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The Interrelations of Genre in Traditional Cambodian Music and Theatre

Francesca Billeri[1]

This article focuses on the interrelation between and the adaptation of musical and extramusical song features in the Cambodian genres of *phleng kar* (wedding music), *phleng arak* (music for *arak* spirits), *lkhaon yiikee* and *lkhaon bassac* (sung-danced theatre genres).[2] The interrelation of genres is the main topic of my doctoral research which started from my master's study on *phleng kar*. Throughout my MA research, it appeared that selected songs from the *phleng kar* repertoire share and exchange musical and ritual features.[3] Here, I considered how these songs were used in other genres and what this could tell us about the social and musical interrelationship of these musics. The aim of this article is to discuss the concept of genre classification from the *emic* perspective of the Cambodian pratictioners showing how they talk and think about their music; and to explore the kinds of culture-specific markers employed by Khmer musicians to distinguish their genres.

Ethnographic research carried out during one year's fieldwork in different provinces of Cambodia and the capital city, Phnom Penh, using a combination of audiovisual recording, interviews, and participant-observation provided me with three case studies which illustrate: songs sharing the same title with different tunes; songs with the same title and similar tunes; and songs with a different title but similar tunes. I then applied transcriptions, using staff notation, to these case studies and analysed musical and extramusical parameters to consider the exchange of musical features and performance analysis following some other scholars' models (Marett 2009; McKinley 2002; Seeger 1987) so as to consider the ritual context.

[1] Francesca Billeri, Post-doc fellow, Università di Roma 'La Sapienza' (Italy), billerifrancesca@libero.it.

[2] For *phleng kar* wedding music see Brunet (1979); Billeri (2016); and McKinley (2002). For *lkhaon yiikee* theatre see Billeri (2021) and *lkhaon bassac* theatre see Billeri (2020).

[3] My first research in Cambodia was a three-month visit in 2009 to complete my MA thesis. I then conducted fieldwork research over a one-year period in 2014/2015 within the doctoral programme. The research was supported by a SOAS fieldwork award. I worked with my husband, who helped me with the language. I conducted lesson-interviews in the provinces of Siem Reap and Kampong Spəɨ with two masters of *phleng arak* music (Man Maen and Maw Yon). During these lesson-interviews I learned to play *arak* songs on the two-string fiddle (*trʊ quu*).

This article shows how the classification and categorisation of genres, even when genres overlap, reflect sociocultural aspects and are attached to a set of musical and extramusical components. Although Khmer musicians recognise the fluidity of genres negotiated by the exchanges between genres, they categorise each of the interrelated songs as connected to a specific ensemble, repertoire and performance context. As a result, they postulate the antiquity and sacredness of *phleng kar bouraan*, the ancient form of wedding music, which they are aware of as being performed across different repertoires. In fact, wedding music and music for the *arak* spirits belong to the *phleng khmer* genre, considered by Khmer musicians to be the most traditional and autochtonous genre, as it does not have any affinity with the music of the neighbouring countries of Khmer influence, such as Thailand and Laos. On the contrary, the theatre genres, *lkhaon yiikee* and *lkhaon bassac*, have foreign origins. Although these two genres are famous in Cambodia, they are considered less important and representative of Cambodian culture than the classical dance-drama and the Royal Ballet primarily due to the *lkhaon yiikee*'s and the *lkhaon bassac*'s foreign origins. In this paper, I provide comparative transcriptions of selected interrelated songs from the genres in question focusing on some musical and extra musical features.

Case Study 1: Similar title and different tune

Nettl (2015) explores the concept of tune families within a single genre and the way in which tunes cross geographic, linguistic and cultural borders in European folk music:

> [Some "songs" or "pieces"] behave as if they had lives of their own, moving across national boundaries, rivers, mountain ranges, oceans, across language and culture areas, stimulating one of their earliest observers, Wilhelm Tappert (1890, 5), to nominate them as "the most indefatigable tourists of the earth." As they move, they usually change, but not beyond recognition, retaining their integrity and this justifies their existence as units in musicological conceptualization. However, their culture may interpret them. (Nettl 2015, 113)

He also acknowledges the difficulty of establishing an 'original' version of a song so that his first model of a tune family, which consists of the transmission of a piece intact, is unreal. Since there are no written sources to draw from, my intent is not to establish an original tune family of songs from different repertoires – as scholars of Chinese music have been able to do, for example Jones (1989) and Witzleben (1995). Rather, I want to show how shared musical and extramusical aspects between songs from different genres recur and how Khmer musicians perceive them. Allan Marett (2009) summarises some of the musical conventions (text, melody and rhythmic mode) of the *Wangga*, a musical and ceremonial genre of Aboriginal people from the Daly region of Northern Australia, which are shared across four repertoires discussed in his book showing that there is a web of understandings common to the whole

Daly region and activated by the performance of *Wangga*. In a society without writing, it is not a score or an original version that constrains a performance, but a set of musical conventions. Therefore, here I will examine some musical traits that are shared by *phleng kar*, *phleng arak*, *lkhaon yiikee* and *lkhaon bassac*.

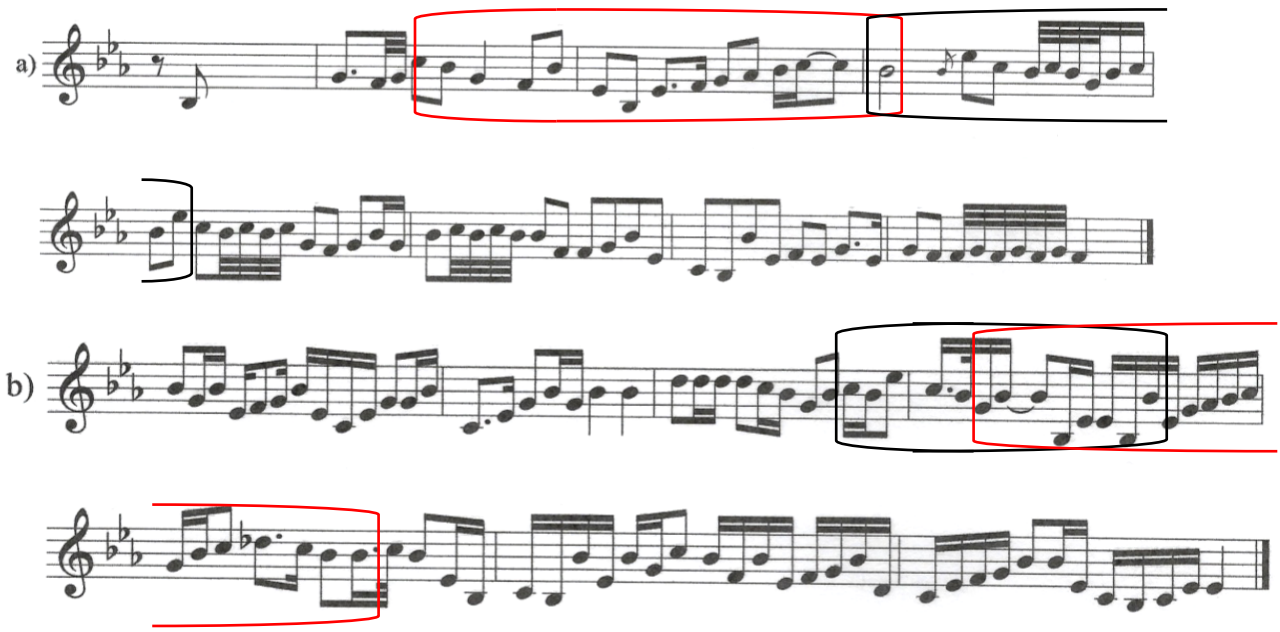
To shed light on the interrelation of songs across different repertoires, even though the boundaries are sometimes blurred, I try to analyse the content and the style of a piece by following the distinction used in folklore and applied to folk music by Bruno Nettl (2015, 115). According to Nettl, content refers to the musical aspects. In the study of the interrelation of Khmer music, the content could coincide with the shared musical features (cadences, scales, modes) while the style is the way in which a piece is performed reflecting the genre it belongs to (use of the voice, particular formulas, the length of melodic/rhythmic phrases). Both 'style' and 'genre' are terms concerned with ways of setting up categorical distinctions, of identifying the similarity between different pieces (songs, objects, performances and 'texts'). The sharing of musical techniques would perhaps encourage a musicologist to declare a similarity of style, while the distinction in subject matter calls attention to a difference of genre (Moore 2001, 432). Many attempts have been made to define a difference between genre and style; the most common one is to identify genre as a category or type of music ('the what'), while style is defined as a way of making music or a manner of articulation ('the how') (Moore 2001, 441).

