song is performed during a wedding ceremony by a renowned *phleng kar* ensemble led by Yun Theara, a former professor at the Royal University of Fine Arts and CLA teacher, while in track 15 the same song is performed

⁹¹ <https://www.facebook.com/olsam.ang/videos/546158788880835/> (accessed 10 September 2016).

by the famous singer and CLA teacher Ieng Sitol, extracted from an unknown CD, played on youtube and not recorded in a ritual context.

A comparison between the commercial version of *Haom Rooj* and the version performed within the ritual context shows the remarkable changes that occur regarding musical features concerning the instrumentation and performance practice. Khmer traditional wedding music is based on a process of improvisation that musicians explain through the metaphor of “taking different roads” or “travelling on different routes and meeting in some specific points.” Each instrument improvises by “taking a road” consisting in renditions of the melody and then all the instruments play the same note on the damp stroke of the cymbals (*chij*). The succession of these notes constitutes the “inner melody” or “abstract melody” that is not heard by the listeners, but is only in the musicians’ mind (Giuriati 1988; Sam 1988). In the commercial recordings, as well as in televised performances, wedding and theatre genres are performed on *phleng samay* ensemble (a combination of semi-traditional and western instruments). As a result, the process of improvisation, which gives to Khmer music a heterophonic nature and peculiar flavor, is adapted to new instruments and performance practices.

The *Haom Rooj* song performed by Ieng Sitol is an example of this adaptation that Khmer traditional music is currently undergoing: melodically simple bass lines are adapted to the melodic lines of the wedding repertoire in order to recreate the traditional heterophonic texture. The introduction of western instruments to the semi-traditional ensemble is considered as a way of modernizing traditional repertoires, appealing to the young and the spectators, and as an enrichment of tradition. Aubert says: “the nature of tradition is not to preserve intact a heritage from the past, but to enrich it according to present circumstances and transmit the result to future generations” (Aubert 2007: 10).

Importantly, nowadays, Ieng Sitol’s musical style is considered as an icon of traditional Khmer music. Nom Chok used to perform *Ikhaon bassac* as a singer and work as a teacher for the CLA. During an interview at his current place of residence in Banteay Meanchey province, he described the challenges he faced while working in Phnom Penh – finding it difficult to accommodate the new trend of westernized *bassac* and *phleng kar*, influenced by Ieng Sitol’s style: “people ask for guitar, bass and loudspeakers during the wedding as Ieng Sitol uses them. Now students prefer studying with Ieng Sitol because he organizes tours in America and Europe; so students are encouraged to learn from him in Phnom Penh” (Nang Chak, interview, 13 October 2014, Banteay Meanchey).

In addition to the different instrumentation and performance practice, the short length of *Haom Rooj* performed by Ieng Sitol shows the de-contextualization of traditional wedding songs. In fact, in the wedding ceremony context, the length of the songs is strictly related to the ritual scene. For example, *Haom Rooj* is not only played during the *Pithii Haom Rooj* ritual but

also to entertain the guests when the bride and the groom change their ceremonial dress and during the transitional moments of the ceremony. Consequently, the song is played many times throughout the ceremony and its length, as well as the lyrics, varies according to the ritual actions. The duration of the commercial version of *Haom Rooj* is shortened mirroring the de-contextualization of the song. As a result, *Haom Rooj* performed by Ieng Sitol (CD, track 15) consists of the repetitions of one section (A) while *Haom Rooj* played during the wedding ceremony is composed of three sections (A-B-C) (CD, track 14).⁹²

Music is also commercialized for fundraising purposes as a “cultural product.” The CDs produced by CLA, funded by the American Embassy in Cambodia, such as *Offering to the Ancestors*, *Offerings to the Masters*, and other CDs released in collaboration with Waterek, a local recording company, such as *Bassac Opera Khmer* are performed by well-known musicians as well as Masters and groups from rural areas of Cambodia. Although the songs are performed in the studio, they employ traditional instruments and style. Importantly, the Masters were asked to choose the songs to perform. Particularly, the CDs mentioned above are directed by a well-known musician, Yun Theara, with whom I worked during my first research experience in 2009. Other CDs such as *Sarekakeo* by Ieng Sitol and Ouch Savy (2007) are collections of famous wedding songs played on a combination of semi-traditional and western instruments although the vocal style of traditional wedding music is maintained.

Therefore, the CLA’s CDs production aims to raise money to support their activities and the activities of their Masters by trying to keep alive the “authentic” musical nature of Khmer traditional music. Other recording productions aim to popularise traditional music so that it appeals to their market. Recordings of popularised traditional music sold as souvenirs reflect an effect of growing cultural tourism that will be discussed in the following section.

4. Cultural Tourism and Cultural Performances

The increased international tourism in Cambodia is having a strong impact on traditional arts. Traditional music and dance genres are de-contextualised and adapted to new performance contexts to appeal to a foreign audience. An example of this phenomenon is the iconic Royal Ballet. Stylised performances of the Royal Ballet, which is listed as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, are performed to celebrate the Khmer New Year in April in Angkor Wat temple and in local restaurants and luxurious hotels in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. The tourism is encouraging local associations such as the CLA to perform traditional music and theatre with the aim of promoting and restoring Khmer performing arts, and raise funds to support their work.

⁹² Here, I provide the corresponding timings on CD track 14: Section A (0:09–3:04); Section B (3:07–4:56); Section C (5:06–6:56).

The CLA employs old Masters who survived the Khmer Rouge regime in order to teach the young the Khmer traditional performing arts. Most of the students come from poor families living in the countryside; CLA supports them by offering scholarship, organizing performances and exchanging programmes with foreign institutions. Catherine Grant (2016b) discusses the learning-based approach to music sustainability in Cambodia and other scholars about other Southeast Asian music traditions (Tan 2008; Wettermark and Lundström 2006).

