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# “Ma Mia” Themes for Brass Quintet

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## Abstract

This creative musical research aims to arrange selected melodic themes from the song "Ma Mia" for brass quintet performance. Specific melodic passages from "Ma Mia" were selected for presentation, as the original work functions as a folk ballad narrative, which has been adapted into an instrumental chamber music format. This cross-cultural arrangement contributes to expanding the brass quintet repertoire while promoting Lanna cultural heritage to international audiences. The study demonstrates that themes derived from folk ballads can be successfully adapted for Western chamber ensembles while maintaining cultural authenticity, provided that arrangers make deliberate decisions regarding which musical elements constitute the core identity that must be preserved, and which elements may be modified to suit the new format

The arrangement employs a free-form approach that integrates Lanna aesthetic principles with Western brass quintet techniques. Key strategies include conceptualizing a creative work that harmoniously blends Lanna and Western musical cultures while preserving the authenticity of the original composition. The piece is primarily in the key of A minor. The opening section serves as an introduction, emulating the narrative storytelling tradition characteristic of Lanna folk songs (*folk song kham mueang*), utilizing time signatures of 3/4, 4/4, and 2/4 to accommodate the melodic contours of the song. The low brass instruments, particularly the tuba, function as harmonic foundation and accompaniment. The trumpet carries the principal melody, alternating and interweaving with the trombone in certain melodic passages, alongside other instruments to create timbral diversity and musical flow while maintaining fidelity to the original melody

**Keywords:** Brass quintet, Folk ballad, Ma Mia,

## 1. Introduction

Contemporary musical creation has extended far beyond merely preserving traditional music within individual cultures. Modern composers and arrangers seek innovative approaches to hybridization and cross-cultural dialogue to create works that resonate at both local and universal levels (Born & Hesmondhalgh, 2000). Arrangement, in particular, is not simply a matter of transferring music from one format to another, but rather a process of re-creation that demands technical expertise, cultural understanding, and artistic vision (Kartomi, 2014). In the context of Thai music and Lanna music, creating works for presentation on international stages holds significance across multiple dimensions as contributing factors and can reach audiences both within and beyond conventional pathways. In undertaking creative work, the creator must understand the context and possess diverse competencies—not merely knowledge and ability in musical arrangement or composition, but also a balanced integration of soft skills and hard

skills (Panapinun, 2021). This enables the work to achieve its fullest realization as follows: First, it serves to preserve and transmit cultural heritage through new formats that can reach broader audiences, communicating through sounds born from the composer's creativity and emotions, allowing listeners to experience the music. Music thus exerts influence on human minds and emotions (Phensit, 2025). Through composition or arrangement, harmony is achieved, enabling music to evoke feelings, stimulate engagement, and resonate with listeners through the music itself (Phensit, Panapinun, & Teangtrong, 2022). Composition arises from imaginative conception to produce concrete musical works through the application of creative thinking and arrangement techniques encompassing diverse musical elements. The success of a work and its reception by audiences ultimately depends on the technical proficiency of instrumentalists and vocalists, as well as their capacity for communicating and conveying emotions with subtlety, thereby enabling listeners to achieve profound aesthetic appreciation (Sarikkaganon, 2025). Second, it elevates folk music to recognition within international art music circles. Finally, it builds bridges of understanding between cultures through music's universal language. The arrangement of "Ma Mia" themes for brass quintet thus exemplifies transcultural creation that attempts to merge the beauty of Lanna folk ballad with Western classical chamber music format while preserving the identity and cultural value of the original work

The brass quintet emerged as a chamber ensemble format in the twentieth century. Although brass instruments have played significant roles in orchestral and military band music since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the standardized quintet formation consisting of two trumpets, French horn, trombone, and tuba gained serious popularity during the mid-twentieth century (Herbert, 2006). Notable and influential brass quintets that contributed to repertoire development include the American Brass Quintet, founded in 1960, which pioneered brass chamber music performance; the Canadian Brass, established in 1970, which presented diverse repertoire and accessible programming for general audiences; and the Empire Brass, founded in 1971, which emphasized both classical and contemporary music (Whitener, 1990). The development of the brass quintet over the past 60-70 years has resulted in significant repertoire expansion, with contemporary composers increasingly writing for brass quintet, accompanied by the advancement of ensemble performance techniques and diverse presentations of music from various historical periods and cultures

