

LOUISE THÁI THỊ LANG'S *FÊTES DU TÊT*: A MUSICAL REPRESENTATION OF  
VIETNAMESE CULTURE

by

TÙNG ANH NGUYỄN

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Dr. Alexandre Dossin, Chair of the Examining Committee

08/01/2024

Committee in Charge:        Dr. Alexandre Dossin, Chair  
   Dr. Juan Eduardo Wolf  
   Dr. Leah Lowthorp

Accepted by:

Leslie Straka, D.M.A.  
Director of Graduate Studies, School of Music and Dance

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Tùng Anh Nguyễn

PLACE OF BIRTH: Hanoi, Vietnam

DATE OF BIRTH: January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1995

### GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon (2020 – 2024)

Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, Budapest, Hungary (2015 – 2020)

### DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Musical Art in Piano Performance, 2024, University of Oregon

Master of Music in Collaborative Piano, 2024, University of Oregon

Master of Art in Piano Performance, 2020, Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music

Bachelor of Art in Piano Performance, 2018, Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music

### AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Piano Performance

Piano Pedagogy

Piano Chamber Music

Historical Performance Practice

Early Music

Musical Iconography

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Employee, University of Oregon, 2020 - 2024

Instructor of Piano and Collaborative Pianist

**GRANTS, AWARDS AND HONORS:**

Graduate Employee Fellowship, University of Oregon, 2020 - 2024

Outstanding Graduate Performer in Collaborative Piano, University of Oregon, 2024

*William A. Gribbon* Scholar Award, American Musical Instrument Society, 2024

*Stipendium Hungaricum* Scholarship, Hungary, 2015 - 2020

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Statement of purpose .....	2
Scope of research .....	3
II. VIETNAMESE HISTORICAL AND MUSIC EDUCATION BACKGROUND IN THE 19 <sup>TH</sup> AND 20 <sup>TH</sup> CENTURY .....	4
Historical background .....	4
Western musical background .....	7
III. COMPOSER'S BIOGRAPHY AND MUSICAL OUTPUT .....	10
Composer's biography.....	10
Musical output.....	16
IV. <i>FÊTES DU TÊT</i> .....	21
The importance of Tết Nguyên Đán in Vietnamese culture .....	21
<i>Fêtes du Têt</i> as a representation of the Vietnamese culture.....	22
<i>Đờn Ca Tài Tử - Southern Amateur Style</i> .....	24
<i>Fêtes du Têt</i> – version for solo piano .....	25
<i>Fêtes du Têt</i> – version for piano and orchestra.....	39
Why this work is important .....	43
V. CULTURAL PRESERVATION .....	44
Cultural preservation .....	44
Incorrect cultural assumptions .....	47
VI. THE DISAPPEARANCE AND REEMERGENCE OF LOUISE THÁI THỊ LANG .....	54
Disappearance .....	54
Reemergence .....	55
VII. CONCLUSION .....	59
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	61

## I. INTRODUCTION

The classical music scene in Vietnam from the 1950s to the present is quite active, with many living composers contributing works studied and performed by students in the Vietnam National Academy of Music. Newly commissioned works are frequently programmed in the Vietnamese National Symphony Orchestra concert seasons. However, these works are virtually unknown outside the country compared to music from other East Asian countries like Japan, Korea, and China. Recently, in 2021, a new DMA lecture document was written about Vietnamese piano music by Nguyễn Hoàng Nam at Temple University, which helps to introduce some of these works to international audiences. Among the composers that were mentioned in Nam's dissertation was Louise Nguyễn Văn Ty, née Louise Thái Thị Lang (1915 – 2007). She is possibly the first Vietnamese composer and performer to achieve international status, with her work being published and performed in France, Southeast Asian countries, and the United States in the 1950s and 1960s.

Louise Thái Thị Lang<sup>1</sup> went to France to study piano and composition in the 1930s. She graduated with the highest honor in piano performance from the Paris Conservatoire in 1938. She returned to Vietnam to teach, give concerts, and compose works based on traditional Vietnamese music. She came back to France in the 1950s and had her works published by Henry Lemoine. A highlight of Louise Thái Thị Lang's career was the premiere of her work for piano and orchestra - *Fêtes du Têt* – at Salle Pleyel in January 1953 with the Concert Lamoureux. The premiere was reviewed by *Times* magazine and *Le Monde* newspaper. After that, Louise Thái Thị Lang continued

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<sup>1</sup> Vietnamese people commonly address others by their first name. The document will address Louise Thái Thị Lang in three ways: in her full name, as Lang according to the Vietnamese tradition, and as Louise according to her Catholic Saint name.