The original aim of the CLA was to preserve and revive traditional performing arts. Today, it also focuses on building the capacity of future leaders in the arts and being a catalyst for the national arts sector; this is the reason why CLA is asking the Ministry of Culture for political support in the process of preservation and promotion of its projects. Some of the CLA's Masters, such as Ieng Sitol, Yun Theara and others are trying to build networking with the government to promote CLA's work including cultural performances in Cambodia and abroad. However, "the government, in particular, the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, supports CLA's ideas and work but does not have enough funds to invest in them" (Chuon Sarin, CLA Core Program Manager, interview, 18 December 2014, Phnom Penh).

To demonstrate the impact of tourism on traditional performing arts, I will briefly examine two cultural initiatives directed towards tourists supported by the CLA, specifically the tourist show *plae pkaa* and the recently-established tourist musical trip the Khmer magic music bus (KMMB) (figure 5.4). KMMB is a group of artists that want to expose young people from the provinces to Khmer traditional music and reconnect villagers to their cultural heritage. It is a sort of cultural exchange. Tourists are invited to join the trips by a small and colourful bus.

I joined a trip during my research fieldwork in June 2015. We went to Kampong Spæi province to meet an ethnic minority called *Suoy*. Some artists from CLA played traditional instruments as well as western including a guitar and a violin for the villagers and then the younger villagers performed some traditional *Suoy* folk dance for us. KMMB has held sixteen big concerts in different villages since the end of 2013; it started thanks to the funds raised by the tourists' engagement. The KMMB initiative is an effective way of promoting traditional Khmer music to tourists and raising awareness of traditional music among the young living in rural areas.

The involvement of musicians and communities may be considered a strategy of music sustainability (Schippers and Grant 2016b). However, traditional musical processes and performance practices are impoverished by the "festivalization" of traditional music and performing arts. For example, the *phlae aa* (fruitful) consists of three-day shows in a tourist area of Phnom Penh (at the back of the national Museum) and Siem Reap city. The first show is "Children of Bassac" which showcases folk dance styles from different areas and ethnic groups. The second show is "Passage of Life" which performs Khmer rituals (weddings, funerals, and healing ceremonies) and the third show is *Mak Thæang*, a traditional *yikee* opera (figure 5.5).

These shows aim to promote Khmer traditional arts and raise money from the sale of tickets and other cultural products such as bags, *kramaa* (Cambodian scarf) and CDs. They are advertised on tourist websites such as Tripadvisor and guides such as the Lonely Planet. This project is an example of the above discussed “collaboration” between the government and CLA; the government gives to CLA the permission to build the stage at the back of the National Museum by sharing ten per cent of the profits.

On the stage is erected a big screen with English subtitles so that “foreign tourists can be connected to Khmer popular theatre” (Arn Chorn-pond, interview, 12 December 2014, Phnom Penh). A similar process occurs in the Hmong traditional music in northern Vietnam, as discussed by Lonán Ó Briain: “The music and dance forms in this performance have been extracted from their participatory origins, reformed, and combined into a presentational performance for an audience that for the most part is unfamiliar with the culture’s origins” (Ó Briain 2012: 164). A couple of years ago, I attended one of the *phlae pkaa* shows: a *yikee* performance based on the Khmer classical story *Mak Thəang*. The “original” long performance was shortened to just sixty minutes. Therefore, not much time was left to the songs accompanying the different themes of the scene. The scripts consisted of short lyrics and additional episodes of funny dialogue to amuse the audience. The dancing movements were simplified and shorter.

Figure 5.4: Khmer Magic Music Bus



Figure 5.5: Advertisement of *Ikhaon yiikee* show by Cambodian Living Arts.



The principal characteristics of these theatre genres have been simplified and adapted to appeal to a foreign audience. At the same time, the young performers have the opportunity as participants in the show to experience new performing practices as in the Hmong music:

The performance frame is familiar enough for the audience to understand its role while the content of the performance challenges them to varying degrees. Similarly, the performers are performing musics and uncomplicated dances that are familiar to them while also gaining experience in contemporary performance practices. (O' Briain 2012: 166)

These changes are ways of “modernizing” traditional music and theatre. It also happens in other Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand (Mattani 1993) and, on a large scale, in Bali where the wider culture has been made “touristic” (Picard 1996; Vickers 1990) as well as the tourist shows of the Vietnamese ethnic minorities in Vietnam (O'Briain 2012). The economic emphasis on the modern is contrasted with tourism’s need for “traditional” cultural “objects” (Vickers 1996: 25). This phenomenon has both positive and negative effects:

On the one hand, young people have the opportunity to perform these traditional arts in the hope of building their career in the cultural sector. Moreover, young people are inspired to create new ways of making music. On the other hand, we [CLA] are afraid of performing Cambodian arts just for pleasing the tourists. We have to balance all of these aspects and find a compromise. (Arn Chorn-Pond, interview, 12 December 2014, Phnom Penh)

The NGOs' aim of preserving and promoting Khmer traditional music implies the introduction of new performing styles shaped exclusively as a tourist attraction. Although tourist representations impoverish the tradition, they are also a way of making profits. Therefore, culture is not only considered as a heritage to safeguard but also a capital to profit from (Picard 1996). The question is: will CLA and those responsible for cultural politics be able to find “a

compromise” between cultural tourism and traditional performances for the sake of keeping the tradition alive? This issue raises the challenge of authenticity and hence encourages top-down approaches to preservation and promotion, as decisions are taken as to what is deemed necessary to retain an affinity with an inherited tradition of performance or creation.

