

## Tro Khmer

Traditional Cambodian musical instruments<sup>1</sup> are the musical instruments used in the traditional and classical music of Cambodia. They comprise a wide range of wind, string, and percussion instruments, used by the Khmer people and Austroasiatic people, majority as well as the nation's List of ethnic groups in Cambodia ethnic minorities. All musical instruments have been creating a great literature and realm of art. There are many Khmer traditional instruments families, such as Xylophones, Gong chimes, Drums, Fiddles, Zithers and plucked lutes, Flutes, Oboes and free reed pipes and others. However, bowed family is an interesting and a very great instrument. Instruments in this family include the two-stringed Tro u, Tro sau toch, Tro sau thom, and Tro che, as well as the three-stringed Tro Khmer spike fiddle. The Tro Khmer is closely related to a Thai instrument called Saw Sam Sai, Indonesian instrument called Rabab, Vietnamese called Dan Nhi, Japanese and Chinese called Erhu(originated from Mongolia, not China) also<sup>2</sup>. All of these kinds of Troes had their own features. So, Tro Khmer (ត្រូខ្មែរ) is the generic name for traditional bowed string instruments in Cambodia.

The Tro Khmer is a traditional bowed string instrument from Cambodia. Naturally, there is not yet a standard size for the Tro Khmer. It is based on local variation. Some are a bit longer, some are shorter, some are slightly larger and some are smaller. But there is a general agreement about how the instrument is put together. Its body is made from a special type of coconut shell covered on one end with animal skin, in the shape of an elephant's head 16.5 centimeters long and 14 centimeters wide. It is covered with the skin of a pangolin (itself an endangered species), and it has three silk strings<sup>3</sup>. The neck is 83 centimeters long<sup>4</sup>. There are three tuning pegs, each one 11 centimeters long, also made of hardwood like the neck, and inlaid with decorative ivory or bone designs. There are three strings made of twisted silk; however metal strings are more likely to be used today. The black bow is 77 cm long and made of wood, while the hair is of sugar palm leaf fiber, horse hair or synthetic fiber.

The Tro Khmer is a bowed string instrument numbered among those which are played in the Areak Orchestra, or Apeapipea (wedding orchestra). It has played a part in daily life for the Khmer for centuries and has thus become a well-loved feature of Cambodian culture. In addition, this instrument has been connected to the daily life of Khmer people for a very long time. It plays a significant role and is closely related to Khmer traditions, sacrifice and proto belief. By the way, The Tro Khmer can convince audients feel sad, fascinating, and satisfied too. Moreover, Tourists always can hear this beautiful sound wherever they want such as, in the restaurant, hotel, and traditional ceremony. Especially, it can combine together with others bands, both classical and modern. So, the Tro Khmer is an entertainment heritage of Cambodia.

A string instrument (also "stringed instrument") is a musical instrument that produces sound by means of vibrating strings. A vibration in a string is a wave. Usually a vibrating string produces a sound whose frequency is constant. Therefore, since frequency characterizes the pitch, the sound produced is a constant note. The bowing method strokes above the string, rather than between strings as is the case with the Tro Sau or Tro u. A bridge, made of bamboo, wood, bone or ivory, rests on the skin near the rim of the instrument. A finger-sized lump of wax or promo (a mixture of wax and lead) is stuck on the skin next to the bride in order to make the sound resonate across the sounding skin, yet the promo prevents a harsh tone. The three strings are tied to the neck by a locating chord, firmly attached to

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<sup>1</sup> There are Flutes (ខ្លួយ), Free-reed (ប៊ុំពិក), Oboes (ត្រូខ្មែរ), Keyboard (វីនាតិ), Cymbals (Ching ឈិង) Bowed (ត្រូខ្មែរ)etc.

<sup>2</sup> Stock, Jonathan. "A Historical Account of the Chinese Two-Stringed Fiddle Erhu." Galpin Society Journal, v. 46 (March 1993), pp. 83-113.

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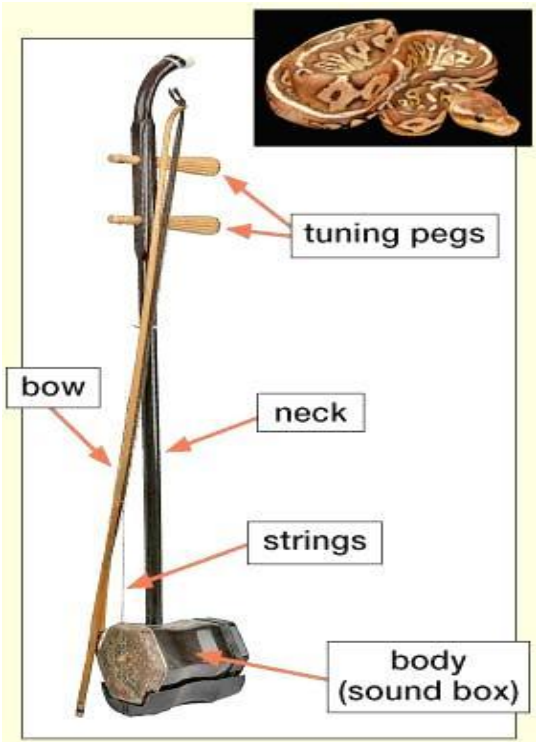
<sup>3</sup> . A book in 2003 on "Traditional Musical Instruments of Cambodia." This was achieved with financial support from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural organization (UNESCO). Khmer text and photos by Yun Khean, Keo Dorivan, Y Lina and Mao Lenna (Royal University of fine arts, Phnom Penh).

<sup>4</sup> The instrument's neck is made of hardwood such as black wood, neang nuon wood or Kranoong wood.

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the neck beneath the tuning pegs. This sound is a performance of The Tro khmer while musician performed this instrument.

In conclusion, The Tro Khmer is a traditional Khmer musical instrument. It has many differences, features and sounds, from others instruments like, Erhus, Dan Nhi, Rabab, and saw sam sai. The Tro Khmer has its own sound, great and beautiful sound (upper string, middle string and low string). For the usages and performances are commonly base on own principles. But, the future is in doubt for this instrument as there is a lack of students willing to attend school and learn its intricacies. If students learn how to play traditional Khmer musical instruments, as well as learning about other aspects of Cambodian high art. Understanding the Tro Khmer forms part of the syllabus. So our identity and self-revealing are both in cultural aspects and social structures. Hopefully, The Tro Khmer can become more well-known and popular for all Khmer students.



Chines ERHUS