

UC Riverside

UC Riverside Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Spicy: Gendered Practices of Queer Men in Thai Classical String Music

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/05f4j044>

Author

Wisuttiapat, Nattapol

Publication Date

2022

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

Spicy: Gendered Practices of Queer Men in Thai Classical String Music

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Music

by

Nattapol Wisuttiapat

September 2022

Dissertation Committee

Dr. Deborah Wong, Chairperson

Dr. Christina Schwenkel

Dr. Jonathan Ritter

Dr. Dredge Käng

Copyright by
Nattapol Wisuttiapat
2022

The Dissertation of Nattapol Wisuttiapat is approved:

Dr. Deborah Wong, Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

Acknowledgement

ยกกรขึ้นเหนือเกล้า ประณตนิ้วดูษฎี “I bring my palms and hands together and raise it above my head. With the fingers that meet, arching like a budding lotus, I pay my utmost respect and homage.” Through this gesture, I would like to express my humble and sincere gratitude to everyone involved in the completion of this dissertation.

I first thank my academic advisor *aajaan* Deborah Wong whose invaluable guidance, suggestions, and comments helped me grow as an empathetic ethnomusicologist and a person. Thank you for supporting me in whatever projects I embarked on, for pushing me when things got difficult and all hopes seem lost, and for making me feel small in your presence—there is always something to learn. I still remember what you said the first day we met during my campus tour in 2018 about how things came full circle. My father was assisting you in your research thirty years ago, and now here I am as your advisee! I cannot say and show enough—and you will still downplay it anyway—just how much your work and what you do inspire a lot of young Thai scholars. I am always grateful to be doing ethnomusicology under your tutelage in the past four years at UCR and looking forward to more scholarly collaborations in the future.

I thank my dissertation committee for their insightful suggestions and comments. Dr. Christina Schwenkel, you have opened the world of critical Southeast Asian studies to me. I always learned something fun and cool from you whether in the classroom, roundtables, or a car ride. Dr. Jonathan Ritter, you will always have a special place in my academic career as someone who helped me “connect the dot” regarding what ethnomusicology is and what ethnomusicologists do. You always remind me to consider whatever I do in bigger picture, how I make my contribution, and most importantly what

is at stakes. I thank Dr. Dredge Käng from UCSD, whose works gave me many important ideas for my research, and for agreeing to serve as my dissertation committee. I look forward to working with you in the future.

Although this dissertation is a kind of “ethnomusicology at home,” it involved a expenses that were supported by several organizations at various stages of my work. My fieldwork research was supported by The Project of Empowering Network for International Thai Studies (ENITS) from Chulalongkorn University, the 21st Century Fellowship from the Society for Ethnomusicology, and the Humanities Graduate Student Research Grant from UCR’s Center for Ideas and Society. The writing phase of a dissertation can be challenging and intimidating, but this has been a fairly speedy process for me thanks to a Dissertation Year Program Award from University of California, Riverside as well as the Summer Dissertation Fellowship from the CIS. I also thank Christine Leapman, the forever kind and generous coordinator of the Gluck Fellows Program of the Arts at UCR, for the funding during my time at the campus and for including Thai classical music as part of the Gluck program’s local school outreach.

Several faculty members at UCR were instrumental in expanding the breadth and depth of my academic knowledge. From the Music Department, I thank Dr. Liz Przybylski for the training me with the fieldwork skillset and methodology and for being my role model of a highly professional scholar. To Dr. Xóchitl Chávez, thank you for always urging me to be more critical and nuanced in my work. I can finally answer your question when I first took your seminar course with pride now—this is my dissertation. I thank the Department’s graduate advisors Dr. Ian Dicke and Dr. Rogerio Budasz for their availability and willingness to address my questions. I also thank Benicia Mangram, our

program coordinator who always found a solution to even the most concerning issues that came along my way—you are the best!

The UCR Southeast Asia: Text, Ritual and Performance program (SEATRiP), led by Dr. Christina Schwenkel, was my second “departmental home” where I gained a great deal of experience. I thank Dr. Emily Hue for her honest comments on my dissertation prospectus. It is through this program that I was able to workshop a chapter from this dissertation. I thank Dr. Jody Blanco and Dr. Claire Edington from UCSD, Dr. Weihshin Gui from UCR, and Dr. Diu-Huong Nguyen from UCI for their thoughts on my dissertation drafts during the workshop series hosted by the Southern California Southeast Asian Studies Network. Their comments came in at exactly the right time and broke the wall I thought I was hitting. I also received thought-provoking questions and suggestions from several members of the ICTM PASEA. I thank Dr. Ricardo Trimillos from the University of Hawai`i, Dr. Verne de la Peña from the University of the Philippines, Diliman, Dr. Arsenio Nicolas from Mahasarakham University, Dr. Peter Jackson, and Dr. John Garzoli for their comments on my paper presentations based on this dissertation.

Fieldwork is perhaps the most fun and transformative part of ethnographic research. I thank my dear friends Pongtep “Hanoi” Tammuangpak and Tawan “Not” Toiem for getting me in touch with virtually every queer men musician I ever mentioned to them. I thank Jakarin “Ton” Mhonthong who welcomed me to the Vjivitvatn ensemble. It is in this ensemble that I met Phongsiri “JJ” Yodphet, who allowed me to tag along for several gigs and concerts until the COVID-19 hit Bangkok. I am grateful to Suraphong Bankraithong and Pitchanat Toojinda, two *ajjaan* from the College of Music of Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University for letting me observe several rehearsals even

without any prior notice. I thank Somprat “Ton” Tonglor who introduced me to great string musicians like Marut “Mark” Vijitchote, Natthavid “Noo” Chiyachan, and Chakri Mongkron. It is through this dissertation that I got to learn more about the behind-the-scenes of string ensemble, and I thank Chidpong Songsermvorakul, Hemarat Hemhongsa, Jarukiat Saengyenying, Sittichai Sorngarn, Nattapann Nuch-ampann, and Varis Autawapaitoon for their willingness to *maomuay* with me. I thank my musician friends from Srinakharinwirot University, Matchim Bunkhong, Pongsathon Meesup, Thanakorn Namwong, Teerawit Klinjui, Wasawat Nualnak, and Pantakan Baitet for giving me a crash course on *kathoeyness*.

I was also blessed to have so many enlightening conversations with so many great thinkers while in Thailand. I thank *aaajaan* Anant Narkkong who always gave me a reminding stick to “open the skull.” I thank Kittisak Laosuk, Chanachai Kawpachone, Phiphat Sornyai, Sippavich Kingkaew, Sgt. Arnut Wongsaman, Pol. Sgt. Watcharaphong Kanchanawarut, Thapanut Thamtheing for their original answers and challenging questions. I am grateful to have collaborated with *aaajaan* Nantida Chandransu in many of her research projects and conferences during my fieldwork. I thank the *aaajaan*s at the Thai and Asian Music Division at Srinakharinwirot University: Surasak Jamnongsarn, Metee Punvaratorn, Veera Phansue, Prateep Lourattana-ari, and Tepika Rodsakan, and the program coordinator Nisakorn Usaphrom for always welcoming me to their offices and asked me to join them for lunch. I owe great emotional and spiritual debt to the late Dr. Kanchana “*paa Taem*” Intarasunanont and *aaajaan* Nikorn Chantasorn who both have already gone to make music with the angels. I am sure that you could feel and sense this research from up there. I specially thank what I call my small little cohort of social media Thai music scholars: Songkran Somchandra, Kunthee Banjukaew, and Kulis

Boonyason—we speak the same language and will certainly do great things to the music scholarship in Thailand!

Living as an international graduate student in the US was not easy, but the Thai American communities played a crucial role in making sure that I thrived here and making sure that I had a good work-life balance. I thank the Sripraram family: *khruu* Chamni “Tong,” and *phii* Patti for being highly accommodating every time I visit Chicago, and this has never changed a bit since we first met six years ago. I thank the Thai community in LA who always invited me to gigs and concerts to remind me of my old musician days: *paa* Muu, *lung* Maew, Teddy, *phii* Phueng, *phii* Arm. I thank *khruu* Viroj Sirironarong who always extended his kindness to me—too bad that we met each other when I almost finished my degree. At Riverside, I am really fortunate to have met quite a few people who will have special place in my heart. I thank *phii* Tuktik for introducing me to Sam Arch and his wife Emma—you all have taken such a good care of me with their delicious food. I am grateful to Scott for teaching a lot of life lessons. I thank Sasiri “Tang” Backstrom who was always by my side and had my back during my stay at Riverside. I thank *phii* Umawadee “Pukki” Isaranggul who took such a good care of me as if I was her son. I am also indebted to *phii* Chorphet for always bringing me food and asking about my wellbeing. I also had Chari Hamratanaphon and Somchate Wasantwisut to thank for putting me in the loop among other Thai students at UCR. Without these people, I could not imagine how my life in Riverside would have been otherwise.

I am grateful to have spent the last four years with my fellow music graduate students from the music department at UCR. Hannah Snavelly (thank you for your willingness to take a look at some of my dissertation drafts) and Chun Chia Tai (thank

you for keeping me posted about schoolwork and helping me with errands and other things), Anna Emilova Sivova, and Bob Bozonelos, I thank both of you for being such good friends. You made our cohort cool! Allan Zheng, you have been such a dear friend and gave me a lot to think about with your comments on my drafts. We had a lot in common in terms of our research interest, and I cannot wait to see you make an impact with your scholarly endeavors! I am grateful to my housemate Pedro Lopez Garcia de la Osa whose advice and delicious Spanish recipes taught me to love life—*un beso*! I thank Matt Werstler, a friend from Northern Illinois University, who shows great interests in my work and always shares interesting academic events with me. I also reserve my gratitude for Anuthep “Jeng” Meelertsom, my “junior” from Kent State University, who never shied away from asking for my comments and feedback while straightforwardly offering his to my dissertation draft. I thank *aajaan* Kanjana Thepboriruk, Jessica Margarita Gutierrez Masini, and Lydia Schneider for their suggestion on my dissertation title.

My graduate school life would not have been possible without the initial support from Dr. Hanafi Hussin from the University of Malaya and Dr. Ramon Santos, from the University of the Philippines, Diliman. Thank you for showing me the way. I would also like to thank Dr. Andrew Shahriari, Dr. Janine Tiffe, Dr. Jennifer Johnstone, Dr. Kazadi wa Mukuna, Dr. Priwan Nanongkham, and Dr. Terry Miller from Kent State University for seeing my potential as ethnomusicologist. You all surely trained me to become one.

The biggest acknowledgement goes to my father Manop Wisuttiapat and my mother Pranee Wisuttiapat who are behind everything that I am today. Thank you for your unconditional support in whatever decisions I have and will make. I hope that this dissertation makes you proud. This dissertation is a real achievement, but it came at a

cost. I would like to express my endless gratitude to my dear wife Nuttha Thong-oum-yai for her patience and selflessness so that I can pursue my academic goal. These three people provided the mental and spiritual motivation behind this dissertation.

Finally, I thank all queer musicians in Thai classical music. I apologize to those whose names I failed to mention in this acknowledgement. But whether or not their musicking interrogates, resists, questions, or critiques heteronormativity in Thai classical music, their presence matters and their participation drives this musical tradition in several significant ways. If you identify yourself as *pen* and play Thai classical music, this dissertation is dedicated to you.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Spicy: Gendered Practices of Queer Men in Thai Classical String Music

by

Nattapol Wisuttiwat

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Music
University of California, Riverside, September 2022
Dr. Deborah Wong, Chairperson

My dissertation examines gender and sexuality constructs in Thai classical music, and how they are reinforced and challenged through the participation of queer men musicians in *khrueng saay* or string music. Drawing on a year of ethnographic fieldwork in Bangkok, the work is situated within ethnomusicology and uses ethnography as its primary method of representation. It is informed by theoretical frameworks from gender, queer, Southeast Asian, and media and cultural studies. My core argument is that the presence of queer men string musicians exposes but does not interrogate heteronormativity in the tradition.

I begin by tracing of the construction of gender-defined rules in Thai classical music during the early to mid-19th century. This resulted in the feminization of string music, a precondition for the subsequent emergence and visibility of queer men musician. I pay attention to various gendered performance and performative methods through which queerness is articulated through musical rendition, embodied gestures, and homoerotic interpretation of song texts. I also investigate the social lives of queer men

musicians string music circles as a contentious space, variously faced by both inward and outward pressure to conform. I focus on gossip about musical lineages to challenge often smoothed-out notions about social interactions among Thai classical musicians. I then examine queer men musicians' consensual pressure to conform in hypergendered institutions to avoid the shame of nonconformity and to maintain their social status. With the close interwovenness of gender, sexuality, queerness, and heteronormativity, I extend the concept of queer worldmaking as a modality in ways that are reconciliatory and oblique.

My dissertation contributes to the critical examination of underrepresented groups in Thai classical music and expands the boundaries of knowledge pertaining to gender, sexuality, and queerness as they intersect with musical performance. My research is part of a broader conversation about ethnomusicology and sexuality, an area that has been very slow to arrive in the discipline. This work joins the rich, critical scholarship of gender, sexuality, and expressive cultures in Southeast Asia from a specific underrepresented angle of queer subjects' lived experiences that are closely associated with classical performing arts.

Conventions and Orthography

The Royal Thai General System of Transcription (RTGST) is an official system, invented by the Royal Thai Institute, of transliterating and transcribing Thai words. In practice, however, this system is at best loosely followed even in Thailand. While offering convenient conversion of a Thai word without the use of diacritics, the system does not indicate tonal inflections, vowel lengths, and certain consonant distinctions. On the other hand, more elaborate system of transliteration like the ISO-11940 addresses the shortcomings of the RTGST system by using diacritics and special characters. This does well in retaining the phonetic characteristics of Thai language, but it comes at a cost of readability. It also does not help that several scholarly works dealing with Thai language have its own convention of orthography. Some are based on the RTGST system, others on the ISO-11940. No matter what system of Thai language transliteration one follows or devices, it is always a challenge to strike a balance between readability and accuracy.

In my dissertation, I follow the RTGST system for its readability, but have made a few adjustments for a more accurate transliteration. First is the distinction between the short and long vowels. The roman alphabet is doubled for a long vowel, i.e., *aa* is for อา, *ii* is for อี, *uu* is for อุ, *ee* is for เอ, and so forth. I do not distinguish the length of certain vowels like เอื้อ *uea*, เอีย *ia*, or แอ *ae* to avoid cluttering. Second is the differentiation between the โอ and the ออ sound with *oo* and *au* respectively. I have decided not to include any tonal inflection indicators in my orthography for readability nor did I incorporate any diacritics for consonants and vowel distinctions. My system of transliteration is intended to give readers an approximate sense of how each word is pronounced. I am sure that those familiar with the Thai language, particularly its tonal

inflections, can reverse-engineer what each transliterated word is in Thai. Spelling of proper nouns, e.g., names of a person or a place, is kept as is.

Thais usually address one another using one's first name, including scholarly citations. I have decided to adhere to this convention by citing and addressing all my interlocutors by their first names. I refer to some of my interlocutors with their nicknames as it is a common practice among acquainted individuals. A person's nickname is included in between their given and family name. for example, Nattapol "Pup" Wisuttipat. Scholarly works in the Thai language are referenced by the first name of the author, appearing first in its bibliographic information. All the years that appear in this dissertation have already been converted into the Gregorian calendar, again for the readability. Note that Thailand uses the Buddhist calendar which is 543 years earlier than the Gregorian one. For example, the 1932 Revolution would fall in the year of 2475 according to the Buddhist calendar; and the year in which this dissertation is completed (2022) is 2565 in Buddhist calendar.

Thai Orthography: Consonants

Thai letter	Romanization	
	Initial Position	Final Position
ก	k	k
ข ค ฃ	kh	k
ง	ng	ng
จ	j	t
ฉ ช ฅ	ch	t
ญ	y	n
ด ฎ ฏ	d	t
ต ฏ	t	t
ถ ฐ ฑ ฒ ฌ	th	t
น ฌ	n	n
บ	b	p
ป	p	p
ผ พ ภ	ph	p
ฝ ฟ	f	p
ม	m	m
ย	y	y
ร	r	n
ล พ	l	n
ว	w	w
ซ ฌ ฌ ฌ ฌ	s	t
ห ฮ	h	-
อ	<i>takes a vowel form</i>	-

Thai Orthography: Vowels

Thai Vowels	Romanization	English Equivalent
อะ, อั	a	Sun
อา	aa	Car
อิ	i	Sit
อี	ii	Beat
อึ, อื	ue	<i>hmmm</i>
อุ	u	Put
อู	uu	loose
เอะ, เอ็	e	Set
เอ	ee	Faith
แอะ, แอ็, แอ	ae	Fat, fair
โอะ, อ (as in กอด)	o	nope
โอ	oo	Go
เออะ, ออ	au	Not, caught
เออะ, เออ, เอ็	oe	Bird
เอ็ยะ, เอ็ย	ia	Ian
เอ็อะ, เอ็อ	uea	-
อัวะ, อัว	ua	<i>voila</i>
ไอ, ไอ, อัย, ไอย	ai	Idea
อาย	aay	Shy
เอา	ao	Shout
อาว	aaw	Now
อุย	uy	Luis
ฤ as in ฤๅ, ฤๅ	rue	-
ฤ as in อิทธิฤทธิ	ri	Sit
-ร	an	Sun
-รร	aun	Shawn

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction.....	1
Gender Constructs and Thai Classical Music	10
Situating Queer and Queerness in Thai Classical Music	20
Civil and Gendered Bodily Practices of Thai Classical Musicians	29
Queer, Sexuality, and Ethnomusicology: Better Late Than Never.....	33
Ethnographic Settings and Methodology.....	42
Chapter Outline.....	50
Chapter 2 Queering Thai Classical Music From Within	54
Queering Musical Institutions and Lineages.....	59
The Blueblood Children.....	61
The Government Public Relations Department and Thai Classical Music.....	71
Huge Sound, High Speed.....	80
Negotiating Gendered Practices on Television.....	91
Conclusion	98
Chapter 3 Embodying Queerness in Gendered Musical Spaces	100
The Musicking Body and Paramparic Body in String Ensemble	103
Khruu Aeb Tribute Concert Rehearsal	108
Mark on <i>Sau Uu</i>	127

Conclusion	140
Chapter 4 Disorientating Erotics.....	142
I am a Woman. It is so Difficult to Make my Desires Seen.	142
The Intimacy of Thai Homoerotic Intent.....	149
The Power/Pleasure/Intimacy of “Surintharaahuu”.....	151
I Want to Make my Desires Seen	158
The Homoeroticism of <i>Naep</i>	168
Conclusion: What Does It Mean to Make My Desires Seen?	174
Chapter 5 A Musical Community Under Surveillance	179
A Hostile Music Circle	179
Gossip and Queer Men String Music Circle.....	182
Accenting the Lineage	185
The Complex World of Direct-Line Students.....	188
The Direct-Line Ends at Me	193
Donning the Accent	207
Conclusion	220
Chapter 6 Conclusion: to <i>Pen</i> or Not to <i>Pen</i>	222
Teachers’ and Musicians’ Effeminacy as an Ethical No-No	226
<i>Kep Aakaan</i> , Queer Potential, and Passing.....	234

Queer by Design and Gender Spectacle..... 243

Looking Ahead: The (In)applicability of the Closet and Queer Worldmaking.. 249

7. Bibliography..... 257

8. Glossary 271

List of Figures

The figures and additional audio-visual media are also accessible via the [supplementary website](#). Ethnographic vignettes that have supplementary media will be marked with “view on website” hyperlink.

Chapter 1

- Figure 1.1: Siraphob Attohi is dressed as Elphaba Thropp or the Wicked Witch of the West, a fictional character from the novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, during a demonstration in Bangkok on November 7, 2020. 2
- Figure 1.2: The author [right, second row] played *ranaat thum* in a variant of *piiphaat* ensemble called *piiphaat naanghong* (ปี่พาทย์นางหงส์) during a Buddhist funeral in Ayutthaya province 13
- Figure 1.3: Kamolchanok “Kwang” Khemayodhin plays *khim* as Angsumalin in the opening episode of *Khuukam* TV series, premiered in 1990 17
- Figure 1.4: Government-issued advertisement during the Cultural Mandates era depicting the do’s and don’ts regarding dressing in public.. 20
- Figure 1.5: The author, 11 years old, plays *khaung wong yai*, for a television show in 2001. I was accompanied by my teacher Nikorn Chantasorn and his fellow musician Sa-man Noi-nit. 43
- Figure 1.6: A photo showing me sitting at the back of *piiphaat* ensemble with string instruments in front of the stage during a performance at the night before *waikhruu* at Bansomdejchaophraya Rajbhat University..... 48

Chapter 2

- Figure 2.1: Rati Wisetsurakan on *jakhee* (front row, left) and Chaluay Chiyachan on *sau uu* (center)..... 57

Figure 2.2: A photo roster of current musician employees at the PRD. The Thai classical musicians are in the bottom two rows. Noo is in the second row from bottom, third from the left.....	73
Figure 2.3: PRD Thai musicians’ office.	74
Figure 2.4: Noo [left] plays sau duang with other PRD musicians during a rehearsal in a studio	75
Figure 2.5: Natthavid Chiyachan or Noo during an interview. Note the altar behind Noo with several masks of Thai classical music deities as well as the shelf on the right displaying portraits of music teachers	75
Figure 2.6: Chaluay (center) performs sau uu while Rati (second row on raised platform) plays jakhee, representing PRD’s Thai classical music ensemble.....	80
Figure 2.7: The front [left] and back [right] covers of a vinyl recording of PRD’s Thai classical music ensemble. Both Chaluay and Rati are featured on the front cover playing <i>sau uu</i> and <i>jakhee</i> respectively.....	81
Figure 2.8: Chaluay [far right on sau uu] and Rati [front row on jakhee] perform in <i>dontrii thai prayuk</i> ensemble for Kanthapphasala TV show.....	92

Chapter 3

Figure 3.1: A Portrait of Aeb Yuwanawanit.....	109
Figure 3.2: Program note of Aeb Tribute Concert. Highlighted in green are “Lao Phaen” and “Jiin Khim Yai” solos whereas “Phayaa Sook” solo is highlighted in yellow.....	110
Figure 3.3: Chai [seating on a chair in front of a <i>jakhee</i> on the right] gestures his hand up and down to urge his students [seating on the floor with <i>jakhee</i>] to play faster.....	115

Figure 3.4: Chai (blue shirt) and Paun (black shirt) send their left hand flying in the air after performing a <i>sabat</i> on their <i>jakhee</i> or the floor zither. Note Chai’s slightly more flexed out fingers of his left hand.....	123
Figure 3.5: Chai’s and Paun’s right hands swing inward as a follow-through from striking the brass string of their <i>jakhee</i>	124
Figure 3.6: Chai stacks his fingers of his left hand together as he moves up the <i>jakhee</i> fret.....	125
Figure 3.7: A Photo of Mark (bottom row, center) playing <i>sau uu</i> with his markup on the spread-out right leg. Note the different seating posture of another <i>sau uu</i> player Meetee Punvaratorn (extreme right)	132
Figure 3.8: Kaew (front row) smiles at Mark after the latter performs the “floating melody.” Also note Paun’s surprised look at Mark for the same reason.....	138

Chapter 4

Figure 4.1: Narong Kaew-aun [in purple shirt] winces as he attempts to sing a high pitch register during the “Tayuay Yuan” performance.....	144
Figure 4.2: A page taken from Narong’s funeral book contains “Surintharaahu” lyrics with Narong’s photo in the background.....	146
Figure 4.3: The <i>jakhee</i> player (center) smiles as Sombat (front) finishes the beginning lyrics of Surintharaahu as other musicians from the Fine Arts Department watch on	161
Figure 4.4: <i>Sao Mai</i> string musician members with a yellow flower behind their ear.....	166
Figure 4.5: <i>Jakhee</i> player to the left pats on his chest as the singer reaches the “ <i>naung pen ying</i> ” part.	166

Figure 4.6: The singer to the left lifts his hand to stroke the flower on his era after finishing singing “*naung pen ying*.” 167

Figure 5.1: A chart showing lineage of Rati’s direct-line student, in bold. 194

Chapter 5

Figure 5.2: A screenshot of my text chat with Teerawit. The blue bubble, sent by me, is translated as, “if you play in *khruu*’s [Chaluay] style, doesn’t the posture have to come out?” Teerawit then replies in the gray bubble, “The posture will come by itself.” 210

Figure 5.3: Teerawit shares his photo playing *sau uu* and assuming the iconic posture from Chaluay’s lineage. He commented below, “the posture would take over if you wanted to bow like *khruu* [Chaluay] hahahaha. I also studied [*sau uu*] with Mark.” 211

Figure 5.4: Mark watches me as I attempted the signature phrase. Note the way he uses his lower sections of his fingers (*nuam niw*) to press the strings whereas I used to tip of my fingers.. 214

Figure 5.5: Mark gave me “the look” when I successfully replicated the phrase within a few attempts. 214

Figure 5.6: Mark and I laughed as he teased about me eavesdropping his *thaang* 215

List of Tables

Chapter 2

Table 2.1: Overview chart of “Nok Khamin” <i>sau uu</i> solo recorded by Chaluay Chiyachan.	83
Table 2.2: Guided listening of “Nok Khamin” <i>sau uu</i> solo recorded by Chaluay Chiyachan	84
Table 2.3: Guided Listening of Rati’s “Sud Sa-nguan” <i>jakhee</i> solo.....	90
Table 2.4: Guided listening of “Choet Jiin” performance by PRD musicians.....	95

Chapter 3

Table 3.1: A comparison of the two versions of the excerpted “Phayaa Sook” <i>jakhee</i> solo melody on which Chai was deciding	117
Table 3.2: A notation showing the basic melody of an excerpt from “Phamaa Haa Thaun.”.....	136
Table 3.3: A comparison between the basic melody and Mark’s <i>sau uu</i> rendition with melodic embellishment.....	136
Table 3.4: An excerpt from “Phamaa Haa Thaun” showing the syncopated note, highlighted in bold.	137
Table 3.5: A comparison between the basic melody and Mark’s rendition on <i>sau uu</i>	137
Table 3.6: A comparison of melodic embellishment of an excerpt from “Phamaa Haa Thaun.”	138
Table 3.7: Mark’s <i>sau uu</i> rendition that deviate from the basic melody, “floating” in the second and third measures (note the different “meeting-point” notes) before joining the rest of the ensemble in the last measure.	139

Chapter 5

Table 5.1: A notation of Chaluay’s signature move in the middle of “Salikaa Chom Duean,” transcribed from my lesson with Mark	213
--	-----

Chapter 1

Introduction

The social and political climate in Thailand has reached a new height since a demonstration in August 2020, led by a group called the “United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration,” declared ten demands for the monarchy reform. The demands were to ensure that Thailand’s most revered institution remained transparent and constitutional, especially amid the criticism of its unnecessary expense of the taxpayer money and its unchecked vigilantism to silent political dissents. This unprecedented declaration came at a hefty cost, as the leaders of the group were charged and subsequently imprisoned with *les majeste* law, also known as the Article 112. However, the protest was joined by thousands of Thais who had grown increasingly frustrated with the government’s inefficiency in leading the country. The movement expanded as quickly as it did heterogeneously: coordinated protests occurred daily and in multiple provinces, while smaller groups voiced concerns about various social issues such as human trafficking, education, and LGBT rights.

LGBT rights activists are easily discernable among the pro-democracy protesters. They sported the rainbow-colored pride flags, dressed as drag queens, danced in parade, and sometimes turned the street into a catwalk for a satirical fashion show aimed at the Thai monarchy. Their demands were inspired by the global gay rights movement, such as legalization of same-sex marriage and sex workers, and educating about gender and sexuality diversity or *khwaam laaklaay thaang pheet* ความหลากหลายทางเพศ. As involved as they were, these protesters were described by several local news agency and even from the fellow straight protesters as providing some additional “colors” to the demonstration. Siraphob Attohi, a member of the Free Gender TH group that joined the protests, was

aware of the LGBT’s associated image of the comical relief and wanted to confront it head on. He said in an interview with the Diplomat¹ “Thailand is said to be the most gay-friendly country in the world, but it really isn’t!” noting the lack of opportunities for women and LGBT people to protest or speak openly.



Figure 1.1: Siraphob Attohi is dressed as Elphaba Thropp or the Wicked Witch of the West, a fictional character from the novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, during a demonstration in Bangkok on November 7, 2020. Photo courtesy of Thairath Online. <https://www.thairath.co.th/news/politic/1971977>.

Siraphob’s comment and the presence of LGBT protesters encapsulate the rather complicated and overlapping terrain of sexual and gendered identities, what anthropologist Dredge Kang called the “Thai genderscapes” (2014a). No doubt that these activists were influenced by the household thinkers on gender and sexuality from the West like Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. They explicitly drew on concepts like

¹ Ana Salvá, “The LGBT Community Joins the Thai Protests,” in *The Diplomat*, Dec 09th 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/12/the-lgbt-community-joins-the-thai-protests/>

gender identity, gender binary, gender performativity, sexual orientations, heterosexuality, homosexuality, and the LGBTQIA+ acronyms to educate the public about gender and sexual diversity. There was, however, little to no critical examination of the local concept, one in which sexual and gendered identities are closely intertwined, one that informs the institutionalized notions of sexual “deviance” in Thai culture.

It appears that these concepts were viewed by progressive activists as “old fashioned” and in need of urgent reforms, but scholars like Rosalind Morris (1994), Peter Jackson (2000), and Megan Sinnott (2012), to name a few, have shown that ideas of gender and sexuality in Thailand are conceptualized so differently from those in the West that they defy a wholesale transplantation of, say, Foucault’s theory of homosexuality.² In this way, the Thai genderscapes today are marked with an unresolved encounter between the Western ideas of hetero- and homo-sexuality and the local concept of three genders: men, women, and “the third genders” like *kathoey* กะเทย and *tom* ทอม. The ardent advocacy for queerness in Thai socio-cultural backdrop, besides bringing the naturalized sexual and gendered identities into questions, is considered a “new” discursive development, while the local concepts of sexual and gender identities acquired a “traditional” cultural connotation. But despite their serious legal demands, the decorative stereotype of these LBGT activists shows that they are, in the eyes of general Thai public, tolerated but not accepted.

If the visibility of LGBT activists in the disruptive 21st century Thailand results in the increased public tolerance toward nonnormative subjectivities, Thai expressive

² This is not to say that Foucault’s groundbreaking conceptualization of homosexuality and heterosexuality as discursive tools is not applicable in Thai cultures. I agree with Foucault’s argument that power pervades through discourse even in the realm of sex, gender, and sexuality. However, the construction of heterosexual, homophobic discourse in Thai cultures did not follow the same historical path as it did in the West. From the outset, homophobic repression in Thai culture may exhibit similar forms with the West, but differs greatly in the underlying social, political, and legal mechanism.

cultures represent a similar avenue where global and local gender and sexual values clash and the limits of tolerance are examined. Thai homosexual cultures are studied from several angles, ranging from print magazine (Jackson 2016), spirit medium in rituals (Morris 2000), film (Fuhrmann 2016), and popular cultures, particularly from East Asia (Käng 2012, 2014b, 2018, 2019; Sinnott 2012). These works, along with the related ones, not only critique heteronormative gender and sexual norms in the country, but also show the slippage of the Western-derived queer theories both as a subjectivity and as an analytical lens when mapped onto a cultural terrain that seems to turn the idea on its head.

Interestingly, however, academic endeavors informed by queer studies have yet to make a substantial impact into the world of Thai classical performing arts and vice versa. *Lakhaun nauk* ละครนอก, an all-male theater performance, seems to be the only artform that receives scholarly attention from such an angle, even though it was in terms of male-bodied, cross-gender performances, and assumed blending of binarized gender identity (Ranchani 2009; Weera 2015; Santiphap 2018).³ Thai classical music, on the other hand, is distinctly lacking discussions regarding gender, let alone sexuality. There are some attempts to address gender issues, but only to reinstate patriarchal structures within the tradition and offer little to no critical contributions (Thattaphon 2016). For many practitioners, Thai classical dance, music, and theatre performances are considered “pure arts,” not to be contaminated by banal topics like gender and sexuality. And since several established and authoritative scholars of Thai classical performing arts are ardent

³ I do not intend to undermine the significance of this scholarly work. My point is that these works represent the localization of queer studies in Thai cultural context – that queer becomes a discursive tool to study the social worlds of the “third gender,” in ways that do not inquire the normalization of heteronormative gender binary. I contend that this line of inquiry is useful and sorely needed, but it must also critically address the heteronormative gender binaries, the very discourse on which the local notions of queerness in Thailand is based.

practitioners themselves, discussing gender and sexuality can put their prestige at risk for bringing up “inappropriate” topics. Unlike the LGBT activists, queer classical performers are more heavily policed by a Thai national morality that emphasizes gender conformity. Breaking these normative codes can shatter not only their career but also their social status.

The incommensurability between the Western and the local notions of gender and sexual values, on the one hand, and the deliberate omission of scholarly inquiry of gender and sexuality in Thai classical performance, on the other, does and should not suggest the absence of queer subjectivities in Thai classical music. Effeminate men musicians are most visible queer subjects in the string music tradition called *khrueng saay*.⁴ Some teach in state-sponsored conservatories, while others work as guest lectures in university-level music programs. These musicians are often seen as judges in Thai classical music contests hosted by various universities, a growing trend following the decline of the once prestigious nation-wide yearly contest sponsored by the Ministry of Education during the past decade. On the eve of a *waikhruu*, or the teacher-honoring ritual, effeminate men musicians would assume the role of florists and event organizers to make sure that the ritual altar is well decorated with colorful flowers, the table covers are pleated and pinned, and that the white robe for the ritual leader is well-ironed. As integral as they are in the tradition, these musicians are rendered almost completely invisible in the canon of Thai classical music scholarship. There are a handful of out and respected effeminate men musicians, but their gender performance and sexuality were never topics of

⁴ There are also several gender-conforming queer musicians in Thai classical music, e.g., masculine-presenting gay musicians in *piiphaat* ensembles and feminine-presenting lesbians in the string counterpart. These musicians are, however, less marked in the tradition due to the lack of any signs of queerness, especially gender nonconformity. Although their social and musical lives present a distinctly queer perspective, my focus on this dissertation is mostly on queer men musicians who were marked by their effeminacy.

discussion, at least officially and publicly. The presence of effeminate men musicians poses a tricky dilemma to several tradition bearers. Effeminacy is as widely recognized as it is neatly hidden in the Thai classical music discourse. Queerness, while undeniably noticeable, poses no threat to undo the firmly established gender roles in this musical tradition. The tolerated presence of effeminate queer men musicians in Thai classical music signifies neither equity nor equality of gender roles in Thai classical music.

What does it mean when queerness does not interrogate heterosexist norms? If that is the case, how does queerness manifest itself when it mediates Thai classical music? These are the central questions I set out to answer in my dissertation. This work is an ethnography of musical and social lives of queer men musicians through various facets of Thai classical music, particularly in the *khrueng saay* เครื่องสาย or the string tradition. I explore various tactics with which queer men musicians display gender and sexual nonnormativity while upholding the morals and values of heteronormative gender roles on and off the stage. I trace how queer men draw on the established gender binary as a resource to articulate nonconforming gestures and desires through musical and embodied gestures. In addition, I investigate the complex interactions as queer men musicians grapple with notions of musical lineage and moral values. The heart of my dissertation centers on a group of musicians who are marginalized, sometimes discriminated, by the traditions' gendered practices because their ambiguous gender performances, and in effect sexuality, are uncategorizable under heteronormative constructs.

I thread together different experiences of queer men musicians through one overarching concept, “spicy” or *saep* in Thai. Spicy is often said among queer men string musicians as an accolade to an excellent performance, i.e., playing their instruments with an extremely high speed or rendering an attention-grabbing melody. However, to be and

remain spicy goes far beyond just simply adding exotic herbs or chilis, a culinary strategy that one follows to “spice things up.”⁵ I argue that the spicy performances of queer men musicians are and should not be reduced to a *kathoey*’s (effeminate men and transgender women) stereotypical act of over-the-top femininity.⁶ Nor is being spicy an innate ability of queer men musicians. On the contrary, spicy is a selective, planned, and strategic move in which queer men musicians unsettle the gender binary and articulate their queer subjectivity, while at the same time not explicitly refusing the very norms they unsettle. Echoing David Halperin’s statement, being spicy is “derigueur among...[queer men musicians] to confront straight society by deploying just so much queerness, just the right, premeasured dose of deviance and nonconformity” (Halperin 1995: 112). Being spicy necessitates queer men subjectivities. Being spicy provides an examining platform that exposes the normalized gender binary and heteronormativity inherent in the musical performances, musicking bodies, musical knowledge, and musical institutions.

At the same time, being spicy does not come without consequences. Articulating spiciness also means that a musician exposes themselves to criticisms. These criticisms may come from within the fellow queer men musicians who question the legitimacy of the very queer performance of spiciness. Depending on how one receives musical knowledge, musicking spicily can draw as much praises as gossip. If spiciness encapsulates displays of queerness, it becomes highly contentious from the watchful eyes

⁵ When used in Thai classical music, *saep*, connotes slightly different meanings and implications than when used originally in culinary context. While the term suggests that a musical performance is “tasty,” it is different from *aruay* อรุ่ย, a term used more commonly in *piiphaat* and string music, in that *saep* implies a sense of being resistive, being antinormative and nonconforming. For most queer men in Thai classical string music, *saep* performance indicates is one that is bold and courageous rather than necessarily sexy. Also, the association with Northeastern Thai ethnicity and culture is absent in this context. In other words, the newly appropriated meanings of *saep* become a somewhat new vocabulary for the queer community.

⁶ See Jackson 2016: 4–14 for more discussion of *kathoey*’s changing associated image in print media, and Dredge Käng 2014b for the same discussion but with respect to transnational media flow and K-Pop cover dance.

of the authoritative musical institutions. These institutions seek to maintain “clean” heteronormative images of Thai classical musicians at least in formal public performances, forcing queer men musicians to variously “claim heterosexual identity to...[gain]...real social and cultural privileges” (Seidman 2003: 12). As such, my use of spicity in queer men musicians does not simply endorse its empowering effect to queerness but also heeds the sexual, moral, and national stakes that come with it.

What I present in my dissertation is a critical examination of Thai classical music through the lens of gender and sexuality. It is more than just a capitalization of queer men musicians’ invisibility in the scholarship, nor is it about merely a sympathetic writing about their musical performances as though they are passive receiving ends of the sexual and gendered practices in the tradition. Instead, I deliberately situate these musicians as active players. With an agency to turn the otherwise subversive gender and sexual identities into an asset, I argue that these musicians do not simply submit to the systemic gender norms but rather constantly negotiate, challenge, downplay, and sometimes even reinforce them.

This dissertation offers an approach to understanding the resilience of queer musicking in a straight place in ways that disturb heteronormativity (Klotz 2021: 11), but pose no threat to it. I argue that queer presence in a non-Western classical music culture offers a unique position formed at the nexus of glocalized notions of gender and sexuality, class status, authority, and nationalism. In line with queer epistemological positions that explicitly disavow heteronormativity, and by extension homonormativity (Sedgwick 1990), I present a different mode of queer performances that are gendered at their core. There are nonetheless moments in these performances that are indeed queer, that is, inexplicable in heteronormative terms. This dissertation is not about me dwelling

on the explanation of what is queer in Thai classical music and what the queer men musicians are like. Instead, I draw on and extend Ashon Crawley's concept of otherwise possibilities (2017, 2020) beyond the intersections race, gender, sexuality, and religion to situate it in a classical music tradition of Thailand that is as strictly underpinned by the ideas of class, gender, and nationalism. The common denominator here is the emphasis on the minoritarian participation in and negotiation with the hegemonic discourse in an expressive culture. Effeminacy articulated by queer men musician may index femininity, but I argue that it also forms a site of queerness, the otherwise possibilities that obliquely identify with the heteronormative gender ideals of Thai classical music.

This dissertation is male-centered and thus does not by any means intend to make a sweeping generalization of queer musician experiences in Thai classical music. Women and queer women practitioners also merit serious scholarly attention, but this is beyond the scope of my dissertation.⁷ Writing about queer men musicians in Thai classical music is more than just an insight into the unheard-of sensual and homoerotic world music, which would have been a favorable ingredient to exacerbate the Orientalist fantasies of “sexual excess that infects both local and Western representations” (Morris 15). I approach the nonnormative phenomenological experiences of these musicians to join a broader conversation about music and sexuality, a field that is slow to arrive in ethnomusicology. At the same time, my dissertation aims to extend and nuance the rich

⁷ During my fieldwork, I have also interviewed both straight and queer women musicians. Masculine-presenting and *tom* (butch lesbians) musicians intersectionally experience distinct challenges of being queer women in a musical space that have long been dominated by men. I have met *toms* who played *piiphaat* instruments and went to gigs and concerts with ensemble members who are men. What struck me in my conversations with these musicians was that they did not feel the need to make their voices heard nor their presence seen. One *tom* musician commented that “we [*tom* musicians] usually just stay quiet (*rao kau yuu kan baeb ngiap ngiap yaang ngia* เราก็อยู่กับแบบเงิบบๆ อย่างเงิบ.” This shows that queer women musicians are indeed marginalized, but their musical experiences should not be conflated with those of the queer men.

scholarship of queer studies, particularly the intersectionality advanced by queer-of-color critiques, outside of the Euro-American cultural settings.

Gender Constructs and Thai Classical Music

I cannot overlook the gendering of musical practices and musicians and the ways they inform their musicking decisions. It did not take long for ethnomusicology to join the emergent “gender turn,” following the coalescing of feminist anthropology in the 1970s (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974; Rieter 1975; Ortner and Whitehead 1981; Ortner 1989). The field’s substantial early responses to this scholarly trend were two edited volumes by Ellen Koskoff (1987) and Marcia Herndon (1990), published within the span of three years. Koskoff’s edited volume considers women as a cultural construct that can be heightened, maintained, reversed, protested, or even challenged by means of the musical performance (1987: 4). Similarly, Herndon posits the constructedness of gender as “a culture-specific, inconsistent and variable precept that has more to do with social roles, age and status than with biology (Herndon et al. 1990: 12). Beyond the goal of rectifying the “concern over inequality in scholarly treatment of female musical behaviors” (Giglio 1993: 115), ethnomusicology’s shift toward music and women became an area in itself with literature that pushes the knowledge boundary of the relationship of the two in several different new directions (Sugarman 1997; Moisala and Diamond 2000; Meintjes 2004, 2009; A. K. Rasmussen 2010; Hayes 2010). In this spirit, I will provide a general overview of the heteronormative ideals that undergird Thai classical music.

It is impossible to write about the musical and social lives of queer men Thai classical musicians without discussing the intersectionality of gender and sexual constructs in Thai culture. Michael Peletz remarks that anthropologists have long been

interested in the “the deeply entrenched and broadly institutionalized traditions of pluralism with respect to gender and sexuality [in Southeast Asia]” (Peletz 2006: 311). The fascination can be traced to the colonial writings in the early modern era, circa fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a period in “Southeast Asia’s history that was characterized by relatively egalitarian relations between males and females, by a good deal of female autonomy and social control as well as considerable fluidity and permeability in gender roles...” (ibid.: 312). Peletz alludes to the prestigious status of cross-dressing, male-bodied individuals or “transgender ritual specialists” who is central to the local rituals like *nat kadaw* in Myanmar and *bissu* in Indonesia. However, such gender pluralism and fluidity were radically reconfigured as distinctly concrete identities during the late 17th to 18th century. Each respective state in the region began to determine specific gender roles of men and women, i.e., masculinity and femininity as an innate natural quality, based on religious orthodoxies and the Western modernity that equated gender to biological sex.⁸ The status of the transgender ritual specialist, whose identities were “uncategorizable” within the state-imposed heteronormative gender roles, became stigmatized and marginalized.

Gender egalitarianism, fluidity, and pluralism in Southeast Asia, as observed by Peletz, became a central topic for late 20th century anthropologists. Included in this corpus of literature are ethnographic fieldworks that explore the “relatively high status” of Southeast Asian women (see Atkinson and Errington 1990), the ways in which gender differences unfold in a local system of power and prestige (Sunardi 2020), the roles of transgender ritual specialist as a mediators between sacred and the human realms

⁸ I should note that some empires in Southeast Asian, most notably the Khmer, historically adopted patriarchal governing rules form Hinduism. The encounter between gender egalitarianism among the working-class people and patriarchy among those in the ruling-class therefore happened long before and was exacerbated by the advent of religious orthodoxies and Western modernity.

(Blackwood 2005; Ho 2009), and how queer subjects negotiate their citizenship under heteronormative nationalist agenda (Boellstorff 2004, 2006, 2007). Anthropological works on gender and sexuality in Southeast Asia serves as a useful backdrop as I consider gender and sexual dynamics in Thai culture.

While there are recent Thai-language anthropological works that employ feminist approaches to study gender as cultural constructs and the valorization of women roles across Southeast Asia (for example, Pranee 2006), some of these studies were criticized by post-structuralists anthropologists for several drawbacks. This includes, for example, the limited scope of household agrarian society samples without accounting for contentious encounters with the ruling-class patriarchal system and the encroaching colonial power, the uncritical predetermination of gender roles with biological sex, and its failure to question the ideological apparatus behind the very construction of these gender roles (Naruphon 2015). The gender egalitarianism may be a cultural characteristic of several Southeast Asian societies, but it was not the case at least for the ruling- and middle-class women who were treated as the property of men. It was the introduction of print capitalism along with the scientific knowledge from the Enlightenment era during the 18th century that sparked the conversation about legal reforms for women's rights, especially for those working in the royal household (see also Barmé 2002; Loos 2005; Andaya 2006).

I mention the contrasting gender dynamics inside and outside of the palace walls because gender constructs of Thai classical music are heavily shaped by both directions. Since Thai classical music was once a court tradition, most of its performance practices are direct remnants of the “high cultures” from the palace, including the gender roles. Concurring with the male-dominated cultures of the elites, the predominant court music

ensembles, *piiphaat* ปี่พาทย์, were exclusively performed by men. This “heavy” music—literally for its instrument size and figuratively for its functions in religious contexts—consisting of xylophones, gongs, reeds, drums, and cymbals, and available in a few variants, is mostly responsible for accompanying religious rituals and theatre performance. And because only this ensemble can play a specific sacred repertory called *naaphaat*, some of which requires a male-exclusive ordination into monkhood, women were not advised to participate in this tradition on the traditional belief that they hold lesser spiritual merit than men. The centrality of *piiphaat* music goes beyond the spiritual realm: it is key genre on which the formulation of Thai classical music theory is based (see Phunphit 1986; Sa-ngad 1989; Manop 1990; Chalerm Sak 1999).



Figure 1.2: The author [right, second row] played *ranaat thum* in a variant of *piiphaat* ensemble called *piiphaat naanghong* (ปี่พาทย์นางหงส์) during a Buddhist funeral in Ayutthaya province. Photo taken on November 8, 2020 by an audience member at the scene.

Most Thai classical music practitioners associate women with “lighter music” like string and *mahoori* มโหรี music.⁹ But such gender role assignments for string music only took shape in the last century. Women’s participation in this musical tradition reached its height during the reign of King Vajiravudh (reigned 1910-1925). In this period, formal string music lessons were taught to young girls who were born to a noble family and “deposited” to different palaces to learn the court etiquettes. The lesson was considered as a part of the skillset of an ideal woman, who were expected to excel in domestic spheres like culinary works and garland making. These values for women were created in opposition to the expected adventurous and patriotic characters of ideal men during that time. The insistent enforcement of these gender norms among the ruling-class Siam (Thailand’s former name) was largely due to the King Vajiravudh’s obsessive fascination with the Victorian England from his education there (Chanan 2019: 247). The imposition of these gender values went far beyond the private sphere of family institutions to represent one of the ruling class’s primary tools toward constructing an “imagined community” (Anderson 1986) of Siam nation state that was “civilized” or *siwilai* ศิวาลัย like the West (Winichakul 2000). Most importantly, these gender values were inseparably attached to classical performing arts of Central Thailand as a representation of the “high cultures.” Thai classical music has since been perceived along the line of binarized

⁹ Though both musical genres are similarly regarded as light music and often associated with femininity, both are distinct in its origin and practices. According to an often-cited writing by Thai music scholar Montri Tramote (1939), *mahoori* ensemble is believed to be one of the oldest court music, with its origin dating back to the Sukhothai empire (13th century). Originally consisting of four instruments: *sau saam saay* ซอสามสาย (three-stringed fiddle), *krajap pii* กระจับปี่ (plucked lute), *thoon* โทน (goblet shaped drum), and *krap phuang* กรับพวง (clapper set), *mahoori* ensemble today is a mixture of *piiphaat* and string ensemble with an addition of the three-stringed fiddle. String ensemble, on the other hand, was a modified format of the old *mahori* ensemble where stringed instruments like *sau duang* ซอด้วง (higher-pitched fiddle), *sau uu* ซออุ้ (lower pitch fiddle), and *jakhee* จะเข้ (floor zither) are added. Thai Historian Damrong Rajanubhab (1930: 12) remarks about the ensembles’ history that they were all once exclusively played by men, at least until the reign of King Mongkut (reigned 1851-1868).

gender ideology, that is, *piiphaat* being equated with macho-masculinity, while string ensemble with soft-femininity.

My allusion to the roles of men and women in Thai classical music should not obscure that fact that the entire system of Thai classical music—its practices, rituals, transmissions, and authority—is constructed to sustain and protect patriarchy (Wong 2001: 220). While it is tempting to deduce gender complementarity given the men’s association with *piiphaat* and women’s in string ensembles, women musicians are accorded little to no decision-making power in the tradition.¹⁰ The emergence of queer men musicians in the string ensemble indeed begs the reconsideration of masculinity in a more fluid and spectral ways, but it hardly grants women musicians any more agency. I am aware of the cultural pattern that queer men musicians in Thai classical music does not equate gender equity—many of my interlocutors believe that queer men do a better job in string ensembles than women. In this way, my examination of queer men musicians in string ensemble reaffirms the domination of male that crosses the gender lines.

Because Thai classical music was ardently supported by the ruling class and later the state as national music, participating in Thai classical music means representing the ideal Thainess or *khwaampenthai*. In other words, it is a measurement of legitimate citizenship. Those who practice this musical tradition are assured to acquire the desirable affects of being Thai, one of which is the gender roles. Playing this music suggests that

¹⁰ The most notable exception to this case is *Khunying* อุกุญชิง (Lady) Chin Sinlapabanleng, *Luang Praditpairoh*’s daughter. She was among the few women who was authorized to lead *waikhrui* rituals. Thai classical musicians usually consider Chin’s success as the ritual leader and her writings on Thai classical music as an extension of women’s authority, a common cultural pattern in Southeast Asia. However, I argue that such a conclusion overlooks other socio-political at play since Chin’s father was one of the most respected musicians to date. Her social and cultural capital thus became a crucial means toward her eventual recognition in the Thai classical music canon.

the intersection of gender and nationality denotes, to a certain extent, elitist association. Some practitioners deliberately capitalize on their participation in Thai classical music to garner social capital necessary for upward social mobilization. This socio-political backdrop of gender constructs in string music is crucial because many of the teachers of queer men musicians today were once palace musicians from the King Vajiravudh era. While the social and musical lives of queer men musicians that I present in this dissertation are indeed queer in many aspects, they are imbricated within the intersection of binarized gender constructs, nationality, and class status, all of which must be brought into account.

After the 1932 revolution that saw the absolute monarchy system replaced by constitutional monarchy, notions of idealized man- and womanhood still lingered. In fact, the controlling and policing heteronormative gender roles on Thai citizen were further reinforced by Field Marshall Phibun Songkhram in the infamous state decree called the Cultural Mandates (รัฐนิยม *ratthaniyom*). First enforced in 1939 as Thailand was thrown into the middle of international conflict of World War II after allying with the Axis powers, the Cultural Mandates adopted several cultural practices from the Western world to “civilize” the Thai citizens, including making men wear trousers and shirts whereas women wore blouses and skirts in public (men and women were usually topless when being outside at that time), having names that reflect their biological sex, propagating monogamy with patriotic men and domesticated women (Naruphon 2015; Jackson 2004). Conforming to the state-imposed gender norms presents yet another layer of meaning of prestige in addition to national citizenship, that is, being civilized.

Thai classical music becomes one of expressive cultural manifestations of the idealized Thai womanhood, one that is soft, gracious, timid, and submissive. One

example is Angsumalin, a Thai women protagonist in a historical fiction novel *Khuukam* คู่กรรม whose romantic affair would eventually end in tragedy with her Japanese soldier lover Kobori, is depicted as playing *jakhee* so graciously that Kobori falls for her. In a live action adaptation aired in 1990, however, Kamolchanok “Kwang” Khemayodhin, an actress who portrays Angsumalin, instead plays a dulcimer *khim* ขิม because she already knew how to play the instrument. *Khim* were quickly sold out in almost every instrument shop and instantly become a symbol of an idealized woman (*kunlasatrii* กุณาสตรี). Although other string instruments like *sau duang*, *sau uu*, and *jakhee* did not enjoy the same degree of public interest, they are similarly regarded as instruments of the proper Thai women.



Figure 1.3: Kamolchanok “Kwang” Khemayodhin plays *khim* as Angsumalin in the opening episode of *Khuukam* TV series, premiered in 1990. Screenshot taken from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9fX1efgf-jU>.

The ideal gendered practices since Phibun’s cultural mandate still inform what is heteronormative for Thai citizens today. In addition to certain gender-indicating materials like clothes (pants vs skirts/dress), social expectation of breadwinning men and household women, and naming of an individual, the most obvious illustration of

heteronormative gender distinction is in the use of two ending particles in a polite or formal conversation: *khrap* ครับ and *kha* ค่ะ. *Khrap* is to be said by a male speaker whereas *kha* by a female speaker. For example, if a man says hello in Thai, it would be *sawatdii khrap* สวัสดีครับ. If the speaker is a woman, the expression would be *sawatdii kha* สวัสดีค่ะ. This gender distinction becomes fuzzy when one uses a particle that does not align with one's perceived gender.¹¹ While there are more contextual nuances at play, it is often the case that one of the salient features of gender-nonconforming subjects in Thai cultures is the use of a particle other than one's perceived gender. *Tut* ตู้ต (effeminate men) or *kathoey* กะเทย (transgender women) would use *kha* to end a sentence, whereas *tom* (butch) would use *khrap*. In any case, the strategic (mis)use of *khrap/kha* particles by *tut*, *kathoey*, and *tom* not only reveals the deeply entrenched heteronormative constructs but also exposes moments when these constructs are misaligned with the gendered body.

As such, effeminate, transgender men, and butch women may illustrate the misalignment of the expected gender ideals with the gendered body but does not upend the said heteronormative constructs. Nonconformity in Thai culture is first read in terms of gender, that is, a *man* with a *woman's* gesture or vice versa, upon which sexual orientation is implied. Similarly, until the 1980s, homosexuality in Thai culture was not conceptualized as an identity *per se*. Rather, it is often read alongside gender nonconformity. For this reason, those with homosexual orientation but are gender normative will be less likely to be spotted for nonconformity. This cultural pattern still has a firm grip in Thai classical music community, and I use this premise as a point of departure in my dissertation. What happens when nonconforming men musicians

¹¹ It should be noted that there are also instances where a speaker intentionally switches to a different particle to show affection to the listener without necessarily implying gender nonconformity. For example, a normative woman may speak to her male students with the *khrap* particle.

participate in a musical performance that is associated with women? This question will be explored further in Chapter 3.

Outside of the state imaginary or gender idealism, string music today is a genre where queer men are mostly visible. Their visibility is further boosted by the public awareness of LGBT rights, which resulted in the more open public display of effeminacy of these musicians. While being aware of the movement, many of my queer men interlocutors did not feel the need to identify themselves as part of the LGBT community. And as much as queer men musicians have sustained Thai classical music's vitality, it is undeniable that their gender performance is antithetical to the gender roles endorsed by the state authority. Public displays of effeminacy can be a controversial subject because it puts the idealized masculinity in crisis (Käng 2018). String music is symbolic of the state's imaginary of idealized femininity, yet the majority of those who inhabit this musical space present a stark contrast to that ideology. What then are the musical, cultural, and social mechanisms that are at work behind queer men musician's role and place in string music? And what do their various modes of participation in this musical tradition tell us about queerness as it intersects with musical performances? Most importantly, what is at stake to perform and embody nonnormative musical performances? These are the central questions I set out to ask in this dissertation. Having laid out how gender constructs work weaved into the local understanding of queer men and Thai classical music, now I turn to the central subject of this study: queer and queerness in Thai classical music.



Figure 1.4: Government-issued advertisement during the Cultural Mandates era depicting the do's and don'ts regarding dressing in public. The left frame depicts the dresses of “uncivilized” Thais to be abandoned, whereas the right frame shows the “civilized” Thai dresses that everyone should follow. Photo courtesy of https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e8/Thai_culture_poster.PNG.

Situating Queer and Queerness in Thai Classical Music

I have so far been using the term queer to describe a specific subjectivity of men musicians in this dissertation. It is therefore acutely necessary that I clarify how queer and queerness is activated in this research. In my dissertation, queer is “most useful in its ability to reference an analytical perspective that explores the ways in which heteronormativity is challenged and subverted” (Sinnott 2012: 472). However, mapping this theoretical lens into Thai cultural context must be done cautiously because sex, gender, and sexuality are conceptualized differently in this region. Rosalind Morris, referring to *Pathamamuulamuulii* ปฐมมูลมุณี, the Thai treaty of the Northern origin or Lanna, notes the tripartite logic of the Thai sexual identity consisting of *phuuchaay* ผู้ชาย (male), *phuuying* ผู้หญิง (female), and *kathoey* กะเทย

(transvestite/transsexual/hermaphrodite) (Morris 1994: 19). Extending Morris's observation, Tamara Loos remarks that "many of Southeast Asia's sex/gender systems differ from those in the United States and Europe in the former's historical tradition of three genders, each with their own ontological status that were not reducible to one another" (2020: 935). The system of three genders forms a basis on which the more recent hetero/homosexual binary operates. In other words, homosexuality is conceptualized based on one's performance of gender identity.

Perter Jackson is perhaps the most notable scholar not only for his sustained interests in male homosexuality in Thailand but also in his attention to the limits of Michel Foucault's theory of sexuality when applied cross-culturally (Jackson 1995; Sullivan and Jackson 2000; Jackson 2000, 2004, 2012). Jackson argues that "[s]exuality conceived in Foucauldian terms has no history in Thailand, remaining discursively bound to gender" (Jackson 2000: 417), meaning that sexual orientations are considered as part of the "categories" of eroticized genders. In other words, the ideas of sexual orientations in Thai cultural concept are expressed in terms of heteronormative gender constructs (see Käng 2014a). The intersection of the Thai traditional system of the "three genders" with the ruling-class's imposition of the Western heteronormative gender roles gave rise to an understanding of the modern Thai genderscapes that individuals with homosexuality will always exhibit cross- or transgender behaviors (Naruphon 2019: 141). Same-sex relationships in Thai society, especially female ones, are thus often marked by heteronormative gender roles where one adopts masculine comportment (*tom* ทอม) and the other embraces feminine gender expressions (*dee* ดี๋) (Sinnott 2004).¹² Likewise,

¹² While this is still true at the time of writing, Megan Sinnott also notes in her subsequent study that there are attempts to eliminate gender binary discourse in female same-sex relationships and that there are increasing romantic relationships among *tom* or butch lesbians (Sinnott 2012).

kathoey, a feminine men or transgender women, are variously looked down upon and stigmatized with derogatory labels because of their refusal “to listen to others’ calls for them to conform to dominant gender norms” (Jackson 2016: 13). Same-sex relationships and homosexuality in Thailand is not considered a subject of serious concern as long as it remains a private matter and those participating in it conform to the established gender norms. Likewise, what brings an individual’s sexual morality into question is the deviance from the heteronormative gender norms. *Kathoey* and *tom* are thus marked for the gender “deviancy,” not homosexuality. Queer men musicians in this dissertation do not necessarily refer to those who refuse to conform to the heteronormative categorical “boxes,” but rather those whose nonconforming gender performances in social and musical interaction place them in a marginalized position as being “sexually deviant.” At the same time, this nonconformity also exposes the deeply entrenched heteronormative gender binary, elitism, nationalism, and moral citizenship in Thai classical music.

Despite the lack of legal sanctions against homosexuality in Thailand, this does not mean that homosexuality is an acceptable behavior, as Peter Jackson writes:

The sexuality of Thai homosexual men is constrained by social norms of “appropriateness” (*somkhuuan* or *mor-som*): of abiding by what are regarded as the acceptable public norms of behaviour, dress, speech, and appearance for men. In Thailand, appropriateness does not denote something that is absolutely or divinely right, but rather what those around one regard as the proper thing to do...In a society based on collective or group values, what others think of one—and not simply how others act in relation to one—becomes a significant social force for ensuring conformity. Thai homosexual men are likely to feel the acute condemnatory force of subtle changes in body language, attitude, or tone of voice that a Westerner may overlook or regard as insignificant (2016: 83–84).

The duty to abide by the social norms of appropriateness, in which case the proper performance of masculinity (because they are male), and the strategic, selective display of effeminacy is what queer men musicians whom I met during my fieldwork had to face

on a regular basis. While some queer men musicians spoke openly about their effeminacy and homoerotic desires, there were also others who preferred to remain silent in this regard.¹³ This deepened my reluctance to use a catch-all term like *kathoey* because none accurately reflect the entire gamut of their subjectivity.

