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# Siam Sonata: Thai Solo Piano Works

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# SIAM SONATA: THAI SOLO PIANO WORKS

by

Korak Lertpibulchai

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the  
Doctor of Musical Arts degree  
in the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

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Thesis Supervisor: Professor Ksenia Nosikova

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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D.M.A. Thesis

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This is to certify that the D.M.A. Thesis of

Korak Lertpibulchai

has been approved by the Examining Committee for  
the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Musical Arts  
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## **PUBLIC ABSTRACT**

The final product of this project is a high-quality recording of solo piano works by three living Thai composers; Nat Yontarak, Atibhop Pataradetpisan and Siraseth Pantura-umporn. It also includes two Yontarak's arrangements of songs by King of Thailand, Bhumibol Adulyadej. This recording consists entirely of solo piano works written and arranged by contemporary Thai composers. As a Thai-born pianist, I believe it is my privilege to promote Thai classical music.

All pieces selected for this project demonstrate distinctively Thai characteristics, as well as pianistic techniques that are engaging to both the audiences and performers.

The recording features Piano Sonata No. 3 "Siam Sonata" by Nat Yontarak, "Duality" by Atibhop Pataradetpisan, "Bells" by Siraseth Pantura-umporn, "Still on My Mind" and "Love in Spring" by H.M. King Bhumibol, arranged by Nat Yontarak.

This recording project aims to archive three generations of composers living in present-day Thailand whose works fit exceptionally well for the solo piano. It is a part of my continuing efforts to open doors to future collaborations. As a Thai pianist, I am excited to be able to help foster a national identity through piano music.

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## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The final product of this project is a high-quality recording of solo piano works by three living Thai composers; Nat Yontararak, Atibhop Pataradetpisan and Siraseth Pantura-umporn. It also includes two Yontararak's arrangements of songs by King of Thailand, Bhumibol Adulyadej. This recording is the first to consist entirely of solo piano works written and arranged by contemporary Thai composers.

This recording project presents a broad spectrum of compositional styles that are currently predominant in Thailand and serve as a testament of modern Thai solo piano composition. It shows the blend of Eastern and Western styles that is prevalent in music by modern Thai composers. All these composers are successful in creating an undeniably modern Thai sound for the solo piano as they employ their unique musical ideas, textures, and performance techniques. They also use Thai traditional folk music in their works.

This recording features:

<b>Duality “ทวิลักษณ์”</b> (1998)	Atibhop Pataradetpisan 6:55 min
<b>Piano Sonata No. 3 “Siam Sonata”</b> (2002) <i>I. Maestoso (Central Region)</i> <i>II. Allegretto scherzando (Northeastern Region)</i> <i>III. Larghetto (Northern region)</i> <i>IV. Allegro tempestoso (Southern Region)</i>	Nat Yontararak     41:05 min
<b>Bells (tribute to Jack Body)</b> (2015)	Siraseth Pantura-umporn 7:07 min
<b>Still on My Mind “ในดวงใจนิรันดร์”</b> (1965)	H.M. King Bhumibol Adulyadej arr. Nat Yontararak 6:38 min
<b>Love in Spring “สมหมาย”</b> (1954)	H.M. King Bhumibol Adulyadej

arr. Nat Yontararak  
3:41 min

Total 65:26 minutes

## **Project Process**

The works featured in this recording were collected during a research trip to Thailand during the summer of 2016, with funding from the University of Iowa Graduate College Summer Fellowship. Before embarking on the trip, I explored on several notable composers active in Thailand. These three composers were selected because their works demonstrated distinctively Thai characteristics, as well as pianistic features that are engaging to both the audiences and performers. Upon arriving in Thailand, I met with the composers and discussed possible repertoire choices. Those meetings and conversations resulted in the selection of these five pieces of music. One of the challenges of this project was that at the time of this recording, these five works were unpublished. In order to be able to practice and record the music, I had to acquire original scores/manuscripts in portable document format (PDF) from the composers.