By following this distinction, this section aims to answer some questions: How are shared contents adapted to different styles? Which components related to the style and contents identify a genre according to Khmer musicians? I shall start my discussion by analysing both the instrumental and vocal tunes of the *Sampoŋ* song.[4] I will firstly examine the instrumental version of the song played by Man Maen on a *trɔ quu* during a lesson-interview. When I asked him the difference between *Sampoŋ arak* and *Sampoŋ phleng kar*, he answered my question by playing three tunes corresponding to the title *Sampoŋ*. He distinguished a tune belonging to the *phleng arak* repertoire, a second tune belonging to the *phleng kar bouraan* (old form of wedding ensemble) and a third tune belonging to the *phleng kar samay kandaal* (semi-traditional wedding ensemble). "Although they share the same title, they have a different meaning, song text, rhythm and tune" (Man Maen, lesson-interview, 10 October 2014, Siem Reap). From a comparative analysis of the content of the three pieces (melodic and rhythmic contour, scale, and cadences) some similarities emerge. They also share the performance style evidenced by changes of octave throughout

[4] This song is performed as a wedding song by a *phleng kar* ensemble, in a ritual of possession (*coul ruup*) by a *phleng arak* ensemble and in *lkhaon bassac* theatre. The song title *Sampoŋ* is translated in different ways. It can be titled in English as 'Casual Hairdo' referring to a "girl's hair tied casually into a bun on her head" (Giuriati 1988, 166). The song title could refer to the fact that in the past this song was also performed for the *Pithii Kat Saq* (Haircutting ritual) as mentioned by Brunet (1974). In the theatre context, it is connected to scenes of love and musicians do not have a translation for it. Similarly, *phleng arak* musicians do not translate the title *Sampoŋ*.

the three pieces. It could be considered as the musician's style and a way to show his virtuoso skills as discussed by Sam in his PhD dissertation on *pin piət* classical music:

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



Example 1: Transcription of the first melodic phrase of a) *Sampooŋ phleng kar bouraan* and b) *Sampooŋ phleng kar samay kandaal* played on a *trɔ quu* (a two-string fiddle) by Man Maen (lesson-interview, 10 October 2015, Siem Reap province).
Note: In b) Man Maen is playing with the tuning of a particular degree (D), sometimes playing it flatter and sometimes closer to natural. The use of key signatures in this example is not intended to imply Western concepts of key and tonality, but to facilitate reading. The example is arhythmic reflecting metric flexibility in performance.

It should be pointed out that the different versions of *Sampooŋ* share some passages that recur in a different order throughout the pieces particularly in the two *phleng kar* songs. When Man Maen played the three versions of the *Sampooŋ* song during my *trɔ quu* lesson, he explicitily considered them as different in terms of rhythm and song texts although he used the same melodic material for each version of the song. Ex. 1 (above) shows a section from *Sampooŋ phleng kar bouraan* as a variation of a section from *Sampooŋ phleng kar samay* (in the red boxes) and vice versa, a section from *phleng kar bouraan* has a similar melodic contour to a section from *phleng kar samay kandaal* (in the black boxes).

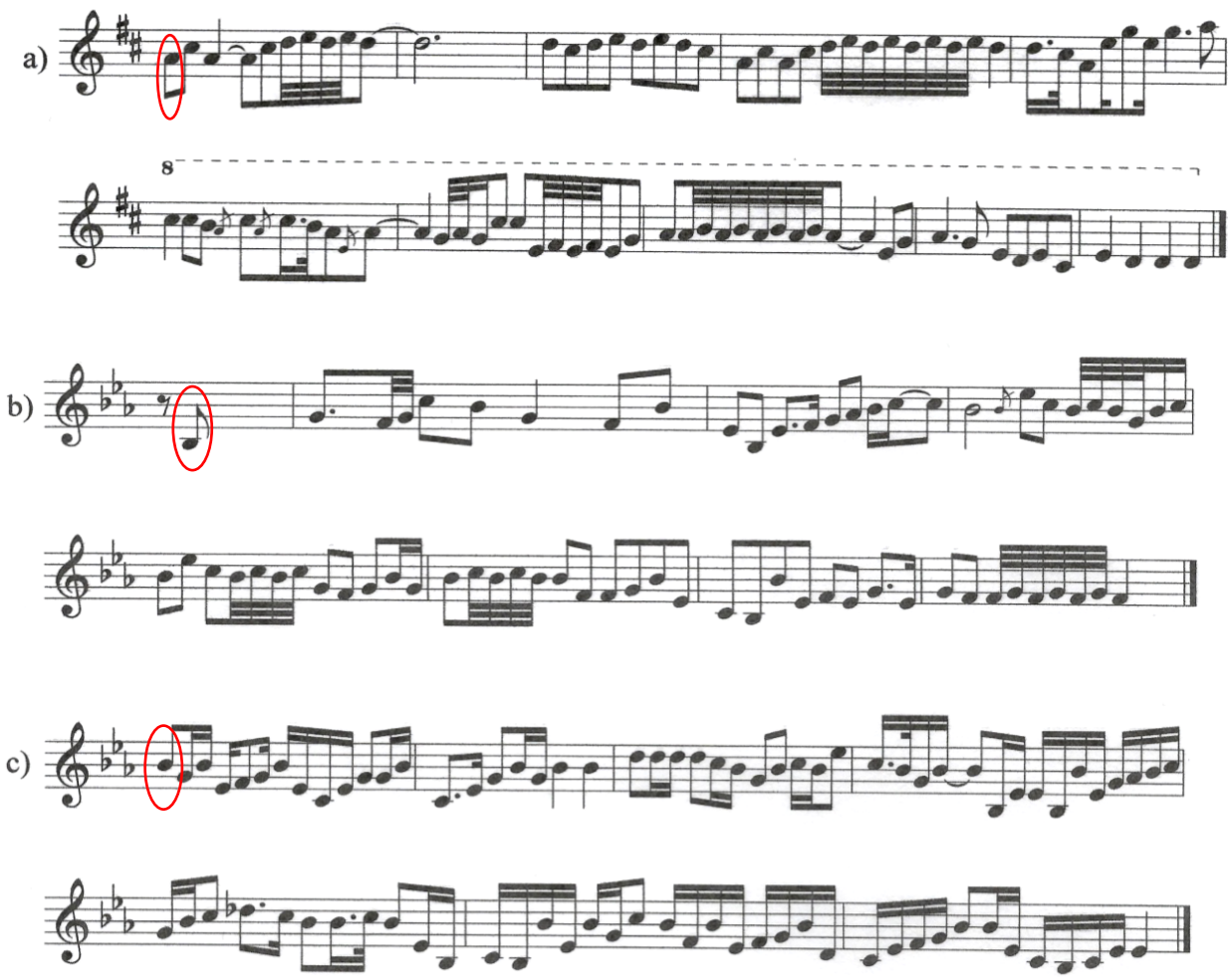
The two versions of *Sampoon phleng kar* seem different *plɔw* (roads) or variations of the "abstract melody." In fact, in Khmer music, there is no fixed melody performed by a specific group of instruments of the ensemble, as in Java (Hood 1954), or Bali, which is not always explicitily performed, but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