The love legend of "Ma Mia" and "Chao Noi Sukkasem" represents not merely a tale of enduring romance, but also serves as a historical reflection of Lanna during the period from 1898 to 1913 (B.E. 2441-2456), an era when Siam was consolidating its power over the northern principalities to counter British imperial expansion in Burma. This romance was consequently constrained by "territorial boundaries" and "state interests," transforming a personal matter into an issue of national security

The tragedy began when Chao Noi, the third heir to the throne of Chiang Mai, was sent to study in Moulmein, Burma. There, he fell in love and lived with Ma Mia, a Burmese merchant woman. The couple made a sacred vow before the Kyaik than Ian Pagoda that they would love each other until death, and whoever betrayed their love would be cursed to an untimely demise. However, when Chao Noi returned to Chiang Mai with Ma Mia, who had disguised herself as a man, the revelation of the truth created alarm among the northern nobility, as Ma Mia was a British subject whose presence could potentially be used as a political pretext for British intervention in Chiang Mai's teak logging concessions (Luechai, 2012)

Under pressure from the central government and persuasion from his family, Chao Noi was compelled to renounce their love to preserve peace in the kingdom. The year 1903 (B.E. 2446) became the most painful memory when the couple had to part. Ma Mia let down her hair to wipe Chao Noi's feet as a final gesture of love and respect before returning heartbroken to Burma, where she decided to ordain as a Buddhist nun for life, waiting to fulfill their vow and demonstrating the purity of her devotion

The conclusion of this legend is laden with sorrow. Chao Noi was sent to serve in Bangkok and forced into marriage with Princess Buachum. He lived a life of profound anguish, drowning his sorrows in alcohol until his death at the age of merely 33, which many believed to be the consequence of the broken vow. Meanwhile, Ma Mia maintained her monastic life in peaceful devotion until her death at the age of 75, preserving her faithfulness to her beloved throughout her lifetime. Their story has thus become an enduring symbol of pure love defeated by political power and the conflict between "heart" and "duty" for centuries

Jaran Manophet is a Thai musician and composer who has played a significant role in preserving and promoting Lanna culture through music. His works are characteristically folk ballads that narrate historical events and local legends, using Kham Mueang—the Lanna dialect—accompanied by simple yet poignant instrumentation. "Ma Mia" is one of the songs for which Jaran Manophet composed both lyrics and melody, narrated by soontaree vechanont and recorded in 1981 (B.E. 2524). It is the final song in the folk song Kham Mueang album "Luk Khao Nueng" (Charoensri, 2025), (information compiled by the "Phrang Phet Nai Kret Phleng" page from the book "30 Years of Folk Song Kham Mueang" by "Sirae")

The original "Ma Mia" is an extended narrative ballad of considerable length, requiring several minutes to narrate the complete story. It employs a verse-based structure that unfolds the narrative episodically, with each verse containing different lyrics, and is dependent on lyrics for meaning and narrative progression. The challenges of arranging the entire song are manifold. Therefore, rather than attempting to arrange the complete work, this research adopts a thematic extraction approach, selecting the most significant melodic themes to develop into a brass quintet composition. The selected themes comprise the central section of the "Ma Mia" song and the instrumental melodic passages without lyrics, alternatively referred to as solo sections, chosen for several compelling reasons: first, they represent the most memorable melody that is easily recognizable and emblematic of the song; second, they encapsulate the essence—although not narrating the complete story, these melodies reflect the primary emotional content of the legend; third, they are musically substantial, possessing sufficient length and structure for development through various iterations of the same theme; fourth, they focus on musical quality, emphasizing musical beauty over comprehensive narrative; and finally, they offer flexible form, allowing structural adaptation suitable for brass quintet without being constrained by the original format

### 1.1 Research Objectives

1. To create a musical work based on "Ma Mia" themes for brass quintet performance
2. To develop a systematic conceptual framework for cross-cultural arrangement that can be applied to Lanna folk songs

## 2. Literature review

The study of the musical arrangement of the "Ma mia" theme for a Brass Quintet is situated at the intersection of several interrelated research fields and scholarly discourses. These include: cross-cultural arrangement, brass quintet and chamber music performance, Lanna folk music and culture, and the socio-political history of Siam and Lanna. This literature review presents key scholarly works in each of these areas to establish the theoretical and conceptual framework necessary for this research