After receiving the music, it took me a few months to learn the music. In the meantime, I also did research on the works and began writing the program notes. The most challenging piece is Siam Sonata, in terms of its length, technique and musical interpretation, which has required the most practice hours compared to the rest of the program. I have performed the works in several public recitals such as the University of Iowa School of Music Recital Hall, the University of Iowa Hospital and Clinics, and Warren Cultural Center (Greenfield, IA).

All four recording sessions were held at the Voxman Concert Hall with UI School of Music recording engineer, James Edel, assisted by Ronald Pui-Yan Lau. I spent two weeks on



selecting takes for editing and sent the marked scores to the recording engineer. After the musical takes were assembled, the recording engineer and I had another four sessions to edit the recordings to produce a complete track.

## THAI FOLK MUSIC

Thai folk music generally depicts local culture, lifestyle, play, dances, ceremonies, or the appreciation of nature.<sup>1</sup> It is usually categorized by their geographic origins within Thailand, or its association with various local or national occasions. The central, northern, northeastern, and southern regions of Thailand are the main geographic locations where most folk tunes originate. The sound and style of each tune is determined primarily by the technical and tonal ability of the intended Thai folk instrument; predominantly heterophonic or polyphonic. Thai traditional music does not include any harmonic texture and consists of a main melody followed by variations played by the same instrument or different instrument(s). While a western musical scale contains twelve pitches, the Thai tuning system has seven equidistant pitches. The interval between any two pitches is ideally 171.4 cents (though it is slightly more or less in practice).<sup>2</sup> In this regard, it is very similar to a Chinese pentatonic scale.

In recent years, many contemporary Thai composers have utilized the 'exoticism' of Thai traditional music combined with western compositional styles. In their pursuit of a new sound, they are following the example of composers of early 20th century composers such as Prokofiev, Stravinsky, and Schoenberg who broke away from the tradition of the late romanticism with their new harmonic, textural, rhythmic, orchestration and experimental techniques.

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<sup>1</sup> Wannapha Yannavut, "An Exploration of Thai Traditional Music for Western Percussion Instruments" (DMA diss., University of Iowa, 2016)

<sup>2</sup> Roongruang Panya, "Thailand." *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF MUSIC EDUCATION IN THAILAND

In the middle of the nineteenth century, western classical music officially entered Thailand via the Thai monarchy during the reign of King Rama V, King Chulalongkorn. He wanted Thailand, both economically and culturally, to develop into a civilization on par with the West.<sup>3</sup> Initially, western classical music was used in the Thai military. Western music was played by small ensembles and brass bands and was used primarily for marching. Later on, larger ensembles began to form. These offered more professional, higher quality performances to public audiences. This enabled Thai musicians to become more proficient on their respective instruments and the stylistic understanding, which also led to the development of western classical music education in Thailand. In 1935, the *Natrasin* School, established by Silpakorn University, was the first public music school in Thailand that provided western classical music education alongside the traditional Thai music program.<sup>4</sup> The popularity of western classical music in Thailand skyrocketed with the introduction of the *Natrasin* School. Since then, Thai public schools have incorporated western classical music into their curriculum from kindergarten to high school. Universities and colleges in Thailand now offer music programs at both the undergraduate and graduate level. Thai music and western classical music complement each other extremely well, in terms of instrumentation and musical style. It is currently common to have Thai or western classical music performed in a large ensemble of both Thai and western instruments. With the advances of music education in Thailand, we began to see many Thai musicians, especially composers, study abroad in western countries. They returned with

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<sup>3</sup> Jittapim Yamprai, "Establishment of Western Music in Thailand" (DMA diss., University of Northern Colorado, May 2011)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

influences from the western education system and musical ideas to Thailand. However, the compositions of such musicians are still deeply rooted in Thai culture.

## PROGRAM NOTES:

### REPERTOIRE AND THE COMPOSERS

The three composers chosen for the project were educated abroad in western countries. They acquired their education through either extensive residencies in western countries or with numerous short trips to those countries.

#### **Duality “ทวิลักษณ์” (1998)**

It is a set of two short abstract pieces, fast and slow. The title, “*Duality*”, is depicted in the composer’s creative uses of contrasting tempi, extreme dynamic contrasts and musical forms. “Duality” is based on various patterns of the pentatonic scale, which create an Eastern-like atmosphere. These scales clash against one another between hands at times. The first fast piece is in a ternary form. There are several western contemporary writing styles used in the work such as frequent meter changes, freely-played passages, and feathered beaming. The second piece is written in an improvisatory style of slower and freer gestures, and it is not as strict structurally as the first piece.