> When a melodic line becomes more and more intricate, it increases its density level; more pitch and rhythmic variations are exhibited. However, the length of the piece remains constant. They all play together at the same tempo, starting and ending at the same time. (Sam 1988, 142–43)

The notion of *bamphlɔy* which means "to cheat; to alter; to change; to embellish" expresses the improvisation process which is "to make things appear different from their original forms," as Maw Yon said "a distortion." Variation of the melody and creativity are remarkable components of the process of improvisation in Khmer music. There is a considerable degree of variability in each performance of a tune; the vocal part is different from the instrumental ones; each instrument improvises different variations at each repetition of the tune; the instrumentation of the tune can also vary. Therefore, the formal structure of the transcriptions given here must be considered only one version of the several 'roads.' Each vocal section is in turn made up of some melodic sections. As the two *phleng kar* songs belong to the same genre, they share the same scale. In contrast, the *phleng arak* song differs as it has two melodic phrases, called by musicians *thaat* (drawers), which are repeated at the lower octave in the second part of the piece on a different scale. Before leaving the melody, I will briefly address the question of pitch and mode.

Giuriati (1988) examines how Khmer musicians use different tone centres ('pitch levels') for each ensemble. He examines *phleng kar* music, *pin piət* (classical genre) and *mɔhaorii* (modern genre) and highlights how "the different pitch level in a non-equidistant tuning gives each genre a particular melodic flavour and intervallic structure" (Giuriati 1988, 211). "The distinction in function and occasion can be considered as a distinction in 'mood' expressed by the difference in instrumental ensembles and pitch levels" (Giuriati 1988, 207). The choice of instruments or ensemble and the selection of a given pitch level is culturally determined by genre. For example, the *phleng arak* version of *Sampoon* has a different tune, pitch level and scale from the *phleng kar bouraan* and *phleng kar samay kandaal* versions. However, the

interrelationship between the two *phleng kar* versions is mainly because both of them belong to the *phleng kar* genre and are built on the same scale and pitch levels – see Ex. 2.



Example 2: Transcription of the first melodic phrase of a) *Sampooŋ arak*; b) *Sampooŋ phleng kar bouraan*; c) *Sampooŋ phleng kar samay kandaal* played on a *trɔ quu* by Man Maen (lesson-interview, 10 October 2015, Siem Reap province).
Note: The use of key signatures in this example is not intended to imply Western notations of keys and tonality, but to facilitate reading. The first pitch corresponding to the tonal centre of each version is circled. The example is arhythmic reflecting metric ambiguity in performance.

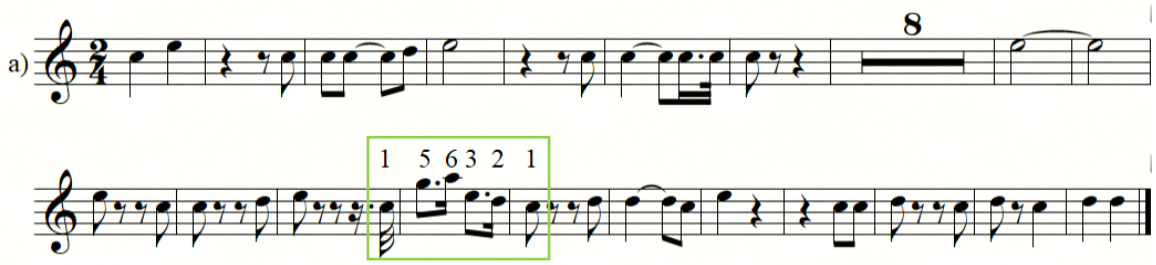
In popular music, scholars try to group ballad-tunes into 'tune-families' regardless of their associations with specific texts (Nettl 1963; Seeger 1966). Bruno Nettl (2015) identifies four types of tune family and defines a piece as "a group of tunes derived from one original" and the variants as "performances of the same songs." However, in the absence of written sources, the identification of the original tune among its variants is problematic since the measurement of the similarity and difference issue is culturally determined. The identity of a repertoire depends on the "assessment or even measurement of degrees of similarity between musics and among their components" (Nettl 2015, 118). However, if there is no

standard technique for establishing degrees of similarity, Nettl discusses some methods that suggest ways in which one could proceed further such as the comparative study of repertoires.

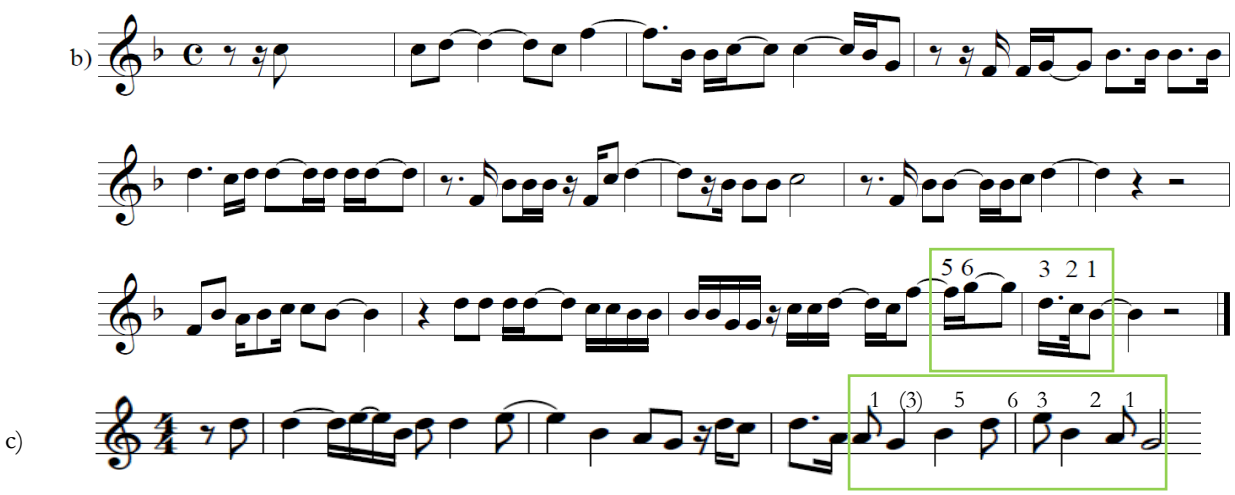
So far, I have analysed the instrumental version of the *Sampoon* song played by the same performer. Now I will compare the vocal lines of *Sampoon arak*, *Sampoon phleng kar* and *Sampoon bassac*, performed by different singers during ritual and theatre contexts. The difference between the musicians' renditions of a piece can be referred to as 'individual variation.' Sutton has used this term in his studies of Javanese *gamelan* music and defines it as including "variation within a single performance by one individual", "variation between performances by one individual", and "variation between performances by different individuals" (Sutton 1993 [1982], 246–47). Here, I have considered examples from various performers.