to perform and introduced *Fêtes du Têt* on numerous occasions around the world and recorded the work in 1955. The title of the piece translates to “Tết Nguyên Đán (Vietnamese Lunar New Year Ceremony),” which is the most important holiday in Vietnamese culture. Louise Thái Thị Lang directly quoted a popular theme from the traditional Southern Amateur Style (Đòn ca tài tử Nam Bộ) repertoire called “Bình Bán Ván.” The theme was associated with Spring and was adapted to a children’s song about Tết Nguyên Đán. Upon further searches through library catalogs, I have tracked down most of her published works and discovered that *Fêtes du Têt* has two versions, one for solo piano and one for piano and orchestra. Given the fact that Louise Thái Thị Lang had her works published by a major publisher and had given concerts around the world, it might be assumed that she would have held a prominent role in the Vietnamese musical scene. Yet, nowadays, her pieces are virtually unknown in Vietnam and worldwide, and the recording of the piano and orchestra version of *Fêtes du Têt* is only available as a video on YouTube. Louise Thái Thị Lang is only mentioned briefly in Vietnam, and almost none of her works are available in the country. Why are there two versions of *Fêtes du Têt*? What Vietnamese Lunar New Year elements are presented in *Fêtes du Têt*? More importantly, why are her works forgotten, and why did she disappear from Vietnamese music history?

### **Statement of purpose**

My research will try to answer these questions by compiling a composer biography and creating an analysis of *Fêtes du Têt*. I will compare the two versions of the piece and address the music from a pianist’s perspective. I will also analyze the compositional techniques that were used, especially how the composer used Vietnamese folk music materials in the work. This research will also branch out to include some aspect of historical and cultural studies, as it is important for a

non-Vietnamese reader to understand the importance of *Tết Nguyên Đán* in Vietnamese culture, and the delicate political and historical situation in Vietnam in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. My research aims to offer a better picture of the composer's biography, prove the importance of her works in the Vietnamese classical music scene, and recognize the composer's effort as a cultural ambassador representing Vietnam through her music. I hypothesize that the absence of her works after the 1950s was a direct consequence of the Vietnam War from 1954 to 1975 and partly because of Western critics and audiences' misinterpretation of Vietnamese culture. I envision my research prompting further studies about Vietnamese classical music and this composer in particular. Consequently, pianists should start to include her works in their repertoire, especially my fellow Vietnamese pianists.

### **Scope of research and methodology**

This project focuses on the two versions of *Fêtes du Tết* and establishes a biography of the composer by addressing historical and cultural evidence. For the music, I will compare and analyze the two versions of *Fêtes du Tết* in form and source material. Addressing the tradition of the Vietnamese Lunar New Year is essential to understanding the piece in terms of cultural background, especially for non-Vietnamese readers, and for that, I will consult Vietnamese cultural newspaper and magazine articles. I will construct the composer's biography based on sources such as newspaper articles, program notes, and conference proceedings. I will then discuss the lack of interest in the composer and her pieces through reviews of her concerts and the political and historical events in Vietnam in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## II. VIETNAMESE HISTORICAL AND MUSIC EDUCATION BACKGROUND IN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY

### **Historical background**

1802 marks the beginning of the Nguyễn dynasty, the last dynasty of Vietnam. In the 1780s and 1790s, the future first emperor of the Nguyễn dynasty - Gia Long, was living in exile and challenged the claim to the throne in a civil war with the Tây Sơn dynasty. Gia Long received help from the French court, particularly from a vicar apostolic of the Paris Foreign Mission Society named Pigneau de Behaine, which resulted in a few hundred French explorers and adventurers arriving in Vietnam.<sup>2</sup> After ascending to the throne, Emperor Gia Long appointed French officials at his court until he passed away in 1820. The French slowly lost favor in the court due to the court's hostility towards foreign emissaries and their persistent efforts to establish regular consular and diplomatic relations.<sup>3</sup>

Under the rule of Gia Long's successor – King Minh Mạng, the tension between Vietnam and France escalated in the 1830s and 1840s. Minh Mạng ordered the persecution of missionaries. He executed at least ten Europeans on a variety of political charges under the suspicion that the Christian population was involved in a rebellion. The King's action intensified the resentment of the French court and the Catholic Church. In 1858, France took on the role of protector of Catholic missionaries of all nationalities. The French fleets cooperated with the Spanish authorities in Manila, Philippines, to execute a military attack on Vietnam to force the then leader, King Tự Đức, to

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<sup>2</sup> John F. Cady, 'The French Colonial Regime in Vietnam', *Current History* 50, no. 294 (February 1966): 72–78, 115.

<sup>3</sup> Cady, 72.

negotiate under French terms.<sup>4</sup> After a series of conflicts that lasted for almost ten years, France seized control of the southern part of Vietnam – Cochin-China – in 1867 and exercised direct control over it as a colony. In 1884, the Vietnamese government had to recognize France’s protectorate status over the northern part of Tonkin and the central part of Annam. At this point, France’s colonization of Vietnam was complete, with three regions and different governing systems.

From 1885 until 1945, Vietnam experienced ongoing tension between the idea of nationalism and foreign colonization. The country has a long history of occupation, including a one-thousand-year period of rule by China from 40 B.C.E. to 938 C.E. Resistance and revolutionary actions were happening across the country. Still, most were thwarted by the French government. After World War I, Nguyễn Ái Quốc – who later was better known as Hồ Chí Minh - was influenced by the Soviet Union and communism, believing it could help Vietnam gain independence from France. He went to France in the 1920s and later to the Soviet Union in the 1930s, then returned to Vietnam in 1941 and formed the League for the Independence of Vietnam (Việt Nam Độc Lập Đồng Minh Hội), or Việt Minh, with the purpose to “awaken the traditional nationalism in the people.”<sup>5</sup> After Japan surrendered to the Allies in August 1945, the Việt Minh led simultaneous revolutions across the country, which led to the abdication of Bảo Đại – the last emperor of the Nguyễn dynasty. Hồ Chí Minh declared the independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1945.