**Atibhop Pataradetpisan** (b. 1971) graduated from the Tashkent State Conservatory in Uzbekistan as a composition major. In addition to being a composer, Pataradetpisan also writes poems, short stories and essays. His works have been published since 1993. Much of Pataradetpisan’s compositions are highly intellectual, and introduce interlocking lines and hidden motives. His other piano works include *Chitakādhāna* (2007) and *Raden Landei* for two pianos (2001).

### **Piano Sonata No. 3 “*Siam Sonata*” (2002)**

Nat Yontararak dedicated this Sonata to His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej on the occasion of his 75th birthday on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2002. He felt that the composition captured the essence of Thai culture. He uses folk tunes from the central, northeastern, northern, and southern regions of Thailand as the theme of each of the four movements.

*The customs, traditions and languages of each region are representative of the spirit of the Thai culture. In diversity we find the strength of unity which is the key to the country's well being. This composition symbolizes the harmony of our love of this homeland and is presented to His Majesty the King who is the supreme being revered by every Thai citizen.*  
~Yontararak

His brilliant writing style follows the pianistic traditions of the great masters of the past such as Franz Liszt, Claude Debussy, and Maurice Ravel. Combined with the unique folk-based flavor, it leads to a composition of substantial, large-scale virtuosic work.

The first movement, *Maestoso (Central Region)*, is written in a classical sonata form and uses two main folk tunes. The first tune is “*Kaek Mon Bang Khunprom Tao*” by His Royal Highness Prince Krom Phra Nakorn Sawan Worapinit. The first two words of the title “*Kaek Mon*” refer to an ethnic group from Myanmar, a country neighboring Thailand. It also implies to a “*Kaek Mon*” form, which consists of three sections with the final phrase of each section ending with the same melody. The “*Bang Khunprom*” is the Palace’s name of the Prince Krom Phra Nakorn Sawan Worapinit. And “*Tao*” is a Thai musical form of a large-scale song, which contains slow, moderate and fast sections. The original form of the song *Kaek Mon Bang Khunprom Tao* follows the format of “*Kaek Mon*” form. The second tune originates from the song “*Kiew Kao*” (Harvesting Rice), and it is a joyful and lively folk melody, sung by the peasants from the central region, while they are harvesting rice. There are several western

compositional styles and techniques that Yontararak applied into his sonata. The movement is unified by the use of “thematic transformation” technique, which is also evident in later movements. The influence of Liszt’s piano writing can be also seen in Yontararak’s extensive use of fast arpeggios and scales, rapid octaves, broken octaves and tremolo passages, declamatory repeated chords, and etc. In the middle of the development section, he creatively uses conventional tremolo technique to imitate the “ra-nad,” a Thai instrument similar to the western wooden xylophone. The first movement is the most extensive in the sonata, and it requires virtuosity, technical freedom, and a cantabile approach in the lyrical sections.

The second movement *Allegretto scherzando (Northeastern Region)* is a fast movement in a ternary form. The main theme of the movement quotes a folk tune “*Toey Sam Changwa*,” one of the most famous and popular melodies of the region. “Toey,” is a common Thai name, and means “great.” “Sam Changwa” is a Thai musical term for a slow song. This folk trademark tune is closely associated with the unmistakable sound of the “kaen.” The kaen is the most cherished traditional wind instrument in the northeastern region and it is used for fun and playful dance activities. The theme of the movement is based on the pentatonic scale (D-E-G-A-C). The piano writing with its upbeat accents, repeated rhythmic patterns and pitches, as well as tremolo-like effect, mimic the way the kaen is usually played. Yontararak succeeds capturing the uplifting and cheerful quality of this tune in the A section of the movement. In the middle section, the theme is transformed into a slow lyrical melody, which is reminiscent of the gentle and sincere nature of the Northeastern people.