The Thai concept of three genders—and by extension sex-gender determinism—is most evident in its language. Thai language does not distinguish between sex, gender, and sexuality, all of which are subsumed in an umbrella word *pheet* or เพศ. Nonnormative genders like *kathoey* and *tom* are usually lumped into the “third gender” or *pheet thii saam* เพศที่สาม category. Those who identified and are identified with the third gender are usually described with negative sexual conditions, including being sexually deviant (*biangbeen thaang pheet* เบี่ยงเบนทางเพศ), wrongly sexed (*phit pheet* ผิดเพศ) or sexually transgressive (*lakkapheet* ลักเพศ). Homosexuality, a Western derived concept, is known generally as *rak ruam pheet* รักร่วมเพศ and perceived as a variant of the two normative genders of men and women with equally negative connotations. In this way, gender categories in everyday talk are visibly distinguishable by outward appearance (Käng 2012: 476). Despite the increased awareness in gender and sexuality studies in Thailand since 2007 that saw the recently-coined Thai terms for gender (*pheetphaawa* เพศภาวะ), sexuality (*pheetwithii* เพศวิถี), same-sex relationships (*rak pheet diaw kan* รักเพศเดียวกัน), and “alternative genders” (*pheet thaang lueak* เพศทางเลือก) (Naruphon 2013: 42),

¹³ The reluctance to “come out” can be observed among Thai homosexual men beyond Thai classical music circles. For both *kathoey* and gay men, there is a constant pressure that their gender performance should conform with their biological sex. Peter Jackson notes that “[t]o be publicly identified as homosexual or gay remains a source of considerable shame involving “loss of face” (*sia naa*) and “damage to one’s image” (*sia phaap-phot* เสียภาพพจน์)” (2016: 67). To “come out” means that one is putting their heteronormative public image at risk. And doing so could cause adverse consequences, i.e., being a subject of shaming gossip that irreversibly damages one’s reputation. Because string music is associated with femininity, men musicians who participate in this tradition are automatically suspected over gender-nonconforming and homosexuality. Men musicians in *piiphaat* music, however, do not face such pressure due to the music’s perceived masculine character.

colloquial conversations are still rooted in the traditional three-gender concept that portrays both gender-nonconformity and homosexuality in a negative light.

This dissertation contributes to the rich scholarship of critical gender and sexuality studies in Southeast Asia, particularly regarding the region's fluid gender constructs that defy a wholesale application of the related theoretical frameworks of gender, sexuality, and queer studies, stemming from Euro-American thinkers. Though my focus is on queer men in Thai classical music, this does not mean that I am representing a niche, conservative, and elite Southeast Asian musical tradition whose concepts on gender and sexuality withstand the encroaching ideas from West. Rather, as has been the case throughout Southeast Asia, the local concepts of gendered sexuality have had a complex intermixing with the imported ideas of hetero/homosexuality. In light of such encounters, what I present in the following chapters reflects another instance of fluid gender and sexuality from and within a specific ethnographic setting.

One notable characteristic of gender and sexual fluidity in Southeast Asia is that queerness may not be considered a positionality. This is particularly true among queer men associated with traditional performing arts, including spirit mediums *nat kadaw*, beautician, and pageantry. Lynette Chua notes the distinction of grievance-driven LGBT movements and the respected queer men professionals that inform the latter to “treat their niche occupational worlds and LGBT activism as separate parts of their lives” (2019: 84–85). Although Chua attributes the conflicting stance to what she calls a “distinctive emotion culture” (ibid.), it can also be implied that the older queer men appeared to be passive about gender and sexual oppression. They just did not see the need of making their gender and sexual identities visible, let alone politicizing it. A parallel can be drawn with the Thai classical music scene. I have met several queer men in this tradition who

made no secret about their nonconformity as well as their support of the recent LGBT activism previously described. Yet, there are also several of them who did not feel the need to appear girlish or *auk saao* ออกสาว beyond the musical space. The world of queer men in Thai classical string music may appear to be removed from other political movements, but both are certainly affecting and are affected by one another. This shows the fluidity of the queer, both as positionality and analytical perspective, from an ethnographic point of view as it moves between being highly politicized and invisible. And by addressing this fluidity, I am embracing the confusion and allow the contradictions to stand without boxing them into certain categories.

It did not take long for me to realize that it was almost impossible to present an elevator speech when I tried to introduce my research project to my interlocutors. I tried saying “I am doing research about *pheet* in Thai classical music” (ผมทำวิจัยเกี่ยวกับเรื่องเพศในดนตรีไทย *phom tham wijai kiaw kap rueang pheet nai dontrii thai*), but my interlocutors would assume that I was solely interested in sex—as in love making. I then had to further explain that I focused on the “alternative gender” in Thai classical music (ผมเน้นไปที่เพศทางเลือกในดนตรีไทย *phom nen pai thii pheet thaang lueak nai don trii thai*). At this point, there are two possible outcomes. Either my interlocutors would get a sense of my dissertation—one of my interlocutors even described my work in rhyming words about the subject of my research: string music, beautiful men (*khruelang saay chaay suay* เครื่องสายชายสวย)—or they would bring their eyebrows together in confusion because they had not seen or heard of such works at the academic level before. Either way, even though my questions are firmly directed to heteronormative critique, I had to explain my work and myself in gendered terms.

There seemed to be no concerted way in which my queer men interlocutors in string music tradition identify themselves. But in the middle of this seeming confusion, my interlocutors were quick to “categorize” themselves along the gender lines. Some of my interlocutors would use a catch-all term *kathoey* to refer to both effeminate, gender-normative men who are homosexual as well as transgender women. Again, homosexuality is not the differentiating factor here, but rather the spectrum of effeminacy that these musicians do or are claimed to exhibit. Another term that I often heard from my interlocutors was *tut* ตุ๊ด, meaning sissies, referring exclusively to effeminate homosexual men.¹⁴ While effeminacy is registered through “subtle changes in body language, attitude, or tone of voice” (Jackson 2016: 52), not all queer men musicians are visibly effeminate. In fact, several queer men musicians tend to distance themselves from identifying with the *kathoey*. Since being *kathoey* is often regarded as an “uncivilized” gender of choice due to its perceived traditional subjectivity that suggests backwardness and unruliness, several queer men interlocutors tend to identify themselves as *gay*, a gender-normative homosexual men, and maintain a gender-conforming public persona.¹⁵ Again, their gender performances can shift from being a gender-conforming *gay* in one place and time to fully embodying feminine comportment like *kathoey* in others. This means that the marginalization of nonnormative men musicians in string music tradition is unavoidable no matter which terms I choose.

¹⁴ Dredge Käng (2019: 21) notes that *tut* identify with femininity through, for example, presenting a feminized comportment and sartorial aesthetic, and often use female speech patterns (such as the *-kha* คำ/ค่ะ female polite particle and terms like *jang-loey* จังเลย that express feminine mood or affect), they think of themselves as essentially male.

¹⁵ I deliberately italicize the word *gay* to distinguish it from gay as defined by the standard English language. As I mentioned earlier, the introduction of the Western concept of hetero/homosexuality binary in Thai cultural construct led to its gendering. Homosexuality thus did not replace the Thai sexual/gendered concepts but was instead added to already-existing gendered sexuality. *Gay* in Thai understanding thus is included in the third gender along with *kathoey*, *tom*, *dee*, etc.

Further, I was also cognizant of not just *what* but also *how* my interlocutors identified themselves. For example, when someone identified with a gendered identity, one would say in Thai, “*chan pen phuuying* ฉันเป็นผู้หญิง (I am a woman)” or “*chan pen phuuchaay* ฉันเป็นผู้ชาย (I am a man)” or “*chan pen kathoey* ฉันเป็นกะเทย (I am *kathoey*).” While the first two statements are common, the third is almost never said in everyday circumstances. This includes other nonnormative gendered identities subsumed within the “third gender” category. Many of my interlocutors chose to identify themselves indirectly by just saying “...am like this เป็นแบบนี้ (*pen baep nii*)” or just simply “am เป็น (*pen*)” without explaining any further. These indirect, open-ended responses were the answer and needed no further explanation; and I took this cue respectfully. That sexuality of my interlocutors is understood but not stated becomes a challenge for me to set a working definition. How should I state the understood-but-not-spoken and avoid misrepresenting my interlocutors all at the same time?

The beauty and the mystery of the open-ended, indirect responses of my interlocutors about their identities encapsulates queer social formation, affect, and the world. By saying *pen*, queer men musicians refuse to be pinned down categorially and ask to be left wondering, and the discursive effect of saying *pen* informs my decision to how I describe my interlocutors in my dissertation. I choose to represent the interlocutors who appear in my dissertation and associated with string tradition in Thai classical music as “queer men” musicians. I follow Megan Sinnott’s use of queer as a reference to the various sex/gender categories that revolve around same-sex sexuality and transgenderism (2012: 472). I understand that “queer” is rarely embraced as an identity marker amongst Thai *kathoey*, *gay*, *tom*, *dee*, etc., nor is the term interchangeable with any of the local understandings of sexual/gendered constructs. However, the term allows for the sidestepping any fixed gendered sexualities of my interlocutors—just like how they

described themselves simply as *pen*. Using queer to designate my interlocutors does not lose its power to suggest their nonconformity with the heteronormative gender norms, and leaves their genders and sexuality mysterious and open-ended, just like how they defined themselves.

I choose to refer to my interlocutors as queer *men* over queer *male* to foreground the musician's gendered subjectivities that are introduced, transformed, and made ambiguous during the performance of string music. My use of the word men goes beyond simply anchoring my interlocutors to the fixed biological traits of being male. It invites an examination of the specific shade of men defined into the tenets of Thai classical music and opens several shades more that are coterminous but never until now acknowledged. I am aware of the contradictory pairing of queer and men together, but such pairing accommodates the situated complexity of *pheet* as an umbrella term of sex/gender/sexuality while moving beyond and around it at the same time. "Queer men" does not just denote the open-endedness of my interlocutor's gendered sexuality; it also suggests what their choice of performance and performativity should/cannot be hastily reduced along the heteronormative gender lines. While some queer men musicians in my research are indistinguishable from "normal" men, others may be as heavily invested in cosmetics, make-up, and jewelry as they are in the musical prowess. They may plunge into a long conversation about pageant contest, and the handsomeness of the male actor in the latest series. But to be sure, they all identified themselves as men musicians. I felt that no further explanation was needed for them—they just "are," and queer men as a term reflects just that. Queer men may be unsettling, but it is exactly what my interlocutors do.

Civil and Gendered Bodily Practices of Thai Classical Musicians

For Thai classical musicians, one of the most obvious displays of queerness is effeminate bodily practices by musicians who are men. Effeminacy may be pointedly heightened by playing, for example, *jakhee* (floor zither) and *sau* (the fiddles) whose seating position and musical gestures are feminized due to the less spread-out body language. At the same time, effeminacy is also believed to be an innate disposition of queer men musicians in string ensemble. In most circumstances, queer men musicians must “keep conditions” (เก็บอาการ *kep aakaan*) or “*khiip luk* คีพ ลุก” (literally to keep their look) by withholding any bodily gestures that reveal their gender nonconformity and thus lead to homosexual suspicion—the curated bodily practices of queer men musicians apply to both on and off stage.

I consider queer men’s necessity to keep their look not just a pressure to conform gender-wise, but a social tactic to navigate within a “terrain of archetypes in which fields of power, morality and experience shape its continually shifting boundaries over time” (Käng 2012: 479). The fields of power and morality are greatly pronounced in Thai classical music, a court-fostered style of music that is disseminated within and representative of the citizenry of an entire nation-state (Myers-Moro 2004: 188). Thus, the questions of when, where, and how queerness can and should be displayed in this context do not only concern gender and sexuality but intersect with morality and manners, two important bodily practices that signify civil citizenship.

Being a “civilized” or *siwilai* in Thai was the central theme among the Thai ruling class during the state formation and nation building period of the 19th century. It was an attempt to modernize—adopting and localizing Western cultural practices and values—Siam, subsequently renamed to Thailand after 1939, to minimize the preconditions of

colonization (Winichakul 2000: 532). The top-down attempt of making Thailand *siwilai*, which continued after the colonial encroachment into the mid-20th century, is most evident in the domain of bodily practice. Beyond the justification of “national progress,” the state’s standardization of personal hygiene, dress, deportment, language, and sex intensified the social and geographical distinction within Thailand (Peleggi 2007: 66). One domain of bodily practice that demonstrates Thailand’s civilizing mission and social distinction is manners.

Thai historian Patrick Jory, writing on the history of manners in Thailand, notes that the performance of good manners is heavily imbued with socio-cultural values and therefore requires training with a large corpus of literature teaching:

“such things as how to stand, walk, sit, pay homage, prostrate oneself and crawl in the presence of high-status people, sleep, eat, manage bodily functions, dress, pay respect to superiors, deal with inferiors, socialize, use one’s time, and how to work and play” (Jory 2021: 2).

Beyond the esoteric knowledge of bodily practices, manners are also fraught with state control:

Rather than denoting old-fashioned notions of desirable social etiquette, manners in Thailand in the modern period are better understood as binding, state-sanctioned codes of normative behaviour [*sic*]. Over the course of the twentieth century conduct has been highly contested between competing political forces and ideological visions. Manners have become politicized and the pressure to conform is acute. (ibid.: 8).

Manners that are regarded as “good behavior” and a reflection of a *phuudii* ฝู้ดึ or the “gentleperson” include a variety of self-constraints. This includes “losing one’s composure” (ibid.: 79), whether one is overwhelmed with delight, anger, or sexual desires. Interestingly, however, Jory argues that *phuudii* behaviors apply to both men and

women because good manners are the determinant of class rather than gender (148).¹⁶ But with acute condemnatory reaction toward subtle change in male body language, attitude, or tone of voice like feminine comportment, female speech patterns, e.g., *kha* ค่ะ/ค่ะ or *khaa* คำ polite particle (Jackson 2011: 51; Käng 2019: 24), it is safe to say that nonconforming gender performance is also a deviance from being *phuudii*. It is not unusual that effeminate men are told to “keep look” for effeminacy is considered as an example of losing one’s gender composure.

The manners of *phuudii* and the pressure to hetero-present oneself is further complicated by the relationship of state institutions and Thai performing arts. The government official or *khaaraatchakaan* ข้าราชการ is perhaps the ideal example of an individual who possesses a high degree of self-control of emotions, is respectful to superiors and subordinate, and is loyal to the monarchy (Jory 2021: 67). Most importantly, *khaaraatchakaan*, as a form of royal bureaucracy, opened up a new avenue of social mobility to commoners with a modern Western education, i.e., grade-schools and universities (ibid.: 70). Thai classical music was fully endorsed by the government whether through conservatories like *Witthayaalai Naataasin* วิทยาลัยนาฏศิลป์ (College of Dramatic Arts), which has 12 campuses located across the country, formal music education in grade schools, military bands, police bands, Fine Arts Department, or The

¹⁶ For the interest of my dissertation, I intentionally omit the discussion on the contested values of manners between aristocracy and the emerging bourgeoisie in the 20th C. Thai culture. Patrick Jory (2021) has provided a remarkable analysis of the shift in the meaning of *phuudii* before it was understood as an epitome of both aristocracy and bourgeoisie in the early 21st C. Thailand. It is in this context that I am approach the concepts of *phuudii* with a special attention to gender, sexuality, and classical performing arts.

Government Public Relations Department.¹⁷ There are multiple options for Thai classical music practitioners to become *khaaraatchakaan*.

Another point worth noting is Thai classical performing arts, especially classical dancing or *naattasin* นาฏศิลป์, has become an embodied form of cultural capital. Participating in this performing art is associated with the courtly styles of disciplining the body, the new middle class and Thai national identity (Jory 2021: 232). Thai classical dance provides greater value and visibility of cultural and national authenticity of the individual through the preservation of the courtly habitus and the national culture. As trained practitioners in Thai classical dance are expected to develop refined manners, they automatically assume the roles “preserving the arts and cultures of the nation” (อนุรักษ์ศิลปวัฒนธรรมของชาติ *anurak sinlapa watthanatham khaung chaat*). The intersection of embodied class status and nationalism form two major cultural axes around which classical performing arts practitioners with nonnormative gender performance must navigate particularly in government organization (Sura 2016). But the highly charged moral and national values also mean high demand to conform and thus self-censorship. Queer men classical dancers capitalize the stage performance to emphasize their gender nonconformity but are likely to downplay their offstage gender performance as irrelevant. It is for this reason that queer studies in Thailand tend to focus on popular staged performances, for it is less removed from the lived experiences (Sappachang 2003; Premprida 2006; Phaunthep 2013; Wacharawuth 2016).

Given that Thai classical music is regarded as a cultural tool with which one absorbs the bodily dispositions of a gentleperson to embody “authentic” Thainess or

¹⁷ University professors were once a part of *kharaatchakaan* system before a legal reform, effective since 1999, that saw Thai public universities gradually transition out of the royal bureaucracy and gain more autonomy. This transition process is also known as *auk nuak rabob* ออกจากระบบ, literally translated as “going out of the system.”

khwaampenthai, my examination of queer men musicians brings gender-sexuality interwovenness and nonnormative performances into the equation of manners and civility and extends queer performance studies to an unusual realm: a classical music tradition wherein queer practitioners subscribe to the established heteronormative gender practices.

Queer, Sexuality, and Ethnomusicology: Better Late Than Never

Ethnomusicology scholarship has only begun to consider issues around music and sexuality seriously at the turn of the millennium. The Gender and Sexuality taskforce, an initiative launched by the Society for Ethnomusicology in 2004, made the first reference to LGBTQ communities three years after the initiative's conception.¹⁸ The taskforce has a dedicated webpage of bibliographies on, for example, "Women's Studies/Gender Studies," "Transsexual Studies/Intersexual Studies," and "Queer Theory/Gay & Lesbian History."¹⁹ However, this site was last updated in 2008, thirteen years ago from the time of writing. It took exactly twenty five years after the first publication of *Queering the Pitch* (1994), an edited volume from historical musicology, for ethnomusicology to come up a similar companion-like edited volume *Queering the Field* in 2019. In its introduction written by Gregory Barz, he admitted that the ethnomusicology has been late to discuss the connection between sexuality and ethnographic research of music. Barz attributes the reluctant engagement to the fact that "ethnomusicology was in a sense already queer (at least relative to music history and music theory)" (Barz 2020: 12), to which I partially agree. Ethnomusicology's approach is indeed queer in the sense that it is, as Deborah Wong reflects, doubly feminized (Wong 2015: 178) as an "outsider" in its related fields, i.e., musicology and anthropology (Moon 2020: 15). But Barz's suggestion should not be

¹⁸ <http://gstsem.pbworks.com/w/page/8504924/2007%20report>.

¹⁹ <http://gstsem.pbworks.com/w/page/8504929/Bibliographies>.

the justification toward ethnomusicology's sidestepping sexuality and heteronormativity in its literature. Barz's suggestion aside, *Queering the Field* not only centers queerness from both methodological and theoretical standpoints, but also acknowledges its fluidity when extended into non-Western musical cultures.

My dissertation joins the broader conversation about ethnomusicology and sexuality to hasten the firm anchoring of this area in the field. I follow Barz's approach to queer theories that center nonnormative performances, as well as gendered and sexualized performing bodies who are marginalized by the heteronormative constructs of their musical tradition. The queer theoretical toolkit forces us to reconsider modes of cultural production that do not align with, and subsequently fall through, cracks in heteronormativity. The crack to which I allude should not be regarded as simply a gap. Instead, I conceptualize this crack as constituting distinct social organizations that appropriate, parody, and refuse the norms from the marginalizing heteronormative realms. And to understand what it is like to fall into the crack, one must experience being in one. For that I find queer nightlife scholarship a highly useful avenue, both analytically and metaphorically.

Reflecting on doing ethnographic fieldwork as a queer woman ethnomusicologist in nightclubs, Luis-Manuel Garcia writes "nightlife provides a realm of activity that is at a remove from everyday life; as such, it holds open an imaginative space for play, experimentation, and self-fashioning" (2020: 337); and "most nightlife spaces—especially dancefloors—are saturated with sexual desires" (ibid 340). This embodied expression of sexual desires within nightclubs and dancefloors is never neutral, but in constant negotiation whether that nightlife space is straight- or queer-oriented (Hidalgo 2009). It is this playful, experimental, and self-refashioning of nightclubs and dancefloor

that, I argue, is linked with the queer men musicians in the string ensemble of Thai classical music. This musical tradition is “at a remove” from the dominant Thai classical music discourse whose theorization is almost solely based on *piiphaat* (Garzoli 2015: 9). And because the *piiphaat* tradition forms a sonic backdrop of the *waikhruu*—a teacher-honoring ritual and perhaps the most-heavily featured cultural context by ethnomusicologists—string ensemble and those who practice it is thought to have little to no ramifications to the advancement of Thai classical music scholarship and its discourse. It is not surprising that the scholarship about the string music is populated by works that analyze, with a predictable pattern, a musical piece from a notable string musicians (see, for example, Natthaphong 2012). While these works offer a great deal of historical information about string musicians—and I draw extensively from it—it also leaves out a massive scholarly gap that would have generated dialogs toward the socio-political aspects within this musical tradition. The scholarship heavily celebrates the esoteric musical legacy, but hardly acknowledges queer men musicians who for better or worse sustain the string music—some of my interlocutors even argued that queer men sustained the entire Thai classical music tradition!

That the performances of queer men Thai classical musicians in string ensemble is analogous to nightlife and by extension dancefloors means that they constitute their own code of conduct, what Kareem Khubchandani calls the “pedagogies,” against which transnational gay Indian partygoers are surveilled and policed. These may come in the form of dress code, entry fees, drink options, gate opening time, etc., But this nightlife pedagogy is not always obediently abided by, as Khubchandani puts it:

Nightlife molds and shapes its participants into political subjects, and those subjects participate through debate, resistance, refusal, and consent. Nightlife traffics in a different set of political tools, relying less on the didactic verbiage of systemic and social change, instead orienting its subjects and patrons through a

variety of sensorial instruments. Dancers at the club too debate, resist, refuse, and consent to the beat. (Khubchandani 2020: 23).

Following Khubchandani's concept of "accenting," i.e., to deliberately articulate one's subjectivity that does not align with the prescribed pedagogy, I argue that string music turns queer men musicians into *accenting* and *accented* participants. What queer men musicians differ from the transnational gay Indian night life participants in Khubchandani's work is that they first and foremost consent to the entrenched gender ideology in the string music before finding an opening to debate, resist, and refuse that very ideology.

I argue that queer men musicians strategically accent against the pedagogy of the imaginary nightclub of Thai classical music in two ways. Some of them perform these accents through deliberate musical and embodied gestures that attract attention. Such articulated feats are considered, often with negative implications, as a feminine affect inherent in queer men musicians. However, I deliberately direct my focus to these seemingly queer, over-the-top, accented moments because they constitute the ethos of "spicy," i.e., musical and embodied gestures that simultaneously unsettle the established gender binary and open queer subjectivity.

Not all accents are "spicy" through and through. Some accents are heavily surveilled among queer men musicians as they delimit a social boundary of a musical lineage using musical and embodied gestures. Those who do not exhibit the predetermined qualities within a musical lineage are thus "accented" out of the group. While one may argue that such social organization of guarding musical knowledge also exists in *piiphaat* tradition (Myers-Moro 1993), my point is that the guarding and policing of musical lineage among queer men musicians occurs among the students. This is important because it reveals the ways in which gender, sexuality, class, and lineage

intersect beyond the simplistic linear direction of teacher-student commonly understood in the *piiphaat*-centric Thai classical music canon.

Tes Slominski's *Trad Nation* (2020), a monograph that examines the ethno-nationalism behind Irish traditional music or trad when its mode of participation becomes transnational and fraught with the politics of race, gender, and sexuality, inspired my dissertation in many ways. Trad's nationalistic identification with straight White men is surprisingly similar to the constructed values accorded to Thai classical music, the music of the straight elite men. Likewise, women's place in these traditions is somewhat constrained, while queer subjectivity is almost completely made absence. In this way, I follow Slominski's lead to interrogate discrimination based on nonnormative identity characteristics in Thai classical music, a musical scene that, like Irish trad, is described as open and welcoming (Slominski 2020: 11). During this research, several queer musicians told me that this music tradition was queer-friendly. As convincing as it is, this statement was immediately muted when Thai classical music was discussed in terms of national performing arts that encapsulate the values and spirits of Thai nation and its cultures. Queerness is positioned as a threat to Thainess or *khwaampenthai* (Käng 2014b: 479). What was assumed as queer-friendly could also be read as the "queer-tolerated-but-not-accepted" musical space. By interrogating assumptions of queer-friendly spaces in Thai classical music, I chart the underlying heterosexism that often goes undetected by those who are not subject to its aggressions and exclusions. Thai classical music has always been celebrated as national heritage, but the heteronormativity that undergirds this prestige has rarely, if at all, been questioned. This dissertation aims to do just that.

I extend the analytical lens of queer theories to interrogate queer subjects in classical expressive cultures. Queer subjects in Southeast Asian popular cultures have

gained scholarly attention in the past three decades (J. N. Garcia 1996; Blackwood 2005; Ho 2009; Decker 2020; Cannon 2020), including Thai popular cultures (Premprida Pramote na Ayutthaya 2006; Jackson 2011; Phaunthep Phrae-khao 2013). In the region's classical performing arts however, the approach is relatively less vibrant. Among such works are Christina Sunardi's examinations of cross-gender performances in Java to illustrate the fluidity and power of masculinity and femininity (Sunardi 2015, 2020), and Henry Spiller's analysis of various modes of men performances in West Java that resist orthodox gender ideologies (2010), as well as the transgender performance in *Topeng Cirebon* from North Java, in which he challenges the taken-for-granted "conventional associations of cross-dressing with homosexual desire, deviancy, and transgender identities" (Spiller 2020: 214). Works by Sunardi and Spillers show that research about queer theories and subjects have been much more advanced in dance than in any other classical performing arts.

A few writings on Thai classical dance resonate with this scholarly trend, particularly in all-male performances. Sura Intamool focuses on cross-dressing in *lakhaun nauk* as a genre of queer performance and a tolerated site for Thai queer identity. Contrary to Spiller, Sura's interlocutors contend that men who are good at cross-dressing and portraying cross-gender roles are likely to be *kathoey*; some of them regarded themselves as a role model for younger aspiring *kathoey* classical dancers (Sura 2016: 84–85). However, Sura did not provide any discussion regarding the pressure faced by the respected *kathoey* classical dancers from the prestigious Fine Arts Department to set an example by "behaving in an appropriate way to be accepted in the society" (ibid.: 86), that is, to pass as straight to avoid harsh social sanctions.

Similarly, Chanan examines the King Vajiravudh's investment in various all-male performances as male homosocial communities in the palace proliferated in his reign. Like Intamool, Chanan argues that in the inner court all-male dance cross-dressing and cross-gender performances were common and homoerotic desires occurred (Chanan 2019: 188–94). Chanan's work demonstrates that homoerotic abounds even in Thailand's most sacralized royal institution that is painted with idealism and responsible for setting the public morality through heteronormative gender lines. However, in my brief conversation with Chanan in a social audio app Clubhouse, he said that he had no information about cross-gender performances or queer subjects in Thai classical music during the Vajiravudh period. His answer surprised me given the close relationship between the classical music and dance in the Thai court, thus reiterating the gap in the scholarship. In light of this, I draw on queer theories not to expose queer men in Thai classical music and leave them vulnerable. Instead, I activate queer theoretical frameworks to value queer men musicians' musical, embodied, and performative decisions, to position these actions against the Thai classical music as *modus operandi*, and to illustrate how and why these actions do not, at least for now, entirely escape the heteronormative grasp.

Throughout this dissertation, I will illustrate moments of queerness. Whether these moments are manifest without the presence of queer subjects themselves (Chapter 2) or necessitate queer men musicians for its full effect (Chapter 3 and 4), they reveal specific modes of performance that do not conform to the established heteronormative gender norms. Rather than drawing a line between what/who is and is not queer, I am invested in treating moments of queerness in Thai classical music as relational to its normative practices. In a sense, if the normative practice in this musical tradition is, in Sara Ahmed's word, a "straightening device" to which all participants are oriented, I

argue that queer men musicians and their performances are reconciliatory because they obliquely dis/orient themselves against cultural straightening devices. Queer men musicians neither opts to assimilate within such structures nor strictly oppose them; rather, they work on and against them, via what José Esteban Muñoz calls disidentification (Muñoz 1999: 11).

Queer men musicians “live on an oblique angle...and follow the straight lines” (Ahmed 2006: 172), but they do so in quite a different socio-political backdrop. I depart from the hegemonic white heteronormative discourse, as pointed out in Ahmed’s work, as well as the racialized, sexualized queer Latinidad in the US cultural settings, as noted by Muñoz, and situate these frameworks within the ethno-nationalist tenets of Thainess that is deeply rooted in class status. As I demonstrate in Chapter 6, queer men musicians’ performance may exhibit disorientating and disidentificatory practices, they must be vigilant when doing so. This is particularly the case for prestigious queer musicians in government institutions. Go too far “out” and they could face serious sanctions and see their accumulated reputation irreversibly damaged. My use of disidentification in Thai queer men musicians is distinguished by a parallel sense of the politics of respectability in Black studies. First coined by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham in her study of Black Baptist women’s moments during the early 20th century, this strategy takes the form of “assimilationist learnings” (Higginbotham 1993: 187). Reflecting on this concept almost three decades later, sociologist Margot Dazey observes:

respectability politics works as a form of social control exerted by members of marginalized groups upon their “own,” which consists of presenting a normative version of, for example, what it means to be Black. By situating a limited range of behaviors as desirable, this type of politics coerces members of marginalized groups into particular ways of conducting themselves and forecloses other possible actions that could jeopardize the group's image (Dazey 2021: 582).

In a similar vein, queer men musicians, no matter how “out,” must constantly curate their musicking bodies within the acceptable purview of masculinity. This is neither just passing nor presenting as straight. It is also maintaining their prestigious status as Thai classical music practitioners, a role that grants queer men musicians an upward social mobility. In other words, the concept of respectability operates to disclose class and status differentiation (Higginbotham 1993: 187). It does not matter whether queer men musicians accent queerness, disorientate against the straight lines, or disidentify with heteronormativity. In the hegemonic discourse of compulsory heterosexuality, these actions will be reduced to a despicable display of the third gender. And in a musical tradition that upholds the spirit of the nation’s cultural purity, religious affiliation, and association with monarchy, nonnormative gender display is simply unacceptable.

The theoretical frameworks in this section are linked together by queer subjects, and I employ them to chart a new critical effort in Thai classical music scholarship. While readers from ethnomusicology and queer studies may find this work—just as the section title suggests—a latecomer to the queer academic party, those with Thai classical music backgrounds will find my dissertation unorthodox in its questions, scope, and methods; and I am humbly proud that it is. On the one hand, this dissertation shares a feminist standpoint not in representing women *per se* but in offering a political space of resistance against unequal gendered and sexualized power relations (Koskoff 2014: 65). On the other, I think about my approach to queer theories as a form of “writing against culture” (Abu-Lughod 1991), one that departs from the persistent trope of “the scholarship of admiration” in Thai classical music (Kitiarsa 2006: 277). It is my hope that my investigation of the social and musical lives of queer men musicians, as enabled

through ethnomusicology, sexuality, and queer studies, forms a budding ground for scholarly furthering whether through discussions, debates, or gossips.

Ethnographic Settings and Methodology

Most of the information presented in the following pages is the result of ethnographic encounters, interactions, and experiences from my fieldwork in Bangkok during July 2020 to September 2021. The span of just over a year spent living in the physical field may give readers an impression of a “touch-and-go ethnography”—a classic colonial approach of arriving in a foreign area, gathering data, and leaving with heaps of recordings and memoirs—but my rather short fieldwork period was informed by an almost lifelong experience as a cisgender, middle class, male born and raised in Thailand and trained in Thai classical music. This dissertation is in many ways an ethnography at home. But before I proceed to reflect on the methodologies advantages and challenges that ensued from my fieldwork, allow me to contextualize this work around my positionality.

I was born and raised in Bangkok. My first language is Thai. My father, a retired university professor, is a Thai classical music theorist and ethnomusicologist by training. My mother is a conservatory-trained Thai classical dance teacher in a primary school. They both work(ed) at Srinakharinwirot University located in Bangkok’s worst traffic and gentrified area called Asoke. Since I grew up running around my father’s music department, I was fortunate to be surrounded by several reputed Thai classical music teachers hired at the department. My father introduced me to Thai classical music when I was in primary school and he “deposited” me as a student to Nikorn Chantasorn, a renowned *khaung wong yai* ซ้องวงใหญ่ (higher-pitched circular gong) player and a *piiphaat* allrounder. I studied the *khaung wong yai* with Nikorn up to a few advanced solo

pieces, participated with some success in musical competition, and performed in a few international festivals abroad. I also studied *ranaat eek* ระนาดเอก, a lead xylophone, with Prasit Intharaphiphat and Veera Phansue, two leading musicians in the *piiphaat* tradition. While my father taught me the “theory” part of the music as well as other techniques, tips, and tricks, for all other instruments in the tradition, I receive advice from other classical music teachers who I met along my musical career. I also completed my undergraduate degree in Thai classical music education at Srinakharinwirot University. The network of people that I accumulated during over twenty years of involvement in the tradition was thus a crucial part of my fieldwork.



Figure 1.5: The author, 11 years old, plays *khaung wong yai*, for a television show in 2001. I was accompanied by my teacher Nikorn Chantasorn and his fellow musician Sa-man Noi-nit. Photo by Manop Wisuttipat.

As much as I represent an insider of Thai classical music, my cultural and social capital have made my experience distinct from many practitioners. The musical training I received may have started at an early age (less than ten years old), but it was almost completely in academic settings. In contrast to my interlocutors, I did not study music with a teacher while living in his/her house, nor did I have the experience of touring with a musical group to perform in a Buddhist funeral for a few nights.²⁰ I also have had access to education abroad, having first spent five years of my high school in India and later pursuing graduate study in ethnomusicology in the United States. I disclose this information not to boast my superior capital that granted me more opportunity and access, but to demonstrate with transparency that the critical interpretations that I have made throughout this work are shaped by specific experiences and made possible through a certain privilege.

Despite my familiarity with Thai classical music, my positionality places me as a relative outsider in my dissertation. As mentioned above, I approach queer men musicians in string ensemble from a perspective of a straight man trained in *piiphaat* tradition. Although I am neither a *kathoey* nor *gay*, nor do I identify myself as queer, my musical life has been surrounded by several queer men musicians as friends, พี่ *phii* (older friends), and น้อง *naung* (younger friends). In fact, straight men were the minority group during my undergraduate years at Srinakharinwirot University; women and queer men (most notably *kathoey* and *gay*) dominated the music department.²¹ Besides my sexuality,

²⁰ Filipino ethnomusicologist and composer Ramon Santos once commented that my musical background was forged academically (inside my father's Thai classical music department) rather than naturally (in the music household), a difference that I acknowledge with humility and pride.

²¹ There was even a joke around the department that “men are scarce, use them economically” (ผู้ชายมีน้อย ใช้สอยอย่างประหยัด *phuu chaay mii nauy chai sauy yaang prayat*). This, however, does not represent the general scenario of Thai classical music outside of the academia that is and has always been dominated by men musicians.

my training in *piiphaat* music was not fully translatable to the string music played by queer men musicians. The instruments used, repertory played, performance practices, techniques, and even trivial conversations among queer men musicians were not what I was used to hearing in *piiphaat* ensemble. As a normative *piiphaat* practitioner trained by the US American school of ethnomusicology with some critical questions about unspoken subjects of gender and sexuality, my prior knowledge and skills of Thai classical music came in handy to show that I was also a musician, thereby alleviating my interlocutors' suspicions stemming from my US institutional affiliation. In sum, I try not to conceptualize my positionality with respect to queer men musicians around insider/outsider distinctions. This is because, as Timothy Rice suggests, such binaries “may not be particularly helpful ways to describe the kind of dialogic relationships in language, music, and dance that develop between people who perform and appreciate traditions they have each made their own in varying degrees” (Rice 2017: 75). I instead treat my ethnographic experiences as encounters (Gaunt 2002; Hess 2018) since the interlocutors and I were equally part of the ethnography.

I am aware that my normative gender and sexual identity, combined with its “correct alignment” with the appropriate musical practice (*piiphaat* music) and my socio-cultural capital, positioned me as an unmarked subject as I navigated myself through my fieldwork. My status of unmarkedness with respect to my research topic means that I bear fewer consequences from my own ethnographic representation than the queer men musicians do. I paid acute attention to this ethnographic immunity in the re/presentation of my interlocutors. All queer men musician names whom I alluded to in my dissertation consented to disclosing their identity. However, I use different conventions to refer to my interlocutors based on how they wished to be addressed respectively. Some of them wanted to go by their first real name, which is a common formal practice in Thai culture,

while others prefer to have their nickname appear instead. The only exception is in Chapter 6, where all the musicians are made anonymous to prevent them from any possible social sanctions caused by the disclosure of their gender and sexuality nonnormativity.

Thai people generally pay a lot of attention to the use of honorifics that precede someone's name. Honorifics can reveal details about the relative relationship between the addresser and addressee. For Thai classical musicians, it is common that experienced musicians are automatically given a title *khruu* or teacher. This was the case for a several of my interlocutors and other deceased renowned string musicians, for example, *khruu* Chai, *khruu* Chaluay and *khruu* Rati. However, some queer men string music teachers preferred the title *phii* ^๕ instead to sound less official and less old, such as *phii* Mark. As much as I am aware of subtle meanings of addressing names in Thai, inserting a title to every single name would make my writing in English more cluttered; this can be distracting to readers non-familiar with Thai language and obstruct the text flow. The clutter becomes even more jarring with the royal family and high-ranking officers with even longer honorifics. In light of this, I decided to include honorifics only upon the first mention of an individual whereas the subsequent allusion will only contain their name. It took me quite some time to accustom myself to referring to many Thai classical musicians by just their first name in my dissertation—and I still and will perhaps continue to struggle to do so—but this missing cultural nuance is a tradeoff that I make to accommodate readers without a Thai language background.

My fieldwork was marked by the uncertainty of COVID-19 pandemic, which profoundly affected how I conducted my ethnography. When I first began my participant observation research in August 2020, Thailand was priding itself for keeping the daily

new cases down to a single digit number at the expense of shutting down all incoming international commercial flights and creating a downward spiral in the domestic economy. Masks were not legally required, but to not wear one in public would immediately provoke a strong social sanction. Bangkok was regarded one of the safest cities from COVID-19 during that time, and I could not have asked for a more ideal condition to conduct my fieldwork. When I arrived in July 2020, the public gathering restrictions had just been lifted, musicians reconvened, gigs and concerts were announced, and *waikhruu* rituals were held.

During this period, I did classic participant observation with some queer men musician interlocutors who I had known since my undergraduate years. I tagged along with them in rehearsals, watched them perform in several events, drove them around, and ate food with them. Most importantly, I played music with them. In the process, I was introduced to more and more queer men musicians whose names I only heard but never had a chance to converse. Even so, some of these musicians seemed to know me through my father. I have recorded about twenty musical performances, and in five of these I was one of the performers. The venues of these performances ranged from a Buddhist temple to a university auditorium and a recording studio.



Figure 1.6: A photo showing me sitting at the back of *piiphaat* ensemble with string instruments in front of the stage during a performance at the night before the *waikhruu* at Bansomdejchaophraya Rajbhat University. I was tagging along my interlocutor JJ when he invited me to join him (he was blocked from view) on stage and play the clappers. Photo taken on December 2, 2020, by Nattapol Wisuttiapat.

While doing ethnography in musical performances allowed me to see the immediacy of queer men musickings, interviews provided an opportunity for these musicians to reflect on their musicking even further. The experience of music-making and the relationships formed were thus primarily responsible for the acquisition of satisfying knowledge during fieldwork (Titon 2008: 80). A great deal of my ethnographic readings of queer men musicians was made possible through conversation with them. Just as Deborah Wong observes Thai performers' passion to talk about the particularities of the *waikhruu* ritual (2001: xviii), most queer men musicians enjoyed sharing behind-the-scenes stories about their musical experience, their teachers, their friends and rivals when they were not performing. Some of these conversations were scheduled for the purpose of

this research. I was at other times caught off guard when a fascinating piece of information occurred in the most unexpected place and time, for example, during a party after a recording session, at a break during a rehearsal, or in a cafeteria. I have conducted over forty interview sessions during this fieldwork. Many of these interviewed may not be referenced in the dissertation, but I cannot understate its importance in guiding me through this musical tradition.

My fieldwork took a sharp turn in April 2021 as the Delta variant of COVID-19 cases caused a spike in Thailand cases—from three to four digits in a span of two months. Bangkok became an epicenter of the outbreak. All the scheduled performances were postponed indefinitely, public gatherings were not allowed once again. My fieldwork consequently migrated to online platforms as queer men musicians livestreamed their rehearsals instead. However, I was still able to schedule several in-person interviews along with a few remote ones during this time. It was in this period that I noticed that my interlocutors often talked about the particularities in recorded performances online, most particularly on YouTube. Social media and internet thus became the field itself, which was not a surprise considering the ways in which the interlocutors state of being “plugged in” (Lysloff and Gay 2003: 2) and “digital” (Pink et al. 2015) was exacerbated by COVID-19. Some of the ethnographic vignettes presented in my dissertation are taken from text chats with my interlocutors, which were supplemented by the recorded audio and video of a musical performances. This hybrid approach in ethnography (Przybylski 2020) became most viable when the entire country went on lockdown midway into my fieldwork. I left Bangkok in September 2021 without bidding a proper farewell to several interlocutors because of the lockdown. But my fieldwork did not stop along with my departure, as I remain connected to many of queer men musicians thanks to the internet.

Christi-Anne Castro reflects on the relationship between queerness, ambiguity, and ethnography that “A truly queer ethnography would, I think, convulse the etiquette of reflexivity in ethnomusicological works to defy the authority of the genre altogether; it would write against itself and render the author both adamant and impotent” (2020: 106). Indeed, I do not claim authority in any of the pages that follow, though I humbly take the responsibility of all the interpretations made and mistakes committed. The ethnographic re/presentation I deploy in this research—attending to the aspects written off by Thai classical musicians as irrelevant—falls along the line of queer methodology. As I seek—sometimes in a rather playful manner—multiplicity and ways of perceiving time and place that subvert hegemonic perspectives (Roy 2015: 113), I do my best to maintain the spirit of “spicy” among queer men musicians alive throughout.

Chapter Outline

My dissertation is divided into two sections that are tied together by the concept of *saep* or “spicy.” The first section – Chapters 1-4 – sheds light into the ways in which queerness manifests in musical and embodied performances, thereby forming the basis of spicy performances in Thai classical music. The three chapters that comprise this section serve as examining lenses into queer moments of Thai classical music, ones that cut through the tradition’s heteronormative guise. The second chapter examines the queer preconditions in Thai classical music that set up the associated image of string music with queer men musicians and the subsequent emergence of these musicians. Centering on the lives of two women string musicians *khruu* Chaluy and *khruu* Rati, both of whom trained with men music teachers from the palace, this chapter focuses the period between mid to late 20th century Thailand as an important turning point in Thai classical music. Chaluy’s and Rati’s prodigious musical talent, their training that refashions the gender

roles of string music, and the rapid change in the surrounding socio-political backdrop, worked together to provide one of the models for subsequent queer men musicians to be spicy.

The third chapter shifts attention to the specific moments in which queer men musicians articulate, with the help of string instruments, their body to gesture gender nonconformity. I draw primarily on the concepts of “musicking bodies” (Rahaim 2012) and on ethnographic readings of string music performances to illustrate the ways in which both sides of the gender binary are mapped onto queer men bodies. I zero in on the *jakhee*, a floor zither, and *sau uu*, a lower-pitched fiddle, as sites that engender queer musicking bodies. This process shows that while effeminacy of queer men musicians may mark themselves as nonconforming or sexually ambiguous, it also serves as an asset in a sense that they have more gender resources with which to work and play.

In the fourth and final chapter of this section, I consider spiciness as a sensual and intimate homoeroticism that is superimposed into a heterosexual song text. I attend to the queer reading of the lyrics in “Surintharaahu,” a musical piece that is popularly sung and played by queer men musicians in string ensemble. Drawing on the concept of comedic disidentification (Muñoz 1999: 119) and disorientation (Ahmed 2006), I propose that queer interpretation of this piece’s lyrics is carried out through a mechanism of “flipping,” the process of imagining a gender role-reversal and assuming the roles of the gendered body so imagined. The queer intimacy of this piece also links together the concepts of musical and sexual climax. While this piece provides a niche musical space for queer men singers and musicians to express and gauge queer desires, it also reinstates queer men musicians with the hypersexualized stereotype, raising the question over the degree and extent to which music is a safe space.

The second section – Chapters 5-6 – turns the concept of the spicy on its head and examines the messiness around and within the queer men string musician’s community. Containing two chapters, my core argument in this section is that queer musical space is as contentious as it is cathartic. The fifth chapter focuses on musical lineage as one of the most policed aspects among queer men string musicians. In this chapter I depart from a well-worn celebrated trope about musical lineage and grouping that attributes the bond between teacher and students to transmission of embodied knowledge, power, and authority. While queer men musician circles share some of the characteristics of the teacher-student relationship, certain lineages can be highly surveilled by its members. Drawing on the concept of “accenting” (Khubchandani 2020) as filter through queer nightlife scholarship, I attend to the ways in which queer men string musicians legitimize, police, and dispute the status of “the direct-line student” (ลูกศิษย์สายตรง *luuk sit saay trong*) through gossiping. It illustrates the marginalized social dynamics among the musicians outside of the *piiphaat* tradition, one that is not recognized by the hegemonic discourse of *waikhruu*.

The sixth and final chapter of this dissertation focuses on the social pressure and strategies of queer men musicians to pass as straight, especially in the hypergendered government institution. It focuses on the varied degrees of negotiation and navigation taken up by queer men musicians with respect to the contextual awareness of a specific place and time (*kaalatheesa* กาลเทศะ). Drawing on the parallel ideas of the display of queer potential and politics of respectability from Black studies as well as incorporating the local discourse that treats homosexual desires as context-dependent, I suggest that queerness is gradually “straightened” as queer musicians move up the social hierarchy and partake in higher-stake musical space. I offer an intersectional investigation of the display of queerness along the axes of morality, nationalism, and class status. Yet, such

mobility is not a one-way street as some queer men musicians participate in informal and private performances where displays of queerness become not only possible but expected.

Taking a step outside of the queer men musicians circle, I reflect in the conclusion on the possibility of taking the examination of queer subjects that are deeply entrenched in heteronormative constructs further, whether in ethnomusicology, Thai studies, or gender and sexuality studies. I also reflect on queer women musicians and their consent to be silent and invisible players in the Thai classical musical scene. Finally, I take my study of queer men Thai classical musicians back to where I begin this introduction, that is, why paying attention to classical performing arts matter as much as popular cultures in terms of giving queer subjects and their equivalents voices and visibility.

A Thai classical music teacher once asked rhetorically, “why would you want to be outside of the frame when there is still a lot of space within to be filled?” This means that a student should rather spend time mastering all the musical knowledge there is than creating something new. My dissertation encapsulates my scholarly refusal to fill in the space of the heavily reproduced field of Thai classical music. And for this very reason readers from a Thai classical music circle may find the interpretations I made in this dissertation problematic. This dissertation is not without flaws, despite my utmost circumspection. Instead, I ask that readers go through these pages as though they are transcending the unquestioned, unmarked frame of Thai classical music with me. This work is in essence “unframable” in terms of Thai classical music scholarship, but it is perhaps the only standpoint that can de-invisibilize the very frame and its underlying ethos. The next five chapters are my invitation to you, readers, to join me on my ethnographic excursion outside of the frame of Thai classical music.

Chapter 2

Queering Thai Classical Music From Within

The gendering of Thai classical music is based on heteronormative constructs and idealized gender norms. The physically demanding *piiphaat* ensemble is perceived with a masculine image whereas the softer sounding *khrueng saay* or string ensemble, and by extension *mahooree*, is equated with femininity. The gendering of Thai classical music is also informed by the functions of each ensemble. *Piiphaat* music enjoys its representative authority from being a sonic accompaniment in ornate religious rituals, a key element for showcasing the royal glory. The ritualistic nature of *piiphaat* music was further underscored when it became inseparable from *waikhruu* ritual.¹ And since women are thought to hold lesser spiritual merit than men, just as in many parts of Southeast Asia where Hinduism and Buddhism is practiced, *piiphaat* becomes a musical space dominated by men musicians. The string ensemble, on the other hand, emerged as a secular entertainment music. While it too originated from the within the palace, it served the Thai royalty in a much more personal manner. Unlike *piiphaat* that was employed during a ritual or theater performance, the string ensemble was played inside the palace as the royal families went about their private lives. Just like other servants of the inner palace, string musicians are mostly women. And with the reserved bodily postures one assumes while playing stringed instruments, string women musicians were typically associated with the image of high-class, noble women or *kunlasatrii*.

¹ *Piiphaat* is inseparable from *waikhruu* rituals of performing arts like Thai classical music, dance, or sometimes in film or television industry. However, there is also a “regular” version of the *waikhruu* ritual, known as *waikhruu saaman* ไหว้ครูสามัญ and observed in schools and general education institution. This “toned-down” variant of *waikhruu* is much shorter in its duration, without the authorized ritual leader or *phithiikaun* พิธีกร, and often carried out with no *piiphaat* music.

To be clear, the gender lines described above are descriptive, as there are no recognized rules that prevent certain genders from playing certain instruments. Today there are as many women *piiphaat* musicians as there are men string musicians, but this does not mean that crossing the gender line has no consequences. Women are restricted from accessing certain esoteric or “high” knowledge reserved only for men, with only a few exceptions. Men string musicians are often tagged with effeminacy, leading to suspicions of sexual deviance. This is because a musician is expected to assume the gender role written into each ensemble. Likewise, queer men musicians tend to gravitate toward stringed instruments because they can perform their effeminacy while musicking.² The prominence of queer men musicians in the string ensemble is so obvious that there is a poetic saying dedicated to this group of musicians: *khrueng saay chaay suay* เครื่องสายชายสวย (string instruments, beautiful men).

Queer men string musicians too demonstrate a sense of belonging and loyalty to a teacher as a representation of a musical lineage, though some may identify with multiple music teachers. The realization of the connection within each musical lineage of string musicians, while sharing common traits with the *piiphaat* tradition, does pose some differences. String musicians identify a lineage more through individual *khruu* or teachers, e.g., Benjarong Thanakoset, Worayot Suksaichon, and Charoenchai Sunthonwathin, than an entire musical household or *baan* บ้าน, e.g., *baan* Duriyapraneet, *baan* Maihaangkrabeen, *baan* Paathayakosol, etc. As a result, the lineages of string musicians are relatively tighter and its boundary quite clear-cut.

² The same can be said of masculine women in *piiphaat* ensemble who are often suspected of being a *tomboy* or *tom*. The proportion of gender nonconforming women in *piiphaat* pales in comparison to nonconforming men in *khrueng sai* ensemble. This may be a confirmation that despite the visibility queer musicians, Thai classical music is still a dominated by those assigned as men at birth or AMAB.

Interestingly, notable queer men musicians in the forefront of the string music circle are not institutionalized music teachers – some are accountants, flight attendants, doctors, lawyers, and engineers. These musicians trace their musical lineages back to women teachers who were once string musicians in the palace. I should note that there are also string music teachers considered by their students to be the “direct line” or *saay trong* สายตรง of great string music teachers like *Luang Pairohsiangsau* and *Phrayaa Phuumiiseewin*, but they are not as celebrated among the queer men string musicians as the court women musicians. In my involvement with the string ensemble tradition as a *piiphaat*-trained musician, two string musical lineages specifically were arguably as prominent as they were controversial. One is the lineage of Chaluay Chiyachan, a former palace *sau uu* player. The other is that of Rati Wisetsurakan, a *jakhee* player who was trained by several music teachers from the palace. Chaluay and Rati both worked as musicians at the Government Public Relations Department (PRD) or *Krom Prachaasamphan* กรมประชาสัมพันธ์.³ Chaluay’s and Rati’s lineage inadvertently consists almost entirely of queer men musicians, and their respective musical styles are the practices toward which several queer men *jakhee* and *sau uu* enthusiasts aspire. Chaluay and Rati are hailed by their queer men musicians today as the pioneers of how to play *saep* or “spicy” string music.

³ Given the organization’s full title, the proper acronym of Government Public Relations Department should be GPRD. However, I choose to follow the organization’s acronym convention that drops out the G letter, i.e., PRD.



Figure 2.1: Rati Wisetsurakan on *jakhee* (front row, left) and Chaluay Chiyachan on *sau uu* (center). Photo taken from Chaluay's commemorative funeral book.

In passing, the popularity of Chaluay and Rati as well as their musical styles among queer men string musicians may seem like another story from the bygone era of former court musicians establishing themselves as major figures in Thai classical music tradition. But when we consider the predominance of the Fine Arts Department (FAD) or *Krom Sinlapakaun* กรมศิลปากร, a government organization known for recruiting highly skilled musicians and responsible for performing and disseminating the “appropriate” format of Thai classical music performance, it is remarkable that the popularity of Chaluay and Rati eclipse many string teachers from the authoritative organization of Thai performing arts, most of whom were men. Contextualized in this way, the popularity of Chaluay and Rati is more than just being queer men musicians' inspiration. I argue that both teachers present complex layers of negotiation between gender roles and gendered musical practices at an institutional level that served as a precondition for subsequent queer musicians to thrive in the tradition.

If Chaluay and Rati are among the prime examples of “spicy” music figures among queer men *khrueng saay* musicians, I am inclined to believe that the two teachers paved the way for the queering of Thai classical music decades earlier. If that is the case, what can the musical legacies of Chaluay and Rati tell us about the underlying gender and sexuality dynamics in Thai classical music? How did the different PRD and FAD performance policies and duties fuel the refashioning – or even a revolution – of gendered practices in the string ensemble as exemplified by the two teachers? And with the refashioning of the string ensemble performance practices by the two teachers, how did their respective musical lineage and style become both a resistant and a policed site for queer musicians? Most importantly, what do all these social interactions tell us about gender and sexuality constructs in Thai classical music at a social and institutional level?

In this chapter, I examine the musical and social lives of Chaluay and Rati, two major figures in string music cultures who are arguably the most famous idols for queer men musicians in the tradition. I will focus first on the two teacher’s formative years when they received musical training in the palace before turning my attention to the teachers’ respective career as string musicians in the PRD. This chapter is not intended to add yet another historical fact to the lives of Chaluay and Rati but presents an interpretation of the available information based on the socio-cultural contexts during that time. I argue that Chaluay and Rati’s popularity among queer men string musicians today can be attributed to their eccentric trainings that blurs the gender lines of Thai classical music.

This chapter focuses on how both the palace and the PRD became institutional platforms from which the two teachers contested the perceived the normative gendered practices of string music purported by the authoritative institution like the FAD. The

queer men string musicians' embracing of the two teacher's musical styles form the point of departure, but the direction goes backward in time. Chaluay's and Rati's musical and social lives go far beyond its association with queer men string musicians. I argue that if there are queer men string musicians who resonate with these musical styles, Chaluay and Rati may be some of the first Thai classical musicians who "queered" the established gendered practices of Thai classical music.

Queering Musical Institutions and Lineages

How do we, or is it even possible to, activate queer reading in the absence of queer subjectivity? How might we locate the past queer sensibilities that emerged in the perceived straight musical practice? These questions emerged when I attempted to theorize the fascination of effeminate men string musicians with the musical styles of Chaluay and Rati. It is convincing that the two musical styles provide a queer musical space, one that decouples gendered musical norms from the musicking bodies. But what about the popularity of these two musical styles before it was embraced by the queer men string musicians, before their increased visibility was equated with stringed instruments? How come the two most popular music styles among queer men musicians trace back to two women musicians who received musical and social trainings from the palace to be the "gentleperson" or *phuudii* (see Jory 2021)? If the musical styles of the two women teachers constitute part of queer men music cultures now, how did it, in Steven Moon's (2020: 26) term, "de-straighten" string music tradition back in the days when queer men musicians were invisible?

While several Chaluay's and Rati's students are queer men, my goal here is not to determine whether the two teachers are queer. Instead, I draw on Phillip Brett's remarks on queer musicology to become "a political act for lesbian and gay scholars who will no

longer suppress those sides of themselves they have been taught by musicology (and in other arenas) to despise and conceal” and to deal with “the institutionalization of the discipline [musicology]” (Brett 1994: 374). What I present here, however, is less about political acts of gay/lesbian musicians in the past than the re-inscription of gender-defined musical normativity. In the same spirit, I am interested in how the musical styles of the two teachers become a catharsis for queer men string musicians to make visible their desired gender expression. Thus, my adoption of queer theory here is to open “the question of the relations between sexuality and gender, both as analytic categories and as lived experiences” (Halperin 2003: 341).

I am not activating queer theory to lay claim to “queer” as an identity, but to investigate the concept of normativity in relation to institutionalization, discipline, canon, and habitus (Barz 2020: 9) in Thai classical music. And by the institutionalization of Thai classical music, I mean particularly the pre-determination of masculine subjectivity with *piiphaat* music and feminine subjectivity with the string music. This chapter will also reveal underlying contentions between the Fine Arts Department’s approach to maintain idealized gender perception toward the two music traditions, on the one hand, and the Government Public Relations Department’s methods that often push the former’s boundary by blurring the gender-defined performance practices. Queerness in this chapter is not manifested subjectively. It is subtly enacted in an institutional as well as structural level, yet this process is vital to understanding the complex relationship between the string ensemble and queer men musicians.

This chapter begins with an ethnographic treatment of Chaluay’s and Rati’s biographies respectively, focusing specifically on their formative years as court musicians and later their rise to wide recognition as the Government Public Relations

Department employees. I then turn my attention to the legacy of the two teachers as they are immortalized by their queer men musician followers. Using the queer gaze, this chapter will lay out the destabilization of the once firmly established strict gender-binary practices in Thai classical music, a process that paves the way for queer men musicians today to make their presence heard, see, and felt.

The Blueblood Children

Chaluay's and Rati's musical and social lives represent an example of a history of Thai classical musicians that is reluctantly part the canon. Given the visibly active roles of palace men musicians due to an earnest support by the royal institution in the early 20th cent. and the gender-defined customs imposed onto Thai classical music, it is likely that women musicians were only responsible for sustaining the tradition as teachers and did not contribute much to the in the development of Thai classical music (Thattaphon 2016). What follows in this chapter is a pushback against the above statement because it is made in agreement with the established norms, one that perpetuates heteropatriarchy and top-down authority. The examination of Chaluay and Rati will be done with the critical lens against those norms first and foremost in mind. By decentering and cutting across these dominating structures, I propose that women musicians are agentive and not passive tradition bearers.

To those self-identified as the students of Chaluay and Rati, the memory of their lives and works are still fresh and vivid. They would often talk about what their teacher would do in a particular point of a piece or refer to a specific memorable performance. In addition to ensuring that their teachers' story lives on through verbal communication, funeral books present invaluable ethnographic insights into the musical and social lives of a Thai classical musician. When a reputed musician passed, their students would come

together and publish—most of the time racing against the clock and the musician’s scheduled cremation—a funeral book that contains the biography, condolence messages, and anecdotes to the teacher’s musical life and works. Chaluay and Rati were no different. The information that follows is drawn from commemorative funeral books of several women string musicians who received music trainings directly in/from the court: Rati Wisetsurakan (1988) Chaluay Chiyachan (2000), Nibha Aphaiwong (1999), and Thongdii Sujaritkul (2007) ([view on website](#)). These sources are supplemented by two graduate theses. One is by Hemarat Hemhongsa, who excellently reconstructs the biography of Rati through in-depth interviews of Rati’s relatives (1998). The other is a musical analysis of Chaluay’s “Kraaw Nai” *sau uu* solo by Natthapong Kaewsuwan (2012).

Chaluay and Rati were born to upper-class families during the later years of the King Vajiravudh’s reign. Chaluay was born on August 13th, 1916 (2459 B.E.) as the fifth of the six children of her father *Luang* Prakromkauranii (Jan) and her mother Bunmi. Rati was born seven years later, on June 12th, 1923 (2466 B.E.) as the third of the six children of her father Lieutenant Colonel *Phra* Wisetsurakan and her mother Jaem Wisetsurakan. Khruu Rati was a niece to *Phrayaa* Anumanrajdhon, one of the early scholars of Thai cultures. Each of the *khruu*’s fathers contains noble hierarchical ranks or *bandaasak* (i.e., *Luang*, *Phra*, and *Phrayaa*) as well as the royally conferred titles or *raatchathinnanaam* (Prakromkauranii and Wisetsurakan).⁴ Their father’s respective ranks and titles are indicative of their family’s close relationship with the royal institution. This social capital

⁴ For further discussion of royally conferred ranks and titles and its association with Thai classical musicians, see Myers-Moro 1993: 192–97.

played a key role in Chaluay's and Rati's privileged accesses to the court traditions and subsequently their early musical trainings.

It is imperative to contextualize the early social lives of Chaluay and Rati particularly with respect to the noble and upper-class society and the royal institution. The 1920s was marked by royal anxiety over the successor to the ailing King Vajiravudh who was not able to conceive a son (Chanan 2019: 9–11). In 1921, King Vajiravudh was engaged with Lakshamilavan, married to Sucharit Suda and Indrasakdi Sachi four months later; he announced his relationship with Suvadhana in 1924, a year before his death. The four women were conferred the title royal consorts. Of all the four consorts, Sucharit Suda and Indrasakdi Sachi will be my focus as they were related to Chaluay and Rati, respectively.

It was a customary practice for noble and upper-class families to seek patronage from a royal family member and send their children to live with them. Some children spent a few years in the palace then left to pursue formal education while others stayed on in service of the royal consorts.⁵ The palace thus was comparable to a kindergarten school where, according to a former court musician and the string ensemble teacher, Nibha Aphaiwong young children taught to read and write. Besides providing education, the palace was the place where these young blueblood children would be taught the social etiquettes of a gentleperson or *phuudii*, which included string music as a performing art for court women (Nibha Aphaiwong 1999: 13–14).

With the help of her uncle's connection with the palace, the six-year-old Chaluay and two of her sisters were “deposited” under the patronage of Sacharit Suda, one of the

⁵ This practice of sending one's child to live with a royal patron is known as to “deposit” one's child or *faak* ฟาก, much like the concept of depositing oneself as a student to a teacher in Thai classical music tradition.

