

Khac Chi Music

Press Release

June 10, 2007

RARE VIETNAMESE INSTRUMENTS AND AGE OLD MUSIC AT THE RAINFOREST WORLD MUSIC FESTIVAL

By Yeoh Jun Lin | Artistic Director - Rainforest World Music Festival. Kuching, Malaysia

It is always such a pleasure to meet wonderfully dedicated musicians who have no pretentious airs about them at all, and then they go on stage and completely bowl over the audience with their dexterity and performance.

This is KHAC CHI from Vietnam – a husband and wife duo who, just between them, play an astonishing array of traditional Vietnamese instruments. There is just the two of them but the technical team for the Rainforest World Music Festival in Kuching has been warned that they are going to be one of the hardest bands to set up for.

They are coming with instruments that have never been seen anywhere before. A lot of them are very delicate and soft sounding instruments. Some of them have been in existence for 4000 years, as since ancient times, the Vietnamese have had a strong inclination for music.

There is the *dan bau* – a one-string zither that Khac Chi is a virtuoso on. It looks like a long narrow box with a tall curved stem made from a water buffalo horn inserted at one end. A small wooden gourd is attached to the stem which is then bent to change the high clear pitched notes that this instrument is known to produce.

Then there is the *koni* or stick fiddle that is only found in Vietnam. Its ancestors came from the south central highlands known as the Truong Son-Tay Nguyen region. It has 2 strings and the player holds it between both legs. But what is striking about this instrument is that it is the player's mouth that acts as the resonating chamber. The strings are attached by silk cords to a disc that is held in the player's mouth and controlled movements of the lips and tongue

produces the tones and colours and depth of emotion a human voice might make.

The lovely Ngoc Bic of this duo is the first woman to ever play the *koni*.



Another instrument unique to the Bahnar people of the

central highlands of Vietnam is the *k'longput*. This is made from a series of large bamboo pipes and sound is made by the player clapping quietly into the open ends of these pipes – the resulting forced air down the pipes produce very resonant low sounds. Legend has it that the Mother Rice Goddess lives in these pipes so it is usually the women who will play this instrument.

A suspended bamboo xylophone used to be a symbol of the ethnic minority tribes like the Tsedan and the Ede. These tribes have perhaps only a few hundred people left that belong to it. This instrument is the *t'rung* and usually come in three sizes.

There are more bamboo instruments – the *tre lac* which is bamboo tubes to be shaken and is very much reminiscent of the Indonesian *angklung*; the *dan moi* or jews harp which is sometimes used as a courtship expression of love; the *khen be* which is a mouth organ of the Thais living in Vietnam and played only by men when they sing and dance in the moonlight to woo their ladies; and the *dinh pa*, which are like long bamboo percussive-like instruments.

And there is more.

The double reed oboe-type *ken bau*, the long-necked expressive lute called the *dan nguyet*, and the zither *dan tranh* which is very similar to the Chinese *zheng*.

Khac Chi is himself also an ethnomusicologist who was one of the first masters at the Department of Traditional Music at the Hanoi National Conservatory before he left for Canada where he now teaches Vietnamese instruments at the University of British Columbia.

He is a fount of knowledge for all these rare and traditional instruments, and he is also always building and creating new instruments. Sitting in on his workshops will be a journey of enlightenment.

Ngoc Bic is the multi-instrumentalist and singer.

She was the first woman to receive first prize for performing on the *dan bau* in the Vietnam Competition of Professional Instrumentalists in 1988, and the following year, she won the Golden Award at the international Folk Festival of World Youth 13th in North Korea.

Together, as a duo on stage, they entertain as they teach and reach out with their music and wit and charm.

The Rainforest World Music Festival promises to be extra special this year seeing that it is the 10th Anniversary and the organizers have been wanting to do something that will raise the bar.

Khac Chi is one of the 17 bands that will be performing over the 3 day weekend. They are joined by other international bands that will come from all corners of the globe, plus Malaysian groups.

Yeoh Jun Lin
Artistic Director
Rainforest World Music Festival
<http://www.rainforestmusic-borneo.com/2007/en/pr/20070610.htm>