The third movement, *Larghetto (Northern region)*, creates an atmosphere of tranquility, nobility and calmness, depicting the northern dialect. The northern region has been influenced by the Lanna Kingdom. The 700-year-old Lanna Kingdom (the Kingdom of a million rice fields),

which was located in the northern region, has inherited a mysterious charm and lush forests of the past. The tune “*Ngiew Ramluek*” used in this movement is a perfect symbol of this nature. “Ngiew” refers to an ethnic tribe in northern Thailand, and “Ramluek” is to recall. The original tune was composed by Boonyong Ketkong to accompany the northern dance. It was constructed in “Tao” musical form, featuring three clearly marked sections of slow, moderate, and fast. While the movement is written in the ternary form, there are clearly recognizable tempo changes that remind us of the original version of the “Tao” form. The piano texture and overall sound in *Larghetto* resembles that of Debussy’s with an abundance of decorated arpeggio ascending and descending through the pentatonic scale, continuing parallel perfect fifths, and imitations of bell and gong sounds in numerous sustained notes and rich octave basses. In the middle section, there are also tremolo octaves in the melody mocking the typical technique of the “ra-nad”.

The final movement, *Allegro tempestoso (Southern Region)*, is in a classical rondo form. The main theme (A) “*Krao Talung*” is repeated three times throughout. “Talung,” a southern “shadow” show, is accompanied by a randomly selected group of Thai instruments. The two other tunes incorporated in the movement are “*Kreed Yang*” (Tapping the rubber tree) and “*Pateh*” (the name of the southern local cloth), in the B and C section, respectively. The rubber tree is the main economic agriculture of the southern region. The upbeat accents and syncopated rhythms in the “Pateh” theme and other sections throughout the movement are a tribute to the typical nature of the southern musical style. With its sharply-played articulations, boldly stated parallel octaves, and straightforward motion, this movement reflects the intense and aggressive nature of the Southern region’s dialect, music, and dance as opposed to the gentleness of the northern style. The southern music is full of energetic drive and upbeat gesture. This last movement presents the most powerful expressions of synchronized sounds and rhythms of all



movements. The reminiscent of the opening theme of the first movement appears in the final section leading to a grand *maestoso*, which ends with the “Krao Talung” theme. Near the final section, Lisztian effect is again heard in bright sounding tremolo and cascading chromatic-scale octaves.

**Nat Yontaratak** (b. 1954), is Thailand’s first Steinway artist, a founder of Nat Studio, an owner of Sala Sudasiri Sobha performing hall, is a graduate of the University of Reading in the United Kingdom. He is considered to be an eminent Thai pianist and piano teacher promoting classical music and teaching young classical pianists. His acclaimed national achievement is the Silpathorn Award, Thailand's Outstanding Contemporary artist. In addition to the Siam Sonata, Yontararak also composed two other sonatas including Sonata No. 1, “*Glory to Our Great Kings*” (1994) and Sonata No. 2 “*Homage to King Rama IX*” (1999).

### **Bells (2015)**

*Bells* is one of two piano solo pieces which imitates Buddhist temple bell sounds by Thai composer, Siraseth Pantura-umporn. His compositional approach is based on the overtone series and the harmonic resonance of the piano strings. According to the composer himself, with the fundamental note being sustained, other pitches in the overtone series are played percussively with various degrees of dynamics to create a sublime harmony. While embedding the Thai tradition music melody, his use of sparse pointillist texture helps to avoid any direct melodic references. This piece was composed as a tribute to late New Zealand composer, Jack Brody, who was one of Siraseth's composition teachers and major influence, who passed away on May 10th, 2015.

**Siraseth Pantura-umporn** (b. 1982) is a graduate of the Chulalongkorn University in Thailand. Although trained primarily in Thailand, Siraseth has sought external influences from

foreign composers such as Sidney Corbett and Peter Eötvös. He also participated in courses outside Thailand, including the Stockhausen course for composition in Kurten, Germany. His music has been performed outside of Thailand in summer festivals and conferences. Most notable of these are the International Society of Contemporary Music, the Asian Composer League, and the Yogyakarta Contemporary Music Festival. Siraseth Pantura-umporn's compositional style is characterized by his departure from the dissonant sonority of modern music. He blends extended instrumental technique, complicated rhythmic structure and special sound effects with traditional idioms of Thai music. His more recent works have also reflected an influence from Buddhist and Zen philosophy. The other solo piano work of Pantura-umporn is *Cosmic Chimes*.