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

Man Maen distinguishes three *thaat* (melodic phrases) in *phleng kar samay kandaal* and two *thaat* in *phleng arak* and *phleng kar bouraan*. We can distinguish some cadences that are shared by the three songs. For example, the three vocal versions of *Sampoon* share a cadence (5 6 3 2 1) at the end of melodic phrases; the cadence constitutes the pentatonic anhemitonic scale on which the three pieces are based – see Ex. 3.[5]



[5] The vast majority of Khmer scales are anhemitonic pentatonic. Within this large group we can distinguish pieces that only use the five pitches of the scale, pieces that also use pitches 4 and 7 as passing tones, and those using pitches 4 and 7 coinciding with *chin* strokes.



Example 3: Vocal line of a) *Sampooŋ arak*; b) *Sampooŋ phleng kar samay kandaal*; c) *Sampooŋ bassac*.
Note: The green boxes show the shared cadences at the end of the first melodic phrase of each version.

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

> There are shorter sections, lines, motifs, rhythmic formulas, which are the constituent members of the songs or pieces. They cannot normally be reproduced by informants and, sung in isolation, they do not properly constitute music. But in analysis they too may be treated individually as units of musical thoughts that have variants, individual origins, and their own life stories. (Nettl 2015, 111)

The interrelationship between songs also concerns the verbal text. Verbal texts cannot be considered as fixed since they are improvised according to the ritual/theatre scenes. In the wedding context, singers improvise the text, drawing inspiration from the ritual action and the bride's and groom's beauty, names, family and social status. *Sampooŋ phleng kar* and *Sampooŋ phleng arak* texts are not related to a specific function in their respective ritual contexts. In fact, in the *coul ruup* ritual, *Sampooŋ* is played after the spirit

possesses the medium in each of the two versions that I recorded in two different rituals and provinces (Kampong Spəi and Siem Reap provinces). In the wedding context, *Sampoon* is played to entertain the guests during the empty moments of the ceremony, even though in the past, according to Giuriati (1988), it was connected to the ritual of "the arrangement of the areca flowers." Betel nuts[6] are mentioned in both of the versions:

1. *Phleng arak*: My dear, please stay by me so that I can give you the fruit of the betel nut
2. *Phleng kar*: She walks jerkily to bring the betel nut for me[7]

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

1. *Phleng arak:* You do love me, but your father does not allow us to marry (Billeri 2019)
2. *Phleng kar*: I want you, but you are married (Tricon and Bellan 1921)

Although musicians postulate that *phleng arak* songs cannot be played in the wedding contexts, we cannot establish whether the wedding text is adapted to the *phleng arak* song text or vice versa. By comparing *Sampoon phleng arak* and *phleng kar* song texts with those of *Sampoon* performed for *lkhaon bassac* theatre, love emerges as a common general theme although there are no parallels in terms of words and sentences. *Lkhaon bassac* and *lkhaon yiikee* texts are related to the scenes or characters. The text is improvised by the actor/singer according to the plot of the story and the theme of the scene so that it can have different song texts depending on the creativity of the actors/singers. For example, I recorded *Sampoon* during a *lkhaon bassac* performance on Bayon TV, one of the main Cambodian television channels, played on traditional instruments for a scene of the story *Preah Puthii Cɨy Komaa* as well as in a studio recording in the Banteay Meanchey province (see Tab. 1).

[6] Betel is a climbing plant whose leaves are chewed by people in Asia.
[7] The image of the "girl walking jerkily" refers to the bride walking jerkily towards the groom during the wedding ritual.

Song Texts		
Sampoon Arak	*Sampoŋ Phleng Kar Samay*	*Sampoŋ Bassac*
Oh! My blossoming flower of betel palm You walked in the evening. My dear, please stay by me so that I can give you the fruit of the betel palm. First I asked your mom for permission to marry you and she agreed. Then I asked your father, but he refused. My dear! You do love me but your father does not allow us to marry	The white-skinny girl She walks jerkily out of the hall (….) She holds the tobacco in her left hand and the betel nut in her right hand (….) She walks jerkily to bring the betel nut for me The white-skinny girl She timidily walks out of the hall smiling	I have not seen you today; do you miss me, my dear? Now I miss you and do you miss me or not? Do you pity me, my dear? If I die, will you miss me?

Table 1: Comparison of *Sampoŋ phleng arak, Sampoŋ phleng kar samay kandaal* and *Sampoŋ bassac* texts.

The first case study examined here shows how Khmer musicians label a tune and give it its title depending on the context of a specific function, ensemble or performance. Consequently, tunes from different genres sharing the same title and musical traits are adapted to the different performance contexts and styles.

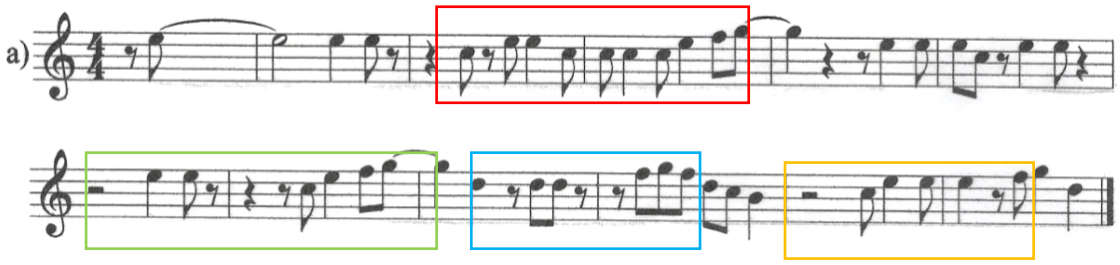
Case study 2: Same title and similar tune

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

During a *coul arak* ceremony in the Kampong Spəi province, I recognised the tune of a famous wedding song *Baay Khon Caaŋ Day* ('Tying of the wrists')[8] played during the *Pithii Baay Khon* ritual (ritual of tying the spouses' wrists). When I interviewed Maw Yon, I told him that the wedding song *Baay Khon Caaŋ Day* was played during the ceremony and he did not immediately recognise the song I was referring to. Then I sang the melody and he said: "Oh, this is not *Baay Khon Caaŋ Day*, this is *Baay Khon Laəng Rong* ('Tying of the pavilion'), it is similar, but it is not the same song" (Maw Yon, interview, 5 April 2015, Kampong Spəi). The two songs have the same melody. *Baay Khon Laəng Rooŋ* is played in the Kampong Spəi province only, during the ritual of paying homage to the *arak*[9] called *Pithii Laəŋ Rooŋ*. To distinguish between the *phleng kar* and the *phleng arak* songs, they add the function of the song in each respective ritual context to the basic *Baay Khon* title: *Baay Khon Caaŋ Day* (*Baay Khon* song for tying of the wrists) and *Baay Khon Laəng Rooŋ* (*Baay Khon* song for tying the pavilion).

