

## Music as Ambassador for World Peace: Ideal or Reality

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### ABSTRACT

Music is usually divided into two main types: liturgical music to encourage people's faith in God and secular music for people's entertainment, including music accompanying dance. Musicians and composers have developed their skills and musical abilities through the ages resulting in music of high quality, complexity and theoretical sophistication. Music masters of each school transmit their music heritage continuously. The growth of science and technology resulted in social change from agricultural to manufacturing economies and finally business services and music became a commodity. Businessmen produced music to suit people's needs and tastes without awareness of musical value, good or bad. The question is "what is music for?" Music is supposed to be a beautiful object for appreciation, and should shape people's minds and morality. Over 50 years of my experiences as a musician and teacher, I have learned that music is a good tool for breaking the ice between international colleagues and me, leading to us becoming good friends. But I still don't know how to make friends with people who are fighting and bombarding out there, especially the weapons-makers and war-creators who are completely filled with greediness and selfishness. In term of "music as ambassador for world peace," music itself must be good and powerful enough to reach the deepest mind of people to reduce their greediness and selfishness and help them become lovers of humanity and nature. This job cannot be accomplished by any one individual, but by composers, musicians, music educators and music education.

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## Article

If music could help to accomplish world peace, that music must be so powerful and well-performed as to be a true ambassador for peace. The question is, is this statement reality or just a dream or cloud in the sky?

I will discuss this statement as an ethnomusicologist, composer and music educator. I would like to discuss two main topics: 1) the power of music, and 2) music and culture as ambassadors for world peace. Firstly, the power of music.

The philosopher Schopenhauer states that: Music is as immediate an objectification and copy of the whole will as the world itself is, indeed as the Ideas are, the multiplied phenomenon of which constitutes the world of individual things. Therefore music is by no means like the other arts, namely a copy of the Ideas, but a copy of the will itself, the objectivity of which are the Ideas. For this reason the effect of music is so very much more powerful and penetrating than is that of the other arts, for these others speak only of the shadow, but music of the essence. (Schopenhauer, ISBN 0-486-21761-2)

That means music can find the way into the deepest part of one's mind. If a community needs good people, that community must offer good music for people to hear. In this case, good music is music that reduces human greed and selfishness, whereas bad

music is that which stimulates greed and selfishness.

Because music can convey meanings about many other things, it frequently serves as a symbol. A particular useful definition of symbol for considering the symbolic aspects of music is "objects, acts, concepts of linguistic formations that stand *ambiguously* for a multiplicity of disparate meanings, evoke sentiments and emotions, and impel men to action". Music is included in definition because musical instruments and sound waves are objects, and the production of music is an act. Since music is an important symbol, behavior that creates music is rightfully considered a form of symbolic behavior. Part of ambiguity in musical meaning comes from the fact that the same performance or piece of music may carry different meaning at the same time have been termed multivocalic

Many people say *music is the universal language* because music can make people feel something, share the emotions of others, and can lead a person's mind to a certain point that no one else can know. For example, liturgical music such as chant, gospel hymns, the Mass, and motets of the Christian faith which help people reach a particular point – faith in God with no doubt.

In the case of Thailand, the land of Buddhism, ritual music is not attached to the Buddhist rite but is used as part of the rite to

prepare people to be ready for performing the ritual activities afterward. For example, in the “evening prelude” *homerong-yen* ceremonial suite (โหมโรงเย็น) to be performed before evening chant and “morning-prelude” *homerong-chao* (โหมโรงเช้า) to be performed before morning chant by the monks) there have instrumental music performed by the *piphat* ensemble (consisting of xylophones, sets of gong circles, oboe, drums and percussion) with undulating melodic contour in short notes and steady rhythm (similar to Baroque music) is performed before the main part of the ritual in order to lead people into a state of meditation, with a clear and calm mind, ready to concentrate on the chant offered by the monks. This music is usually performed in ritual ceremonies for any stage of life from birth to death. Of course, it’s also true for secular music or music for entertainment.

Many different ethnic groups around the world utilize both instrumental and vocal music as part of ceremonies for different stages of or occurrences in life. Now a day it is hard to find a single pure culture most cultures were acculturated. Acculturation is the continuous process by which one culture assimilates and adapts certain aspects of another culture or cultures. (Elizabeth May. 1980)

The cultural concepts involve both the content of the discursive consciousness of a

people and their implicit values and knowledge that operate only at the particular level. This dual nature of the basic concepts makes them especially difficult for the observer to understand. (John E. Kaemmer. 1993)

It seems doubtful that such “universal” aspects of music contribute to cross-cultural communication through music, and in any case what evidence is available tends to stress the barriers rather than the communicability of diverse styles.

