

A SEA OF STORIES

Music and Myths from Southeast Asia

An Esplanade Commission
By Open Score Project

22 - 31 Jul 2026, Wed - Fri

Welcome message

Welcome! Selamat datang! வணக்கம்! 欢迎! ยินดีต้อนรับ! Xin chào mừng!

These greetings show the many wonderful cultures we have around us! Open Score Project welcomes YOU aboard *A Sea of Stories: Music and Myths from Southeast Asia*! Get ready to explore the unique music traditions of Southeast Asia as we journey through the incredible tales from each of these lands.

Our little island Singapore, is growing. And just like our ancestors, more people are coming here, bringing their cultures with them and calling this garden city home. This has made Singapore vibrantly colourful in so many ways—food, art, and music!

Learning about these different cultures around us is important because it helps us understand and appreciate the world better. Knowing about others' traditions and customs makes us kinder and open to new ideas!

I like to think of Open Score Project as a team of music superheroes. Our musicians come from different backgrounds and play all sorts of cool ethnic instruments. Even though we are different, we all share a love for making music. We can create amazing things when we work together. So can YOU!

I encourage you to celebrate our differences and discover the things we all have in common. Let's grow together, be understanding and find ways to make our home a better place.

Do you hear the wind calling? It is time to sail, play, and enjoy as we embark on *A Sea of Stories* and explore sun-kissed Southeast Asia!

All hands on deck!

Gildon Choo,
Artistic Director and Writer of *A Sea of Stories*
Founder of Open Score Project



Indonesia

During the show, we heard about the Malin Kundang folktale which originated from West Sumatra.

The picture on the right shows the rock formation in Air Manis beach in Padang, called **Batu Malin Kundang**. It resembles the bowing form of a man. **Batu** means 'rock' or 'stone'. According to legend, Malin Kundang turned into stone when his mother cursed him for refusing to acknowledge her after he became rich.



Activity 1

Identify Singapore and Padang on the map and circle them.

Minangkabau is the largest ethnic group on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia.

The Minangkabau people are known for their traditional Minang music which employs traditional instruments, as well as modern Minang pop music that incorporates instruments such as the piano and guitar. This modern style of music was likely influenced by the Dutch during the Dutch colonization of Indonesia.



Image taken from <https://en.wikivoyage.org/wiki/Sumatra>

Dendang is a music tradition of the Minangkabau people.

Den

means 'I'



Indang

means 'to sing'

The **saluang** is a bamboo flute used to accompany the singer. The playing of the flute and singing is performed in alternating verses, like a call and response. This traditional form of music is called **Dendang Jo Saluang**. The flute has four finger holes and is made from talang, a thin bamboo found drifting in rivers.

How is the saluang played?

(Scan the QR code on the right to find out)



Activity 2

Create your own call and response.

Call and response is a musical technique where one part (like a singer or instrument) plays a phrase and another responds, just like in Dendang Jo Saluang. It is also used in many other cultures. Write your own call and response!

Example

Call: "Who's got the power?"

Response: "We've got the power!"

Call: _____

Response: _____

Activity 3

Fill in the blanks.

Gendang Sunda is a Sundanese (West Java) two-headed drum, known as **indung** (m _ _ _ _ _). It is accompanied by two smaller drums known as **kulanter** (c _ _ _ _ _ _ _).

The word 'gendang' means drum, and 'Sunda' is short for Sundanese.



Image by pngtree.com



Scan to watch a video of a **Gendang Sunda** performance.

Thailand

The chapter of Sudsakorn's adventure is a short excerpt from the epic story titled Phra Aphai Mani. It is the longest Thai poem, with 48,700 lines! The poem was written by Sunthorn Phu who started it in 1822 but only finished in 1844! This means he took 22 years to write it!

At Hat Sai Kaeo beach on Ko Samet island, you can find the statue of Sudsakorn's parents—a man playing a flute, and a mermaid.