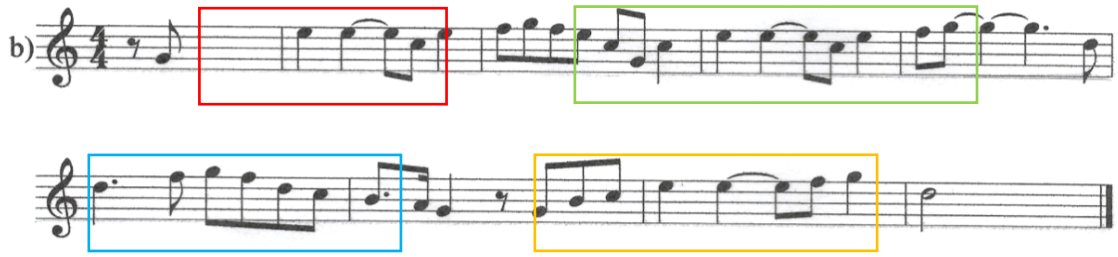
> Since some *phleng kar* songs, for instance, *Sampooŋ*, *Konsaeng Krahaam* and *Angkor Riec* are played in *coul ruup* ceremonies when requested by the *ruup* [medium], people mix up *phleng kar* with *phleng arak*. However, these songs are unrelated since the melody, rhythm and verbal texts are different. (Maw Yon, personal communication, 5 April 2015, Kampong Spəi province)

There are micro-variations in terms of rhythm; the register of the singers is different. The wedding song is sung by a female voice while an old male singer sings the *phleng arak* version. The embellished melody and the lyrical style of the *phleng kar* song differ from the repeated notes which characterise the fragmented style of the *phleng arak* songs (see Ex. 4).



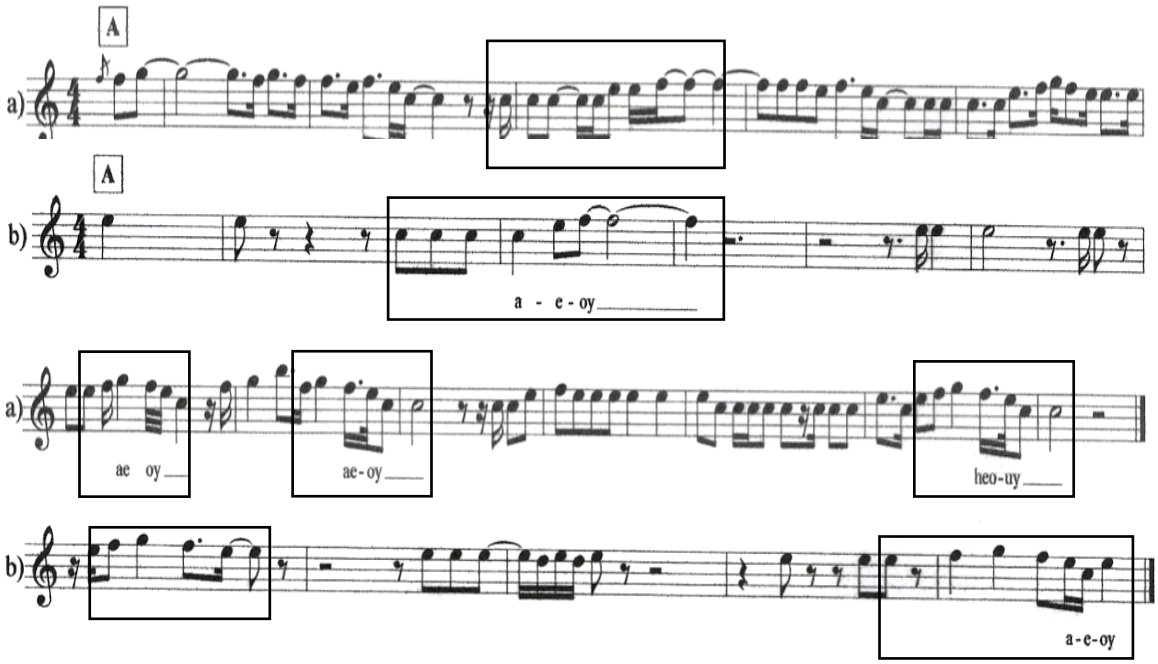
[8] The Ritual of Tying the Wrists is one of the most important rituals in the wedding ceremony. The couple's relatives tie a red cotton thread around the bride's and groom's wrists in turn, symbolising prosperity and eternal union.

[9] *Arak* are supernatural spirits living in natural places. They can harm a person who does not observe the *arak*'s rules and does not respect the societal conventions of their environment. Consequently, healing rituals (*coul ruup*) are organised to interrogate them and learn the causes of the illness and its remedies. Nowadays, the *arak* spirits are still considered as doctors and fortune-tellers. This belief is still alive in rural villages where the health care service is less developed than in urban areas.



Example 4: First melodic phrase of a) *Baay Khon Laəŋ Rong* (from *coul ruup* ceremony, 26 April 2015, Kampong Spəł); b) *Baay Khon Caaŋ Day* (from wedding ceremony, 5 March 2009, Phnom Penh). Note: The boxes with the same colour correspond to the shared melodic patterns.

A second example (Ex. 5) is *Kong Saoy* (literally *kong* = 'group'; *saoy* = 'to eat') which is played only in the Kampong Spəł province to recall ancestors' spirits in *coul ruup* ceremonies. The song has a similar function within wedding ceremonies when the ancestors' spirits are recalled to bless the bride and the groom and are invited to join the wedding banquet. The comparison of *Kong Saoy phleng kar* and *Kong Saoy phleng arak*'s tunes shows a similar melodic contour and cadences which mostly coincide with the nonsense words *aeoy*/*heoy*[10] that singers add to the verses to fill the beginning, middle or the end of the musical phrases as shown in Ex. 5 below.



Example 5: The first section (A) of the vocal line of a) *Kong Saoy phleng kar bouraan* and b) *Kong Saoy phleng arak*. Note: The boxes indicate the shared melodic patterns.

[10] *Oeun* is "a vocal fluctuation (…) which is used only at the musical level and not in everyday conversation" (Sam 1988, 212).

Even in this case, the verbal texts of the two songs present some parallels. In the wedding context, singers improvise the text, drawing inspiration from the ritual action, while in the context of *coul ruup* rituals, the verbal text recalls different kinds of *arak* spirits (territorial spirits, ancestors' spirits and Master spirits), evoking their stories and personal characteristics. The singer's voice embodies the followers' voice asking for blessing and apologies. For example, the *phleng arak* and *phleng kar* texts of *Kong Saoy* evoke the ancestors' spirits, in particular, the 'head' of Master spirits (*kruu thom*) called *Samdac Preah Kruu* who is addressed as *Look* and invited to join the ceremony. The two texts express Khmer beliefs in animistic spirits and the tradition of offering music to spirits and deities as shown by the only sentence shared by the two texts: "We are offering *Kong Saoy*." The table below illustrates the two examined texts of *Kong Saoy* that I recorded during a *coul ruup* ceremony in Kampong Spəi in 2015 and a wedding ceremony in Phnom Penh in 2009. The sentences in red indicate some parallels between the two texts in terms of words and general meaning.

