

Ballades from Thai Literature for Piano Solo: “Phra Abhai Mani” by Denny Euprasert

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Abstract

The composition *Phra Abhai Mani* by Silpathorn Artist Dr. Denny Euprasert was commissioned by the author as part of the project “Ballades from Thai Literature for Piano Solo.” The project started in May 2017 after the author received a grant from the National Research Council of Thailand.

The author then selected four distinguished Thai contemporary composers to write piano works that show a strong relationship with Thai culture and literature. Therefore, each of the composition was named after famous Thai literature. Four composers participated in this historical project were Professor Dr. Narongrit Dhamabutra (*Three Perspectives of I-Nao*), Assistant Professor Dr. Denny Euprasert (*Phra Abhai Mani*), Associated Professor Dr. Wiboon Trakulhun (*Ramayana*) and Assistant Professor Dr. Saksri Vongtaradon (*Mattanapata*).

This paper focused on *Phra Abhai Mani* and the compositional style of Dr. Denny Euprasert that combines Jazz idiom with classical element. The composition has 10 movements and demonstrates advanced techniques required by both composer and performer. Four main movements were selected to discuss in this paper.

Keywords: Ballade, Piano solo, Thai literature, Contemporary music, Denny Euprasert

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Introduction

The composition *Phra Abhia Mani* by Silpathorn Artist Denny Euprasert subtly combines Jazz and classical idioms. Dr. Denny Euprasert, a leading Jazz pianist in Thailand and the Dean of Rangsit University Conservatory of Music, drew inspirations from the favorite Thai literature of the same name, written by *Sunthorn Phu*, the great poet of Rattanakosin period.

This composition has ten movements named after the important characters or places from the literature. Most of the harmony and other significant musical ideas are mainly Jazz-influenced.

The composer used thematic transformation and cyclic form throughout the entire composition, thus creating a unity for this multi-movement work in a very stylistic and pianistic way.

The Two Brothers (1st movement)

This movement was written in Binary form. Both of part A and part B features the two main characters: *Phra Abhai Mani* and *Sisuwan*. The texture of this movement is homophony and was written in C major.

Measure 1 is an introduction of part A. The composer used the opening gesture that presented the main chord in Jazz style, which has E and B as the third and seventh note of the C major chord in Rootless voicing style.

Allegro ♩. = 144

The musical score is for the first movement, 'The Two Brothers'. It is in 12/8 time and marked 'Allegro' with a tempo of 144 beats per minute. The score shows the first two measures of a piano introduction. The right hand (RH) starts with a melody of eighth notes: E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, followed by rests. The left hand (LH) plays a bass line of eighth notes: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, followed by rests. Dynamics are marked as *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *f* (forte) in the first measure, and *mp* (mezzo-piano) in the second measure. The score is written in C major.

Measure 2 – 5 introduce melody C – F to B – F in the right hand to emphasize C major 7 chord followed by a melody derived from A harmonic minor scale.

1

5

6

7

The melodic line beautifully combines some chromatic notes with A minor scale, creating a flavor of contemporary Jazz music. The syncopated melody in the right hand was written in a group of eighth notes in 12/8 time signature. Left hand accompaniment was written in E – B ostinato.

3

Measure 6 – 8 use Chromatic chord progression, which is F major chord and E major chord, and uses Ab in measure 8 as an enharmonic note of G# in the previous measure to continue the melody in two-handed unison.

Measure 9 – 10 use standard chord progression II – V – I which is D7 – G7 – C with the melodic line in chromatic scale followed by E Phrygian mode.

Measure 11 – 12 return to Homophonic texture by using the cluster notes from E Phrygian mode in the right hand. The accompaniment in left hand uses E – B combination to gently create the sound of C major 7 chord in Rootless voicing style.

Measure 14 – 15 use melodic sequence that combines chromatic notes with some principle notes of G7 chord, which is the dominant seventh chord of C major.

