THE THANG OF THE KHONG WONG YAI AND RANAT EK:

A transcription and analysis of performance practice in Thai music

in two volumes

Volume I
The Transcription

by

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The concept of the 'Thang' - which can be translated as a 'way' or 'path' - is fundamental to performance practice in Thai music. The Thang refers to an appropriate version of the basic melody, specifically imagined for a particular instrument, in a Thai composition.

Two of the most important Thai tuned percussion instruments are the 'Khong Wong Yai' - a set of 16 gongs on a circular frame - and the 'Ranat Ek' - a higher pitched wooden xylophone. It is the Thang appropriate to these essential instruments in the Thai ensemble that are transcribed in Western notation in Vol.I. Three well-known Thai compositions, the titles of which are 'Khaek Borathet', 'Chorakhe Hang Yao' and 'Sarathi', are used to demonstrate the Thang. In the case of each composition, seven individual versions of the Thang on each instrument have been transcribed and, for the first time in the literature on Thai music, compared.

In Vol.II special attention is paid to the rules governing performing practice, to the character of the individual player's Thang and the relationship in the three chosen compositions between what is fixed and predetermined and what is free.

1: NOTE ON THE TRANSCRIPTION

1.1 The Players

I have listed the players who kindly shared their expertise with me as P1, P2, P3 etc.. Some of them expressed a preference not to be identified. I have respected this wish and applied it consistently to all of them. This policy, moroever, is in accord with anthropological practice, where such information often remains anonymous.

Anonymity brings a further advantage. If the players are not named, this will facilitate public discussion and, possibly, criticism of their individual Thang. There is no tradition of comparative criticism among Thai musicians. If the players were identified, embarrassment would preclude productive debate.

The players represent a wide spectrum of age and experience. They are considered to be without exception among the leading exponents of Thai music. About half of them are resident in Bangkok, the other half in other regions of central Thailand. The majority of the players are full-time teachers in university and college, or teach in schools. The remaining players are either full-time musicians, members of ensembles funded by the government, or self-employed. The youngest of

the players was aged 33 when I carried out my research in 1987, while the most senior was aged 68.

1.2 The Score

For the convenience of the reader, I have laid out the score so that all seven versions of the Thang for all three compositions can easily be compared. It is also for reasons of convenience that the thesis is bound in two separate volumes, which allows for easy consultation of the transcription while the text is being read.

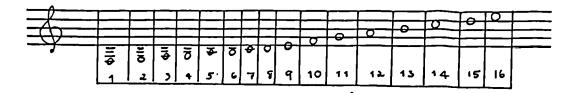
1.3 Pitch

The Thai system of tuning is related to what in Western terminology would be described as a whole-tone scale. This is fully described in Morton (1976: 22-29), but it is worth repeating here that the Thai basic interval is between a semitone and a tone, but closer to Hence, there is no exact equivalent scale in a tone. Western Music. (See also Ketukaenchan 1984: 3-4.) is this system of tuning that we hear in the performances on the accompanying cassettes.

My transcription of course uses Western notation. The sixteen pitches of the gongs of the Khong Wong Yai are represented throughout my transcription by the

equivalent pitches in Western notation that I set out below:

Ex.1

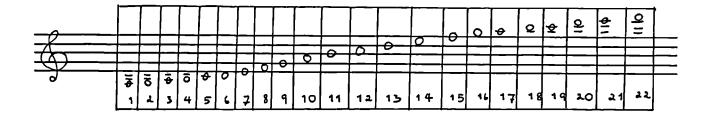


Although my illustration above suggests a fixed set of pitches, in fact in Thailand the tuning of the Khong Wong Yai may vary slightly according to the individual ensemble. There is no 'standard' pitch as there is in the West. In general, however, the pitch of the lowest and largest gong approximates pretty closely to the D shown above, but one octave higher. In order to make the transcription as practical as possible, I have written out the Thang for the Khong Wong Yai one octave below its actual sound.

