

cross-cultural comparison and affinity easily aligns with the ceaseless explorations essaying forth from Sabapathy's pen. These writings are also valuable to revisit because they compose a tender portrait of a wide-eyed explorer who is writing with honesty and gusto as a confidant and friend of the artists.

Through the years, Sabapathy's writing has consistently remained accessible, lucid and devoid of the scholarly conceit that many academic writings tend to suffer from. For his audience is not simply an academic one, and the fluidity and reach of Sabapathy's writings testify to an undertaking that is akin to public art history even before such a field ever found a name for itself. One must not forget the chasm that an art historian trained in the great traditions of art must cross in order to find a home in the quicksand of modernity. While something of that past endured through the crystalline quality of Sabapathy's writings, therein also lie an art historian's multiple reinventions in the liquid modernity of the late twentieth century.

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*Music and Recording in King Chulalongkorn's Bangkok*. By James L. Mitchell. Bangkok: Silkworm Books, 2022. xviii+342 pp.

This valuable new book is unprecedented. The early years of Thai music recording history are almost entirely unresearched beyond scattered magazine articles and a few dissertations in Thai. The author is an ethnomusicologist whose careful scholarship often addresses

topics long missing from the English language scholarship on Thai music. His first book addressed the history and cultural impact of the popular music form known as *luk thung*, and it reflected similarly exhaustive research (Mitchell 2015). His new book intersects with several bodies of scholarship, including popular music studies, historical ethnomusicology and Thai history. Research on the earliest years of the global recording industry has been addressed by a few notable music scholars (e.g., Pekka Gronow), but Mitchell's focus on Thailand is unparalleled. The only other comparable publication is *Longing for the Past: The 78 rpm Era in Southeast Asia* (Murray 2013), a gorgeous book and compact disc compendium that addresses most of Southeast Asia with some attention paid to Thailand.

Mitchell's book offers a deep, focused dive that zooms in on the seven scant years from 1903 to 1910 when King Chulalongkorn's national modernization project was in full swing. As the blurb puts it, this book "is the story of Siamese musicians, European recording experts and Chinese middlemen". While the book is a dream read for audiophiles, it reaches beyond and rises above a simple discography. Mitchell offers vivid, sustained attention to the cultural and historical context for the tracks captured on 78 rpm records, so the book will interest readers from far beyond music studies. Not only does Mitchell attend more broadly to the Bangkok entertainment industry of the period, but he also addresses the key role of Chinese ethnic businesses in establishing recording companies, music stores and entertainment venues that supported the emergent gramophone market in Bangkok. He also addresses the proliferation of dance drama during the period (which always included music) that underwent rapid change and expansion as the aristocratic intelligentsia experimented with Thai and western creative fusions.

The book contains a brief preface, four chapters, a concise conclusion, a hefty set of appendices, an extensive bibliography and an excellent index. The appendices are extraordinary. Appendix A offers a chronology of 1898–1912 that interleaves recording company activities with royal projects. Appendix B is an extraordinary set of lists in which Mitchell has painstakingly assembled information

on 1,340 records issued by eleven recording companies, with issue numbers, matrix numbers, song titles, song types (genres), and ensemble/performer names, all in Thai and English, with images of eighteen labels. Appendix C contains a compendium of all the titles of Thai pieces recorded between 1903 and 1915, alphabetized in Thai, with romanization. These appendices are invaluable source material in themselves and are central to Mitchell's contribution.

The first three chapters bristle with historical information about musicians and their aristocratic contexts. They are models of their kind. Although in some cases they retell histories found elsewhere, I also encountered fresh information about musicians, some well-known and others less so. For instance, Mitchell addresses the contributions of several famous women who are sometimes left out of more patriarchal, masculinist histories of Thai court music. His sustained attention to individuals and specific groups, venues and patrons offers an essential intervention against how Thai music history is too often told in generalized positivist terms.

Mitchell provides a set of links to streaming audio of all these recordings on YouTube (on p. x), accessed through a QR code, or better still through his extraordinary multimedia website containing links to streaming audio, images of record labels and more (<http://thaimusicinventory.org>). The bilingual Thai/English website—which contains links to approximately seventy-five of the recordings discussed in his book—is a major achievement in its own right and contains materials beyond this book from Mitchell's Thai music research more broadly. I defy any reader not to get sucked into the riches of the website, which I regard as part of the book rather than a mere addendum. Mitchell's focus on discography is a generative model of its kind.

In sum, any reader interested in Thai music or this pivotal period of Thai history will be thoroughly engaged. I sometimes found myself wishing for a more sustained narrative with a more explicit set of research questions. Some of the sections are quite brief, e.g., two or three pages long, and read like encyclopedia articles. But Mitchell's exhaustive research pulled me along. The details he has amassed

about musicians, recording companies, venues and repertoire are compelling. The shaping force of early twentieth-century recording technology on Thai performance—and Thai society—is very clear.

The book is nicely designed. The ninety-two black-and-white images are clear and crisp. The extensive tables in the appendices are models of clarity, with both Thai- and English-alphabet names of performers and repertoire titles. This book is a tribute to Silkworm Books' importance for Thai studies and to James Mitchell's painstaking, important attention to the Thai music industry.

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