King Vajiravudh's consorts. Nibha, a women musician who was earlier deposited in Sucharit Suda's palace, said in an interview that Chaluay was among the youngest and the last addition to the girls in Sucharit Suda's care. Besides providing basic education and literacy, Sucharit Suda, being an avid supporter and practitioner of Thai classical music, started a formal string music training for her deposited children, aged between eight to fifteen years old, at her residence Phayathai palace. She arranged three renowned men string music teachers from the Kamonwaathin family: *Luang Waungjakheerap* (Too), *Phra Sanphleengsuang* (Bua) and Chum.⁶ Chaluay started her *sau uu* training with *khruu* Chum and later had advanced *saw uu* lessons with *Phra Sanphleengsuang*, a seasoned *pii nai* and *sau uu* player. Her early life's schedule at the Phayathai palace was quite a routine as she recalled in an interview in her funeral book:

The daily routine would start from waking up at seven o'clock. We [the girls under Sucharit Suda's care] would be dressed in a green robe and white blouse. After having breakfast, it was the school until noon and then we would have lunch. Then our nanny would take us for an afternoon nap – they would stare at us to sleep! The afternoon was the Thai [classical] music class with the teachers from outside the palace (*Nibha Aphaiwong* 1999: 2)

By the time *Phra Sanphleengsuang* passed, Chaluay, then about 17-18 years old, had accomplished several long and complex *thayaay* repertory and mastered several solo pieces, including the ultimate solo of Thai classical repertory “Kraaw Nai” and “Khaek Mon.”

Chaluay, along with other children under Sucharit Suda's care, went on to become the “inner women musicians” or *nak dontrii ying faay nai* นักดนตรีหญิงฝ่ายใน who accompanied the King Vajiravudh and performed for him during his leisure times.

⁶ Based on the royally conferred titles and ranks *Luang Waungjakheerap* and *Phra Sanphleengsuang* were clearly court musicians. The third brother Chum, on the other hand, was not hired as a court musician, hence his undecorated name.

Chaluay was, according to her biography in the funeral book for her cremation, the mainstay for the *sau uu* position in this musical group due to her “clear, bright tone color that also emits immaculateness” (2000: 4). This group of women musicians later came to be known as *Nariisiisumit* นารีศรีสุมิตร. Phunphit Amatyakul writes that the group continued performing through the reign of the King Prajadhipok, became the first all-women string ensemble to incorporate piano into their performance, and later was in hiatus following the 1932 revolution (Phunphit 2007: 66).

Rati’s childhood and her subsequent early music training was closely tied with the court but in a slightly different way. Since Rati’s father was a high-ranking military officer and held a conferred royal rank and title, there was a closer connection of their family to the King Vajiravudh - the name Rati was given to her by the King Vajiravudh himself. Like Chaluay, Rati was deposited prior to school age. But it was under the patronage of Indrasakdi Sachi at the Dusit Palace, located just over a mile away from Sucharit Suda’s Phayathai palace. After spending a few years in the palace, Rati left the palace and started grade school education circa 1930. After finishing high school, she entered a pre-college school to prepare for her application for an undergraduate law degree at Thammasat University. However, her college life was cut short as the university suspended all the classes due to World War II.

Despite spending most of her childhood and teenage years outside of the palace, Rati’s father still wanted to equip her with the palace women practices which, of course, include string music. After deciding that *jakhee* would be the instrument for his daughter, he started hiring men string music teachers from the palace to give private music lessons in the evening after Rati was done with school. Her father did not expect her to become a professional musician but hoped for Thai classical music to be taken up as a hobby or

“special ability” (*khwaam samaat phiseet* ความสามารถพิเศษ) besides her education, at which point the reign was that of the King Prajadhipok.

Sangwaan Kunlawankee, a famous *jakhee* player who taught several royal families of the previous monarch King Chulalongkorn, was the first *jakhee* teacher hired to teach Rati when she was in primary school. Rati’s lesson with Sangwaan was brief as the teacher passed away soon after. Chum Kamonwaathin, one of the string music teachers at Sucharit Suda’s palace where Chaluay lived, was hired next. Rati learned a substantial number of pieces with Chum, including a few solo pieces. After Chum’s death, the third teacher to be hired to teach Rati was Jaang Saengdaoden, a another *jakhee* virtuoso from the Division of Entertainment (later Fine Arts Department) during the reign of King Prajadhipok. There is no evidence regarding how long each of these three teachers taught her, but it was with Jaang that Rati learned “Khaek Mon” and “Kraaw Nai,” the two ultimate *jakhee* solo pieces. The *thaang* or the version of “Khaek Mon” and “Kraaw Nai” from Jaang was notorious for its aggressive and explosive playstyle. But not only could Rati learn and play them, she perfected “Kraaw Nai” and performed it live for a radio broadcast when she was nine years old (Hemarat 1998: 103).

When Jaang passed away prematurely at the age of thirty, Rati was about to enter pre-college school. Her father then deposited her to the fourth teacher Sawaeng Aphaiwong. Hemarat writes that when Sawaeng started teaching Rati, the former was already a *jakhee* player of the Fine Arts Department. Given that the Fine Arts Department was reestablished in 1933 (Hemarat 1998: 105), this implies that Rati’s music lesson did not stop amid the political uncertainty surrounding the 1932 revolution. The twenty-year-old Rati was already a household name, known for her heavy and explosive *jakhee* style under the tutelage of the previous three teachers. But under Sawaeng’s brief mentorship,

Rati's *jakhee* style was further polished and her solo repertory expanded, firmly establishing her among the most talented women Thai classical musicians to watch at that time. Rati's music lessons with Sawang still continued until they came to a halt at the height of World War II. With the downfall of Thai classical music popularity from Phibun Songkhram's Cultural Mandates that required all Thai classical musicians to have a license, Rati stopped playing *jakhee* for several years and started her first job as a government officer at the Irrigation Department.

The 1932 revolution and the subsequent World War II aptly serves as a reflective intermission for Chaluay's and Rati's lives, one that revolved around the court music traditions and knowledge. While the two were born with a noble status thanks to their blueblood family and sent to the palace at an early age, their initial Thai classical music encounters were starkly different. Chaluay's palace stint until the 1932 revolution was typical of a court woman at that time. Her Thai classical music training took place almost entirely behind the walls of Sucharit Suda's palace. She may be the youngest – perhaps the most talented – among the crop of Sucharit Suda's *Nariisumit* group, learned a vast *sau uu* repertory directly from one of the best *sau uu* players of the time *Phra Sanphleengsuang*, and performed literally before King Vajiravudh as well as King Prajadhipok, but her work environment made her name relatively obscure outside the palace. The “holy trinity” of the string music in the pre-1932 period was comprised of men musicians, *Luang Phairausiangsau* for *sau duang*, *Phra Sanphleengsuang* on *sau uu*, and *Luang Waungjakheerab* on *jakhee*.

Rati's childhood upbringing and early music training was almost the opposite. Since she spent most of her school life outside the palace, her music lessons were much like a private tutoring. Leading *jakhee* teachers were hired to train her, one after another,

all of whom were leading men string musicians coming straight from the court. With her determination and dedication to *jakhee* practice, Rati's skills improved quickly and exponentially. It is also worth noting that Rati had more exposure to the string music among the noble family outside the palace. This included performances during a public gathering and for a radio broadcast. This public aspect of her life resulted in Rati's high reputation prior to the 1932 revolution and World War II. In other words, Rati was already recognized as a rising star within the string music circle. But this rising *jakhee* prodigy would go on to establish herself as one of the most famous women musicians in the post 1932 revolution period when she started working at the Public Relations Department. It is here that Rati met Chaluay and formed a formidable partnership that is still fondly remembered by their students.

The gender dynamics of Chaluay's and Rati's early musical training is key to unpacking their subsequent rise to fame. It is equally important to understand the gendered practices that were imbued into Thai classical music during the time when the royal-nationalist sentiments were at their height. In this period, King Vajiravudh was so fascinated by the gender roles of the Victorian era that he imposed such values to construct a distinct masculinity and femininity values of the Siamese citizens, in top-down order: noble men were taught to be adventurous whereas women were domesticated with household chores (Worathipha 2019: 228–30). Nowhere was, in Judith Butler's words, gender performativity of an idealized Siamese women more clearly and repetitively stylized than? in the court (Butler 1999: 179). Such were the values that were instilled to Chaluay and Rati during the latter's brief tenure in the palace.

Both teachers were noted for their withheld expression and reticence. Marut Vijitchote, also known among his students as Mark, notes that he looks up to Chaluay, his

teacher, not only in terms of musical techniques but also bodily postures (personal comm). This is because to him, Chaluay's expression, with or without *sau uu*, epitomizes the manners of the "palace people" (*chaaw wang* ชาววัง) or the gentleperson (*phuudii*). In Hemarat's similar recount of Rati's refined personalities shaped by the palace culture, note the adjectives used to define immaculateness and imply class status:

"Those who know her often say that she is indeed someone who spent their childhood in the palace. That is because she has an elegant [*sangaa-ngaam* สง่างาม] demeanor, knows how, when, and where to behave appropriately and strategically [*kaalatheesa* กาลเทศะ], a salient characteristic of a nobleperson [*phuudii*]." (Hemarat 1998: 99–100, emphases mine)

The stylized gender performance of Chaluay and Rati, exhibited in the form of manners, are described with words that are heavily loaded with values and expectations of a woman set by the Thai authority. The shaping of the two teachers' gender performativity positions them among the idealized women musicians. For the subsequent generation of musicians, emulating musical style and embodied, gendered characteristics of Chaluay and Rati go far beyond a confirmation of one's legitimacy within the musical lineage. It reflects one's awareness of the gentleperson practices. Besides a marker of a music school, the palace-informed musical and embodied aspects serve as a class statement for a musician's upward social mobility, to be discussed later.

But the gender stylization that is mapped onto the musical styles of the two teachers in question is quite the opposite. Musical training for the women musicians in Sucharit Suda's palace was at odds with the other disciplining of idealized womanhood. Unlike other women-specific tasks like needlework and embroidery that were to be trained by the senior court women, the music lessons were given by men teachers. It is arguable that professional Thai women classical musicians were not to be found then and that the Kamonwathin brothers may have trained their students at the Phayathai palace to

perform easy-listening string ensemble to please – a duty of domesticated women – the King.⁷ However, Chaluay went above and beyond the expectation. She learned and completed from *Phra Sanphleengsuang* more than few solo pieces, pieces that were least called for when in service.

Solo pieces are far more sophisticated than the ensemble counterparts and were meant for a more serious, competitive performance context. If that is the case, then why would Chaluay be taught of all those pieces? The answer may not be clear from her musical life pre-1932. As I will make clear later, the career path she took post-1932 would demonstrate that she was able to imitate what her teacher, *Phra Sanphleengsuang*, demonstrated. This led to a snowballing effect in the learning process where more and more pieces were “released” from *Phra Sanphleengsuang* to Chaluay’s memory. In other words, it is safe to say that her *sau uu* signature is stylized not as pleasing nor sweet, but rather bold and adventurous, which runs in contrast to other trainings in the palace.

The same could also be said for Rati. Not only were her teachers the famous men *jakhee* players hired directly from the court and the Fine Arts Department, but she also developed exceptional playing skills at an early age because of her continuous dedication to practice. This in turn allowed her to play all the fast, difficult *jakhee* solo pieces full of tricks and techniques, many of which were arranged from the perspective of men musicians. As a woman, Rati was noted for her modesty and unassuming manner, as noted above. But as a woman musician, she did not at all reflect the idealized gender roles of a women with her music with an explosive, daring, and fierce playstyle.

⁷ The word “please” is deliberately used in this sentence to reflect the male gaze on the uses and functions of string ensembles as exclusively secular and therefore holding less spiritual merit, in contrast with *piiphaat* music that is more ritual-oriented and considered sacred.

To summarize, what appears as gender-transgressive, bold musical practice of Chaluy and Rati stands in opposition to their reserved gender performance of disciplined high-class women. Yet to question their gender conformity was unimaginable. Many of the teachers' students told me that one of the things they looked up to in both teachers was their high-class or noble-like behaviors. Unless I insistingly asked, these students rarely mentioned about Chaluy's and Rati's impact in refashioning the gender roles in the string music. While gender play is widespread in Southeast Asian performance traditions, I have not yet encountered any other such accounts in Thai classical music—not at least explicitly. Despite the apparent lack of conscious gendered practices among Thai classical musicians, I argued that Chaluy's and Rati's musical legacy showed a glimpse of the string ensemble as a queer musical space. Jeffery Roy, drawing from Kai Fikentscher's reference to queer night club dance, notes in his dissertation about the performances of trans-gender *hijras* in India that “dance has the capacity to reflect or amplify ‘the social conditioning of one’s gender’ [and] also question or subvert these constructions playfully” (2015: 247). The musical life of Chaluy and Rati did just that, only it was musicking, not dancing and without the explicit presence of the queer subjectivity. Such special musical and cultural upbringings of both teachers would make even greater impact to the string music tradition when the two started working as musicians at the Public Relations Department.

The Government Public Relations Department and Thai Classical Music

As hinted throughout this chapter, Chaluy and Rati's employment at the Government Public Relations Department (PRD) proved a significant turning point of their respective careers in many ways. It was here that they gained exponential recognition as string musicians with their musical flair and prowess. Their popularity

attracted queer men string music enthusiasts, paving the way for subsequent visibility of queer men musicians in the field. This period also marked a nexus between gender play, first in the musical training of the two teachers, and queer musicking subjectivities that unsettle the heteronormative gender binary of Thai classical music. But before I proceed to piece together the musical and social life of the two teachers in this period, it is important that I foreground the institution from which the two garnered their stardom, the Government Public Relations Department. To keep my historical approach consistent, I open with an ethnographic vignette at the organization, using this as a point of entry to trace its history during the period when Chaluay and Rati were active.

August 30th, 2021: Four days ago, Tawan Toiem or Not, a gay man, talented multi-instrumentalist, and a close friend of mine, offered to put me in contact with *khruu* Natthavid Chiyachan or Noo, head of the Thai classical music band at the Government Public Relations Department and Chaluay's grandson. After a brief conversation with Noo, Not gave me Noo's Facebook account name and phone number. I called Noo and set up an interview appointment with him on this day, at the National Broadcasting Services of Thailand (NBT), a division under the PRD.

I drove to the NBT in the morning on that day. Despite the government's work-from-home order amid the struggle to contain the COVID-19 outbreak, there was hardly any parking space in the compound. I parked and waited a few minutes in front of what looked like a broadcasting tower when Noo appeared from the building's entrance to let me in. We walked through that building, taking several turns along the way, and finally reached the office of the Thai classical musicians at the PRD. There was a photo roster of the current employees in front of the office. At the bottom section of the roster were photos of the nine Thai classical instrumentalists, eight men and a woman, and two

women vocalists who are full-time employees. As the head of the Thai music ensemble, Noo's photo was placed first in the musician roster.



Figure 2.2: A photo roster of current musician employees at the PRD. The Thai classical musicians are in the bottom two rows. Noo is in the second row from bottom, third from the left. Photo by the author.

The PRD Thai musician's office was a typical office with rows of desks, chairs, and desktops cluttered with files and documents.⁸ But what gave the place away as a

⁸ In Thailand, few government workers or faculty members have their own offices. Instead, offices are more often shared space, with multiple desks and workstations.

musicians' office were the framed portraits of Thai classical music teachers along with mallets on some of the desks.



Figure 2.3: The PRD Thai musicians' office. Photo by the author.

Noo told me that there was, however, not much to see at the office because most of the activities occurred in the studio where the musicians spend much of their time rehearsing and performing.⁹ The next room I was shown was next to the office. It was small rectangular room with a raised platform. On the platform was an altar, a constellation of artifacts that reflects Thai classical music's cosmology and spirituality: Buddha statues, masks of Thai classical music deities, and several Ganesh statues. On one side of the room was a two-level shelf displaying several great Thai classical music teachers, mostly men. I conducted my interview with Noo in this room.

⁹ I did not have a chance to look at the studio during my visit because the person who had the key was not on the premise that day.



Figure 2.4: Noo [left] plays sau duang with other PRD musicians during a rehearsal in a studio. Photo courtesy of Noo's Facebook page.



Figure 2.5: Natthavid Chiyachan or Noo during an interview. Note the altar behind Noo with several masks of Thai classical music deities as well as the shelf on the right displaying portraits of music teachers. Still image captured from a video footage by the author.

I present this vignette to give a general sense of the workplace environment of the PRD Thai classical musicians. From the outset, the duties of the PRD Thai classical music are much like that of the Fine Arts Department, both prioritizing dissemination of musical performances. What distinguishes the PRD ensemble apart is the discourse

behind their performances. The official website of the Fine Arts Department's Office of Performing Arts states their vision and mission as to "preserve, continue, and the disseminate Thai arts and culture" ([Office of Performing Arts](#) 2020).¹⁰ The Music Administration Unit of the National Broadcast Services, the official title of the PRD music ensemble, has a slightly different mission, i.e., "to produce, research, and develop Thai and Western music to be a medium in disseminating government's important policies as well as preserving, promoting, and continuing Thai performing arts" ([Music Administration Unit, National Broadcast Services of Thailand](#) 2013). Though both institutes share common goals in preserving and continuing Thai performing arts, the Fine Arts Department leans more toward upholding musical performance as a form of high art and culture and as a national symbol involving royal and religious ceremonies, whereas the PRD is more conscious about connecting the public to the government. This slight difference illustrates a contrasting history of the two organizations, which was key to understanding Chaluy and Rati's rise to stardom.¹¹

The PRD has quite a conflicting history with its current roles. According to the PRD's official website, the organization was founded on May 3, 1933, a year after the revolution that led to the end of the absolute monarchy and the birth of a constitutional democracy.¹² Its initial name was Publicity Division, but it underwent multiple changes: Publicity Bureau in 1933, Publicity Department in 1940, and Public Relations

¹⁰ I translated the Office of Performing Arts' mission and vision from Thai despite the availability of the English translation language because it is written as "preserve, preserve, and disseminate Thai arts and culture."

¹¹ Public relations in Thailand is also examined by several Thai historians and media studies scholars as a governmental tool to construct an "imagined community" (Anderson 1986) through nationalist consciousness and to control its citizen long before its institutionalization as PRD itself. For example, Pitipatanacozit (2000), Ekachai and Komolsevin (2004), Tantivejakul (2014).

¹² The complete official history of PRD can be found at <https://www.prd.go.th/th/content/page/index/id/1>.

Department in 1952 through the present.¹³ This organization was founded by Prime Minister Marshall Phibun Songkhram who, along with other Thai intelligentsias, spearheaded the 1932 revolution. During its initial years, the organization's main purpose was to use media like radio, newspaper, and print advertising "to carry out propaganda campaigns in support of his leadership and to promote Thai nationalism (Tantivejakul 2019: 260). Heavily supported by the government, the primary tasks of the of the Publicity Bureau was not at all about glorifying the Thai monarchy, an institution that was on the brink of collapsing. Rather it was about encouraging democracy, support for government, and later promoting the US-based capitalism and controlling the encroaching communism during the cold war era (ibid: 261).

In the wake of the 1932 revolution, Phibun's imposition of "The Cultural Mandates," a state decree that aimed to "civilize" cultures of the Thai people took a heavy toll on Thai traditional performances. Thai classical music was strictly controlled and those with a license approved by the Fine Arts Department could only perform it. This period of heavy cultural policing was known to many traditional practitioners as the "dark age." At the same time, the government's Western orchestras were getting increased support as "civilized music" and tasked with several performances and recordings.¹⁴ Western-derived amusement activities like ballroom dancing, accompanied with big bands playing a fusion of Western and Thai musical styled known as *phleeng thai saakon* เพลงไทยสากล and *phleeng luukkrung* เพลง ลูกกรุง, were encouraged, alienating

¹³ Interestingly the PRD's official website did not mention anything about Phibun as the organization's founder. That the name of Phibun, notoriously known for his anti-monarchy ideology, is deliberately written off from the history of PRD is arguably the organization's attempt to wipe slate clean, as it is now working in full support of both government and the royal institution.

¹⁴ Phibun is often portrayed as the antagonist among the Thai classical musicians due to his cultural mandates that restricted public performances of the tradition. His place in the Thai classical music history is further implicated in the 2004 feature film *The Overture*, a biopic of Luangpraditphairoh (Sorn Silpabanleng).

traditional values and cultures of local people in the process (Kammales and Patcharin 2018: 344).

“Patriotic songs” or *phleeng pluk jai* เพลงปลุกใจ, songs that instill nationalist sentiments, dominated the government’s musical production in the late 1930s through the mid-1940s. Yet, different government institutions’ music divisions had their own interpretation of what patriotic songs entailed. The Fine Arts Department Western Orchestra was responsible for playing newly composed patriotic songs that revolve around the historical greatness of the past monarchy through warfare, but the Publicity Division’s counterpart was playing songs that propagated Phibun’s cultural mandates including, for example, wearing western-style hats and being aware of civic duties (Kannaphon 2001: 28). The music band at the PRD, or Publicity Division at that time, served the government’s progressive values striving for democracy, but the Fine Arts Department was doing their best to keep the monarch-centric conservative ideals alive. Their split path would, however, slowly merge in the years that followed.

While the Thai classical music ensemble has been a mainstay since the founding of the Fine Arts Department, PRD’s own ensemble had a more modest beginning. Based on an account of the head of Thai music section during her time, Pamela Myers-Moro writes that the PRD’s ensemble was employed in 1939 as a collection of instruments rather than musicians (1993: 201). Kannaphon Yothinchatchawal (2001: 31), on the other hand, quotes a writing by Rati that PRD’s Thai classical music ensemble started in 1938 as a string ensemble called Khana Samaklen (คณะสมัครเล่น the amateur group) consisting of a group of amateur men musicians from the Post and Telegraph Department. This amateur string ensemble was intended to be a back-up ensemble to fill in any scheduled musical groups that got cancelled; the group was met with an unexpected busy broadcast

schedule because a government's Thai classical music ensembles were not always on call around the clock (ibid: 32). What started as a part-time string ensemble later had several new members, though not formally trained, and could provide a variety of musical performances beyond string music.

The PRD's Thai classical music ensemble was not officially recognized as a part of the PRD itself until in 1951 when it was equipped with instruments for common Thai classical music performances, i.e., *piiphaat* and string music. The appointment of Khap Kunchon, a blueblood Thai classical music enthusiast, as the head PRD just a year later was followed by a recruiting of highly trained Thai classical musicians. When the organization was renamed as the Public Relations department in 1952, the first cohort of trained Thai musicians was hired, and it consisted of mostly men who played the instruments and women as vocalists. Chaluay and Rati were employed as PRD's Thai classical musicians in 1954 and 1953, respectively, making them the first women instrumentalists at the PRD.¹⁵

¹⁵ The year when Chaluay's and Rati's started their employment at PRD is debatable across various sources. In a roster of PRD's musicians from a funeral book of Sudjit Duriyapraneet, a reputed Thai classical singer and a former head of PRD Thai classical music ensemble, Chaluay's and Rati's employment began in the same year, i.e., 1950 (Sudjit 2013: 152). Chaluay's funeral book mentions that her employment started in 1954 (Chaluay 2000: 4), and Hemarat, in his thesis, writes that Rati's position as the PRD's musicians was from 1955 (Hemarat 1998: 112). Rati's funeral book, on the other hand, states that she started her employment at PRD first as a record keeper before being transferred to a musician position. Given that Chaluay and Rati position in PRD's Thai classical music ensemble started during Kap Kunchon's leadership, I am inclined to believe that 1954 and 1955 were the years Rati and Chaluay were recognized as PRD musicians, respectively.



Figure 2.6: Chaluay (center) performs sau uu while Rati (second row on raised platform) plays jakhee, representing PRD's Thai classical music ensemble. Photo taken from Chaluay's commemorative funeral book.

Huge Sound, High Speed

Because Chaluay and Rati joined the PRD Thai classical music ensemble within the span of a year, they performed together for the ensemble so many times that their musical partnership, along with the similar personality, was referred to as “the twins of the PRD.” But it was the innumerable performances, a primary duty of PRD's musicians, that slowly garnered them the public attention. Unlike the Fine Arts Department Thai classical music ensembles that are responsible for the “big events” like royal and religious ceremonies with occasional concerts, the performance of the PRD's ensemble was at the time more public facing. With access to recording technologies in the 1950s, Hemarat notes that the PRD's Thai musicians would gather at 10 am every day for a recording session, a routine that echoed the PRD's policy to record and disseminate Thai classical music (Hemarat 1998: 117). Chaluay and Rati played several pieces, both in

representative musicians and ensembles to disseminate their performances.¹⁶ This has resulted in a space for re/writing Thai classical music history, one that brings marginalized musicians out of the shadow of the authoritative institution. I do not intend to undermine Chaluy and Rati's musical trainings and prowess. Rather, I suggest that media and technology catalyzed the popularity of their musical styles that do not conform to the expected gender roles of string instruments in Thai classical music. And this precisely amounted to their popularity and subsequently appeal to effeminate men musicians despite the equally active role of the Fine Arts Department in disseminating and recording musical performances.

While having recorded many performances with PRD Thai classical music ensemble, it was the solo pieces that made the two stand out. Let us take a close listening to Chaluy's *sau uu* solo in a piece called "Nok Khamin" (The Canary).¹⁷ "Nok Khamin" is a short, three-section piece noted for its recurring melodic patterns at the second half of the first and the second section. In a solo format for *sau uu*, the first round of each section usually begins with a slow tempo marked by a continuous florid melody, known as *thiaw waan* ที่ยาวหวาน or "the sweet round." The second round of each section is distinguished by a faster tempo with a more continuous stream of sixteenth notes, known as *thiaw kep* ที่ยาวเก็บ or "the *kep* round."¹⁸ On listening to solo pieces on string instruments, one can

¹⁶ Although recordings of Thai classical music performances have been around much earlier, vinyl records of solo pieces by Thai classical music virtuosi published from the 30s through the 60s are considered historically valuable items for Thai classical music enthusiasts. Besides capturing the music from the past great music figures, these records have been widely used as references for the "authentic" version of a solo piece. See Jarun Kanchanapradit's article (2018: 89-92) for a near-exhaustive list of these vinyl records.

¹⁷ This record has been digitized and published on YouTube in CHEE channel: https://youtu.be/_ShjqbkDP8

¹⁸ *Kep* is a Thai classical music term referring to a continuous stream of sixteenth note with respect to the main melody.

expect an alternation between slow and fast tempi as a section is repeated. To help visualize the piece, an overview chart, along with a guided listening are provided below.

Timestamp	0:01	0:54	1:23	2:04	2:14	2:46
Melodic setting	Melismatic	Syllabic	Melismatic	Syllabic	Melismatic	Syllabic
Form	AB	AB	CB	CB	D	D
Section	1		2		3	

Table 2.1: Overview chart of “Nok Khamin” *sau uu* solo recorded by Chaluay Chiyachan.

Timestamp	Section & Form	Description	Gender Implication
0:01	1 A	Chaluay begins the slow round of the first section (<i>thiaw waan</i>). Notice the high pitch registers as she presses the strings further down the <i>sau uu</i> neck, a technique reserved for solo pieces.	Pressing the higher pitches down the neck of fiddles is not common in ensemble pieces because it sounds “impolite” (<i>mai riaprauy</i>). Musicians are expected to play their part plainly, with occasional technical flair. In solo pieces, however, these otherwise impolite musical practices are expected to boast the complexity of the solo’s specific arrangement. Chaluay’s showcasing such technique early into the solo presents an interesting contrast with the expected “politeness” of a women musician.
0:13		Chaluay brings her left hand back up to grip the upper part of the instrument’s neck. Note the slurs and the florid, continuous melody of the slow part. <i>Ching</i> , small hand cymbal, joins in and continues throughout.	
0:18		The drums <i>thoon rammanaa</i> comes in to bolster the rhythmic department.	
0:38	1 B	The solo reaches the second half of the first section.	
0:44		Chaluay moves her left fingers down the <i>sau uu</i> neck once again.	
0:54	1’A	The second round of the first section (<i>thiaw kep</i>) begins, marked by Chaluay’s sudden change to a much faster tempo.	This transition between the slow and fast rounds is vital to the discussion of gender implications in this solo. A sudden leap in tempo like this is not usually found in string instruments solo. Although the <i>thiaw kep</i> in discussion consists of a continuous melody like <i>ranaat eek</i> that normally renders it at a relatively fast tempo, it operates on a different aesthetic. Speed is not the priority, but instead the clarity. Chaluay’s fast <i>thiaw kep</i> rendition of the “Nok Khamin” solo breaks the sweet and pleasant images of <i>sau uu</i> and presents a <i>piiphaat</i> -esque sensation, as though she is “racing” through the melody.

Timestamp	Section & Form	Description	Gender Implication
0:59		Note the permutation of three pitches <i>mi</i> , <i>re</i> , and <i>do</i> , a signature of this version of “Nok Khamin” solo.	These characteristic ways of rendering <i>kep</i> melody, also repeated in the second round of the second and third sections in this solo, is what makes Chaluyay’s musical style or <i>thaang</i> stand out even when playing in ensemble. While this salient feature distinguishes Chaluyay’s <i>thaang</i> from other contemporary women stringed musicians, it also runs the risk of being too excessive in terms of technical flair. This high-risk-high-reward style would later establish Chaluyay as one of the riveting Thai classical women musicians.
1:11		Note the jump between high and low registers as the first half of the section comes to an end.	
1:12	1’B	The of the second half of this round is marked by melodic phrases that give an illusion of melody being misaligned with the duple rhythmic symmetry, creating a moment of tension that is resolved soon after.	
1:19		Chaluyay “releases the throttle” as she brings the tempo down preparation for the slow round of the second section.	Moving between lightning fast and slow parts in this solo, technological necessity of the records aside, can be read as a alternation between the customary gender-defined slow and soft character of stringed instruments and the redefining bold, if not audacious, take on the musical practices once exclusive to the more masculine <i>piiphaat</i> realm.
1:23	2 A	The slow round of the second section begins, marked by sliding pitches and hammering of the <i>sau uu</i> strings	
1:39	2 B	The recurring part returns, note the melodic similarity with 1 B	
1:55	2’A	Chaluyay pauses momentarily for the fast round of the second section. The tempo suddenly accelerates again.	
2:04	2’B	A similar melody from 1’B returns.	
2:10		Chaluyay brings down the tempo ahead of the final section.	
2:14	3	The slow part of the third section begins. Again, note the sliding pitches and hammering to embellish the melody.	
2:46	3’	The fast round of the third section begins here. The tempo accelerates for the last time.	
3:01		Chaluyay pulls the tempo back to conclude the solo.	

Table 2.2: Guided listening of “Nok Khamin” *sau uu* solo recorded by Chaluyay Chiyachan ([view on website](#)).

During the time of this recording, circa mid to late 1950s, Thai classical music performances recorded by women musicians were already common, but most of the solo pieces were recorded by men musicians. Only a few women musicians had recorded a solo on vinyl, and Chaluy was among them. Listening to this recording, I was struck by the unusually fast tempo that the piece was played in overall, especially the transition between the slow and fast rounds of each section. I asked Mark, one of Chaluy's students about it, wondering whether this fast tempo was caused by the speeding up of the playback. Mark confirmed that Chaluy was indeed playing in a faster tempo to ensure that the solo did not exceed the time limit of the record. The recording technology may necessitate the faster playing speed, but this led to further repercussions of the gendered practices of this music tradition.

While I was fascinated with the speed of Chaluy's solo, Mark commented that the unusually faster speed caused the slow parts to only be partially embellished, which was not how the solo was to be commonly played. His comment may read as a slight reservation toward the solo being reduced from its perfection due to technological constraints, but it reveals some important gendered concepts accorded to string instruments and its solo repertoire. The reason string instruments play solo repertoire in the slow-fast tempo because the first round of a section is meant for a musician to show off elaborate, complex embellishing techniques of the tremendously slowed-down main melody. The second round of a section, while containing a stream of sixteenth notes, is meant to exhibit the intricate weaving of the solo melody with respect to the corresponding main melody piece. Playing continuously in a fast speed is referred to by a

musician as *wai* or ไหว, e.g., *tii ranaat wai* ดีระนาดไหว.¹⁹ This word, however, is widely used in *piiphaat* context where an ability to play fast indicates a greater skills and therefore better musician. String instruments, on the other hand, is almost conceptually the opposite: elaboration, embellishment, and grace. With such contrasting playing virtues, it is not surprising that *piiphaat* and stringed instruments are aligned with normative masculinity and femininity respectively.

Chaluay's "Nok Khamin" solo is just one of several performances during her tenure at the PRD. I choose to discuss this piece because it represents one of the moments in which she destabilized and blurred the gendered notions of stringed instruments. These recordings, along with other performances, earned her a reputation of a women *sau uu* player with a fast pace and scintillating *thaang*, which was distinct from the relatively more constrained style of dominant *sau uu* schools. Speed was not the only quality that distinguished Chaluay, nor was it the "Nok Khamin" solo: Chaluay's students maintained that her ace solo pieces are "Kraaw Nai" and "Khaek Mon," regarded as the top solo pieces in Thai classical music.²⁰ Chaluay performed "Kraaw Nai" on several occasions,

¹⁹ In everyday language, *wai* would mean "to be able to" and is often paired with a verb to indicate that a subject is able to perform the said verb. For example, ฉันทนไหว (*chan thon wai*) would mean "I can tolerate"; ไม่ไหวแล้ว (*mai wai laew*) would mean "[I] can't take it any longer." In musical terms, however, *wai* characterizes a musician's ability to play at a high speed and carries gendered implications. Because *ranaat eek*'s idiomatic style of continuous playing in octave, being *wai* is a characterizing trait of a player. Though the term can be occasionally applied to other instruments in *piiphaat* instruments, it is not as common in stringed instruments in part because the key technical skill in these instruments is the sophisticated flowering of an extended melody rather than playing fast. Rati's recognition as a *wai jakhee* player hints toward a destabilization of gendered practices in Thai classical music as stringed instruments are adopting performance practices once confined within *piiphaat* ensemble.

²⁰ While "Kraaw Nai" is considered the top solo in Thai classical music and Chaluay is known for her bold rendition of the piece, my conversations with Chaluay's students revealed that it was "Khaek Mon" that Chaluay and her students value the most. Chaluay's solo of the piece is so heavily guarded that, unlike "Kraaw Nai," its recording is extremely rare. Mark speculated that *Phra Sanphleengsuang*, Chaluay's teacher, told her that this solo was arranged specially for her and not to teach it to anybody. Chaluay did anyway but demanded her students not to perform the piece unless necessary. Mark recalled that before every rehearsal of the "Khaek Mon" solo with Chaluay, she would ask her students to turn off all the recording devices.

both on stage and in studio, but the most significant performance of the piece was one in 1979 that won her a royally conferred prize in a competition at the National Theater in 1979. Unlike “Nok Khamin,” “Kraaw Nai” is a one-section piece that is played one time through. While the play style moves between florid melodies and a constant stream of pitches, the tempo does not shift dramatically but instead slowly accelerates from start to finish.

In a thesis that formalistically analyzes the “Kraaw Nai” solo, Natthaphong Kaewsuwan (2012: 33–36) mentions detailed historical anecdotes pertaining to the “Kraaw Nai” solo from three of Chaluay’s students: Mark, Noo, and Dusadee Sawangwiboonpong, who will appear later in this dissertation. The selected anecdotes from the three students show common descriptions of Chaluay’s “Kraaw Nai” musical characteristics: a “huge,” imposing timbre (*siang too* เสียงโต), speedy (*wai* ไหว), and ferocious (*dudan* ดุดัน). These words are associated with masculinity and, of course, at odds with the expected gender performance of stringed instruments. Some of them even mentioned that Chaluay’s “Kraaw Nai” contains parts that imitate *pii* idiomatic style because Chaluay’s teacher, *Phra* Sanphleengsuang, was a *pii* player himself. Combining the close reading of and listening to the recorded performance as well as historical anecdotes pertaining to Chaluay, her recognition was in part due to her high level of musical command on *sau uu*. At the same time, it was the nonconforming aspect of her musical playstyle that set her apart from other contemporaries. Chaluay’s musical self was highly mediated with the notions of masculinity. However, these virtues were never even thought to be transgressive, precisely because she performed these musical virtues with the perfectly gender-conforming embodiment and affect of the court women.

Rati was already a musician to be reckoned with when she joined PRD Thai classical music ensemble as the *jakhee* player. Like Chaluay, Rati has recorded several pieces for her organization, further reaffirming her tour de force. In addition to crafting Rati's stardom status, recorded *jakhee* solos also reflect yet another transformation in her musical style. At PRD, Rati worked closely with Samaan Thongsuchot, the organization's *khaung wong yai* player. Saaman created four solo *jakhee* pieces for Rati in 1975: "Nok Khamin," "Sud Sa-nguan," "Surintharahuu," and "Aa-than." These pieces are tailor-made for Rati with techniques that are described as "decisive" (*detkhaat* เด็ดขาด) and "swift" (*chapwai* ฉับไว), qualities that do not align with the gendered roles of women musicians nor the stringed instruments. Jarukiat Sangyenying, a *jakhee* player who closely follows the musical and works of Rati, mentioned to me that working with Samaan took Rati's *jakhee* style into a whole new level. She was already known for her ability to execute fast and explosive melodies, but Samaan made sure that these attributes were well foregrounded in Rati's performance.

To illustrate Rati's prowess during her spell at PRD, I will take a close reading on "Sud Sa-nguan" solo. "Sud Sa-nguan" is a one-section piece with a tinge of idiomatic melody of the Mon music culture. This "foreign" element in Thai classical repertory is known as the "accent" or *samniang* สำเนียง. As such, "Sud Sa-nguan" is considered have a Mon accent. "Sud Sa-nguan" is played two times through. This is also true for most of its solo versions.²¹ For the *jakhee* solo, the first round of the piece starts at a relatively slow speed, but the playing concept differs with that of *sau uu* solo. Instead of executing elaborate embellishments of the melody using florid, sliding notes and hammering, the slow first round of the *jakhee* solo is where a musician can perform a short, quick burst of

²¹ *Ranaat eek* is the only exception. The instrument usually plays four rounds of one-section solo pieces. Each round proceeds with increasing speed and showcases different techniques.

melodies, sometimes in three strokes (*sabat*) or in phrases (*khayii*). The second round of the piece works on a similar principle to *sau uu*, faster speed and using stream of sixteenth continuous notes or *kep*. This solo was recorded at the PRD studio in 1975 soon after the piece was completed.²² The solo was preceded by a vocal part, sung by Sudjit Duriyapraneeet, Rati’s colleague at the PRD.

Timestamp	Section & Form	Description	Gender Implications
0:01	Vocal	Sudjit’s voice enters, marking the start of the audio clip.	
3:12	<i>Jakhee</i>	As Sudjit approaches the end of her part, Rati picks up the last phrase before proceeding to the solo.	
3:16	A	Rati quickly asserts herself in the slow round of the solo with a <i>sabat</i> , followed almost immediately by a <i>khayii</i> . These quick-firing melodic bursts continue throughout the first round.	The speed and execution of these techniques were novel at that time. <i>Sabat</i> and <i>khayii</i> are common techniques in <i>jakhee</i> solos, but performing these techniques in succession and in a burst was almost unprecedented from a women <i>jakhee</i> player.
3:43		Rati reaches for the brass string on her instrument. Note the distinct buzzing timbre.	
4:12		The solo reaches the final phrases of the section. The tempo slowly increases, and the short bursts of melodic phrases is slowly replaced by constant sixteenth note of <i>kep</i> melody.	
4:27	A’	The second round of the solo begins with an interplay with the brass string.	
4:35		The melody now enters the Mon accent. Notice the rest and the tremolo with occasional strike on the brass string.	
4:53		The Mon accent comes to an end, followed by the “last sprint” of the solo. This part is marked by another brass string before the transition into a complete <i>kep</i> style with a sudden increase in tempo.	This is what characterizes Rati’s explosive and aggressive playstyle. Having already hinted at her ability to perform at a high tempo in the beginning, here she was accelerating as though there was no

²² The solo is accessible through <https://youtu.be/9VlIO9p1Bgo>.

5:08		The solo reaches the maximum speed when Rati “releases the throttle” to transition to the ending. Notice a sudden deceleration of tempo followed by a tremolo at the end.	speed limit. Like Chaluay’s solo discussed above, Rati broke from a conventional practice solo piece on stringed instruments, one in which speed is not part of the consideration. The techniques, pace, and execution of the solo piece here is a result of her working with Samaan Thongsuchot at PRD and is also greatly informed by <i>ranaat eek</i> practices. As such, Rati may be keeping her gentleperson look all the while playing the <i>jakhee</i> , but her musical language is well wrapped up with masculine qualities like strength, aggression, and speed.
------	--	---	--

Table 2.3: Guided Listening of Rati’s “Sud Sa-nguan” *jakhee* solo ([view on website](#)).

There were several contemporary women *jakhee* players active at the same time as Rati, for example, Nibha Aphaiwong, Thongdii Sujaritkul, Phaithoon Kittiwon, but these *jakhee* teachers are known for their playstyles that display technical flair in a rather composed manner. These musical characteristics are known among musicians as *riaprauy* เรียบร้อย, or polite and gracious. Not only does this polite and gracious musical style correspond to the similar expected gender performances of a women musician, but it also suggests musical lineages whose roots stem from the palace days or the “golden age” of Thai classical music. Women *jakhee* players of such styles are thus respected for their personification of ideal women musicians and representing the remnants of the palace cultures under which Thai classical music once thrived.

However, it is almost impossible to think about high-speed, explosive *jakhee* style without including Rati on the list. Rati may have been trained by several renowned men music teachers from the palace, but her lessons mostly occurred privately. Because of that it is reasonable to speculate that she has more leeway to experiment with her *jakhee* style in ways that is not dictated by the gendered constructs from the palace. She may have been so well trained that she could respond to any tricks given by her teachers. Her

solo style is not held back nor is it constrained—she went all out and all over the place with all the flairs, but very strategically. It is this tight space through the crack between gendered and social aspects her Rati’s cultural and musical upbringing that caused her *jakhee* style to depart from other contemporaries.

Negotiating Gendered Practices on Television

Apart from performing for mass-produced records, Chaluay’s and Rati’s reputation of fast, explosive musical style becomes even more apparent when they performed with men musicians on television. They appeared in several Thai classical music programs broadcast by the PRD. The visual aspect from this form of media further nuances the ways in which gendered division between stringed and *piiphaat* instruments is muddled during a musical performance. The televised PRD Thai classical music performances can be traced to Thailand’s first television channel “Thai TV Channel 4 Baangkhunphrom,” also nicknamed “Channel 4 Baangkhunphrom” (ช่อง 4 บางขุนพรหม) after the name of the palace where the station was based. Channel 4 belonged to the Thai Television Corporation Limited, a company incentivized by the Publicity Department (PRD’s former name) and first aired in 1955.²³ While broadcasting government works and speeches from the Prime Minister, the channel also offered a wide range of programs, including those featuring Thai traditional arts. Among them, “*Kanthapphasaaalaa*” คันทรรพศาลา or “The Musician’s Pavilion” is considered the earliest television program about Thai classical music. When television broadcast expanded across Thailand, the PRD Thai classical music ensemble made several trips to perform for regional TV stations, most

²³ The Thai TV Channel 4 underwent multiple transformations along with its parent company as Bangkok was dealing with volatile political situations. When Thai Television was dissolved following its report on the October 6, 1976 massacre, Channel 4 was transferred to and has since remained under a new government establishment, Mass Communication Organization of Thailand (MCOT). After the transfer, Channel 4 was renamed Thai Color Television Channel 9, known in short among Thais as Channel 9. In the digital TV era since 2015, the channel is known as MCOT HD.

notably in Khon Kaen, 280 miles away in the Northeast, and Song Khla, 452 miles away in the South.



Figure 2.8: Chaluay [*far right on sau uu*] and Rati [*front row on jakhee*] perform in *dontrii thai prayuk* ensemble for Kanthapphasalaa TV show. Photo courtesy of Anant Narkkong.

Situating Chaluay and Rati's place in the history of Thai classical music media may shed some light to the contextual factors surrounding their PRD career. To examine how they negotiated with the gendered practices of string instruments, however, I must step closer to consider some of their notable recorded performances, the way made music in the records. Following Louis Meintjes' focus on moments of contestation over sound production as a lens to examine the racialized politics within South African recording studio as (Meintjes 2004: 25), I contend that what Chaluay and Rati did in their recorded performance goes beyond mere representation of women musicians to reveal the complexity between the gendered musical tradition, instruments, and the musicians, all of which mediated by the recording technology. But unlike Meintjes' investigation of

identity politics behind the scenes of recording studio, I will focus on the subtle details revealed during the very public footage of PRD Thai music ensemble performing “Choet Jiin.”²⁴

“Choet Jiin” is considered one of ultimate ensemble pieces for Thai classical music. Believed to be composed in the King Monkut reign during the mid-19th century, the piece consists of four sections that is filled with overlapping (*luuk lueam* ลูกเหลื่อม) and call-and-response (*luuk lau luuk khat* ลูกลื้อลูกขัด) melodies, a salient feature of a long and difficult *thayauy* repertory. Each section is led by its respective vocal part and then played one time through. All four sections of “Choet Jiin” share the same ending melody derived from “Choet,” a *naaphaat* piece used to accompany performances and rituals. Conventionally, the vocal part of the piece is sung in free rhythm. When the instrumentalists follow, each section starts with a relative slow tempo that gradually increases toward the end. The tempo is reset after the end with the free rhythm vocal part resuming, and the cycle repeats. Since the ending of “Choet Jiin” is played in a *kep* style, this part of the piece is regarded as an indicator a musician’s stamina. The musician must make a final “sprint” through sixteenth notes at the end of each section when the tempo has already accelerated dramatically.

Timestamp	Section & Form	Description	Remarks on gender
0:01	Vocal	Sudjit begins the piece with a vocal part. Note the free rhythm of this section. The camera positioned her in the middle of the frame with Rati sitting slightly off-set behind Sudjit’s right hand side.	
0:53		Sudjit imitates the first phrases of the first section’s melody in a metered section. Note the <i>ching</i> or a hand cymbal punctuating the rhythm.	

²⁴ The piece can be accessed via <https://youtu.be/jtQykjt6KFo>.

Timestamp	Section & Form	Description	Remarks on gender
1:07		Sudjit reverts to the free rhythm vocal part throughout.	
1:22		<i>Ranaat eek</i> picks up the ending part of the vocal with an alternation between fast <i>kep</i> melody and tremolo.	
1:34		All instruments join the <i>ranaat</i> to see off the vocal's part. The camera transitions to first focus on the <i>ranaat eek</i> player before slowly zooming out to reveal other members of the ensemble.	
1:48	1 st section Instrumental	The beginning of each section of "Choet Jiin" is marked by a distinct phrase -MRD -R-D	As the camera zooms out, note the rather relaxed bodily posture of the <i>piiphaat</i> instrumentalists: <i>ranaat eek</i> , <i>ranaat thum</i> , and <i>khaung wong lek</i> . String musicians, including Chaluay and Rati, are relatively more still.
3:08		The camera pans to focus on Chaluay as the ensemble brings the tempo up several notches and with a stream of the <i>kep</i> melody.	Note that Chaluay and Rati plays the <i>kep</i> melody with the <i>piiphaat</i> instruments. Both looked composed even though the men <i>piiphaat</i> musicians body become a little stiff due to the accumulated fatigue. Notice on 3:12 when Chaluay plays her melodic part "against" the ensemble, making the <i>sau uu</i> stand out.
3:23	2 nd section instrumental	The fast <i>kep</i> melody breaks off to a tremolo to mark the end of the first section, followed by the distinct beginning melodic phrase to indicate the second section	Again, Chaluay and Rati races with the <i>piiphaat</i> player as the ensemble quickly raises the tempo with the <i>kep</i> melody.
4:53		The first "signature" overlapping part of the piece. This is where <i>ranaat thum</i> gets a chance to improvise as the rest of the ensemble follows the main melody.	We can get a sense of how gender constructs are embodied in Chaluay and Rati in this moment. While both are seated in <i>phapphiap</i> position, as expected from string musicians, they showed little animation. But behind this composure is the explosive playstyle that simultaneously contrasts and compliments the <i>piiphaat</i> instruments.

Timestamp	Section & Form	Description	Remarks on gender
6:38	3 rd section instrumental	The third section begins	At 6:45 we can see a close-up shot of Rati's hand movements on <i>jakhee</i> . Notice the swiftness of the plectrum strokes on her right hand and her distinctive stretched-out left fingers on the fretboard.
7:24		The piece reaches the second "signature" overlapping part. Note the similarity of its beginning with that of the second section.	The tempo accelerates quickly as usual. But at this point the <i>piiphaat</i> musicians' bodily gestures appear to be more animated. The <i>khaung wong lek</i> player moves their torso to help articulate the rhythm. <i>Ranaat eek</i> is visibly using great effort to maintain the pace while <i>ranaat thum</i> sprays their mallets all over the xylophone keys. The string musicians, well within the pace, showed no such sign of struggle.
8:47	4 th section instrumental	The last section of "Choet Jiin", consisting mostly of overlapping and call-and-response melodies.	
10:49		Each of the instruments takes a turn to do a short solo round. Note that the <i>sau duang</i> overplays into Rati's part, making the transition not as clear-cut.	During the solo, we could hear respectively the <i>jakhee</i> and <i>sau uu</i> from Raii and Chaluay alone. It becomes clear that both were comfortably handling their part well, even in solo.
12:08		Last "sprint" of the section. All instruments play a <i>kep</i> melody in a faster tempo than any of the previous sections before ending with a tremolo. Unfortunately, Chaluay and Rati are not shown in this part.	

Table 2.4: Guided listening of "Choet Jiin" performance by PRD musicians ([view on website](#)).

This footage of "Choet Jiin" shows just how fast or *wai* Chaluay and Rati can play their instrument. But what makes this footage even more significant is that the two bring the explosiveness head-to-head with the men-dominated *piiphaat* instruments. Perhaps the musicians were forced to hasten their performance to fit the allocated time slot and the vocalist reduced to just the first section, but it was obvious that Chaluay and

Rati showed no sign of slowing down at any point during the performance, even though the *piiphaat* musicians were pushing the tempo one section after another. It was not uncommon to see the *piiphaat* musicians giving their all and trying their best to conceal the excruciating fatigue while playing at a high speed given what was expected in a piece like “Choet Jiin.” But to see two women string musicians, seated politely in *phapphiap* position, playing along with such a composure, was indeed a rare sight.

Even the comment section on YouTube was full of praise particularly for Rati. One of the comments reads “*khruu* Rati’s strokes are so sharp” (ครูระดีตีดีคมมาก *khruu ratii diid khom maak*). Another states “*khruu* Rati plays so so well – her strokes are so tight” (ครู ระดี ดีดีดีมาก ๆ ตรีบ แน่นมาก *khruu ratii diid dii maak maak khrap naen maak*). The audio-visual clues as well as the comment sections unanimously and unmistakably suggest that Chaluay and Rati, though playing the feminine-gendered stringed instruments, have no trouble fitting in the musical domain dominated by men, whether in terms of instruments, repertory, or even performance practices.

The commentaries on Chaluay and Rati’s musical characteristics reveal a great deal about the beginning of the blurring of gendered-defined conventions in Thai classical music at that time. Like Chaluay, Rati was known for her playing fast or *wai* ไหว , and unforgivingly ferocious style or *dudan* ดุดัน. But the comment about Rati’s “sharp” *jakhee* stroke was specific to her instrument and bears a connection with *ranaat eek* in that both instruments have quickly decayed pitches produced by plucking the strings and striking the keys respectively. *Khom* คม in this sense means not just “sharp” but also incisive, definitive, and clear. The word is often paired with another word ชัด *chat*, meaning “clear,” to be *khomchat* คมชัด or “sharp” and “clear,” or sometimes expressed with a particle as *khomkhaay* คมคาย to mean gracefully sharp. The word might be gender-

neutral in ordinary parlance, but it is mostly associated with a masculine practice of *ranaat eek* when a player produces perfectly even octaves with both hands across the instruments while maintaining a high speed. Rati's "sharp" *jakhee* quality means that her strokes are always even, producing a consistent timbre whether swinging her wrist inward or outward. It can be argued that having equal instroke and outstroke is a prerequisite for any *jakhee* player, but doing so is much more difficult at a high speed, a practice not commonly observed by women players. Rati's praise along with her newly arranged solos by Samaan as being sharp both confirms her virtuosity, but the associated gender that this term suggests in this musical tradition shows that Rati's musical style indeed consists of masculine traits.

To put the contentious gender practice in this musical performance in perspective, I draw on Tes Slominski's examination of "shut up and play!," a refrain commonly used in Trad, the traditional music of Ireland, to argue that it simultaneously resembles and differs from the "Choet Jiin" performance. Slominski argues that "Shut up and play!" represents a moral ideal that guides, liberates, and constrains an act of playing and hearing music:

Though "shut up and play" is not always aimed at those who would start "difficult" conversation about gender, sexuality, or race, the 'moral ideal' of silence-as-music in Irish traditional music has had the effect of limiting critical discourse, especially about the experiences of musicians in the scene (Slominski 2020: 158).

Chaluay and Rati did exactly just that. Not only did they "shut up and play!" but they did so with grace and composure. From the surface, it can be argued that both used their music to do the talking – they could "rise up" to the level of *piiphaat* with *khruelang saay* instruments and as women musicians. Such gender negotiation, however, is not readily readable because it was double masked, first by their noblewomen-like demeanor

and second by the music itself. But with an informed reading of their musical performance, combined with the gendering of Thai classical music and instruments, what appears as a “shut up and play!” musical experience illustrates a decoupling of gendered musical practices. More importantly, this occurred through and within perfectly gender-conforming musicking bodies, ones that have absorbed structural gender paradigms and then affects them in turn (Wong 2015: 181). The perceived musical masculinity is crafted within the normative feminine musicking body. And this queer moment of the stringed instruments would later serve as a temporary closet for queer subjectivities to assert themselves. For Chaluay and Rati’s musical style breaks the traditional gendered norms linked to string music ensemble, queer men musicians thus looked up to these two musicians as role models for being *saep* or spicy.

Conclusion

Chaluay and Rati are just two of many examples of women musicians who revolutionized string instrument praxis, particularly *sau uu* and *jakhee*—they made the string music “spicy.” The lens of the queer gaze allows for an informed reading beyond their widely celebrated and illustrious musical careers at the PRD. They rewove once separate and binary gendered notions into their musicking. By simultaneously embodying the affects of idealized noblewomen and transcending the masculine musical realms, combined with the publicity they performed as PRD musicians, they provided perfect queering preconditions that paved the way for the presence of queer men musicians in the tradition. As such, what happens to be a queer space was not born out of a vacuum, but from the convergence of once incommensurable hetero-gender norms shaped by situated social, political, and institutional underpinnings.

I have a few caveats as I make these arguments. The above theorization of the historical preconditions to one of the liveliest queer spaces in Thai classical music is a testament to local concepts that conflate gender and sexuality. Like Chaluy and Rati, many queer musicians in these ensembles embody effeminacy while making their musical voices heard through a bold and aggressive style of play. But I must reiterate that the musical styles of these two teachers only represents a queer condition predicated by a powerful conformity of gender performance. There are other string musical lineages that are embraced by queer men musicians, lineages whose music is marked by a “polite” (*riaprauy* เรียบร้อย) style and not as striking as Chaluy’s and Rati’s. Likewise, while some of Chaluy’s and Rati’s students revealed that the musical styles of these lineages resonated with their nonconformity, some other musicians from the lineages in question refused to comment on the connection between gender-defined musical practices and queerness.

Having laid out the importance of gender constructs and performance in queer musical spaces, the next chapter will provide focused attention to how queerness is expressed in the moment of musicking. I will narrow down our field of view from a broad, institutional perspective to one that is embodied and subtle. If the string ensemble is a queer musical space, how then is queerness embodied, heard, and felt? This is the question the next chapter sets out to answer.

Chapter 3

Embodying Queerness in Gendered Musical Spaces

In the previous chapter, I have shown how the feminized string ensemble began to incorporate musical styles that were once exclusive in the masculinized *piiphaat* music, as seen through the careers of two groundbreaking string women musicians: Chaluay Chiyachan and Rati Wisetsurakan. Chaluay and Rati's legacies defies the fixity of the established gender constructions in Thai classical music, constituting a precondition for queer men musicians to be *saep* or spicy. The cases of Chaluay and Rati on *sau uu* and *jakhee* are nothing short of revolutionary that brought string instruments to an unprecedented popularity. In the process, the accomplishment and legacy of the two women string musicians redefine the established performance practices deeply informed by the idealized gendered constructs. Since the 70s quick firing *jakhee* with electric burst of pace and *sau uu* with unpredictable *thaang* became a new playing style that is still highly sought after even today. These qualities, among others, resonated with queer men musicians who, despite finding comfort with gender roles of the string instruments and ensemble, sometimes refused to play by those very accorded roles.

Because string ensembles are not woven into the Thai classical music's cosmology as the *piiphaat* is in several Thai Hindu-Buddhist rituals, the *waikhruu* included, the former's performances are not as ubiquitous as the latter's. Unlike *piiphaat* music that often takes place in an open area in, for example, a Buddhist temple, and its sound heavily amplified by loudspeakers, string musicians often perform indoor like a concert hall or an auditorium with a smaller scale audio amplification. Different performance venues and contexts between these two classical music genres mean each attracts different yet overlapping audience. Since *piiphaat* takes place in the open,

anybody is basically invited whether one is a Thai classical music enthusiast or a clueless passerby.¹ String music performances, being more contained, attracts a rather niche group of listeners. Most audiences attend these performances on purpose—they do not run into it. And since string music performances are usually held as a tribute of a string music teacher, those present in such events are somehow connected to one another in both good and bad terms (see Chapter 5). String music performances may be used as a part of sonic offering during the *waikhruu* ritual and as a replacement for the *piiphaat mon* in Buddhist funerals at the time of writing, but they still play secondary role as a secular, entertainment music and hold less spiritual merit than *piiphaat* does. During my fieldwork, I met several string musicians during *waikhruu* rituals, but have seen relatively few *piiphaat* musicians in string music performances. String music is thus constrained in many ways, whether from the performance context, sonic, spiritual, and most important gender aspects.

In this chapter, I would like to bring the intersection of gender constructs of Thai classical music and queer men musicians closer in terms of space and time. Here I am shifting the ethnographic gaze away from the history, stories, accounts, and recounts, to the music and musicians in action. “How and why musicians do what they do?” is a classic question that all ethnomusicologists are familiar with, yet it has not, in my humble opinion as a straight cis-male Thai classical musician who received training in ethnomusicology, been asked critically enough outside the universe of *piiphaat* music. I take this question into two different ethnographic vignettes of the string instrument musicking to examine how queer men musicians talk and think about their music. I am

¹ There are also *piiphaat* “concerts” that take place in an auditorium where a ticket or a formal invitation is required for the audience. These concerts are often held for a rather closed musician circles and sometimes involve the presiding of a royal family. The performance I mentioned early in Chapter 4 is one such example.

intentionally choosing the term “music-making” as opposed to “performances” because my focus goes beyond the staged setting to include rehearsals and commentaries. These are the moments when thought processes that informed musical products can be foregrounded and make visible the underlying gendered constructs.

The proposed off-stage, close-reading approach is meant to supplement the well-treaded path examining staged performance. In fact, several Thai classical music scholars have shown that such close reading of staged performance is a viable option that effectively cuts through the purely musical specificity of the dominant *piiphaat* tradition, particularly in competitive settings (Phoasavadi 2005; Lekakul 2017), ritualized spaces (Myers-Moro 1993: 160–91; Wong 2001), and from pedagogical standpoint (Silkstone 1993). But apart from Adler’s work that examines the guarded transmission and the endangered-by-design status of the *khrueng saay pii chawaa* ensemble (2014) there has been little to no ethnographic studies dealing with musical and social lives of string musicians. With the careful and focused reading on the music-making moments through the lived experiences of queer men musicians in this tradition, I will uncover the unmarked and/or seemingly invisible gendered constructs that will otherwise evade speculation in *piiphaat* ensemble. And I start from arguably the most conspicuous aspect of music-making: the musician’s body.

As I continued talking to string musicians and sometimes making music with them, I noticed that the body of the musicians sometimes became the center of a conversation apart from the technical, historical, and anecdotal aspects of a music being played at the moment. And by body, I do not mean the scientific physiology of a musicians, though the subject itself warrants a scholarly exploration. Instead, I was intrigued in the musician’s attention on the posture that one assumes while playing an

instrument. I draw on the ethnography of the body, a method that is well developed in dance and performance studies (see, for example, Ness 1997: 64–66; Rivera-Servera 2004: 276–79; Kedhar 2014; Sunardi 2020: 461–67). Obviously, the conversation about posture has to do with practicality, efficiency, and visual aesthetics of playing an instrument, but it extends much more towards the gender expression and musical lineage. It is from this angle that I am asking the question: “how and why musicians do what they do?”

What follows is a hybrid ethnography (Przybylski 2020), combining the feet-on-the-ground participant observation and interview with a close watch on recorded performances online. The participant observation was treated on the spot, attending to the ethnographic nuances in the moment, as well as recorded for a subsequent reading of myself and my interlocutors. The recorded materials include interview and rehearsal and performance footages. The ethnographic experience I recreate therefore will not be in a chronologically linear order but will instead proceed according to an issue being discussed.

The Musicking Body and Paramparic Body in String Ensemble

In this chapter, I first bring the bodies and music-making in dialog with Matthew Rahaim’s *Musicking Bodies*, a work that critically and analytically examines the ways that physical gesture and vocal action work together to embody the melodic ideas, the resultant musical product, in *khyal*, one of the most popular North India or Hindustani vocal music (2012: 3–4). Although bodily gestures are often regarded among Rahaim’s interlocutors as insignificant compared to the musical prowess, he argues that the animated hand movements by *khyal* singers play equally, if not important role in imaging, realizing, and subsequently executing a complex vocal melody. This raises a

critical turn toward what Rahaim calls *musicking bodies*, “a trained body in action, engaged mindfully in singing and/or playing an instrument (2)” by arguing that “physical disciplines of music are vehicles without which music would not happen at all (10).” By attending to the *musicking bodies*, Rahaim offers a critique that challenges the handy distinction of music, not *musicking*, as a separated subject of mind while body only at best plays a passive supplementary role. I argue that in the string ensemble, Rahaim’s *musicking bodies* do not become evident. Rather, the musician’s bodies articulate specific decisions about nonconformity.