An example is the music used for healing in animistic ceremonies of North and Northeastern Thailand, such as the ghost-dance (*ram-phifa* รำผีฟ้า of the north and *jole-mamuad* โฉลมะม่วง of the northeast). More detail cannot be provided because of limited time, but many examples exist worldwide.

All the musics mentioned above help shape people’s minds toward

goodness, faith, calm and a sense of humanity, and away from greediness and selfishness.

Secular music or music for entertainment can be divided into two kinds: traditional and popular. Popular music affects people’s lives and has strong influence on people’s ideas because it is pervasive and can be heard on TV, radio and especially on social networks. Traditional music such as folk or local music functions to entertain people as well as to accompany other arts such as

theatre or dance. This music reflects people's way of life and often consists of songs in lyrical form. The song texts often reveal the lifestyle of the culture and serve to teach behavior and manners and pass cultural heritage to the new generation. Some of this music contains metaphor and double entendre.

Now, let us move to the second topic: music and culture as ambassador for world peace. Please allow me to discuss the statement "music is the universal language." As a matter of fact, it is not true; music has never been a universal language. In the case of language, the sound and the written letters of a particular language are only symbols to represent the meaning of the language and only people of that particular society can understand it clearly. They have to learn and collect experiences over time, until they have enough accumulated experiences to understand all the meanings of the signs of the language quite clearly. So, music is not a universal language because you cannot understand any music thoroughly except music of your tradition. (Alan P. Merriam. 1997)

This is because music is a product of culture. Music of a particular society is made by people who grew up in that community, and is shaped by the community's culture or ways of life such as beliefs, religion, ritual, arts, ideas, behavior and language. We call them *emic* (the insider) while we are *etic* (outsider)

of that tradition. Even if *etic* people like you and me spend some period of time in that particular society and are able to speak their language fluently, we still will not understand their music as the *emic* person does. This is because our interpretation of that music is based on our own cultural background. As much as we try to understand that music, it will still appear as a reflection of our own culture as if we look at it in a mirror in which we see ourselves in the foreground and the people of the other culture in the back. Music occurs in the same manner as language. So music is an un-universal language.

If music is an un-universal language, how can music be an ambassador for world peace? Before answering this question, please let me tell you about some of my 40 year experience as, seemingly, a music ambassador.

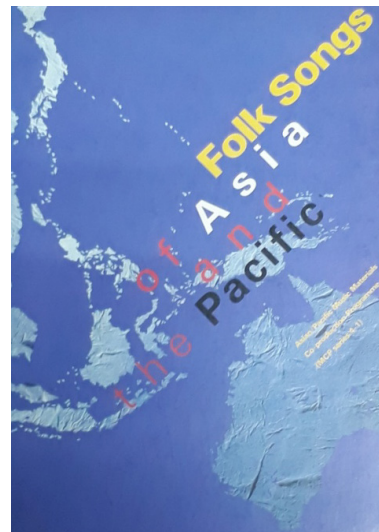
1968, I and a group of musicians from Prasanmit College of Education, Bangkok, performed Thai music in Kuala Lumpur and Penang, Malaysia. We made some friends afterward and later we created a music exchange program between our two countries. In 1975, I was a visiting scholar at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia teaching Thai music in an ethno-musicology program for around 20 international graduate students including students from England, Singapore, Japan, India, Malaysia and Australia. Those

students performed Thai classical pieces understood and appreciated in Thai music. Was I a music ambassador?

In 1983-90, as a representative of Thailand I attended the Asian and Pacific Music Experts Meeting for co-production materials, Asian Cultural Center for UNESCO three times in Tokyo, Japan and Islamabad, Pakistan. The productions included four sets of cassette tapes and booklets containing over 100 pieces of traditional music of Asian countries for school music teachers of 17 countries to use as a teaching aid to help children understand their neighbors' cultures and be able to sing the traditional songs of those countries. Some of these songs are still well known in those countries.



Co-production booklet 1981



Co-production booklet 1988

For example, *Loi-Krathong* (Floating Lamps) and *Chang* (Elephant) of Thailand, *Katak-lopai* (The Frogs) of Indonesia and *Bulan* (The Moon) of Malaysia are still being sung in schools. Were the delegates from those countries music ambassadors?