As a consequence of World War II and Hồ Chí Minh’s declaration of independence, he was invited to France to negotiate the terms for an “independent” Vietnamese state within the emerging

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<sup>4</sup> Cady, 73.

<sup>5</sup> Ben Kiernan, *Việt Nam - A History from Earliest Times to the Present* (Oxford University Press, 2017). 377.

French Union.<sup>6</sup> However, the negotiations collapsed on the matter of Cochinchina, as it wanted to be a separate independent republic from the proposed Vietnamese state.<sup>7</sup> Military conflicts between France and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam soon broke out after Hồ Chí Minh's return to Hà Nội. This was the First Indochina War and lasted until 1954. In an attempt to counter Hồ Chí Minh's nationalist movements, France negotiated with ex-Emperor Bảo Đại from 1947 until 1949, resulting in the creation of the State of Vietnam within the French Union, with Bảo Đại as the Chief of State.<sup>8</sup> In 1949, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam received support from the Soviet Union and the newly established People's Republic of China, while the State of Vietnam received support from other members of the French Union and the United States.

The Democratic Republic of Vietnam's victory at the Battle of Điện Biên Phủ in May 1954 led to the negotiation in Geneva for a peace solution. After two months of bargaining, it was decided that the French forces and the State of Vietnam's army would regroup south of the seventeenth parallel while the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's army would station north of it. Internationally supervised elections would be conducted within two years to decide the Vietnamese government. However, further political agendas from both the northern and the southern sides, along with their allies, prevented reunification. In 1955, Prime Minister Ngô Đình Diệm of the State of Vietnam ousted Bảo Đại in a rigged referendum.<sup>9</sup> He proclaimed himself President of the new Republic of Vietnam. This was the Vietnam War that lasted from 1954 to 1975. In this period, the two Vietnamese states were referred to as North Vietnam and South Vietnam. The Soviet block and

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<sup>6</sup> Cady, 'The French Colonial Regime in Vietnam'. 78.

<sup>7</sup> Cady, 78.

<sup>8</sup> Cady, 78, 115.

<sup>9</sup> Kiernan, *Việt Nam - A History from Earliest Times to the Present*, 405, 406.

China backed the North, while the United States and its allies supported the South. North Vietnam emerged victorious in 1975, reuniting Vietnam as the modern Socialist Republic of Vietnam

### **Western musical background**

European music could have arrived in Vietnam as early as the sixteenth century through the Catholic missionaries. Latin masses were likely sung by European priests and possibly by Vietnamese followers.<sup>10</sup> From the 1700s, as the relationship between the church and the state improved,<sup>11</sup> this music expanded among Vietnamese Roman Catholic populations. During the colonial period starting from 1884, Western music was mostly taught in Roman Catholic churches and French schools,<sup>12</sup> and Vietnamese people could listen to Western classical music in military bands, nightclubs, various classical music concerts, and other forms of entertainment for French colonial administrators.<sup>13</sup> Starting in the 1910s, a group of Vietnamese intellectuals was involved in a reform and modernization movement across the country for social and economic changes. As a result, some of Vietnam's traditional musical genres adopted European instruments in their performances,<sup>14</sup> and some Vietnamese were selected to perform Church music during service in larger churches in Hà Nội, Hải Phòng, Huế, and Sài Gòn.<sup>15</sup> After World War I, wind bands comprised of Vietnamese were formed and managed by the military authorities, and, by 1945, they were performing standard repertoire by Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Tchaikovsky, among others.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Terry E. Miller and Sean Williams, eds., *The Garland Handbook of Southeast Asian Music* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 284.

<sup>11</sup> Miller and Williams, 284.

<sup>12</sup> Miller and Williams, 284.

<sup>13</sup> Miller and Williams, 284.

<sup>14</sup> Miller and Williams, 284.

<sup>15</sup> Ngọc Tú et al., *Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam - Tiến Trình và Thành Tựu* (Hà Nội: Vietnamese Institute of Musicology, 2000), 41.

<sup>16</sup> Tú et al., 43.

There were efforts to create music schools in both Hà Nội and Sài Gòn from the 1910s to 1930s. Albert Poincignon (1875 – 1935) was a customs officer for the French administration in Hà Nội and an established pianist and conductor in the French community.<sup>17</sup> He opened *the Institut Musical de Hanoi* in 1913 to strengthen the local musical scene. During World War I, he organized concerts to benefit the war effort and later to support victims of the war. The students were children of French officials, and it was unclear if the *Institut* included any Vietnamese students, but Poincignon clearly wanted to expand the training to Vietnamese.<sup>18</sup> In 1927, he formally approached the government of the Protectorate of Tonkin to request financial support to expand his *Institut* into a conservatory. The plan was approved, and the *Conservatoire Français d'Extrême-Orient* was founded. However, in 1930, the school closed after only three years due to financial burden and lack of encouragement from the Indochinese government.<sup>19</sup> Despite its short-lived operation, about fifty Vietnamese students enrolled, and many of them received the highest honors.