At the same time, I approach Rahaim’s conceptualization about bodies with respect to music in a slightly different way. My focus is primarily on the instrumentalists in the string ensemble. I am concerned not on the vehicular aspect of the *musicking bodies*. Rather, I am more interested in the in/voluntary articulation of certain bodily gestures through musical instruments, and the gendered, disciplined *musicking* that becomes possible in specific musical instruments and by specific musicians. In other words, I am interested in how the gender and sexuality of queer men musicians play into their *musicking bodies* in the string ensemble.

Before complicating Rahaim’s *musicking bodies* further to the gendered constructs of Thai classical music. It is instructive that I note the term’s plural form. This is because it contains two *bodies*: one is *musicking body* or the body that comes alive in the moment of musical performance and the other is the *paramparic body* or the disciplined disposition of a particular singer’s *musicking body*, developed over many years of training and practice (8). Of course, the body that comes alive in a musical performance is also disciplined, some more so than others. Nonetheless, the two

ethnographic vignettes that I offer below represents instances where *musicking body*, and *paramparic body* are each emphasized.

In his analysis, Rahaim did not discuss in much length how gender affects the musicking bodies. However, he points to how bodily movement is expected different based on the gender of the performers. It appears that animated motion by men singers, though not desirable, are more readily forgivable than if it is from women. “A female singing body,” noted Rahaim, “was not to reach out to the audience with glances and gestures but was to remain self-constrained, pious, detached, still (25).” It is also worth noting that most of Rahaim’s gestural-musical analyses come from men singers.² In any case, Rahaim’s discussion of perception of women musicking bodies in Hindustani music can be similarly drawn a parallel in Thai classical music as Pamela Myers-Moro remarks about the gendered body positions and postures of musicians:

[M]ale and female musicians follow *normal gender-defined etiquette* when seated on the floor, males crossing their legs in front of themselves [*khatsamaat*]..., women wrapping their legs around the either side [*phapphiap*] because *open-legged postures are improper* (1993: 30 emphases mine).

However, the musician’s position and posture are sometimes determined by an instrument played, as noted by Myers-Moro:

According to an informant, in ancient times women only played the kinds of ensemble which used strings, and naturally they sat *phapphiap*. During the era of Rama VI (1910-25), men began to play stringed instruments as well, but they too sat *phapphiap*. This convention is maintained today in all serious performance contexts: players of stringed instruments..., regardless of sex, will not sit cross-legged. The stringed instruments “leave to body open” to view. Men playing wind

² Although my interlocutors are also men, but condition around which these Thai musicians operate is quite distinct from Rahaim’s cases. Unlike the *khyal* singers whose gestures pose no questions, if not threat, to the local gender norms, the men string musicians who appear in this chapter make music on instruments and a musical space that are perceived to be feminine. Thus, the gestures, postures, and body positions that men musicians express in the string ensemble is not only affiliated with the musical sound but also indicative of conforming, resistance, and negotiation of gender constructs that inform Thai classical music.

and percussion instruments conventionally sit cross-legged because those instruments “hide the body” (ibid.)

Based on Myers-Moro’s account, it must be noted that men musicians can move quite freely between *piiphaat* and string ensembles and can comfortably assume any body positions and postures without violating the “normal” etiquette. The same cannot be said for women musicians who are shunned from *piiphaat* ensemble primarily due to physical (they are not strong enough) and socio-cultural (they hold less spiritual merit) reasons. Moreover, they are always expected sit *phapphiap* otherwise it is considered an *improper*. In sum, the ideally perceived women musicking body both in Hindustani and Thai classical music is one that is constrained and reserved.

The construction of what Myers-Moro calls “gender-defined etiquette” that informs what is considered *normal* and *improper* are not examined explicitly in her work, in great part because that is not her primary focus. But clearly, this etiquette is not applied equally across all musicians and runs counter-intuitive to the predominant ideas of gender complementarity, egalitarian gender roles, and comparatively deemphasized gender differentiation shared among Southeast Asian Studies scholars (Loos 2020: 933). An explanation to this discrepancy is that the gender-defined etiquette of Thai classical music is built around the gender binary concept introduced from West to the Siamese ruling class during the Reign of King Mongkut in the mid-19th century. Anthropologist Naruphon Duangwiset argues that this top-down gender concept was so firmly and uncritically normalized that it causes an illusion of eternal patriarchal Siamese society; but subsequent studies have indicated the presence of the egalitarian and complimentary gender roles among Siamese working classes or *phrai* ไพร่ (2015). Given that Thai classical music was once an integral part of the Thai court, it is thus safe to say that the

seemingly men-centered gender etiquette that persists today reflects the ruling class's ideas related to gender roles.

If the body positions and postures of women musicians in the string ensemble are constrained in several ways, rendering it much less animated subject compared to *khyal* singers, how then do these somewhat muted musicking bodies, to use Rahaim's words, come alive during a musical performance? Rather than searching for big and ranged body movements, I noticed that many of the musicians whom I witnessed and interviewed chose to articulate on this very gender-defined etiquette to make their musical-making a complete process. This is particularly true for queer men musicians, who find themselves at home with the effeminate body positions and postures one assumes in the string ensemble. I argue that the nonnormative gender performance of effeminate men in the string ensemble is an asset, not a hindrance. It is considered an additional embodied resource that they have at their disposal, particularly when musicking.

I now turn to the presentation of the two ethnographic vignettes. The first one is from a rehearsal of a tribute concert for one of a famous *jakhee* teacher, Aeb Yuwanawanit. In this event, I observed and talked to Sittichai Sorngarn or *khruu* Chai, one of Aeb's students. I attended the rehearsal in person, but unfortunately the actual concert never, at least at the time of writing, took place because of the COVID-19 outbreak in Bangkok.³ The second vignette is from my interviews with one of Chaluy's student, Marut Vijitchote or Mark. As mentioned earlier, each of the vignettes will be supplemented with a close watch/listening of a recorded performance by both Chai and Mark. In these close examinations, I will point toward gender-defined bodily gestures and

³ The concert eventually took place on February 4th 2022, several months after I left the field. The video footage of the concert can be accessed at <https://youtu.be/5jQdTSFtIyk>.

nonnormative musical characteristics that are momentarily articulated. My core idea in this chapter is that even in a decidedly gendered musical space like the string music ensemble, there is still some wiggle room that is capitalized and only made visible through nonconformity, i.e., through the musicking bodies of effeminate men musicians.

Khruu Aeb Tribute Concert Rehearsal

Bansomdejchaophraya Rajbhat University April 4th, 2021

At the *thambun* ทำบุญ or merit-making ceremony in commemoration of Aeb's death anniversary on January of 2021, JJ told me that this year was important for Aeb because she would be 120-year-old if still alive ([view on website](#)). To celebrate the milestone, Chai, JJ's teacher, was planning to organize tribute concert for Aeb. The concert was titled *The 120 Years of Khruu Aeb: Collecting Old Songs, Telling Stories* (120 *chaatakaan khruu Aeb kep phleeng kao maa lao rueang* 120 ชาตกาล ครูแอบ เก็บเพลงเก่า มาเล่าเรื่อง) and was scheduled to take place on the evening of May 7th 2021 at an auditorium in Chulalongkorn University in the middle of Bangkok. Eleven performances of string music, in groups and solos, were planned for this concert. Spearheading this concert, Chai explained in an interview that he wanted this concert to contain an overarching educational narrative for the audience. So, the order of the performance, with a few exceptions, follows the chronological timeline in which Aeb learned each of the pieces. For example, the “Lao Phaen” ลาวแพน and “Jiin Khim Yai” จินขิมใหญ่ solos (highlighted in green on the program note) are based on a shellac recording dated to the reign of King Chulalongkorn about a century ago and considered one of the first *jakhee* solos to be recorded. According to Chai, Aeb learned these two solos before she even reached her teenage years.



Figure 3.1: A Portrait of Aeb Yuwanawanit. Photo courtesy of <https://www.facebook.com/KhunkhruXaebYuWnWnichy/photos/a.425048997561135/584747828257917/>.

รายการแสดงงานจุฬาวาซิต
 “๑๒๐ ชาตกาล ครูแอบ เก็บเพลงเก่า มาเล่าเรื่อง”
 วันศุกร์ ที่ ๗ พฤษภาคม ๒๕๖๔
 เวลา ๑๘.๐๐ – ๒๐.๐๐ น.
 อาคารศิลปวัฒนธรรม จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

ดนตรีหน้าม่านบรรเลงกล่อมงาน

เพลง ลาวอิดออด เถา เครื่องสายผสมหีบเพลงชัก วงบางขนาย
 (บรรเลง ๑๗.๓๐ น.)

พิธีกรนำเข้าสู่งาน จุฬาวาซิต ครั้งที่ ๒๑๙

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| ๑. ถิ่นนามให้ริ้วชาครู | มโหรี วง มรก.บ้านสมเด็จเจ้าพระยา |
| ๒. โหมโรงครอบจักรวาลออกมาย่อง | มโหรี วง มรก.บ้านสมเด็จเจ้าพระยา |
| ๓. เพลงบุหลัน ๓ ชั้น | เครื่องสายไทย วงอาวูโส |
| ๔. เพลงทะเลแยะ ๓ ชั้น | เครื่องสายไทยผสมซอสามสาย วงเพื่อนรัก |
| ๕. เดี่ยวจะเข้หม่อมเพลงจีนขิมใหญ่ ๒ ชั้น | กลุ่มหลานศิษย์ |
| ๖. เดี่ยวจะเข้เพลงลาวแพน ๒ ชั้น | โกญจนาท วิบูลย์เพ็ง |
| ๗. เพลงล่องลม เถา | เครื่องสายปี่ชวา วงเฉลิมศิลป์ |
| ๘. เดี่ยวจะเข้หม่อมเพลงพญาโตก ๓ ชั้น | สิทธิชัย ศรีกาญจน์ และลูกศิษย์ |
| ๙. เดี่ยวจะเข้นางครวญ ๓ ชั้น | ธัญญพงษ์ ณ นคร |
| ๑๐. เดี่ยวจะเข้หม่อมเพลงเข็ดนอก | ณรงค์ เขียนทองกุล และลูกศิษย์ |
| ๑๑. เดี่ยวจะเข้หม่อมเพลงกราวโน ๒ ชั้น | กลุ่มลูกศิษย์ |

Figure 3.2: Program note of Aeb Tribute Concert. Highlighted in green are “Lao Phaen” and “Jiin Khim Yai” solos whereas “Phayaa Sook” solo is highlighted in yellow. File courtesy of JJ ([view on website](#)).

JJ invited me to come to observe one of the rehearsals at Baansomdejchaophraya Rajbhat University (BSRU), where received his bachelor’s degree of musical education. I immediately said yes, even though not knowing how to commute there. BSRU is located West of the Chao Phraya River, what the local calls *fang thonburi* ฟังธนบุรี or *fang thon* ฟัง

บน in short, meaning the Thonburi Side. Since I lived on the *fang phranakhaun* ฟังพระนคร or the East side of the river, travelling to BSRU by car was not very convenient considering Bangkok's notorious traffic jams and the university's limited parking space. JJ recommended I take the subway train or MRT, a bus, and then about a ten-minute walk.

I took JJ's advice and made my way to the College of Music at BSRU on the morning of April 4, 2021. Even though I took an elevator to the ninth floor, I was half-soaked in sweat after walking the heat and humidity, carrying my tripod and camera gear. I knew that I was at the right place due to a faint *jakhee* sound coming from the hallway to the left of the elevator. I then stood in front of the room where I heard the sound and peeked through a small pane. There were several about ten people in the room, each warming up on their respective *jakhee*. JJ was not in there, but I was told to enter the air-conditioned room anyway. I quickly removed my shoes and entered.⁴

Chai was on one side of the room, seated in front of a *jakhee*. Not far behind him was his twin brother Paun, who is also a trained *jakhee* player, and Kaew or Dusadee Swangviboonpong. Surrounding Chai in a U-shaped line were nine *jakhee* players, seven men and two women. Most of them were current students, along with a few alumni. I witnessed at length a rehearsal of “Phayaa Sook” พญาโศก solo, highlighted in yellow on the program note. Adhering to the theme of the concert, this is a solo that Aeb learned when she was a teenager. Before I proceed further, it is important that I present a brief introduction to this solo piece.

⁴ I later learned that there was another rehearsal that took place concurrently on the same day at Suankularb School just over a mile away from BSRU. The team that rehearsed at the school was responsible for most of the concert performances. The group that I witnessed at BSRU would play three out of the total eleven pieces listed for the concert. Once the BSRU rehearsal was over, Chai and Paun went to join the other team at Suankularb School for the second rehearsal.

“Phayaa Sook,” literally translated as “A Sorrow Noble” is recognized among Thai classical musicians today as a piece played to express sorrow and grieving in a theatrical play. The most recent publicly televised performance of “Phayaa Sook” was during a march of the Royal Urn procession as a part of King Bhumibol’s funeral in 2017, though the piece played was a rearranged version made for the Western brass band. Besides its sorrowful meaning and use in theatre accompaniment, solo versions of “Phayaa Sook” are one of the most widely performed solo pieces in Thai classical music. There are various “Phayaa Sook” solos made for every melodic instrument in the tradition.⁵ “Phayaa Sook” solo is considered a “standard” format of solo repertory in Thai classical music. The piece only has one section. “Phayaa Sook” is played through twice in an ensemble format, and each time a musician would “flesh out” the basic melody by piecing together the learned formulaic musical passages. This fleshing out part may slightly vary each time the piece is played, so long as its ending pitches correspond with those in the basic melody. In the solo format, however, the melody, already fleshed-out in a very complex fashion, is expected to be played with minimal to no modification. Though the melody of “Phayaa Sook” solo is derived from the same basic melody, it is rendered entirely differently each time. To untrained ears, the “Phayaa Sook” solo might not sound like a piece that is repeated twice.

Like all solo repertory, the first round of “Phayaa Sook” solo on *jakhee* starts with a slow tempo. This allows a player to perform a three-note fluttering or *sabat* สะบัด and a double-time melodic phrases or *khayii* ขยี้. The challenge of performing these techniques in a slow tempo is that a musician must anticipate for the right timing to insert these short

⁵ The cultural meanings of performing, teaching, and learning “Phayaa Sook” from a *piiphaat* perspective is examined by Deborah Wong’s (1991) where she discusses how the solo piece comes to represent three generations worth of a musical lineage.

bursts of *sabat* and *khayii* in between the loose melody. Not doing these techniques carefully might disrupt the rhythmic flow, known among the musicians as *chaung fai* ช่องไฟ or literally the “fire gap.”

Toward the end of the solo’s first round, a player usually picks up the pace to prepare for the repeat. The second round of a single section solo piece consists primarily of a *kep* เก็บ melody where the musician plays a stream of sixteenth notes throughout the section. The *kep* part in a solo is often arranged in ways that is distantly related to the main melody to demonstrate the creativity and complexity of the specific solo version. This part of the solo is carried out in a faster tempo to showcase the player’s dexterity and stamina, as well as the ability to maintain *naew* or แนว, that is, gradually accelerating the tempo. In other words, the first round of “Phayaa Sook” solo starts off with a relatively slow tempo that noticeably increases during the transition. The second round is played at a faster yet accelerating tempo. Thai musicians metaphorizes a good *naew* to be “tapered like a mouse tail” or “*riaw pen haang nuu* เรียวเป็นหางหนู”

After the first round of rehearsal, Chai said there were two to three spots of *sabat* that were quite muddled and needed to be more pronounced. Greater concern was toward the *naew* of this solo as Chai felt it could have proceeded with a faster tempo. Chai felt that the players were somewhat holding back the *naew*. He said that the *naew*, specially at the second round, should be just “tight for the hand,” or *tueng mue* ตึงมือ. This means that the tempo of the second round must be faster, but not so much that it overwhelms the players. It is worth noting here that the form of “Phayaa Sook” solo on *jakhee* is no different in other string instruments, i.e., starting with a slow “sweet” first round or *thiaw waan* เขียวหวาน followed by a complex melodic stream or *thiaw kep* เขียวเก็บ in the second. But unlike other stringed instruments that focus on the clarity and the complexity of

thaang in the second round of a solo, this characteristic must be carried out on *jakhee* in a way that significantly “tapers the *naew*.” Chai’s strategy toward “Phayaa sook” solo on *jakhee*, showed a glimpse of boldness, or even aggressiveness, which could be attributed to his brief training with Rati. This runs counter-intuitive to the perceived image of string music as a genre strictly suited for soothing, easy listening repertory due to its mellow timber; and to its ostensible inability to assert itself musically like the percussive and loud *piiphaat* ensemble.

Chai stressed quite many times about the clarity of the *sabat* for it was a vital part in the first round of the solo. All the *jakhee* players then played repeated on the part that Chai mentioned multiple times until he felt it sounded better. Chai then invited his friend Kaew to sing the vocal part of “Phayaa Sook” that precedes the *jakhee* solo. The duration of the lyrics was equivalent to the piece’s melody without any repetition. Halfway into the ending passage, the *jakhee* picked up and played through.

Chai had all the *jakhee* players work particularly on the transition between the first and the second round of the solo. Toward the end of first round the player’s left fingers were gliding along the frets away from the player towards the lower-pitched end of the instrument. At this point Chai waved his hand rhythmically up and down, suggesting a push in the tempo ([view on website](#)). The players immediately responded, and the difference was instantaneously noticeable. Observing the rehearsal at the moment, I could only tell that everyone was suddenly playing faster. Revisiting the recorded footage revealed much more details than just a tempo push. What followed was the beginning of the solo’s second round in which the players left hand glided through the melody toward the plucking right hand. The faster tempo, the *kep* melody, and the upward melodic contour together gave the impression that the *jakhee* was riding a

melodic wave until its peak, the top fret. No sooner had the left hand reached the highest pitch it made its way downward again. This time the melody did not stop at the lowest fret but continued down to the second and third string.



Figure 3.3: Chai [seating on a chair in front of a *jakhee* on the right] gestures his hand up and down to urge his students [seating on the floor with *jakhee*] to play faster. Photo taken by the Author ([view on website](#)).

It is common for *jakhee* to carry out the melody on the top string. The middle string is used occasionally when the melody goes beyond the lower register of the top string. It is sometimes played simultaneously with the first string to create a tone cluster. The bottom string, made of brass, is used mostly in alternation with the top string, a technique called *krathop saay* กระทบสาย or “colliding the strings.” Its low and buzzy timbre makes the strong unfavorable to be used as a main melody string in an ensemble. In a solo repertoire, however, the bottom string is sometimes used to carry out a melody to feature the full range of the instrument.

The buzz continuously rang as the players carefully crafted out the “Phayaa Sook” melody from the bottom string. Just twenty seconds into the second round of the solo,

almost the entire range of the instrument was exhausted. At this point there was clearly a different momentum in the piece. The *naew* was much better, more tapered. Chai still watched on intently and played along with the group occasionally. He made no comment about the *naew* after the end of the solo but continued fine tuning a few spots at the ending to make everyone was in sync.

JJ, along with a few more *jakhee* players arrived. The group now changed their seating pattern from a U-shaped to multiple rows. Content with the *naew*, Chai turned his focus to the *jakhee*'s pick-up from the ending of the vocal part. He stressed that all the *jakhee* should be very precise with their timing to make the *sabat* at the beginning of the solo sound as one. The crisper the *sabat* is, the more impressed the audience would be. However, he also shared a “dirty trick” with the players. If somehow one any of the players “freaked out” or *sati taek* สติแตก right at the start of the solo on the stage, Chai told them to immediately switch to the “lip-sync” mode, that is, moving their left hand along the frets as they would without the plucking right hand touching the string. This way, all the *jakhee* could both appear and sound together even in a difficult situation. Chai even demonstrated the “lip-sync” by pretending to play a *jakhee* in the air.

It is worth noting just how the performance aspect can be as important, sometimes even more so, than the technical aspect in a musical solo piece that is performed in a group. This presents somewhat a conundrum to what it means to perform a solo piece. It is well recognized that solo pieces or *phleeng diaw* เพลงเดี่ยว are the technical zenith of Thai classical repertory. *Phleeng diaw* is traditionally performed on one melodic instrument accompanied by rhythmic instruments like the drums and the hand cymbal or *ching*. But after the orchestra-size ensemble or *mahaaduriyaang* gained its popularity, most notably the performance by the Wittayaalai Naataasin in the 2537 concert, Thai

classical musicians began to explore the performance of a solo piece on multiple melodic instruments. While the goal of performances like these remains decidedly musical, i.e., showcasing the skills, competency, technicality, and the musical lineage of the players, its performative aspect should not be ignored. Several musicians gracing the musical instruments as though they are choreographed is a satisfying sight for many to witness. The sheer number of musicians can also indirectly suggest the prestige or *baaramii* บารมี of a teacher or *khruu*. But at the same time, a group solo performance can alleviate some pressure off the musicians because no individual is held accountable for a conspicuous mistake. The focus in this case is not so much about sounding together as moving together. That is why Chai allowed the players to activate the “lip-sync” mode if one felt unconfident. He even asked all the players to have the same red color plectrum string on the concert day.

After a lunch break, the group rejoined for a final round of rehearsal. This time Chai played along with his students throughout the piece. He was satisfied with the way the solo unfolded, saying that the *naew* was perfectly “delicious” or *araay* อร่อย. Just as the solo looked set for the concert, Chai noticed a passage somewhere in the middle of the *kep* melody that seemed off. Still unable to identify the passage in question, he said that it did not feel right to his fingers’ muscle memory. JJ and his friend began scouring through the solo’s second round, one passage at a time. Not long after, they reached the part where each played slightly different. As shown below.

Version 1							
RTLS	TLRT	M R S M	RTLS	<u>FMR</u> M F	<u>SFM</u> F S	<u>LSF</u> S L	<u>TLS</u> L T
Version 2							
RTLS	TLRT	S M R T	RTLS	<u>FMR</u> M F	<u>SFM</u> F S	<u>LSF</u> S L	<u>TLS</u> L T

Table 3.1: A comparison of the two versions of the excerpted “Phayaa Sook” *jakhee* solo melody on which Chai was deciding. The difference of between the two version is highlighted in bold ([view on website](#)).

The difference was in the permutation of the four notes on the third measure in the passage, highlighted in red. In the context of the solo's entirety, this could have been written off as inconsequential to the solo performance. But that was not the case for Chai, who repeatedly tested one version after another on his *jakhee* to see which felt right for him. Still unsure, he now reached for his phone to listen to a recording of the solo. After several hearings, he arrived at a conclusion for the version 2. It has been almost fifteen minutes between the spotting of the problematic passage and its resolution.

I asked Chai later that day in an interview about what could be possibly at stake that made choosing between two permutations of one off-beat measure⁶ quite a serious undertaking. He replied that it was more than just a musical decision. Even though he was fully aware that even Aeb did not play the “Phayaa Sook” solo the exactly the same every time, keeping the melody consistent meant avoiding any gossip or *mau* เม้า that he had handed the “wrong” music to his students (*tau phleng phit* ต่อเพลงผิด). This indicates that micro-managing a group solo was not just for musical and performative reasons but a reflection to the integrity of a musical knowledge and lineage. Upon asking him about the significance behind the *naew* or the pacing, Chai said that it could either make or break the entire solo. For him, the piece was not meant for easy listening nor was it downright aggressive. Particularly when played by twenty *jakhee*, the *naew* must pick up from the start. It should be not too fast, not too slow, but just enough for everyone to feel the “tension” or the manageable degree of fatigue in their hands (*naew ued mai ao, naew rew mai ao, taung kamlang tueng* แนวอืดไม่เอา แนวเร็วไม่เอา ต้องกำลังตั้ง).

⁶ In ensemble repertory, the off-beat notes are usually given more flexibility to variate because it bears less significance to the structure of the piece. The downbeat notes, or *luk tok*, especially last one in the fourth and eighth measures, are key to a piece's integrity. As such, these notes are, except in a very rare occasion, to be played uniformly by all melodic instruments in the ensemble. The octave of the downbeat notes may vary, but its location in its respective octave must be the same, otherwise the ensemble will be incoherent.

Chai gave an interesting description regarding the rendition of the *naew* in this solo:

“You must keep in mind that the solo that I know is not the same as the original. It will be ‘spicy’ (*saep* แซบ) because that is my temperament (*jarit* จริต). Not that all solos in the old days are all *saep*, but it is who I am. Even though I have aged quite a bit today, but I keep being *saep*. You see, all the fine-tuning so far has not really touched the emotion (*aarom* อารมณ์).”

Literally, what he meant was that he liked to play the solo a little faster. But what caught my attention was his allusion to a specific taste (*saep*) and temperament (*jarit*). *Saep* originally is a Lao word used describe a tasty food. The word *saep* was initially adopted by *kathoey* community as an expression of admiration toward someone who is sexy or has strong sexual appeal. The new meaning of *saep* soon became widespread in the mainstream pop culture, especially in entertainment news when a celebrity is spotted in a tiny swimsuit. In a sense, *saep* does not just denote sexiness but also connotes boldness and confidence.

Jarit, on the other hand, is derived from Buddhism as a term to describe the six personal traits in which an individual can be categorized. In the daily conversation, however, the term has little to no religious association. *Jarit* is interchangeable with *nisai* นิสัย, meaning personality. It should be noted the latter only refers to a general characteristic of a person such as generous (*mii naamjai* มีน้ำใจ), cheerful (*raaroeng* ร่าเริง), or selfish (*henkaetua* เห็นแก่ตัว), etc., while the former denotes a behavioral performance that conditioned by personal experience, cultural background, and social norms – much like Bourdieusian habitus. Unlike *nisai* that is limited to a person’s mind, *jarit* accounts for a more phenomenological level. It is a personalized interaction and reaction which consequently result in the intersectional (class, gender, ethnicity) bodily expression. More

importantly, *jarit* specifically describes women's temperament as opposed to gender-neutral *nisai*. *Jarit* is both embodied and effeminate.

As I relistened to Chai's allusions to these words from the recorded interview, it struck me that I have rarely heard the words *saep* and *jarit* within *piiphaat* settings. Of all my involvement in *piiphaat* music, the closest culinary-derived term to *saep* for expressing one's admiration toward a musical performance is *arauy* which means tasty or delicious. Similarly, neither in performance nor rehearsal have I heard any discussion related to *jarit* of a musician in a *piiphaat* ensemble. *Piiphaat* musicians do talk about physical movement and postures (*thaa* ท่า or *thaathaang* ท่าทาง) of musicians during music-making: how well a player is able to keep a poker face or *kep aakaan* เก็บอาการ whilst undergoing intense fatigue and exhaustion from playing continuously at a high speed.⁷ In this sense, the suppression of bodily expressions and the emotionless appearance of musician in *piiphaat* ensemble can be read as an indication of invincibility – a projection of masculine strength unfazed by the very music's physical demands. Such gendering of *piiphaat* in turn places the string ensemble on the opposite end as a lighter and more forgiving type of music.

Chai's mentioning of *saep* and *jarit* therefore not only exposes the gender binary accorded to Thai classical music but challenges the idea itself. It is easy to deduce that Chai wanted the "Phayaa Sook" solo to break from the trope of sweet and slow string repertory. I should note that Chai's idea is by no means novel. As seen from Chaluy and Rati musical legacies in Chapter 2, Fast-paced string musical performances were, at least

⁷ The way I use the phrase *kep aakaan* in this chapter is not to be confused with the ideas of holding back one's display of queerness, discussed in Chapter 6. The meaning of *Kep aakaan* in this chapter is literal, that is, to maintain one's composure despite being overridden with, for example, joy, sorrow, shock, or fatigue. In Chapter 6, on the other hand, it refers specifically to a display of queer potential in male-bodied musicians.

in the time of writing, not uncommon. In fact, the stringed instruments are better suited for playing at high speed due to the more economical movement. Instruments like *sau* and *jakhee* can produce twice as many pitches in one circuit of body movement compared to *piiphaat* instruments like the xylophones or *ranaat* and the gongs or *khaung*. Despite the advantage, speed seems to be not as valorized in the string ensemble. The question here is not whether stringed instruments can play fast but rather how they are perceived and described when doing so. It can be argued that *saep* is used because Chai did not shy away from disclosing his queerness, but this also means that playing fast on *jakhee*, and in the string ensemble by extension, is not valued the same as in *piiphaat*. The *naew* of “Phayaa Sook” was described as *saep* not only because it was simply fast, but because the *jakhee* did not submit to the gendered role set by *piiphaat* ensemble and its repertory.

The boldness to break from the perceived image of soft string music was compounded by the incorporation of the musician’s body. When I asked Chai during the interview just why *jarit* was so important to the performance, it became clear to me that the word meant more than just his personal temperament:

“Okay, for a *jakhee* player, you must possess that *inner* feeling, and by that, I mean your thoughts while playing this [“Phayaa Sook” solo]. You must first “season” (*prung* ปรุง) yourself, how you interpret the music. In “Phaayaa Sook” you feel sad, but you must move on because you are proud (*tauranong* ทราวนอง). It’s like you’ve got to have the grace (*liilaa* ลีลา). Your hands, eyes, seated posture must give out [the message].”

Contrary to removing oneself from the *piiphaat* musical performance, Chai insisted that his students must imagine themselves into the music. This was not for the purpose of trance, but for corporeally situating oneself *vis-à-vis* “Phayaa Sook” solo to bring out that grace or *liilaa*. Again, this was different from *piiphaat* for *liilaa* was mostly restricted within the music itself, while in this solo such quality exuded from the music, musicians situated body, and their extension, i.e., *jakhee*.

To illustrate Chai's emphasis of *jarit*, it is best to see how he demonstrates it himself. For this purpose, I will temporarily step out of the rehearsal room to take a close and careful look at one of Chai's recorded performance on *jakhee* to support his claim. The performance is from a concert hosted at Chulalongkorn University, one of Thailand's most prestigious higher education institutions. The concert was a tribute to mark the 100th anniversary of the founding of *Duriyaban* ดุริยบรรณ, a famous but discontinued instrument maker company. The performance, published on YouTube in 2015,⁸ in a channel named Saisaw features a string ensemble named *Phuean Rak* เพื่อนรัก or "Dear Friends." Chai and his twin brother Paun were on *jakhee*; Mark, who will be discussed later, played *sau uu*; and Kaew was the singer. They were accompanied by other men musicians who were seated in the second row, playing rhythmic instruments. The piece performed in the video is "Phamaa Haa Thaun" พม่าห้าท่อน.

I would like to pay specific attention from 6:40 to 7:14 because it is one of the moments when Chai's *jarit* is evident. In the first twenty seconds, the group was playing a standard *kep* melody that would transition to a more tuneful part that mimics Burmese musical style. Toward the end of the *kep* melody, the two *jakhee* did a *sabat*, a quick burst of three successive pitches at 7:01. The *sabat* finished with an open string and sent Chai's (in blue shirt) and Paun's (in black shirt) left hand flying in the air, but Chai's left-hand fingers were more relatively flexed out.

⁸ The performance can be accessed from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8n_H3hzFQfs&ab_channel=Saisaw.



Figure 3.4: Chai (blue shirt) and Paun (black shirt) send their left hand flying in the air after performing a *sabat* on their *jakhee* or the floor zither. Note Chai's slightly more flexed out fingers of his left hand ([view on website](#)).

The two *jakhee* concluded the *kep* melody with an articulated in-swing stroke of the bottom brass string. This time the players' left hands lifted off as a follow-through. Again, Chai's left hand had a wider range of motion than his twin brother.



Figure 3.5: Chai's and Paun's right hands swing inward as a follow-through from striking the brass string of their *jakhee* ([view on website](#)).

As the ensemble transitioned into the Burmese-style part at 7:08, the *jakhee* did a short tremolo in the middle of the fret bars. Instead of merely pressing with the index finger, both players tilted their left hands a little more inward such that their middle, ringer, and little fingers are tiered almost vertically.



Figure 3.6: Chai stacks his fingers of his left hand together as he moves up the jakhee fret ([view on website](#)).

These gestures may seem trivial to the eyes of straight men musicians. It may be considered as unnecessarily exaggerated or *wer* เวิร์. Especially on an instrument so charged with feminine values like *jakhee*, an articulated gestures of a musicking body would only add to the suspicion of nonconformity. But for queer men audiences, these extra, articulated bodily moments meant more than just an exaggeration. It was an indirect statement that a musician embraces the gendered aspects of the self and of the instrument before blurring it altogether. This exactly made what Chai called *jarit* come through.

To return to Rahaim's notion of musicking body, how might we understand *jarit* in terms of a gendered musicking body? The close reading provided above convinces me to believe that the postures and gestures of *jakhee* player differ, though not unrelated, from *khyal* vocalists. Since the voice is part of a biological body, physiological and/or kinesthetic change can create a discernible musical difference (Rahaim 2012: 91). By

contrast, since *jakhee* is considered an extension of a musician's body, *jarit* is not always complimentary to the instrument. There are several virtuous effeminate men *jakhee* players who do not express the so-called *jarit* while performing. I suggest that *jarit* is a specific form of musicking body that comes alive not by default but through strategic articulation, and by effeminate men musicians. Also, *jarit*, when articulated, does not cause substantial change to sonic aspect of the music. Rather, it implies the gender play of the effeminate men musicians, which make the musical experience more meaningful. In this way, the *jarit* of a *jakhee* player is not a neutrally articulated embodiment. It is a form of musicking body imbued with the local gender constructs of the musical tradition of which it is a part.

Back to the rehearsal. Curious, I went on to ask whether *jarit* has anything to do with a musician's gender. Chai used the word “the gender crossers” (*phuak khaam pheet* พวกรข้ามเพศ) to refer to effeminate gay men who play *jakhee*. He said that these musicians possess a unique blend of the strength and *jarit*, both of which radiate upon playing the instrument. “A well-trained *jakhee* player,” continued Chai, “have these two virtues harmonizing one another all the time.” The special role of the “gender crossers” in this musical space corresponds with the presence of the transgender ritualists in a sense that they have a special ability to combine the two genders (Morris 2000; Blackwood 2005; Ho 2009; Peletz 2009). And *jakhee* provides a musical space similar to *naa haan* หน้าฮ้าน, an open lawn in front of a Northeastern Thailand's *mau lam* หมอลำ performance where homosexual men are usually seen dancing – those playing *jakhee* can perform an idealized femininity that characterizes the instrument (Phaunthep Phrae-khao 2013: 67–68). Yet, I argue that while the conceptualization of the string ensemble and instruments, particularly *jakhee*, is strongly based on a heteronormative gender binary, but it is precisely this specifically gendered musical space that allow effeminate men musicians

regardless of their sexuality to thrive. Because *jakhee* is within the feminine musical domain, men musicians' effeminate gender performance is not only acceptable but sometimes even expected and articulated.

Chai's fine-tuning strategy in the solo rehearsal based on *saep* and *jarit* represents a moment in time where gendered constructed within Thai classical music is blurred and stirred; and queer men musicians can take up both gender identities simultaneously. However, not all string instruments enjoy such expressivity of *jakhee*. There are several occasions when gender expression of the string musicians must be done rather covertly. How then do body, gender, sexuality, and even musical lineage play out in these circumstances? In what follows, I turn my focus to the poetics and politics behind *sau uu*, a lower-pitched fiddle, to parse what I call a "coded behavior" as a different means of gendering strategies in the string ensemble

Mark on *Sau Uu*

I have shown the ways in which *jakhee* is used as an active extension of the musicking body to express a musician's fluid gender identity. The special synergy between *jakhee* and male nonconformity is what most queer men string musicians agree upon regardless of their chosen instrument in the string ensemble. But what happens when these musicians play other instruments than *jakhee*? How do they navigate and negotiate their gender and sexual identities when/if their instruments do not readily constitute a queer space like *jakhee*? In this section, I pay special attention to the ways in which musical lineage and coded behavior intersect to form the tactics used by queer men musicians to live in the gendered realm of string music. I do so through the musicking body of Marut Vijitchote or Mark, a former airline accountant who doubles as a *sau uu* virtuoso.

The approach taken in this part is different from the Chai's "Phayaa Sook" rehearsal. I draw primarily on my two interviews with Mark and supplement it with an ethnographic treatment of his recorded footage of *sau uu* performance. I first interviewed him in February of 2021 and then followed up three months later. Within this period, Thailand witnessed a sharp rise in COVID-19 cases after several months of zero infection. As a result, the government intensified the emergency decree that has been in effect for over a year since March 2020. Public gatherings were prohibited, including concerts and music performances. At that point, the internet became my research sanctuary as Thai classical music community migrated online. Two of my interviews with Mark occurred in person. What follows is not a chronological account of my interview with Mark. Parts of the conversation are selected to substantiate each point and argument I make as I proceed.

As a Thai classical music practitioner, I had heard of Mark quite a few times but never actually met him. His name was frequently mentioned when I had interviewed with Somprat Tonglor and Jakarin Mhontong, two *sau uu* players about my age who are part of the Chaluay musical lineage. What caught my attention was that they treated Mark sincerely as their master but did not address him as one. This misled me to think that Mark was not a lot older than I was, when in fact he was only a few years younger than my mother. Jakarin introduced me to Mark via a mobile app called LINE when we first met. Mark, after learning who I am and what my research topic is, was willing to share his insights. Both interviews with Mark took place in the living room of his house where he keeps several ornately decorated *sau uu* on display in his cabinets.

I began my interview with Mark with getting-to-know-you questions, including when he started learning Thai classical music, how he was introduced to *sau uu*, and

some characteristics of the musical lineage he inherited from his teacher Chaluay. All my questions were met with detailed response from my interview. But after only half an hour into the interview, as I was phrasing a question in my head, Mark suddenly asked “Are we talking about *pheet yet?*” (*Khao rueang pheet yang* เข้าเรื่องเพตยัง). I was caught by surprise! That was the first time that an interviewee steered the conversation into *pheet* topic without my lead.⁹ Revising the recorded interview footage, I looked clearly dumbfounded by Mark’s question. Finding myself in an awkward position, all I could do was ask him to repeat what he just said. He did, with a coy smile and his hands eagerly rubbing. I burst into laughter to cover up my awkwardness and invited him to open up the topic.

After Mark spent a few minutes talking about a general overview of queer men musicians twenty to thirty years ago, I asked him why *jakhee* is so representative of effeminate (*auk saaw* ออกลาว) men. His response, both verbal and gestural, in great part corresponds to Chai’s observation about a musician’s *jarit* on this instrument, though it verges on gender essentialism:

“It’s the body and instrumental aspect [that makes *jakhee* a symbol of effeminate men]. When you play [*jakhee*], you sit in the middle front row of the ensemble. And every time you swing the plectrum, it’s as if you get to [*pumping up his chest and slightly shaking his shoulder*] “lift yourself up and feel proud” [*choet* เชิด]. It’s like you get to look like an aristocratic woman [*khunying* คุณหญิง]. The way you sit in *phapphiap* position,¹⁰ move your hands, and all those body movements

⁹ In retrospect, my understanding was that Mark wanted to start talking about his sexual relationship with men Thai classical whereas I was looking for insights about gender constructs in Thai classical music and the ways in which it is dealt by nonconforming Thai classical musicians. This misunderstanding might seem jarring, but it is very likely to happen since the terms sex, gender, and sexuality are all referred to by a single term in Thai, *pheet* [เพต]. Even though I attempted to explain my research interest, Mark was kind enough to let me know that he still had no objection in about his sexual relationship and that I could not ask him straight away.

¹⁰ *Phapphiap* or พับเพียบ is a seated position where one leg is folded outward while the other is folded inward. It is considered as a more polite form of sitting than the cross-legged position.

[straightening his right arm and flexing fingers on his left hand like he was playing an air jakhee] exude that distinctive *jarit*. *Sau* players could not as much [display the *jarit*] because all they do it this [clenching his left hand and hold it up and moving his left hand back and forth like he was playing an air sau uu]. But for *jakhee* you have to *choet* and straighten your back [playing air jakhee again]. It...it...it [rolling both his hands away from his chest] exudes the feeling of being beautiful [*suay* สวย]. The playing techniques of the instrument also help in driving this aspect of being a woman.

Even though Mark agrees that almost every aspect of *jakhee* is suitable for effeminate men musicians, his remark was based on the premise that the instrument represents certain qualities that are culturally tied to being a woman. Again, it must be noted that these so-called feminine characteristics are only activated in a specific musical space and not all effeminate men who play *jakhee* imagine themselves to be a woman despite embodying those characteristics. It is not so much about either/or than both/and.

How then did Mark compensate the relatively more restricted bodily movements in *sau uu* that makes it less ideal for showcasing the qualities of being *suay* and *choet*? This seemed to be a question for which he did not have an immediate answer. Mark momentarily looked up in contemplation and murmured, “Ummm, I don’t really know.” I felt like he had to put some efforts into answering, when he said that the *phapphiap* sitting position was something he could play with. He said that he would “spread the foot” or *phaay thao* (พายเท้า) that is folded outside, which followed how his teacher sat while playing *sau uu*. Mark explained that one would usually tuck the outward-folding foot toward the hip (*kep thao* or เก็บเท้า), but Chaluay would let the foot rest a little further away from her hip. Mark used several adjectives to describe his thoughts on Chaluay’s posture. The posture looked “beautiful” (*suay* or สวย), meaning that it is pleasing to look at, especially with the instrument. He said that it also looked “long” (*yaaw* or ยาว) and “flow,” meaning that the body occupies a little more space because outward foot is slightly extended rather than fully tucked in. According to him, the fully tucked in foot in

phapphiap position was unquestionably an appropriate (*riaprauy* เรียบร้อย) posture, but it looked a bit too meek (*jiamjiam* เจียมเจียม).¹¹ The spread-out foot, on the other hand, allowed him to feel more relaxed and assertive while musicking.

As Mark suggested, the seating posture is school- or lineage-specific. But a musician's lineage or school can also be identified by seating posture. When I texted Mark asking for further explanation on *phaay thao* ผายเท้า, he sent me two photos of Chaluay seated in the position. He made a circle mark around his teacher's foot that is spread out from the body in lieu of verbal explanation. After that he sent a third photo of himself playing *sau uu* besides another *sau uu* player Metee Punvaratorn who was seated with his outward foot tucked in. Like the previous photos, Mark's spread-out foot is marked in circle, but he provided me with more commentary. He wrote "Look at Metee tucking his feet just like uncle (*naa* น้า) Loem. To each their own LOL" (*doo Metee khao kau nang kep thao taam baep naa Loem sai khrai sai man hahahahaha* ดูเมธีเขาก็นั่งเก็บเท้าตามแบบน้ำเหลิ้ม สายใครสายมัน 55555). Mark was mentioning that Metee's seating posture was just like his teacher, *naa* Loem or Chaloem Muangpraesii. It is in this moment that reveals a significance of body posture and the identification of musical lineage or school, thereby exhibiting Rahaim's *paramparic body*. However, Mark seating position and his comparative commentary goes beyond the "transmission of bodily dispositions through teaching lineages" (Rahaim 2012: 111), in a sense that they are recognizable – or even traceable – and laden with gendered meanings. Bodily posture and musical lineage are

¹¹ Mark also sits in *phapphiap* position with the outward foot tucked in when not playing *sau uu*, for example, when he visits a monk in a temple.

suggestive, but not deterministic, to one another, yet specific posture of some musical lineages allow for more articulation of gender non/conformity than others.¹²



Figure 3.7: A Photo of Mark (bottom row, center) playing *sau uu* with his markup on the spread-out right leg. Note the different seating posture of another *sau uu* player Meetee Punvaratorn (extreme right). Photo courtesy of Mark.

Another indicator of *jarit*, according to Mark, is the way in which a players produce a *sau uu* timbre. The easiest way to distinguish a *sau uu* player is how one moves from one pitch to another as one bows the instrument. Mark compared this specific ability to control the endpoint of each pitch to how one finishes a phrase or sentence,

¹² I am always fascinated by the ways in which string musicians pay close attention to the gestures of a musicking body. Not that *piiphaat* musicians do not care about gestures, but string musicians seem to develop an ability to identify a musician or a musical lineage through minute gestural details. Teerawit, who is a *sau uu* player, was able to identify Chidpong Songsermvorakul, the *jakhee* musician in the cover photo of my supplementary website, just by looking at the gesture of Chidpong's hands.

what he called *haang siang* ทางเสียง or literally “the voice’s tail.”¹³ If a player bows without *haang siang*, it is likely that their *sau uu* bowing will be abrupt and blunt. In contrast, if a player speaks with *haang siang*, this will be reflected in the controlled, smooth, and seamless bowing strokes. Mark said, “if I am asked where the *jarit* [of a *sau uu* player] comes from, I would say the sound. That is because the sound coming out of my *sau* pretty much has *haang siang*. I do not like to bow my *sau* bluntly.” In other words, the careful handling of *sau uu* bowing was, according to Mark, what characterizes a player’s *jarit*. Compared to *jakhee* as an instrument that favors the expression of effeminate *jarit*, such characteristics are not as visibly enacted on *sau uu*, so much so that even the instrument specialist struggled to verbalize them.

The conversation then drifted to other topics and my hope that Mark would entertain my preoccupation with *jarit* slowly waned. However, the topic would return fifteen minutes later, and it unexpectedly answered some of my questions regarding how Mark navigates and negotiates his gender-nonconformity with *sau uu*. I was asking him to say a few things about the *thaang* or a specific style of embellishing a basic melody of a piece that he inherited from his teacher, Chaluay. Mark said that he tried to stay true and honor his teacher’s *thaang* whenever he plays *sau uu* by making little to no changes to some of the melodic phrases that Chaluay taught. Nonetheless, he thought about rendering the *thaang* strategically when performing in an ensemble, which reflects Chaluay’s characteristic musical style that made her famous:

“I sort of customize my *thaang* a little bit, depending on whether I want or don’t want to use it, whether I want to look a part [of the ensemble] or stand out. This awareness is accumulated through experiences. Like sometimes when they [other

¹³ In verbal conversation, a *haang siang* is added by saying *khrap* គ្រប់ (for men speakers) or *kha* ក្រ (for women speakers) at the end of each sentence to add a sense of politeness and respect from the speaker. *Haang siang* is expected when a speaker addresses to someone who is older or when a conversation takes place formally.

instruments] are going up [the pitch register], why would I be going up high with them? I just go down to the lower register to make me seen. When they are running with lower pitches, I would go high pitches. If others play a loose melody, I fill it up. That way I make myself a little more visible. But these are my own observations. didn't ask me to do those things herself, but those [strategies] crystalized over time. You know, like in the beginning of a piece when everyone will be playing smoothly, will be doing a jagged melody. Or when others are coming in really fast, she would play something calm.”

To be fair, such strategies are not necessarily a rebellious act. They were rather desired because otherwise the mushy and low timber of *sau uu* can easily be overshadowed by the *sau duang*'s penetrating raspy as well as the *jakhee*'s buzzy percussive tone colors. For Mark, to find a spot to make his teacher's *thaang* shine through was something of a brain exercise.

But I felt that this strategic musicking was more than just honing technical skills. It was also a matter of the in/visibility of the musician. When I asked Mark whether his deviant yet calculated use of *thaang* was his way of expressing *jarit*, he nodded affirmatively. Since his bodily movement, continued Mark, is not allowed the same expressive freedom as in *jakhee*, he had to turn to the music, more particularly the *thaang* itself, to help with the expression. Based on Mark's explanation, *jarit* is not exclusively about how a musician organizes their body with respect to the gender construct accorded to an instrument. *Jarit* could be visible, or rather audible, through how a musician approaches a musical piece. In this sense, *jarit* is as much musical as it is embodied.

Mark's loyalty to Chaluay's *thaang* went beyond just playing exactly what was taught: that loyalty is not necessarily about replicating every little detail of his teacher's sonic production. This may explain why all *sau uu* players who adopt Chaluay's *thaang* have a common seating posture: resting the instrument close to the inner left thigh, tilting it forward, using inner left finger knuckles to press the strings, torso crunching toward the

right making the left shoulder higher than the other. But Mark did not consider the seating posture that I just described as one homogeneous bodily positioning. To him, what I saw as one single posture consists of two components: the handling of instrument and the seating position itself. Even when talking about instrument handling, Mark was only focusing on using the finger's bottom sections (*nuam niw* นวมนิ้ว) to press the strings, saying that it was a technical necessity if he was to reproduce his teacher's sound. Perhaps because Mark viewed instrument handling to be more a matter of skills and techniques than a corporeal discipline, this might explain his difficulty trying to respond to my question about *jarit* and his subsequent discussion on the *phapphiap* position. However, Mark's instrument handling also implies that he was imagining his teacher as he plays – he embodies Chaluay. Thus, despite his claim, it was obvious that instrument handling and seating position are equally key to bring forth the *jarit*.

To return to the idea of *paramparic* body once again, Mark's verbal and gestural attempts explain to me the importance of *jakhee* as well as his bodily postures while playing *sau uu* illustrates that the bodily disciplines marking the teacher-student relationship also functions as a claim of inheriting a status (Rahaim 2012: 117). These trained musicking body serves as a statement, or a “brand” as musicians call it, of one's musical lineage. The seating posture and the instrument handling are enough to give away the Chaluay's lineage. But the *jarit* expressed by through the *paramparic body* also indicates class status. The deliberate ways in which *jakhee* players and Mark specifically “organize” their bodies is more than just effeminate articulation, but also boast the musicking body's class, i.e., embodying *khunying* or a noble woman. Yet, the *paramparic body* and *jarit* displayed by Mark is deeply intertwined with, if not inseparable from, the *thaang* of a specific melodic variation of a musical school or lineage. To further illustrate the merging of *thaang* and *paramparic body* as Mark make

visible his *jarit*, I would like to return to the video recording of “Phamaa Haa Thaun” performance that I left off in Chai’s *jarit* discussion.

I have explained the way Chai articulated his bodily movement as he played the *kep* melody during the transition into the Burmese-style section. At 7:07, the transition is complete, and so begins the new section marked by the entrance of *klaung saung naa* player behind the *khloy* or flute player. Here, the ensemble changes from heterophonically playing embellished melody to playing a single melodic line together. In this homophonic melodic line called *bangkhap thaang* or “mandatory *thaang*,” all the melodic instruments are expected to follow the predetermined melody with minimal to no embellishment. This is true for the two *jakhee*, *khloy*, and *sau duang* (cropped out of video), players who played the first few loose notes in this section in unison:

----	- D - F	----	- S - L
------	---------	------	---------

Table 3.2: A notation showing the basic melody of an excerpt from “Phamaa Haa Thaun.”

Mark, however, started the supposedly *bangkhap thaang* บังคับทาง melody with noticeably tighter notes, all the while maintaining the falling tones (highlighted in bold) to stay in the part:

Other melodic instruments	----	- D - F	----	- S - L
Mark on <i>sau uu</i>	----	D R M F	--DR	M F S L

Table 3.3: A comparison between the basic melody and Mark’s *sau uu* rendition with melodic embellishment. Notes in bold marks the end of a melodic phrase.

At this point, Mark has made a clear indication that he will not be simply following the plain *bangkhap thaang* melody “without a fight.” Note that since the extra notes added here perfectly compliment the rising contour of the *bangkhap thaang* melody, i.e., *do (re mi) fa (do re mi fa) sol la*, it blends with the loose notes and did just enough to make Mark’s part noticeable but not audacious. At 7:09 the ensemble proceeds

to the next passage of the section in unison, including Mark. The unison was short-lived as Mark takes an unexpected route at the fixed melody at the fifth measure.

----	- S - D	----	- S - L	- D - -	- S - L	--- S	--- F
------	---------	------	---------	----------------	---------	-------	-------

Table 3.4: An excerpt from “Phamaa Haa Thau” showing the syncopated note, highlighted in bold.

Just when the other melodic instruments move to a syncopated high *do* (in bold) and come down the end the passage at the note *fa*, at 7:11, Mark starts his “run” again by a quick high *do* and *re* with his ring and little fingers respectively. He immediately slides his right little finger down the instrument, a rather unconventional practice for *sau* players when playing in an ensemble, to reach for the high *mi*, back to *re* with the ring finger, *do* with the middle finger. Keeping right his hand in that position, he repeats the run between *do* and *mi* two more times, making the passage sound more like a *kep* melody, before meeting the rest of the ensemble at the ending note *fa* at 7:15:

Other melodic instruments	- D - -	- S - L	--- S	--- F
Mark on <i>sau uu</i>	- - D R	M R D R	M R D R	M R D F

Table 3.5: A comparison between the basic melody and Mark’s rendition on *sau uu*. Note how Mark deviates from the first two “meeting-point” notes (in bold) on the second and third measures before joining the rest of the ensemble in the fourth measure.

This run may start from the same note, the high *do*, and ends on the same note as every other instrument, but the middle of the run sounds nothing like the original *bangkhap thaang* melody altogether. When the main melody makes a descent, Mark shot up and “floats” (*lauy* ឆ្ងាយ) over it by hovering up and down the three notes: *mi*, *re*, and *do*, before making a sudden dive to meet the rest of the ensemble at the rendezvous point *fa*. As soon as the passage ends, Kaew, could be seen smiling in satisfaction after hearing Mark’s totally unanticipated feat. Even Paun, one of the *jakhee* player, shot a surprised look at Mark. Indeed, Mark and his *thaang* on *sau uu* did stand out for a moment.



Figure 3.8: Kaew (front row) smiles at Mark after the latter performs the “floating melody.” Also note Paun’s surprised look at Mark for the same reason ([view on website](#)).

Mark reunited with the ensemble in the next phrase with some slight embellishment along with *sau duang* and *jakhee*:

Jakhee	----	- M - F	--- S	--- R
Sau duang	----	- M - F	-- S L	S F M R
Mark on sau uu	----	D R M F	-- S L	S F M R

Table 3.6: A comparison of melodic embellishment of an excerpt from “Phamaa Haa Thaun.” Note how Mark’s rendition is denser than the others.

7:16 marks the last phrase of this Burmese-style section in which everyone plays *kep* melody that starts from the note *mi*, goes down to the *sol* in the lower octave, and returns to *re* to conclude the first round of the section. Even when the *bangkhap thaang* melody itself is in the form of *kep*, Mark still finds a way to deviate from the rest of the ensemble. Instead of following the exact melody, he begins the phrase from *ti*, goes up to the *re* on the higher octave, and makes his way down to meet everybody else at the ending note *re*. What results is the conspicuous timbre of *sau uu* that jumps out from the other instruments.

Other melodic instruments	(S) M S R	M R D T	L S L T	L T D R
Mark on <i>sau uu</i>	- T D R	D T L T	L S F M	S F M R

Table 3.7: Mark’s *sau uu* rendition that deviate from the basic melody, “floating” in the second and third measures (note the different “meeting-point” notes) before joining the rest of the ensemble in the last measure.

Within the span of fifteen seconds, Mark strategically played with the otherwise plain *bangkhap thaang* melody by infusing the idiomatic *thaang* he learned from his master Chaluay. This was strategic because Mark did not repeat those plays in the repetition of the Burmese-style section – he played the *bangkhap thaang* melody plainly with the rest of the ensemble. Mark told me that he intentionally did not pull the same trick twice because doing it once was enough to make him and his part visible. Do those things over again would have his part predictable and could make the entire section feel “too much” (*yoe koen* เยอะเกิน). Based on the instant reaction from Mark’s ensemble members, it is safe to say that he stole the show in this section. In an interesting commentary to this moment, Mark playfully mentioned that it was a deliberate attempt to make the audience “look at him for once” (*doo chan nit nueng* ดูชั้นนิดหนึ่ง).

Clearly, the use of *thaang* to display Mark’s *jarit* is much more subtle and *thaang*-specific than Chai’s case and requires an informed listening to his performance. Also, Mark did not execute those tricks in a fast tempo. Yet, I argue that what Mark and Chai has in common is the nonconforming ethos behind their performance, whether musical or embodied. For Mark, it was about finding wiggle room in unlikely musical spaces and caught everyone by surprise with his teacher’s signature *sau uu thaang*. Precisely for this reason, Chaluay’s *sau uu thaang* is well recognized amongst queer men *sau uu* players and even string music enthusiasts as the *saep* ones. Just as playing *jakhee* is the musical moment in time that makes available the masculine and feminine traits to the effeminate men musicians, activating and embodying Chaluay’s *thaang* on *sau uu*, as

demonstrated by Mark, allows these players to stand out in positive ways while implying their nonconformity in the process.

Conclusion

Through the theorization of musicking bodies, Chai and Mark musical and embodied strategies reveal the negotiation underlying the seemingly gendered tradition of Thai classical music. This is possible after shifting the focus away from the *piiphaat* music and toward the musicking bodies in the string ensemble. The advent of fast and bold playing style in this ensemble was the first breakthrough from the ensemble's perceived image of slow and soft music meant to be played by court ladies. This defiant approach found its resonance with the effeminate men musicians who capitalize on the particularly embodied and musical knowledge of *jakhee* and *sau uu*, to express their *jarit* and assert their nonconformity whether through postures, articulated musicking bodies, and daring musical *thaang*. As suggested by Chai, the effeminate male body in the string ensemble is considered the strength, not weakness, because they can "play with" *jarit* and the masculinity. And through Mark's unpredictable *sau uu*, he was able to combine the *paramparic body* and the signature *thaang* from his teacher to make himself visible despite being constrained by the *sau uu*'s bodily postures.

This, however, does not mean that there is no gender contention in *piiphaat* music. Increasing number of women *piiphaat* musicians, some of whom have been initiated to learning high-level *naaphaat* pieces once reserved only for men, have raised a few questions and concerns among men musicians regarding the impact of women in the once male-exclusive musical terrain of *piiphaat*. Queer men musicians too populate *piiphaat* tradition, but their presence is more obscure. This is because the performance practices of *piiphaat* instruments do not help in articulating effeminacy, therefore many

queer men musicians assume masculine-presenting embodiment in this tradition. Negotiations of gender and sexual identities of women and queer men musicians in a deeply male-centered *piiphaat* ensemble is certainly worthy of scholarly attention, but this is beyond the scope of my dissertation. Moreover, I argue that such negotiation is more visible in non-dominant musical traditions like the string ensemble. Another caveat is that not every gesture embodied by the effeminate men musicians in the string ensemble points toward *jarit*. I reiterate here again that these bodily postures are *articulated* from time to time, and that to extract meanings out of every small detail from the bodily gestures, postures, and positions would be an overanalysis.

Expression of musicking bodies in string ensemble is strategic as it queers the assigned gendered values of this musical genre with the stylized effeminacy of the male bodies. These carefully curated musicking bodies, I argue, are simultaneously queer (not subscribing to the established socio-musical norms) and gendered (drawing on the effeminate bodily organizations). Their controlled and articulated musicking bodies temporarily confer elite class status (*khunying*) on the queer men musicians. While the process explored in this chapter highlights the articulation of *seap* or spiciness through nonnormative gender performativity and grants a non-heteronormative musical space, the next chapter will consider *saep* in its sensual sense when a seemingly straight musical text in Thai classical music is given a homoerotic twist.

Chapter 4

Disorientating Erotics

In *Queering the Field*, a groundbreaking edited volume that addresses sexuality in ethnomusicology, Christi-Anne Castro writes in her reflection on doing queer ethnography and being a queer ethnographer that “whether queerness hides or is simply waiting for recognition may be for the observer or reader to decide, but there are occasions for obvious display” (2020: 107). This sentence encapsulates the unresolved tension between nonnormative gendered and sexualized performing bodies, on the one hand, and heteronormative constructs, on the other. Castro’s statement captures the spirit of this chapter. I ask: what is at stake when a display of queerness becomes obvious?

Chapter 3 explored the embodied expression of queer men’s nonconformity when they musick, and this chapter focuses on how some queer men musicians reinterpret the Thai classical music canon through the lens of non-heteronormative desires. At the heart of this chapter is “Surintharaahu,” a piece whose lyrics are adopted as a site of non-heterosexual pleasure and intimacy. Just as queer men string musicians capitalize on the intersection of class and gender to render their otherwise problematic subjectivity legitimately and ambiguously visible, “Surintharaahu” shows the queering of otherwise unmarked heteronormative desires, thereby unsettling the erotics of this gendered music tradition in more ways than one. This chapter explores how *saep* is invoked sensually through song texts.

I am a Woman. It is so Difficult to Make my Desires Seen.

In the tribute concert celebrating Rati’s 90th birth anniversary—which would have been her age if she were still alive—at the esteemed Bangkok National Theatre on March

16th, 2014, the venue was packed with several dozen men string musicians who identified themselves as part of her musical lineage. The event consisted of several performances featuring *jakhee*, both in ensembles and solo. One of the items was “Thayaui Yuan,” a long and complex piece from the *thayaui* repertory, performed by a group of *piiphaat* and string musicians on the stage.¹

Seated in *phapphiap* position just in front of the ensemble was Narong Kaew-aun, a man in his seventies who began with a melisma or *uean* เอื้อน to indicate that the piece had begun. The singer was much older than the ensemble members behind him. He lifted the microphone in his hand up toward his mouth, only to pull it away when he raised his volume. Taking a big, deep breath time and again, he barely reached the high pitch register in the next phrase. The attempt to squeeze his vocal cords caused him to wince noticeably, revealing the wrinkles on his face. While unfazed by his own frailty, his singing was far from perfect, and he showed a sign of discomfort from sitting in *phapphiap* position. But there was no other singer who could sing like him. At that time, he no longer made many appearances as a singer due to health issues, yet he never refused to step up – or rather sit down – on the stage whenever requested. He also never failed to surprise the audience with his excellent memory of musical lyrics and techniques, a feat that earned him the nickname “Narong *ruay thao*” ณรงค์ร้อยเถา or “The Hundred-*thao* Narong.”² As he reached the end of his part, the entire ensemble picked up theirs and began to play. His hand was still shaking up and down as the camera faded out

¹ The performance can be accessed at <https://youtu.be/S3KuiEWbGro>.