5. Conclusions

The different patterns of changes delineated in this chapter show how processes of preservation of “authentic styles” (for example, the work of CLA through recordings production and cultural performances) and popular translations for local consumption (for example, the television performances and recordings) co-exist in the cultural scene of contemporary Cambodia. These changes are related to the modernization, transformation and adaptation of traditional music and theatre to new performance contexts including television, CD recordings and cultural performances which are regulated by economic and socio-cultural trends. This process is discussed by Howard:

Preserving performance arts and craftsman require measures that restrict personal freedom, preventing change caused as practitioners access new ideas and new forms, or restricting access to the media and to new technology. Craftsmen seek distribution and sales of their products, and will typically modify techniques to streamline the manufacturing process or to accommodate new materials, reflecting availability to inspire audiences, often those prepared to pay, and modify their presentations accordingly. (Howard 2006:28)

Turnbull (2006) discusses how property speculation in Phnom Penh, tourism, performances abroad, and foreign pop music all impact upon a community of artists struggling to recover their craft and resources. To appeal to the “buyers” and the audience, new elements which are considered “modern” are added to traditional music such as western instruments.⁹³ This syncretism reflects the aim of popularizing traditional music in order to be marketed and labelled as “popular music” although its authenticity is altered. However, new genres can be invented by maintaining their identity and dialoguing with other musical traditions. “The problem is not merely to repeat the past, but rather to take root in it to ceaselessly invent” (Ricoeur 2006: 51). “Doing nothing would lead to irretrievable loss” (Howard 2006: 174). However, are artists aware of the consequences of their choices in their own culture?

Cohen (2016) argues the two sides of the tradition referring to postcolonial Indonesia starting from Shill’s definition (1981) of tradition as a “consensus between living generations and generation of the dead” (1981:168). On the one side, there are recognized experts of tradition who monumentalize heritage through the nomination of living national treasures and the

⁹³ A similar process is discussed by Judith Becker (1980) in relation to the changes that occurred in the Javanese gamelan music and teaching after the introduction of western notation. In contrast, Jeffrey Dyer (2018) examines the ability of Khmer musicians to read music notation to create song’s variations.

standardization and codification of artistic genres. “Here, authenticity is the king, modernization is critiqued and regional and individual variances are suppressed” (Cohen 2016: xiv). On the other side, tradition is considered as a set of new ideas and resources available for local practitioners to resist the homogenization effects of the global capitalism. In between these camps are the traditional artists who continue to perform in the “traditional” way but, at the same time, they are keen to learn and appropriate the latest trends to attract contemporary audiences (ibid).

The process of preservation and popularization of traditional performing arts leads to a phenomenon of “patrimonization”⁹⁴ of music which can be defined as the use of music as a trait of cultural identity in order to characterize local communities within a larger nation. At the same time it fosters economic processes from which local communities may benefit. It also implies nationalistic views and the freezing of cultural traditions in time and space like a museum display with the aim of keeping alive repertoires and practices that are gradually disappearing with a different function. This process also enforces nationalistic views as “traditional genres also can strengthen social, cultural, and national identity; bring economic gain through performance and tourist activities; and reinforce social fabric by transmitting Cambodian values and ideals (Grant 2017: 434). Arn Chorn-pond, the founder of CLA, emphasized this aspect during an interview: “Through traditional music young people learn about their history, their country and their parents. They learn who they are. They can also make money and have decent jobs in the art sector” (Arn Chorn-pond, interview, 12 December 2014, Phnom Penh.

In addition, the conformity of traditional music and theatre to conventions of television and the socio-political arena has contributed to the de-contextualisation of these repertoires. However, the modernization of traditional music and performative practises keeps alive traditional art and artists after the devastating actions of the Khmer Rouge regime and encourages young artists to create new musical genres and build their career as artists fostering creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship. The concept of modernity operates as a means for rewriting and re-inventing the past (Cohen 2006: xix).

One of the discourses on which the concept of genre is based is the “genre gap” between individual songs and genre labels which means “reconfiguring the song under a different genre label” (Sparling 2008: 415). For example, in the television context the wedding song *Kong Saoy* sung by Ol Samang is labelled as a *camriəŋ bassac* song.⁹⁵ Ol Samang adapted the *bassac* nasal vocal style to the melodic line of the song. Although the lyrics recalling the ancestors’ spirits to join the wedding banquet lose their original ritual meaning and the *bassac* ensemble is replaced

⁹⁴ The term “patrimonization” is the English adaptation of the Italian word “patrimonio” that means “heritage.”

⁹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/olsam.ang/videos/546158788880835/> (accessed 10 September 2016).

by the *phleng samay* ensemble, it is still possible to distinguish some traditional components such as the *bassac* vocal style and the heterophonic interplay. In addition, the re-configuration of songs under a different genre label allows the circulation of songs across different genres.

The traditional genres that were once embedded in oral tradition and functioned within ritual ceremonies, are nowadays being moved onto modern theatre stages, into recorded media formats, and into festival contexts, becoming increasingly “presentational” in nature – products prepared by musicians for others to listen to (Turino 2008: 52). The frame for presentational performance consists of specific cues such as the stage, use of microphones, and stage lights which distinguish performers and audience. An example of this is the transformation of theatre performances which in the past they took place on a mat surrounded by the audience in the villages; nowadays they become more presentational as they move onto the stage, using light and sound effects and amplification system. Musicians attract the audience’s attention through the performance depending on the “genre frame” (ibid). It is not possible to preserve and promote intangible heritage in performance and creation without change as societies evolve (Blacking [1978] 1987:112). Here, traditional genres are transforming and adapting to the emerging performance contexts, so there is not only loss, destruction, and impoverishment, but also enrichment, adaptation, technology, syncretism, and a demonstration of how the forms of these transformation reflect people’s current attitudes towards traditional forms in this contemporary globalized world.

Conclusions and Directions for Future Research

My research on *phleng kar* wedding music is one of the few studies in which a Khmer repertoire is transcribed and analysed, and in which songs are linked to specific titles, musical patterns, texts ritual functions and performance contexts. Most studies on *phleng kar* wedding music only provide a general description of the ritual processes and objects of the wedding ceremonies; the sole musical references are the song titles, which are just mentioned without being contextualized in the wedding ceremonies. The studies of *phleng kar* predate the regime of the Khmer Rouge that began in 1975, such as the Commission de Musique (1969) group, Pich (1964), and Porée-Maspero (1958), among others. McKinley's (2002) recent study has provided some musical analysis of the songs and texts in relation to the rituals in which the songs are performed.

