

MUSICAL TRANSFIGURATION

a journey across Vietnamese soundscapes



Le Tuan Hung and Le Thi Kim

- 1 **Six Royal Pieces** – Court music of the Nguyen dynasty (1802-1945) 6'01"
- 2 **Crossing Mountain Pass** – Chanted poetry (19th century) 3'29"
- 3 **Four Grand Landscapes** – Classical Chamber Music of Hue, Central Vietnam 6'45"
- 4 **Lullaby** – Village music, Southern Vietnam 6'42"
- 5 **Black Horse Song** – Wedding song from Hue, Central Vietnam 2'30"
- 6 **Chant of a Soldier's Wife** – Chanted poetry (18th century) 7'16"
- 7 **Reflection** – Music by Le Tuan Hung (1991) 7'18"
- 8 **Welcoming Spring Song** – Village children's spring welcoming song 5'04"
- 9 **Love Song** – Village love song, central Vietnam 7'52"
- 10 **At the City of Ascending Dragon, Recollecting the Past** – Chanted poetry (19th century) 3'48"
- 11 **Paper and Strings** – Music by Le Thi Kim (1991) 5'52"

Le Tuan Hung: dan tranh [Vietnamese zither], skin and clay drums, bronze bells, sanh [wooden sticks] and voice.

Le Thi Kim: dan tranh, sinh tien [coin clappers] and voice.

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Musical Transfiguration presents an acoustic journey across the soundscapes of Vietnam, from the majestic sounds of court music to the subtle flow of lullabies, from the haunting voices of chanted poetry and classical chamber music to the lively rhythms of village festival songs, and from the sounds of the past to the present. Pieces of court, classical and village music are realised in the authentic performing practice of Vietnamese musical tradition in which personal touches and improvising skills have always been greatly appreciated. Newly created pieces reflect the artists' perception of the present and link the past to the present with threads of sound.

1 Sau Bai Nha Nhac [Six Royal Pieces]

Court music of the Nguyen dynasty (1802-1945)

Two *dan tranh*

Thai Bat Dat [Eight Rows Dance]

Thai Bat Bong [Flower Dance]

Hanh Quan [King's Movements]

Dang Dan Cung [Ascending the Rostrum]

Xuan Phong [Spring Wind]

Long Ho [Dragon and Tiger]

These six pieces are performed consecutively without a break after a free metered improvised introduction.

2 Qua Deo Ngang [Crossing Mountain Pass]

Chanted poetry.

Text: Ba Huyen Thanh Quan Nguyen Thi Hinh (19th century)

Voice and *dan tranh*

Descending from the mountain in the twilight
Stones among grass and trees,
flowers among leaves

On the steep: tiny shades of the lumberjacks

Along the river: huts of highlanders

Thinking of the fate of the nation,

my heart deeply in pain

Missing home, a bird tirelessly calls

Standing in the boundary of sky,

mountain and water

A lonely soul with her own feelings

3 Tu Dai Canh [Four Grand Landscapes]

Classical Chamber Music of Hue, Central Vietnam

Dan tranh solo

This piece is in the *nam ai* mode of Hue music and conveys a sense of tranquillity and melancholy.

4 Ru Con [Lullaby]

Village music of Southern Vietnam

Voice and *dan tranh*

In the autumn winds

Mother soothes little child

throughout the night

while

thinking of

their beloved one

far, far away

...

Cry no more, my baby

Sleep well, my child

Oh, my sweet little one.

5 Ngua O Hue [Black Horse Song from Hue]

Wedding song from Hue, Central Vietnam

Voice, *sinh tien*, and bells

My black horse,

I put on a golden saddle,

a silver mouthpiece,

and a deep red rein

decorated with black bronze bells

On the black horse,

with a lotus,

I will take you home

6 Chinh Phu Ngam Khuc [Chant of a Soldier's Wife]

Chanted poetry.

Text: Excerpt from the eighteenth century 412-lined verse narrative by Dang Tran Con (d.1745) and Doan Thi Diem (1705-1746?)

Voice and *dan tranh*

Who'll make a pillow heaping grief on grief?

Who'll have a dinner cooking gloom and gloom?

I try to ally my pain with flowers and wine,

But sorrow stales the wine and wilts the flowers.