² *Thao* เถา is a form of Thai classical music repertory in which a musical piece is played in at least three rhythmic levels. The most common format of *thao* repertory consists of *saam chan* สามชั้น, *saung chan* สองชั้น, and *chan diaw* ชั้นเดียว rhythmic levels. For Thai classical singers, singing a *thao* repertory means there are more lyrics to memorize and techniques to master. *Thao* can also be a counting unit for musical pieces played in this format. The nickname “Narong *ruay thao*” means that he has hundreds of *thao* repertory lyrics memorized in his head. In other words, Narong can readily sing a piece, even when called for immediately.

from him. Unfortunately, that appearance on stage was perhaps his last filmed performance. He passed away from a heart attack on September 23, 2015.



Figure 4.1: Narong Kaew-aun [in purple shirt] winces as he attempts to sing a high pitch register during the “Tayuay Yuan” performance. Screenshot from the video footage of Rati’s tribute concert ([view on website](#)).

The man whom I alluded to was Narong Kaew-aun, also known as Narong Ruambanleng from the music group he was a part of. Besides his eidetic memory of the Thai classical singing repertory, he was known to be omnipresent in every Thai classical music performance. Whether it is a *waikhruu*, a *piiphaat* competition, a concert, or even a funeral, he was sure to be seen at those events either as a singer or in the audience. I have seen him at many such events, and had the privilege to perform with him, though it was not the best performance because he and I had not rehearsed together. He also had a career as a singer in the Public Relations Department Thai music ensemble where Chaluay and Rati were employed. As a highly experienced singer, Narong was loved by all Thai classical music communities, and it was not surprising to see him in action in such a significant event as the concert above. And to put the scale of this event into perspective, it was presided over by the Crown Princess Sirindhorn, King

Vajiralongkorn’s sister, the only Thai royal family who has a sustained interest in Thai classical music.

It is customary for the students of a deceased Thai classical musician to publish a book that features their teacher’s biography, musical lineage, career overview, and major performances, as well as condolence messages from the teacher’s relatives. In other words, funeral books are an invaluable source for Thai classical music history, and Narong’s is no different. It contains an outpouring of condolences from the representatives of the Fine Arts Department, Public Relations Department, and several leading universities. Narong’s photographs, handwritten memos, and his musical performances are carefully curated. But what is most striking to me in this book is at the end. Just a few pages before the back cover, a lyric from a piece called “Surintharaahuu” (สุรินทรอาหุ) is printed on the center of the page with a photo of young, well-groomed Narong, seated in *phapphiap* position and his lips slight apart in front of a tiny microphone, as though he was uttering those printed words. The lyrics, adapted from the Thai epic poem *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* (ขุนช้างขุนแผน) and to be read from left to right then top to bottom, is translated as:

[English translation] I am a woman.
[Transliterated lyrics] *Naung pen ying*
[Original lyrics in Thai] น่องเป็นหญิง
And you,
Phau kau pen
พ่อก็เป็น
If my body was that of a man,
Thaa tua naung nii pen phuuchaay
ถ้าตัวน่องเป็นผู้ชาย
Some time tonight
Kham kham wan nii
คำคำวันนี้

It is so difficult to make it [my desire] seen
yaak jing jing ja hai hen
ยากจริงๆ จะให้เห็น
what a brilliant, superb man you have been
chaay loet prasoet sii
ชายเลิศประเสริฐศรี
and yours is that of a lady for a moment
tuaa khaung phau phlaay pen satrii
ตัวของพ่อพลายเป็นสตรี
I’ll fondle you to my heart’s content
ja pai naep hai nam jai
จะไปแนบให้หน้าใจ

(Pitchanat Toojinda 2016: 88 original text in Thai, translated by the author)

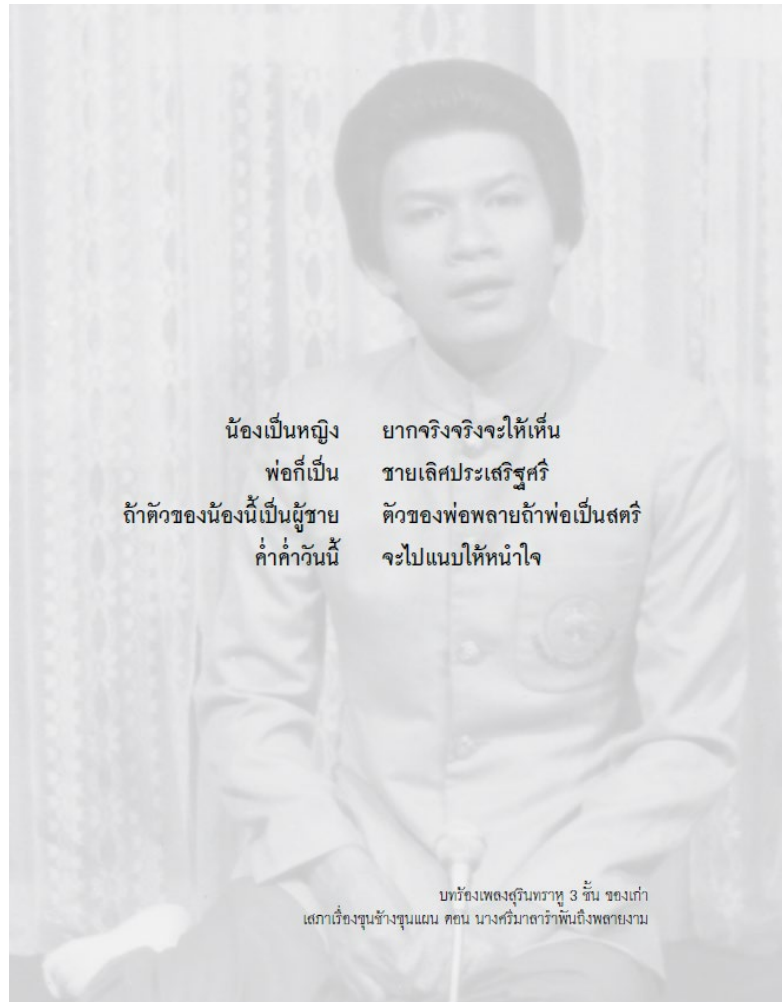


Figure 4.2: A page taken from Narong's funeral book contains "Surintharaahuu" lyrics with Narong's photo in the background ([view on website](#)).

Curious, I sent a text message to Pitchanat Toojinda, the editor of Narong's funeral book, about the reasons for including these lyrics. Pitchanat told me that it was added by Sathian Duangchanthip, a Thai music scholar who served as a supervisor for the book project, and that he had no idea why it was added. There was no way for me to confirm with Sathian, for he had already passed away in 2017, so I decided to reach out to another contributing author of the book, Varis Autawapaitoon, with the help of my friend Hanoi. Hanoi insisted that I include him when I interviewed Varis because he, as Varis's student, knew how to get the most information out of his teacher. Varis, a highly

skilled queer men Thai classical singer, responded during a virtual interview to my inquiry that he knew Narong well enough to ascertain that “Surintharaahuu” was not the latter’s favorite piece to sing. As to why the lyric appeared, Varis just said, ambiguously, “Yep, that’s it!” (*nan lae, kau yaang nan lae* นั้นแหละ ก็อย่างนั้นแหละ). Hanoi, who was also present in the interview, nodded in agreement. Varis’ reply was careful, since he did not want to imply any negative assessment of Narong. But just like how queer men choose an open-ended *pen* เป็น or “to be” as nod to nonnormative gender and sexual identity, Varis’s ambiguity was an answer itself. Besides his musical prowess, Narong’s homosexuality is equally acknowledged among Thai classical music aficionados – it is just something that is not publicly spoken about. To the “insiders” of this tradition, the lyrics above are not a posthumous outing of Narong’s queerness. It is instead a subtle heartfelt homage to his nonconforming sexuality.

Narong’s life and musical career is a perfect example of Perter Jackson’s statement that homosexuality in Thai culture is tolerated but not accepted. Narong’s “private homosexuality, even when generally suspected, is considered a separate realm that does not impact on a man’s public performance of his civic duties” (Jackson 2016: 65). Narong did not embody the “*kathoey*’s deviance [that is] publicly visible...” and his “homosexuality, even where suspected or known, generally remains hidden.” (ibid.: 66). My focus here thus is not whether Narong’s homosexuality is suspected, known, or hidden. It is about how the “Surintharaahuu” lyric, while suggesting women’s desire on the surface, is also the emblematic conduit of homoeroticism, and singing it makes it simultaneously known and hidden.

This chapter is about desire, pleasure, intimacy, and erotics in Thai classical music that are queered through a non-heteronormative reinterpretation of a straight

musical text. I argue that the display of queerness in this song text is made possible by what I call “flipping,” the process of imagining a gender role-reversal and assuming the roles of the gendered body so imagined. As I will elaborate later, the “Surintharaahuu” lyrics are flipped twice. The first flip provides the raw material for queer men singers to articulate their nonnormative subjectivity whereas the second flip, done performatively, sensually brings forth the homoerotic interpretation of the straight text. While a queer desire finds its voice in “Surintharaahuu,” its manifestation is still strongly grounded in heteronormative constructs, thereby harkening back to certain sexual stereotypes of queer men musicians. This in turn demonstrates that the permissible surfacing of queerness in Thai classical music is highly contingent on context and, when surfaced, it is at best tolerated but not accepted.

In what follows, I begin with a discussion of some theoretical through-lines used to thread the chapter together. I argue that “Surintharaahuu” is “bound up with issues of gender construction and the channeling of desire” (McClary 1991: 54). Next is the reflection of the “Surintharaahuu” lyrics where I examine aspects of gender roles that are baked into typical Thai heteronormative romanticism. This discussion then serves as precursor for my attention to the queer interpretation of the text. I consider how homoerotic intents are musically evoked by queer men Thai classical singers. This chapter reveals a more intimate strategy by nonconforming musicians to play with pleasures and desires, on the one hand, and heteronormativity, on the other, to unsettle the rigid gendered practices of Thai classical music. Instead of drawing on multiple embodied genders as a resource, they confront the tradition by subtly de-straightening it.

The Intimacy of Thai Homoerotic Intent

In the previous chapter, I parsed the conflated meanings of sexual intercourse, biological sex, culturally constructed gender, and sexual orientation that are subsumed a single umbrella term in Thai: *pheet* or เพ็ด. This chapter considers *pheet* in its sensual form without discarding its conflated undertones of identity markers. This is my point of entry to understand the nuances within the “Surintharahuu” lyrics. The translated lyrics of the piece, though not fully capturing its poetics, poetically depict a woman’s frustration from having to suppress her desires toward her crush, a handsome young man. It also reveals the men’s active role in sexual relationships, as seen from the woman’s imaginary gender switch, the flip. From the outset, the lyrics are indeed “sexy.” But to examine how this heteronormative sensual lyric is successfully queered, I must first lay out the critical frameworks driving my theorization.

Sexuality’s function as a discursive tool is to naturalize heterosexuality and impose control and authority over homosexuality as “unnatural” and immoral, as pointed out elegantly by Michel Foucault and Judith Butler in *The History of Sexuality* (1976) and *Gender Trouble* (1990), and then by David Halperin (1995). These ideas were slow to arrive in music scholarship but were groundbreaking when they did. Suzanne Cusick proposed a thought-provoking connection between musicality and (homo)sexuality beyond the sense of “genital pleasure” as “a way of expressing and/or enacting relationships of intimacy through physical pleasure shared, accepted, or given” (Cusick 2006: 70). The relationships between intimacy and physical pleasure are then mediated by Foucauldian “power” forming the power/pleasure/intimacy triad (ibid.: 71). Reflecting on the impact of Cusick’s triad, Fred Maus (2019: para. 5) acknowledges “[l]esbian sexuality and lesbian musicality as ways of negotiating pleasure, intimacy, and power,

avoiding the fixed power hierarchies of conventional gender roles,” thus breaking out of Butlerian “compulsory heterosexuality.” Cusick’s triad, and its elaboration by Maus, informs my thinking in this chapter. With these in mind, I treat “Surinthataahuu” first as a nexus of power/pleasure/intimacy triad and second as a site of where queer men singers use “interpretive strategies to reverse the power relationship” (Maus 2019: para. 21) of compulsory heterosexuality.

My aim in foregrounding the queering of “Surintharaahuu” is to write directly about musicality and sexuality to undo that which “muffles and closets sexuality” (Maus 1995: 96). By writing directly, I focus on the ways non-heteronormative desires are channeled, albeit suppressed, through hegemonic sexual norms. Deborah Wong states that desire is one of many manifestations of erotics such that:

[a]n erotics is the place where the affective and the structural come together and where corporeal control is felt and made visible... Erotics are where bodies meet bodies and where subjectivity comes home to roost in a body. Erotics are not only about women, sex, queer experience, or misogynist representation. Erotics are about all those things, as well as many other things we never seem to get to, especially heteronormative values...All musics rely on erotics, even those focused on spiritual ecstasy rather than corporeal sexuality or pleasure (Wong 2015: 179).

Wong’s point closes the circuit, bringing home the tangible connection between desire and Cusick’s triad. In the same vein, Steven Moon, critically tracing the trajectories of queer theory and ethnomusicology, notes that this so-called circuit has the potential to “critique the heterosexist dynamics which have been able to render themselves silent/invisible/ “unmarked” while forcing out queer and demanding its legibility” (Moon 2020: 18). This is precisely my aim in this chapter.

I push further Moon’s observation about ethnomusicology’s engaging with queer theory, thus transitioning into another stage of work on music, gender, and sexuality. In addition to leaning on popular music studies as a “common object of inquiry” (ibid.: 18),

I see what these theoretical underpinnings can tell us about a classical music tradition. I attend to how sexual desires are conceptualized within the Thai cultural milieu. Peter Jackson notes that, “In Thailand, sexual desire is commonly regarded as a mood (*aarom* อารมณ์) or temporary emotional state. Homosexuality is also sometimes viewed in the same way, as a transient mood or interest rather than a fixed character trait” (Jackson 2016: 72). “Surintharaahu,” exemplifies the transient nature of sexual desire in ways that allow both hetero- and homoerotics to simultaneously coexist and “come out.” This illustrates how queer theory can offer an incisive critique even of a classical music as a culturally gendered system that sustains heteronormativity as unmarked and protected. I argue that by reformatting straight musical texts and capitalizing on the dissonance between the narrative (heteronormative song texts) and the performative (queer men singers), the queer interpretation of “Surintharaahu” is a strategy of disidentification (Muñoz 1999) and serves as a disorientating device against compulsory heteronormativity (Ahmed 2006). The utility of queer theory is further discussed in the next chapter as I investigate conflicts and tensions among queer men string musicians through the lens of nightlife scholarship.

The Power/Pleasure/Intimacy of “Surintharaahu”

The primary focus of this chapter is the performativity of homoeroticism—the process through which nonnormative desire(s) is enabled through nonnormative performers. On the surface is a tension between the majoritarian culture of gendered implications of Thai classical music and the minoritarian subjects, i.e., queer men singers. While this interaction shares some aspects of what Muñoz calls disidentificatory practices, i.e., drawing on and reformatting majoritarian culture, it is distinct in a few ways. First, I zero in on the intersection of gender, sexuality, and class rather than foregrounding race

and diaspora (cf. Muñoz’s emphasis in queer Latinidad). Second, the goal of Thai queer disidentification is not to generate cultural critique, at least explicitly. The queer reading of the “Surintharaahuu” lyrics is superimposed onto heterosexual desires. As a result, queer and “straight” reading of the piece occurs simultaneously. It is thus important that I return to its lyrics again to lay out a general overview of this musical piece so I can unpack the layers of meaning behind its lyrics.

“Surintharaahuu” is one of those musical pieces that contains an “accent” or *samniang* สำเนียง – *samniang* Mon สำเนียงมอญ in this case – without an accent indicator in front of its title.³ There are three sections in “Surintharaahuu,” each with six, eight, and eight metric-cycles in its length. The piece can be played in *thao* เถา format, beginning with the most expanded metric level *saam chan* สามชั้น, followed by regular metric level *saung chan* สองชั้น, and concluded with the contracted metric level *chan diaw* ชั้นเดียว.⁴ Due to its tuneful Mon-accented melody, “Surintharaahuu” is suitable for casual, easy-listening performances, mostly by string ensembles. The *saam chan* metric level of the piece is also the basis for several solo variants, and the lyrics that are the subject of this chapter are also from this metric level.

In both solo and ensemble formats, the lyrics of “Surintharaahuu” are always sung before the instrumental section and are in the format of a poem much like other Thai

³ Pieces containing an “accent” or *samniang* usually have an indicator of the accent in its title, for example, “**Mon** Duu Daaw,” “**Khaek Mon** Baang Khun Phrom,” “**Lao** Phaen,” “**Jiin** Khim Yai,” etc.

⁴ I deliberately use metric cycles as a unit to measure the length of a musical piece to avoid a possible confusion that *saam chan* level is longer than *song chan* and so on. This is because as a piece progresses in *thao* from, that is, from *saam chan* to *song chan* and eventually *chan diaw*, both its length and the accompanying metric cycle are proportionally contracted. On a written notation, the length of the music may seem to be halved as it progresses from one metric level to another other. However, the number of the corresponding metric cycles remain constant throughout. Measuring a musical melody against its corresponding metric cycle is also how musicians check whether they learn or remember a piece correctly. A similar concept of proportional metric levels also exists in Javanese gamelan *irama*. For further comparative analysis of this musical process, see Judith Becker 1980.

classical music pieces. As mentioned earlier, the text is taken from the classic Thai literary work *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*.⁵ It is excerpted from the 28th episode, “Phlaayngaam dai naang Siimaalaa” พलयงามได้นางศรีมาลา or “Phlaayngaam gets Siimaalaa.” Siimaalaa is daughter of the ruler of Phichit พิจิตร city who was visited by Khun Phaen and Phlaayngaam. Below is the original version of the corresponding text, written in *klaun paed* กลอนแปด or “the eight poem” form (eight syllables per line), along with the annotations showing the rhyming scheme:

อกน้อง / ยากนัก / ด้วยเป็นหญิง	ต้องซ่อนรัก / หนักนึ่ง / อยู่กับที่
<i>Ok naung / yaak nak / duay pen ying</i>	<i>Taung saun <u>rak</u> / <u>nak</u> ning / yuu kap thii</i>
(My heart is burdened for being a woman,	having to hide my heavy love in place)
मैंเป็นชาย / พ่อพलय / เป็นสตรี	ค่ำวันนี้ / เป็นตาย / จะหมายไป
<i>Maen pen <u>chaay</u> / phau <u>Phlaay</u> / pen satrii</i>	<i>Kham wan nii / pen <u>taay</u> / ja <u>maay</u> pai</i>
(If I were a man and you Phlaay were a lady,	tonight, dead or alive, I will visit you)

The original text exhibits typical *klaun paed* กลอนแปด traits with four core stanzas, each containing eight syllables except for the first one. The slashes indicate the rhythmic page; the bold letters show the rhyme between the first and the second stanza; the italics denote the rhyming schemes between the second, third and fourth stanza; and the underlined letters suggest the internal rhyming within a stanza.

The poem depicts a monologue by Srimalaa, a daughter of the ruler of Phichit city. She was under a magic spell cast by Phlaayngaam, who fell for Srimalaa’s beauty at first sight. Under the spell, Srimalaa was having second thoughts about meeting Phlaayngam again that night. But burdened with the expectations of what it meant to be a respectable and aristocratic woman, Siimaalaa could afford neither to share nor show her longing for Phlaayngam. All she could do was stay in her bedroom alone and lament the

⁵ *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* is one of the most popular literature whose lyrics are adapted into several Thai classical music pieces.

difficulty of having to restrain her romantic desires, all in the name of being a good noblewoman. Her own imagination then became her best friend as she envisioned a gender swap with Phlaayngaam. If she was Phlaayngaam, she would risk everything to sneak into her own bedroom, regardless of any consequences.

Khun Chang Khun Phaen is one of the most-cited Thai literary works in the examination of gender inequity. The spotlight, however, is mostly on Wan Thaug วัณทอง, a key woman character in the story. She was coerced into romantic affairs with two men, first with Khun Phaen and later in the story with Khun Chang, and her promiscuity is criticized throughout the narrative. Khun Phaen, on the other hand, despite having five wives throughout the story, is hardly ever problematized as a womanizer. Quite the opposite, his polygamy is glorified as a trait of an idealized masculinity. Though there are increasing counterarguments that Wan Thaug was coerced into multiple affairs without consent and therefore a victim of patriarchy (Wanna 2012; Boonwadee 2016; Suputcharin 2021), this does not change the consensus that she is a fictional characters who represents women's sexual "deviance." The saying *Wan Thaug saung jai* วัณทองสองใจ, or "the two-heart Wan Thaug," is used to describe such a woman.

Worathipha Sattayanusakkul notes that the criticism toward Wan Thaug suggests a polygamous society dating back to the Ayutthaya period (circa. 14th – 18th century) and that this fictional character is often used as a counterexample of an idealized woman who is supposed to remain forever loyal to her husband no matter what happens (Worathipha 2019: 106–9). Worathipha further observes that when polygamy occurs among commoners, women are often shamed for being full of sexual desires or *tanhaa raakha* ตัณหาราคะ whereas men are lauded for possessing authority and masculine charm. Considering Cusick's power/pleasure/intimacy triad, women, at least in the fictional

world of *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*, play a passive, receptive role in terms of pleasure-seeking in the power game of intimacy. That is, they are expected to conceal their intimate desires and to “protect themselves” or *rak nuan sanguan tua* รักนวลสงวนตัว. Men, on the other hand, is expected to play an active, penetrative role in the same power game.⁶

Gender stereotyping in literature as a moral lesson is perhaps the state’s strategy to maneuver moral policing through soft power. Such regulation, however, is not as severe as other gender-related state sanctions in Southeast Asia: Suharto’s New Order regime in Indonesia, Aung San Suu Kyi’s alleged sexual and reproductive transgressions in Myanmar, or Malaysian’s state allegations of sodomy on Anwar Ibrahim are a few examples (Peletz 2012: 908). The culturally normalized idea that women must guard themselves from and avoid extending an invitation to have sexual relationships with men may be a symptom of patriarchy, but several works have revealed that such systems are sometimes resisted, particularly in the popular music sphere. Andrea Decker notes that *dangdut* performance in Indonesia constitutes a site where women singers can exhibit power through their irresistible bodies. “By simply revealing more of their bodies than is usual, or by dancing in an erotic manner, women move men to lose their senses, get carried away by their emotions, and give women money” (Decker 2020: 42). Similarly, Ubonrat Siriyuwaksak notes the use of sexually enticing and comical lyrics especially by

⁶ Such gender relations are still observable in both everyday lived experiences and the expressive cultures of Thailand, though this is also changing due to a capitalist market that created what Ara Wilson calls “intimate economies” (2004: 101) in the form of shopping malls, nightclubs, and transnational corporations. For example, public affection between men and women is more and more common; an increasing number of women are willing to partake in jobs once considered taboo for women, particularly those involved in nightlife industry, including prostitution; and the heightened visibility of gender nonconforming and transgender individuals lead to a somewhat increased in public tolerance toward non-heteronormative relationships. Another pioneering Marxist-oriented work on the relationship between political economy and gender and sexuality in Southeast Asia is Aihwa Ong’s ethnography (1987) of spirit possession in Malay women factory workers.

women singers places Thai *phleeng luukthung* เพลงลูกทุ่ง as a genre that defies “restrictive pleasure and challenging the sexual hierarchy...” (1990: 71). Thus, if Wan Thaung is the victim of the imposition of a gender regime through soft power, Siimaalaa, the central character in this poem excerpt, personifies women’s erotic power and (indirectly, even if anachronistically) the defiant spirit of *dangdut* and *phleeng luukthoong* respectively.

Though the excerpt in question is not about Wan Thaung, the same logic still holds true. If Wan Thaung represents the gender-defined sexual immorality of a commoner, Siimaalaa occupies the opposite end of the spectrum. Siimaalaa is a perfect woman – born to the ruler of a city, blessed with beauty, well trained to embody idealized femininity, married to Phlaay Ngaam and loyal to him all her life. My focus here is on the strategies employed by Siimaalaa to express her intimate and sensual desires in ways that do not corrupt the image of idealized woman. She appears to understand her position in the power game of intimacy even when spellbound. That she is younger than Phlaayngam – from the pronoun *naung* น้อง⁷ indicating the addresser is younger – and is a woman puts her in an asymmetrical “disadvantage.” Making her desires known would therefore only jeopardize her image. But by imagining herself as a man, i.e., Phlaayngaam, she can articulate her insatiable longing for Phlaayngaam. The gender-switch flips the game into Siimaalaa’s favor such that she is granted the power to articulate her desire and suspend the social constraints that would normally prevent her desire from coming forth. For a moment, Siimaalaa controls the momentum of this game of intimacy as an active, penetrative player.

⁷ Perter Jackson (2016: 136) notes that “Thai [language] possesses an elaborate pronoun system, with multiple first, second, and third person pronouns, whose usage depends...on the relative social and/or age status of speakers, listeners, and persons referred to in any given situation.” This is a case in point. Siimaalaa’s specific use of pronoun *nuang*, the term that also functions as a noun denoting a younger sibling, not only implies that she is younger than Phlaayngaam but also reflects the concept of younger woman and older man that is baked into the Thai romanticism.

Siimaalaa's gender-switch strategy has a certain parallel with Fred Maus's reading of Cusick's triad in a sense that Siimaalaa, socially constructed as a non-dominating and powerless woman in terms of agency, pleasure, and intimacy, reverses the fixed power hierarchies. But the same strategy *does not escape* the fixed power structures of the gender system for two reasons. First, the distribution of power is, after all, tilted toward men—Siimaalaa's articulation of desire is possible only because she imagined herself as Phlaayngaam. Second, Cusick's discussion foregrounds the queer power distribution among two women in a lesbian relationship whereas Siimaalaa and Phlaayngaam exemplifies heterosexual desires. Of course, Cusick's theorization is situated in Western classical music and is not universally applicable, at least literally. It is here that I make a critical intervention by situating Cusick's triad within "Thai genderscapes" (Käng 2014) to extend the former's usefulness. As in many cultures of Southeast Asia, Thais target nonnormative gender performance as a telltale sign of homosexuality. Consequently, those who are visibly marked as homosexual are expected to exhibit gender "deviance." The performance examined in this chapter thus is primarily informed by the queer men musicking bodies who self-identify with effeminacy and whose homosexuality is indexically assumed. The following discussion is not applicable to gender-conforming queer musicians, though there may be some overlap, precisely due to the precedence of gender performance. I maintain my focus on gender-nonconforming queer musicians not only because they are more readily perceptible to my cisgender, heteronormative eyes but also because their marked nonconformity accords them a peculiar place within the tradition.

This moment of heteroeroticism may not unsettle the established gender conventions, but it nonetheless provided a base for further queer reading. When the lyrics are flipped twice, first by the fictional character's gender switch and second by the queer

men musician's homoerotic interpretation, its message does not "land" on its original orientation but becomes disoriented. This disorientation of the heteroerotic lyrics by queer performativity, though not completely escaping its original construct, is where sexuality and musicality meets. Power, pleasure, and intimacy are negotiated not by *avoiding* but instead *playing with* the fixed power hierarchies of conventional gender roles.

I Want to Make my Desires Seen

In this section I illustrate how the queering of "Surintharaahuu" is achieved with the help of the second flip. This flip results in the slight modification of the lyrics from its original poem excerpt, enabling an intimate participation of queer men subjectivity. As shown earlier, the piece's lyrics are worded slightly differently from the original lines in *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*. The changes include shortening, extending, and replacing certain words to make the song text correspond with the length of the "Surintharaahuu" three-section melody. Despite the changes, the desires, intimacy, and gender dynamics that form the text's core message are not only kept intact but are intensified through the performative act of singing. This is especially the case in the final stanza of the lyrics "*kham kham wan nii ja pai naep hai nam jai*" (คำคำวันนี้จะไปแนบให้หน้าใจ Some time tonight, I'll fondle you to my heart's content), to be discussed later. The homoerotic message may reach its peak at the very end of the piece, but the performative queering of "Surintharaahuu" lyrics occurs from its very beginning.

It all has to do with the first three words *naung pen ying*, and who sings them. When a vocalist begins "Surintharaahuu" with "*naung pen ying....*," this opening is imbued with two interpretive possibilities. It could be read as a part of narrative in a sense that it literally tells the story from the original *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* excerpt.

Naung (‘younger sibling’ or ‘younger partner’) in this sense refers to Siimaalaa as a woman. At the same time, this phrase could also be understood as the singer’s gender identification where the pronoun *naung* suggests that the *singer is* a woman. When a female-identified vocalist performs this lyric, it raises no issues because the gender of the narrative and that of the musicking bodies both align. It is therefore not surprising that several notable women singers, such as Charoenchai Sunthonwathin, Sudjit Duriyapraneeet, and Surang Duriyaphan have sung these lyrics, and their performances have received critical acclaim from Thai classical singing circles. By contrast, when a male-identified singer takes on this lyric, it creates a provoking – or amusing, or titillating – gender dissonance in the narrative versus the performative. That a normative man must be responsible for expressing Siimaalaa’s desire and is gendered as a woman through the phrase “*naung pen ying*” can be inexplicable to some audiences, and even the male-identified singers themselves. As a result, such dissonance can draw a smile, and sometimes laughter, from the informed audience.

Some straight men singers take the gendered aspects of the beginning of “Surintharaahuu” seriously, and they do so for obvious reasons. Varis listed some established senior men Thai classical singers who never sang “Surintharaahuu” in public performance. He asked rhetorically, “think about it, can you ever imagine these *khruu* (the senior men singers) singing *naung pen ying*?” Indeed, singing those words would unsettle the singer’s masculine identity, bringing their public image into question even though the gender and sexuality of these singers were normative. But there is an exception to this cultural pattern. In a recorded performance of “Surintharaahuu” *jakhee* solo by a group of men string musicians from the Fine Arts Department, the preceding lyrics were sung by Sombat Sangwianthong. Sombat’s straight cis-male masculinity was beyond doubt in his career, having spent most of his adventurous musical life within

piiphaat circles. His alcoholic consumption and smoking may be some of the evident markers of masculinity among this musical circle, but his straight identity was further reinforced by that fact that, during his prime, Sombat’s singing was so charming that he had a fan club (*mae yok* แม่ยอด), mostly women. Some of them admired him so much that they bought him a golden necklace as a present. Perhaps Sombat, already in the twilight of his career when the performance was recorded, was confident that his attested masculinity would make him immune to the dissonance caused by the “Surintharaahu” lyrics.

As gracious as Sombat’s singing was, the dissonance between the narrative and performative gender were too apparent to ignore. Sombat opened the singing with a vocable *oe* ๑๑๑, decorated by a long melismatic run lasting almost ten seconds. At the end of the run, marked by an added consonant *u* or *y* at the end of the vocable to give an *oey* or ๑๑๒ sound, Sombat took a deep breath and uttered the first three syllables of the lyrics. Slowly and carefully through his aged, raspy, but controlled vocal timbre came the lyrics: “*Nau.....ng...pen...ying..... oe.....oe.....*” Just as Sombat was completing this phrase, the *jakhee* player could not contain a smile (other musicians on the stage were not smiling!).

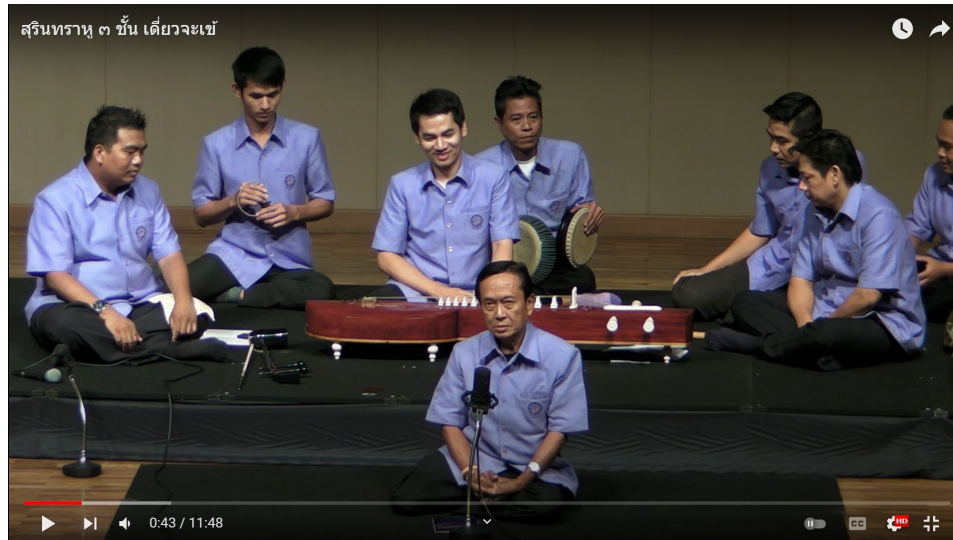


Figure 4.3: The *jakhee* player (center) smiles as Sombat (front) finishes the beginning lyrics of Surintharaahu as other musicians from the Fine Arts Department watch on ([view on website](#)).

The smile was not because the *jakhee* players found Sombat’s singing funny, nor was it because the Sombat was enacting stereotypical feminine behaviors while singing those words—Sombat was composed in his demeanor. Rather, it was a reaction to the uncommon sight of dissonance that such an established “masculine” figure like Sombat is performatively becoming a woman. Although I raise this case as an exception, it strikingly illustrates the extent to which “Surintharaahu” is gendered and the narrative and performative dissonance that could entail. Such dissonance becomes perceptible through the specific (read: wrong) combination of the gendered musicking bodies and gendered texts.

I must note the internal differentiation of the interpretation above by different audiences. Although most of the audiences in musical event like this are musicians themselves, it takes a specific gender and sexual positionality to be able to receive such message. To uninformed listeners, such dissonance may appear comedic and bear little significance to the performance as a whole. But for an informed audience, the *jakhee*’s player reaction to Sombat’s utterance of *naung pen ying* carries a deep and somewhat

complex connotation as explained above. Sometimes musicians themselves capitalize on the underlying message behind this dissonance and deliberately make it obvious for the audiences. However, the reaction may as well be far from uniform, as I will return to shortly.

Varis remarked that the oldest recording of “Surintharaahuu” singing that he knew was performed by *Luang Siangsanaukan*, a men court musician from the King Vajiravudh era. The performance is believed to have been recorded between 1922-1931, the period during which his performances of Thai classical singing are cataloged (Kanchanapradit 2018: 85, 90). Claiming that he owned and has listened to the recording, Varis observed that *Luang Siangsanaukan* singing did not “contain any affect of womanhood at all” (*mai mii jarit khwaampenyng loey* ไม่มีจริตความเป็นหญิงเลย). Perhaps the performance practices at that time were different, especially in terms of gender performance in music given that the breakthrough of women musicians in Thai classical music tradition did not occur until the 1930s. Either way, this suggests that the shift toward feminization of “Surintharaahuu” occurred in the past five to six decades, which corresponds with the construction of gender values during the nation-building period and the subsequent bifurcation of *piiphaat* and string music as men and women music respectively.

Varis speculated that “Surintharaahuu” gains its status as a marker of queer men singers following their closeted prominence in the music scene beginning in the late 1950s. Again, Varis listed five to six queer men singers—identifying them with *pen* เป็น—who were active at that time, including Narong. The singers mentioned by Varis were marked with effeminacy that runs counter to the localized idea of normative masculinity as being physically strong and showing little to no grace in bodily

comportment. Nonnormative gender performance—not homosexuality—was the basis through which queerness is marked, leading to social sanctions imposed in Thai culture. Even with the emergence of gender-conforming homosexuality in Thailand since the 1970s following the Gay Liberation Movement (Peter A. Jackson 2000; Käng 2014) is viewed as a separate identity from existing ones. “Surintharaahu” lyrics thus serves as a site where such queerness in the form male effeminacy identity is expressed. And this expression is done through the same process that straight men singers tend to avoid: the dissonance between the narrative and performative gender.

When sung by queer men vocalists, “*naung pen ying*” signifies queerness. Through the performative utterance of these words, these singers deliberately make their assumed masculinity vulnerable to hint their gender-nonconformity and by extension their sexual orientation. The ambiguity of their gender and sexuality thus balances out the narrative and performative gender dissonance inherent in the lyrics, which explains queer why men singers are poised to handle these texts better than straight men. However, to think that queer men singers embrace “*naung pen ying*” simply because they want to be a woman would be a mistake. Varis shared a joke that queer men singers were not only fond of singing “*naung pen ying*” but sometimes make it even more sensual in the following phrase, that is, “*yaak jing jing ja hai hen*” (I am a woman. It is so difficult to make it my desire seen). They did so by lowering the tone inflection of the word *yaak* ยาก (difficult), resulting into a word *yaak* ยาก (to want).⁸ What was first a depiction of Siimaalaa’s repression of her desire is flipped yet again—from “I am a woman; *it is difficult* to make my desires seen” to “I am a woman; *I really want* to make my desire seen.” This time however, the point is not about being a woman. It is about revealing

⁸ Thai language is a tonal language, which means that changing a tone inflection can change the meaning of the word. *Yaak* as ยาก (falling intonation) versus ยาก (low-flat intonation) is one such example.

one's desire. Queer men sing these lyrics not to become a woman through the gender-switch but to imagine homoerotic intimacy.

The interaction between queer men singers and audiences in “Surintharaahuu” can be best observed in informal performances. In such contexts, while the artist/audience distinction persists, there is more freedom of casual communication between the two. In other words, informal performances exhibit increased participatory possibilities than the strictly presentational ones in formal concerts (Turino 2008: 26). Also, some actions that are inappropriate in the formal musical performances are temporarily permitted in the informal contexts. Let us consider a recorded “Surintharaahuu” performance by a string ensemble on the night before the *waikhruu* ritual at Srinakharinwirot University in 2017. Queerness is suggested from outset by the name of this group *Sao Mai* or สาวไหม, a double meaning and homonym that denotes an act of weaving (*sao*) silk (*mai*) and “woman + question mark,” the question of whether they have a feminine character. Both meanings apply to the group because string instruments in Thai used silk strings in the past. At the same time, this group was a voluntary gathering of the undergraduate men students in the Thai classical music department who self-identified as queer, as well as those suspected to be queer simply because they played string instruments.

When the *ching* or small hand cymbal gave a cue, the musicians greeted the audience by performing a *wai*, i.e., putting their palms together at the chest and bowing their heads. Just as the *wai* ended, every musician produced a small yellow color flower and put it behind each of their left ears. Placing flowers behind one's ear is not at all a usual practice in a performance. It was a comedic gesture mimicking traditional women decoration, ensuring the audience would get the group title's (Sao Mai) queer double

meaning. The audience, who were also undergraduate Thai classical music students and aware of the gender and sexuality of the musicians, reacted with mild laughter.

As if the message of effeminacy was not clear enough, the group started a short introductory melody from a *phleeng luukthung* hit “Sao Iisaan Rau Rak” (สาวอีสานรอรัก “*Iisaan* Girl Awaits Love”). The audience, as soon as registering the melody, clapped along while shrieking in delight. The melody only lasted about seven seconds, and the first singer took over with the “Surintharaahuu” lyrics right after. He began the lyrics with the customary slow and extended melisma (*uean* เอื้อน). The audience could be heard laughing and shouting in the background. When the singer reached the “*naung pen ying*,” the *jakhee* player on the left lifted his left hand to his chest, nodding his chest, and stroking his hair as though he was the referent of the phrase. This triggered one of the audience members to scream “Oooooooooooooooooiiiiiiiiiii” in somewhat mild but harmless jealousy of the *jakhee* player’s exaggerated gesture.

Hearing the audience’s uproar, the singer looked up as he continued with the melisma. Just when he paused to take a breath, he brought his left hand up to deliberately stroke the flower on his ear. This bodily articulation of femininity played along with the dissonance of the lyrics. This time the audience reacted even more abruptly and uniformly with laughter, screams, and applause. Almost every member of the ensemble was smiling (which performers almost never do). Contrary to Sombat’s singing where the dissonance was felt but restrained, this performance capitalized on the dissonance to reinforce the musician’s queer subjectivity. The articulation epitomizes *kathoeyness* in a sense that the femininity was intentionally exaggerated—and the audience acknowledged it ([view on website](#)).



Figure 4.4: *Sao Mai* string musician members with a yellow flower behind their ear.

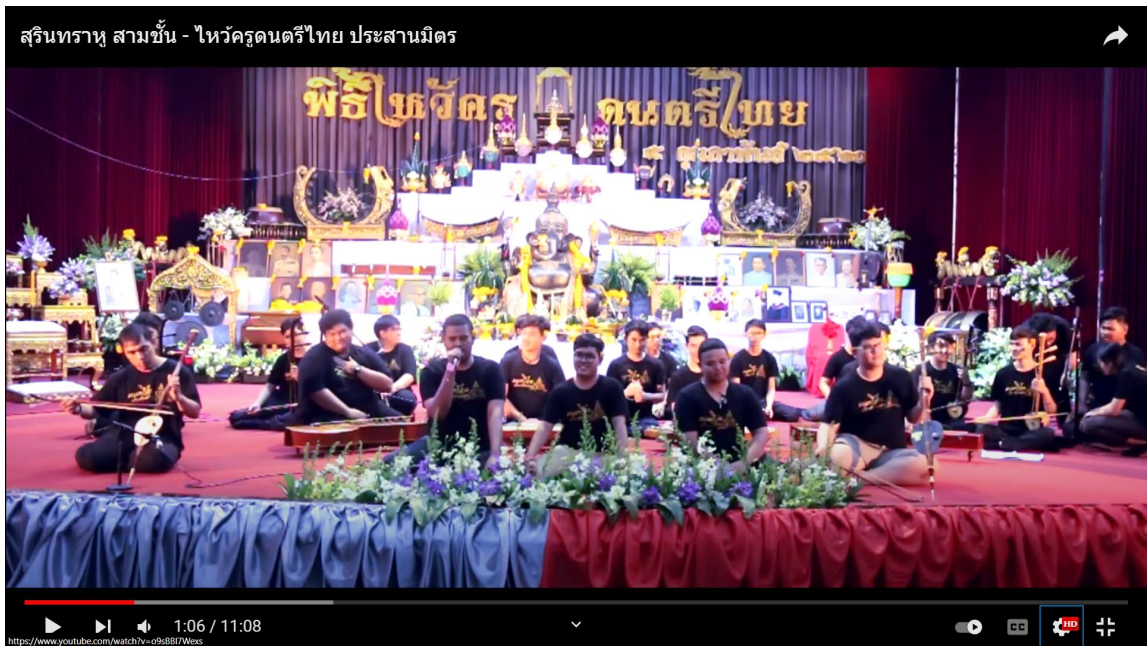


Figure 4.5: *Jakhee* player to the left pats on his chest as the singer reaches the “*naung pen ying*” part.



Figure 4.6: The singer to the left lifts his hand to stroke the flower on his era after finishing singing “*naung pen ying*.”

Again, just like the case of Sombat’s singing, the queer message may not be picked up by all audiences. Let us not forget that the audience in this video was mostly Thai musicians of both *piiphaat* and string music genres. *Piiphaat* musicians may laugh off this series of gestures as some sorts of informal cross-gender antics, but they may also miss out on the flipping processes and the homoerotic undertone that was present right from the start of “Surintharaahu.” My point is that not every musician, myself included, possesses such an awareness during such performances. It takes, I reiterate, a certain positionality to decode what is being conveyed behind these performative act of flipping and the homoerotism that runs counter to the “Surintharaahu” song texts.

This dissonant performance reinforced the musician’s queer subjectivity. In a rather casual performance context like this, the male-bodied impersonation of womanly practices was registered more as humorous than as a transgression. I argue that the situatedness of the singer’s and musician’s obvious display of queerness exhibits in part

what Jose Esteban Muñoz calls comedic disidentification, a practice that works on and against the dominant culture using the strategic and disarming use of humor to accomplish cultural critique while avoiding direct confrontation with phobic and reactionary ideologies (1999: 119). Muñoz foregrounds the queer and Latina lifeworld of a Cuban American lesbian artist Carmelita Tropicana whose humorous camp and *choteo* performances critique, for example, the US shallow cultural stereotypes of Latino community and politically fraught Cuban American identity. I extend Muñoz's intersectional writing of gender and sexuality outside of racializing discourse into one that is class-oriented. Queer men's embodying the dissonance in "this song" mocks the "proper" gender-social norms that symbolize the ruling class status, i.e., the character of Siimaalaa. Their obvious display of queerness might not be perceived as a critique itself, but it clearly targets the gender ideals, the dominant culture, and turns it into a parody.

The Homoeroticism of *Naep*

If the opening lyrics of "Surintharaahuu" paves the way for a disidentification that registers queer men singers as "constructed and contradictory" while creating "desire within uneasiness" (ibid.: 119), the third line of the lyrics is a clear indication of the erotics in which, as Deborah Wong suggests, "bodies meet bodies and where subjectivity comes home to roost in a body" (Wong 2015: 179). I argue that the meeting of the bodies and queer subjectivity in the piece's third section is activated by the combination of the heteronormative text and the nonnormative gender performativity of the singer. The construction of this assemblage is contradictory and arguably queer, but its very dissonance opens possibilities to imagine other forms of pleasure and intimacy excluded by compulsory heteronormativity.

My discussion in this section is inspired by Sarah Ahmed’s proposal of queer phenomenology to critique the limits of normative sexuality. Ahmed suggests that bodies are sexualized when they inhabit space, and that phenomenology helps us to consider how sexuality involves ways of inhabiting and being inhabited by space (Ahmed 2006: 67). Ahmed further draws on spatiality to note that sexuality is understood in terms of “having” an orientation, which itself is understood as being “directed” in one way or another. Compulsory heterosexuality is thus conceptualized as a given vertical “straight line.” Orientations toward sexual objects affect our doings, such that different orientations, or different ways of directing one’s desires, means inhabiting different worlds (ibid.: 68). In this sense, to have desires other than heterosexual ones means a failure to comply with the vertical straight line, or to be disorientated. I follow Ahmed’s lead “not...to overcome the disorientation of the queer moment, but instead inhabit the intensity of its moment” (ibid: 107).

By articulating homoerotic desires, queer men’s singing of “Surintharaahuu” is a disorientating device against the compulsory heterosexuality inherent in the song texts. But such disidentificatory performance does not mean inhabiting a different world altogether. Instead, this world of queer desires—one that obliquely identifies with the given vertical straight line—is superimposed onto the already existing one. This became evident when Hanoi asked Varis some questions about this in the same interview, and it is too important not to discuss the conversation in detail ([view on website](#)).

Hanoi: I’m asking...among the three sections...and as a singer...for “Surintharaahuu”...which section do you like the most? Like, each section has its own peak, but you [Varis], as a singer, which section is your favorite?

Varis: If it’s about “*naung pen ying*”...

Hanoi: I mean, suppose there are three singers, and you must sing only one section, which one would you choose?

Varis: You know what? If I don't want to get involved with all the dramas that could unfold, I would just pick the first section and sing it right away.

Immediately realizing that Varis's answer was not what he was expecting, Hanoi emphasized the question once again:

Hanoi: (*tapping his chest with his palm*) [say] from your heart, [say] from your heart, [say] from your heart for real!

Varis: Well, if I have to say from my heart, I must sing the third section.

Hanoi: (*smiling*) Ahhhhhhh!

Me: (*smiling*) Why? Why?

Varis: Because the third section is when things resolve [คลี่คลาย *khlii khlaay*]. All the things that build up from the first and second sections are resolved here. All of this that I'm saying [about the preceding lyrics] comes down to one thing...(*contemplating*)...*let yut kuu thoe* [ليتยุกกูเถอะ]—that's all...

Hanoi and I burst out a laughter upon hearing Varis mentioned *let yut kuu thoe*.

Let yut is in fact part of an invented language called “The Luu language” or ภาษาลู *phaasaa Luu*, widely used among the Thai LGBT communities as a coded message and identity formation.⁹ Despite its recognition as “language,” the Luu language is in fact more like a pre-determined coding system that can be applied to any existing languages. Its general rule of thumb is that any syllable of a given language is always doubled. The consonant L always takes the first of the double syllables, while the original consonant moves to the second one. The original vowel remains the same in the first syllable, while the second syllable is always with a vowel “u,” with some exceptions. The ending consonant of the original word is repeated twice. For example, *phet* เพชร or diamond would be transformed into “*let phut*.” Reverse-engineering “*let yut*” would then result in the word “*yet*” which means “to fuck” in Thai or *yet* เย็ด. In other words, Varis was

⁹ For the history, uses, and functions of the Luu Language among *kathoey* communities, see a fascinating Individual Study by Punyaphaun Roopkhan (2019).

gesturing that the lyrics in the third section was comparable to an invitation to have sex—
“*just F me already!*” Noticing that Varis was gradually “opening up” in his response,
Hanoi asked further ([view on website](#)):

Hanoi: Which specific word in the third-section lyrics then is your favorite?

Varis: (*reciting the lyrics in spoken words*) *Thaa tua naung nii pen phuu chaay...tua khaung phau phlaay pen satrii... Kham kham wan nii...ja pai naep hai nam jai*

Hanoi: Please give us [the lyrics] with all the *uean* เอื้อน like how you would actually sing it.

Varis: (*closing his eyes and drawing his eyebrows together*) *tuaaaaaaaa...khong (using falsetto) ueeeeeeeeng...oeeeeeeee... (resuming to normal voice) hoe oeeeeeeee... phauuuuuuuuu...auuuuuuuuu...phlaayyyyyyy...ya hoe oe... thaaaaaaaaaaaa... phau pennnnnnnn... hue ue ue ue hue ueeeeeeee...satriiiiiiiiiiiii... This is it.*

Hanoi: (laughing contentedly) In fact you should have continued a bit more to *kham kham wan nii*.

Me: That’s the peak spot (จุดพีค *jud phiik*), isn’t it?

Varis: Yes, of course it is...

Hanoi: Let me tell say something about this. If there are three singers and you ask them to choose, all of them would always want to sing the third section. And they would crave to sing—and will be judged when singing—*kham kham wan nii*...and then how much they can articulate the phrase *ja pai naep hai nam jai*.

Varis: They [the fellow musicians] will listen for how well you can sing *naep*. You see, to make someone completely lay flat on another person (*naep sanit* แบนสนิท) does not do any good. (*Raising his voice earnestly*) To effectively *naep* here is to do it with a “stick in the middle” (*dueay klaang* เตี้ยกลาง) You know, it’s not about lying down flat like on an asphalt road!

Me: So...does this *naep* action also apply to same-sex relationship? I mean even when people like you all are singing it?

Varis: (*Rolling his eyes, annoyed that I was not really getting his message*) It the same action of *naep* that I just said. It’s like they are having..... some “example” or something...you know?

Varis's pause, followed by a random English word "example" seemed to be totally unrelated to the conversation. It was clear that he stopped and uttered the English word out of the blue as an attempt to avoid saying something directly. Given the context, all three of us unanimously understood that the word "example" was an improvised replacement for sex. Varis might treat *naep* in "Surintharaahuu" as sex, but only a phallus—what Varis called the "stick in the middle"—was needed to differentiate between a highly sensual *naep* from a mundane sense of just being physically close together. His omission of the receiving end of the phallus does not castrate the feminine actor, but rather reorients compulsory sexuality by intentionally ambiguating the receptive organs. The act of sex still stands, as does Phlaayngaam, but the partner of this erotic intimacy, due to the queer interpretation, is no longer prescriptive. Through this dissonant process, homoeroticism can be subtly injected, thereby unsettling the unmarked straight line of the narrative.

By "how well you can sing *naep*," Varis refers to the elaborate ways that a singer decorates the word with a melisma. The sections of a piece where classical singing is featured are characterized by a much slower pace compared to the instrumental sections that follow it. Its lyrics are usually embellished with *uean* เอื้อน, a system of codified melismas containing a set of vocables. Often the words of the lyrics are extended with melismatic techniques, and the singing of *naep* is one such example. Since the melodic contour of *naep* is in a descending direction and passes through as many as five pitches, it is a challenge for a singer to explore all these pitches without spilling into the next rhythmic cycle.

Varis's comment about the last line of "Surintharaahuu's" lyrics associates intimate desires with a musical climax. In fact, there are quite a few Thai classical music

pieces that depict sex even more explicitly, but the popularity of “Surintharaahuu” among queer men singers rests on the challenge to performatively invoke sensual homoerotic undertones. I must mention Susan McClary’s iconic arguments about how sexual activities are mapped onto musical works. For her, the musical climax involves arousal and desire-stimulating as “metaphorical ejaculation” (McClary 1991: 125). Although McClary’s metaphorical erotics of climax in Western art music works to expose a discursive hegemonic masculinity, I draw on her work to illustrate that Varis, and to some extent other queer men singers, activate a parallel sexual and musical climax as they “sculpt” the word *naep*. Contrary to McClary’s climax (which indicates the end), Varis sees the entire act of lovemaking as a climax. This in turn makes the longing for intimate desires and the gender-switch flip in the lyrics as “foreplay.” This explains why *naep* carries such heavy erotic connotations.

For queer men singers, perfecting the singing of *naep* is more than just a matter of aesthetic satisfaction. It was also about stimulating intimacy. The more articulate and refined the rendition of *naep*, the more intimate and “sexy” this imaginary intimacy would become. Tending to the lyrics in this section is a gauge that measures the singer’s ability to activate that intimacy and to fulfill the sensual satisfaction of the expectant queer listening audience. Peter Jackson notes that, “in Thailand, sexual desire is commonly regarded as a mood or temporary emotional state. Homosexuality is also sometimes viewed in the same way, as a transient mood or interest rather than a fixed character trait” (Jackson 2016: 72). “Surintharaahuu” exemplifies the transient nature of sexual desire in ways that allows both hetero- and homoerotics to coexist. Queer men singers experience homoerotic pleasure as they put themselves in Siimaalaa’s shoes and experience intimacy with the fictional men character Phlaayngaam. However, this form of flipped and queered desire does not entirely escape normative gendered constructs

because these vocalists enliven homoerotic intimacy with Phlaayngaam through the feminine ideals personified by Siimaalaa.

Conclusion: What Does It Mean to Make My Desires Seen?

“Surintharaahuu’s” lyrics are sensually charged. The gender switch in the narrative of the song text, combined with narrative and performative gender dissonance, allows any queer vocal performance of this piece to open otherwise desires beyond heteronormative understanding. The contradictory and unsettling nature of the performance may be the reason why it is reserved for queer men singers, but it should be reminded that partaking in a performance that is also intelligible through the “straight line” of heterosexuality is not without consequences. What then are the stakes for making one’s queer desire seen in this musical tradition?

Whether it is superimposing homoeroticism onto the heterosexual texts of “Surintharaahuu” or imagining non-heterosexual intimacy through gender ambiguity, these are my interpretation of nonnormative performances and performativity within a Thai classical music context. Hanoi, Varis, and other queer men musicians with whom I have spoken rarely, if at all, think of their performance in “Surintharaahuu” in this way. These vocalists are of course aware of their tolerated but not accepted status. They know that there are only few musical niches where their nonnormative subjectivity, i.e., effeminacy, works to their advantage. If embodying femininity in string ensembles (as discussed in Chapter 3) is one such niche for queer men string musicians, queering the “Surintharaahuu” lyrics is a comparable site for the singers. Hanoi and Varis’s account implies that they use their effeminacy as a disidentificatory entrance into the straight world before disorientating it. Like many string musicians, Hanoi and Varis believed that

their effeminacy is an asset. But why is “Surintharaahuu” singing best performed by queer men singers?

I suspect that the sensuality of “Surintharaahuu” adds a distinct layer to nonnormative performance in ways that is not observed by string musicians. Queer men’s ability to reach the double “climax” of “Surintharaahuu,” regardless of the planes of orientation, inevitably reinforces the queer stereotype of possessing strong and sometimes uncontrollable sexual desires. Moreover, many singers comply with that accorded expectation. When I asked Hanoi why queer men singers are so eager to sing “Surintharaahuu,” he said:

“These LGBT¹⁰ [singers] come with *pheet*...you know...they come with sex. They are obsessed with sex in their brain (*khuen samaung* ชื่นชมอง). Talk about being horny, you know! (*in a higher register*) When you sing...this [third] section, you don’t think about anything else. All that everyone has in their thoughts are dirty stuffs, let me you this!... If there is someone who straight up wants to the sing the third section, you can assume that there are number one in sex. But for those who like to maintain their [straight] image, they would be more composed while singing and add little to no extra ornamentations [for the third section]...They would not try to...(clenching his fist and throwing it down)...ummmmmmmmm you know? ([view on website](#)).

Based on the context of the conversation, Hanoi’s gesture with his long *ummm* interjection was an implicit explanation of the act of embellishing the third section of “Surintharaahuu” lyrics, particularly the *neap* part, to generate a homoerotic climax. I am quoting Hanoi’s comment here because it reveals the constructedness of queer men subjects as always already sexualized. In fact, the hypersexualization of homosexual men is built into the term that describes them. Homosexual relationships were once defined in

¹⁰ Many of my interlocutors use LGBT more as a shorthand to refer to gay and *kathoey* communities than as an inclusive acronym for nonnormative subjectivities. With the awareness of pride movement after 2010s, queer men community tend to use the Western-derived term LGBT to identify themselves because it sounds more “modern” than the value-laden local terms like *kathoey* or *tut*.

Thai as รักร่วมเพศ. While this phrase as a whole indicates same-sex practices, many queer men sarcastically understand that it suggests two things that only homosexual men do, to love (*rak* รัก) and to have sex (*ruam pheet* ร่วมเพศ) at the same time. The consensus toward hypersexualization of homosexual men is further exacerbated by lingering aftereffects from the public panic that linked homosexuality with the cause of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Thailand during the late 1980s to the early 1990s (Jackson 1995; Fordham et al. 1998: 77; Fordham 2001; Käng 2012: 489). Such associations resulted in assumptions about careless and uncontrolled sexual practices among homosexual men. Even though homosexuality is now dissociated from HIV/AIDS, the remnants of public anxiety from three decades ago persists in the form of the hypersexualization of queer men community.

Queer men's assumed effectiveness in "Surintharaahuu," while serving as a critically enabling site for homoeroticism, also reessentializes them. The hypersexualization for queer men in "Surintharaahuu" is a niche that both empowers and marginalizes. Combined with cultural expectations that regards (homo)sexual desires as a mood rather than a marker of identity, this marginalized queer reading of "Surintharaahuu" poses no significant threat to the heteronormative integrity of Thai classical music. If making one's desires seen comes at a cost of being hypersexualized, is music a safe space for any obvious display of queerness after all? My answer is yes, with an asterisk. The queer musicians I referenced are clearly out and aware of the musical context in which they can and cannot be out, i.e., when articulating effeminacy or being girlish (*auk saaw* ออกลาว) is allowable, and when it is not. Yet, there are many queer men musicians who choose not to display any queerness whatsoever even if the context allows, to maintain their normative public-facing image or "face." The sensual queer interpretation of "this song" is hardly a political act in the eyes of my queer men

interlocutors. The performance is at best considered an additional “spice” by some, and at worst an embarrassing sign of deviance by others. But because of the tolerated but not accepted status of homosexuality in Thailand, music provides an avenue that grants a freedom to play with queerness. One may articulate, suppress, or remain ambiguous.

Despite queer men musician’s superimposition of homoerotic desires, what undergirds the perceived hypersexualization of queer men in “Surintharaahuu” is the heteronormative discourse that regards queer men, particularly *kathoey*, as second-class sexual citizens in the sense that their intimacy must be enacted referentially. Their queer desires, sensuality, and intimacy is grounded in gendered ideals. While I respect their creative gender reformatting of Thai classical song texts and enjoy – and admire – their playful manipulation of homoerotic desires, I cannot help but think that this moment of queerness is hidden in many ways. It is done under the guise of heteronormative texts, is most enlivened in informal performance contexts, and relies on the audience’s understanding of queer gestures. The framing discourse binds queer men not to the problem of disclosing/obscuring their sexuality (Sedgwick 1990), but to channeling their desires with explicit reference to heteronormative gender norms. And because queer men are “categorized” as the “third gender,” their desires are tailored to eventually lose out to “genuine” straight romance.

In this light, the hypersexualization of queer men places them in a paradoxical position: a tragic lover. Such a narrative pervades how Thai popular culture essentializes queer men desire. One example is a gay advice column called “*Chiiwit Sao Chaaw Kee*” (ชีวิตเศร้าชาวเกย์, the sad life of gay folks) in a bi-monthly magazine *Plaek*, which was

active three decades ago but now discontinued (see Jackson 2016).¹¹ The homoeroticism of “Surintharaahuu” does not suggest the sad and tragic life of queer men *per se*, but the ways in which my interlocutors and queer men vocalists approach its performance and performativity is situated under the binding discourse of heteronormativity.

This is not to undermine the powerful and effective performativity of queer men singers. My point is to demonstrate that such disidentificatory practices and disorientating processes are so well incorporated into heterosexual norms that one needs a fine-toothed comb to parse their homoerotic meanings and messages within any context. By moving between the hetero- and homosexual realms in the music, narrative, and the performative, singing “Surintharaahuu” might not sound all the way “out.” But in this musical tradition that is laden with nationalism, authenticity, elitism, and morality, all of which deeply entrenched in a heteronormative gender binary, making one’s queer desire seen in “Surintharaahuu” is an obvious display of queerness (as described by Castro) that both hides and awaits recognition. In the next section, I shift my focus from queer expressions in Thai classical music to the conflicts and disagreements among queer men string musicians. I do so in Chapter 5 by considering the string musical lineage as a highly policed space where queer men musicians vie for the status of a legitimate member through secrecy, guarding knowledge, and gossip.

¹¹ Another example is even closer to our topic at hand: “Siidaa” สีดา, a single from Thai men singer Danupol (Jae or แจ้) Kaewkarn.¹¹ Released in 1989, the song is distinct from other singles in its album *Yaang Lueksueng Dae Khun Khon Phiseet อย่างลึกซึ้งแต่คุณคนเดียว* (*Deeply Yours, My Special One*) due to its depiction of non-heteronormative romance ([view on website](#)). The lyrics in “Siidaa” are based on the true tragedy of Pranote Wisetphaet, a famous *kathoey* classical dancer from the Fine Arts Department, known for their performances as the iconic female protagonist Siidaa สีดา in the Hindu epic *Ramakien* รามเกียรติ์ Pranote committed suicide after suspecting that their male lover had left them. The lover, after realizing the untimely passing of the dancer, took his own life.