### ***Love in Spring***

This is the 19<sup>th</sup> song of the Royal Collection. King Bhumibol composed it after his return home for permanent residence in Thailand in 1954. H.H. Prince Chakrabandh Pensiri penned the English lyrics, and the Thai lyrics were written by Thanpuying Somroj Swasdikul. *Love in Spring* is a bittersweet love tune, and has become one of the most endearing compositions by King Bhumibol.

### ***Still on my Mind***

This is the 37<sup>th</sup> song of the Royal Collection. King Bhumibol wrote it in 1965, and this was the first composition that King Bhumibol wrote both the melody and the English lyrics. Originally titled as *I Can't Get You out of My Mind*, it was later changed to *Still on My Mind*. King Bhumibol asked Professor Dr. Prasert Na Nagara to write the Thai lyrics for it and to retain

the verse-for-verse format of the English version, keeping the translation as faithful to the original as possible.

Both Pieces, *Still on My Mind* and *Love in Spring*, were originally written for Jazz Band, but in this recording, they are arrangements made for solo piano by Nat Yontarak. King Bhumibol was supportive of the arts and served a major source of inspiration for Thai musicians during his lifetime. Besides these two songs, there are seven additional songs composed by King Bhumibol that Nat Yontarak has arranged for solo piano.

**King Bhumibol Adulyadej** (1927-2016) was the ninth monarch of Thailand from the Chakri dynasty and he was also known as Rama IX. During his stay in Lausanne, he took up various musical instruments and studied music seriously under the direction of Mr. Weybrecht, a native of Alsace. King Bhumibol started taking saxophone lessons after his elder brother, King Ananda Mahidol pushed him into the room to take the lesson on his behalf. The king trained as a classical musician exclusively for about two years, before being attracted to the groove of jazz music. He learned jazz by imitating the recordings of Sidney Bechet and Johnny Hodges. The King began to compose at the encouragement of King Ananda. Although “Candlelight Blues” was the first piece he had written, he did not go public with it because he felt it needed fine-tuning. Because of this, the first royal song to be showcased by King Bhumibol was “Love at Sundown.” King Bhumibol wrote 48 songs from 1946 to 1995. His collection of songs includes marches, waltzes, and Thai patriotic songs. Many of these have been etched firmly into the memories of all Thai citizens as a source of comfort and pride.

## LINER NOTES

1. **Duality “ทวิลักษณ์”** (1998) 6:55
  
- Piano Sonata No. 3 “Siam Sonata”** (2002) 41:05

  2. I. Maestoso (Central Region) 15:39
  3. II. Allegretto scherzando (Northeastern Region) 7:29
  4. III. Larghetto (Northern region) 8:51
  5. IV. Allegro tempestoso (Southern Region) 9:06

6. **Bells** (2015) 7:07
  
7. **Still on My Mind “ในดวงใจนิรันดร์”** (1965) 6:38
  
8. **Love in Spring “ลมหนาว”** (1954) 3:41

### **DUALITY** by Atibhop Pataradetpisan

Two abstract pieces show contrasting elements/factors such as tempi, dynamics and musical forms with various contemporary writing techniques. **Pataradetpaisarn** is a renowned composer, writer and poet currently active in Thailand. His compositions are highly intellectual, and introduce interlocking lines and hidden motives.

### **SIAM SONATA** by Nat Yontarak

A substantial, large-scale virtuosic work combines with brilliant writing style influenced by the pianistic traditions of the great masters of the past such as Liszt and Debussy with unique folk based flavor. A representative of the Thai culture, Yontarak uses folk tunes from the central, northeastern, northern, and southern regions of Thailand as the theme of each of the four movements. **Yontarak** is a well-known pianist and piano teacher in Thailand, founding of the Nut Studio, and also a Steinway artist.