Less musical information is provided for the theatre genres and *phleng arak*; the information available focuses on general descriptions of the spirits and the ceremonies (Porée-Maspero 1962) as well as the theatre performances aspects such as characters, costumes and ensembles (Samoth 2003; Pich Tum 1997). To my knowledge, there have not been any studies on *Ikhaon yikee* and *Ikhaon bassac* music. The primary reason for the lack of research on these genres is the archaeological and historical orientation of Khmer studies. In addition, the promotion of the classical dance-drama, the shadow puppets theatre (*sbek thom*) and the Royal Ballet as genres of UNESCO world human heritage has contributed to the lack of focus on theatre genres and *phleng arak*. These genres are considered iconic of Khmer culture worldwide. As a result, *Ikhaon yikee* and *Ikhaon bassac* are unknown outside Cambodia. Although these two genres are famous in Cambodia, they are considered less important and representative of Cambodian culture than the classical dance-drama and the Royal Ballet primarily due to the *Ikhaon yikee* and *Ikhaon bassac* foreign origins.

This work constitutes the first codification of these unknown repertoires and shows the connection between songs and the dramatic/ritual scenes. Secondly, it explores the interrelation of ritual and theatre genres through the process of adaptation of songs to new performance contexts, ensembles and functions that reflect new socio-cultural and economic trends. Although these genres may appear a niche in the broader cultural scenario of Cambodia, they reveal important features of genres and classifications, areas which have been less investigated in ethnomusicology. My research is not only about endangered traditional musical and theatre genres of Cambodia; it is also about the study of the concept of genre for classificatory purposes in ethnomusicology from an *emic* perspective. This work investigates on the concepts of genre and classification criteria in oral music traditions through specific case-studies concerning the movement of songs across different Khmer traditional music and popular theatre genres.

Genres scholars such as Ben-Amos (1976) in folklore and Fabbri (1982) in music are devoted to understanding genres through performance, discourses, contexts and social

conventions. In the field of oral tradition, the work of Heather Sparling (2008) defines how genres in the Cape Breton Gaelic context are discursively constructed and contested, and how these genres shift over time and place while being linked to social classifications and social actions. My research on Khmer traditional music shows how classification and categorization of genres, even when genres overlap, reflect sociocultural aspects (Rice 1994; Seeger 1987; Sugarman 1997) and are attached to a set of musical and extramusical components. The markers that create boundaries between genres are culturally determined: "like a proverb, a classification is a highly compressed form of expression that may nevertheless be pregnant with cultural meaning" (Kartomi 1990: 14).

From the conceptualization of genre emerges a tight relationship between music and ritual, ceremonial and performance contexts (McKinley 2002); musical genres are seen as inseparable parts of their contexts (Moisala 1991). The conceptualization of music sheds light on the comprehension of music. It also emphasizes the presence of an audience that may be either visible people or invisible spirits. In the case of *phleng arak*, the spirits constitute the audience since they interact with musicians by expressing their likes or dislikes. In the theatre contexts music is a "communicative interaction between performers and the audience" (ibid); the audience influences the length of the performance, the kinds of stories and the general success of the performance and the theatre troupes.

Moisala illustrates different criteria of classification in the Gurung music of Nepal that indicate how musical genres are inseparable from their contexts of performance, ethnicity of performers and origin of music. The categories of local music and radio music overlap when they are performed in the village context; Gurung distinguish them depending on whether they want to emphasize the origin or the ethnicity of the particular song. Another example is provided by David Hughes' study of traditional folk songs in Japan. In one village, when asked for folk song (*min'yō*), people mentioned songs from elsewhere that are widely known rather than their own local songs. One performer said that local songs were disappearing, primarily due to loss of original context or because of competition of songs from elsewhere (Hughes 2008: 64).

The comparative analysis of function and texts of Khmer wedding and *phleng arak* music reflects the Khmer religious syncretism and ritual life. Not only do the comparative study of songs belonging to different genres gives an insight into the musical processes of a specific music tradition but it also reveals cultural aspects and the role of music in Khmer culture. Therefore, a particular song identified by more than one label constitutes a starting point for assessing cultural, aesthetics, adaptation and change. The study of the concept of genre in oral music tradition reveals some important aspects relating to:

- The way in which musicians communicate and talk about their music;

- The functions of rituals and theatre performances in Khmer society and the relationship between music and occasion/performance contexts;
- How to think comparatively about music.

Scholars have attempted to build an ethnotheory of specific cultures (Feld 1982; Zemp 1979) to gain an insight into the musical terminology and processes from an *emic* perspective. By following their example, I have reconstructed the ways in which musicians define and classify their music through interviews, interview-lessons, by reviewing interviews and asking questions to gain additional information or to clarify earlier comments. To investigate issues of the classification of genres and interrelation of songs, I interviewed as many as informants (singers, musicians, actors, governmental and non-governmental officers, mediums, and audiences) as I could, who each offered a unique perspective. The voices of these people have resulted in an overview of the genres in question which is quite consistent, and also verifies the validity of the existing classification of Khmer music, based on the connection of genres with their performance contexts, ensembles and functions, that has been established, adopted and widely accepted by foreign and Khmer scholars such as Daniélou (1957) and the Commission de Musique (1969) group.