In the case of the Ranat Ek, however, the transcription is written in accordance with the actual sound of the instrument, with the exception of P1 who played all three pieces one pitch lower than shown in the transcription. P1 preferred to demonstrate his Thang at a pitch level appropriate to the Ranat Ek when

playing with the fiddles. I have transposed his Thang for the convenience of comparison with those of his colleagues. My illustration below shows the relationship between the keys of the Ranat and their equivalents in Western notation. The system identical with that of the Khong Wong Yai and the lowest Ranat Ek corresponds key of the to F illustration:

Ex.2



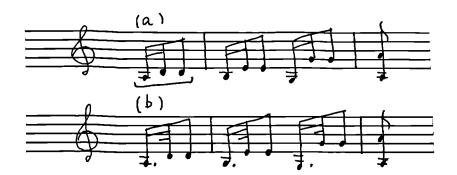
It is very important to remember that what my transcription indicates is the sound produced by the instruments, not a pitch or interval that can be strictly matched with its Western equivalent, which is why I have no need to make use of accidentals. For example, when gongs Nos.7 and 10 are played together, this is necessarily represented in my transcription by a fourth, C-F (see Ex.1, p.3). But the actual sound, of course, because of the Thai system, is somewhat different from that interval as understood in the West.

1.4 Rhythm, Tempo, Dynamics

Perhaps because of the absence of written music in a performance, players can sometimes become extremely free in rhythm, especially at the beginning and end of a piece. These passages are difficult to reproduce in notation but I have done my best to give an accurate record of them. There are, however, two points to be made about the transcription of the Khong Wong Yai:

(a) Generally speaking, in passages consisting of broken fourths and/or octaves, the players will play either Ex.3(a) or Ex.3(b): there will be no doubt about the rhythm. Occasionally, however, the players do not establish the dotted rhythm with absolute clarity, in which case my notation always follows the basic model shown in Ex.3(a):

Exx.3(a) and (b)



(b) When playing the rhythmic pattern shown in Ex.3(a) above, the player will often use the mallet to stop the sound of the last note in each group [______] from resonating, with the exception of the last note of

the group preceding the final octave. This technique (known as 'Prakhob') can appear to add an extra note to a group. Where this extra note is heard clearly, I have included it in the group as shown in Ex.4: the dots indicate the note that is stopped and the resulting addition. Where the extra note is not clearly heard, I follow one of the basic models shown in Exx.3(a) and (b).



So far as tempo is concerned, it must be kept in mind that the players were mostly demonstrating their Thang as soloists, not as members of an ensemble. Therefore they selected a tempo according to their individual preference. In general, the players began at a relaxed tempo and then gradually increased their speeds. I have not introduced metronome marks into my transcription but as an indication give here the tempo at which P1 opened his Thang Khong Wong Yai for Khaek Borathet and the tempo which he had established by the end of the composition:

= 50 ---> 74.

The Thai ensemble in general maintains a stable dynamic level with relatively few contrasts. For this

reason I have not used dynamics as part of my transcription.

1.5 Signs used in the score

- (a) When an apostrophe (?) appears after two bars, this indicates, for the purpose of my analysis, the end of the Wak (for an explanation of this term, see Vol.II, p.18). This should not be read as indication of a break or pause in the continuity of the music.
- (b) A number in a square 1 indicates the end of the rhythmic unit (see p.9). I show when a player repeats a section by adding '(repeat)' above the first bar, in which case the relevant number in a square is also repeated.
- (c) As already explained, P1, P2, P3, etc., equals Player 1, Player 2, Player 3, etc., and this identification only appears on the first page of the transcription of each composition.
- (d) In the case of the Ranat Ek, for all three compositions I have added my own Thang Khong Wong Yai at the bottom of the score for the purpose of comparison. This bottom stave is identified by '(KWY)'. This Thang is not included in the cassettes.