### **BELLS** by Siraseth Pantura-umporn

The piece imitates Buddhist temple bells. It is based on the overtone series and the harmonic resonance of the piano strings. With embedding Thai folk melody, the piece uses sparse pointillist texture helping to avoid any direct melodic references. **Pantura-umporn** is a notable composer residing in Thailand. His works have been performed internationally. His compositional style is characterized by his departure from the dissonant sonority of modern music. He blends extended instrumental technique, complicated rhythmic structure and special sound effects with traditional idioms of Thai music.

**STILL ON MY MIND** by H.M. King Bhumibol Adulyadej, arr. Nat Yontarak

The 37<sup>th</sup> song of the Royal Collection, it was originally a jazz tune played by the jazz band.

**LOVE IN SPRING** by H.M. King Bhumibol Adulyadej, arr. Nat Yontarak

The 19<sup>th</sup> song of the Royal Collection, this is a bittersweet love tune, and has become one of the most endearing compositions by King Bhumibol.

This recording is dedicated to the **King Bhumibol Adulyadej** (1927-2016), the IX monarch of Thailand from the Chakri dynasty, who has passed away on the 13<sup>th</sup> of October, 2016 during the early process of the project. King Bhumibol was supportive of the arts and served a major source of inspiration for Thai musicians during his lifetime.

**Korak Lertpibulchai** originally from Thailand, graduated from Mahidol University (B.M, 2012) and Illinois State University (M.M, 2013). She is currently completing the DMA in Piano Performance and Pedagogy at the University of Iowa under the tutelage of Dr. Ksenia Nosikova. Her primary teachers have included Dr. Joshua Russell, Dr. Eri Nakagawa, Dr. Mina Ivanova, Dr. Ramasoon Sitalayan, and Supaphon Vibulpanuvej.

Active as a performer, recently she has performed with Dr. Kenneth Tse, a saxophone professor of the University of Iowa at the Luther College (USA), Dr. Ksenia Nosikova at Mahidol University, College of Music (THAILAND), and Leslie Wong, a Singaporean saxophonist, at the Northwest University for Nationalities (CHINA), the Xi'an Conservatory of Music (CHINA), Montclair State University, West Virginia University and Ball State University (USA). Korak has also performed as a solo performer at the Guest Artist Recital series (Illinois State University), the American Liszt Society Iowa Chapter, the Old Capitol's Piano Sundays series (University of Iowa), the Schlern International Music Festival (ITALY), etc.

From 2014 to 2016, Korak served as the Performance Assistant at the University of Iowa which allowed her to perform as the pianist for the Center for New Music. During her tenure at the Center for New music, she has given world premieres at the University of Colorado at Boulder, the Indiana University, the University of Northern Iowa, the University of Cincinnati and the University of Iowa.

Since 2016, Korak has assumed the position of collaborative faculty at the Asia Pacific Saxophone Academy, where she coaches students and perform with faculty from around the world.

## PROJECT IMPACTS AND OUTCOMES

Upon completion of this project, I plan to share it with a wider public. I will also seek out opportunities for publication with a recording company in Thailand. A relationship with a recording company will ensure more national exposure for the project, and provide a resource for potential future projects.

The recording is an example of my continuing effort to promote the works presented and also to the pioneer reference recording of these pieces. This drew the attention of both musicians and audiences to the piano works of contemporary Thai composers. Finally, I hope this recording will position me as one of the major advocates and performers of contemporary classical music in Thailand.

After graduation, I intend to expand the results of this recording project through solo recitals in my home country, Thailand, and in other parts of Asia. I will also continue to make subsequent recordings of newly written solo piano works of Thai composers.

The value of this project draws attention from various types of audiences: pianists, composers, musicians, and music lovers -domestic and international. In addition to Thai musicians and academics, this project could interest Thai non-musicians since it presents material that this audience will be familiar with in the form of traditional Thai musical styles and elements, as well as melodies from traditional folk songs.

This recording project aims to archive three generations of composers living in present-day Thailand whose works fit exceptionally well for the solo piano. It is a part of my continuing efforts to open doors to future collaborations. As a Thai pianist, I am excited to be able to help foster a national identity through piano music.

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