On the contrary, the research findings show that Khmer music classification based on song titles is not reliable due to the intersection of titles, melodies and extramusical aspects. According to Khmer musicians, wedding music is the most traditional genre and it has influenced the *phleng arak* repertoire as well as the theatre genres. My research findings show that *phleng arak* and *phleng kar* share many musical traits but they differ from the theatre genres due to the foreign origins of *Ikhaon bassac* and *Ikhaon yiikee*. However, in the absence of written sources, we do not have any evidence supporting the musicians' accounts of the antiquity of wedding music and its influence on the other genres. Although "ethnographic data are always reconstructions of other people's constructions" (Geertz 1990: 68), I aimed to include my informants' voices as much as possible. Every comment is a reconstruction of experiences, thoughts and feelings. What I have written here is a construction based on my own experience and the words of my informants which are constructions based on their own experiences.

On the one hand, from the study of the interrelationship and exchange of repertoire emerge the fluid boundaries of genres. "Genre served a dual purpose in that it provided a system of classification as well as a conceptual framework for articulating characteristics of the individual components or units within that classification" (Harris 1995:514). On the other hand, "definitions and categories serve practical purposes and tell us something about how people understand music. But we should be suspicious because they create boundaries, [and] because they have a static nature" (Holt 2013: 8). Here, genres are analysed as "performative processes" rather than

as a static object (Seeger 1987; Sparling 2008). Musical performances are not only sounds but are also contexts of which those sounds are a part.

In order to show how songs from different genres interrelate, I have distinguished the controversial categories of genre and style following the approaches of Nettl (1963) and Moore (2001). “Genre” refers to a large distinction between wedding music, theatre music, and music for the spirits while “style” refers to more specific musical features (vocal style, cadences, and rhythm). Songs interrelate in terms of song titles, melodies, scales, texts, function and performance practices. The first case study examined in Chapter 4 shows how Khmer musicians label a tune and title under a specific function, ensemble and performance context. By comparing three different tunes (*Sampoong arak*, *Sampoong bassac* and *Sampoong phleng kar*) labelled under the same title it is possible to delineate the characteristics of each genre, the ensemble and their function which is directly connected to their performance context. The second case study shows how a melody labelled under the same title is adapted to different genres assuming different musical features such as melodic and rhythmic micro-variations. The third case study shows how the song title is not related to a specific function but is a similar tune labelled with two different titles and is adapted to different ensembles, contexts and functions. Therefore, the shared components are adapted to different stylistic traits of each genre while the stylistic differences between interrelated songs reflect the peculiar features and consistency of each genre.

In the everyday talk of ordinary people, musics are classified according to the title of the performance in which that kind of music or song takes place (i.e. theatre songs). The context of performance is one factor of classifying music. While the notion of genre has useful in classifications and works relatively well to create boundaries, it has also allowed for crossover between boundaries. Heather Sparling (2008) tries to define a theory of genre through the case study of Cape Breton Gaelic music. She considers genres as labels applied to expressive cultures that are socially constructed through discourses. One of the discourses on which the concept of genre is based is the “genre gap” which may mean “reconfiguring the song under a different genre label” (Sparling 2008: 415). Some of the elements that facilitate the “reconfiguration” and movement of songs across different repertoires are the multi-expertise of musicians and the transformation and popularization of songs for recording production and mass-mediated performances. Most of the musicians I worked with used to play for the royal family and the king so that they had a contact with the *pin piat* classical genre.

Therefore, these musicians are aware of the use of different instruments, performance practices and repertoires. Nom Chok used to perform *lkhaon preah riac troap* and *pin piat* before performance *bassac* opera; Man Maen specialized in *phleng arak* music used to play the *tro kmae* for royal weddings, King Sihanouk and his family. The other factor that allows the circulation of songs across genres is the adaptation of traditional/theatre songs to other performance contexts

and practices. A wedding song can be popularized and transformed into a *Ikhaon bassac* song by using *bassac* instruments and vocal style as illustrated by the example of the *Kong Saoy* song in Chapter 5. The last chapter is a reflection on the concept of musical genres in the light of changes and transformations of traditional repertoires in contemporary Cambodia whose musical and extramusical features have been hybridised and adapted to “new” and “modern” performance practices.

If ‘the same’ music is used and understood in different ways, is it then sensible to speak of genre/style with the implication of musical coherence and categorical sameness carried by these terms? (...) It would seem that the persistence of categories and processes of categorization, despite the ongoing cultural diversification and stylistic hybridization of musical landscapes, indicate that they are important to the way people organize their perception of socio-musical space, as well as to how the field of music is politically and commercially regulated. (Johansson 2016: 46)

Khmer musical genres have shifted through time and socio-cultural changes due to the advent of mass media, digital media, western influences and the growth of cultural tourism. All of these processes affect traditional music through different patterns of change and adaptation which are significant examples of re-purposing that foster new ways of making music.

Future research could be done on many levels. Due to time constraints and limited funds I have not deeply examined the interrelation of these genres in different provinces; an investigation of the interrelationships of these songs performed in different geographic areas of Cambodia would reveal specific musical and extramusical characteristics of each genre in terms of title, texts, tunes, and performance practices. It would allow drawing a comparative map of the interrelated songs across the country.

In addition, further investigation on the musical components and conventions shared among the genres could be done since my analysis primarily focuses on the interrelation of extramusical features of the genres in question. In examining songs with a similar melodic contour, it is apparent that while they adhere to the general direction of the contour, they may differ from each other in certain details. How do these details differ? Which is the boundary between a piece and a genre? What marks a genre? A more detailed analysis of the musical differences of the interrelated songs would reflect the stylistic features of each genre and the way in which they represent each genre. Given that the practice of improvising variations is a common feature pervading much of the music-making in the selected genres, an area for future research could be directed towards exposing techniques of musical variation.

Finally, further research could be devoted to processes of cultural tourism, mediatization and their impact on the dissemination and consumption of traditional music in the present day. In addition to the transformation and popularisation of traditional practices, the ways in which Khmer traditional music is disseminated and reproduced in the present day have changed due to the advent of new technologies including the Internet. Future research could investigate how the

use of the Internet and social media allows a transnational dissemination of traditional genres and how new ways of disseminating and reproducing traditional music affect listeners' perceptions of traditional genres.