In Sài Gòn, The *Comité artistique de Saigon*, led by Charles Martin, was founded in 1928. The *Comité* invited prominent European artists to Sài Gòn to perform, namely violinists Jacques Thibaud, Joseph Szigeti, Cecilia Hansen, and pianists Benno Moiseiwitch and Armande Caron. In 1933, the *Comité* established the *Conservatoire de Musique*, starting with piano classes taught by Armande Caron, but it closed shortly afterward because of financial shortages.<sup>20</sup> After this, music

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<sup>17</sup> Michael E. McClellan, 'MUSIC, EDUCATION AND "FRANÇAIS DE COULEUR": MUSIC INSTRUCTION IN COLONIAL HANOI', *Fontes Artis Musicae* 56, no. 3 (September 2009): 319.

<sup>18</sup> McClellan, 319.

<sup>19</sup> Nam Hoàng Nguyễn, 'Solo Piano Music by Vietnamese Composers: A Performative and Historical Perspective' (Temple University, 2021), 2, <https://www-proquest-com.uoregon.idm.oclc.org/docview/2572581124/fulltextPDF/3624D856BE524D9APQ/1?accountid=14698&parentSessionId=d5tbCu0f9F8i7GYdZ%2BZ7Xf2A%2FZFokG7bGLfDJaM4ZyY%3D&sourcetype=Dissertations%20%20Theses>.

<sup>20</sup> Tú et al., *Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam - Tiến Trình và Thành Tựu*, 49.

education in Hà Nội and Sài Gòn was restricted to private lessons and miscellaneous concerts but achieved considerable results. From 1943 to 1946, a formal music school was founded by the Association for Music Studies in Hà Nội. The school recorded an enrollment of about three thousand students, followed by the creation of a thirty-musician brass band and an orchestra in 1945.<sup>21</sup>

From 1945 to 1954, records of musical activities were interrupted because of the First Indochina War. Following the division of North Vietnam and South Vietnam in 1954 after the Geneva Accord, music schools similar to the Association for Music Studies were established in both countries in 1956. The Vietnam School of Music was founded in Hà Nội, and the Saigon National Conservatory of Music and Theatrical Arts was created in Sài Gòn.<sup>22</sup> The North Vietnamese government promoted the composition of popular and revolutionary songs to support the war and building a socialist regime.<sup>23</sup> The South Vietnamese government also used music as a political agenda,<sup>24</sup> but the music school in Sài Gòn was not ostensibly required to serve this purpose.<sup>25</sup> After the Vietnam War ended in 1975, the Vietnam School of Music was renamed the Hà Nội Conservatory and recently became the Vietnam National Academy of Music. The Saigon National Conservatory of Music and Theatrical Arts was changed to Hồ Chí Minh City Conservatory. The Vietnamese government also created a music college in the city of Huế and smaller intermediate-level music schools around the country.<sup>26</sup> A few instructors from the northern music schools were

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<sup>21</sup> Miller and Williams, *The Garland Handbook of Southeast Asian Music*, 287.

<sup>22</sup> Miller and Williams, 287.

<sup>23</sup> Miller and Williams, 287.

<sup>24</sup> *Music in Southeast Asia : Record of Proceedings of the First Regional Music Conference of Southeast Asia, Held on August 29-31, 1955, at the University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines*. (Manila: The Unesco National Commission of the Philippines, 1956), 76.

<sup>25</sup> Miller and Williams, *The Garland Handbook of Southeast Asian Music*, 287.

<sup>26</sup> Thị Nhung Nguyễn, *Âm Nhạc Tỉnh Phòng - Giao Hưởng Việt Nam: Sự Hình Thành và Phát Triển Tác Phẩm Tác Giả* (Hà Nội: Vietnamese Institute of Musicology, 2001), 54.



trained by the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe, while some of the instructors in the southern schools were trained in France and Western Europe.<sup>27</sup> Nowadays, more Vietnamese students are able to receive training abroad, thus increasing the level of music education in Vietnam in general.

### III. COMPOSER'S BIOGRAPHY AND MUSICAL OUTPUT

#### **Composer's biography**

Louise Thái Thị Lang was born on January 4th, 1915, in Chợ Lớn (present-day Hồ Chí Minh City, Vietnam) and passed away on August 10th, 2007, in Combs-la-Ville, France.<sup>28</sup> Her father, Alexis Thái Văn Lân, was one of the few Vietnamese engineers to receive education in France. He played a prominent role in the intellectual community in Cochinchina, holding positions and working with various organizations, factories, and banks in the early 1920s.<sup>29</sup> The family had a deep appreciation for Western music, with the boys receiving violin lessons and the girls learning to play the piano. Louise's duet performances with her sister Marcelle Thái Thị Liên were highly esteemed within the family.<sup>30</sup>

Being raised in the Catholic faith, Louise received her early musical education from the Catholic Sisters in Chợ Lớn at the age of six. Louise and her sister Marcelle displayed immense talent at an early age and showed promising musical abilities.<sup>31</sup> In 1929, a young French pianist

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<sup>27</sup> Miller and Williams, *The Garland Handbook of Southeast Asian Music*, 287.