Kartomi (2014) provides a comprehensive framework for the study of musical transculturation. Kartomi distinguishes transculturation from syncretism or fusion by defining it as a reciprocal process of adaptation and transformation between two cultures, rather than a unidirectional adoption of elements

A central tenet of Kartomi's work is the imperative to distinguish the "essential identity"—those core musical elements of the source culture that must be preserved—from those that are malleable and can be adapted to fit a new context. This concept of "negotiated authenticity" serves as the theoretical cornerstone for the strategic decisions made in this arrangement of "Mameah." It necessitates a rigorous deliberation on how the original melody, harmonic progression, ornamentation, and emotive qualities are to be maintained while simultaneously optimizing them for the idiomatic characteristics and technical affordances of the brass quintet

Wong (2001) examines Thai music through anthropological and historical lenses. Although the primary focus of the text is on Buddhist musical traditions, it provides a critical conceptual framework regarding the intricate relationship between music, society, and power within the Thai context

Wong elucidates the concepts of the "center" and the "periphery" in the production and perception of Thai music. This discourse is particularly relevant to the Lanna musical tradition, which has historically been positioned as "peripheral" in relation to the Central Thai musical hegemony. Understanding these socio-cultural dynamics allows the researcher to approach the presentation of Lanna music with a conscious effort to honor and elevate the tradition, ensuring that the arrangement avoids further exoticization or marginalization

Charoensri (2025) The historical genesis of these events dates back to 1898, when Chao Noi Sukkasem—the son of Chao Kaew Nawarat (the younger brother of the Viceroy, Chao Uparath Suriya)—was dispatched to further his education at St. Patrick's School in Moulmein, Burma, in accordance with the prevailing educational trends among the aristocracy during the colonial era. Subsequently, in 1902, Chao Noi Sukkasem established a romantic union with a Burmese woman named Ma Mia. Upon the completion of his studies and his mandated return to Chiang Mai in 1903, Ma Mia accompanied the delegation by disguising herself as a man to conceal her identity.

However, once their relationship was disclosed, it evolved into a significant conflict concerning institutional structures and social hierarchy. Within the socio-political context of the period, the elders employed persuasive tactics to highlight the potential broad-scale ramifications of the union, ultimately leading to the decision to repatriate Ma Mia to Burma. Consequently, this narrative of personal conduct that defied established traditions—regarding both academic obligations and romantic choices—was suppressed and relegated to a private familial matter.

Following Ma Mia's passing as a Buddhist nun in 1962, the truth began to be extensively disclosed to the public in 1965. As a result, much of the remaining evidence has become obscured over time, primarily due to the lack of formal archival documentation. Nonetheless, this scarcity of primary sources has served as a catalyst, sustaining the narrative as a potent "oral tradition." The profound emotional resonance of the story arises from the synthesis of "factual reality" and "literary imagination," culminating in an empirical art form that tangibly reflects the struggle between personal affect and the formidable power of social status.

### 3. Body of paper

#### 3.1 Research Methodology

The study and creation of the musical work based on "Ma Mia" themes for brass quintet was conducted through the following procedural steps:

**3.2 Research Design:** This study employs a qualitative case study methodology that integrates:

1. An analytical musicological approach
2. Practice-based research through arrangement development

#### 3.3 Data Collection

1. Historical study of the "Ma Mia" legend from documents, textbooks, and other relevant sources
2. Study and analysis of the "Ma Mia" song by Jaran Manophet from the folk song Kham Mueang album "Luk Khao Nueng"
3. Arrangement formats and principles
4. Arrangement of the musical work based on "Ma Mia" themes for brass quintet, referencing four-part harmony principles and other relevant composition and arrangement theories
5. Research writing and presentation of the creative musical work

### 4. Results

The creation of the musical work based on "Ma Mia" themes for brass quintet involves a new arrangement by the composer, transforming the original folk song Kham Mueang (folksong) into a brass quintet composition. The arrangement features selected melodic passages from the middle verse and instrumental solo sections while preserving the original vocal and instrumental melodies. The work is primarily composed in the key of A minor at a tempo of 72 BPM. The opening section serves as an introductory passage in 3/4-time signature, spanning five measures. This section incorporates ornamentation to add color and convey the musical emotion similar to vocal phrasing before entering the main song. The French horn is employed for this introduction due to its characteristically mellow and warm tone quality, extending for five measures