2: THE TRANSCRIPTION















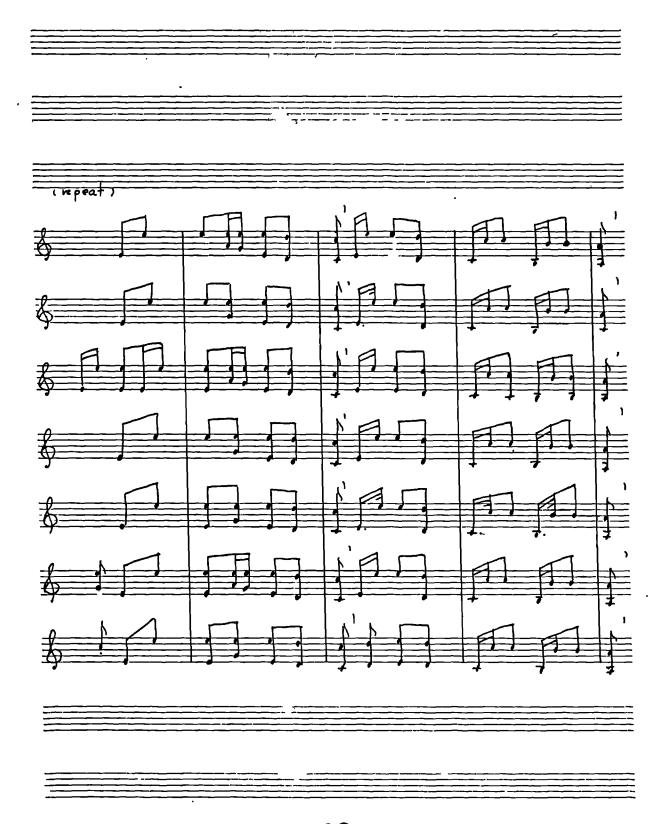








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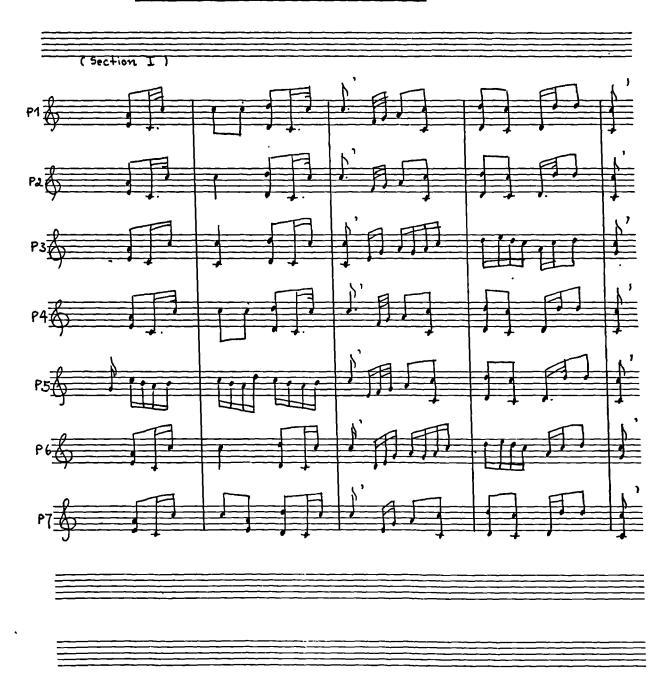