Piphat is a Thai musical ensemble that features traditional classical Thai music. It often consists of woodwind instruments (eg. *khlu*), and percussion instruments (eg. *ranat thum*, gong, chimes etc.)



Scan to watch a video of a Thai traditional **piphat**.

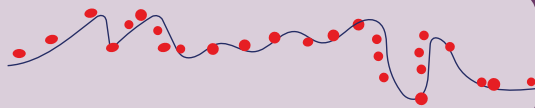
Musicians of the Thai Music Group,
Fine Arts Department [cr. FB: Thai Music Group]



Two methods of improvising on the ranat thum

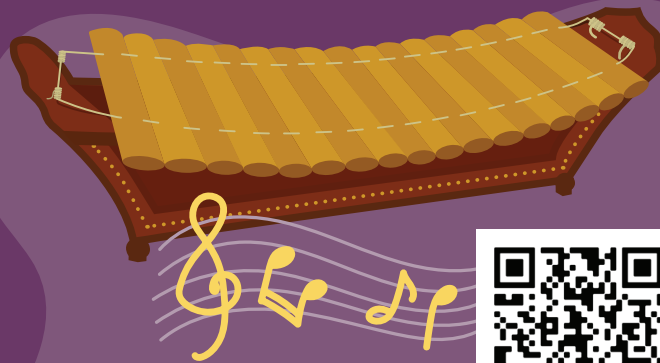
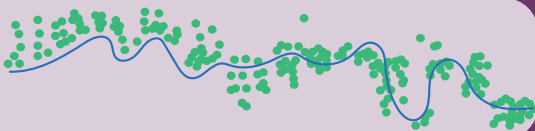
- 1 Kep** - when one adds more notes to the main melody.

Main Melody



- 2 Kro** - when one plays the same few notes repetitively.

Main Melody



The **ranat thum** is a low-pitched xylophone from Thailand consisting of 17 bars suspended by cords over a boat-shaped trough resonator.

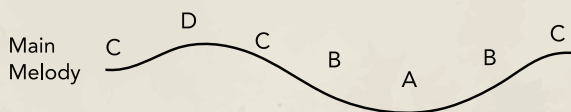


Scan to watch a video about the *ranat thum* instrument.

Activity 4

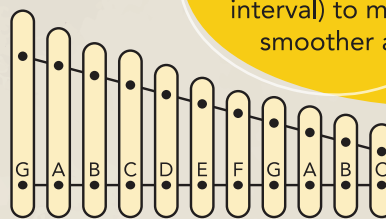
Improvisation using the Kep method.

Write your own improvisation by adding one or two improvised notes in between each of the notes from the main melody.



Example:

C E D F E C A C E D B C G C A E D C B A G D C



Tip

You may go up or down in pitch. However, use notes that are near to the main notes (e.g. step or skip interval) to make your melody sound smoother and more connected.

Your improvisation

C D C B A B C

A **flute** is a woodwind instrument that is made from a tube with holes. It can be played horizontally, vertically or even slanted.

Modern flutes, like the ones in Western orchestras, are usually made of metals like nickel, brass, silver or gold. Traditional flutes are usually made of wood or bamboo.

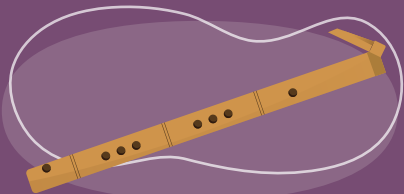
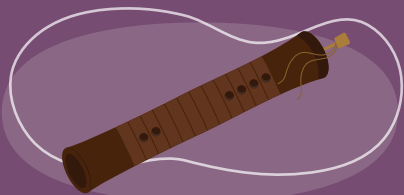
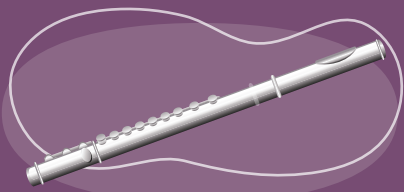
Pi phu thai is a reed instrument made of bamboo. The 'pi' in its name is a generic term for any variety of reed instruments in the Thai traditional instrument family. It is similar to the Chinese reed instrument known as the *suona* or *guan*.