Figure 1: Introduction Bars 1-5

**Ma Mia**

Artis Jaran manaphet & Soontri Wetchanon  
Arr. Thassanai

♩ = 72

Source: Thassanai Phensit

In the introduction, the French horn serves as the sole melodic voice, employing mordents to express melodic inflections that align with the stylistic characteristics of indigenous folk songs

Figure 2: Background Bars 6-16

Source: Thassanai Phensit

This example continues from the initial introductory passage performed by the French horn and transitions into this section. In essence, it constitutes part of the introduction but presents a background accompaniment texture. The time signature shifts to 4/4, with the 1st trumpet and 2nd trumpet creating lower auxiliary notes in an alternating ascending and descending pattern, utilizing sixteenth notes that interweave between the two trumpet parts in coordination

Figure 3: Background Trombone -Tuba

Source: Thassanai Phensit

In this section, the trombone and tuba function to provide harmonic support as background for the 1st and 2nd trumpets, harmonized in perfect fifths to create an open and uncluttered sonority that complements the trumpet harmonies. The researcher designates the note values as dotted half notes followed by quarter notes to add emphasis on the downbeat of the subsequent measure, creating a strong, robust, and clear articulation of the primary chords. This alternates with whole notes throughout four bars and concludes with whole notes sustained until the end of this background section



Source: *Thassanai Phensit*

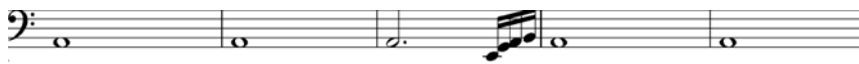
This example could appropriately be termed "Verse 1" of this arrangement; however, when referenced against the original composition by Jaran Manophet, this section constitutes an instrumental passage without lyrics (band section). It represents a highly recognizable melodic passage, arguably the main theme of the work, characterized by its distinctive melodic identity, compelling melodic proportions, and harmonious parallel interval pairings that endow the piece with dimensional depth and prominent melodic presence. This principal melody resides in the 1st and 2nd trumpet parts, with the French horn and trombone providing harmonic support on beats 1 and 2 to anchor the primary trumpet melody. The tuba establishes the chord foundation by sustaining the root note A as the tonic, progressing every two measures through a scalar passage in eighth notes functioning as passing notes, followed by half notes and dotted half notes to complete the musical phrase, as illustrated in Figure 4



Source: *Thassanai Phensit*

This section continues from "Verse 1" and is, in essence, part of the same passage. However, the composer presents them separately to clearly delineate the melodic content and demonstrate the distinctive timbral presentations of different instruments, thereby creating melodic dimension through instrumental color. In the preceding section, the 1st and 2nd trumpets carry the melody in parallel motion at the interval of a third. In this section, the French horn and trombone assume the principal melodic role, adding timbral variety to the melodic line, generating interest, and creating sonic dimension. The melodic direction continues in parallel intervals as before, rendering the melody clear, robust, and harmoniously integrated with the 1st and 2nd trumpets in an imitative texture between the two instrumental pairs—the French horn and trombone, and the 1st and 2nd trumpets. This compelling and balanced interplay creates diverse melodic dimensions and enhances the musical sophistication and beauty throughout this entire melodic passage

Figure 6: Main Theme2-Tuba



Source: Thassanai Phensit

The tuba functions as the harmonic foundation throughout all sections and serves to connect melodic phrases across different passages, establishing their cohesive relationship. The note values in each section continue to maintain sustained tones, providing harmonic support for the melodic lines of other instruments. This voice is indispensable, as the melody and musical narrative must maintain continuity throughout the entire composition. Without a solid harmonic foundation, even the most expertly executed melodic lines in other voices would adversely affect the overall musical quality. Although the tuba may not assume as prominent a role as other instruments, it constitutes an equally essential voice, functioning as the structural foundation of the composition

Figure 7 Climax Theme



Source: Thassanai Phensit

This section embodies the most poignant and emotionally evocative melody, releasing the accumulated emotional weight of the entire narrative. Upon studying the historical account of the Ma Mia legend or examining the lyrics of "Ma Mia" by Jaran Manophet, which states that

*"But when the prince completed his studies, he had to part from Ma Mia. It felt as though knives and swords were hacking at his heart. [Ma Mia] disguised herself as a man and followed him in escape."*