Chapter 5

A Musical Community Under Surveillance

A Hostile Music Circle

I have grown more accustomed to the surprised reactions of fellow Thai classical musicians when I said that my research was about gender and sexuality in Thai classical music. Of all the suspicions and skepticisms that I have seen, felt, and heard, one response stuck with me throughout my fieldwork.

One morning during my first month of fieldwork, I was making a cup of coffee in the office of Department of Thai Music of the Srinakharinwirot University when my teacher, Veera Phansue, a seasoned *piiphaat* musician, came in with a coffee cup in his hand. As we exchanged our usual greeting and struck up a conversation, Veera asked what my dissertation was about. I recited my well-rehearsed elevator speech describing my research and explained my specific interest in queer men musicians in string ensembles. Veera momentarily paused, his eyebrow raised, and then giggled. I knew that this was coming, so I made it clear to him that I was not joking. He then replied: [teasingly, with a muted smile] *Rawang naa...wongkaan nii man raeng* ระวังนะ วงการนี้มันแรง (Careful, this circle is hostile).

All I could respond with was a dry laugh as he left the office, sipping his coffee. *Raeng* literally means ‘force’ in Thai. As an adjective and adverb, it describes something or an action that is physically powerful or forceful. As slang, however, *raeng* describes an unforgiving, unwelcoming, or outspoken personality. Based on the context of the conversation, what Veera meant by *raeng* was its slang implications. Because the circle

of queer men string musicians is *raeng*, he thought it could be hostile for me, hence the translation.

Veera's cynicism is not surprising. Thai classical musicians, including me, are aware that the circle of queer men string musicians is notorious for controversies, conflicts, and dramas. To be fair, such things are bound to happen in any musical circle, but why is one group of musicians singled out as a hotbed of disagreement? What controversies make this circle so *raeng* and dreaded by many from outside it? Despite what appears to be a hostile musical circle, many of those self-identified with it show no intention of leaving. I subsequently decided to include Veera's remark as one of the questions in every interview I conducted throughout the fieldwork.

Most of my queer men interlocutors agreed with the *raeng* nature of the queer men string music circle. Hanoi and Not, two queer men musicians who I had known for over ten years, became noticeably animated whenever I brought up the topic in our conversations. They would always react with something like, "Just let me know what you want to hear, there is tons of gossip in this circle." Often when I shared my interviews with Not and Hanoi, they seemed to always have some kind of a backstory to every person I mentioned. Sometimes when I cross-referenced one interlocutor to another, they would give me a rhetorical question like "Oh xxx (an interlocutor's name), do you know this story about him?" or a cliffhanger like "Oh xxx, that one's unusual" (*Khon nii mai thammadaa*).¹ Of all the gossip and controversies that surfaced during my interviews, unexpectedly or intentionally, they revolved around one common theme: a musical lineage.

¹ "Unusual" or *mai thammadaa* ไม่นormal is to be taken figuratively. It is not that the person mentioned has an eccentric behavior or personality. Instead, it suggests that the person is the center of gossip circulating around the queer men string circle.

Thai classical music ethnomusicologists have noted the significance of musical groups in the transmission of musical knowledge (Wong 1991; Miller 1992; Silkstone 1993; Myers-Moro 1993). Oral/aural transmission is seen as a part of the discipline's critique of musical literacy, a movement initiated as early as in the 1980s in influential work by Charles Keil (1979) and Hugo Zemp (1979), for example. Though this body of Thai classical music literature fell out of favor among the scholars in the field and did not receive further development as ethnomusicology took a sonic turn toward aurality and sound studies (see, for example, Feld 2003; Erlmann 2004; Ochoa Gautier 2014; Daughtry 2015; Tausig 2019; Rasmussen 2019; Robinson 2020), it provides an argument against any simplistic understanding that romanticizes au/oral transmission against modernity. However, due to the representative centrality of the *waikhruu* or teacher-honoring ritual, scholarly investigations of musical communities in Thai classical music focus mostly on esoteric processes that shape the teacher-student relationship, and has also prioritized the *piiphaat* tradition. The string music community, not playing as integral role in the *waikhruu* ritual as does *piiphaat*, was thus assumed to operate in the same fashion. Further, frictions, conflicts, and contentions between and within musical groups are reduced to merely gossip and have little to any academic significance in the scholarship.

In this chapter, I intend to rectify this perception by foregrounding controversies and gossip among queer men string musicians—controversies that make this musical circle *raeng*. This chapter adds to the well-worn trope of tracing the lineage of a great music teacher in Thai classical music scholarship while approaching the messy reality within string music circles. Following the leads set by nightlife ethnography scholarship, particularly Danielle Antoinette Hidalgo's investigation of embodied expression in Bangkok nightclubs (2009), Kareem Khubchandani's multi-sited ethnography of

transnational Indian gay nightlife (2020), and Alexander Cannon's contemplation of queer phenomenology as a method in ethnomusicology (2020), I theorize string music circles as an imaginary night club. In this space, as demonstrated earlier, string music performance makes queer affect come alive through *musicking bodies* and articulates one's musical lineage and training through *paramparic bodies* (Rahaim 2012). But on this very imaginary musical dance floor, queer musicking bodies are also heavily policed on the grounds of lineage legitimacy. The policing of musical lineage legitimacy originates from musical performances, takes place in the form of conversations, gossip, and rumors, and spreads like an attached program note. I argue that the hostile or *raeng* reputation of queer men string music circle is due to the policing of musical performance, making it appear to be under heavy surveillance.

Another equally important counterargument that I make in this chapter is to problematize the heteronormative attribution of the *raeng* queer men string circle to the presupposed stereotypical personality of *kathoe*y as hyperfeminized (Jackson 2016: 7–14). Instead, the circle is shaped by the socio-political forces that are often overlooked by hetero- and *piiphaat*-centric epistemology. Attending to the controversies stemming from the policing of queer men string mode thus reveals a different mode of what anthropologist Pamela Myers-Moro (1993) calls the “guarding of knowledge” or *huang wichaa* (หวงวิชา). And by centering queer men string musicians as active agents, I show the other side of Thai classical music lineage that is less straight – literally and sexually – but fuzzier at some times and discontinuous at others.

Gossip and Queer Men String Music Circle

In her ethnography of Thai classical music in Bangkok during the late 1980s, anthropologist Pamela Myers-Moro notes the jealousy toward rival schools that

characterize circles of Thai classical musicians (Myers-Moro 1993: 116–24). Deborah Wong also remarks that tensions and conflict rarely arise between disciples and their teachers, and if they do, they tend to “issue from the matters of group identification” (Wong 2001: 70). What I present in this chapter relies on gossip to expand on Myers-Moro’s and Wong’s comments. Jealousy, tensions, and conflicts are indeed integral to group identifications. In the queer men string music circles, unlike the *piiphaat* circles referenced above, it is impossible to avoid gossip. In a sense, the degree of one’s involvement in the queer men string music circle is somewhat evaluated by how much gossip you have heard and known.

Gossip and rumors were taken seriously in anthropological inquiry as early as the 1960s as a rhetorical tool to maintain and/or disrupt social boundaries and group morality (Gluckman 1963). Theorizing gossip took shape in the 1970s as part of anthropology of privacy, and later became more nuanced with the reflexive turn following the crisis of representation (P. J. Wilson 1974; Van Vleet 2003). My interest in the role of gossip in queer men string music circle is inspired by Roger Abrahams’s performance-centered approach, in which “[g]ossip is...one of many inevitable performances of everyday life,” having “divisive or destructive public actions” (Abrahams 1970: 293) and “is available for social control and the pursuance of individual aims” (ibid., 299). At the same time, I draw on Van Vleet’s efforts to disrupt the values given to gossip as having questionable validity (Van Vleet 2003: 498). In this chapter, I show that gossiping, a feminized activity, has the potential to serve as a rhetorical methodology in queer and feminist historiography to “disrupt normative scholarly understandings of historical methods, evidence, and truth claims” (VanHaitsma 2016: 138).

Gossip is translated as *ninthaa* (นินทา) in Thai. It constitutes one of the “bad oral deed” in the fourth of the Five Precepts that Buddhist laypeople should observe. However, things are often easier said than done. In my fieldwork, my interlocutors did not usually say *ninthaa* because it sounded too formal. They instead used the word *mau* (เมา) which is a direct transliteration of the English word “mouth.” *Mau* is often paired with an additive to sound more dramatic as *maumaui* (เมามอย). And yes, *maumaui* is associated with women and by extension queer men. I once asked a queer men musician about the differences between hanging out with men in *piiphaat* ensemble and with queer men in the string one. He replied “hang out with the *piiphaat* men? What’s there? They just drink and smoke after they’re done playing. But us, we gang up and start *maumaui* about everyone we know.”

Beyond gossip’s assigned gendered value and its label as a creation of and by “a common narrative of deviant sexualities” (Crawley 2013), gossip can reveal a great deal of cultural significance. It functions as a link to understanding the “techniques of achieving power” (Abrahams 1970: 299) and to “controlling and... manipulating what is said and unsaid” (Van Vleet 2003: 508). In this sense, gossip possesses an appeal of secrecy and even esoteric knowledge. It operates in an almost identical parallel realm of knowledge (*wichaa* วิชา), including that of music, in Thai culture – the two are not readily available and one must earn the trust and right to receive them. The only exception is that gossip is not reinforced by spiritual potency, power, and authority in the ways that traditional knowledge or *wichaa* is. In this way, those who hold great amounts of gossip in Thai classical music can be feared as much as those who hold esoteric musical knowledge. This may explain the tendency of my interlocutors to add a cliffhanger about the “backstory” when referencing another musician. As much as gossip is powerful, it is also pleasurable.

I do not intend to pounce on gossip as mere entertainment given my somewhat outsider status as a cisgender straight male practicing *piiphaat*. Rather, I took great caution in thinking and writing about gossip by queer men musicians. I am fully aware that “direct enquiry into lineage and status would create a considerable amount of anxiety, if not panic, that secrets might be revealed” (P. J. Wilson 1974: 96). What I present below is some of the “gossip” that circulates among queer men string musicians, precisely because it pushes the boundary of knowledge about the social structure of Thai classical musicians that is mostly taken from *piiphaat* perspectives. There are several far too sensitive stories that I have been told about certain queer men string musicians to be disclosed here without harming their reputation, or mine. Ethnomusicologist Terry Miller often jokes with me “Thai classical music is a fairly small circle. Everyone seems to know and hate one another.” I have decided some stories are better kept to myself, as gossip.

Accenting the Lineage

I find nightlife scholarship useful in theorizing the controversies and surveillance surrounding the queer men string ensembles for several reasons. In her prolonged and intensive autoethnography of embodied interactions in several Bangkok nightclubs, Danielle Antoinette Hidalgo observes that these places are “sexual fields” where “gender and sexual enactments occur in face to face interactions” (2009: 8,22). These enactments can be fluid as clubbers – through subtle changes in dance moves, conversation tones, continuously assessing of the club’s environment – reorient their gender performativity to fit into different club’s sexual ethos, or it can be fixed when the Western concept of queerness is a square peg in a round hole for Thai notions of gendered sexuality. Gendered, sexualized, and eroticized, the embodied interactions in the clubs can be both

conforming and transgressive, depending on the changing context and one's relative positionality.

Embodied interaction is where I establish a common ground between the queer men string music circle and Hidalgo's lived experience in the nightclubs. Just as I have demonstrated that the articulation of musicking bodies can be a cathartic site of queerness, this articulation also functions as a marker of a musical lineage. Thai nightclubs frame intimacy and gender performativity in very different ways than do most queer men string players, but Hidalgo's ethnography helped me consider how an embodied musical lineage is embraced, resisted, and policed both by the queer string music circle and the authority.

In this circle, deviating from the agreed-upon musical style within a lineage, particularly in solo pieces, can put a musician under a spotlight, bringing their place in the lineage into question. To theorize this, I draw on Kareem Khubchandani's approach to the political undertone of accents as "negotiated pleasures of language, choreography, music, and intimacy in ways that refused, ignored, or misinterpreted the party's pedagogy" (2020: 33). I compare a party to a musical lineage: both are spaces loaded with predetermined musical styles. Accents "undo the binary codes of inhabiting global gay nightlife, not resistance per se, but politically inflected acts 'that remain outside of the field of political action properly conceived'" (ibid.). For Khubchandani, accents go beyond language to include dress code, body odor, and makeups, all of which mark queer Indian partygoers as different and other. Likewise, the controversies surrounding the lineage of queer men string musicians are based on the accented musical moments deemed outside the lineage's proper musical practices. I suggest that these accented musical moments are policed both ways, internally by the queer men musicians and

externally by the heteronormative constructs maintained by authoritative musical institutions.

My use of Khubchandani's accent is not to be confused with the Thai understanding of *samniang*, though the two concepts share some overlapping. While *samniang*, literally translated as 'accent', is widely used as a marker of sameness or difference, it is strictly confined within auditory realms. This auditory marking can be illustrated by a Thai saying "*samniang sau phaasaa kiriyaa sau sakun*" (สำเนียงสื่อภาษา กิริยาสื่อสกุล), meaning "accent indicates a language, demeanor indicates a lineage." The saying's implication is that one's social behavior is an indicator of how one is raised. The saying's "accent indicates a language" is also exemplified in a Thai classical music repertory called *phleeng samniang phaasaa* (เพลงสำเนียงภาษา) or "accented language pieces." Pieces in this repertory contain essentialized accents mimicking other musical cultures exotic to that of Thai classical, such as *lao* (Lao), *khamen* (Khmer), *phamaa* (Burmese), *farang* (Western), *yuan* (Vietnamese), *khaek* (Indian, Arabian, and the Nusantara regions), and *jiin* (Chinese).² Thus, Thai understanding of accent or *samniang* shares the dynamic of representing the other, but does not suggest the active gesture of "undoing" a dominant scheme as posited by Khubchandani. Whereas any accent (*samniang*) is an auditory marker of the Other, Khubchandani's critical concept of accent accounts for actions inflected as politically improper. It is in the latter sense that I consider embodied musical lineage as an accent understood by its surveilling members.

This chapter nuances the accounts provided in Chapters 3 and 4. It balances out the empowering moments of queer musicking bodies with an eye to the highly

² For further discussion on accented pieces in Thai classical music, see Miller 1998: 281 and Kanchanapradit and Bhrammaputra 2015.

contentious social dynamics behind the musical circle that is under surveillance. To circle back to my analogy of queer men string music circles as nightclubs, both are socio-politically charged and anything but neutral. This chapter illustrates that “the degree of engagement with sound fluctuates, often revealing fractures in place where the uncertain and oppressive nature of space reappears” (Cannon 2020: 126) In other words, “what may seem liberating at one moment changes to exclusion at another” (ibid.).

The Complex World of Direct-Line Students

There are certain common phrases used to describe a student’s relationship with their teacher. A student in Thai is a *luuksit* ลูกศิษย์ where *luuk* ลูก means a child and *sit* ศิษย์ is derived from Sanskrit *shishya* meaning a disciple. *Luuksit* often comes with the word *khruu*, also derived from Sanskrit *guru* for teacher. While the significance and implications of these two terms are explored at length in Deborah Wong’s monograph focusing on the *waikhruu* ceremony (2001), little has been done about how the concept of *luuksit* plays out among the students within and across musical lineage. In this chapter, I focus on an evergreen discussion within the queer men string music circle: who is and is not a student within the lineage.

To be recognized as part of a musical lineage means much more than just being the receiver of passed-down musical knowledge. It also connotes social-economic status and sometimes confers a certain authority in the tradition. In its broadest form, becoming a *luuksit* means that one must have at least received extended musical training directly from the teacher, in person.³ Those who have taken such lessons may be known as *luuksit saay trong* ลูกศิษย์สายตรง or “a direct-line student.” For example, *khruu* Chai is the direct-line student of Aeb Yuwanawanich, Mark and Noo are the direct-line students

³ See Wong 2001: 116–22 on what it is like to have a traditional face-to-face music lesson with a teacher.

of Chaluay.⁴ Whether or not one is a direct-line student, the status of *luuksit* must be consensual, acknowledged by both the student and the teacher.

There are several ways in which teachers display and implicate their straight-line students, the most common being the *thaang* or lineage-specific musical style. For queer men string musicians, however, musicking bodies become an equally important tool to assert this status, and this is particularly so in the case of Chaluay's musical lineage in Chapter 3. A musician thus tends to emulate their teacher's musical "language" and body postures while performing.⁵ The display of a direct-line student, voluntarily or not, is an example of *paramparic bodies*. That is, the musical lineage is specifically embodied. However, discussion about this status is often scrutinized beyond musical performance and turns into gossip, and even heated debate online, leading to the so-called *raeng* musical circle. A musician's direct-line student status can be questioned if there is just the slightest variation spotted in their solo performance. Listeners will ask whether they ever had a face-to-face music lesson with their teacher.

Manop Wisuttiapat, a Thai classical music scholar and my father, once observed in our casual conversation that Thai classical musicians tend to have prolonged discussions about minute musical details. One could bring up a short melodic phrase from a piece for a specific instrument and have an hour-long discussion. This was especially true when I was learning solo pieces on *khaung wong yai*, a circular gong and a part of *piiphaat*

⁴ I identify myself as a direct-line student of Nikorn Chantasorn who taught me since I was eight years old, though I had started Thai classical music training much earlier with my father. I have not, however, officially taken any extended music lessons with one specific teacher but have been blessed by the kindness of several string musicians who gave me short workshop sessions.

⁵ It should be noted that most musicians enact the specific musicking body and the musical language without the intention of making a statement that they are a straight-line student. In most cases, this process occurs almost instinctively because of extended intensive training. The debate over straight-line students is arguably outside of the "the music itself" according to Tes Slominski (2020: 136), yet it reveals so much about the rich and contentious social lives of queer men string musicians that I cannot ignore it.

instruments, with my teacher Nikorn Chantasorn. He would sometimes stop and asked me if I knew why a certain phrase in a solo is played in such-and-such a way. I said no, as expected. Nikorn would go on and explain with a smile that this many notes in the phrase must be played with the left hand and this many with the right. He would say that this was how the piece was taught by his teacher – minus the verbal explanation – and he was repeating the process with me. To make sure that what he said was heard and clear, he would reiterate that I must play the phrase exactly in that order. If someone does not play the phrase in this order, it means that the person did not learn the piece from him. In a heterophonic musical tradition like Thai classical music where melodic variations dominate, solo pieces operate in the opposite way. It is about an exact replication. Slight variation could cost a musician their social status in the musical lineage.

For string musicians, solo pieces are particularly important to displaying one's musical lineage. Unlike the *piiphaat* lineage system, where a musician identifies both with a teacher and the music group one normally plays with, string musicians associate with a lineage primarily through a teacher. A group of students studying with one teacher is viewed as sharing the same “teacher's line” or *saay khruu* (สายครู).

As a group, *piiphaat* lineages represent a variety of repertoires, both ensemble and solo formats. This is in great part due to the nature in which the transmission of musical knowledge occurs. Pamela Myers-Moro suggests in her ethnography about the social organization of Thai musicians that *piiphaat* teachers often train their students in groups whereas string music teachers often hold private lessons in what she called “a family music lesson” (1993: 111, 134). In the *piiphaat* tradition, the entire ensemble commonly hails from a single teacher. The same cannot be smoothly translated to string music

musician circles as a lineage is often understood individually rather than collectively.⁶ For instance, *sau duang*, *sau uu*, and *jakhee* players in the same string ensemble can be from three different musical lineages, each articulating their signature musical style during the performance. Since string music circles are more individually based, solo pieces are a crucial avenue to exhibit one's distinct musical profile through the articulated emphases of small minute details.

Despite the difference in their respective social structures, the values of solo pieces hold true in both *piiphaat* and string music circles. Writing about the transmission of a solo piece on *khaung wong yai* and its significance for a musical lineage, Deborah Wong observes:

A teacher's decision to pass on certain solo pieces to a student indicates a deep commitment between them, and the inheritance of a teacher's repertoire of solo pieces is a matter of great pride. Solo pieces...are not simply pieces played by a single performer. They are special virtuosic renditions of pieces that show off the skill of the performer, the style of the performer's teacher, and the techniques possible on the chosen instrument (1991: 2).

While Wong's observation is also true for string instruments, I should note that solo pieces are not independent compositions but rather "special virtuosic renditions" of existing pieces. In fact, there are only a handful of pieces – less than twenty – that are popularly rendered for solo format. It is therefore not unusual to find the same solo, for example, "Nok Khamin," "Phayaa Sook," "Sud Sa-nguan" or "Khaek Mon" in almost

⁶ The social structure of *piiphaat* and string ensembles must be treated with a caveat given the institutionalization of Thai classical music, especially in higher education. Thus, a university, and its faculty members, form yet another type of lineage – an institutional one – with which musicians identify themselves in addition to the traditional sense of lineages. A musician can identify themselves with their institution or a faculty member (Srinakharinwirot University or Metee Punvaratorn) as well as the teacher with whom they take private music lesson (Marut Vijitchote or Mark). Obviously, these lineage identifications are selective and strategic depending on the appropriateness of place and time or *kaalaatheesa* (กาลเทศะ). It is thus important to treat the "lines" of musical lineages as layers as well. In my discussion, however, I have singled out one line and layer from a musical lineage to avoid confusion.

every musical group and lineage. However, each lineage will have a distinct signature written into their respective solo version. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that a musician observes all the minute details in a solo piece not only for perfection but also to show loyalty to one's lineage. It is possible to learn multiple solo pieces from different teachers or lineages, but it is not advisable to mix two or more styles into a single solo piece – indeed, it is unheard of. Doing so would suggest a student's lack of commitment to learning solo pieces and could be seen as an insult to the lineage whose style is referenced in that solo (Myers-Moro 1993: 114). In other words, Manop's observation about the tendency of Thai classical musicians to talk about small details are a social tactic used by members in the lineage to make sure that one does not *accent out of it*. Musical style is a quality to be conformed to, almost to the letter. Deviating from that is undesirable and could put one's lineage legitimacy into question. And once doubt is raised, it is difficult to erase it, at least from the fellow lineage members' minds. In this sense, accent is utterly different from *samniang*. It delimits a musical lineage.

Obviously, no self-identified members of a string musical lineage want to consciously deviate from the musical style to which they pledge allegiance. What is interesting is that while all these members claimed their legitimacy of a direct-line students, such claims are constantly being verified through the process of gossiping. Natthawit Chiyachan or Noo, Chaluay's grandson and her *sau uu* student, provided a fascinating analogy:

“About gossiping, it all comes down to whether the person being gossiped about actually studied [with their teacher]. Sometimes they did not really study [with the teacher] and bragged otherwise. And that leads to gossip. Anyone can say they studied with Chaluay and Rati, but you can't get away from the students who are the real direct-line students. These people are connected like CCTV cameras. They saw who came and went to their teachers. Let's say you asked Mae [Chidpong Songsermworakul] whether a person really took a lesson with Rati. Mae would ask around his fellow friends who were also direct-line students. If

Mae and others said they didn't recognize that person, chances are that person did not really take a lesson with Rati. They might have learned it by ear from a cassette. I mean, the [string music] circle is so small! There is no way to be a direct-line student without knowing other direct-line students" ([view on website](#)).

If the *waikhruu* is how the social and knowledge formation operates in the *piiphaat*-centric understanding of Thai classical music, direct-line students and musical lineage membership legitimacy marks the parallel formation among the queer men musicians in string music circle. The difference is that the queer men string music circle is maintained not just through the traditional initiation, i.e., "depositing" oneself as a disciple to a teacher, but also through a constant verification of claims to direct-line student and lineage membership legitimacy in the form of gossip. Surveillance thus becomes an essential tool for string music and queer men musicians, whose positions are peripheral with respect to the mainstream *waikhruu* ritual.

In what follows, I will present two different cases that demonstrate the heavy surveillance of queer men string music circles. The first example deals with the policing and guarding of accented musicians from a musical lineage while the second investigates gossip over a musical lineage that is thought to have an accent against musical authority.

The Direct-Line Ends at Me

Of all the lineages of queer men string music circles that constitute this tradition, debates over who is or is not a student of Rati, the famous woman *jakhee* player from the Public Relations Department who I discussed in Chapter 2, dominates the backstory of this lineage. To be sure, there are several lineages of *jakhee* that are traced to former palace women string musicians, and debates over the direct-line status student in any of these lineages are bound to occur. But Rati's publicity and her prolific recorded works often put her at the center of debates and gossip among her students. Although I have not

heard of any direct confrontational arguments over this subject from my interlocutors, the gossip surrounding Rati's lineage is often quite passively aggressive.

To better grasp the makeup of Rati's lineage, let us consider who is included in Rati's direct-line students. Below is Rati's musical genealogy, taken from a tribute concert commemorating her 90th birthday on March 16th, 2014 (Sakarín 2014: 50):

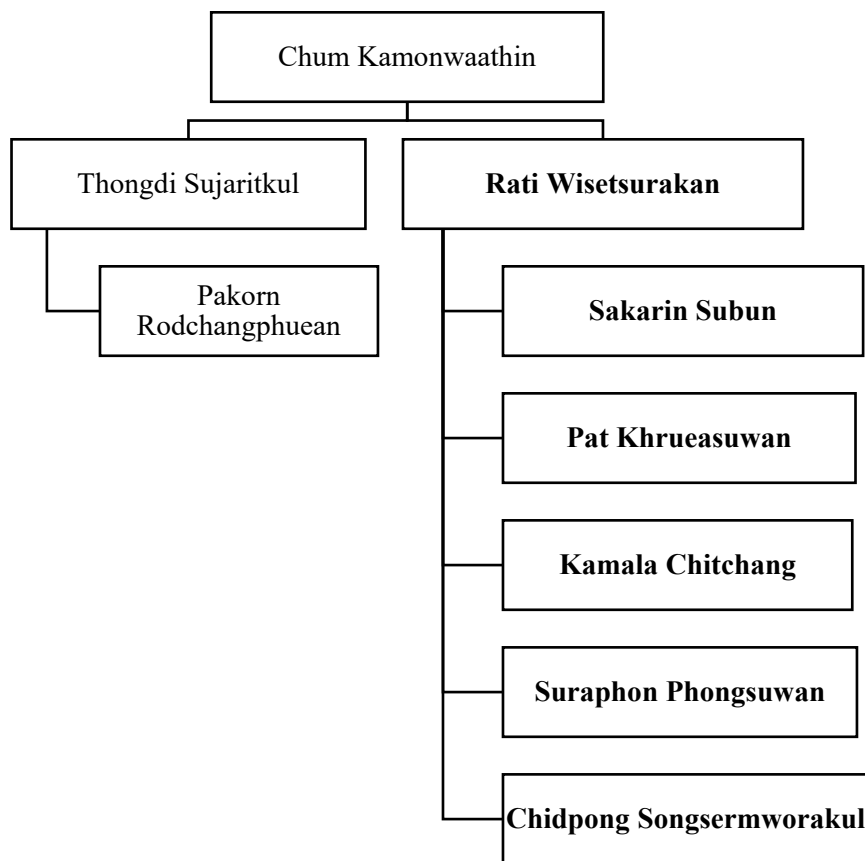


Figure 5.1: A chart showing lineage of Rati's direct-line student, in bold.

But only after having several conversations with *jakhee* players self-identified within Rati's lineage, though not necessarily direct-line students, did I realize that what circulated among the queer men string circle regarding Rati's lineage is far more complex than what the chart offers. In short, this genealogy, like all history, is selective and incomplete. There are, of course, students who had direct lessons with Rati but were

excluded from the coveted direct-line student list. Interestingly, as I will demonstrate below, some of them were welcomed by the lineage while others were not even considered a part of it.

While Rati had quite a stellar musical career as one of the most remarkable women *jakhee* players in Thai classical music (as illustrated in Chapter 2), she only began accepting students for lessons toward the later years of her career in the Public Relations Department. Rati accepted her first student, Chidpong Songsermworakul, in 1975 at the request of Sudjit Duriyapranit, Rati's colleague at the PRD. At the time of this writing, Chidpong, in his late sixties, was a *jakhee* teacher at Nakhonsawan Rajbhat University, having retired from his own business. According to Hemarat Hemhongsas's thesis, which explores the life history of Rati at length based on accounts from her students, Chidpong founded the first private Thai classical music school in Nakhonsawan province and named it after his teacher, Rati (1998: 171).

Conducting an online interview with a senior string musician like Chidpong was a challenge for me. Unlike Mark and Noo who were outspoken about sensitive topics related to musicians, including their effeminacy and sexuality, Chidpong was much more reserved. I realized, judging from our age difference and his demeanor, that some of my questions about queer men musicians were too inappropriate to even ask. So, I had to tweak the questions on the fly to be less explicitly directed at gender and sexuality and more general in nature.

Chidpong told me that he was an undergraduate student and a member of the Thai Music Club at Chulalongkorn University when Sudjit introduced him to Rati, because he had to learn a *jakhee* piece for an upcoming concert performance. He said that his case was an exception, for Rati was known to refuse to accept anyone as a *luuksit*. It was at

first counterintuitive that such a highly sought-after *jakhee* player like Rati did not want to have an apprentice to continue her legacy. In fact, Chidpong learned soon after getting accepted as Rati's student that she in fact had received requests from many aspiring *jakhee* musicians to be her student. Instead of turning down their requests, she would redirect those interested students to Nibha Apaiwong, a former woman musician from Sujarit Suda's palace (see Chapter 2) who was teaching at the prestigious Thai performing arts conservatory called The College of Dramatic Arts or Wittayalai Nattasin. Chidpong said that Rati would "ward off" (*pat* ปัด) requests from interested musicians because she regarded Nibha as her teacher and was in a more fitting position to accept a disciple.

It was not that Rati did not want to teach any students and therefore ended up sending many of them to Nibha. It was a specific act of considerateness known as *kreeng jai* (เกรงใจ), "to be considerate, to feel reluctant to impose upon another person, to take another person's feelings (and 'ego') into account, or to take every measure not to cause discomfort or inconvenience for another person" (Komin 1991: 136). For Thai classical musicians the role of teacher is often handed to those with most seniority, which explains why Rati wanted those approaching her to see Nibha first. Rati's role as a teacher was to begin when Chidpong was accepted. Rati's late teaching record, her reputation of not accepting students, and her small pool of students, led those outside of the lineage to believe that Rati was extremely hard to approach. Rati's ostensibly unwelcoming attitude and reticence were held against her (Abrahams 1970: 296). Chidpong, writing in Rati's commemorative concert program, was aware of this reputation but believed it was part of a screening process:

When I first went to take lessons [*tau phleeng*] with *khruu* [Rati], many friends of mine (in the Thai classical music circle) were surprised. Some said I was lucky. Most of them would say something along the lines that it is usual since *khruu*

rarely accepts any students [*luksit*]. Some even go so far to accuse her of guarding her knowledge [*huang wichaa*]. This is because *khruu* has relatively few [direct-line] students. When someone wants to take lessons with *khruu*, they were often met with her refusal, causing such rumors. In fact, *khruu* accepts a student by considering whether their personality was suitable [for her] to be their *khruu* and [for them] to be *sit* (Chidpong 2014: 62 in Thai, translated by the author, emphases in the original).

It should be noted, however, that Rati's lineage of direct-line students started to take shape about the same time she was hired as a lecturer of *jakhee* at Chulalongkorn's University's newly founded Thai Music Education major in 1978, among her other teaching stints at a few schools and universities. By that time, Chidpong had already graduated and other direct-line students who appear in the chart above him started taking lessons with Rati. Of all Rati's direct-line students, only Pat and Kamala were not from Chulalongkorn University; there were students from Thammasat University who deposited themselves to Rati at her workplace, PRD. According to her commemorative funeral book, Rati had a brief tenure at Chulalongkorn University when she left in 1982, a year before she retired from the PRD, and in 1987 was diagnosed with a "blood-related condition" (1988: 7). After a year of medication, she passed peacefully in the morning of April 7th, 1988.

Despite Rati's short stint at Chulalongkorn University's music education department, her musical legacy continued following the department's hiring of Sakarin Suubun as *jakhee* instructor in the early 1990s. With Sakarin's hiring, all the incoming undergraduate students majoring in *jakhee* get to learn the musical style of Rati's lineage. Having had in-person music lessons with Sakarin, these students were allowed to be a part of this lineage, albeit not direct-line. As a result, Rati's lineage, once identified through personal connection, now took on an institutional profile and affiliation. This

explains why most of the controversies and gossip surrounding this lineage stemmed from the music education department of this university.

Chidpong described himself, Pat, Suraphon, and Sakarin as those who “learned all the moves” (*rian thuk krabuan* เรียนทุกกระบวน) from Rati. Nonetheless, he recalled two more students who deposited themselves with, and were accepted by, Rati when she was already sick. One is Hemarat Hemhongsa, former music faculty member at Chulalongkorn University, and the other is Rawee Angthong, a bank executive director. Chidpong added that the two only learned a piece or two from Rati and then were further mentored by Sakarin, their fellow lineage member. Perhaps the lack of prolonged face-to-face interaction with Rati might explain Hemarat and Rawee absence from the chart. Nonetheless they are recognized not only as a part of the direct-line students but as Rati’s “last students” (*luuksit khon sudthaay* ลูกศิษย์คนสุดท้าย).

I have heard quite a lot about Hemarat for years, from the time I was an undergraduate student of Thai classical music at Srinakharinwirot University. The gossip that I heard from my queer men friends about Hemarat was that he has a *raeng* personality (*pen khon raeng raeng* เป็นคนแรงๆ). This made me reluctant to approach him, fearing strong pushback. It was Not, my queer men friend, who urged that I could not afford not to have a conversation with him if I wanted to know about Rati’s lineage. I gathered my courage and sent him a text over Facebook Messenger, to which he promptly replied. A few days later I successfully set up an interview with him over Zoom.

Knowing that Hemarat was a senior teacher (*khruu phuuyaii* ครูผู้ใหญ่), much the same status as Chidpong, I had to indirectly approach the gossip within Rati’s lineage and

about effeminate men *jakhee* players. When I asked for his comments regarding the popularity behind Rati's musical style, he suddenly revealed his concerns:

Hemarat: Now Thai classical music is having an issue. *Thaang* is disappearing. When people did not get the *thaang* [did not learn in in-person], they make it up. Also, learning from records [*kae pleeng*] is not the same as from the teacher [*tau phleeng*]. Now there are a lot of new *thaang* that are all made up. Even then there are also people who learned directly from *khruu* Rati, just other lineages.

Me: Does such issue happen with *khruu* Rati's lineage?

Hemarat: I think so. *Khruu* Rati was possessive [*huang*] of her music and did not easily accept a student. But on the flipside is that *thaang* is becoming lost. Instead of those interested can get it from *khruu*, it's like "I came up with my own goddamn *thaang* [*kuu khit thaang khaung kuu eeng* ภูคิดทางของตัวเอง]. So, it is crazy and cracked [*baa bau khau taek* บ้าบอแตก] like you see it today. You see, those heavily breaking the conventions [*nauk kraub* นอกกรอบ] were inspired by *khruu* Rati. They did not learn, they just imagined.

For Hemarat, whatever was handed from the past was pure and perfect. Any changes that did not come from an authorized teacher are unwelcome in his musical lineage. This nostalgia for the bygone era and the cynicism toward transformations is common in Thai classical musicians, both *piiphaat* and string. Ethnomusicologist Pamela Myers-Moro characterizes this attitude of backward-looking as "devolution," the opposite of evolution and progress (Myers-Moro 1989: 191). Hemarat's comment reflects the nostalgic and devolutionary perspectives as pointed by Myers-Moro, but this should not be reduced to a mere inability to move on with the present. His comment also suggests the urgency of maintaining the musical lineage, and the coveted direct-line student status.

Sensing from his reply that he was not shy about revealing his nonconformity and that he had no intention of trying to sound nice, I decided to be more direct with my questions about a gossip surrounding X, a highly talented *jakhee* player and a pianist who claimed his music was greatly inspired by Rati's *jakhee* style.

Me: I have heard that Rawee, Hemarat, Sakarin, and Chidpong were all recognized as Rati students, but what about *khruu* X?

Hemarat: [*Responding almost immediately with emphasis and raised tone*] I can attest that *khruu* X did not learn from *khruu* Rati at all. But I admit that he was greatly impressed by and wanted to be like *khruu* Rati. But because he did not study with her [*rian* เรียน], he was creating what not.

Me: What if he studied with *khruu* Rati?

Hemarat: He would be the same [*laugh*] because that's who he is. I heard *khruu* Rati once said that "Well, X, if only he had learned with me, he would be such a great musician" [*X niana thaa dai rian kap khruu ja keng maak loey X* เนียนนะ ถ้าได้เรียนกับครูจะเก่งมากเลย].

With the assertive response from Hemarat, I followed up with Chidpong by sending him a text asking for his comments about X's relationship with Rati's lineage. His reply was much more straightforward: "X is not *khruu*'s [Rati's] student" (*X mai dai pen luuksit khruu* X ไม่ได้เป็นลูกศิษย์ครู).

X is reputed for his avant-garde approach in his *jakhee* solo arrangements, including a "Surinthataahuu" *jakhee* solo performance with a Thailand's leading fusion band that combines Western pop musical instruments with the Thai classical ones.⁷ The performance was critically acclaimed not only for X's effortless execution of complex *jakhee* techniques but also for its unorthodox performance practices, e.g., repeating a section three times instead of two and abrupt rhythm changes. Even X made it clear that his highly explosive and aggressive *jakhee* playstyle is directly inspired by Rati. X's fascination with Rati's musical style was so strong that he acquired the "Kraaw Nai" *jakhee* solo from Rati's *thaang*, but this sparked a huge controversy among Rati's direct-line students. I will say more about why I use the word "acquire," which is deliberately vague because the gossip around this matter isn't conclusive. If X was outspoken about

⁷ Fusion bands like this are known in Thai as "contemporary bands" and "contemporary music;" *wong khaunthem* วงคอนเทม or *wong dontree ruam samai* วงดนตรีร่วมสมัย in Thai.

being inspired by Rati and went to the effort to *acquire* her version of “Kraaw Nai,” why didn’t Rati’s direct-line student view X as outside her lineage?

The root of the problem is *how* X knows that solo. I mentioned earlier that “Kraaw Nai” and “Khaek Mon” are two of the top-tier solos in Thai classical music. It was no exception for Rati. “Kraaw Nai” was highly treasured and guarded (*huang*) by Rati not because she did not want to pass it down herself but because it her teacher Chaang Saengdaawden ordered her not to do so. From what Chidpong and Hemarat told me - and they are two of Rati’s few direct-line students - Rati had only done two recording sessions of the elusive “Kraaw Nai” solo, and those records were only circulated among her direct-line students and their subsequent apprentices. Furthermore, Rati’s “Kraaw Nai” solo is one of Thai classical music’s most heavily guarded works. It is privileged knowledge, quite literally. This solo rendition has never been performed publicly – the “Kraaw Nai” solo versions that are commonly heard today are the ones handed down by Thongdii Sudjaritkul and Aeb Yuwanawanit. For many string musicians, Rati’s “Kraaw Nai” was nothing short of a legend.

With the highly guarded status assigned to Rati’s “Kraaw Nai,” her direct-line students are stringently policing the transmission of this solo as well as the circulation of Rati’s recordings. For example, one can only learn this piece in-person from one of Rati’s direct-line students. One must practice this piece in a private space with no recording devices turned on. However, at least two of Rati’s direct-line students that I interviewed felt that X could not have learned “Kraaw Nai” solo in-person with Rati—they never saw X visit their teacher when she was still around. The gossip has it that X taught himself the solo piece from a tape cassette that he somehow acquired from Rati’s house. As incredible as it was that X was able to reproduce the complex techniques that Rati

performed on *jakhee* after learning by ear, his actions were condemned by Rati's musical lineage members. It was regarded as a security breach in their musical vault. Their most prized "asset" was on the loose.

In a sense, guarding of Rati's "Kraaw Nai" solo shares certain discursive parallel with the knowledge, power, and authority in Thai classical music, an aspect in the tradition that has been emphasized by ethnomusicologists (Wong 1991; Miller 1992; Myers-Moro 1993; Wong 2001). "Kraaw Nai" represents embodied knowledge that should be transmitted only under authorization by those who have the right to possess it, similar to the process of transmitting the ritual pieces called *naaphaat* หน้าพาทย์ in the *waikhruu* ritual. But the case of "Kraaw Nai" is not confined within the ritual space. The secrecy and guarding of the solo marks and delimits Thai musical groups, but it also generates an aura of treasured and embodied knowledge that has a mythical character. Apart from her technical flair, Rati's musical knowledge is also valued for its secrecy. This explains why the recorded solo was never intentionally shared outside of Rati's direct-line students. X's access to the cassette was perhaps seen as a threat to the lineage integrity and the desacralizing of the mythical aura that surrounds the elusive "Kraaw Nai" solo.

At this point, I was so curious about the "drama" behind the much-treasured "Kraaw Nai" that I brought this conversation to Chidpong. After some text chats, Chidpong shared with me an audio clip excerpt during his "Kraaw Nai" solo lesson with Rati, which he recorded in 1986. It vividly reminded me of how my teacher Nikorn would bring up small details about the piece he was teaching. In this minute-long excerpt, Rati gives Chidpong strict directions not to pass the solo down to anyone ([view on website](#)):

Rati: (*hastily stutters*) Don't...Don't...Don't teach [*tau* ตั๋ว] this to anyone, okay? Just keep this to Mae [*แมะ*, Chidpong's nickname] yourself. Don't give it to anybody, this cassette.

Chidpong: (*quietly and humbly*) Yes [*khrap* ครับ]

...*Silence*...

Rati: Mostly when I give this ["Kraaw Nai" solo] (*pauses*). I don't give this anybody easily, let me tell you.

Chidpong: (*quietly and humbly*) Yes

...*twang twang* [*jakhee* string being plucked]

Rati: But you must [*twang twang*] you must promise me that...

Chidpong: (*quietly and humbly*) Yes

Rati: You don't teach this to anybody AT ALL. (*With heavy emphasis*) Whatever it takes or no matter what, just say that "I can't give it." Keep this just for Mae, alright? Don't give it to anyone.

...*Silence*...

Rati: Lots of people are craving to learn ["Kraaw Nai" solo] from me.

Chidpong: (*short quiet laugh* in agreement)

Rati: But I don't [teach it]. Other [solo] pieces are okay but these two solos – "Khaek Mon," "Kraaw Nai" – I treasure [*huang*] it a lot.⁸

...*Relatively long silence, followed by indistinct words and then Rati proceeds to play the beginning of the "Kraaw Nai" solo on her jakhee...*

This might explain why Rati refrained from accepting students until later in her career, when she passed down her solo repertory to her first and only cohort of students: Chidphong, Sakarin, and Pat.⁹ Chidpong speculated that Rati may have realized that she

⁸ *Huang*, when used with an object like *huang wichaa*, would mean "to guard." When used without an object, the word would mean to *treasure*. In general, *huang* refers to a feeling of not willing to let go or share one's belonging, so the term could either mean to *guard* or *treasure*, or both, depending on the context.

⁹ Chidpong only recognizes these three names for those who have learned all the solo pieces from Rati. According to Chidpong, while Suraphong and Kamala did not learn the complete repertory from Rati, the two were very close to Rati and often referred to by Rati as her students [*huksit*], hence their inclusion in the direct-line students.

should pass the two solos to some students to prevent it from eventually disappearing. Even then, she did so cautiously. In his thesis, Hemarat recalls that Rati would tell her students after completing a solo, “Do not tell anyone that *khruu* [I] taught you [*tau* ๓๑] this piece,” “Do not play this for anybody,” and “It was *khruu* Jaang’s order” (Hemarat 1998: 129).

For the Rati’s direct-line students, X’s acquisition of “Kraaw-Nai” was downright immoral and unacceptable. There was no evidence as to how X retrieved the recorded “Kraaw Nai” solo, but he managed to replicate the recorded solo in any case. Given X’s expertise in piano and his talent in Thai classical music, this feat was far from surprising. But he learned the solo without Rati’s permission and despite the presence of her direct-line students. Based on what he “learned” from Rati’s *jakhee* playing style, he further built on it as time went on in his musical career, creating an even more explosive, aggressive, yet unique style hitherto unprecedented in *jakhee* circles. X’s *jakhee* style, once matured, sounded like no one else. It was his own signature invention. This, however, were deemed by the *jakhee* circle as unorthodox as well as disrespectful, as reflected in Hemarat’s somewhat satirical comment.

Though Rati’s faithful students were critical about X’s means of acquiring Rati’s musical knowledge, Chidpong and Hemarat acknowledged his development of an idiosyncratic *jakhee* musical style. Anant Narkkong, a seasoned Thai classical musician, scholar, and ethnomusicologist, cited the controversy between X and Rati’s musical lineage as a prime example of the hostile or *raeng* ๒๕๓ queer men string music circle but from the opposite perspective. In my conversation with Anant, he questioned how X was treated despite the latter’s utmost respect to Rati. According to Anant, X was blocked off (*kiitkan* ๓๑๓) and became the “diaspora” of her lineage – not even considered in the

roster of Rati's students.¹⁰ Anant did not consider X's musical invention based on Rati's musical style as an adulteration. Rather, it was a courageous and daring extension (*tau yaut* ต่อยอด) of the style that defies both the established conventions of Thai classical music and *jakhee* performance practices.

Certainly, there is much more to be learned from these disputes and the other controversies surrounding the queer men string music circles. They are far more than just gossipy dramas. In presenting the above information, by no means am I implying who is right or wrong. Neither do I attempt to remain neutral or objective. Instead, I follow Christina Sunardi's lead in her study of cross-gender performances in Java regarding how the "micro-moments of interactions on- and offstage are critical moments of complex cultural and ideological work" (Sunardi 2015: 158). Sure enough, these moments, as heavily charged and pointed as they are, defy the smooth and "straight" drawing of a lineage like the chart I presented. What is often feminized and therefore brushed off as irrelevant if not useless gossip reveals as much the heavy surveillance placed on a musical lineage as the continuity and discontinuity that marks it.

Since Rati's direct-line students generally place authenticity and construct authority simultaneously on the exact replication of solo pieces and on the continuity of the passing of knowledge, they therefore view X's creative innovations and his self-teaching from a recorded cassette as antagonistic to their musical lineage. What transpired here is similar to Christopher Witulski's observations of how *Gnawa* ritual musicians in Morocco counter growing commercial influences on the ritual to maintain a sense of authenticity (Witulski 2018). In so doing, the process of building authenticity becomes generative of authenticity itself – a locus where authenticities are negotiated.

¹⁰ Anant literally said the word "diaspora" to describe X's status in Rati's lineage.

Likewise, Rati's direct-line lineage, and even Rati herself, successfully fended off any threats to their authentic correctness of their most cherished solo pieces while X charted his way to establish himself as another version of authenticity.

It is not wrong to infer a sense of guarding knowledge or *huang wichaa* from Rati's words, but it was the heavy policing among her direct-line students that intensified the debate over who is or isn't part of the lineage. Not only were certain important musical pieces supervised closely and bodily postures impeccably mirrored to maintain uniform practice across the lineage, but the means of knowledge acquisition also played an equally crucial role in determining its members. To circle back to the analogy I raised in the beginning of this chapter, conventions established by the lineage members are comparable to what Khubchandani calls nightlife pedagogies, or "particular behaviors and comportments in bars that one must learn," and failing to do so renders oneself "unassimilated" and "accented" (Khubchandani 2020: 83). In this case, however, what gives away the accent is neither effeminacy nor nonconformity. It is instead the bypassing of the valorized face-to-face "inheritance" of musical knowledge. X's means of acquiring the "Kraaw Nai" solo raises the threat of discontinuity to lineage integrity, and thereby becomes the accent that excludes him from Rati's lineage.

What I have presented above explores the heavy, CCTV-like surveillance within queer men string music circles through the analogy of nightlife accent. In a sense, Rati's heavily policed lineage is comparable to the ways that clubbers are under their other clubbers' constant eyes. One suspicious accented move can cause rippling gossip over one's legitimacy in the club. Once such gossip spreads, given its tendency to draw the all-ears Thai classical music "clubbers," queer and straight, it overwrites all the past accumulated credits and renders the person as irreversibly suspicious. Such was an

example of an accent thrust onto an individual. However, accenting can also be donned deliberately as a refusal of a hegemonic power. In what follows, I present another example of surveillance, this time from of Chaluay's *sau uu* lineage.

Donning the Accent

I illustrated in Chapter 3 how Mark models his seating postures after Chaluay to display his nonconforming *jarit*, an embodied base for his affect. With this seating posture is the use of the lower sections of left-hand fingers (*nuam niw* นวมนิ้ว) to press the strings as opposed to the fingertips (*plaay niw* ปลายนิ้ว). Knowing that *sau uu* did not favor body posture in ways that feel beautiful or *suay* like *jakhee* did, he strategically used his musical style or *thaang* to make him stand out instead. The dropped-shoulder seating posture, the use of *nuam niw*, and the melodic variations that occasionally go “against-the-grain,” contrasting with the melodic direction of the ensemble, is what characterizes Chaluay's musical style. Consequently, those who learned from Chaluay are said to inherit her trademark bold and jolting *sau uu* style.

Like Rati, Chaluay earned her reputation from countless public and recorded performances as a *sau uu* musician at the Fine Arts Department. In her later years at the Public Relations Department, Chaluay was invited to teach at several schools and universities, including the Thai music education department of Chulalongkorn University along with Rati. Chaluay's lineage was not as deeply attached to any specific academic institution like her compatriot, and she generously accepted almost every student who wanted to deposit themselves as her student at her home. This, however, did not and should not take away the fact that Chaluay's *sau uu* playing style was a highly revered *thaang* among string musicians.

The veneration of Chaluay's lineage can be illustrated with Somprat Thonglor or Ton, a highly skilled *sau uu* player who studied the instrument with Mark from the age of fifteen. I first met Ton during my undergraduate sophomore year when he joined the Thai music education department at Srinakharinwirot University. At that time, Somprat had made his name along with his twin brother Woraprat as promising *sau uu* and *sau duang* players respectively after winning a national music competition organized by the Ministry of Education.¹¹ Somprat embodies Chaluay's lineage masterfully with all the trademark seating positions, instrument handling, and, most importantly, the playing style. Somprat's entrance into Srinakharinwirot's Thai music education department raised some concerns over possible conflicts of musical lineages since the department's *sau* instructor, Metee Punvaratorn, was trained by Chalerm Muangpraesi, a seasoned musician hired as a lecturer of *sau* there. The anxiety soon disappeared as Somprat adapted well to the university's *sau* playing style and inserted Chaluay's *thaang* only when appropriate. Somprat and I performed together multiple times during our undergraduate years.¹²

When I sat down and interviewed Somprat, asking for his comments regarding the *raeng* queer men string music circle, Somprat smiled coyly in affirmation of the circle's hostility and, as expected, shared with me some gossip which I cannot disclose. Yet, Somprat reminded me that it was not all about being *raeng*, for there were musicians who have the utmost mutual respect. This was the case when he took lessons with Chalerm in the University. He recalled a class where his cohort were learning the long and complex

¹¹ Woraprat went to Chulalongkorn University for his undergraduate degree.

¹² One of my performances with Somprat can be accessed at <https://youtu.be/1wzZhPoN7O4>. In the video, I was playing the *thon-rammana* drum whereas Somprat was playing *sau uu*. Note Somprat's iconic seating posture and instrument handling. The performance also featured Narong Ruambanleng, a Thai classical singer who appears in Chapter 4.

thayauy repertory, and Chalerm did not “touch him” (*mai tae loey* ไม่แตะเลย) at all, meaning that the teacher would not even ask Somprat to play the piece on his instrument. In his recollection, Chalerm would make him play *jakhee* to accommodate other students who were all playing *sau* in the class and said to him “your *thaang* is already good” (*thaang thoe dii yuu laew* ทางเธอดีอยู่แล้ว). And when Chalerm had to teach a solo piece to his student, he instead had Somprat play “Nok Khamin” for his fellow *sau* students and asked him to notate the solo for the entire class, to which Somprat duly agreed.

Even with the notated version of the solo, Somprat lamented that nobody could really play the piece:

In the end there was none who could really bow it right. Like, they have the notes right, sure. But if the methods were not there, the feelings were not there, you can play this to death and still not sound the same [as Chaluy] [*tae sud thaay khon thii dai jing jing - mai mii loey sak khon kheu dai noot jing - tae thaa withii maidai feeling maidai hai taay kau mai muean* แต่สุดท้ายคนที่สีได้จริงๆ ไม่มีเลยซักคน คือได้โน้ตก็จริง แต่ถ้าวิธีไม่ได้ ฟीलิ่งไม่ได้ ให้ตายก็ไม่เหมือน].

Dard Neuman similarly notes the inadequacy of the “literate mode” of transmission in Hindustani music that “musicians [who received the literate mode] do not possess a direct, unconscious, unmediated and purely internal sense of music” (Neuman 2012: 446). Simply put, the notated version of the solo fell short of conveying all the minute details required for the execution. Somprat’s comment reinforces the embodied significance of au/oral transmission that is not substitutable by, or to be understood as a simple reversal of, written notation. As a result, all his friends ended up learning the solo with “thick accents.”

Teerawit Klinjui, a *sau* player and a friend of mine from Srinakharinwirot University, learnt *sau uu* with Mark but also took lessons from other string music teachers like Somprat. Although Teerawit identified himself as Mark’s student, he

admitted that his tie to Chaluay’s lineage was as strong as Somprat’s. Yet Teerawit’s lessons with Mark were sufficient to teach him what it takes to render Chaluay’s musical style without any accent. When I asked him over Facebook Messenger about how the bodily posture mattered in Chaluay’s lineage, Teerawit wrote “the posture will come by itself” (*thaa man ja maa eeng* ท่ามันจะมาเอง).

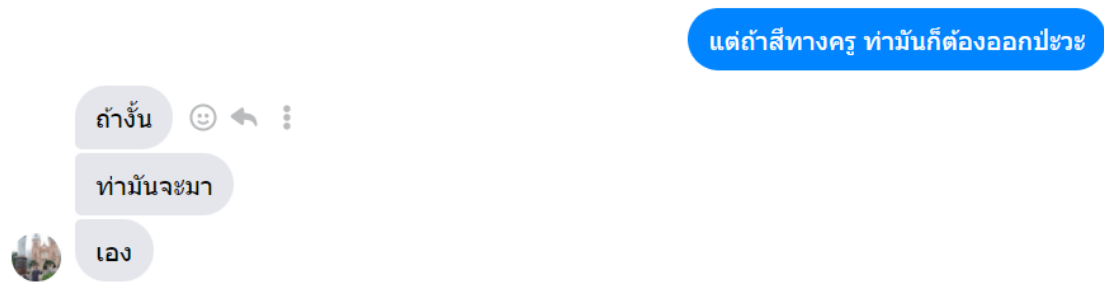


Figure 5.2: A screenshot of my text chat with Teerawit. The blue bubble, sent by me, is translated as, “if you play in *khruu*’s [Chaluay] style, doesn’t the posture have to come out?” Teerawit then replies in the gray bubble, “The posture will come by itself.”

I asked him whether the posture might concern a player for being “too feminine,” to which Teerawit replied with an Instagram photo of himself playing *sau uu*, seated with a dropped left shoulder and the lower sections of the left-hand fingers wrapping around the instrument string. Obviously, he was playing in Chaluay’s style. He then commented on the photo, writing that “the posture would take over if you wanted to bow like *khruu* [Chaluay] hahahaha. I also studied [*sau uu*] with Mark” [*thaa man phaa pai thaa sii baeb khruu 5555555 phom kau rian kap phii Mark* ท่ามันพาไปถ้าสีแบบครู 5555555 ผมก็เรียนกับพี่มาร์ค]. Teerawit’s comments reinforce Mark’s statement in Chapter 3, that the specific posture and instrument handling is not just a matter of feeling beautiful or *suay* but also a technical necessity so crucial to the lineage.

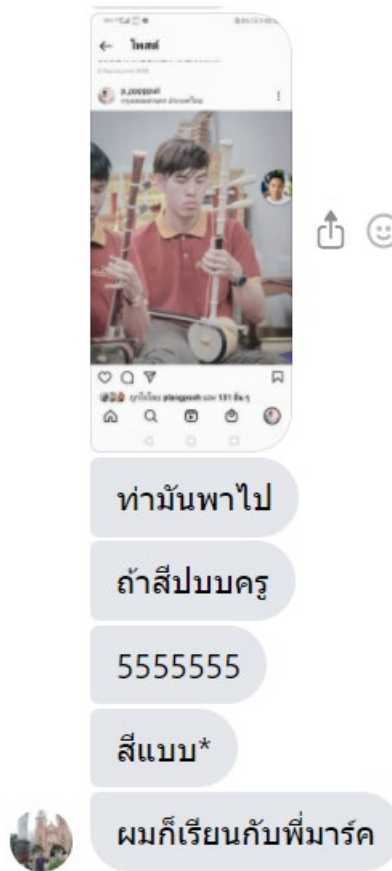


Figure 5.3: Teerawit shares his photo playing *sau uu* and assuming the iconic posture from Chaluay’s lineage. He commented below, “the posture would take over if you wanted to bow like *khruu* [Chaluay] hahahaha. I also studied [*sau uu*] with Mark.”

I could not agree more with Somprat’s and Teerawit’s remarks about Chaluay’s lineage. I experienced her lineage first-hand during an impromptu *sau uu* lesson with Mark. I was interviewing him for the second time in his house when he responded to my curiosity over the specifics of Chaluay’s *sau uu* style by inviting me to learn a piece. Upon my acceptance of his invitation, Mark swiftly got up from his sofa and grabbed two *sau uu* from his cabinet. After putting rosin on the two *sau uu* bows, he asked me what piece I wanted to learn. I had no idea what to answer. Pausing briefly, Mark said that there was one piece that Chaluay, already retired from PRD then, once asked him to teach

to a group of high school students on her behalf when he visited her. The piece's name was "Salikaa Chom Duean" (สาลิกาชมเดือน) or "A Magpie Admires the Moon." Despite its short length, Mark considered the piece a perfect model to "condition the hands" (*prap mue* ปรึบมือ) of a beginner student to adapt to Chaluay's musical style. He then handed one *sau uu* to me. Both of us then tested out the strings and adjusted the tuning pegs to ensure our *sau uu* were in tune.

This was the first time I had had a one-on-one music lesson on a string instrument. Not that I did not know how to play string instruments, but I always used whatever *thaang* I felt was nice. Sometimes I just made one up on the fly. I sometimes asked for suggestions but had never deposited myself officially with any string music teacher. In contrast to my *piiphaat* training, my knowledge and skills on string instruments are informal and scattered at best. It took just the first few beginning phrases of "Salikaa Chom Duean" for me to realize just how thick an "accent" I had on *sau uu*. I struggled immediately: my timber sounded coarse, the grace notes were out of time, and my bowing strokes were out of place. While Mark of course played smoothly and made playing those opening notes seem effortless, I was stiff, rough, and clumsy.

Holding on to my prior experience of learning a new piece in *piiphaat* ensemble, I tried my best – mostly unsuccessfully – to replicate what Mark showed me, one phrase after another. Though Mark did not interrupt my playing to verbally explain the necessary techniques in a particular phrase, he would put down his *sau uu* for a break and share anecdotes about Chaluay, like how she would never let go of her *sau uu* while teaching. In the middle of the piece, Mark paused to tell me that what he was going to show me next was Chaluay's signature move (*luuk khruu dooy chaphau* ลุกครูดอยเฉพาะ):

LSRM	FDFL	SDFL	SFMR
------	------	-------------	------

Table 5.1: A notation of Chaluy’s signature move in the middle of “Salikaa Chom Duean,” transcribed from my lesson with Mark. The normal and underlined letters respectively represent outward and inward bow strokes. The note in bold indicates the pitch that is an octave higher.

Having some familiarity with Chaluy’s musical style already, it did not take long for me to replicate this phrase. Mark watched normally as I attempted this phrase and then he suddenly widened his eyes, angled his face, pressed his lips together, and gave me “the side-eye look” in surprise when I managed to pull this phrase off in a couple of attempts, with a lot of technical blemishes, of course. At the end of the phrase, Mark commented jokingly ([view on website](#)):

Mark: [*exclaiming*] You must have been eavesdropping [this *thaang*] quite a lot, haven’t you?” (แอบฟังมาเยอะละสิ) [*laughing*]

Me: [*laughing*] I just heard this a few seconds ago! (เพิ่งฟังตะกี้เอง)

Mark: [*with a broad smile*] Ooooy! How did you memorize it so quickly!?! (โอ้ย! ทำไมจำได้เร็วขนาดนี้)

We both laughed and continued through the end of the piece.



Figure 5.4: Mark watches me as I attempted the signature phrase. Note the way he uses his lower sections of his fingers (*nuam niw*) to press the strings whereas I used to tip of my fingers. Photo screenshot from video footage recorded by the author.



Figure 5.5: Mark gave me “the look” when I successfully replicated the phrase within a few attempts. Photo screenshot from video footage recorded by the author.



Figure 5.6: Mark and I laughed as he teased about me eavesdropping his *thaang*. Photo screenshot from video footage recorded by the author.

Mark expressed his suspicion of me “eavesdropping” Chaluay’s signature melody because the melody progresses in a rather unconventional contour. Those who were new to Chaluay’s musical style or *thaang* would often find this signature melody a bit odd in its sequence and require quite a bit of getting used to in terms of muscle memory. Such was the reaction that he was expecting from me, a *piiphaat*-trained musician who never took a serious string music lesson, when he first demonstrated the phrase. That Mark expected a student (me) to struggle to naturalize the signature melody demonstrates the first gateway into Chaluay’s musical style.