13

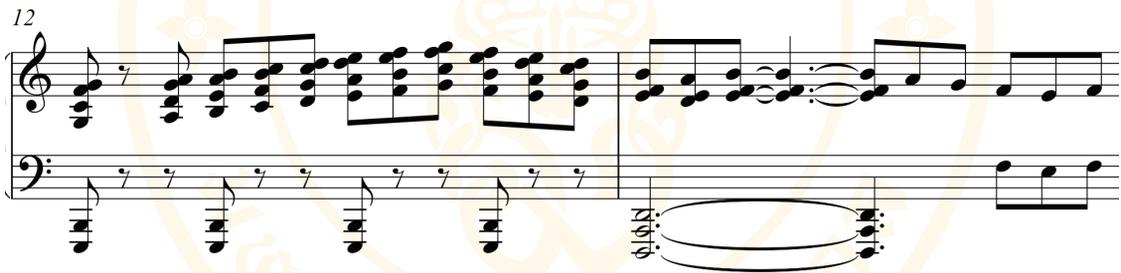


Measure 17 – 18 are the cadence built on V – I relationship with motif from the previous sequence. The left hand continues to use C major 7 chord in Rootless voicing style.

10



12



14



17



20



22



Measure 19 – 20 introduce the new melody of B section. Both hands continue to use a similar rhythmic motif with chromatic harmony.

19



Measure 21 – 23 show an ascending melody that reaches to the first climax of this movement at the C minor chord in measure 23.

21



Measure 27 – 28 are similar to measure 11 – 12 but uses thicker harmony.

Measure 30 – 36 prepare the cadence by using the previous melodic motif with chromatic notes, which will lead to the polychord creating from F major and A major chords at measure 36.

Measure 37 – 42 is the recurrence of two main melodies from the beginning of this movement. This section also functions as a small coda by showing the main melody in reversing hands to reinstate the title “*The Two Brothers*”.

37 L.H. *mp* R.H.

40 *f*

The Mermaid (2nd movement)

In this second movement – The Mermaid – Dr. Denny Euprasert wrote in a through-composed style, which means the whole movement continues without interruption and does not separate into multi-sectional form. The tempo is quite slow but flowing naturally, imitating the beauty of the mermaid’s movement. The mysterious charm of the mermaid is developed through an obscure harmony and spontaneous melodic line.

Measure 1 – 4 is an introduction with melodic motif borrowed from the second theme of the first movement. The composer used F major 9 chord with sequential movement in the bass line.

1 **Adagio espressivo e rubato** $\text{♩} = 86$ *mp*

Measure 5 – 9 present the main theme in C major but added extra notes developed from 2nd and 3rd intervals.

Measure 10 – 14 use a melody based on G melodic minor scale in the right hand with descending bass line in the left hand. A large interval in the left hand creates a broader sense of harmony.

Measure 15 – 17: The main melody was developed by expanding the range and using harmony that is more remote to the principle key.

Measure 21 – 23: The melodic line in the right hand continues to develop to the climax in measure 23 that uses D augmented chord in the left hand with chromatic notes in the right hand.

Measure 24 – 28: The composer used B major as a principle tonality in this section. Most of the melodic notes are in black keys with a very high register. This movement beautifully finishes with C major 7 chord. The last note in the melody emphasizes the B which is the 7th note of C major scale.

The Two Sons (6th movement)

Even though the composer is a remarkable Jazz performer and composer, this polyphonic movement showed a strong influence from the music of Paul Hindemith and Samuel Barber. Two main subjects of this Fugal movement represent two sons of *Phra Abhai Mani*. The composer subtly created the subjects by combining the theme of their parents. *Sutsakhon* theme started with *Phra Abhai Mani*'s material but finished with a motif from the Mermaid theme. On the other hand, *Sinsamut* theme combines *Phra Abhai Mani* with Ogress melody. Therefore, the creation of Fugal subjects corresponds with the story line from literature. This movement was written in Binary form.

Measure 1 – 3 present first subject (*Sutsakhon* theme) by combining *Phra Abhai Mani* motif from measure 19 – 20 of 1st movement with the main theme of the Mermaid movement from measure 16.

1 **Moderato fuoco** ♩ = 100

Similar to other typical Fugal movements in Baroque style, the followed statement was presented in 5th interval below the first statement.

1 **Moderato fuoco** ♩ = 100

Measure 4 – 5 follow the standard fugal technique that has each subject or voice introduced in different register. The upper voice that used to be the subject will play a countersubject or a contrapuntal line that was a continuation of the previous voice.

Measure 6 – 9 develop the main melody by using thicker texture in the right hand and adding octave virtuosic passage in the left hand.

Measure 10 – 14 is the third entrance of the main melody in the right hand with an inversion technique.