The **khloi** is a Thai bamboo flute, similar to the South Indian **venu**. Both flutes have **eight** finger holes.

There are three types of **khloi** -

- 1 Khloi lip** (high)
- 2 Khloi phiang aw** (mid)
- 3 Khloi u** (low)

The lowest pitch, **khloi u**, has only **six** finger holes, just like the North Indian **bansuri**.



Activity 5

Draw in the correct number of finger holes for each instrument.

(Hint: You can find the answers on pages 2 and 4)



Bansuri (North India)



Khlui (Thai)

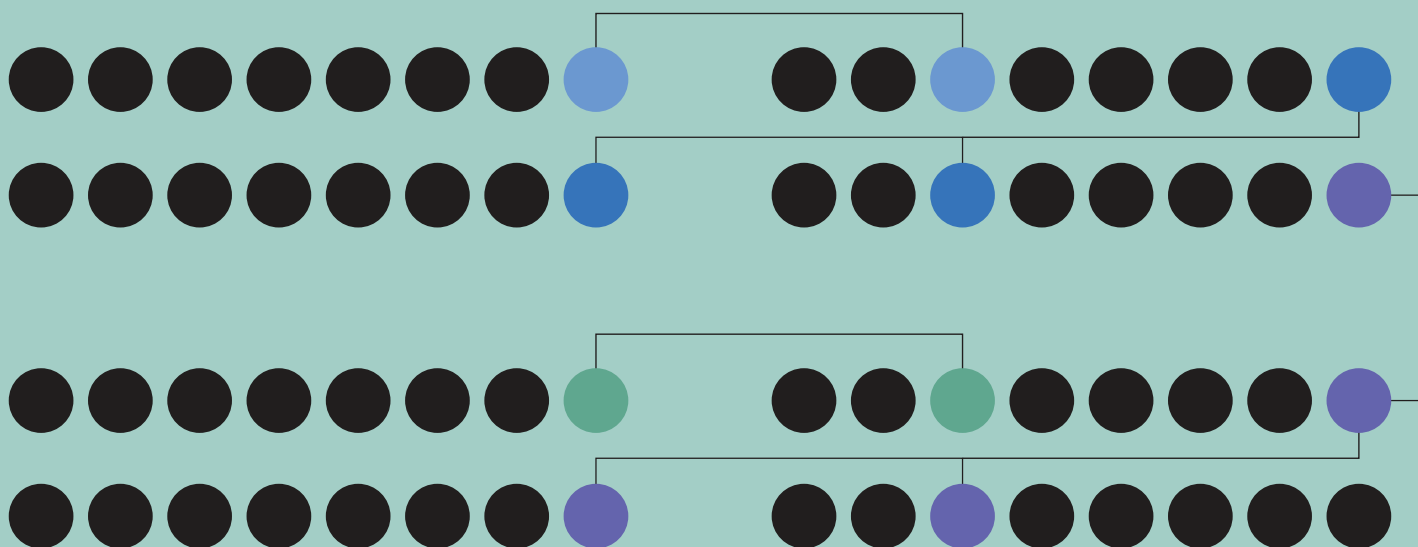


Saluang (Indonesia)



Venu (South India)

Rhyming pattern found in the story of Sudsakorn



Each line has **eight** syllables. Certain syllables rhyme with corresponding syllables in the next line as shown in the rhyme scheme diagram above.

Fun fact!

Rap is another musical style in which rhythmic and rhyming speech is chanted to a musical accompaniment.