Glossary of Khmer Terms

<i>Arak</i> (អារក្ស)	Spirit, demon (these supernatural beings may be benevolent or malevolent).
<i>Asna</i> (អាសនៈ)	Altar for the master spirits.
<i>Ayay</i> (អាយ៉ៃ)	A satirical sung dialogue between a male and female Singer performed within the wedding ceremony or on television.
<i>Baay say</i> (បាយសី)	Ceremonial ornament made of a section of banana tree trunk with legs to which three, five, seven, or nine tiers of banana leaves rolled up in finger shapes have been attached.
<i>Bamphlay</i> (បំផ្លែ)	The process of musical improvisation.
<i>Bat Camriaj</i> (បទចម្រៀង)	Song title: vocal piece.
<i>Bat Phleng</i> (បទភ្លេង)	Song title: instrumental piece.
<i>Beh Phlae Caa</i> (បេះផ្លែឈើ)	Ritual of collecting the fruit to offer to the masters of music at the end of <i>coul ruup</i> rituals.
<i>Beh Pkaa Twaay Kruu</i> (បេះផ្កាធ្វើគ្រូ)	Ritual of collecting the flowers to be offered to the masters of music at the end of <i>coul ruup</i> rituals.
<i>Bon Bancoh Saymaa</i> (បញ្ចុះសីមា)	<i>Bon Bancoh Saymaa</i> , the ceremony for the construction of pagoda Festival to set up the sacred boundary markers of a temple.
<i>Bon Claen Samethiphal</i> (បុណ្យឆ្លងសមិទ្ធផល)	Festival to inaugurate a building.
<i>Bon Kathin</i> (បុណ្យកម្រិន)	Festival to give gifts to monks leaving rainy season retreat (late October).
<i>Bon Paccay Buən</i> (បុណ្យបង្គំបួន)	Thanksgiving to parents.
<i>Bon Pcum Bən</i> (បុណ្យភ្នំបិណ្ឌ)	Festival to honour deceased ancestors' spirits (late September).
<i>Bon Phuum</i> (បុណ្យភូមិ)	Village festival.
<i>Bon Pkaa</i> (បុណ្យផ្កា)	"Flower ceremony", a fund-raiser for the temple (anytime of the year).
<i>Bouraan</i> (បុរាណ)	Ancient.
<i>Caaj</i> (គាង)	Cylindrical-shaped idiophone played in <i>Ikhaon bassac</i> theatre.
<i>Camriaj</i> (ចម្រៀង)	Songs.

<i>Camriəŋ bantəw</i> (អ្នកចម្រៀងបន្ទូល)	Chorus.
<i>Camriəŋ bassac</i> (ចម្រៀងបាសាក់)	Song extracted from <i>Ikhaon bassac</i> stories.
<i>Camriəŋ yikee</i> (ចម្រៀងយីកេ)	Songs extracted from <i>Ikhaon yikee</i> stories.
<i>Canwaa</i> (ចង្កា)	Scarf crossed on the breast.
<i>Canwak</i> (ចង្វាក់)	Rhythm.
<i>Capey dong weng</i> (ចាប៉ីដងអ័ង)	Long-necked lute.
<i>Chaayam</i> (ឆៃយ៉ាំ)	A musical genre played for parades and Buddhist festivals.
<i>Chij</i> (ឈីង)	Small bowl-shaped brass hand cymbals (unpitched).
<i>Coom</i> (ចោម)	A green coconut with a cone-shape top on which are pinned sugar palm leaves with a betel nut fixed with a bamboo stick in the middle.
<i>Coul arak</i> (ចូលអារក្ស) or <i>Coul ruup</i> (ចូលរូប)	“Entering the <i>arak</i> ” or “Entering a medium”. Ritual in which a spirit possess a medium.
<i>Croonj</i> (ច្រូង)	Offering for musicians in <i>coul ruup</i> ceremonies. It consists of a bowl made of rattan containing traditional Khmer sweets, tobaccos, incense sticks, a whole roasted chicken, soft drinks and some Khmer money.
<i>Dah Skor</i> (ដាស័ស្ករ)	Ritual of exciting the drum before <i>Ikhaon bassac</i> performances.
<i>Doung thəw</i> (ដូងធម៌).	Offering for <i>arak</i> spirits and Buddha. It consists of a whole coconut as base supported by several bamboo skewers set at angles in the sides.
<i>Huən</i> (ហ្នែង)	Different movements of characters, different dramatic actions and themes of <i>Ikhaon bassac</i> theatre.
<i>Kamnaap</i> (កំណាព្យ)	Poem.
<i>Kampucciə Kraom</i> (កម្ពុជាភ្នំក្រាម)	Khmer people living in the south western part of Vietnam.
<i>Kbən</i> (ក្បឺន)	Hem of the <i>sampoət</i> (Cambodian skirt) rolled together and passed back between the legs where it is tucked in.
<i>Khim</i> (ឃឹម)	Trapezoidal hammered dulcimer.
<i>Kmaoc</i> (ខ្មោច)	Ghost.
<i>Kmaoc priəy</i> (ខ្មោចព្រួយ)	Ghost, spirit (especially the spirits of still-born children).
<i>Kmaoc priy</i> (ខ្មោចព្រៃ)	Spirits of the forest.