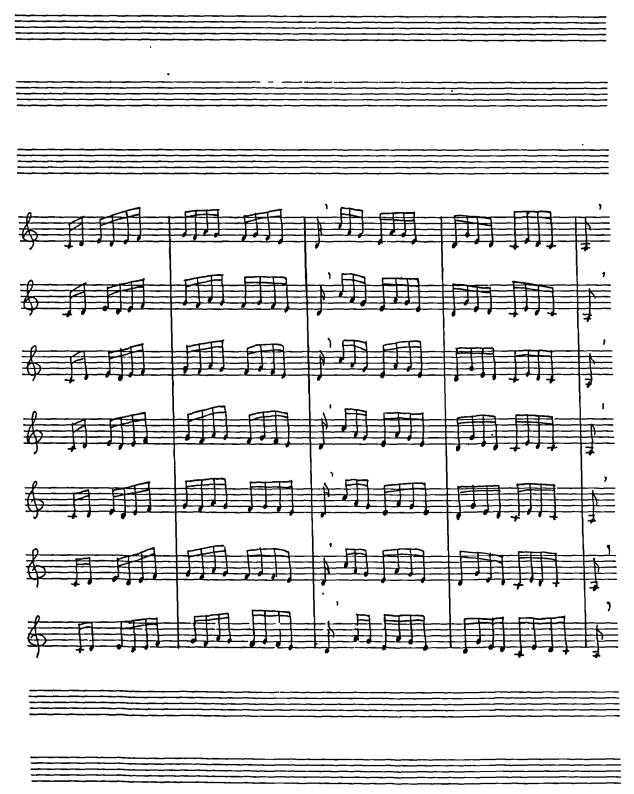
2.2 THANG KHONG WONG YAT

CHORAKHE HANG YAO (SAM CHAN

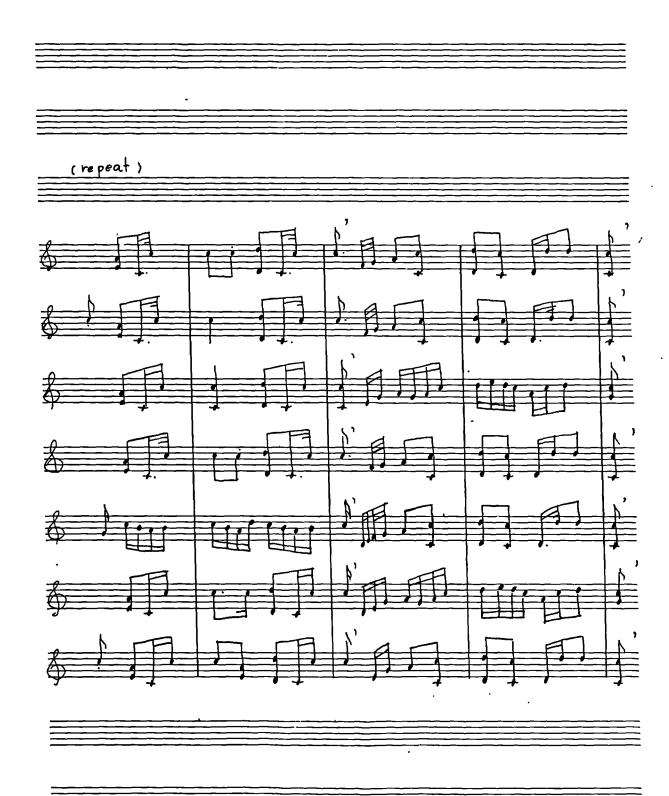










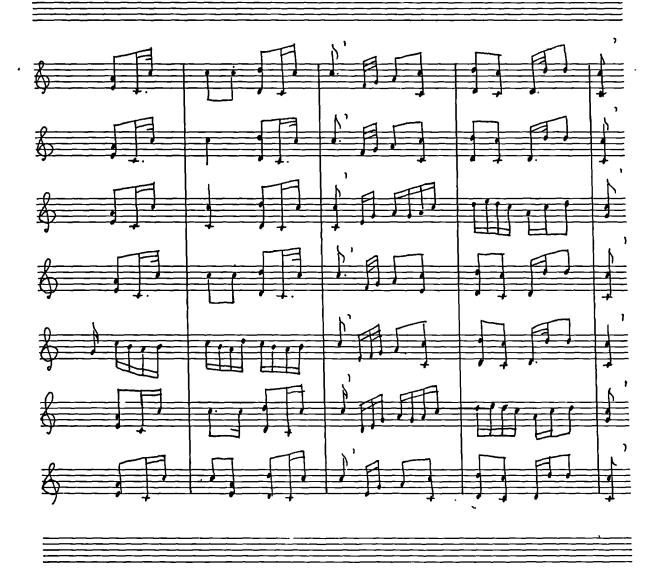