Musical score for measures 10-14. Measure 10 shows a complex melodic line in the right hand with many accidentals and a bass line with chords. Measures 13-14 continue the melodic development in the right hand and the accompaniment in the left hand.

Measure 15 – 17 is the last appearance of the subject.

Musical score for measures 15-17. Measure 15 features a syncopated melody in the right hand and a bass line with chords. Measures 16-17 show the continuation of the subject and its accompaniment.

Measure 18 – 20 is section B of the movement, which presents the new *Sinsamut* theme. The ostinato in left hand borrowed materials from previous movement, while the syncopated rhythm added a strong Jazz flavor into the section.

Musical score for measures 18-20. Measure 18 starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic and shows a syncopated melody in the right hand and a bass line with chords. Measures 19-20 continue the section B theme.

Measure 21 – 26 is the recurrence of the main melody from previous movement but was slightly altered by thematic transformation technique.

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24

Measure 27 – 30 function as a small coda or a *codetta* that brings the same thematic materials from the beginning of 1st movement but changes the rhythmic grouping from triplet to sixteenth note. The movement dramatically ends with F major 7 chord in the highest volume.

27

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The Hermit (9th movement)

The composer wrote this movement in two-part polyphony. Two main characteristics of the Hermit, according to the interpretation of Dr. Denny Euprasert, are mystery and humor. Some of the previous motif reappears again in this movement, though being altered by thematic transformation technique.

Measure 1 – 2 bring the main melody from the “*Dragon Horse*” movement and created the answer by inverting the previous subject.

0 **Moderato con anima** ♩ = 100

The musical score for measures 1-2 is in 2/4 time. The right hand (treble clef) starts with a melody in measure 1: a quarter rest, followed by quarter notes G#4, A4, B4, and C5. In measure 2, the melody continues with quarter notes C5, B4, A4, G#4, and a half note F#4. The left hand (bass clef) has a whole rest in measure 1 and a series of eighth notes in measure 2: G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F6, G6, A6, B6, C7, D7, E7, F7, G7, A7, B7, C8, D8, E8, F8, G8, A8, B8, C9, D9, E9, F9, G9, A9, B9, C10, D10, E10, F10, G10, A10, B10, C11, D11, E11, F11, G11, A11, B11, C12, D12, E12, F12, G12, A12, B12, C13, D13, E13, F13, G13, A13, B13, C14, D14, E14, F14, G14, A14, B14, C15, D15, E15, F15, G15, A15, B15, C16, D16, E16, F16, G16, A16, B16, C17, D17, E17, F17, G17, A17, B17, C18, D18, E18, F18, G18, A18, B18, C19, D19, E19, F19, G19, A19, B19, C20, D20, E20, F20, G20, A20, B20, C21, D21, E21, F21, G21, A21, B21, C22, D22, E22, F22, G22, A22, B22, C23, D23, E23, F23, G23, A23, B23, C24, D24, E24, F24, G24, A24, B24, C25, D25, E25, F25, G25, A25, B25, C26, D26, E26, F26, G26, A26, B26, C27, D27, E27, F27, G27, A27, B27, C28, D28, E28, F28, G28, A28, B28, C29, D29, E29, F29, G29, A29, B29, C30, D30, E30, F30, 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15

Measure 18 – 19 briefly bring some previous melodic materials from 3rd movement. Another important compositional technique in this section is polytonality, which created a strong dissonance between two hands.

18

Measure 21 – 22 is a coda with polytonality technique, which is one of the main compositional devices of the composer in this entire work. The melody in the left hand is on G pentatonic scale while the right hand is in F# pentatonic scale.



Measure 23 – 27 present the ostinato and fragments of the main melody again before ending the movement with fading Jazz harmony.



Conclusion

The aforementioned analysis shows that Denny Euprasert is a Jazz virtuoso who could write with variety of compositional tools and, at the same time, demonstrate a great architectural design of his work. The author strongly feel that Phra Abhai Mani and three other compositions from the same set stand on equal term with standard classical repertoires, as well as with the new music by leading contemporary composers from the West and other Asian countries.

It is a great hope that the analysis of Phra Abhai Mani will encourage more Thai pianists to perform this monumental work and will inspire other Thai composers to create more piano works that represent Thai culture.

Bibliography

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