<i>Kralay damnaa</i> (ក្រែងទ្រង់ដំណើរ)	Literally “counterfeit walking.” A technique used by musicians to embellish the melody.
<i>Kramaa</i> (ក្រមា)	Traditional Khmer scarf.
<i>Krap</i> (ក្រាប់)	Wooden clappers played in <i>Ikhaon bassac</i> theatre.
<i>Kree preah thvǎ</i> (ត្រែកព្រះធម៌)	Altar for master spirits (<i>kruu thom</i>).
<i>Krom phleng</i> (ក្រុមភ្លេង)	Ensemble.
<i>Kruu coap snual</i> (គ្រូជាប់ឈ្នួល)	Relationship between the person recovered and the master spirit.
<i>Kruu thom</i> (គ្រូធំ)	Master spirit.
<i>Ksaediaw</i> (ខ្សែដៀវ) or <i>Ksae muay</i> (ខ្សែមួយ)	Monochord.
<i>Kumpii</i> (គម្ពីរ)	A code containing the rules and mantras that a medium has been taught as well as his or her remedies and ritual procedures.
<i>Laang Roonj</i> (ឡើងអាង)	Ritual of paying homage to ancestral family spirits in an annual ceremony.
<i>Lam skvǎ</i> (ឡាំស្កវ)	Fast rhythm of the drum accompanying the entrance of the characters in <i>Ikhaon yikee</i> theatre.
<i>Lao</i> (ឡោ)	A small gong made of copper or bronze played in <i>Ikhaon bassac</i> music.
<i>Liǎn skor</i> (លឿនស្កវ)	Fast rhythm of drums.
<i>Lkhaon</i> (ល្ខោន)	Theatre; drama.
<i>Lkhaon bassac</i> (ល្ខោនបាសាក់)	Cambodian popular theatre with dialogue and singing from the Bassac River region.
<i>Lkhaon khaol</i> (ល្ខោនខោល)	Masked theatre.
<i>Lkhaon luong</i> (ល្ខោនហ្លួង)	Classical or court dance.
<i>Lkhaon preah reach troap</i> (ល្ខោនព្រះរាជព្រូង)	“Drama of royal heritage”; classical or court dance.
<i>Lkhaon yikee</i> (ល្ខោនយីកេ)	Cambodian popular theatre with dialogue and singing accompanied by large round drum (<i>skvǎ yikee</i>).
<i>Mak Thǎang</i> (ម៉ាក់ថើង)	Literary Cambodian tale.
<i>Mee baa</i> (មេបា)	Ancestors’ spirits.
<i>Meemut</i> (មេមុត)	Literally “who has many followers”, a medium.
<i>Meeraa</i> (មេរ៉ា)	A legendary progenitor of the Khmer people.
<i>Mchaorii</i> (មហោរី)	A modern Cambodian musical genre.
<i>Nam</i> (ណាំ)	Actors (<i>nam proh</i> ‘males’ and <i>nam sray</i> ‘females’).
<i>Neāq pool</i> (អ្នកពោល)	Narrator.
<i>Neāq taa</i> (អ្នកតា)	Guardian spirits of village.

<i>Niat Mit Teang Pram Pii Sandaan</i> (ញាតិមិត្តប្រាំពីរសន្តាន)	Inviting the extended family of ancestors' spirits.
<i>Niyéy Lian Caak</i> (និយាយលឿនចាក)	Improvisation of a speech when actors entries the stage in <i>Ikhaon yikee</i> theatre.
<i>Pey Pok</i> (ប៊ីពក)	Bamboo flute.
<i>Phleng arak</i> (ភ្លេងអារក្ស)	Music for calling <i>arak</i> spirits.
<i>Phleng kar</i> (ភ្លេងការ)	Wedding music.
<i>Phleng kar bouraan</i> (ភ្លេងការបុរាណ)	Old wedding music.
<i>Phleng kar samay kandaal</i> (ភ្លេងការសម័យកណ្តាល)	Semi-traditional wedding music.
<i>Phleng kmae</i> (ភ្លេងខ្មែរ)	Traditional Khmer music genre.
<i>Pin piat</i> (ពិណពាទ្យ)	Classical genre of Khmer music.
<i>Pithii Cang Day</i> (ពិធីចងដៃ)	Ritual of tying the wrists performed during wedding ceremonies.
<i>Pithii Coan Tii</i> (ពិធីជាន់ទី)	Ritual of applying beeswax on the actors' eyebrows, lips and throat before theatre performances.
<i>Pithii Kat Saq</i> (ពិធីកាត់សក់)	Hair-cutting ritual performed during wedding ceremonies.
<i>Pithii Kronj Pialii</i> (ពិធីក្រុងពាលី)	Ritual evoking the mythical serpent which supports the earth invoked at the beginning of the construction of a building.
<i>Pithii Liebamnan</i> (ពិធីលាបំណន់)	Offerings to <i>arak</i> to fulfill a vow or free oneself from one's vow.
<i>Pithii Praset Kamlanj Kruu</i> (ប្រសិទ្ធិកម្លាំងគ្រូ)	Ritual to invite all holy spirits to bless and protect a performer from any bad influence.
<i>Pithii Roam Chweel Croonj</i> (ពិធីរាំឆ្ងល់ច្រង)	Ritual of dancing around the <i>croonj</i> .
<i>Pithii Saen Ciidoun Ciitaa</i> (ពិធីសែនដីដូនដីតា)	Ritual of offering to ancestors' spirits.
<i>Pithii Sampeah Kruu</i> (ពិធីសំពះគ្រូ)	Ceremony to honour the teachers.
<i>Pithii Twaay Bangkum</i> (ពិធីថ្វាយបង្គំ)	Ritual of raising the hands.
<i>Pithii Twaay Kruu</i> (ពិធីធ្វើគ្រូ)	Offerings, including music, to master spirits.
<i>Pithii Twaay Preah Pisnukaa</i> (ពិធីព្រះពិស្ណុការ)	Offering music to Preah Pisnukaa. Also called <i>Pithii Haom Roonj</i> .