In 1990, I was the chief of the "Children's Music and Dance Group" attending the First World Children's Music Festival in Nagoya, Japan, sponsored by Tokai Bank. Eight Thai children performed music and dance onstage along with children from Europe and other parts of Asia. Although the children did not have any languages in common, they communicated with each other by body language, they laughed and sang together, and exchanged name cards. As they grew up they wrote to each other and became good friends. I felt those kids were real junior music ambassadors, am I right?



Delegates from Asian countries international meeting in South Korea



Lecture demonstration on Thai music for international delegates in South Korea

In 2007, I participated international meeting consisted of music experts from Asian countries and presenting paper on Thai music as well as learning from those participants and later on we were good friend.

In 2017 and a few years earlier, I as a vice president of Thailand Association of Music Educators offered an ASEAN music and dance

workshop supported by the Ministry of Culture of Thailand. We brought 20 musicians and dancers from 10 ASEAN countries to exchange their music and dance cultures and share their artistic knowledge with over 300 teacher participants who then brought the knowledge to their students in 65 schools and colleges all over Thailand. Were those artists from ASEAN countries music ambassadors?



Delegates from Brunei demonstrates *gambus*



Delegate from Cambodiademonstrates *trua che*





Thai participants practice Indonesian music



Burmese musician is teaching *songkok* to Thai learner with an interpreter



Delegate from Laos performs *khaen* music



Malay musician is demonstrating *rebab* and Thai interpreter



Vietnamese playing *danbao* to Thai audiences



Thai performs *krajabpi* to international musicians

In 2017, I and a group of Thai musicians was invited by Nanjing University of Arts to perform Thai classical music for “The Chinese Music Teachers Meeting” in Nanjing, resulting Chinese music teachers appreciated Thai music a lot and they had good relationship to each others.



Thai music in Nanjing University of Arts

In 2017, there were few Chinese musicians from Kunming College of Arts came to Thailand and perform Chinese traditional music at Bangkokthonburi University and that event creating good relationship between Thais and Chinese musicians since then.



*Tang-gu* and *gucheng* are performed by Chinese Musicians at BTU





Chinese chamber ensemble from  
Kunming College of Arts

Most of the musics mentioned above were traditional classical musics.

How about popular music?

Music and the other arts play a special role in every society providing us contact with the intuitive, mysterious, and emotional realms of life that logic is hard-pressed to explain. In this way, music balances the part of us that is logical, rational, and factual, with the part of us that is imaginative, sensitive, and spiritual.

As a symbolic system, music permits us to express and communicate the truth of our inner being. It allows us to explore those mysterious, illusive, and imaginative worlds of meaning that we do not fully understand. (Charles Fowler, p. 131-133)

The sentences states above is about “music and its meaning”, meaning of music of deferent people are different because those people interpret the meaning of same music in different ways bases on their accumulative

experiences. So that, only good music that shape up people good mined ought to be taught in school. In this case it is the role of music educators.

As mentioned earlier; *music can find its own way into the deepest part of the mind.* And the real function of music is to encourage people's ethical nature and aesthetic sensibilities, but only good music meets with this function. Today music is often a kind of merchandise; music is for sale, the music producers willing to produce music to suit consumers' taste without awareness of the “real function of music” because what they want is only money. No one can say all music available on the market, on TV, radio and social media is good. Good music for most people is based on one's own idea - *It's good because I like it* and I don't care what it is. Are all of those musics promoting peace?

World peace doesn't mean only peace between countries but intra-country as well. How could Thai people use music to make peace between the yellow-shirts and the red-shirts in Thailand during the past few years? How could American people use music to make peace between Republicans and Democrats on the day that Donald Trump was elected president? How can music stop the war in the Middle East? And how can music stop the war creators from creating war? If there is some kind of powerful and good

music, that music must be perceived by those Thais, Americans, and Middle-Easterners and the war creators themselves as a one- way door that only opens from the inside of the room.

We need open-minded people who are willing to get rid of selfishness, and to produce this kind of world population we need help from every single unit and also worldwide systems such as economic, education, and mass media. Yes, music education, specifically

music teachers are part of this holistic system. We all know that the world is huge, with many complexities and much diversity. As music educators, musicians and composers, what we will do in order to make the dream come true--the dream of "making music an ambassador for world peace?" The question still remains.

Is "Music as Ambassador for World Peace" an Ideal or Reality?

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