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

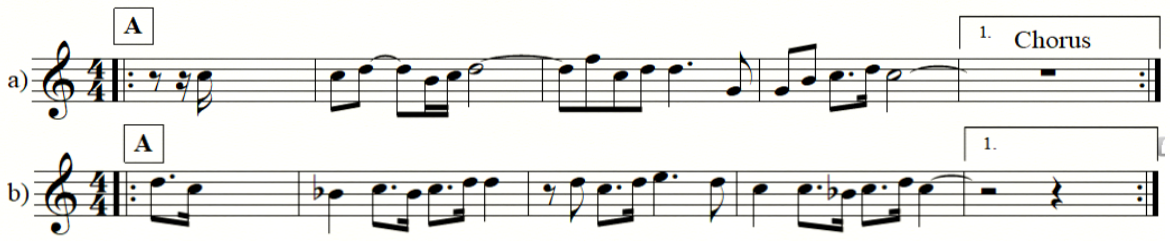
If I have done something wrong [**aeoy**], do not be angry [**heouy**]	My master [**heouy**] the parents of the bride and groom are behind
[**Aeoy**] *Samdac Preah Kruu*, *Samdac Preah Kruu* with the metal stick [**heouy**]	Please bless them [**heouy**]
The metal stick, the metal stick, *Look*, you can go beneath the surface of the ground and water	Please my dear [*oun*] May the bride and groom be happy
Mighty *Look* You are mighty to solve problems every time	

Table 2: Comparison of *Kong Saoy* (*phleng arak*) and *Kong Saoy* (*phleng kar bouraan*) texts.

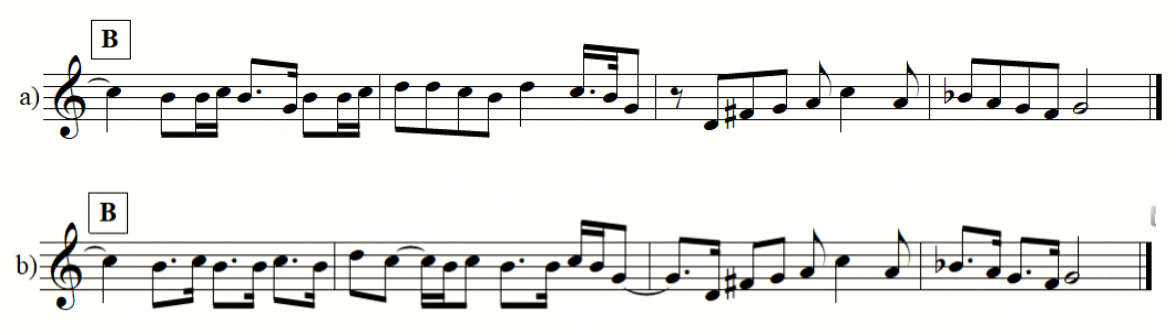
Unlike *Sampoon phleng kar* and *Sampoon phleng arak* texts, *Kong Saoy* and *Baay Khon* songs are related to a specific function. The examples of *Kong Saoy* and *Baay Khon* show how a similar melody labelled under the same title is adapted to different genres assuming different musical features such as melodic and rhythmic micro-variations. Titles and texts specify their function within the connected ritual context.

Case study 3: Different title and similar tune

The third case of the interrelation of songs concerns similar tunes with different titles such as the *yiikee* song *Noang Pisara* (Thai title)[11] and the *phleng kar* song *Sat Tra Yaan* ('The giant ibis'). The two songs have two sections (A-B) and share a similar melodic contour with slight rhythmic micro-variations due to the personal style of the singers, the lyrics and the different ensembles (Ex. 6). In the wedding context, the *Sat Tra Yaan* song is not related to a specific ritual or function while the *yiikee* song is related to the dance movements and has a slower tempo since it is played for the *rɔbam yiikee* (*yiikee* dance) which precedes the theatre performance.

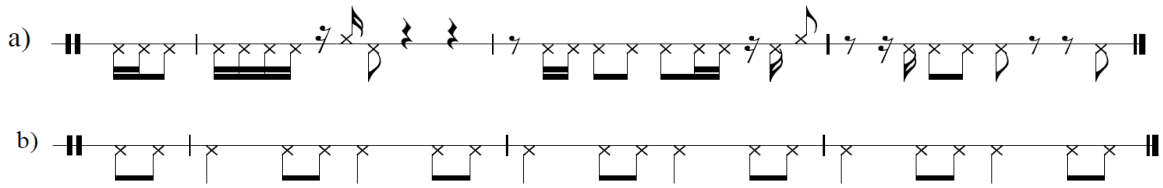


[11] The translation of the title is not provided. Sometimes the title is not known to the musicians themselves, either because the words of the title are really old or because the words are borrowed from foreign languages, as in the *yiikee* songs, *Noang Pisara*, whose title and even the chorus employ a combination of Thai and Malay words.



Example 6: Section A and B of the vocal line of a) *Noang Pisara* and b) *Sat Tra Yaaŋ*.
Notes: The *yiikee* vocal line has been transposed for ease of comparison (the original pitch of *Noang Pisara* was F#). The *yiikee* song vocal line is alternated with the chorus (*totuel*) which is not transcribed. It is composed of a group of women singing backstage.

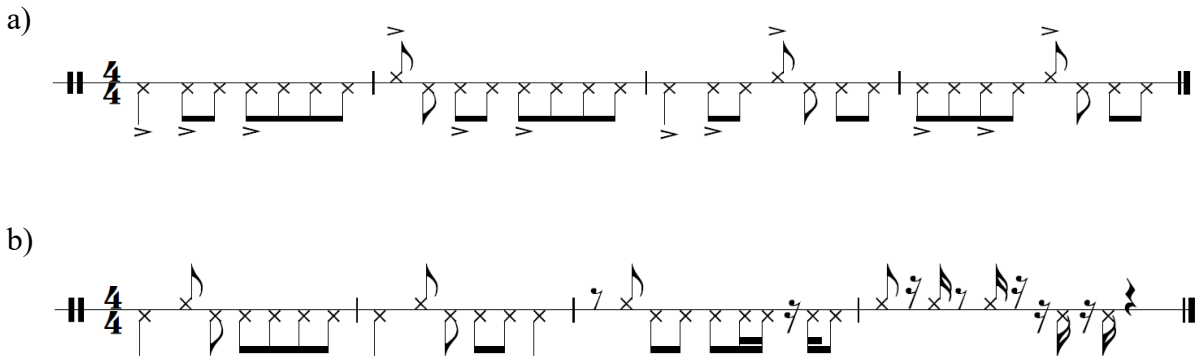
According to my informants, the melody is the same, but the verbal text is different depending on the stories. The two vocal lines appear to be variants of the same song which is adapted to different ensembles, contexts and functions. The title is not always the same. In fact, sometimes two songs share the same melody, but they have different verbal texts and titles. The remarkable difference between *Sat Tra Yaaŋ* and *Noang Pisara* is related to the rhythmic patterns and the various types of drums, such as the *yiikee* drums, which are linked to the dancers' movements. In addition, the *yiikee* song has a slower tempo – see Ex. 7.



Example 7: Rhythmic patterns of a) *Sat Tra Yaaŋ* and b) *Noang Pisara*.

Rhythms of theatre songs are distinctively different from the other genres. The *phleng arak* and *phleng kar* music uses the same drums, called *skɔɔ arak* or *skɔɔ day* (hand-drum), and rhythm, although the *phleng arak* rhythm is functional to the possession of the spirits by means of a gradual increase in tempo. This similarity is related to the fact that both these repertoires belong to the *phleng khmer* genre. The rhythmic pattern of the two songs is similar (see Ex. 8). These rhythmic patterns prior to the possession phase are similar to those of *phleng kar* songs and there are no specific rhythms or sequences of songs connected to particular spirits as occurs in other possession music traditions such as the Vietnamese *chau van* songs

(Norton 2000), the Burmese *nath saing* songs (Chiarofonte 2014), or the Tunisian *stambeli* (Jankowsky 2010). Songs are instead chosen by mediums who usually already know which spirit will possess them. The increase in the tempo of *phleng arak* music has a key functional role in *arak* possession. In wedding music, there is no acceleration of tempo but a steady rhythm. "When musicians play *phleng kar* music for *arak* spirits, the rhythm is faster and the meaning of the song is different" (Man Maen, interview, 24 January 2015, Siem Reap). So the *phleng kar* song is adapted to the 'nasty' (*kac*) character of *phleng arak* music and its rhythm.