Despite Mark’s surprise at my familiarity with Chaluay’s *thaang*, there were at least two things that I failed to replicate during the lesson. One was trying to use *nuam niw* to press the *sau uu* strings. When I tried to use the lower sections of my left-hand fingers like Mark did, it felt so uncomfortable that I could barely produce any pitches, not to mention hold the instrument in place. Using the fingertips instead of *nuam niw* was just

how I started playing *sau uu*, and Mark did not mind this at all. However, it was striking that I could not reproduce several subtle flowerings that Mark demonstrated throughout the melody of “Salikaa Chom Duean.” Perhaps it was because I was not a trained *sau uu* players, but I could not rule out the importance of the *nuam niw* in rendering this *thaang*.

The second was the bowing directions. As seen from the transcription above, Mark did not use a constant and symmetrical alternation between outward-inward bowing strokes when he played. The convention of *sau* bowing directions is that one usually begins a melodic phrase with an outward and ends with inward bowing motion. If a measure contains an odd number of notes, the player must combine two notes in the outward direction to maintain the inward stroke at the end. The above notation contains a symmetrical and even number of notes, yet Mark seemed to alternate and combine the strokes whenever and wherever he pleased and still somehow managed to end each phrase with an inward stroke. This was a huge struggle for me, for I was always bowing with alternating inward-outward motions – also the standardized practice. Whenever I attempted to combine some strokes, I either ended up in an outward motion or did not finish the phrase because of my fixation on the bowing. At some point, Mark had to stop and tell me that it was okay even if I kept alternating the bow strokes so I could reorient my focus to the piece.

Mark’s purpose behind this lesson was for me to get a sense of what it is like to play and embody Chaluay’s musical lineage, a goal I did not achieve for the most part. But this moment also exposed, on the one hand, Mark’s highly disciplined musicking body that stayed true to its lineage and, on the other, my own accented musicking body that didn’t look the part. Speaking of my bowing, which followed the conventional norms of alternating inward-outward stroke, Mark was aware that this was established as the

“correct” way of bowing *sau uu* and *sau duang* and that doubling the notes in a single stroke is often avoided because doing so would be to “cheat the bow” or *koong khan chak* โกงคันชัก. Despite that, he deliberately sometimes doubled the notes in each stroke but made sure to end each phrase with an inward stroke. His reason was that the constant alternate bowing does not make a melody flow smoothly and made it sound interrupted. He would employ the alternating stroke only when he wanted to emphasize individual notes in a certain part of a piece.

A few words about the standardized or correct way is instructive before I proceed. It is difficult to pinpoint what exactly is the standardized way of playing Thai classical music or who or what organization set the standard. There is a consensus that whatever musical practice and style is endorsed by the Fine Arts Department and the College of Dramatic Arts or Wittayalai Nattasin becomes the standard that musicians should follow to be considered a “correctly” trained musician. Even the *Standard Criteria of Thai Music and Criteria for Assessment 2001* (เกณฑ์มาตรฐานดนตรีไทย และเกณฑ์การประเมิน พุทธศักราช 2544/2001), an official guideline issued by the now-dissolved University Bureau for Thai classical music curriculum in higher education level, was followed only loosely because universities and conservatories tend to design their own curriculum and adhere to their differently endorsed musical lineages (Sobroek 2006). In any case, it is expected by all that a Thai classical musician must perform and behave politely on stage or *riaprauy* เรียบร้อย. This includes the refined performance practice of instruments. For example, *ranaat eek* players are supposed to render every note to a constant beat. Playing the instrument with the notes in a swing-like rhythm is known as *khayook* ไชยก and this marks a *ranaat eek* player as unrefined. Similarly, those playing *sau* are expected to observe, among other things, the alternative outward-inward bow strokes and not to cheat the bow.

For this reason, it was understandable why Mark’s seemingly arbitrary bow strokes can be criticized for being unrefined. Teerawit told me that one of his Thai music professors during his undergraduate days always complained to him whenever he saw *sau uu* players from Chaluay’s lineage play because that professor believed that the musicians in this lineage did not know how to bow “properly” and ended up cheating the bow all the time. Even Mark shared a criticism of Chaluay’s style he heard, that it violates the standardized way of bowing the *sau uu*, a practice observed mostly and strictly in the academic institutions and conservatories like the College of the Dramatic Arts or Wittayalai Nattasin. He commented that these institutions put too much effort into making the bowing strokes perfectly equal. To him, this approach made the music sound “like a block” (*pen blauk blauk pai mot* เป็นบล็อกไปหมด) and has lost the “*samniang*” or accent in Thai terms.

Using *nuam niw* to press the *sau uu* strings also became the subject of criticism that marks Chaluay’s musical lineage. Mark revealed that not everyone liked the way his lineage holds the instrument. Sometime during a lesson with Chaluay, Mark recalled, she would share gossip that someone from the authoritative institution commented that using the lower sections of the fingers made it look like she was clenching the *sau uu* into her hand (*kam sau* กำซอ). Interpreting this anecdote from Chaluay, Mark surmised that perhaps his teacher’s way of holding the instrument was against the standard or the correct convention. Mark told me that Chaluay did not have any response to the comments. He argued that Chaluay was also from the palace, so it made no sense that the practice she learned at the palace was dismissed by the current standard. For Mark, Chaluay’s playing technique felt natural to him (*pen thammachaat*), but it was the institutionalization of Thai classical music that “sets a frame to the natural” (*ao thammachaat maa tii kraup* เอาธรรมชาติมาตีกรอบ), thus leaving no room for diversity.

The above account flips the situation where Chaluy's musical lineage was policed and viewed as having an accent compared to the hegemonic practice of Thai classical music as institutionalized in universities and conservatories. I invoke José Esteban Muñoz's concept of "disidentification," or ambivalent tactics that "retain the problematic object [the criticism over Chaluy's style] and tap into the energies that are produced by the contradictions and ambivalences" (Muñoz 1999: 71). Amid the criticism surrounding her bowing and handling of *sau uu*, Chaluy and her students did not assimilate into the standard or correct conventions of playing. In contrast, they proudly donned an accent against the hegemonic practice of the tradition. Here, gossiping reveals how the members of Chaluy's musical lineage "maintain their own positions and their own silences, establishing and resisting authorities" (Van Vleet 2003: 499). The ethnographic vignettes presented above suggested that the lineage was able to stand their ground against the criticism and became one of the most popular and non-institutionalized *sau uu* styles among string musicians. Following the lead of Tes Slominski's remark that "participation in trad can be an act of...disidentification from normative citizenship..." (Slominski 2020: 160), I argue that Chaluy, Mark, Somprat, and Teerawit embodied this lineage to disidentify from normative gender roles in some instances, normative musicianship in others, or both at the same time.

This is not to imply that the interrelationships between the members of Chaluy's lineage were devoid of any conflicts. In fact, Mark, Somprat, and Teerawit all shared gossip toward direct-line student legitimacy much the same as in Rati's case. My point here is not to reproduce the same social interactions. Instead, I argue that heavy surveillance and hegemonic conventions worked to the advantage of Chaluy's lineage. Not only did the lineage members ride the wave of authoritative criticism, but they turned it on its head and used it against the very hegemonic forces that criticized them.

Conclusion

As much as gossip and controversies are responsible for the impression of hostile or *raeng* queer men string music circle, it also allows the circle to thrive. This chapter nuances prior scholarship on the social structures of Thai classical music by moving beyond the formation of the structures to examine in ways in which these structures are maintained and resisted. I liken this musical circle to nightclubs, wherein sexual fields where embodied and musical expressions are heavily policed for “accents.” I was able to unpack the multi-layer aspects of controversies surrounding “direct-line” student status as well as the tension between an alleged “accented” musical lineage with the hegemonic force of institutionalized conventions. In sum, gossip and controversies in queer men string music circles shows the political process behind “accents.” Accents are both policed for negative identification (not a direct-line students) but can also be used the other way around for disidentification.

Again, this does not mean that gossip and controversies only exist among queer men string music circle. Gossip and controversies percolate through every musical circle—I was always ready to listen to gossip!—but it was the queer men string music circle that picked up these stories and *maumaay* so effectively and sometimes dangerously. My point here, I reiterate, is that by attending to the kind of oral histories that are neglected as irrelevant and feminized but in fact form the basis of queer men string musician’s social formation, a more nuanced investigation of music as culture is possible, including one that is notoriously characterized as hostile. Queer positionality is vital to the efficacy of gossip in Thai classical music, not because non-queer subjects do not engage in such acts, but because of the similarly perceived illegitimate values accorded to both gossip and queer men musicians. Gossip about accenting in and out of

musical lineages, as I have argued throughout this chapter, keeps queer men string music circles alive and *saep*, for better for worse.

To conclude this chapter, I was rather surprised when Teerawit told me that the reason behind his decision to seriously study string musics was to escape the stress from the chaotic gossip and controversies he experienced in *piiphaat* ensemble. He admitted to me that he was quite naïve and knew very little about how *raeng* the string music circle, populated mostly by queer musicians, could be. Teerawit too has become the center of gossip, which caused him quite a lot of stress lasting for several months. Reflecting on this complication in hindsight, he joked with me “I thought I would escape the heat to lean on the cold (*nee raun maa phueng yen* หนีร้อนมาพึ่งเย็น)¹³ by leaving the *piiphaat* circle and join the string one. But it turned out that the string circle was not at all cold – it was STEAMING!” Now that I have discussed how queer musicians navigate the first crack in the tradition – the musical lineage – the next chapter will focus on how queer men musicians navigate through the second crack – the gendered and hypergendered basis for most musical institutions.

¹³ *Nee raun maa pheung yen* หนีร้อนมาพึ่งเย็น is a Thai saying meaning to take escape a problematic situation and take refuge somewhere safe.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: to *Pen* or Not to *Pen*

Queer men subjects in Thailand cover a broad spectrum. It is difficult, if not impossible, to characterize them without essentializing. Many of my interlocutors variously identified themselves along the “exploded” gendered and sexual identities (Jackson 2000). Whether self-identifying as *kathoey*, *tut*, *gay*, or deliberately leaving their gender and sexual identities open-ended by simply saying *pen* เพ็น or “to be,” queer men musicians in string ensemble are marked for their effeminacy. Their gender performance does not align with the ideal performance of masculinity institutionalized by the state. The queer-signifying effeminacy, as I illustrated in Chapter 2, is driven by and manifest in the constructed association of string music with femininity. String music serves as a site that enables the articulated effeminate musicking bodies and marked them and the gendered other.

With the double “flipping” introduced in Chapter 4, queer men singers superimpose intimate homoerotic desires onto the straight musical text of “Surintharaahuu.” Again, this flipping is firmly grounded on the gender constructs as these vocalists substitute themselves with the fictional woman character in the song text. The unsettling of gender-defined conventions that leads to queer musical moments is what ties effeminate musicking bodies and the flipped homoerotic desires by queer men musicians in string ensembles.

It is tempting to compare these queer men musickings in Thai classical music to drag performances. These performances possess the implicit energy to shatter bourgeoisie (state-imposed) sexual and social morality (La Valley 1995: 65) and expose the artificiality of conventional gender roles (Halberstam 1998: 261). However, I am hesitant

to conclude that such connections are explicit. While I have seen a few queer men musicians who dressed as a woman and played a *jakhee* on stage, it was done in a low-stake settings like informal and casual gigs. Exaggeration, mockery, and humor, which exemplify the drag spirit, are heavily controlled, if at all permissible, by queer men musicians in large part because Thai classical music itself exemplifies the conventional gender roles as well as sexual and social morality. Drag performances that disavow hegemonic heteronormativity and invite gender and sexual creativity, but such is not the case for Thai classical music. Especially in institutionalized settings like government organizations and state-sponsored conservatories, to “drag” or to “camp” as Thai classical musicians is borderline taboo. But since nonnormative performances like these are what complete the otherwise “pure” arts, they are thus relegated to a kind of contained, and comedic space. *Lakhaun Nauk* stands as one such example. Another example is the homoeroticism of “Surintharahuu” discussed in Chapter 4. These examples are part of the dominant discourse and narrative, yet they can be transformed into essential sites for cultural critique when the main action or story is suspended.

But let us not forget that gender and sexual transgression in Thai culture is tolerated but not accepted, and that the level of tolerance is relative. As conservative as it may be, many government institutions are known to have queer men musicians of various “out” degrees. Some may sport outright effeminate comportment or being girlish (*auk saaw* ออกลาว), while others may have a highly timid disposition (*riaprauy* เรียบร้อย). Some of them even work in high-ranking positions: as a chair, director, or a vice-president. Along with these musicians are gender-normative cis-male queer men musicians who fit seamlessly with the heteronormative environment of government institutions. If queer men musicians are tolerated in the government institutions that uphold the moral values, including heteronormativity, of Thai classical music as the music of the nation, what then

is/are the threshold(s) under which nonconformity of the queer subject is allowed, and in fact has a significant presence? How then do these queer musicians navigate and negotiate with these thresholds to maintain respectability?

This concluding chapter addresses Thai classical music's associated national and moral values that force queer men musician to conform to state-endorsed gender norms. This conformist force is more pronounced in government institutions like schools, universities, the Fine Arts Department, the Public Relations Department, the military, and police departments. I trace the hypergendering of these government institutions and how queer men musicians in these organizations must adapt to this somewhat unforgiving working environment. Such looming heteronormative pressure means that failing to conform would result in tainting the image of an institution—displays of queerness symbolized the “uncivilized” or ill-mannered status of the male-gendered bodies. However, most queer men musicians were willing to abide by this pressure. Being a Thai classical musician provides an employment opportunity in government institutions, thereby increasing one's social status. To challenge the heteronormative gender norms in their workplace would mean making their employment and social status vulnerable, a risk not worth taking.

The tolerated but not accepted attitude towards queer men musicians in hypergendered government organizations presents a unique scenario in which the display of queerness is “subject to context-specific interpretation” and, in the end, does not interrogate heteronormativity in Thai classical music. It may appear that freedom of expression is limited for these musicians, but such was and is hardly seen as a systemic problem. In fact, several queer men musicians acknowledged that effeminate presentation can be “inappropriate” in certain circumstances. I draw on queer men musicians'

mediated display of queerness to revisit queer worldmaking, a creative process that “encompasses the social practices, cultural productions, and political activities that are generated from the performative disruption or refusal of state-sanctioned heteronormative reproduction” (Zaino 2021: 582). By revisiting what Zaino calls queer worldmaking, I do not intend to undermine the creative, improvisatory, intimate, transformative, recycling, expansive, utopian, and deconstructive nature that marks these modes of performances (Berlant and Warner 1998: 558; Buckland 2002; Yep 2003: 35; Muñoz 2009). Instead, I am interested in how queer worldmaking operates particularly when it does not outright refuse state-sanctioned heteronormative reproduction. Also, my examination of mediated display of queerness is directly related to the social structure of the state at large, such that Thai classical music is part of the superstructure of the state’s political economy, especially in the frictive double image of classical performing arts as a remnant of feudal exquisiteness and a niche for marginalized subjects in government organizations. I echo Sara Ahmed’s remark that “to make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things” (2006: 161), and that it “is possible to live on an oblique angle [being queer], and follow the straight lines” (ibid.: 172). But what are the “things” that can be disturbed by queer men musicians in this setting? I will unpack this question in the next section. I start by considering queer men musicians whose main job is a government official teacher or *khaaraatchakaan khruu* (ข้าราชการครู).

Teachers' and Musicians' Effeminacy as an Ethical No-No¹

When I mentioned my dissertation project to my father, he quickly suggested three queer men musicians who I should interview. My father has taught over thirty cohorts of undergraduate students majoring in Thai classical music and has known several gender nonconforming students, but the names that he suggested came from a cohort that graduated over thirty years ago—so something must have set them apart from other effeminate men students. At the time of writing, two of them had received PhD degrees and worked as government official teachers, while the other went on to become a university professor, founded a new department, and chaired it. My father explained that these students are fondly remembered not only because they were the first “third-gender” students who were successful in their career paths, but also because they refused to “keep conditions,” which caused quite a stir among the faculty. Following my father’s advice, I reached out to the one of the teachers to set up an interview.

This teacher, anonymized as C, was a Deputy Director of Student Affairs at one of the state-funded conservatories. He was employed as a government official teacher, but mostly oversaw administrative tasks, particularly student’s disciplinary actions. I have known C for over twenty years through my father. His gender performance and sexual orientation was no secret to me, but I had never discussed it seriously with him. Upon arriving at the conservatory, I was led to the Office of the Directors. C’s office was within this compound. In front of C’s office was the station for his secretary who would greet all C’s visitors before letting them in. I notified C’s secretary of the purpose of my visit, and she introduced me into C’s room where he was handling a case of student

¹ The supplementary multimedia for this chapter features queer men musicians who are *khaaraatchakaan khruu* or government official teachers ([view on website](#)).

misconduct. His office was spacious without heaps of student’s notebooks or paper sheets. There was a cabinet by his office desk that displayed his PhD diploma and a few accolades he received. Hung by the cabinet was his PhD graduation gown from one of Thailand’s elite universities. I immediately realized he was indeed a high-rank employer in this institution. He glanced at me, nodded to acknowledge my presence, and told me to wait until he was done with his business.

Despite being in the khaki-colored uniform—buttoned up shirt, a pair of trousers, with royal regalia adorned on his shoulders and chest—for male government officials and ending his sentences with a polite particle for male speaker *khrap* ครับ, it was not hard for me to discern his effeminacy. His somewhat feminine bodily comportment—how he moved his arms and hands during the conversation—and his tendency to prolong words in a sentence were the primary telltale signs. Yet C’s effeminacy was not overly exaggerated. His “conditions” are kept such that the effeminacy came off like a habitual “accent” rather than a natural disposition. C’s experiences will form a two-part foundation of this section: one was during his university student days two decades ago and the other during his working career. I will interject in each period with accounts from other queer men musicians in the similar positions, i.e., undergraduate students and government official teachers, to avoid any essentialization of queer men experiences in Thai classical music.

C confidently asserted that the conservatory had long been open and receptive (*poet-rap* เป็ตรีบ) of “alternative genders” (*pheet thaang lueak* เพศทางเลือก).² His reasoning was that students in the institution possessed a higher susceptibility to emotional and

² This term has now replaced *pheet thii saam* เพศที่สาม or “third gender” as an indication of changing ideas around gender identification in Thai culture. While many Thai feminist and queer activist use this term along with *khwaam laak laay thaang pheet* ความหลากหลายทางเพศ, many of my interlocutors used “third gender” and “alternative genders” interchangeably.

gender swings, the characteristic artist's spirit. Queer men's artistic and innovative virtues, and their ability to generate new trends in fashion, entertainment, and slang, seems to be a common justification for queer men's dominance and success in creative industries such as design and personal beautification in postcolonial Southeast Asia (Käng 2012: 481; see also Ho 2009). Contrastingly, however, C's assertion about the apparent openness towards gender diversity in Thai classical performing arts was countered by the degree of self-censorship in C's self-identification. He described his gender identity indirectly during my conversation with words *auk* ออก (out) and *pen* เป็น (to be).

It is important that I make a few notes regarding the translation of *auk* before proceeding. While *auk* in its literal sense means “out,” *auk saaw* (girlish) does not suggest that an individual comes “out” of the closet and is open about their gender or sexual identity that does not align with the status quo. Quite the opposite, *auk saaw* indicates a trace of effeminacy and is used with men. The closest Thai translation of “to come out [of the closet]” would be *poet tua* เปิดตัว, meaning to reveal or open oneself. In this sense, *auk saaw* or *pen* it is not a matter of being in or out of the closet. It is about when to subdue any possible signs that would otherwise shatter their curated gender and sexual ambiguity. Here is an example of C's use of these words when he reflected on the queer men presence during his undergraduate years in the 1990s:

“*Taun raek raek thii khao pai kau yang mai dai auk maak maay na...run phii nai khana...mii laay khon loey la tae khao mai dai auk khao pen maen tae rao ruu waa khao pen* ตอนแรกๆ ที่เข้าไปก็ยังไม่ได้ออกมากมายนะ...รุ่นพี่ในคณะ...มีหลายคนเลยล่ะ แต่เค้าไม่ได้บอก เค้าเป็นแมน แต่เรารู้ว่าเค้าเป็น”

(At first when I entered [the university] I was not **showing** [being girlish] that much... There were a lot of the men in my senior, but they did not **show** [being girlish]. They **were maen** [heteromasculine-presenting], but I knew that they **were** [not straight]).

In the context of gender performance, *auk* is usually paired with *saaw* สาว (a young lady), that is, *auk saaw*, to denote an exhibition or revealing of feminine comportment by a man. Similarly, *pen* is usually coupled with either *kathoey*, *tut*, or *kee* (gay)—for example, *pen kathoey* (to be *kathoey*)—to indicate one’s gendered sexuality. Simply saying *auk* and *pen* made a sentence incomplete, but it was a deliberate rhetorical move by C to talk about his gender performance without having to specify it explicitly. If C was adamant about the conservatory’s history of openness to alternative genders, why did he deliberately obscure his self-identification?

C may be correct in his assertion that Thai classical music, like other classical performing arts, has long been open to nonnormative gender individuals. This openness, in the case of queer men musicians, is valid as long as the musicians render their nonconformity ambiguous. In other words, they must conform to the heteronormative gender binary. This is precisely what happened on stage when queer men musicians play string instruments in Chapter 3. Effeminacy is allowed to be articulated while its potential transgression is mitigated by the inherent feminine nature of the instruments. The ostensibly visible effeminate musicking bodies of these musicians are thus made ambiguous. I argue that C’s open-ended identification is a similar tactic deployed by queer men musicians off stage. By doing so, queer musicians like C, and Mark and Chai (Chapter 3), made obvious their nonconformity against the established gender roles in both Thai classical music and government officials, yet they refused to be pinned down into any categories under the so-called “third gender” umbrella.

Two caveats must be given here. First, the gender and sexual ambiguity enabled by *pen* or not *pen* does not mean that a conversation like this can take place openly in public. Second, queer men outside Thai classical music circles also observe such obscure

responses when confronted with the moment of self-identification. To *auk* or to *pen* may illustrate a certain degree of oblique identification with queerness, but sometimes these musicians' display of queerness always runs the risk of breaking the threshold of gender ambiguity. Once the ambiguity collapsed, the confrontation between queerness and gender norms can be unwelcome despite its perceived queer-friendly status.

C continued that during his undergraduate days his effeminacy, coupled with the fact that *jakhee* was his major instrument, caused some concern among the faculty. C said one faculty member, a straight man who had worked in the department since its inception, was especially uncomfortable with his comportment on the grounds that it was "inappropriate." But C believed that the problem was also because of the professor's conservative personality, as he reflects:

"It's like, you know, I studied [to become a] teacher, and...[this professor]...was quite ancient-headed (*hua booraan* หัวโบราณ). So, to be a teacher you must set an example (*pen mae baeb* เป็นแม่แบบ) to the kids, right? So, he didn't want me to be...be like that. But at that time, I just transitioned from high school to university, and life was more independent. I just wanna have fun. But his professor would always call me and tell me off. I was not really happy with it. He even called my mom and reported about me!"

Quite clearly, the professor believed that to be a teacher means one must align their gender performance with biological sex. Effeminacy is inappropriate behavior for a male teacher because it sets a bad example to students who might copy their teacher. In most feuds like feuds like this, student had to follow their faculty's advice (read: order) even though they disagreed. That was not the case for C.

"Now that my mom was concerned about me [because of the professor], the next day I decided to vent it off at...[the professor]...I was like [*raised his voice and in rapid delivery*] 'who are you to be nosy with my stuff? Whatever I am (*pen*) is none of your business!' In hindsight I feel sorry for that, to be honest. But...[the professor] was never mad at me. He rather thought of it as a joke. Like when there was a queer man in a new cohort, he would say 'Ooooyyyy! Your senior

[classmate] was something. Their stuff is no joke (*khaung man raeng* ของมันแรง). You have a pioneer!”

C’s decision to confront the professor head-on established him as the iconic “pioneer” of queer men in the music department. His legacy left an impression on the professor that queer men musicians are unpredictable and can burst into an unthinkable action at any moment, hence the remark “their stuff is no joke” or *khaung man raeng* ของมันแรง.³

Even two decades later, several queer men musicians who studied at the same music department as C noticed the professor’s unchanging reactionary—though to a lesser degree—attitude toward gender-nonconforming students. P, a *piiphaat* musician self-identified as *pen*, joined the department in 2014, and said that he was warned by his senior classmates prior to an interview round in his admission process about this professor’s limited tolerance of gender nonconformity. As expected, the professor picked up on P’s soft masculinity and asked whether P likes to date men or women. P chose to be honest and said he likes to date men. P recalled that the professor’s recent homophobic anxiety over his student’s gender performance was at its peak around 2011-2012. During these years the incoming Thai music undergraduate students of the department were dominated by men with conspicuous feminine comportment or those who *auk saaw* อุกสาว. Fearing that these students might dress wear a skirt and a women’s blouse to class and giving a bad image to the department,⁴ the professor made sure that effeminacy was

³ See also my discussion on the perceived hostile environment of queer men string music circle in Chapter 5.

⁴ In Thailand, most public and private schools require that students wear a uniform. The same is true for most public universities. This uniform is gendered, i.e., men are wearing buttoned-up white color shirt and black trousers while women wear a more slim-fitted shirt and a skirt of the same respective colors. University uniform is considered a polite dress and students are expected to wear them going into classes. The professor in question was known to be very strict not only about uniform, but also wearing them in the right “gender.”

kept in check early on. He made these students take an oath before an altar of several masks of sacred Thai classical music deities that they would study hard (*tang jai rian* ตั้งใจเรียน) and not cross-dress as a woman (*taeng ying* แต่งหญิง). S, one of the queer men students majoring in *sau uu* from that cohort, recounted his response to the oath: “I promised him [the professor] that I would not cross-dress [as a woman]. But if there is a chance, then I am not so sure about it!”

Of course, not all queer men were willing to confront the professor’s anxious requests. Some of them identified themselves as *pen* but were never confronted with these questions from the professor because of the lack or absence of effeminate comportment. For the professor, homosexuality was not an issue. It was the effeminacy that he regarded as against the ethics of a teacher: setting an example of “correct” heteronormative gender practices. Coupled with the fact that Thai classical music practitioners are linked with the preservers of national heritage, whether from the perspectives of a teacher of Thai classical music, male effeminacy is considered a threat to Thainess (Käng 2012: 479). Anthropologist Dredge Käng notes a similar crisis of masculinity when a Thai K-pop cover-dance group Wonder Gay, parodying a K-Pop girl group Wonder Girls, made a viral video on YouTube in which they performed in school uniform, on a school stage, in front of the flagpole, but to a Korean song:

First, through mimicry of K-pop, Wonder Gay challenge the value of Thai music and more broadly Thai culture. Second, through their open queerness, Wonder Gay contest the appropriate expression of gender and sexuality in Thai society. As performing artists, they are expected to be good role models for youth, and their gender/sexuality are questioned by those who speak for the Thai public in this regard. Third, given an international online audience, the pride and shame of the nation are at stake (2018: 62).

While experiencing similar pushback, it should be noted that queer men Thai classical musicians are more restricted in their agency compared to queer subjects who

participate in popular cultures that are constantly glocalized. Megan Sinnott notes that the inter-Asian circulation of Korean popular culture, combined with local gay male linguistic practices, are the primary source of recent transformations in Thai queer women's aesthetic performances and linguistic categorizations (2012: 457). As a representation of Asian globality, K-pop provides new refashioning opportunities for Thai queer men to perform femininity as a kind of modern Asianness (Käng 2014: 568). This is not the case for queer men Thai classical musicians. The performance of effeminacy in Thai classical music, a tradition rooted in a nationalist discourse, stands in opposition to modern Asianness. Effeminacy in Thai classical music then harkens back to the local distinction of *kathoey* as an object of embarrassment and/or affectionate ridicule.

A senior queer man *jakhee* player from a very prestigious musical lineage was aware of the increased visibility of queer men musicians, but remained cautious about being too far out:

“I mean be [*pen*] whatever you want to be. But some things that can affect you [negatively], like being *kathoey* and then dressing as whatnot and then act deliriously [*phoe phoe* เพ้อ ๆ], are of course inappropriate. I think that's not right. This would result in that *kathoey* being comedic relief.”

His opinion serves as a reminder that queer men performance in string music is not analogous to dragging, though both generate important repercussions that unsettle hegemonic heteronormativity in different ways.

My point is not to polarize the local concept of Thai *kathoey* as premodern and the Western gay as a kind of inevitable modernity. Rather, I want to push back against the teleological notion that the *kathoey*'s aspiration to become gay is a modernizing evolution (though there are many who share this belief). Martin Manalansan argues that, in a

diasporic context, “Filipino gay men do not readily assimilate into modern gay personhood and instead actively recuperate the bakla [Filipino equivalent of *kathoey*] as a way to assert a particular kind of modernity” (2003: x). Similarly, queer men musicians do not—or rather *are not allowed*—to reach out and assimilate to modern Asianness; they are locked into an inherent association with *kathoey*. With the disconnect from popular culture to refashion their modern identities, queer men musicians must assimilate to the very gender and sexual regime of which they are a part. They must “keep their condition” or *kep aakaan* เก็บอาการ.

Kep Aakaan, Queer Potential, and Passing

“Keeping one’s condition” or *kep aakaan*, is vital for the survivability of queer men musicians in Thai classical music. This process is necessary because excessive effeminacy can shatter their social status, the epitome of Thainess as an artist and a teacher. As I suggested, some queer men face heavier pressure on their conditions (they are more effeminate) than others (they are cis-masculine-presenting). Given the transnational media’s empowering influence on queer men in Thailand to come out, having to keep one’s condition in Thai classical music seems to not bode well for nonconforming musicians. However, in this section, I treat “keeping one’s condition” as a strategy championed by queer men musicians as they blend in to conform, in some moments, and stir up their queerness to verge on transgression, on the other.

I argue that the pressure to “keep one’s condition” in Thai classical music is distinct from other notable Thai queer popular culture performances, for example, cover-dance, drag, and cabaret, mainly due to the controlled display of queerness and the absence of discursive modernity. However, the tradition surprisingly shares several parallels with Black gospel performance. Alisha Lola Jones notes that “[m]ale vocal

musicians have become the highly scrutinized worship leaders within black churches, evaluated for the ways in which the aural-visual features of their musical performance reveal their *queer potential*” (2020: 16, emphasis mine). Jones’s discussion of queer potential will frame my discussion of “keeping one’s condition” in this section.

Managing queer potential in the face of a heteropatriarchal system of expressive cultures and with moral values at stake is, I argue, the common denominator between Black male gospel performance and queer men string musicians in Thai classical music. Like Thai classical music, queer potential in Black gospel performances is suggested both visually, i.e., feminine gender expression that includes, for example, gesturing and speaking habits and aurally, i.e., the Black countertenor vocal who transcends the expectations of how gendered bodies make sound (59,73,85). Once detected, the display of queer potential became proof of queerness that a performer is “spiritually afflicted” (59) and needs to be delivered. Queer potential is also necessary within the worship experience, such that the musicians reveal contradictions that reinscribe a heterosexist ethos in Black gospel performance (26, 217). Jones gives the example of Patrick Dailey, a Black male countertenor performer, who “understood his conscious gestural heteropresentation [of ideal masculinity] as a necessary device for him to be viewed as a competent and appropriate minister” (84). In a sense, “keeping one’s condition” is a strategy to minimize the display of queer potential to mitigate social sanctions based on national morality in the case of Thai classical music and spiritual morality in Black gospel performance.

Let me return to the life story of C once again. Fast forward to his status as a vice-director of the conservatory with a PhD degree in the ethnographic present. C admitted

that the pressure to keep his condition is huge. But there is some wiggle rooms for him to go all out:

“Today, when I got my PhD degree and started working in administrative positions [*whispering*] I have to keep my conditions (*kep aakaan*) when I go out in the public, you know. Although every student here knows what I am, but when I speak, I must do my best to keep my conditions. It’s like I also have to maintain this aspect, but when students meet me [in a private space] I go all out (*tem thii เต็มที่*). I am myself (*pen tua khaung tua eeng* เป็นตัวของตัวเอง). But when I’m with a lot of students or in a teacher meeting, I have to remain composed (*samruam* ส้ารวม).

Like Patrick Dailey, C deploys what Jones describes as “performative mechanisms through which black men acquire an aura of sexual ambiguity, exhibit an ostensible absence of sexual preference, and thereby gain social and ritual prestige in gospel music” (19). Race is not a major factor for C, but the aura of sexual ambiguity and the exhibition of ostensible absence of sexual preference balances out any display of queer potential. As importantly at stake in the “keeping the condition” in C’s case is the public social prestige, especially when gender nonconformity—as opposed to homosexuality in Jones’s discussion—becomes much more precarious as one gains upward social mobility.

C’s use of *samruam* ส้ารวม with respect to keeping his condition is worth discussing. *Samruam* refers to one’s ability to refrain from making immediate gestures or emotional expression in an obvious, explicit, or exaggerated manner. This includes, for example, an ability to control one’s laughter, elation, anger, or even pain. *Samruam* is situational, i.e., a social etiquette that is expected in formal gatherings, as it is categorial, i.e., some groups of people are expected to be *samruam* more than others. Buddhist monks are the representative example of ones who lead a *samruam* life in its strictest sense. C’s sense of *samruam* also refers to controlled expressions, but what is to be controlled in this sense is not emotion *per se*. It is rather a sign of queer potential, in this

case effeminacy. Being *samruam* as a means of keeping one's condition is loaded not only with the pressure to conform, but also suggests the social and class status of *phuudii* or someone with a trained, refined, and learned heteronormative bodily deportment.

The pressure of keeping one's condition, however, is not universally felt across all queer men musicians. Let us consider a story from K, another queer man who my father mentioned. At the time of my interview with K, he had recently finished his doctoral degree and was about to participate in the commencement ceremony in December 2020. K was born and raised in Chumphon (ชุมพร), a province in Southern Thailand. He said that he joined the same university as C, but three years later. But unlike C, K was not as outspoken – he was quite timid and spoke softly to me. K told me that his undergraduate years were not as eventful as C's because he did not emphasize his effeminacy like C did. He did not like to cross-dress or wear makeup. His reason was: “I think it felt too much for me. If I can't help but being like this (*pen*), the least I can do is be a well-behaved student (*riaprauy* เรียบร้อย).” K's reasoning might illustrate his early development of sensitivity toward keeping his condition, for which he did not have to deal with the homophobic music professor at that time. However, through this very reasoning, he implied that being gender nonconforming is immoral, hence the necessity of being a well-behaved student.

For queer men musicians, keeping one's condition, becoming *samruam*, requires one to conform to the “appropriate” heteronormative norms to avoid any backlash stemming from failed gender/sexual ambiguity. Keeping one's condition can be considered an assimilating move by queer men musicians while participating in Thai classical music. Jose Esteban Muñoz uses the term “sexual assimilation” to echo Lisa Duggan's (2004) critique of homonormativity. Muñoz argues that homonormativity

suggests “the retreat [of homosexuality] into the private sphere that conservative homosexuals have participated in...” such that “assimilationist homosexuals are willing to “turn off and on” their sexuality” (2009: 54). Conforming, assimilation, and turning off/on queer men’s sexuality certainly are helpful concepts. Muñoz’s suggestion should bring us to an obvious conclusion that queer men musicians are systemically oppressed in Thai classical music. But C, and many queer men musicians with whom I talked, was adamant that they felt welcomed by the tradition and the institution they were in, and that keeping condition is simply necessary in this tradition.

Some contextualization is needed to situate what appears to be queer men musicians’ consensual conformity. While it is true that these musicians assimilate to institutionalized gender norms, they did not turn off and on their sexuality altogether. In fact, as I pointed out earlier, sexual orientation is as much the issue as gender performance. Instead, these musicians are already marked with signs of queer potential in the first place. For this, I argue that keeping condition is a process of ambiguating queerness through conformity. Keeping condition is also variously exercised and experienced, depending on a musician’s gender expression. Some might not feel the need while others must keep their condition on daily basis.

The conforming and assimilationist undertones of keeping conditions can also be expressed in terms of passing. That is, queer men musicians pass as heteromasculine and cis-male.⁵ Beyond the fact that this practice blurs carefully marked lines around gender and class and calls attention to the ways in which identity categories intersect, overlap, construct, and deconstruct one another, I am particularly interested in its conservative

⁵ I intentionally avoid describing the passing of queer men musicians as queer passing as straight. This is because, as I have reiterated throughout this chapter, sexual orientation is not the center of attention. It is the gender performance that induces the pressure to conform and assimilate.

aspect such that passing also holds larger social hierarchies firmly in place (Schlossberg 2001: 2–3).⁶ Certainly, my interlocutors’ passing in the form of keeping conditions reflects deeply entrenched and internalized heteronormative gender norms. Minimizing and obscuring otherwise obvious effeminacy are crucial means to passing in this case. The stakes and expectations of queer men musicians to pass as heteromasculine is more acute in such a socially respectable position as the Thai classical music teacher. Any display of queerness is thus more tolerated among those in the lower end of the Thai classical music social ladder, i.e., young queer men musicians; while it gradually becomes a charged morality concern as one gets older and transitions from a student to a teacher.

In Thai culture, queerness, whether in the form of male effeminacy or homosexuality, is judged differently in different social contexts (Jackson 2016: 91). C’s shifting gender navigation as a student and as an established administrator demonstrates this. For C, the priority of keeping conditions had more to do with retaining the legitimate position to command respect than disclosing sexuality, though the latter inevitably becomes part of the process.

Insofar as passing is concerned, queer men musicians’ condition-keeping in the social matrix of Thai classical exhibits several situated characteristics of the politics of respectability, a concept popularized by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham in her work on the women’s movements in the Black Baptist church between 1900 and 1920. The movements in this period saw Black Baptist women adopt the dominant White American morals and manners and condemned what they perceived to be negative practices among

⁶ Perhaps the most famous example of passing in the US American music scene is Billy Tipton, a male jazz musician who was identified posthumously as female (Middlebrook 1998). By passing as a man, Tipton gained access to and even succeeded in the male-dominated jazz musical space, but eventually her “shape-shifting became permanent” (Jurich 1999: 70).

their own people (Higginbotham 1993: 187)— what is called the “disavowal of the legitimacy of black rage” (Smith 2014). While the assimilationist leaning of the politics of respectability reinforced the hegemonic values of White America, it did and should not suggest the failure of African American women’s protest; the politics of respectability assumed a fluid and shifting position along a continuum of African American resistance (Higginbotham 1993: 187). Keeping in mind the underlying intersectional complexity of this cultural pattern, what Black Baptist women attempted through racialized discourses is parallel to my case in point along Thai gender expectations. To gain and maintain respect in Thai classical music institutions, queer men musicians assimilate to heteronormative gender norms while condemning male effeminacy.

But what then is the continuum along which the position of queer men musicians is fluid and shifting? Instead of race being the deciding factor, I argue that queer men musicians’ position is fluid and shifting along the multiple and intersecting plane of contexts. C’s narrative illustrates that the politics of respectability behind condition-keeping is constantly shaped by the appropriate time and place (*kaalatheesa* กาลเทศะ), class status, and age, of queer subjects. This is not to say that the social mechanism of respectability politics is only exercised by queer musicians. Straight musicians in government institutions too are mindful of upholding their status through embodying manners and civility. But to echo Patrick Jory’s comment about the long and politicized history of manners and civility in Thai culture (2021), the class-identifying and embodied display of civility assumes the naturalization of heteronormative gender norms. If, for example, a gender-conforming subject is overcome by emotions and lose their composure, they may be viewed as undeserving of their social position. For queer men musicians, any obvious display of effeminacy is a sign of “losing control” and subsequently a source of shame. My point is that queer men musicians, as much as they

have more gender “resources” to play with, must be cautious as to which gender resources to play and when, where, how, and with whom, they should play the resource(s). Drawing on the “wrong” gender resources in an inappropriate context can result in the loss of respectability.

Keeping one’s condition as a Thai classical music teacher operates on a similar basis of the homosexual closet, one that is driven by shame. Just as the closet became a pointed metaphor in the 1960s for the minoritized US queer community in a sense that homosexuality and transgender identities were considered shameful topics (Bobker 2020: 195), obvious displays of effeminacy by queer men musicians were a major source of uncivility, particularly as a teacher. But to say that queer men musicians like C develop a heightened sensibility toward certain displays of queerness that brings shame does not necessarily suggest that the social lives of these musicians follow the closet/out binary. This is, again, because gender performance is a driven factor for Thai classical music from which homosexuality is assumed. Philip Brett regards the intentional closeting of gay musicians in positions of power as an obliteration of homosexuality by silence, “one of the most crushing intellectual indictments of positivistic [Western art] musical scholarship” (2006: 16). Such, I argue, is not the case with C who embraces who he *is* (*pen เ็น*). C’s students and his colleagues know who he *is*. The closet, at least in its metaphorical sense, is not the point here, for keeping one’s conditions nonetheless leaves a trace of queer potential.⁷ C was not moving between a homo/heterosexual

⁷ Extending the ideas of closet and coming out as a dichotomized gay secrecy/disclosure (Sedgwick 1990: 67) can be tricky in Thai culture. To “come out” in Thai queer context does not just connote homosexuality but also gendered performance. In other words, when a man comes out, effeminacy is almost always expected. The most iconic examples of the localized meaning of coming out are from the case of two Thai pop singers Ben Chalait and Aof Pongsak. They first entered the industry as a hetero-presenting male. But after coming out in 2011 and 2013 respectively, both started embodying effeminate bodily comportments as an indicator of their post-closet selves. Gender-conforming homosexual men may be described by coming out, but the term does not contain the same gendered valence as effeminate queer men.

epistemological binary, but he was certainly negotiating a complicated set the gender lines.

Keeping one's condition may signify gender-role passing, which is in turn intertwined with the context-specific closet and the respectability politics. Steven Seidman describes the complexity of passing of closeted individuals as:

...not a simple, effortless act; not just about denial or suppression. The closeted individual closely monitors his or her speech, emotional expression, and behavior in order to avoid unwanted suspicion. The sexual meaning of the things (for example, clothes, furniture) and acts (for example, styles of walking, talking, posture) of daily life must be carefully read in order to skillfully fashion a convincing public heterosexual identity. For closeted individuals, daily life acquires a heightened sense of theatricality or performative deliberateness. The discrete, local practices of sexual identity that is the stuff of the closet reveals something of the workings of heterosexual domination but also of how gays negotiate this social terrain (Seidman 2003: 31).

C's example resonates with Seidman's statement regarding how subduing the obvious display of queerness means that gender nonconforming bodies become ambiguous enough to pass the scrutiny of heteronormative gender norms in Thai classical music. Again, keeping one's condition is contingent and context-dependent. I echo Christi-Anne Castro on the relationality closet: it is a "a moment-to-moment negotiation of passing" (2020: 115). What I have discussed is a reconciliatory mode of keeping one's condition that renders queerness ambiguously open-ended. However, there is also a different relationality of condition keeping. This mode simultaneously upholds the vibrancy of the display of queerness while fulfilling the expectation of hegemonic heteronormative norms.

Queer by Design and Gender Spectacle

The conservatory represents a government institution where heteronormative gender constructs are highly emphasized. The employees who are government officials (*khaaraatchakaan*) face the necessity to abide by the binarized gender ideals not only because they are regarded as exemplifying those with civil manners, but also because they are viewed as the preservers of the national culture (Thai classical musicians) and as cultural exemplars (teachers). While government institutions are places that straighten any display of queerness, this does not mean that queer men musicians are only left with the option of keeping their condition. This section will consider a specific navigation of queer subjects that elicits tolerance without having to constantly keep their conditions in public.

Let me provide a story from N, a senior *sau uu* player who was the director of a Thai classical music ensemble at a non-conservatory government institution. As a government official in a non-teaching institution, N's status was quite distinct from but not unrelated to that of C. N was a full-time professional musician but did not carry the weight of example-setting as would a teacher.⁸ N shared the same attitude as C regarding the queer-friendly nature of Thai classical music. N started working in this institution first as a part-time hire around the early 1990s before he received tenure as a government official a few years later.

Despite N's respectable position in his workplace, his display of queerness was much more obvious. His fitted shirt and trousers, light facial makeup, his side-parting hairstyle that almost looked like a bob, conspicuous jewels on his rings, and a side-

⁸ While N's official position was an artist rather than a teacher, he had several students who deposited themselves to be his student. It was thus not uncommon to hear his name preceded by the *khruu* honorific from the queer men string music circle.

carrying tote bag gave me the impression of a David-Bowie-like androgynous look – just not as flashy. The way he inflected the ending word in a sentence and gestured with flexed fingers during an interview session were a clear sign of effeminacy, which was later confirmed by his use of feminized particle *kha* or *คะ* during our conversation.

I was surprised by N's intermittent insertion of English words. Not that Thais did not use words borrowed from English and other languages in vernacular language, but N's English word choices were not common among Thai speakers. He intentionally used the words “against” in English sense to say that his workplace was not against gender nonconforming musicians (“*thii nii mai against na*” or “*ที่นี้ไม่มี against นะ*”). He went on to reflect that there was almost no need to keep his condition during his college days when he was still exploring various Thai classical music instruments:

N: There are some instruments that I just can't [master]. *Khaung* [*moving his hand around himself to gesture the gong's circular rack*]

Me: Wait, you learned *khaung* too?

N: [*Nodding profusely*] Of course! There was one elective course back in the day that all students must play *khaung* to learn the basic melody and variation melody. And you know what, as soon as I grabbed the gong mallets [*closing his eyes, his hands fumbling as though he was sleep walking*] I got sleepy...SLEEPY!!! My teacher was like “COME ON DAUGHTER [Ooooy luuk saw โอ้ย ลูกสาว] !!!

What's the matter?”

Me: Daughter?

N: Yep, daughter. You see I used to be much more girlish [*auk saaw*]. Like I dyed my hair red [*waving his hands around his heard*], put on lipstick. It's like...you know...a drag queen. I went all out. Not to mention skinny pants, stiletto heels, and what not. I still did dress like that when I started working here.

Me: Did your teacher not say anything?

N: [*Shaking his head profusely and in high vocal register*] He knew! All the [string music] students were all *kathoey*, and all teachers knew it! Those teachers taught at many universities, why wouldn't they notice this pattern? But they saw [*kathoey*] as adorable [*naa rak* น่ารัก]. But these people tended to their teachers

like no men could ever do. They would be like “*khruu khaa* this *khruu khaa* that,” while all the men would be out drinking.

The surrounding social circumstances between N’s and C’s gender performances were strikingly polarized. Let us not forget that N was also pursuing a teaching degree in Thai classical music at his university. Yet he could cross-dress—what he called *drag queen*—and went to school with little to no backlash from his teachers. N’s teacher addressed him as “daughter” out of affection, but this also showed that N’s queerness was perceived along gender lines, i.e., the feminine comportment. Perhaps the almost accepting musical environment through N’s perspective was because he was surrounded by professional Thai classical musicians rather than professors like C. And it was the professional musicians who would also constitute N’s colleagues when he was hired at his workplace as a musician. The stakes to keep one’s condition seems to me much lower when teaching is not the primary task.

If we are to go by the tolerated-but-not accepted principle of Thai culture toward queer subjects, it was remarkable that N’s obvious display of queerness did not result in a social sanction from his co-workers who were straight—and mostly men—musicians. Instead of being a source of shame, N’s articulated effeminacy was seen as quaint or *naa enduu* น่าเอ็นดู. N’s recollection of his early days illustrates that there was room for queer articulation in Thai musicians. This was, again, contextually contingent. Without the heteronormative gaze coming from the cognizant social status of teacher, N’s off-stage bodily conduct was not subject to the same policing as the case of C. But as much as I admired and respected N, I was far from being convinced that Thai classical music was receptive of queer display coming from gender nonconforming musicians. The reason lies within N’s explanation:

N: There is no [homophobic] discrimination here. Like I said, I used to dress more [effeminately] and there were no consequences. There is no bullying here because

I was in the performing arts division and people know that [colleagues in this division are queer].

I found N's remark, which was similar to what C observed earlier, remarkable because it reveals the shifting function of the classical (and elite) musical practice as it captures the feudal essence of the bygone era but is now placed in a new bureaucratic social structure. The consequence of such repositioning of the classical performing arts with respect to the Thai governmental organizations, caused by the accumulated epochal changes from feudalism to bureaucracy since the 1932 revolution, can be understood through Marx's framework. I will briefly draw on Regula Qureshi, who uses Marxist mode of production theory to critically consider Hindustani music within its social structure and political economy (2000), to argue that the highly valorized sonic sublime—power and authority through the transmission of ritualized esoteric knowledge (Wong 2001)—of the Thai musical “art” attains a queer status in the government institution. In the bureaucratic social structure, those participating in classical performances still maintain what Peter Manuel calls “‘residual’ elements that linger on from the past historical periods” (Manuel 2019: 53) while being placed in a niche corner of the capitalist-oriented government organizations. Situated within the government's social structure that naturalizes the performance of heteronormativity, the sublime world of Thai classical music and dance is placed outside this normative frame. Within this sublime world, some modes of performance disrupt and unsettle the heteronormative social norms now endorsed by the state. Consequently, those who participate in the sublime world of performing arts are often seen as being deviant from social norms, including the gender and sexual ones. Such grounding is not to gloss over a Marxist political economy framework to understand traditional musics, but I suggest that the discursive shift surrounding classical performing arts and those who participate in it is directly and closely tied to corresponding state formations.

The expectation that those involved in classical performing arts are queer illustrates that the sublime is associated with a place for the social misfits, a place where gender norms are suspended, and a place where queerness is allowed. N's and C's remark that Thai classical music is queer-friendly must be reconsidered in a larger socio-cultural frame in which its discourse is produced and sustained. Classical performing arts in government organizations represents a marginalized queer sublime space outside, but not separated from, the heteronormative bureaucratic social structure. As a practitioner, though not queer-identified, I find it painful to argue that perhaps the queer-friendly world of Thai classical music is a myth, just like how Thailand is falsely understood as an exotic gay paradise (Morris 1994: 15; Jackson 2016: 37–40). Supeena Insee Adler (2014) notes the discourse of “endangered by design” surrounding the string-reed ensemble called *khrueng saay pii chawaa* เครื่องสายปี่ชวา was created to ensure the “righteous” inheritors of this musical knowledge. A parallel could be drawn here about queer men musicians in government institution. The queer-friendly attitude was possible because Thai classical music was itself queer-by-design with respect to the heteronormative social structure of government institutions.

N did not have to be careful about keeping his condition, but this does not mean that he is free from the social force of heteronormative gender structure. He was instead willing to fulfill the expected heteronormative gender roles that earned him a heightened tolerance despite his obvious display of queerness. He recalled in his early days when he was a junior musician that he had to do all the labor, particularly moving a full set of *piiphaat* and string ensembles that contained several heavy instruments from the storage to recording studios and back. He was also responsible for moving these heavy instruments when his workplace had a public concert performance, which they often did. In addition to moving, he was tasked with setting up the ensembles so they were ready to

play when the senior musicians arrived. His job back then was basically to arrive early and leave late, and N did all this with another colleague who was also a queer man.

As N was telling me about this experience with great enthusiasm, he summed up his laborious experience as “two *kathoeyes* were moving the instruments” (*kathoey saung khon khon khrueng* เกษยสองคนขนเครื่อง). N’s description is worth discussing because it reveals the gender division of labor in Thai classical music tradition. N’s use of the catch-all term *kathoey* refers to effeminate men musicians who would usually be associated with the “light” labor works meant for women in a musical performance like drapery, floral decoration, and cooking. Moving instruments, or *khon khrueng*, on the other hand, is a term understood among Thai classical musicians as men’s work. To have *kathoeyes* move the instruments thus creates a dissonance between the embodied (effeminacy) and performed (moving instruments) gender of the male bodies. But as unassuming and commonplace as it is, I argue that the phrase is a fine example of how queerness is woven into heteronormative gender norms. While I have argued in Chapter 3 that queerness provides additional gender resources for these string musicians toward musicking, N’s example suggests quite the opposite. N’s effeminacy was tolerable under the condition that he fulfilled the normalized gender roles of a male body, i.e., literally doing the heavy lifting.

N’s experience is not unique. During my undergraduate days, my queer men friends would always avoid moving instruments whenever we had a performance outside of the department saying that it was not their thing. They would nonetheless help with moving the lighter instruments like the string instruments and the rhythmic ones. They would gravitate towards feminized forms of labor such as food preparation, flower arrangement, and drapery, but I would always hear them say playfully that the ideal

situation would be to sit still and look pretty, not drenched in sweat! Of course, there were also less effeminate queer men friends who were not as reluctant to move the instruments. However, when a faculty member from the department was present, these queer men friends had no choice but to help move a few heavy instruments or they would be reprimanded for being selfish. I provide my own insights to suggest that shame stemming from queerness, particularly male effeminacy, in this case is mitigated by the performance of normative masculinity. Although this creates an unsettling moment of gender dissonance, it reassures that male effeminacy does not overthrow normative masculinity. Queerness in Thai classical music indeed charts unexplored aesthetics, otherwise sensual possibility, messy reality, and cultural critique. But against the state institutions that many queer men musicians call home, queerness, I am afraid, does not upend but rather upholds heteronormative norms in Thai classical music.

Looking Ahead: The (In)applicability of the Closet and Queer Worldmaking

I have unpacked multiple ways that heteronormative norms in Thai classical music are unsettled by queer men musicians only to argue that this does little to interrogate those norms, and this may seem like a pessimistic place to end my study. The musicking of queer men musicians is not overtly politicized but rather relies on oblique identification with heteronormative gender norms. Most of my interlocutors regarded the homophobic attitude in Thai classical music as an individual issue rather than a structural one, a perspective I duly respected. They acquired a heightened sensitivity toward time-place appropriateness or *kaalatheesa* to decide whether and to what extent they could/should keep their conditions. I sometimes tried to push it by asking my interlocutors about the system that forces them to constantly assess appropriateness. The answer I got was essentially that “it is what it is.” Queer musicking operates carefully

along the customs that naturalize the tradition's gendered social order, reaffirming gender roles and patriarchy in the process (Sugarman 1997: 244). This, I argue, makes any scholarly intervention even more pressing precisely because it raises an example in which queerness does not refuse but works alongside heteronormativity, albeit asymmetrically. I also argue that the seeming lack of cultural critique of queer performances in classical tradition also warrants critical scholarly attention.

Critical closet narratives underscore the significance of this dissertation. As I wrote above, queer men musicians' efforts to keep their condition shares certain similarities with being closeted. It is similar in a sense that the closet for queer men musicians operates through a refusal to be named except by implication. David Halperin argues that homosexuality's closet is more than just disclosing or hiding homosexuality. According to Halperin, the closet conceals queer affects, sensibility, identification, habitus and style by recoding heterosexual practices (Halperin 2002: 29). This, I argue, is what takes place within the musicking and the quotidian lives of queer men musicians. It is not so much about the dichotomy of "coming out" or "being closeted" *per se*. It is about the gender management of sexual identity within the institutionalized culture that is organized around dichotomous gender identities and the ideal of heterosexual norms (Seidman 2003: 50). In this light, I echo Eve Sedgwick's incisive remark that the closet is constructed as a structure that perpetuates heterosexuality through what she calls a "double-binding effect" of minoritizing and universalizing discourses (1990). Likewise, queer men musicians expose the closet epistemology—the problem of knowing that in turn exposes the presumptive heterosexuality through the articulation and ambiguity of gender performances (Chambers 2003: 26). But if heteronormativity has been heavily theorized as an oppressive threat, why are queer men musicians willing to engage in embodied and musical performances that work to perpetuate it?

I would be naïve to claim that queer men musicians were uncritical about their own choices. Certainly, theoretical models from in queer studies has barely penetrated Thai culture, let alone its classical music scenes. But I would argue that these musicians understood the stakes of being queer men Thai classical musician. This state-endorsed expressive culture becomes the means through which an underrepresented individual can gain social mobility, particularly as a government official. One can gain even greater social capital by associating with authoritative musical lineages, which could ultimately lead to a connection with the royal family. For someone whose gender performance is deemed against the heteronormative ideals of the state, Thai classical music confers an aura of prestige through its esoteric knowledge and the honorable status of teacher. This prestige in turn guards musicians from potential social sanctions aimed at their gender nonconformity. These advantages are a significant impetus for queer men musicians to partake, but not submit to, heteronormative norms to compensate for any perceived gender and sexual deviance.

Is Thai classical music then a safe space for queer men musicians, or any queer musicians for that matter? My answer is still yes, with the same asterisk. It is a safe space as long as the display of queerness either remains ambiguous or fulfills heteronormative gender norms. This allows queer musicking bodies and homoeroticism to percolate through the otherwise straight musical tradition. But once this ambiguity or the expected fulfillment fails, heavy social sanctions can be inflicted on queer men musicians. They can be, for example, subjected to pejorative gossip by the queer men musician's watchful circle, excluded from social gatherings in the form of rehearsals, gigs, and concerts, or accused of being "uncivil" for their obvious effeminacy.

Queer men's presence in a classical music tradition exemplifies the tension of a gendered/sexual minoritarian subject who navigates within a majoritarian culture. But this is not a unique scenario. Queer men's presence is common in Thai classical dance. Pichet Klunchun and Prumsodun Ok are two such influential figures in the classical dance of Thailand and Cambodia, respectively. Their performance motives are quite clear: to break the heteronormative norms of their respective classical genre. There are a few similar examples in Thai classical music performances: an unorthodox rearrangement of "Surintharaahu" solo on *jakhee* performed by Saharat Chanchaloem is one such example. Saharat admitted the popularity of *jakhee* among queer men musicians (Anant 2003), but refused to situate this particular performance within any homoerotic interpretations. What then might be learned from these nonnormative musical performances when they do not achieve heteronormative critique? Is such a performance queer after all?

I believe it is. I view the many modes of participation of queer men musicians as queer in the sense that they expose deeply entrenched heteronormative structures in Thai classical music. These musicians may not refuse, deny, or disrupt this structure, but their performances and participation unsettle the structure's fixity and supposed naturalness that has for so long evaded scholarly examination. Whether knowingly or inadvertently, queer men musicians' musicking is a worldmaking process since it, in Dorinne Kondo's words, "evokes sociopolitical transformation and the impossibility of escaping power, history, and culture" (2018: 29). Building on her core idea that "[w]orldmaking advances the bold argument that race and gender pervade aesthetic form" in the theater (45), I contend that the musical and social life of queer men musicians exposes the worldmaking presumptions of the pervasive heteronormative, national, and moral characteristics of Thai classical music. Those presumptions create majoritarian and minoritarian subjects.

But as discussed throughout this dissertation, queer men musicians' careful, strategic social navigation blurs this distinction. They "make/unmake/remake worlds" (54).

But queer men musicians' worldmaking does not substantially critique the dominant heteronormative structures of Thai classical music. Instead, it offers glimpses of a glitch in the structure. Such embodied and musical performances are not always "out there" but rather tacit. According to Jose Esteban Muñoz, one of the ways to prove and read queerness and its gestures is to suture it to the concept of ephemera: "as a trace, the remains, the things that are left, hanging in the air like a rumor" (2009: 65). I argue that the display of queerness in Thai classical music is just that. Despite its articulation, the display of queerness is filled with the intention to be lost in space or in relation to the space heteronormativity (72). Being lost does not mean being passively swallowed by the dominant culture. Queer men musicians agentively and obliquely tailor their musical and social selves in ways that are illegible through a straight lens. This very tactic of making themselves lost through the ephemera of queer gestures is what allows them to thrive within Thailand's most conservative musical tradition.

Queer men in Thai classical string music demonstrates a challenging example of queer worldmaking because their performance aims more to reconcile with than break from the heteronormative confines of the dominant culture. One might ask whether this is a queer worldmaking at all because it does not explicitly generate cultural critique. My sense is that in a culture where minoritized queer subjects are closely intertwined with gender performance and are marked for high social stakes, a direct confrontation with heteronormativity is unwise. My dissertation offers one of many possible angles to examine how queer men musicians find a workaround to turn the heteronormative structures in Thai classical music in their favor. I argue that these musicians constantly

enact queer worldmaking. They allow a glimpse of queerness as an ideal that productively unsettles, as a potentiality that is visible on the horizon (to paraphrase Muñoz), and as an “another world” of otherwise possibilities. However ephemeral and reconciliatory, queer men musicians in Thai classical music is surely making a world right under the nose of heteronormative one. By conceptualizing queer performance in classical performing arts in this way, I hope that this dissertation charts a refreshing perspective on mediated queerness. My approach aims to extend queer theories beyond popular expressive cultures into nonnormative performances in Southeast Asia’s traditional artforms, a disciplinary realm that has long invited gender-transvestism.

The oblique and often ambiguous place of queerness in Thai classical music may not work toward queer utopian futurity, the not-yet-there horizon suggested by queer-of-color critiques (Muñoz 2009). This observation is even more evident given that queer men in Thai classical string music seem to exist in isolation from other LGBT movements. Their world is variously influenced by those movements, but the different positionality of queer men musicians means that their participation in a larger LGBT activism seems relatively muted. While it is true that Thai classical music provides a sociocultural leverage toward the tolerate-but-not-accepted attitude on gender nonconformity, queer men in classical performing arts face just as many heteronormative constraints than other queer communities. I argue that queer men musicians’ meagre involvement in LGBT activism illustrates the fluidity of gender and sexuality. For many queer men musicians, queerness is not necessarily a layer of identity to be made visible or politicized. But as LGBT movements generate increasing awareness of gender oppression and homophobic discourse, and as queer men musicians become more visible, it is exciting to what these musicians will bring to Thai classical music in the foreseeable future.