<sup>28</sup> Josiane Gradot, 'LOUISE THAI THI LANG DITE LANG', accessed 3 June 2024, <https://gw.geneanet.org/maogra?lang=en&p=louise&n=thai+thi+lang+dite+lang&oc=0>.

<sup>29</sup> Jason Gibbs, 'Phụ nữ Việt Nam với đàn piano đầu thế kỷ XX', *BBC News*, 14 May 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/vietnamese/forum-47833156>.

<sup>30</sup> Gibbs.

<sup>31</sup> Gibbs.

named Armande Caron, who had been a student of the renowned pedagogue Isidor Phillip at the *Conservatoire de Paris*, arrived in Cochin-China. It was confirmed that she had given lessons to Marcelle and likely to Louise as well.<sup>32</sup> Despite the traditional challenges faced by women pursuing artistic careers, the family supported both sisters' musical studies due to their talents, the potential for a fulfilling experience, and the prospect of a stable profession.<sup>33</sup>

According to the family tree, Alexis Thái Văn Lân's family was naturalized as French citizens in July 1930.<sup>34</sup> The family may have taken this action partly because of their origin in Cochin-China, which was a French colony, and Alexis's history of education in France and his involvement in the local government. As early as 1933, Louise composed some early pieces of music in the Western style using traditional Vietnamese material, and she expressed her wish to further her musical studies in order to compose such music.<sup>35</sup> Louise Thái Thị Lang decided to go to Paris in 1933 and was accepted into the Conservatoire de Paris to study piano with George DeLausnay and Yves Nat, and composition with Marcel Samuel-Rousseau and Henri Tomasi.<sup>36</sup> It is interesting to speculate whether Louise had the chance to meet Isidor Philipp since he taught at the Conservatoire until 1935. The connection between Louise Thái Thị Lang and Henri Tomasi is also worth noting, as Henri Tomasi served as the conductor for the Radio Colonial Orchestra in French Indochina from 1930 to 1935, and they could have met prior to Louise's departure to France in 1933. In 1938, Louise Thái Thị Lang graduated with distinction and returned home according to the family's wishes, where

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<sup>32</sup> Gibbs.

<sup>33</sup> Thị Kiêm Nguyễn, 'Phỏng vấn bà Thái Văn Lân', *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*, 17 August 1933, 212 edition, <http://baochi.nlv.gov.vn/baochi/cgi-bin/baochi?a=d&d=HtCq19330817.2.6&e=-----vi-20--1--txt-txIN-----#>.

<sup>34</sup> Gradot, 'LOUISE THAI THI LANG Dite LANG'.

<sup>35</sup> Nguyễn, 'Phỏng vấn bà Thái Văn Lân'.

<sup>36</sup> Thanh Bình Trần, 'TÀ ÁO DÀI VIỆT NAM VÀ BẢN SYMPHONY SUITE TRÊN SÂN KHẤU PARIS', 4 January 2020, <https://dongtac.hncity.org/spip.php?article7177>.

she maintained an active teaching and performing schedule. During this time, she further composed more music that was based on traditional Vietnamese tunes.<sup>37</sup> She got married to Nguyễn Văn Ty in 1938, an engineer like her father, and started to appear in public as Louise Nguyễn Văn Ty - a combination of her Catholic name and her husband's full name. There is no clear explanation for this decision; one reason could be that her husband was a highly influential figure and it would be advantageous to use his name.

In the early 1940s, Louise Nguyễn Văn Ty performed regularly on Vietnam's radio system and in concerts with European musicians.<sup>38</sup> After 1945, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Ty worked as a politician and a diplomat for the State of Vietnam. He was stationed in France starting in 1951 and brought the family with him. Louise Nguyễn Văn Ty returned to Paris with her family and received support from Henri Tomasi, her previous mentor, who introduced her to the Paris musical scene.<sup>39</sup> Louise Nguyễn Văn Ty also received financial support from her father, Alexis Lân, to publish her works in Paris through the publisher Henry Lemoine.<sup>40</sup> According to her nephew, she published a total of eight works between 1951 and 1955.<sup>41</sup> *Fêtes du Têt* were among these works, and she performed the piece on the piano with several prominent French orchestras. An article about her performance with the Radio de Lyon as early as July 12th, 1952, is available.<sup>42</sup> The biggest occasion was the live premiere of the piece with *Orchestra Lamoureux* at *Salle Pleyel* on January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1953, which received a

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<sup>37</sup> Trần.

<sup>38</sup> Miller and Williams, *The Garland Handbook of Southeast Asian Music*, 287.

<sup>39</sup> Gibbs, 'Phụ nữ Việt Nam với đàn piano đầu thế kỷ XX'.

<sup>40</sup> Trần.

<sup>41</sup> Trần.