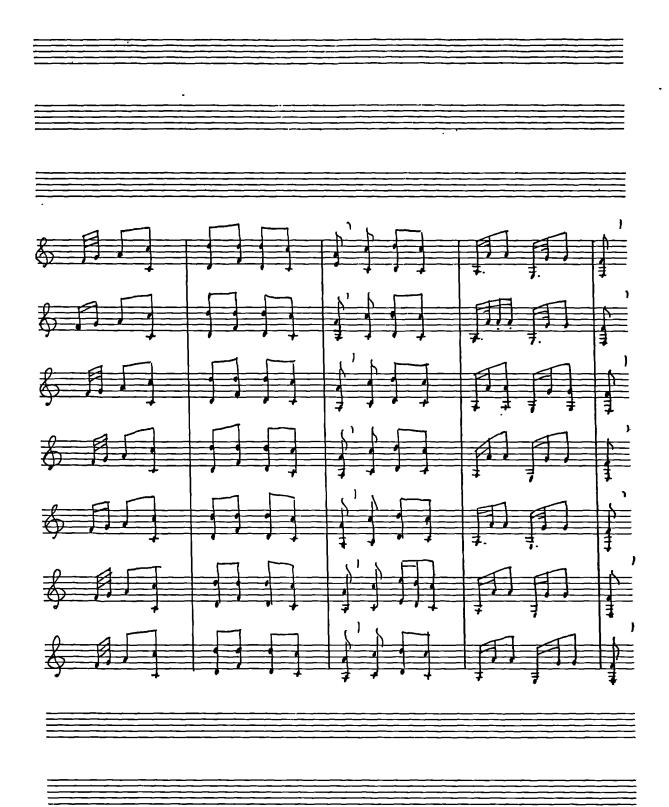




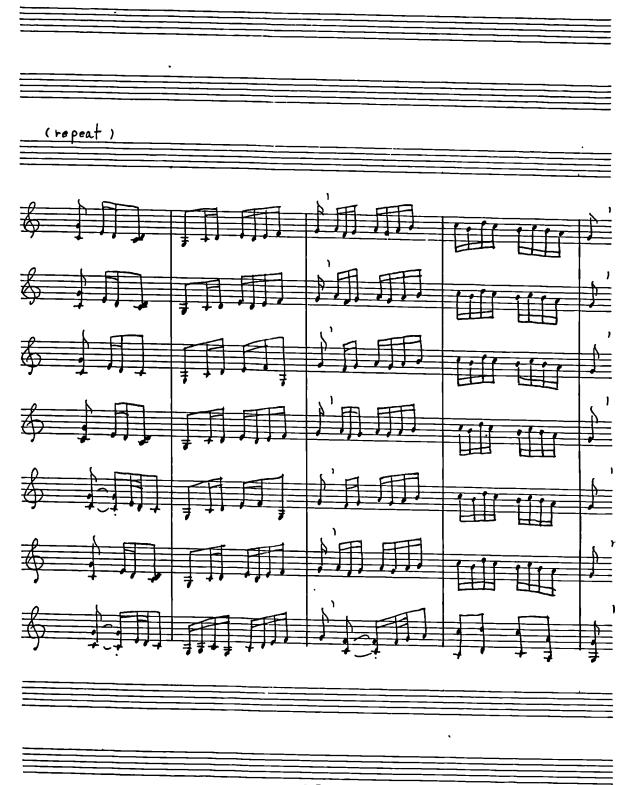


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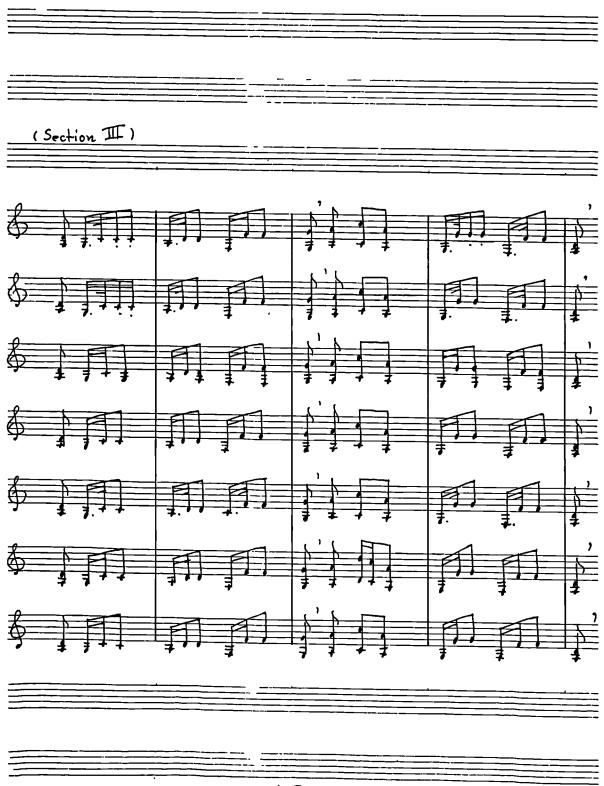


