As oblique and conciliatory as their presence may be, we should not let this overshadow the crucial contributions queer men musicians bring to this music tradition. After all, these musicians have been integral to the proliferation of the string music tradition for the past fifty years. Their musical and social aesthetics ensure that the string tradition remains relevant and holds spiritual values as important as those in the dominant *piiphaat* music, all while playing an explicitly secondary role in the epistemology and cosmology of this music culture. These musicians, whose creativity, born partly against and partly in support of compulsory heteronormativity, push gendered boundaries and seek other possibilities to imagine as well as embody other musical pleasures unrecognized by the dominant narratives. I have learned that the perceived hostile music circle of queer men musicians is both a consequence and a response to the heteronormative gender-defined rules. And whether I, a cisgender straight men *piiphaat* practitioner, end up being the subject of gossip, I have nothing but respect and gratitude for the queer men musicians who welcomed me into their circles. Without these musicians, the *waikhruu* altars would not be as elegantly decorated, the musical lineage bonds would not be as close-knit, and most importantly, Thai classical music would not be as *saep* or spicy. Queer men in Thai classical string music may be known to add color to this tradition, but I argue that such color is much more humanizing and critical than compulsory heteronormativity allows them to be. They make Thai classical music alive.

This dissertation is incomplete in the sense that it does not present a comprehensive view of the musical and social lives of all queer musicians in Thailand. But that was never my intention. I have illustrated some ways that ethnomusicological and ethnographic inquiries can generate critically meaningful interventions in scholarship on Thai classical music. I hope that my scholarly endeavor will spark further conversation regarding non-normative performances not only in Thailand, but in any

classical heteronormative traditions where queerness manifests itself. Because queerness represents a potentiality, my work does not signify an end. My dissertation is part of a larger conversation in ethnomusicology, where sexuality is waiting to be engaged, dialoged, disputed, and no longer denied.

Bibliography

- Abrahams, Roger D. 1970. "A Performance-Centred Approach to Gossip." *Man* 5 (2): 290–301. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2799654>.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1991. "Writing against Culture." In *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, edited by Richard G. Fox, 137–62. Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press.
- Adler, Supeena Insee. 2014. "Music for the Few: Nationalism and Thai Royal Authority." PhD diss., Riverside, California: University of California, Riverside.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2006. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Anant Narkkong. 2003. "กระทบสายร้ายเรียงเพียงใจไหว Krathop Saay Raay Riang Phiang Chai Wai [Ringing the String, Gracing the Wavering Heart]." *Phleng Dontri [Music Journal]* 9 (6): 13–23.
- Andaya, Barbara Watson. 2006. *The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Anderson, Benedict R. 1986. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Atkinson, Jane Monnig, and Shelly Errington, eds. 1990. *Power and Difference: Gender in Island Southeast Asia*. California: Stanford University Press.
- Barmé, Scot. 2002. *Woman, Man, Bangkok: Love, Sex, and Popular Culture in Thailand*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Barz, Gregory F. 2020. "Queering the Field: An Introduction." In *Queering the Field: Sounding Out Ethnomusicology*, edited by Gregory F. Barz and William Cheng, 7–30. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Becker, Judith. 1980. "A Southeast Asian Musical Process: Thai Thăw and Javanese Irama." *Ethnomusicology* 24 (3): 453–64. <https://doi.org/10.2307/851153>.
- Berlant, Lauren, and Michael Warner. 1998. "Sex in Public." *Critical Inquiry* 24 (2): 547–66.
- Blackwood, Evelyn. 2005. "Gender Transgression in Colonial and Postcolonial Indonesia." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 64 (4): 849–79.
- Bobker, Danielle. 2020. *The Closet: The Eighteenth-Century Architecture of Intimacy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Boellstorff, Tom. 2004. "'Gay' Language and Indonesia: Registering Belonging." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 14 (2): 248–68.
- . 2006. "Gay and Lesbian Indonesians and the Idea of the Nation." *Social Analysis* 50 (1): 158–63. <https://doi.org/10.3167/015597706780886102>.
- . 2007. *A Coincidence of Desires: Anthropology, Queer Studies, Indonesia*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.

- Boonwadee Montrikul Na Ayuthaya. 2016. "The Role of Women : A Perspective in Thai Social Justice." *Governance Journal [วารสารการบริหารปกครอง]* 5 (2): 24–37.
- Brett, Philip. 1994. "Are You Musical? Is It Queer to Be Queer? Philip Brett Charts the Rise of Gay Musicology." *The Musical Times* 135 (1816): 370–76. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1003225>.
- . 2006. "Musicality, Essentialism, and the Closet." In *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, edited by Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas, 2nd ed., 9–26. New York: Routledge.
- Brett, Philip., Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas, eds. 1994. *Queering the Pitch : The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*. New York: Routledge.
- Buckland, Fiona. 2002. *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Butler, Judith. 1999. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Cannon, Alexander M. 2020. "Outing the Methodological No- No: Translating Queer Space to Field Space." In *Queering the Field: Sounding Out Ethnomusicology*, edited by Gregory F. Barz and William Cheng, 120–38. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Castro, Christi-Anne. 2020. "Queerness, Ambiguity, Ethnography." In *Queering the Field: Sounding Out Ethnomusicology*, edited by Gregory F. Barz and William Cheng, 106–19. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Chalermasak Pikulsri. 1999. *สังคีตนิยมว่าด้วยดนตรีไทย Sangkiit Niyom Waa Duay Dontrii Thai [Music Appreciation on Thai Classical Music]*. 2nd (1987). Bangkok: Odeon Store.
- Chambers, Samuel A. 2003. "Telepistemology of the Closet; or, The Queer Politics of Six Feet Under." *The Journal of American Culture* 26 (1): 24–41. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1542-734X.00071>.
- Chanan Yodhong. 2019. "นายใน" สมัยรัชกาลที่ ๖ "Naai Nai" *Samai Ratchakaan Thii Hok ["Court Males" during the King Rama VI Reign]*. 7th ed. Bangkok: Matichon.
- Chidpong Songsermvorakul. 2014. "ครูกับศิษย์ Kruu Kap Sit [Teacher and Student]." In *บูชาครูผู้เป็นที่รักและยินดี "90 ปี คุณครูระตี วิเศษสุรการ" Buuchaa Khruu Phuu Pen Thii Rak Lae Yindii "90 Pii Khun Khruu Ratii Wisetsurakan" [An Homage to the Endearred and Welcome Teacher "90 Years of Teacher Ratii Wisetsurakan]*, edited by Ttirapaun Yincharoen and Sakarin Subun, 62–64. Bangkok: P Press.
- Chua, Lynette J. 2019. *The Politics of Love in Myanmar: Lgbt Mobilization and Human Rights as a Way of Life*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Crawley, Ashon T. 2017. *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- . 2020. *The Lonely Letters*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Cusick, Suzanne G. 2006. "On a Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort Not to Think Straight." In *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*,

edited by Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas, 2nd ed., 67–83. New York: Routledge.

- Daughtry, J. Martin. 2015. *Listening to War: Sound, Music, Trauma and Survival in Wartime Iraq*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dazey, Margot. 2021. “Rethinking Respectability Politics.” *The British Journal of Sociology* 72 (3): 580–93. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12810>.
- Decker, Andrea. 2020. “Hidden for Their Protection: Gendered Power, Provocation, and Representation in Dangdut Competition Television.” *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde / Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 176 (1): 37–69. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-17601002>.
- Duggan, Lisa. 2004. *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Erlmann, Veit. 2004. “But What of the Ethnographic Ear? Anthropology, Sound and the Senses.” In *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening, and Modernity*, edited by Veit Erlmann, 1–20. Oxford: Berg.
- Feld, Steven. 2003. “A Rainforest Acoustemology.” In *The Auditory Culture Reader*, edited by Michael Bull and Les Back, 223–40. Oxford: Berg.
- Fordham, Graham. 2001. “Moral Panic and the Construction of National Order: HIV/AIDS Risk Groups and Moral Boundaries in the Creation of Modern Thailand.” *Critique of Anthropology* 21 (3): 259–316. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X0102100301>.
- Fordham, Graham, Cornelia Ann Kammerer, Ron Provencher, Patricia V. Symonds, Nicola Tannenbaum, Mark Vanlandingham, and Ara Wilson. 1998. “Northern Thai Male Culture and the Assessment of HIV Risk: Toward a New Approach.” *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 12 (1): 77–164.
- Fuhrmann, Arnika. 2016. *Ghostly Desires: Queer Sexuality and Vernacular Buddhism in Contemporary Thai Cinema*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Garcia, J. Neil. 1996. *Philippine Gay Culture: The Last Thirty Years : Binabae to Bakla, Silahis to MSM*. Diliman: University of the Philippines Press.
- Garcia, Luis-Manuel. 2020. “The Queer Concerns of Nightlife Fieldwork.” In *Queering the Field: Sounding Out Ethnomusicology*, edited by Gregory F. Barz and William Cheng, 335–52. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Garzoli, John. 2015. “The Myth of Equidistance in Thai Tuning.” *Analytical Approaches to World Music* 4 (2): 1–29.
- Gaunt, Kyra D. 2002. “Got Rhythm?: Difficult Encounters in Theory and Practice and Other Participatory Discrepancies in Music.” *City & Society* 14 (1): 119–40. <https://doi.org/10.1525/city.2002.14.1.119>.
- Giglio, Virginia. 1993. Review of *Review of Music, Gender, and Culture*, by Marcia Herndon, Susanne Ziegler, and Max Peter Baumann. *Ethnomusicology* 37 (1): 115–17. <https://doi.org/10.2307/852250>.

- Gluckman, Max. 1963. "Papers in Honor of Melville J. Herskovits: Gossip and Scandal." *Current Anthropology* 4 (3): 307–16.
- Halberstam, Jack. 1998. *Female Masculinity*. Twentieth anniversary edition with a new preface. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Halperin, David M. 1995. *Saint Foucault : Towards a Gay Hagiography*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 2002. "Homosexuality's Closet." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 41 (1): 21–54.
- . 2003. "The Normalization of Queer Theory." *Journal of Homosexuality* 45 (2–4): 339–43. https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v45n02_17.
- Hayes, Eileen M. 2010. *Songs in Black and Lavender: Race, Sexual Politics, and Women's Music*. African American Music in Global Perspective. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Hemarat Hemhongs. 1998. "วิวัฒนาการการถ่ายทอดการบรรเลงจะเข้: การศึกษาเชิงประวัติศาสตร์ Wiwatthanaakaan Kaan Thaaythaud Kaan Banleeng Jakhee: Kaan Sueksaa Choeng Prawattisaat [The Evolution of the Transmission in Jakhae Performance: A Historical Research." MEd Thesis, Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University.
- Herndon, Marcia, Suzanne Ziegler, International Council for Traditional Music, and ICTM Study Group on Music and Gender. 1990. *Music, Gender, and Culture*. Wilhelmshaven, West Germany: Florian Noetzel Verlag.
- Hess, Juliet. 2018. "A 'Discomfortable' Approach to Music Education Re-Envisioning the 'Strange Encounter.'" *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 26 (1): 24–45. <https://doi.org/10.2979/philmusieducrevi.26.1.03>.
- Hidalgo, Danielle Antoinette. 2009. "Expressions on a Dance Floor: Embodying Geographies of Genders and Sexualities in Bangkok Nightclubbing." *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*. Ph.D., California: University of California, Santa Barbara.
- Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. 1993. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Ho, Tamara C. 2009. "Transgender, Transgression, and Translation: A Cartography of Nat Kadaws: Notes on Gender and Sexuality within the Spirit Cult of Burma." *Discourse* 31 (3): 273–317.
- Jackson, Peter A. 1995. "Thai Buddhist Accounts of Male Homosexuality and AIDS in the 1980s." *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 6 (3): 140–53.
- . 2000. "An Explosion of Thai Identities: Global Queering and Re-Imagining Queer Theory." *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 2 (4): 405–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691050050174422>.
- . 2004. "Phet: An Indigenous Thai Discourse - Why Foucault's Theory of Sexuality Must Be Adapted in Studying Thai Culture." *Journal of Language and Culture* 23 (1): 57–66.

- . 2011. *Queer Bangkok: 21st Century Markets, Media, and Rights*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucr/detail.action?docID=863883>.
- . 2012. “Introduction to the English Edition.” In *Thai Sex Talk: Thai Language of Sex and Sexuality in Thailand*, edited by Pimpawun Boonmongkon and Peter A. Jackson, 5–14. Chiang Mai: Mekong Press.
- . 2016. *First Queer Voices from Thailand: Uncle Go’s Advice Columns for Gays, Lesbians and Kathoeyes*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Jones, Alisha Lola. 2020. *Flaming?: The Peculiar Theopolitics of Fire and Desire in Black Male Gospel Performance*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jory, Patrick. 2021. *A History of Manners and Civility in Thailand*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jurich, Marilyn. 1999. “The Female Trickster—Known as Trickstar—As Exemplified by Two American Legendary Women, ‘Billy’ Tipton and Mother Jones.” *Journal of American Culture* 22 (1): 69–75. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1542-734X.1999.00069.x>.
- Kammales Photikanit and Patcharin Sirasoonthorn. 2018. “Reconstruction of Social Ideology through the Power of Music: Case Study of Suntaraporn Band, Thailand.” *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences* 39 (2): 343–50.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.kjss.2018.05.003>.
- Kanchanapradit, Jarun. 2018. “การศึกษาเพลงเดี่ยวจากแผ่นเสียงโบราณ Kaan Sueksaa Phleeng Diaw Jaak Phaensiang Booraan [A Study of Solo Repertoire from Gramophone Records].” *Journal of Education Studies* 46 (4): 79–99.
- Kanchanapradit, Jarun, and Wanida Bhrammaputra. 2015. “Rājādhīrāt: From the History to an Influential Literature for Mon-Accented Thai Traditional Repertoires.” *International Journal of Creative and Arts Studies* 2 (2): 23–34.
- Käng, Dredge Byung’chu. 2012. “Kathoey ‘In Trend’: Emergent Genderscapes, National Anxieties and the Re-Signification of Male-Bodied Effeminacy in Thailand.” *Asian Studies Review* 36 (4): 475–94.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2012.741043>.
- . 2014a. “Conceptualizing Thai Genderscapes: Transformation and Continuity in the Thai Sex/Gender System.” In *Contemporary Socio-Cultural and Political Perspectives in Thailand*, edited by Pranee Liamputtong, 409–29. Dordrecht: Springer.
- . 2014b. “Idols of Development: Transnational Transgender Performance in Thai K-Pop Cover Dance.” *TSO: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1 (4): 559–71.
<https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2815246>.
- . 2018. “Surfing the Korean Wave: Wonder Gays and the Crisis of Thai Masculinity.” *Visual Anthropology* 31 (1–2): 45–65.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08949468.2018.1428013>.

- . 2019. “The Softening of Butches: The Adoption of Korean ‘Soft’ Masculinity among Thai Toms.” In *Pop Empires*, edited by S. Heijin Lee, Monika Mehta, and Robert Ji-Song Ku, 19–36. University of Hawai’i Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv7r429w.7>.
- Kannaphon Yothinchatchawal. 2001. “ดนตรีผสม ‘สังคีตสัมพันธ์’: กรณีศึกษาวงดนตรีกรมประชาสัมพันธ์ Dontrii Phasom ‘Sangkheet Samphan’: Kauranii Sueksa Wong Dontrii Krom Prachaa Samphan [Related Music ‘Sangkheat Samphan’: A Case Study of the Public Relations Department Band].” MA thesis, Thailand: Mahidol University.
- Kedhar, Anusha. 2014. “Flexibility and Its Bodily Limits: Transnational South Asian Dancers in an Age of Neoliberalism.” *Dance Research Journal* 46 (1): 23–40. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0149767714000163>.
- Keil, Charles. 1979. *Tiv Song*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Khubchandani, Kareem. 2020. *Ishtyle: Accenting Gay Indian Nightlife*. Triangulations. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.9958984>.
- Kitiarsa, Pattana. 2006. “Modernity, Agency, and ‘Lam Sing’: Interpreting ‘Music-Culture Contacts’ in Northeastern Thailand.” *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 17 (2): 34–65.
- Klotz, Mathew. 2021. “Considering (Queer) Musicking Through Autoethnography.” *MUSICultures* 48: 9–28.
- Komin, Suntaree. 1991. *Psychology of the Thai People: Values and Behavioural Patterns*. Bangkok: Research Centre, National Institute of Development Administration.
- Kondo, Dorinne K. 2018. *Worldmaking: Race, Performance, and the Work of Creativity*. Durham: Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478002420>.
- Koskoff, Ellen, ed. 1987. *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- . 2014. *A Feminist Ethnomusicology: Writings on Music and Gender*. New Perspectives on Gender in Music. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- La Valley, Al. 1995. “The Great Escape.” In *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*, edited by Alexander Doty and Corey K. Creekmur. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Lekakul, Great. 2017. “Prachan: Music, Competition, and Conceptual Fighting in Thai Culture.” PhD diss., London: University of London.
- Loos, Tamara. 2005. “Sex in the Inner City: The Fidelity between Sex and Politics in Siam.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 64 (4): 881–909.
- . 2020. “Reading Gender Trouble in Southeast Asia.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 79 (4): 927–46. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911820002387>.
- Lysloff, René T. A., and Leslie C. Gay Jr. 2003. “Introduction: Ethnomusicology in the Twenty-First Century.” In *Music and Technoculture*, edited by René T. A. Lysloff and Leslie C. Gay Jr., 1–22. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

- Manalansan, Martin F. 2003. *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora*. Perverse Modernities. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Manop Wisuttiapat. 1990. ดนตรีไทยวิเคราะห์ *Dontri Thai Wikhrau [Thai Music Analysis]*. Bangkok: Chuan Phim Press.
- Manuel, Peter. 1993. *Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2019. “Marxist Approaches to Music, Political Economy, and the Culture Industries.” In *Theory for Ethnomusicology: Histories, Conversations, Insights*, edited by Harris M. Berger and Ruth M. Stone, 2nd ed., 51–70. New York: Routledge.
- Maus, Fred. 1995. “Love Stories.” *Repercussions* 4 (2): 86–96.
- . 2019. “‘What If Music IS Sex?’: Suzanne Cusick and Collaboration.” *Radical Musicology* 7.
- McClary, Susan. 1991. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Meintjes, Louise. 2004. “Reaching ‘Overseas’ South African Sound Engineers, Technology, and Tradition.” In *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*, edited by Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello, 23–46. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- . 2009. “The Politics of the Recording Studio: A Case Study from South Africa.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*, edited by Nicholas Cook, Eric Clark, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, and John Rink, 84–101. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Middlebrook, Diane Wood. 1998. *Suits Me: The Double Life of Billy Tipton*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Miller, Terry E. 1992. “The Theory and Practice of Thai Musical Notations.” *Ethnomusicology* 36 (2): 197–221. <https://doi.org/10.2307/851914>.
- . 1998. “Thailand.” In *Southeast Asia*, edited by Terry E. Miller and Sean Williams, Vol. 4 of *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*:240–356. New York: Garland Publishing.
- Moisala, Pirkko, and Beverley Diamond, eds. 2000. *Music and Gender*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Montri Tramote. 1939. ดุริยางคศาสตร์ไทย: ภาควิชาการ *Duriyaangkhasaat Thai: Phaak Wichakaakan [Thai Musicology: Theory Part]*. Bangkok: Matichon.
- Moon, Steven. 2020. “Queer Theory, Ethno/Musicology, and the Disorientation of the Field.” *Current Musicology* 106: 9–33. <https://doi.org/10.7916/cm.v106iSpring.6768>.
- Morris, Rosalind C. 1994. “Three Sexes and Four Sexualities: Redressing the Discourses on Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Thailand.” *Positions* 2 (1): 15–43. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10679847-2-1-15>.

- . 2000. *In the Place of Origins: Modernity and Its Mediums in Northern Thailand*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. 1999. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Cultural Studies of the Americas ; Volume 2. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- . 2009. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press.
- Myers-Moro, Pamela. 1989. “Thai Music and Attitudes toward the Past.” *The Journal of American Folklore* 102 (404): 190–94. <https://doi.org/10.2307/540681>.
- . 1993. *Thai Music and Musicians in Contemporary Bangkok*. Berkeley, CA: Centers for South and Southeast Asia Studies, University of California at Berkeley.
- . 2004. “Constructions of Nation and the Classicisation of Music: Comparative Perspectives from Southeast and South Asia.” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35 (2): 187–211.
- Naruphon Duangwiset. 2013a. “บทนำ: ‘ลูกผสม’ ของวัฒนธรรมทางเพศในสังคมไทย Bot Nam: ‘Luuk Phasom’ Khaung Watthanatham Thaang Pheet Nai Sangkhom Thai [Introduction: ‘Hybridity’ of Sex/Gender/Sexuality Cultures in Thai Society].” In *เพศหลากหลายเจดสี: พหุวัฒนธรรมทางเพศในสังคมไทย Pheet Laak Cheet Sii: Phahu Watthanatham Thaang Pheet Nai Sangkhom Thai [The Colors of Pheet: Cultural Pluralism and Sex/Gender Diversity in Thailand]*, edited by Naruphon Duangwiset and Peter A. Jackson, 29–59. Bangkok: Sirindhorn Anthropology Center.
- . 2013b. “เพศหลากหลายในสังคมไทยกับการเมืองของอัตลักษณ์ Pheet Laaklaay Nai Sangkhom Thai Kap Kaanmueang Khaung Attalak [Sex/Gender Pluralism in Thailand and the Politics of Identity].” *Journal of Social Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University* 25 (2): 137–68.
- . 2015. “รื้อสร้างมายาคติ ‘ความเป็นชาย’ ในสังคมไทย Ruesaang Maayaakhati ‘Khwaam Pen Chai’ Nai Sangkhom Thai [Deconstructing the Myth of ‘Masculinity’ in Thai Society].” *Anthropology Concepts - The Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre* (blog). 2015. <https://www.sac.or.th/databases/anthropology-concepts/articles/3>.
- Natthaphong Kaewsuan. 2012. “วิเคราะห์เดี่ยวซออุ้เพลงกราวในทางครูลอย จิยะจันทร์ Wikhau Diaw Sau Uu Phleeng Kraaw Nai Thaang Khruu Chaluay Chiyachan] [A Musical Analysis of Kraw-Nai Solo for Saw-U by Khru Chaluay Chiyachan].” MA thesis, Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University.
- Ness, Sally A. 1997. “Originality in the Postcolony: Choreographing the Neoethnic Body of Philippine Ballet.” *Cultural Anthropology* 12 (1): 64–108.
- Neuman, Dard. 2012. “Pedagogy, Practice, and Embodied Creativity in Hindustani Music.” *Ethnomusicology* 56 (3): 426–49. <https://doi.org/10.5406/ethnomusicology.56.3.0426>.
- Ochoa Gautier, Ana María. 2014. *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.

- Ong, Aihwa. 1987. *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Ortner, Sherry B. 1989. "Gender Hegemonies." *Cultural Critique*, no. 14: 35–80. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1354292>.
- Ortner, Sherry B., and Harriet Whitehead, eds. 1981. *Sexual Meanings, the Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Pat Khruesuwan and Rawee Angthong, eds. 1988. *อนุสรณ์งานพระราชทานเพลิงศพนางระดี วิเศษสุรการ Anusaun Ngaan Praraatchathaan Phloeng Sop Naang Rati Wisetsurakan [Commemorative Book for the Royal Cremation of Miss Rati Wisetsurakan]*. Bangkok: Prayurawong Corporation.
- Peleggi, Maurizio. 2007. "Refashioning Civilization: Dress and Bodily Practice in Thai Nation-Building." In *Dress, Gender and Nationalism in Asia and the Americas*, 65–80. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press.
- Peletz, Michael G. 2006. "Transgenderism and Gender Pluralism in Southeast Asia since Early Modern Times." *Current Anthropology* 47 (2): 309–40. <https://doi.org/10.1086/498947>.
- . 2009. *Gender Pluralism Southeast Asia since Early Modern Times*. New York: Routledge.
- . 2012. "Gender, Sexuality, and the State in Southeast Asia." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 71 (4): 895–917.
- Phaunthep Phrae-khao. 2013. "ผู้สาวหน้าอำมหอมอล่า: ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างกะเทยและผู้ชายในคอนเสิร์ตหมอลำอีสาน Phuu Sao Naahaan Mau Lam: Khwaam Samphan Rawaang Kathoey Lae Phuu Chaay Nai Concoet Mau Lam Ii Saan [Phuu Sao Naa Haan Maulam: The Relationship between Katoey and Men in Northeastern Thailand Mau Lam Concert]." In *เพศหลากหลายเจดสี: พหุวัฒนธรรมทางเพศในสังคมไทย Pheet Laak Cheet Sii: Phahu Watthanatham Thaang Pheet Nai Sangkhom Thai [The Colors of Pheet: Cultural Pluralism and Sex/Gender Diversity in Thailand]*, edited by Naruphon Duangwiset and Peter A. Jackson, 60–85. Bangkok: Sirindhorn Anthropology Center.
- Phoasavadi, Pornprapit. 2005. "From Prachan to Prakuad: The Process of Officializing Traditional Music Competition in Contemporary Bangkok." PhD diss., University of Washington.
- Phunphit Amatyakul. 1986. *ดนตรีวิจิตร Dontrii Wijak [Music Appreciation]*. 2nd ed. Bangkok: Raksipp.
- . 2007. "Khana Naarii Sii Sumit Wong Khrueng Saay Phasom Pianoo Ying Wong Raek Khong Prathet Thai [Narii Ssii Sumit Band: The First All-Women String Ensemble Plus Piano of Thailand]." In *Anusaun Ngaan Phraraatchathaan Phloeng Sop Naang Thongdii Sujaritkul [Commemorative Book for the Royal Cremation of Miss Thongdii Sujaritkul]*.
- Pink, Sarah, Heather Horst, John Postill, Larissa Hjorth, Tania Lewis, and Jo Tacchi. 2015. *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*. SAGE.
- Pitchanat Toojinda, ed. 2016. *ณรงค์ แก้วอ่อน (รวมบรรเลง): นักร้องชายกรมประชาชน ฉายา "ณรงค์ร้อยเถา" Narong Kaew-Aun (Ruambanleeng) Nak Raung Chaay Krom Phrachaa Chaayaa*

- “Narong Raay Thao” [Narong Kaew-Aun (Ruambanleeng) the Male Singer of Public Relations Department with the Title “The Hundred-Thao Narong.” Nonthaburi, Thailand: Ying Yang Press.
- Pranee Wongthes. 2006. เพศสภาวะในสุวรรณภูมิ (อุษาคเนย์) *Pheet Saphaawa Nai Suwannaphuum [Gender in Suwannaphuum (Southeast Asia)]*. Bangkok: Matichon.
- Premprida Pramote na Ayutthaya. 2006. กะเทยเย้ยเวที *Katheoy Yoey Weethii [Kathoeey Mocks the Stage]*. Bangkok: Matichon.
- Przybylski, Liz. 2020. *Hybrid Ethnography: Online, Offline, and in Between*. CA: SAGE Publications.
- Punyaporn Roopkian. 2019. “ลาภูลาหุซุแล : ภาษาสู่กับการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ของกลุ่มกะเทย laa phuu laa suu suu lae: phaa saa luu kap kaan kaang attalak khaung klum kathoeey [laa phuu laa suu suu lae: The Luu Language and Identify Formation of Kathoeey communities].” BA Thesis, Nakhonpathom, Thailand: Sinlapakorn University.
- Qureshi, Regula Burckhardt. 2000. “Confronting the Social: Mode of Production and the Sublime for (Indian) Art Music.” *Ethnomusicology* 44 (1): 15–38. <https://doi.org/10.2307/852653>.
- Rahaim, Matthew. 2012. *Musicking Bodies Gesture and Voice in Hindustani Music*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Ranchani Srisaman. 2009. “บทปริภาษในบทละครนอก: ภาพสะท้อนค่านิยมไทย Bot Boriphaat nai Lakhaun Nauk: Phaap Sataun Khaaniyom Thai [Reprimand Dialogs in Lakhaun Nauk: A Reflection of Thai Values].” *Manutsayasad Wichakan* 16 (2): 8–21.
- Rasmussen, Anne K. 2010. *Women, the Recited Qur’an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rasmussen, Anthony W. 2019. “Acoustic Patriarchy: Hearing Gender Violence in Mexico City’s Public Spaces.” *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 23 (1): 15–42. <https://doi.org/10.1353/wam.2019.0001>.
- Rawee Anghong and Marut Vijitchote, eds. 2000. *อนุสรณ์งานพระราชทานเพลิงศพนางฉลวย จิยะจันทร์ Anusaun Ngaan Praraatchathaan Phloeng Sop Naang Chaluay Chiyachan [Commemorative Book for the Royal Cremation of Miss Chaluay Chiyachan]*.
- Rice, Timothy. 2017. *Modeling Ethnomusicology*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rieter, Reyna R., ed. 1975. *Toward an Anthropology of Women*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Rivera-Servera, Ramón H. 2004. “Choreographies of Resistance: Latina/o Queer Dance and the Utopian Performative.” *Modern Drama* 47 (2): 269–89. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mdr.2004.0000>.
- Robinson, Dylan. 2020. *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*. Indigenous Americas. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Rosaldo, Michelle Zimbalist, and Louise Lamphere. 1974. *Woman, Culture, and Society*. California: Stanford University Press.

- Roy, Jeffrey. 2015. "Ethnomusicology of the Closet: (Con)Figuring Transgender-Hijra Identity Through Documentary Filmmaking." PhD diss., California: University of California, Los Angeles. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9f89v8mm>.
- Sakarín Subun. 2014. "ศิลปินผู้ที่เชี่ยวชาญด้านจะเข้ในกรุงรัตนโกสินทร์ Sinlapin Phuu Thii Chiawchaan Daan Jakhee Nai Krung Rattanakosin [Artists Specializing in Jakhee in the Rattanakosin City]." In *บุชชาครูผู้เป็นที่รักและยินดี "90 ปี คุณครูระพี วิเศษสุรการ" Buuchaa Khruu Phuu Pen Thii Rak Lae Yindii "90 Pii Khun Khruu Ratii Wisetsurakan"* [An *Homage to the Endeared and Welcome Teacher "90 Years of Teacher Ratii Wisetsurakan*], edited by Tiirapaun Yincharoen and Sakarin Subun, 42–57. Bangkok: P Press.
- Sa-ngad Phukhaothong. 1989. *การดนตรีไทยและทางเข้าสู่ดนตรีไทย Kaan Dontrii Thai Lae Thaang Khao Suu Dontrii Thai [Thai Music Practices and Its Entry]*. Bangkok: Dr. Sax.
- Santiphap Siphueak. 2018. "การวิเคราะห์บทบาทตัวละครเอกฝ่ายหญิงในละครนอกด้วยทฤษฎีสตรีนิยม Kaan Wikhrau Botbaat Tua Lakhuan Eek Faay Ying Nai Lakhaun Nauk Duay Thritsadii Satriiniyom [Analysis [Sic] the Female Leading Actress Roleplay in Lakorn Noke by Feminism [Sic] Theory]." *รายงานการประชุม Graduate School Conference 1 (2)*: 1111–18.
- Sappachang Ekasart. 2003. "คาราโอเกะคลับ พื้นที่และตัวตนของเกย์อ้วน Kaaraaooke Klup...Phuentii Lae Tuaton Khaung Kee Uan [Karaoke Club...Space and Identities for Chub Gay]." MA thesis, Bangkok: Silpakorn University.
- Schlossberg, Linda. 2001. "Introduction." In *Passing: Identity and Interpretation in Sexuality, Race, and Religion*, edited by Maria Carla Sánchez and Linda Schlossberg, 1–13. New York: New York University Press.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. 1990. *Epistemology of the Closet*. California: University of California Press.
- Seidman, Steven. 2003. *Beyond the Closet: The Transformation of Gay and Lesbian Life*. New York: Routledge.
- Silkstone, Francis. 1993. "Learning Thai Classical Music: Memorisation and Improvisation." PhD diss., England: University of London.
- Sinnott, Megan. 2004. *Toms and Dees: Transgender Identity and Female Same-Sex Relationships in Thailand*. Southeast Asia: Politics, Meaning, Memory. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- . 2012. "Korean-Pop, Tom Gay Kings, Les Queens and the Capitalist Transformation of Sex/Gender Categories in Thailand." *Asian Studies Review* 36 (4): 453–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2012.739995>.
- Siriyuvasak, Ubonrat. 1990. "Commercialising the Sound of the People: Pleng Luktoong and the Thai Pop Music Industry." *Popular Music* 9 (1): 61–77.
- Slominski, Tes. 2020. *Trad Nation: Gender, Sexuality, and Race in Irish Traditional Music*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Smith, Michelle. 2014. "Affect and Respectability Politics." *Theory & Event* 17 (3). <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/559376>.

- Sobroek, Anant. 2006. “การศึกษาเปรียบเทียบหลักสูตรด้านดนตรีไทยตามเกณฑ์มาตรฐานดนตรีไทย Kaan Sueksaa Priapthiap Laksuut Daan Dontri Thai Taam Keen Maaatrathaan Dontri Thai [Comparative Study between Thai Music Curriculum and the Standard Criteria of Thai Music].” *Language and Culture Journal* 25 (1): 62–79.
- Spiller, Henry. 2010. *Erotic Triangles: Sundanese Dance and Masculinity in West Java*. Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2020. “Going through the Motions: Transgender Performance in Topeng Cirebon from North Java, Indonesia.” In *Queering the Field: Sounding Out Ethnomusicology*, edited by Gregory F. Barz and William Cheng, 198–216. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Suesat, Wacharawuth, and Patcharin Sirasoonthorn. 2016. “Simon Cabaret and ‘Kathoe’ Assemblage’: A Reconstruction of Power Relation in New Social Network.” *Journal of Social Sciences, Naresuan University* 12 (1): 125–50.
- Sugarman, Jane C. 1997. *Engendering Song: Singing and Subjectivity at Prespa Albanian Weddings*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sullivan, Gerard, and Peter A. Jackson. 2000. *Lady boys, tom boys, rent boys: Male and female homosexualities in contemporary Thailand*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Sunardi, Christina. 2015. *Stunning Males and Powerful Females: Gender and Tradition in East Javanese Dance*. University of Illinois Press.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/j.ctt1287ncb>.
- . 2020. “A Mythical Medieval Hero in Modern East Java: The Masked Dance Gunung Sari as an Alternative Model of Masculinity.” *Ethnomusicology* 64 (3): 447–72. <https://doi.org/10.5406/ethnomusicology.64.3.0447>.
- Suputcharin Nakkongkom. 2021. “ภาพแทนสตรีในวรรณคดีไทยเรื่อง ‘ขุนช้างขุนแผน’ Phaapthaen satrii nai wannakhadii thai rueang Khun Chang Khun Phaen [The Representation of Women in Thai Literature Entitled ‘Khun Chang Khun Phaen’].” *Ganesha Journal [พินนศวรรสาร]* 17 (2): 43–60.
- Sura Intamool. 2016. “Queer Performance, Queer Performers: The Shaping of Thai Queer Identity through Lakhon Nok.” *Chiang Mai University Journal of Fine Arts* 7 (1): 65–90.
- Tantivejakul, Napawan. 2019. “The Never Changing Story: Eight Decades of the Government Public Relations Department of Thailand.” *Public Relations Review* 45 (2): 258–66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2018.08.009>.
- Tausig, Benjamin. 2019. *Bangkok Is Ringing: Sound, Protest, and Constraint*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Thattaphon Poonsuwan. 2016. “‘ผู้หญิง’ กับบทบาทการเป็นครูดนตรีไทย (พ.ศ. 2475 - 2500) ‘Phuu ying’ kap botbaat kaan pen khruu dontrii thai (phau sau 2475 - 2500) [“Women” and their roles as Thai Classical Music Teacher 2475 - 2500 BE].” *The Thammasat Journal of History* 3 (2): 13–67.
- Titon, Jeff T. 2008. “Knowing Fieldwork.” In *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, 2nd ed., 25–41. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Turino, Thomas. 2008. *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Van Vleet, Krista. 2003. "Partial Theories: On Gossip, Envy and Ethnography in the Andes." *Ethnography* 4 (4): 491–519.
- VanHaitsma, Pamela. 2016. "Gossip as Rhetorical Methodology for Queer and Feminist Historiography." *Rhetoric Review* 35 (2): 135–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07350198.2016.1142845>.
- Wanna Numun. 2012. "นัยการล่วงละเมิดทางเพศในวรรณคดีไทยโบราณ : กรณีสี่ตาคูกความทางเพศและวันทองถูกข่มขืน Naiya kaan luanglamoet thaang pheet nai wannakhadii thai boraan: kauranii siidaa thuuk khukkhaam thaang pheet lae wan thaung thuuk khomkhuen [The Implications of Sexual Abuse in Thai Classic Literature: The Sexual Harassment of Sida in Ramakian and the Rape of Wantong in Khun Chang-Khun Paen]." *Institute of Culture and Arts Journal* 13 (2).
- Weera Bua-ngarm. 2015. "ละครนอกวัง 'นาฏกรรมของสามัญชน' Lakhaun Nauk Wang 'Naatakam Khaung Saamanchon' [Rakorn Nork Wang 'The Dramatic Works of Ordinary People']." *Journal of Fine Arts Research and Applied Arts* 2 (1): 193–209.
- Wilson, Ara. 2004. *The Intimate Economies of Bangkok: Tomboys, Tycoons, and Avon Ladies in the Global City*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wilson, Peter J. 1974. "Filcher of Good Names: An Enquiry Into Anrhropology and Gossip." *Man* 9 (1): 93–102. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2800038>.
- Winichakul, Thongchai. 2000. "The Quest for 'Siwilai': A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Siam." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59 (3): 528–49. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2658942>.
- Witulski, Christopher. 2018. "Contentious Spectacle: Negotiated Authenticity within Morocco's Gnawa Ritual." *Ethnomusicology* 62 (1): 58–82. <https://doi.org/10.5406/ethnomusicology.62.1.0058>.
- Wong, Deborah. 1991. "Across Three Generations: A Solo Piece for Thai Gong Circle." *Balungan* 5 (1): 2–9.
- . 2001. *Sounding the Center: History and Aesthetics in Thai Buddhist Performance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2015. "Ethnomusicology without Erotics." *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 19 (1): 178–85. <https://doi.org/10.1353/wam.2015.0014>.
- Worathipha Sattayanusakkul. 2019. *หญิงร้าย Ying Raay [Bad Women]*. Bangkok: Gypzy Group.
- Yep, Gust A. 2003. "The Violence of Heteronormativity in Communication Studies." *Journal of Homosexuality* 45 (2–4): 11–59. https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v45n02_02.
- Zaino, Karen. 2021. "Queer Worldmaking." In *Encyclopedia of Queer Studies in Education*, edited by Kamden K. Strunk and Stephanie Anne Shelton, 578–82. Brill.

Zemp, Hugo. 1979. "Aspects of 'Are'are Musical Theory." *Ethnomusicology* 23 (1): 5–48. <https://doi.org/10.2307/851336>.

นิกา อภัยวงศ์. ในงานเสด็จพระราชดำเนินพระราชทานเพลิงศพคุณนิกา อภัยวงศ์ *Nibha Aphaiwong: Nai Ngaan Sadet Phraraatchadamnoen Phraraatchathaan Phloeng Sop Khruu Nibha Aphaiwong [Nibha Aphaiwong: A Commorative Funeral Book for the Royal Cremation of Nibha Aphaiwong]*. 1999. Bangkok: Silpsanong Press.

Glossary

Aarom อารมณ์ – an emotion, as in happiness, anger, and sorrow.

Arauy อร่อย – normally used to describe something delicious, in musical context, *arauy* describes an excellent musical performance.

Auk saaw ออกสาว – to be girlish, often used with effeminate men when they reveal a feminine comportment.

Baan บ้าน – literally a house, used in Thai classical music context to refer to a unit of associated or related musical groups, such as *baan Duriyapranit*, *baan Baanglamphuu*, *baan Phaathayarat*, etc.

Baaramii บารมี – a charismatic power gained by accumulated noble deeds of accomplishments that grants one's legitimacy over a position or status.

Bandaasak บรรดาศักดิ์ – an archaic ranking system used in Thai government systems before the 1932 revolution. *Bandaasak* is in a form of a title that precedes one's name, starting from *khun* ขุน, *luang* หลวง, *phra* พระ, *phrayaa* พระยา, *somdetch jaophrayaa* สมเด็จเจ้าพระยา.

Bangkhap thaang บังคับทาง – a category of Thai classical music repertory in which its melody is to be played with little to no idiomatic variation across an ensemble.

Biangbeen thaang pheet เบี่ยงเบนทางเพศ – a medical/psychological term used to describe a sexual deviancy, particularly gender non-conforming and homosexuality. The term is now falling out of favor in colloquial language.

Chaaw wang ชาววัง – palace dwellers, mostly of aristocratic heritage.

Chaay suay ชายสวย – literally beautiful man/men, used paired with *khrueng saay* เครื่องสาย, i.e., *khrueng saay chaay suay* to refer to queer men string musicians in Thai classical music.

Chan diaw ชั้นเดียว – a rhythmic level in Thai classical music that is a proportionate contraction of *saung chan* สองชั้น rhythmic level. See also *saam chan* สามชั้น and *thao* เถา.

Chapwai จับไว – a swift movement or action.

Chat ชัด – clear, see also *khom* คม.

Chaung fai ช่องไฟ – a gap between two things, whether physical or abstract. Musically speaking, *chaung fai* refers to the duration of a silence between each note.

Choet เชิด – a *nhaaphaat* หน้าพาทย์ piece used to indicate a movement from one place to another.

Choet เชิด – holding one’s head up with the chin tilted upward as a sign of overbrimming self-esteem.

Jakhee จะเข้ – a three-string floor zither in Thai classical music used in string ensemble, also notoriously known as a symbol of queer men.

Jang loey จังเลย – an additive particle to a sentence comparable to “for real.” Its specific intonation can indicate gender of the speakers, including *kathoey* or the third gender.

Jarit จริต – embodied disposition of an individual.

Jiamjiam เจียมเจียม – a meek, timid, and unassuming behavior.

Detkhaat เต็ดขาด – used to describe a clinical action, one that is executed with great precision.

Dudan ดุดัน – used to describe something that is ferocious and imposing.

Dueay klaang เดื่อยกลาง – a slang for penis.

Duriyaban ดุริยบรรณ – a discontinued Thai classical instruments manufacturer whose products now become highly sought-out collector’s items.

Fang Phranakhaun ฟังพระนคร – the part of Bangkok city east of the Chao Phraya เจ้าพระยา River.

Fang thonburi ฟังธนบุรี or **Fang thon** ฟังธน – the part of Bangkok city west of the Chao Phraya เจ้าพระยา River.

Haang siang หางเสียง – literally a “voice’s tail,” refers to formalizing particles spoken at the end of a sentence. See also *kha* ค่ะ and *khrap* ครับ.

Hen kae tua เห็นแก่ตัว – selfish.

Hua booraan หัวโบราณ – conversative or old-fashioned.

Huang wichaa หวงวิชา – “guarding of knowledge,” an act of transmitting knowledge, including music, to only legitimate members of one’s social circle; and keeping the knowledge from those outside of it.

Kaalatheesa กาลเทศะ – literally “time and place,” an individual’s awareness of conducting oneself appropriately according to the given norms in specific times and places.

Kathoeay กะเทย – a transgender female, though it is also used as an umbrella term to refer to all non-normative male, i.e., from transgender women to effeminate men.

Keetkan กีดกัน – to ward off or block something or someone.

Kep aakaan เก็บอาการ – literally “to keep condition,” to withhold an explicit expression of one’s emotions, feeling, or dispositions to appear calm and composed.

Kep thao เก็บเท้า – to keep one’s foot close to one’s body, especially while seated in *phapphiap* position. See also *thao* เท้า.

Kep เก็บ – a musical term in which a musician renders a basic melody into a consecutive and continuous stream of pitches comparable to the sixteenth notes.

Kha ค่ะ – a formal particle, spoken by women, that is added to the end of a sentence. See also *haang siang* หางเสียง and *khrap* ครับ.

Khaaraatchakaan ข้าราชการ – government officials.

Khaek Mon แขกมอญ – an advanced solo musical piece in Thai classical music containing three sections and each section features imitations of *khaek* แขก or Indian and *mon* มอญ or Mon musical accents.

Khatsamaat* or *Khatsamaathi ขัดสมาธิ – sitting cross-legged.

Khaung wong lek ฆ้องวงเล็ก – a higher pitched gong circle that renders a main melody of a piece similar to the *ranaat eek*.

Khaung wong yai ฆ้องวงใหญ่ – a lower pitched gong circle responsible for carrying the main melody of a musical piece.

Khayii ขยี้ – a musical technique in which a *kep* เก็บ melody is played in double time.

Khayook โขยก – literally to limp or to hobble, refers to a swing-like rhythmic rendition of a melody, often associated with negative connotation against the Thai classical music aesthetics.

Khiip luk คีพลุค – from English “keep look,” to maintain one’s bodily composure, especially the calm and composed behavior, see also *kep aakaan* เก็บอาการ.

Khluy ขลุ่ย – a Thai flute used in string ensemble and soft *piiphaat* (*piiphaat mainuam* ปี่พาทย์ไม้นวม).

Khom คม – sharp. See also *chat* ชัด.

Khrap ครับ – a formal particle, spoken by men, that is added to the end of a sentence. See also *haang siang* หางเสียง and *kha* ค่ะ.

Khrueang saay เครื่องสาย – a string ensemble in Thai classical music featuring stringed melodic instruments including the higher pitched fiddle *sau duang* ซอด้วง, the lower pitched fiddle *sau uu* ซออู้, and the floor zither *jakhee* จะเข้. Initially emerging as a light music played by women, the ensemble mostly performed in secular contexts.

Khrueang sai pii chawaa เครื่องสายปี่ชวา – a louder variant of the *khrueang sai* ensemble in which a quadruple reed instrument *pii chawaa* ปี่ชวา is added along with a pair of double headed drums *klaung khaek* กลองแขก.

Khruu ครู – from Sanskrit *guru*, a teacher.

Khunying คุณหญิง – a title given to a noblewoman.

Khwaam laaklaay thaang pheet ความหลากหลายทางเพศ – sex, gender, and sexuality diversity.

Khwaampenthai ความเป็นไทย – literally Thainess, an umbrella term that encapsulates the nation-state discourse through traditional and classical expressive cultures of Thailand endorsed by the Thai government since the post WWII period.

Klaun paed กลอนแปด – a type of Thai poetry format in which each stanza contains eight to nine syllables.

Klaung saung naa กลองสองหน้า – a double-headed barrel drum used in the *piiphaat* ensemble and in solo accompaniment.

Koong khan chak โกงคันชัก – literally “to cheat the bow,” a musical term for the *sau* player to describe when a single bowing stroke contains multiple notes in *kep* style. This is undesirable because *sau* players are supposed to cover a single *kep* note in a single bowing stroke.

Kraaw Nai กราวไน – a solo piece in Thai classical music regarded as the most advanced and difficult piece in the solo repertory.

Krathop saay กระทับสาย – a *jakhee* playing technique in which a player strikes all three strings at once.

Kreeng jai เกรงใจ – a virtue in which one is considerate of performing a task, asking for a favor, or doing something, lest it causes discomfort to a person or people involved.

Krom Prachaasamphan กรมประชาสัมพันธ์ – The Government Public Relations Department or PRD.

Kunlasatrii กุลสตรี – a woman who exhibit the ideal femininity, i.e., passive, reserved, domestic, and excel in performing the expected tasks from those ideals, such as garland-making, cooking, food-carving, and Thai classical music.

Lakhaun nauk ละครนอก – literally “outer drama,” an all-male theatre performed by commoners outside of the palace territory.

Lakkapheet ลักเพศ – to behave or dress in ways that do not align with one’s biological sex, mostly used with negative connotations.

Liilaa ลีลา – an articulation of minor details that characterize one’s idiosyncratic musical style, a grace.

Luang หลวง – a second rank from the old system of the Thai government official hierarchy, see also *bandaasak* บรรดาศักดิ์.

Luuk lau luuk khat ลูกล้าลูกขัด – a section in Thai classical repertory where the melodic instruments play a series of melodies in call-and-response manner.

Luuk lueam ลูกเหลื่อม – a section in Thai classical repertory where melodic instruments in an ensemble play a series of melodies in an overlapping manner.

Luuksit saay trong ลูกศิษย์สายตรง – literally “direct-line student,” a student who studies in-person, whether on-on-one or in a group, with a teacher for an extended period. *Luuk sit saay trong* is believed to have most completely received a teacher’s knowledge in Thai classical music, thus possessing authority of knowledge in the musical lineage.

Luuksit ลูกศิษย์ – literally “child-disciple,” a student, often implying a tie with one teacher or more. See also *khruu* ครู.

Mae yok แม่ยก – literally “lifting mother,” a fan club, mostly women, of charming male performers, especially *luukthung* ลูกทุ่ง singers and the traditional theatre *li-kee* ลิเก.

Mahaaduriyaang มหาดุริยางค์ – an ensemble format, invented in the early 1970s, that consists of a large number of *piiphaat* and string instruments, much like an orchestra.

Mahoori มโหรี – an ensemble dated back to Sukhothai period (circa 13th – 15th cent.) used for light, secular music. *Mahoori* ensemble today is characterized by an addition of a *saw saam sai* to a combination *piiphaat* and string instruments.

Mau lam หมอลำ – an artistic poem recitation commonly found in Northeast Thailand and Laos. The term *mau lam* refers to the reciter of a poem who is accompanied by *mau khaen* หมอแคน, a musician who plays a free-read mouth organ called *kaen* แคน. *Mau lam* today incorporates electric Western instruments like keyboard, guitar, bass, and drum set, and is performed on stage in a concert-like setting.

Mau แม้า or **maumauy** แม้ามอย – a slang for to gossip, see also *ninthaa* นินทา.

Mii naam jai มีน้ำใจ – a generous and kind personality.

Naattasin นาฏศิลป์ – an umbrella term of Thai classical dances.

Naep แพบ – to fondle or cuddle. As used by queer men musicians, *naep* has sensual connotations.

Naew แหว – a technical term for Thai classical music that depicts the progression of a tempo from slow to fast over a performance.

Naung น้อง – a younger sibling, also a first-person pronoun when a speaker is—or wants to be—younger than the listener.

Ninthaa นินทา – to gossip, see also *mau* แม้า or *maumauy* แม้ามอย.

Nisai นิสัย – the personality of a person.

Nok Khamin นกขมิ้น – literally “a canary,” a piece in Thai classical music containing three sections. In its solo version, “Nok Khamin” is regarded as a miscellaneous solo piece and exists in several versions depending on the musical grouping and lineage.

Nom นม – literally breast or milk, the term in Thai classical music refers to the frets along the body of the floor zither *jakhee* จะเข้.

Nuam niw นวมนิ้ว – the middle and lower sections of the inner fingers that are particularly used to press on the *sau uu* strings in Chaluay’s musical lineage.

Pathamamuulamuuli ปฐมมูลมุลี – Buddhist palm leaf manuscript collection from Lanna culture in Northern Thailand, noted by gender and sexuality scholars in Thailand and Southeast Asia for its mention of transgenderism in the form of a hermaphrodite in Thai creation myths.

Pen mae baeb เป็นแม่แบบ – to be an exemplar for one’s followers or students.

Pen เป็น – literally “to be,” it is used intentionally in incomplete grammatical format: *chan pen* ฉันเป็น (I am) to indicate one’s non-normative gender and sexual identities without having to specify a specific “category.”

Phaay thao ผายเท้า – to spread out one’s feet that are folded outward while sitting in. *phapphiap* พับเพียบ position. See also *thao* เท้า.

Phapphiap พับเพียบ – a seating position in which one folds one leg inward and the other outward. *Phapphiap* position is considered a more polite seating position—an indication of deference and respect—than the cross-legged position.

Phayaa Sook พญาโศก – a “standard” solo piece in Thai classical music containing one section that is play through twice, though it is played four times in *ranaat eek*.

Pheet thaang lueak เพศทางเลือก – literally “alternative genders,” a term that replaces *phheet thii saam* เพศที่สาม to describe gender non-binary identities.

Pheet thii saam เพศที่สาม – a term that refers to gender non-conforming identities, for example, *kathoey* and *tom*. It is now falling out of favor and being replaced by a less derogatory term *pheet thaang lueak* เพศทางเลือก.

Pheet เพศ – an umbrella term in Thai language that includes sex, gender, and sexual orientation.

Pheetphaawa เพศภาวะ – a recently coined term that refers to gender and gender identity.

Pheetwithii เพศวิถี – a recently coined term that refers to sexual orientation.

Phii พี่ – literally an older sibling and a first-person pronoun when a speaker is older than the listener. See also *naung* น้อง.

Phit pheet ผิดเพศ – literally “wrong sexed” or “wrong gendered,” a derogatory term that refers to an individual whose gender performance does not align with one’s biological sex.

Phleeng diaw เพลงเดี่ยว – a solo musical piece in Thai classical music.

Phleeng luukkrung เพลงลูกกรุง – literally “song of the city child,” a popular music genre emerging in the 1970s that depicts (mostly heterosexual) romance and the life of urban Thai people.

Phleeng luukthung เพลงลูกทุ่ง – literally “song of the rice field child,” a popular music genre, also emerging in the 1970s that depicts the rural lifestyle of Thai people with simple lyrics and incorporation of traditional instruments, particularly those from the Northeastern region.

Phleeng plukjai เพลงปลุกใจ – government-sponsored songs with patriotic message circulated around the Thai mainstream media during the Cold War era. Some of the songs are still played by the military to invoke nationalist sentiments.

Phleeng thai saakon เพลงไทยสากล – Thai popular music genres that incorporate Western music elements, including *phleeng luukthung* เพลงลูกทุ่ง and *phleeng luukkrung* เพลงลูกกรุง.

Phleeng เพลง – a song, a musical piece, or a composition.

Phra พระ – literally a monk. In the old system of the Thai government official hierarchy, *phra* is a third rank above *luang* หลวง. See also *bandaasak* บรรดาศักดิ์.

Phrai ไพร่ – working class people, a commoner.

Phrayaa พระยา – In the old system of the Thai government official hierarchy, *phrayaa* is the fourth rank above *phra* พระ. See also *bandaasak* บรรดาศักดิ์.

Phuak khaam pheet พวกข้ามเพศ – a colloquial term for transgender, including effeminate men and butch women.

Phuu chaay ผู้ชาย – a man or men.

Phuu dii ผู้ดี – a nobleperson with a civilly trained bodily disposition.

Phuu ying ผู้หญิง – a woman or women.

Pii nai ปี่ไผ่ – a quadruple reed instrument used in the *piiphaat* ปี่พาทย์ ensemble.

Piiphaat naanghong ปี่พาทย์นางหงส์ – a variant of *piiphaat* ensemble, used mostly in Buddhist funerals.

Piiphaat ปี่พาทย์ – a dominant musical ensemble in Thai classical music used in ritual and theaters, consisting of at least a xylophone (*ranaat eek* ระนาดเอก), a gong circle (*khaung*

wong yai ฆ้องวงใหญ่), drums (*ta-phoon* ตะโพน, *klaung that* กลองทัด), a quadruple reed (*pii nai* ปี่ใน), and a pair of hand cymbals (*ching* ฉิ่ง).

Poet tua เปิดตัว – literally “to open” or to reveal oneself, used in this case to indicate that a person does not conform to the heteronormative gender binary.

Poet-rap เปิดรับ – to open up, be receptive, or accepting.

Prap mue ปรึ่มมือ – literally to “condition one’s hand,” used to describe a process to train one’s muscle memory to internalize the movements of a specific musical style.

Prung ปรุง – to season, or to add ornamentations to a musical melody in a piece.

Raa roeng ร่าเริง – to be cheerful, to be delightful.

Raatchathinnanaam ราชทินนาม – a royally conferred name that accompanies the title (*bandaasak* บรรดาศักดิ์) of a high-ranking government officials or Buddhist monks, e.g., *Luang* [a *bandaasak*] Praditpairoh [*raatchathinnanaam*].

Raeng แกรง – a hostile or unwelcoming personality or environment.

Rak nuan sanguan tua รักนวลสงวนตัว – a saying that a woman should not express their desire explicitly, and that they should not allow private body parts, including thighs and shoulders, to be seen and touched by men. Failing to do so means that the woman loses her spiritual merit for being allegedly promiscuous. Men, however, are not subject to such constraints.

Rak pheet diaw kan รักเพศเดียวกัน – a recently coined term that refers to same-sex relationship, replacing the derogatory description *rak ruam pheet* รักร่วมเพศ.

Rak ruam pheet รักร่วมเพศ – a derogatory term that refers to same-sex relationships.

Ranaat eek ระนาดเอก – a higher pitched xylophone that leads the *piiphaat* ปี่พาทย์ ensemble.

Ranaat thum ระนาดทุ้ม – a lower pitched xylophone, used in *piiphaat* ปี่พาทย์ ensemble, responsible for often off-beat, syncopated variation of a main melody.

Ratthaniyom รัฐนิยม – the cultural mandates issued by Thai Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram during 1939-1942 that included several transformations of Thai cultures adopted from the Western culture. For example, a requirement to wear shirts and hats when going outside, prohibition of chewing betelnut, having a name that reflects one's gender, and authorization of traditional performances.

Riaprauy เรียบร้อย – to be tidy, neat, polite, and formal.

Riaw pen haang nuu เร็วเป็นหางหนู – an expression that describes a gradual increase of a tempo during a performance of a musical piece in Thai classical music.

Ruam pheet ร่วมเพศ – to have a sexual intercourse.

Saam chan สามชั้น – an extended version of a rhythmic level, see also *thao* เถา, *song chan* สองชั้น, and *chan diaw* ชั้นเดียว.

Saay khruu สายครู – a musical lineage whose root can be traced to a single teacher.

Saay trong สายตรง – literally “a direct line,” used to refer to a Thai classical musician who received musical knowledge by studying with a teacher in-person for an extended period of time.

Sabat สะบัด – a technique in Thai classical music in which a performance makes a quick burst of three adjacent pitches in either ascending or descending order.

Saep แซบ – from Lao language, a spicy food. In Central Thai colloquial terms, *saep* also means sexy, bold, and daring.

Samniang สำเนียง – musical accent that suggests individual personality. It also indicates an imitation of non-Thai musical idioms.

Samruam สำรวม – to be polite and composed, especially in a formal event.

Sangaa-ngaam สง่างาม – gracious.

Sati taek สติแตก – a rather informal expression when someone loses one’s mind, to freak out.

Sau uu ซออุ้ – a lower-pitched fiddle in the *khruelang sai* เครื่องสาย ensemble.

Sia phaap-pot เสียภาพพจน์ – to be humiliated or embarrassed, particularly in terms of one’s public image.

Siang too เสียงโต – an expression that describe a musical style with loud and imposing sound coming from a musical instrument.

Sit ศิษย์ – from Sanskrit *shishya*, a student or disciple. See also *luksit* ลูกศิษย์.

Siwilai ศิวไลซ์ – from English “civilized,” to be culturally modern, mostly with reference to the Western world.

Song chan สองชั้น – a regular rhythmic level in Thai classical music. See also *saam chan* สามชั้น, *chan diaw* ชั้นเดียว, and *thao* เถา.

Suay สวย – beautiful.

Taeng ying แต่งหญิง – to cross-dress as a woman.

Tang jai rian ตั้งใจเรียน – to study hard, diligent.

Tanhaaraakha ตัณหาราคะ – a sexual desire.

Tau phleeng phit ต้อเพลงผิด – to incorrectly pass on a musical piece to a student, whether in part or in whole.

Tauranong ทรวง – filled with pride and self-esteem.

Thaa ท่า or **Thaathaang** ท่าทาง – a pose, gesture, or bodily movement.

Thaang ทาง – a musical style characteristic to a musical lineage, such as “Nok Khamin” solo of Chaluay’s *thaang* (*diaw* “Nok Khamin” *thaang khruu* Chaluay เดี่ยวนกขมิ้นทางครูฉลุย). A specific idiomatic way of rendering a main melody of the same musical piece for different instruments in an ensemble, such as *thaang jakhee* ทางจะเข้ or *thaang sau uu* ทางซอู้. *Thaang* also means a concept that determines the pitch location on an instrument, but this concept is not discussed in this work.

Thambun ทำบุญ – to make merit, to do good deeds, most notably in the form of offering food to Buddhist monks.

Thao เถา – a Thai classical music form in which a piece is played in three different rhythmic levels—sometimes more though it is uncommon—that are proportionate to one another. A *thao* form usually started with the most extended version *saam chan* สามชั้น, followed by a regular version *saung chan* สองชั้น, and then a contracted version or *chan diaw* ชั้นเดียว.

Thayauy ทวย – a type of Thai classical music repertory with long and complex melodies meant to showcase a player’s skills and proficiency.

Thiaw kep เที้ยวเก็บ – the second part of a solo performance practice in string ensemble in which a melody is rendered in a continuous stream of notes or in *kep* style. *Thiaw kep* is usually played after *thiaw waan*.

Thiaw waan เที้ยวหวาน – the first part of a solo performance practice in string ensemble in which a melody is rendered slowly with extensive embellishment and flowering. The part is usually followed by *thiaw kep*.

Thoon rammanaa โทณ รำมะนา – a paired set of a goblet-shaped drum and a frame drum used in the *khrueng sai* or string ensemble.

Tom ทอม – a butch lesbian or a masculine-looking woman. See also *dee* ดี.

Tueng mue ตึงมือ – a technical term in Thai classical music that describes a tempo that gives enough resistance to one’s muscle but at the same time not too much to carry on playing.

Tut ตู้ต – a derogative term for sissies, see also *kathoey* กะเทย.

Waikhruu ไหว้ครู – a teacher-honoring ritual in which one pays homage to their teacher and the deity of knowledge in their crafts, especially in performing arts like music, dance, and Thai boxing.

Wai ไหว – a technical term in Thai classical music to describe the playing of a musical instrument, mostly *piiphaat* ปี่พาทย์, in a speedy manner.

Wer เวอร์ – from English “over,” an exaggerated reaction or emotion.

Wichaa วิชา – an organization of a complication of a set of knowledge that can be learned and transmitted, a discipline.

Witthayalai Naattasin วิทยาลัยนาฏศิลป์ – College of Dramatic Arts, state-sponsored conservatories of Thai classical performing arts with thirteen campuses located across Thailand.

Yaak ยาก – difficult.

Yaak อยาก – to want.

Yaaw ยาว – long.

Yet เย็ด – an explicit word for having sex, to fuck.

Yoe koen เยอะเกิน – overboard, too much.