<sup>42</sup> 'UNE ŒUVRE MUSICALE D'INSPIRATION FOLKLORIQUE VIETNAMIENNE', *VIET NAM*, 15 July 1952.

review from *Times* magazine<sup>43</sup> and the French newspaper *Le Monde*.<sup>44</sup> Louise Nguyễn Văn Ty also got to perform *Fêtes du Têt* with *Orchestra Pas de loup*, conducted by Albert Wolff in April 1954, which *Le Monde* also reviewed.<sup>45</sup> She recorded the piece in 1955 with *Orchestra Lamoureux* conducted by her mentor Henri Tomasi. It was published by Philips as *Nguyễn Đán - Fêtes du Têt*.

In August 1955, Southeast Asia's first regional music conference was held in the Philippines, bringing delegates from East and Southeast Asian countries and representatives from UNESCO. Louise Nguyễn Văn Ty was the head of the Vietnamese delegation attending this conference. Since the conference was affiliated with UNESCO, the Vietnamese delegation attending this conference was the Republic of Vietnam, which was just founded after the Geneva Accord in 1954 and recognized by UNESCO. Louise Nguyễn Văn Ty performed *Fêtes du Têt* with the Manila Symphony Orchestra during the closing gala concert of the conference, directed by fellow Vietnamese conductor Michel Nguyễn Phụng.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> 'Music: An Oriental in Paris', *Times*, 26 January 1953, <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,817792,00.html>.

<sup>44</sup> René Dumesnil, 'LA FÊTE DU TÊT', *Le Monde*, 22 January 1953, [https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1953/01/22/la-fete-du-tet\\_1971659\\_1819218.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1953/01/22/la-fete-du-tet_1971659_1819218.html).

<sup>45</sup> René Dumesnil, 'LES CONCERTS', *Le Monde*, 14 April 1954, [https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1954/04/14/les-concerts\\_2012805\\_1819218.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1954/04/14/les-concerts_2012805_1819218.html).

<sup>46</sup> 'Music and Dance Festival', 28 August 1955, [https://archives-prasidh.silapabanleng.org/uploads/r/silapabanleng-archives/a/8/2/a82a9efea62a56f248625f8e88db22dfac6487a14f0d18878d209297e6cda19c/TH\\_SLPBL\\_MISC-050.pdf](https://archives-prasidh.silapabanleng.org/uploads/r/silapabanleng-archives/a/8/2/a82a9efea62a56f248625f8e88db22dfac6487a14f0d18878d209297e6cda19c/TH_SLPBL_MISC-050.pdf).

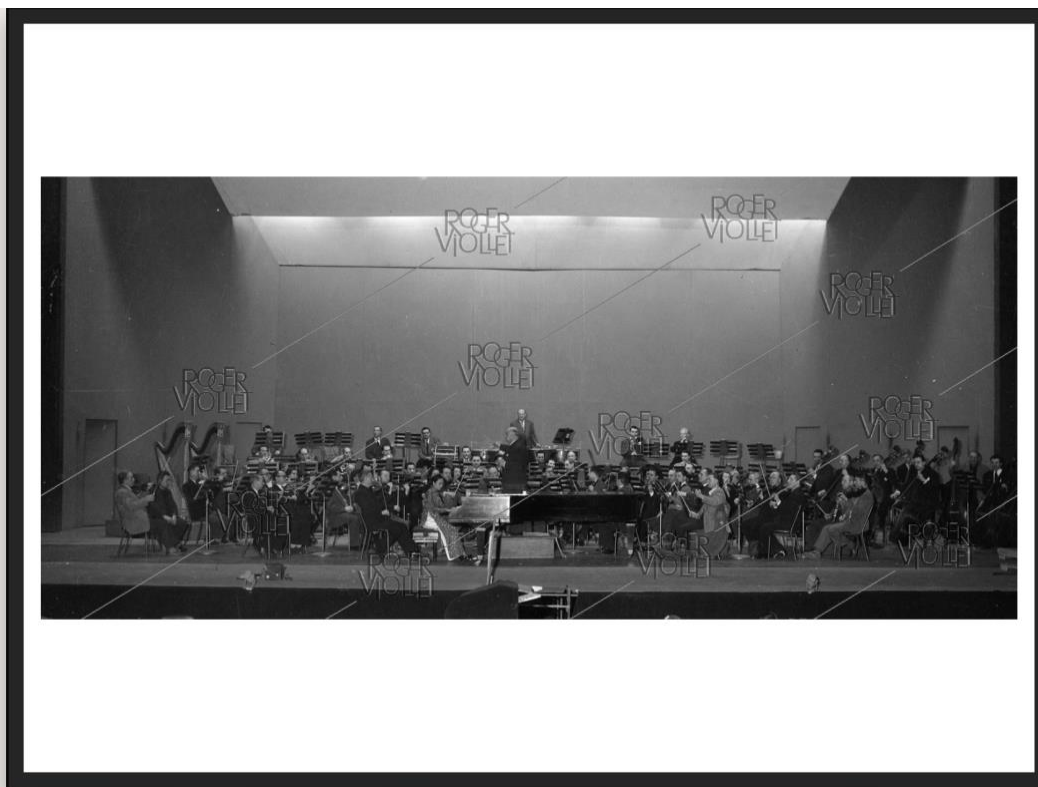


Figure 1 : Louise Nguyen Van Ty, pianist. Pas de loup orchestra, conducted by Albert Wolff.<sup>47</sup>