2.3 THANG KHONG WONG YAI

SARATHI (SAM CHAN)













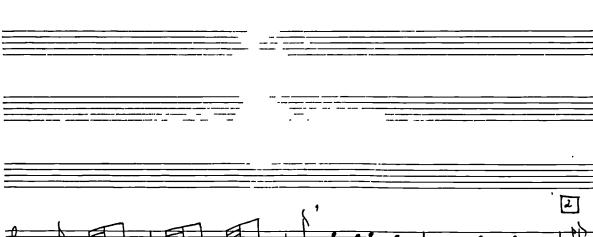


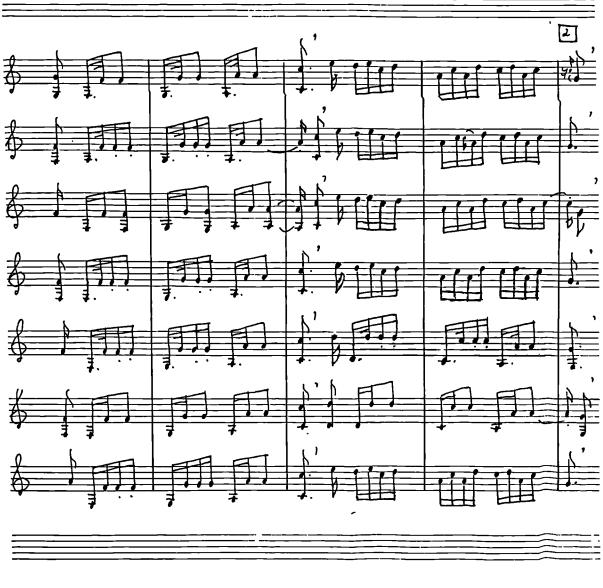






























































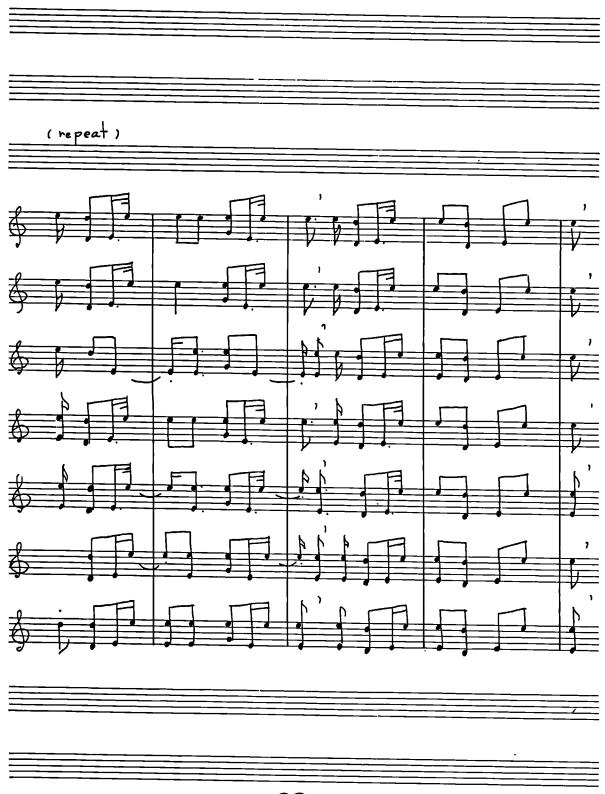




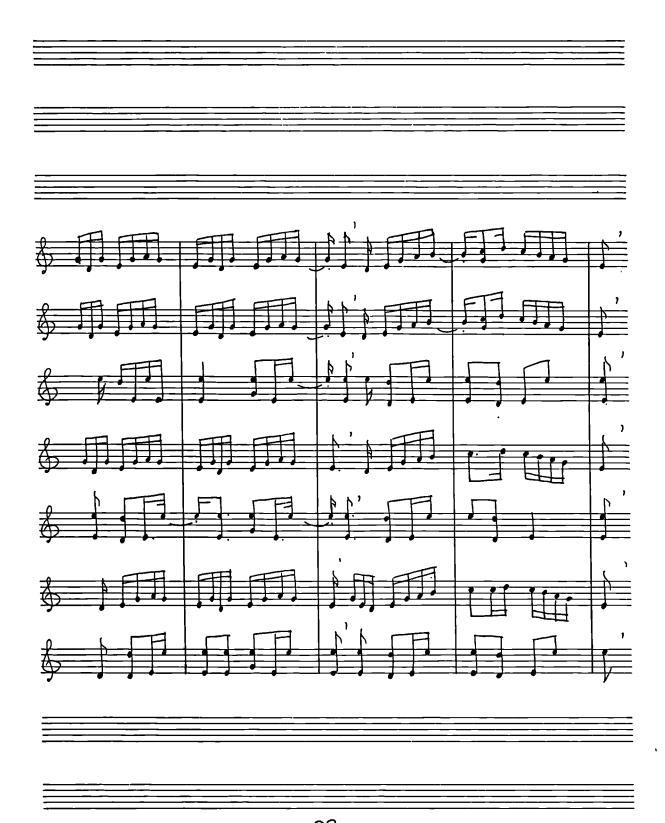


