<i>Plae Kaa</i> (ផ្លែផ្កា)	Indigenous definition of improvisation. Literally “making the sound beautiful.”
<i>Praliy Bat Phleng</i> (ប្រលែបទភ្លេង)	Literally “distortion.” A technique used by musicians to embellish the melody.
<i>Prapaynii</i> (ប្របៃណី)	Traditional/tradition.
<i>Pray Ikhaon</i> (ព្រៃពណ្ណេន)	Spirits who can possess actors.
<i>Preah Cinwuaŋ</i> (ព្រះជិនវង្ស)	A Cambodian literary tale.
<i>Preah Pisnukaa</i> (ព្រះពិស្ណុការ)	Viśvakarman (ancient Indian god of craftsmen).
<i>Preah Thaong and Niang Niak</i> (ព្រះចៅង នាងនាគ)	The legendary couple considered to be the first rulers of Cambodia.
<i>Priam</i> (ព្រាហ្មណ៍)	Brahmin. The king’s advisor.
<i>Priay</i> (ព្រាយ)	Ghost, phantom; evil spirits believed to cause illness.
<i>Ptill</i> (ផ្កិត)	Silver bowl filled with water and flowers.
<i>Qaiam</i> (ក្បែម)	Collar used in <i>Ikhaon yikee</i> costume.
<i>Qobakaa</i> (ឧបករណ៍)	Instruments.
<i>Rɔbam</i> (របាំ)	Dance.
<i>Rɔbam Yikee</i> (របាំយីកេ)	Dance preceding the <i>Ikhaon yikee</i> theatre performance.
<i>Roam vong</i> (រាំវង់)	A popular dance in which people moves clockwise in a circle (<i>vong</i>).
<i>Ruup</i> (រូប)	Medium (who can be possessed by ancestral spirits).
<i>Saa Pidaan</i> (សាពិដាន)	Ritual of dismantling the ceiling performed by a musician at the end of <i>coul ruup</i> rituals.
<i>Samay</i> (សម័យ)	Modern.
<i>Samay kandaal</i> (សម័យកណ្តាល)	Semi-traditional.
<i>Samdac Preah Kruu</i> (សម្តេចព្រះគ្រូ)	The head of the master spirits.
<i>Samleeng kŋua</i> (សម្តេងក្នុង)	Low-heavy voice.
<i>Samleeng proh</i> (សម្តេងប្រុស)	Male voice.
<i>Samleeng sray</i> (សម្តេងស្រី)	Female voice.
<i>Sampoat</i> (សំពត់)	Cambodian skirt.
<i>Səlpak</i> (សិល្បៈ)	Performing Arts.
<i>Səlpak mahaacon</i> (សិល្បៈមហាជន)	Live theatre performances.
<i>Səlpak tuurɔwtuah</i> (សិល្បៈទូរទស្សន៍)	Theatre performance on television.
<i>Skɔw arak</i> (ស្ករអារក្ស) or <i>skɔw day</i> (ស្ករដៃ)	Small goblet-shaped hand drum.

<i>Skow bassac</i> (ស្កូវបាសាក់)	Drum played in <i>Ikhaon bassac</i> theatre.
<i>Skow cmool</i> (ស្កូវឈ្មួល)	Literally “male drum” played in <i>Ikhaon yikee</i> theatre.
<i>Skow ñii</i> (ស្កូវញី)	Literally “female drum” played in <i>Ikhaon yikee</i> theatre.
<i>Skow koun</i> (ស្កូវកូន)	Literally “child drum.” Small drum following the leader (<i>skor me</i>) played in <i>Ikhaon yikee</i> theatre.
<i>Skow mee</i> (ស្កូវមេ)	Literally “drum mother.” The leader instrument usually played by a <i>Ikhaon yikee</i> Master.
<i>Skow yikee</i> (ស្កូវយីកេ)	Drum played in <i>Ikhaon yikee</i> theatre.
<i>Slaa thwə</i> (ស្លាធម៌)	Offering for <i>arak</i> spirits and Buddha. It consists of a cylindrical section of banana trunk (about three or four inches high) supported by several bamboo skewers set at angles in the sides.
<i>Slaap han</i> (ស្លាបហង្ស)	“Wings of a swan” made of gold used as ornaments of <i>Ikhaon yikee</i> costumes.
	Nasal voice.
<i>Snual meemut</i> (ស្នួលមេមត់)	A medium that has many followers.
<i>Taadaok</i> (តាដោក)	Small rectangular wooden percussion box played in <i>Ikhaon bassac</i> theatre.
<i>Taakee</i> (តាខេ)	Three-stringed zither in the shape of a crocodile.
<i>Teewadaa</i> (ទេវតា)	Benevolent spirits invoked and invited to the wedding ceremony.
<i>Tik daam</i> (ទឹកដម)	Literally “nectar, juice”. <i>Tik daam</i> (sweet water) is a sort of tremolo played on melodic instruments.
<i>Tlok</i> (ត្រុក)	Comedians, clowns in theatre performances.
<i>Trw chee</i> (ទ្រុឆេ)	Two-stringed fiddle with a cylindrical resonating chamber. It is the smallest of all the fiddles and it is only played in <i>Ikhaon bassac</i> ensemble.
<i>Trw kmae</i> (ទ្រុក្មែរ)	Three-stringed fiddle played in <i>phleng kmae bouraan</i> genre.
<i>Trw quu</i> (ទ្រុក្ខូ)	Lower-pitched two stringed fiddle with an attached bow.
<i>Trw quu camhiang</i> (ទ្រុក្ខូចំហៀង)	A two-stringed fiddle accompanying the vocal line in <i>Ikhaon yikee</i> and <i>Ikhaon bassac</i> music.
<i>Trw sao</i> (ទ្រុសោ)	Higher-pitched two-stringed fiddle with an attached bow.
<i>Tum Tiaw</i> (ទុំទាវ)	A Cambodian literary tale.
<i>Tumnuk Crien</i> (ទំនុកច្រៀង)	Lyrics.

<i>Tumnuk Phleng</i> (ទំនុកឆ្កឹង)	Tune.
<i>Tuuj Skor</i> (ទូងស្ករ)	Ritual of beating the drum performed in <i>Ikhaon bassac</i> theatre.
<i>Yeaq</i> (យក្ស)	Giant (a role-type of <i>Ikhaon bassac</i> theatre).

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