I clap the jade bars - they give no sound

I touch the zither - its bridges fall
I grieve for you whom duty sent away
to tread long trails with hunger in your bag.

The mocking cuckoo's song makes me shed
tears
The watchman's drumbeat tug at my heart's
strings
My looks have changed, turned drawn and
pale
How bitter parting is! I know the taste.

In deep sorrow, my love for you strengthens
Who's given it to me, this sorrow?
Because of you tears burn my eyes
Because of you I shiver all alone

I am not to join you there inside your tent
My tears are not to wet your battle cap
But I can always be with you in my dreams
Night after night, I prow! all riverbanks for
you...

*English translation by Huynh Sanh Thong,
revised by Le Tuan Hung*

7 Bong Anh Troi May [Reflection]

Music by Le Tuan Hung
A reduced version for 2 *dan tranh*.

A musical impression gained from viewing
layers of clouds slowly moving in the sky and
their tranquil reflection on shimmering water.

8 Hoi Xuan Ve [Spring Welcoming Song]

Music: Fragments of village children's
spring welcoming song and original music by
Le Tuan Hung and Le Thi Kim.

Text: Village poetry and additional lyrics by
Le Tuan Hung

Two voices, *sinh tien*, *sanh*, and drums

Winter has passed by very quickly
and Spring is coming
We wish all people, here and there,
a prosperous season

Listen! Music has started in the village
If you are there, open the door of your house
to welcome the arrival of the Spring
to welcome the arrival of the spring

Greeting friends from the north and the east
Greeting the phoenixes
courting each other on the tree

Let's drink to celebrate the arrival of spring
The new winds and the light reflected from the
bottom of your cup make me feel drunk
Let's greet the new season
with a thousand songs

9 Ly Tinh Tang [Love Song]

Village love song, central Vietnam.
Voice and *dan tranh*

Hue, the place of beauties, poetry and dreams,
Mountains and rivers seem to be in love with
grass and trees
On water,
shimmering under the bright moon,

Murmuring the promises of lovers
A small boat
A lonely young girl, rowing
Are you waiting for someone?

10 Thang Long Hoai Co [At the City of Ascending Dragon, Recollecting the Past]

Chanted poetry.

Poem: Ba Huyen Thanh Quan Nguyen Thi
Hinh (19th century)

Voice and *dan tranh*

Creator! Why do you create this life?
Until now,
how many foggy mornings have passed?
On the old route, the horse carriage travels in
the midst of autumn grass' soul
The sun comes down, leaving behind the
shadow of the old castle
Stones still face the sun and moon
Waters still witness the sorrow of life
For thousands of years, history has been
nothing but repeated events
Viewing the remains of the past, my heart is
filled with deep sadness.

11 Day va giay [Paper and Strings]

Music: Le Thi Kim

Dan tranh and paper

An attempt to capture in sounds the feelings in
time of difficulty.

Le Tuan Hung is a composer, performer and author. He specialises in Vietnamese classical and village music. Apart from performing Vietnamese traditional music, he has also been exploring music and sound sources from other cultures for inspiration to create new soundscapes. He has performed widely in Australia, Asia, the Pacific Region and Europe. He is the author of various publications on Vietnamese arts and music and is regarded as an international authority in Vietnamese musicology.

Le Thi Kim is a composer and virtuoso in Vietnamese classical and village music. Apart from being a very active composer-performer, she taught at the Conservatoire of Music in Vietnam for several years. In 1984 she received a National Gold Medal for Excellence in *Dan Tranh* Performance. She has performed widely in Asia, Australia, Canada and Europe.

Instruments

Le Tuan Hung: *dan tranh* [Vietnamese zither], skin drum, clay drum, bronze bells, *sanh* [wooden sticks] and voice. Le Thi Kim: *dan tranh*, *sinh tien* [coin clappers] and voice.

Composition, arrangement and performance:

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Le Thanh Nhon and Le Tuan Hung

Relief: Le Thanh Nhon – depicts Sun and Summer Dance (front), Spring Lady dropping flowers on life (page 6) and Autumn Leaves and Moon (page 2)

Artists' portraits: © 1991 by Vivienne Mehes



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