After 1955, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Ty was transferred to work in the United States, and Louise Nguyễn Văn Ty had her debut concert tour in America. It was reported that she performed at New York Town Hall in 1957<sup>48</sup> and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., in 1958.<sup>49</sup> Starting from this moment, Louise decided to use her maiden name, Thái Thị Lang, instead of her husband's name, Nguyễn Văn Ty. The concert advertisement for her American tour stated that Louise Thái Thị

<sup>47</sup> Boris Lipnitzki, *Louise Nguyen Van Ty, Pianist. Pas de Loup Orchestra, Conducted by Albert Wolff*, n.d., Photograph, n.d., <https://www.granger.com/results.asp?inline=true&image=0680029&wwwflag=1&itemx=35>.

<sup>48</sup> 'Louise Thai-Thi-Lang Gives Recital', *The New York Times*, 12 March 1957, <https://www-proquest-com.uoregon.idm.oclc.org/docview/114024056/51454E0BB41B46DEPQ/1?accountid=14698&sourcetype=Historical%20Newspapers>.

<sup>49</sup> John Haskins, 'Musical Given Exotic Flavor', *The Washington Post*, 13 January 1958.

Lang had also given recitals in Australia and North Africa, in addition to “the Orient” and Europe.<sup>50</sup> She was featured in the 1959-1960 concert season managed by Willard Matthews.<sup>51</sup> In 1962 and 1963, she embarked on a two-month research trip in Asia to collect composition materials. Her destinations included Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong. A Singaporean newspaper article in 1962 stated that Louise Thái Thị Lang was an “American-Vietnamese pianist and composer” who “arrived in Singapore to study Malaya music.”<sup>52</sup> It is unclear if she had settled in America and was naturalized as an American citizen. The final newspaper archive about her public performances was in Malaysia in 1962 and later in Hong Kong in 1963.<sup>53</sup>

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<p><b>CONDUCTORS</b></p>	

Figure 2: Willard Matthews concert management brochure.

<sup>50</sup> *Louise Thai Thi Lang Concert Advertisement*, n.d., n.d.,  
<https://www.ebay.com/itm/315342345919?itmmeta=01J0496JEYAVCBXK458M0SVZ1K&hash=item496bde56bf:g:8H4AAOSwyOtlq0GB&itmprp=enc%3AAQAJAAAA4DaQKG44bX9AQS6JzwLPEIFyJ9NsF7zm7f87ijpwBbVK3tNvW98Q8Kn%2BkOmWSWaj8asj%2Fsn5DOxOZcn5EefWR5FGHy9Hu4zfShM7kFa7OK9B9B22LR1vHRkp3SXOhJyOYpIRZHgphUNHH8S0JNoHIVEpdZsFZ0yFGS7KV4js%2BaSlxjdyZwz7WE%2BVqL35eQCWKm%2B6CtAHhZrR%2F6yRkyADrJfPUfSineKC3tbNisiFBRuzI%2FVINfj4bxYvgle328CRxECzQNxtZWWl8rVrHbU%2FyeIHa6kKmYVYKWEpYIK0nrh%7Ctkp%3ABk9SR8KnmomBZA>.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Concert Management Willard Matthews’, *Music Club Magazine*, April 1959, 44.

<sup>52</sup> ‘MALAYAN MUSIC STUDY IS HER AIM’, *The Straits Times*, 6 December 1962,  
<https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/digitised/article/straitstimes19621206-1.2.73>.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Louise Thai Thi Lang Composer Pianist’, *South China Morning Post*, 11 January 1963.

After Louise Thái Thị Lang's travel to Paris in 1933, her younger sister, Marcelle Thái Thị Liên also went to Paris and then to Czechoslovakia (present-day Czechia) to study piano in 1948. Marcelle Thái Thị Liên obtained her diploma from the Prague Conservatory of Music in 1951. During her time in Europe, she got married to Mr. Trần Ngọc Danh, a diplomat from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. This was a turning point for the two sisters, as they were married to two diplomats from different Vietnamese states who represented different ideologies. Because of the consequence of the Geneva Accord and later the Vietnam War, Marcelle Thái Thị Liên and Louise Thái Thị Lang were not able to see each other until 1980 when Marcelle's son and Louise's niece Đặng Thái Sơn received the first prize of the 10<sup>th</sup> International Chopin Competition in Warsaw. Louise Thái Thị Lang passed away on August 10th, 2007, in Combs-la-Ville, France, at the age of 92.

### **Musical Output**

It is difficult to compile a thorough list of Louise Thái Thị Lang's work besides the eight pieces Henry Lemoine published in Paris in the 1950s. There is no record of any original pieces that were performed or published in Vietnam in the 1940s after she graduated from the Paris Conservatoire, even though she started composing as early as 1933<sup>54</sup> and introduced some of her works in the 1940s in Sài Gòn.<sup>55</sup> According to Vietnamese musicologists, the pieces Louise Thái Thị Lang composed in Vietnam in the 1940s were transcriptions of Vietnamese folk tunes that later appeared in *Việt Nam – Album pour Piano*.<sup>56</sup> After 1955, program notes existed about original

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<sup>54</sup> Nguyễn, 'Phỏng vấn bà Thái Văn Lân'.