Example 8: Rhythmic patterns of a) *Srəy Kmaw* (The black lady) (before possession) and b) *Sampooŋ phleng kar samay* played on a *skɔɔ arak*.

Unlike the *phleng kar* and *phleng arak* genres, there are similarities between the two theatre genres. In *lkhaon yiikee,* the function of the drums is to provide rhythmic accompaniment to the *rəbam yiikee* dance at the beginning of the performance and throughout the performance, since actors dance while acting and singing. In the *lkhaon bassac* context, the predominant function of the drums (*skɔɔ bassac*) is to provide onomatopoeic accompaniment to the characters and scenes. Therefore, the musical function of the drums serves to identify the popular theatre genres as does the naming of the drum as either an *lkhaon yiikee* or an *lkhaon bassac* drum. The rhythm of the *skɔɔ* is different depending on the scene and character. The *skɔɔ* play different rhythms to reproduce the sound of the scene. As a result, the function of the songs justifies their rhythms and an interrelationship only occurs between *phleng arak* and *phleng kar* due to their common roots. Tab. 3 below summarises the interrelations of the songs examined above.

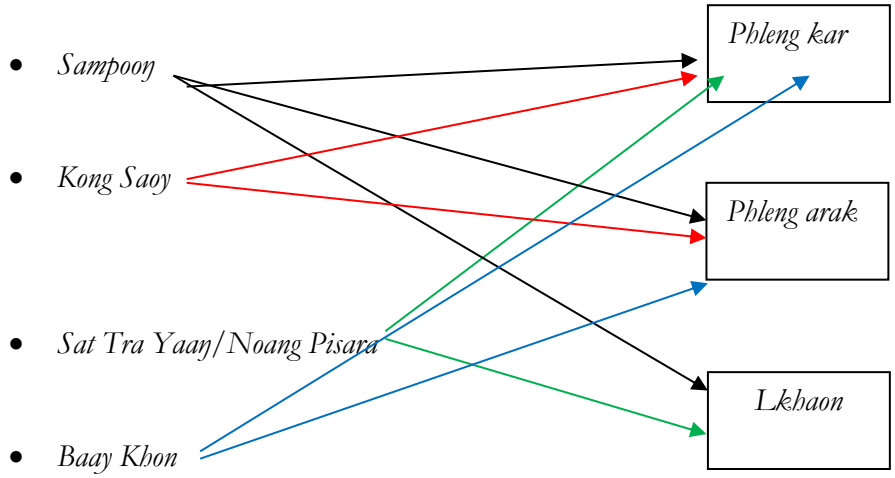


Table 3: A general summary of the interrelations between the examined songs.

Postulating the Antiquity and Sacredness of Phleng kar Bouraan Music and Phleng Arak Music

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

Figure 1: *Lkhaon bassac* musicians play *phleng kar* wedding music on *phleng kar samay kandaal* instruments before the beginning of a theatre performance. Photograph: Francesca Billeri (2015).

Therefore, the antiquity and divine nature attributed to *phleng kar* and *phleng arak* music are the reasons why they are performed across different genres and performance contexts. Although it is difficult to establish which genre is the most ancient due to the absence of sources, my informants postulate that *phleng kar bouraan* is the oldest form of Khmer music. However, they classify both the *phleng kar* and *phleng arak* genres as *phleng khmer* (Khmer music) or *phleng khmer propiynii* (Khmer traditional music). Khmer musicians have defined these genres as 'Khmer music' to express their autochthonous and intimate character which accompanies their 'private' ceremonies (Porée-Maspero 1958) including weddings and rural ceremonies related to the cult of animistic spirits such as the *coul ruup* or *coul arak* healing ceremonies. More importantly, the term *phleng khmer* is adopted to distinguish Cambodian traditional music from the neighbouring countries of Khmer influence such as Thailand and Laos[12] whose musical tradition does not employ specific ensembles for wedding and healing rituals.

[12] The classical *pin piat* genre is very similar to the Thai *pi phat* due to the historical relations and reciprocal influences of the two countries.

Figure 2: *Reak Smey Sorya phleng arak* ensemble, Kampong Spəɨ province. Photograph: Francesca Billeri (2015).

Figure 3: *Phleng kar bouraan* ensemble, Phnom Penh. Photograph: Francesca Billeri (2009).

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

> The Cambodians trace their music back either to the mythological time of the creation of the world by the Hindu gods, or to a more recent world which closely affects the autochthonous tradition. So in

> Cambodia the well-known legend of the 'Shiva Dance' says that the wife of Brahma, Sarasvati, played the monochord. (Brunet 1979, 206; translated by the author)[13]

The Angkorean iconography also attests the antiquity of the *phleng khmer* ensemble; in fact, the monochord *ksaediəw* and the cymbals (*chiŋ*) are depicted on a sixteenth-century bas-relief at the Angkor Wat[14] and Angkor Thom temples. Another reason why *phleng kar houraan* music is performed across different genres is related to its sacredness. However, not all the Khmer musical genres have a 'divine' nature; only the classical genre *pin piət* and the wedding music *phleng kar* are infused with a sacred sphere (Giuriati 2003). The *pin piət* genre is connected to Buddhist celebrations and royal ceremonies and has a strong Thai influence; the *phleng khmer* music has the function of recalling and amusing animistic spirits. Moreover, it is considered the only kind of art capable of expressing poetical images related to the theme of love, nature, mythological episodes and figures, expressing historical and socio-cultural values.
However, it is difficult to classify the two genres chronologically and postulate their mutual influence since they share many aspects. On the contrary, although again we do not have any evidence, the *lkhaon yiikee* and *lkhaon bassac* theatre forms can certainly be considered less ancient than *phleng arak* and *phleng kar* music and they are not considered autochthonous due to their foreign origins.

Some reflections on the concept of genres in ethnomusicology

The concept of genre is widely used in ethnomusicology but rarely theorised in relation to oral music. It has been more studied in popular music (Fabbri and Chambers 1982; Frith 1996; Holt 2009; Negus 1999). In his study *Genre in Popular Music*, Holt (2009) delineates the reasons why there is little scholarly writing about genre and why it has been marginalised despite the increasing interest in issues of identity and culture in music studies that has emerged over the past couple of decades. The first reason is the great difficulty in establishing theories of genre since genre is: a fluid concept which often owes more to social/narrative constructs than to the music per se. The second reason is that research on genres has been oriented toward the collective and the general; an emphasis on the general and the collective in culture has not always been embedded in an understanding of the individual and the particular, however culture in music discourse cannot be understood without paying attention to the individual and the particular. Genre has implications for how, where and with whom people make and experience music. Without paying attention to genre, we would be poorly prepared to discuss a number of important issues:

[13] "Les Cambodgiens font remonter leur musique soit à l'époque mythologique de la création du monde par les dieux hindous, soit à un monde plus récent qui touche de près le fonds autochtone. Ainsi au Cambodge la légende bien connue de la 'danse de Civa' dit que l'épouse de Brahma, Sarasvati, jouait du monocorde."
[14] See Groslier (1921) for the iconography of musical instruments during the Angkorean period.

How do musicians communicate? What are the functions of rituals in a musical tradition? How can we think comparatively about music (Holt 2009)?