3.4 THANG RANAT EK

KHAEK BORATHET (SAMCHAN)

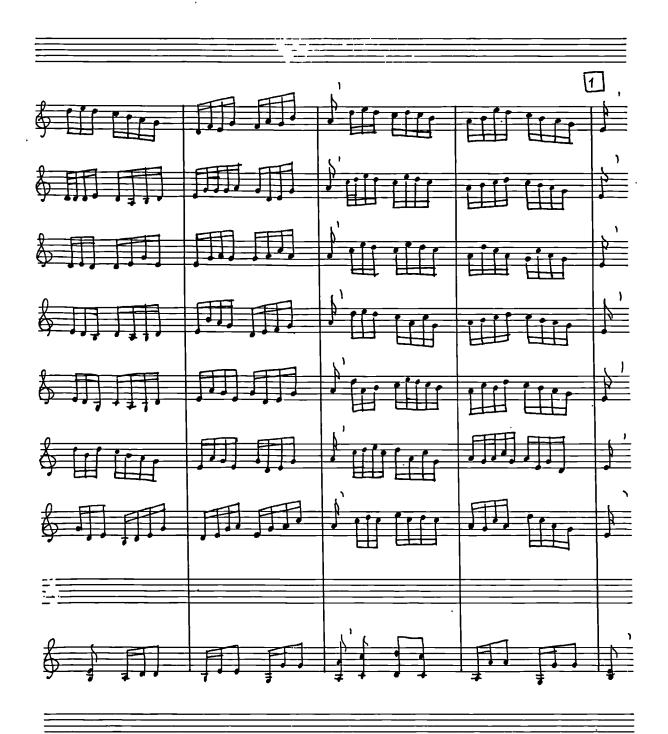
















(Section II)









(repeat)









2.5 THANG RANAT EK

CHORAKHE HANG YAO (SAM CHAN)









(repeat)









(Section I)









(repeat)