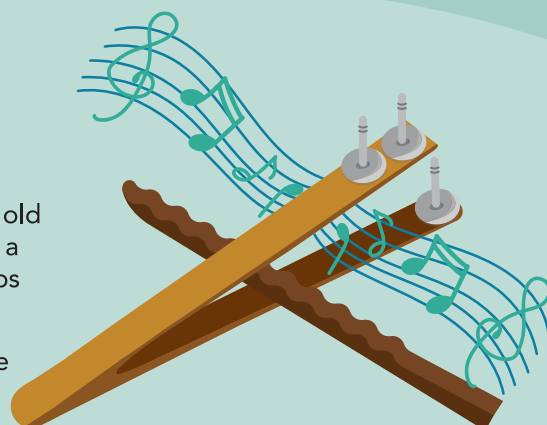
Scan to learn how to create your own rap.

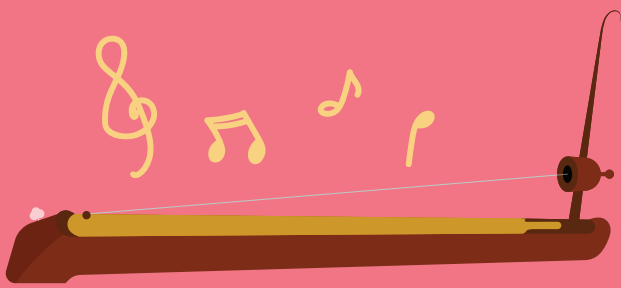
Vietnam

Senh tien

The *senh tien* is made from three pieces of wood, a small brass bell, and old Chinese coins. It is a fun percussive instrument which is a combination of a clapper, rasp and jingle. It is commonly played by the native ethnic groups in North Vietnam.

The *senh tien* resembles the castanet. It is fun and delightful to watch the *senh tien* performed in dance-like gestures. The instrument is played to accompany rhythms in rituals, ceremonies and secular performances.



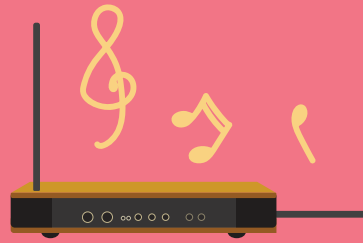


Dan Bau

Dan bau is one of the most unique instruments of the world and is central to Vietnamese music.

The word 'dan' means instrument, and 'bau' means gourd. It is believed that in the past, the instrument was made from dried gourds. Today, it is made up of mostly wood, and a metal string.

Requiring tremendous precision, it takes a lot of practice to be able to strike the harmonic points on a single string. Interestingly, the *dan bau* was mostly played by the blind community in the past.



Theremin



Scan to see how a *theremin* is played.

VS

The **theremin** is a Western electronic musical instrument that is played without any contact by the performer. Instead, it uses the performer's body as an electrical control.

Tones are produced by moving the right hand and fingers within the electromagnetic field around a vertical rod on the right side of the instrument. Volume is controlled by moving the left hand around a metal ring on the left side.

It requires precision to produce the desired tones.

Activity 6

Indicate whether each statement shows a similarity or difference between the instruments.

S / D

Statement

The *dan bau* is an Asian instrument while the *theremin* is a Western instrument.

The *theremin* is played without being touched by the performer while sound is produced when the string of the *dan bau* is struck.

The performer must be precise in finding the accurate positions or points in order to play the *dan bau* and *theremin*.

Did You Know?

It might be hard to imagine that the *dan bau* was mostly played by the blind community. But did you know that there are many other famous blind musicians around the world? Here are two of them!

Other blind musicians around the world

Ah Bing (Chinese: 阿炳), also known as Hua Yanjun was a blind musician from China specialising in **erhu** (a two-stringed musical instrument held in the lap and played with a bow). By the age of 18, Ah Bing could play more than 300 pieces of music and he was also good at singing. However, in his 30s, Ah Bing lost sight in both eyes due to illness. He then became a busker. He composed works which are still played today. His most renowned work includes *Er Quan Ying Yue*— *Reflection of the Moon at Er Quan*.



Scan to watch an *erhu* performance by Ah Bing.



The **Gozes** were blind female musicians who belonged to a guild and travelled widely, singing epic poems and popular songs of the time accompanied with the shamisen. Some believe that **Tsugaru shamisen** (a fast, loud, and improvisatory way of playing the Japanese shamisen) is said to have been created by them.