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

- ensembles;
- occasions/functions of song;
- rhythms;
- performance contexts.

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

- different vocal registers specific to each genre;
- musicians' styles;
- rhythmic and melodic features;
- verbal texts (nonsense words).

Songs sharing the same title can also have the same function (e.g. *Kong Saoy* song); the different tunes depending on the geographic area (*Srəy Kmaw)*. Additionally, titles can specify the genre's name (*Sampooŋ arak*) and the ritual's name (*Baay Khon Caaŋ Day*). A song with different titles can share the same tune (*Noang Pisaraa* and *Sat Tra Yaaŋ*). The interrelations of texts occur in terms of words and sentences, general theme, subject of the text, aspects of poetic meter and improvisation. The rhythm is also linked to dance such as in *lkhaon yiikee* theatre and is interrelated, especially in *phleng arak* and *phleng kar*, where

the rhythm shares similar patterns due to the similar ensembles and performance practices. Ensembles are also connected to specific repertoires although crossover occurs between them.

The study of the interrelationships and exchanges of repertoires illustrates the fluidity of notions of genre. By analysing the concept of genre in folklore, Harris has defined it as "a site of contestation" in which categories of classification are blurred, merged and overlapped: "Genre served a dual purpose in that it provided a system of classification as well as a conceptual framework for articulating characteristics of the individual components or units within that classification" (Harris 1995, 514). While the notion of genre is useful for classification purposes, it is clear that people tend to use it in a fluid manner, allowing items to crossover between categories. In the field of oral tradition, the work of Heather Sparling (2008) defines how genres in the Cape Breton Gaelic context are discursively constructed and contested, and how these genres shift over time and place while being linked to social classifications and social actions. My research on Khmer traditional music shows how classification and categorisation of genres, even when genres overlap, reflect sociocultural aspects (Rice 1994; Seeger 1987; Sugarman 1997) and are attached to a set of musical and extramusical components. From the conceptualisation of genre emerges a tight relationship between music and ritual, ceremonial and performance contexts (McKinley 2002); musical genres are seen as inseparable parts of their contexts (Moisala 1991).

The concept of genre is a complex issue in ethnomusicology since genres are context-specific and have different kinds of markers. However, most of the taxonomic denominations described by non-specific terms designating the mode of execution, working circumstances, textual themes and performance practices are shaped and coined by scholars only for study purposes (Laboratorio Edison 1993). In this connection, researchers have failed to pay attention to the traditional terminologies used within the communities to which the music belonged due to the difficulties of adapting indigenous denominations of a limited area to a wider and more general classification.

In this article, I have reported the information gathered from the Khmer musicians during my fieldwork. These data have contributed to giving my research the *emic* approach followed by some scholars (Feld 1982; Kartomi 1990; Zemp 1979) which reflects how musicians conceive and talk about their music. When presenting their music to outsiders, Khmer musicians list ensemble types: *krom phleng pin piət* (classical ensemble), *krom phleng mahori* (entertainment music), *krom phleng arak* (music for spirits), *krom phleng kar* (wedding music), *krom phleng samay* (modern/pop music). These ensembles are defined according to the context/function (*pin piət* as music for Buddha, royal ceremonies and classical dance-drama; *məhaorii* at parties; and *phleng khmer* for accompanying rites of passage and rural ceremonies). Some of these ensembles can be grouped under the label *phleng prapəynii* (traditional) or *phleng bouraan* (ancient). The term *prapəynii* refers to all the genres that are considered to have a historical value and to be authentically Khmer such as *pin piət*, *phleng kar*, *phleng arak* and *phleng məhaorii*. Genres grouped together

under the *bouraan* label are considered to be ancient since they have not undergone significant changes over the years; this category encompasses *pin piət*, *phleng arak* and older and rarer ensembles such as *phleng kar bouraan*. As evidenced by the iconography, the *phleng kar bouraan* instruments are shared with the *phleng arak* ensemble while the *phleng kar samay kandaal* are shared with the theatre ensembles except for the drums which identify each theatre genre. However, there is no evidence of the influence of *phleng kar* music on the *phleng arak*, *lkhaon yiikee and lkhaon bassac* repertoires.

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

Glossary of Khmer Terms

Arak (អារក្ស)	Spirit, demon (these supernatural beings may be benevolent or malevolent).
Bamphlɔy (បំផ្លែ)	The process of musical improvisation.
Bouraan (បុរាណ)	Ancient.
Chiŋ (ឈឹង)	Small bowl-shaped brass hand cymbals (unpitched).
Coul arak (ចូលអារក្ស) or *Coul ruup* (ចូលរូប)	"Entering the *arak*" or "Entering a medium." Ritual in which a spirit possesses a medium.
Ksaediəw (ខ្សែរមៀវ) or *Ksae muɔy* (ខ្សែមួយ)	Monochord.
Laəng Rooŋ (ឡើងរោង)	Ritual of paying homage to ancestral family spirits in an annual ceremony.
Lkhaon (ល្ខោន)	Theatre; drama.
Lkhaon bassac (ល្ខោនបាសាក់)	Cambodian popular theatre with dialogue and singing from the Bassac River region.
Lkhaon yiikee (ល្ខោនយីកេ)	Cambodian popular theatre with dialogue and singing accompanied by large round drum (*skɔɔ yiikee*).
Mɔhaorii (មហោរី)	A modern Cambodian musical genre.

Phleng arak (ភ្លេងអារក្ស)	Music for calling *arak* spirits.
Phleng kar (ភ្លេងការ)	Wedding music.
Phleng kar bouraan (ភ្លេងការបុរាណ)	Old wedding music.
Phleng kar samay kandaal (ភ្លេងការសម័យកណ្តាល)	Semi-traditional wedding music.
Phleng khmer (ភ្លេងខ្មែរ)	Traditional Khmer music genre.
Pin piət (ពិណពាទ្យ)	Classical genre of Khmer music.
Pithii Cang Day (ពិធីចងដៃ)	Ritual of tying the wrists performed during wedding ceremonies.
Pithii Kat Saq (ពិធីកាត់សក់)	Hair-cutting ritual performed during wedding ceremonies.
Pithii Twaay Kruu (ពិធីធ្វើគ្រូ)	Offerings, including music, to master spirits.
Pithii Twaay Preah Pisnukaa (ពិធីព្រះពិស្ណុការ)	Offering music to Preah Pisnukaa. Also called *Pithii Haom Rooŋ*.
Prapəynii (ប្រពៃណី)	Traditional/tradition.
Preah Pisnukaa (ព្រះពិស្ណុការ)	Viśvakarman (ancient Indian god of craftsmen).
Rɔbam (រាំ)	Dance.
Rɔbam Yiikee (រាំយីកេ)	Dance preceding the *lkhaon yiikee* theatre performance.
Ruup (រូប)	Medium (who can be possessed by ancestral spirits).
Samay (សម័យ)	Modern.
Samay kandaal (សម័យកណ្តាល)	Semi-traditional.
Samdac Preah Kruu (សម្តេចព្រះគ្រូ)	The head of the master spirits.
Skɔɔ arak (ស្គរអារក្ស) or *skɔɔ day* (ស្គរដៃ)	Small goblet-shaped hand drum.
Skɔɔ bassac (ស្គរបាសាក់)	Drum played in the *lkhaon bassac* theatre.
Skɔɔ yiikee (ស្គរយីកេ)	Drum played in the *lkhaon yiikee* theatre.
Trɔ quu (ទ្រអ៊ូ)	Lower-pitched two stringed fiddle with an attached bow.

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