

Music so sacred that it can't be written down - that is the music that makes up the repertoire of Chulalongkorn University's Wong Khrueng Sai Pi Chawa Ensemble.

Following long-established Thai traditions, the ensemble's musicians learn songs passed down through oral tradition and train for years before they are considered adept. Performing this sacred music is a dying craft, and the Wong Khrueng Sai Pi Chawa Ensemble is intent on keeping it alive.

Combining the sounds of traditional Thai string instruments and the *pi chawa*, a type of reed oboe, the Ensemble plays a style of music that is performed at the many ceremonies that mark milestones in every Thai person's life.

The *pi chawa* produces a unique high-pitched wail, and its sacred strains permeate every aspect of Thai society and culture, from birth ceremonies to funerals, from royal coronations to healing ceremonies. The instrument is said to have originated in Persia, and then brought to Thailand via India and Java. Its very name harks to this history, as *Chawa* is the Thai word for Java.

By performing the *pi chawa* together with Thai string instruments, the Wong Khrueng Sai Pi Chawa Ensemble produces a sound that is at once hypnotic and discordant. This sound is different from other more common traditional Thai ensembles as the string instruments have to be tuned to the scale of the *pi chawa*, creating a complex style of music that only the most accomplished of musicians can play and improvise with.

The Wong Khrueng Sai Pi Chawa Ensemble of Chulalongkorn University is one of Thailand's most experienced traditional music groups. Comprising professors and graduate students from the University's Department of Thai Music, the Ensemble has brought this unique tradition of Thai music to over twenty countries around the world.