Scan to view the *Tsugaru* style of shamisen.

WORDSEARCH

Activity 7

Find the words in the word bank below.

Words can be found in any direction (including diagonals) and can overlap each other.

B	X	U	H	B	K	G	J	Z	D
Z	Y	S	N	Z	Z	E	M	E	I
E	I	V	N	K	V	N	N	E	A
W	U	D	A	Z	S	D	Z	O	H
J	L	Q	A	I	A	A	F	Q	T
B	H	A	M	N	T	N	V	Q	U
Q	K	U	G	J	B	G	Y	D	H
O	C	S	A	L	U	A	N	G	P
R	A	N	A	T	T	H	U	M	I
N	E	I	T	H	N	E	S	M	P

1. GENDANG

2. SALUANG

3. PI PHU THAI

4. KHLUI

5. RANAT THUM

6. DAN BAU

7. DENDANG

8. SENH TIEN

Glossary

1. GENDANG

A traditional drum used in various music traditions in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei.

2. SALUANG

A traditional bamboo flute with four finger holes from West Sumatra, Indonesia, used in Minangkabau cultural performances.

3. PI PHU THAI

A traditional Thai double-reed wind instrument made from wood or bamboo, known for its piercing sound in classical and folk music.

4. KHLUI

A traditional Thai vertical bamboo flute with eight finger holes, producing a mellow and melodious sound used in classical and folk music.

5. RANAT THUM

A traditional Thai wooden xylophone with large, low-pitched bars, played with padded mallets to produce deep, resonant tones in classical music ensembles.

6. DAN BAU

A traditional Vietnamese zither with just one string, played with harmonic overtones and a flexible rod to produce a hauntingly expressive sound.

7. DENDANG

A type of Indonesian music where people sing and play instruments together and is often performed at special events and celebrations.

8. SENH TIEN

A traditional Vietnamese percussion instrument resembling a pair of castanets. It produces a rhythmic clicking sound when the two pieces are struck together.

Music & Myths from Southeast Asia

During the show, we heard the music and folktales from three countries in Southeast Asia: Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam. Can you recall which country each of these stories was from?

Activity 8

Write your answers in the boxes beside each story.

(a) This folktale is about a brave boy named Sudsakorn, the son of a mermaid and a prince. Raised by his grandfather, he sets out on an adventure to find his father. Along the way, he encounters magical creatures, fierce giants, and dangerous challenges. With his mythical dragon-horse by his side, a magical weapon, and his cleverness, Sudsakorn overcomes each obstacle. The story teaches courage, determination, and the importance of family.

Country:

(b) This folktale is about two powerful spirits who compete for the love of Princess Mi Nuong. Son Tinh, the Mountain Spirit, and Thuy Tinh, the Water Spirit, are both strong and magical. The king decides that whoever brings wedding gifts first will marry Mi Nuong. Son Tinh wins by arriving first. Angry and jealous, Thuy Tinh causes floods each year to attack Son Tinh's mountain. However, Son Tinh always manages to protect his land. The story explains the yearly floods in this country and teaches about resilience and the power of nature.

Country:

(c) This folktale is about a poor boy named Malin who leaves his village to seek his fortune, promising his mother that he will return once he is successful. However, after becoming wealthy and married, Malin returns but is ashamed of his poor mother. He refuses to acknowledge her. Heartbroken, she prays for justice, and Malin is cursed. A storm turns him into stone as punishment for his ungratefulness. The stone, resembling a kneeling man, serves as a reminder to always respect and love your parents, no matter how successful you become.

Country:

Meet the Artists

Open Score Project

Open Score Project (OSP) is a Singaporean group of musicians from different backgrounds and musical styles. Together, they create music that combines all their different styles into one unique sound. OSP wants to celebrate Singapore's diverse cultures through their music. They have performed in the Chingay Parade as well as festivals overseas, in countries such as Uzbekistan, Vietnam and China.

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Illustrator: Shelly Liew

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