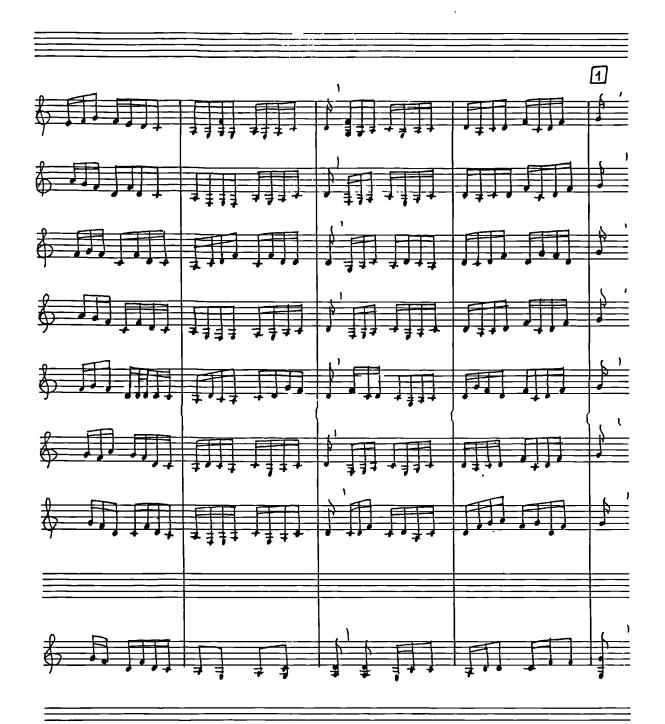






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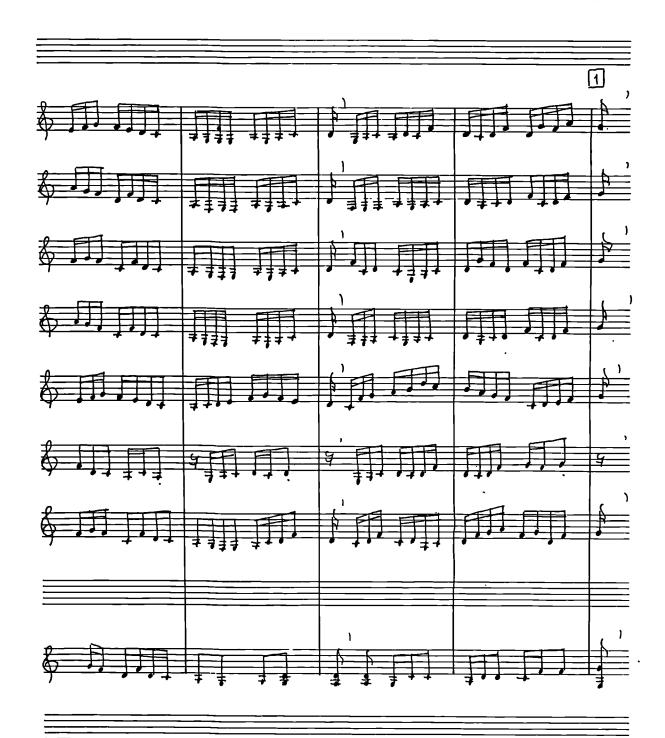






(repeat)









2.6 THANG RANAT EK

SARATHI (SAM CHAN)

















(repeat)

















(Section I)





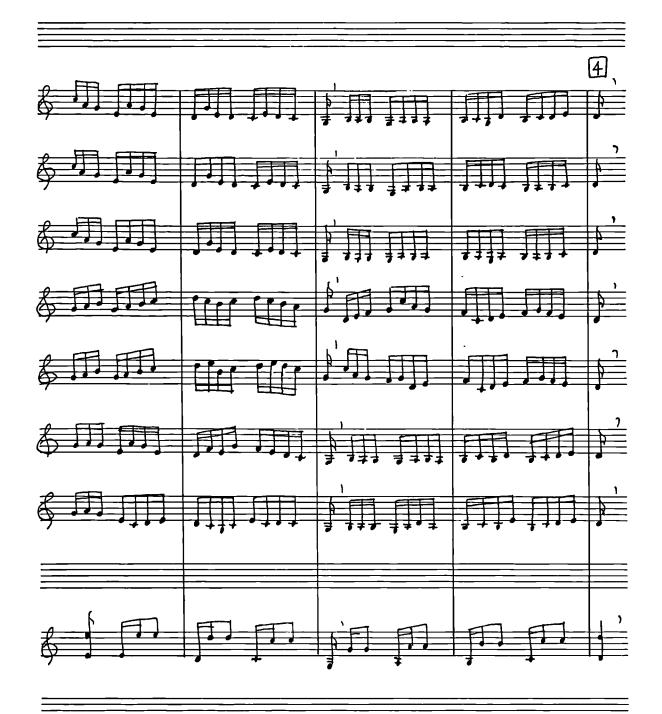












(repeat)

















(Section II)









