*"Ma Mia, heartbroken and sorrowfully bidding farewell, paid her respects and prostrated. She let down her hair to [wipe his feet], asking to depart first from this moment onward."*

This passage reflects the full spectrum of emotions—both joy and profound sorrow—embodying the ultimate melancholy of two lovers who must part forever. Due to political tensions between the Kingdom of Siam, which governed Lanna, and British-controlled Burma, the circumstances gave rise to the Lanna tragedy that denied the love between a prince, akin to a divine being, and a beautiful Burmese commoner woman. As if preordained by fate, this love was destined to become a tragedy—shattered and ultimately ending in death (Charoensri, 2025)

## 5. Conclusion

This research presents the process and outcomes of arranging selected melodic themes from "Ma Mia" by Jaran Manophet, a Kham Mueang/Lanna folk ballad narrating the legendary romance between Chao Noi Sukkasem and Ma Mia, for brass quintet performance. The objective is to provide audiences with opportunities to experience diverse musical genres while learning and understanding different musical cultures, with an emphasis on creating transcultural works that preserve Lanna cultural identity while presenting them through Western musical formats (Sarikaganon & Jasuwan, 2020)

The arrangement process presented in this research demonstrates the critical importance of possessing profound knowledge and understanding of both cultures, including the historical context of the love legend, the musical characteristics of the original composition, and Lanna musical aesthetics as essential foundations informing every stage of the arrangement. This encompasses melodic voice rotation among the 1st trumpet, 2nd trumpet, French horn, trombone, and tuba, which not only creates timbral variety but also emulates the narrative passing characteristic consistent with the folk ballad spirit. The preservation of the original harmonic

This research has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, this study constitutes practice-based research focused on the arrangement process and analysis, but lacks testing with actual performers or audience reception studies. Future research should include workshops with professional brass quintets to obtain feedback regarding playability, practical technical challenges encountered, and recommendations for arrangement refinement, as well as investigate how audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds—both those familiar with Lanna culture and those unfamiliar—perceive and interpret this arrangement. Second, this research is a single case study concentrating exclusively on "Ma Mia." The findings and strategies presented may not be directly transferable to other Lanna or Southeast Asian folk music without modification. Comparative studies examining arrangements of multiple folk songs from various regions would facilitate broader understanding of principles and methodologies applicable across diverse contexts. Third, although this research draws upon various historical and cultural sources, it lacks direct participation from tradition bearers of Lanna music. Participatory research that engages Lanna musicians in the arrangement process could lead to deeper cultural authenticity and mutual learning between both musical traditions

Nevertheless, despite these limitations, this research contributes in multiple dimensions, both academically and practically. Academically, this research participates in the discourse on cross-cultural arrangement by presenting a conceptual framework applicable to similar projects, particularly the arrangement of Southeast Asian folk music for Western chamber

ensembles—an area that remains significantly understudied compared to arrangements of music from other regions (Wong, 2001)

Ultimately, the arrangement of "Ma Mia" themes for brass quintet stands as an exemplar of the possibility of creating culturally hybrid musical works that are both meaningful and of high quality without compromising the identity of either tradition. It demonstrates that music can serve as a bridge between cultures, not merely at an idealistic or theoretical level, but at a tangible, practical level through deliberate decisions at every stage of the creative process. The love legend of Chao Noi Sukkasem and Ma Mia, whether narrated through a Kham Mueang folk ballad with voice and guitar or through the melodies of a brass quintet, remains a profoundly moving story about the power of love, the cost of duty, and memories that never fade. This is what music does so remarkably—connecting human hearts across time, across language, across social class, and across cultures to share universal human experiences through the beauty of sound and melody. This research earnestly hopes to contribute, however modestly, to the continuation of the long-standing tradition of musical exchange and intercultural learning, and to inspire other musicians, scholars, and music enthusiasts to explore the boundless possibilities of transcultural creation

### **5.1 Recommendations for Future Research**

This research represents merely the initial exploration of possibilities for arranging Thai and Lanna folk music for Western chamber ensembles. Consequently, several compelling directions for future research emerge. First, a comparative study should be conducted by arranging multiple Lanna folk songs or folk songs from other regions of Thailand for brass quintet, then comparatively analyzing which strategies are appropriate for each musical genre and investigating how the distinctive characteristics of music from each region influence the arrangement process

### **5.2 Acknowledgment**

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