<sup>55</sup> Gibbs, 'Phụ nữ Việt Nam với đàn piano đầu thế kỷ XX'.

<sup>56</sup> Nguyễn, *Âm Nhạc Thánh Phòng - Giao Hưởng Việt Nam: Sự Hình Thành và Phát Triển Tác Phẩm Tác Giả*, 26.

compositions that were performed, but it was unclear if they were published. Moreover, the eight pieces published in Paris were through a personal agreement between Louise Thái Thị Lang and the publisher, and Henry Lemoine did not start a publishing contract.<sup>57</sup> All those eight pieces are now out of print and only exist in selected archives and libraries worldwide. Upon conducting thorough searches in library catalogs, I have successfully compiled a list of those eight pieces. They were all composed for solo piano and are as follows:

1. *Con Ngựa Ô – Le Cheval Noir – The Black Horse* (1951)
2. *Tiếng Hát Trên Sông – Le Chant au Fil des Ondes – The River’s Song* (1952)
3. *Nguyễn Đán – Fêtes du Têt* (1952)
4. *Hành Vân: Marche des Nuages* (1953)
5. *Việt Nam – Album pour Piano* (1954)
6. *Hoa Đăng – Les Lanternes: Scherzo* (1955)
7. *Suite de Poèmes* (1955)
8. *Après la Sécheresse, la Pluie – Légende pour Piano* (1955)

All these compositions are based on traditional Vietnamese music, culture, or literature. In the case of *Nguyễn Đán – Fêtes du Têt*, Louise Thái Thị Lang also published another version in 1952 with the description “Tableaux symphoniques pour Piano principal et Orchestre.” There are major differences between the two versions that were published in the same year, and the version for piano and orchestra had more musical material and was more rounded in terms of form. This leads me to

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<sup>57</sup> Tung Nguyen to Valerie Alric, ‘Louise Nguyen Van Ty’, 24 May 2024.



believe that the solo piano version was written earlier. The 1955 Philips recording of *Fêtes du Têt* featured an additional piece titled *Suite de Poèmes pour Récitant et Orchestre* on its cover. Interestingly, each movement of this piece has a title similar to the *Suite de Poèmes* for solo piano, indicating that it may also existed in a different version. Regrettably, no musical score is available for the narrator and orchestra version, but it is intriguing to imagine the potential outcome. Based on this information, we can categorize the pieces featuring orchestra as a separate group. They are the following:

9. *Nguyễn Đán – Fêtes du Têt - Tableaux symphoniques pour Piano principal et Orchestre* (1955)

10. *Suite de Poèmes pour Récitant et Orchestre* (1955)

After the conference on Southeast Asian music held in 1955 in the Philippines, Louise Thái Thị Lang was inspired by Philippine traditional music and composed a set of variations on a Philippine Air. The piece got its US premiere during her debut concert in New York.<sup>58</sup> The National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C concert brochure gave us more detailed information about the piece: a set of twelve variations.<sup>59</sup> It is unclear if Louise Thái Thị Lang performed this piece before her US tour, as no physical copy of the music is available now. During her research trip to Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong from 1962 to 1963, she composed a new piece titled *Far Eastern Marine*

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<sup>58</sup> ‘Carnegie Hall Brochure 1956 - 1957’ (Alfred Scott Publisher, 1957), <https://www.cervantesvirtual.com/research/carnegie-hall-5/dd9190c8-2dc6-11e2-b417-000475f5bda5.pdf>.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Louise Thai-Thi-Lang, Pianist’ (NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, 12 January 1958), [https://www.nga.gov/content/dam/ngaweb/research/gallery-archives/concertprograms/1950-1960/1957-1958/15A4\\_69313\\_19580112.pdf](https://www.nga.gov/content/dam/ngaweb/research/gallery-archives/concertprograms/1950-1960/1957-1958/15A4_69313_19580112.pdf).

*Landscape*. The world premiere of the piece was in Hong Kong City Hall Theatre concert on January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1963. It received a favorable review from the South China Morning Post

Her new work, *Far Eastern Marine Landscapes*, for which she had evidently been saving herself, contains some highly imaginative and original writing, and is an agreeable mixture of the Oriental and the French, with the latter predominating in the general atmosphere and expressiveness. Especially the last item, “Cavalcade of the Sea,” was cleverly varied and evocative.<sup>60</sup>

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PROGRAM:

I.  
Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue.....Bach  
Sonata, E minor, No. 34.....Haydn  
Sonata, B minor, Op. 58.....Chopin

II.  
Twenty-four Preludes .....Scriabin  
Prelude and Fugue in G sharp minor.....Taneiev

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Copland, Hageman, Burleigh, H. C. Moses and first  
performance of a group of songs by Joseph Haas.  
Baldwin Piano

**TOWN HALL** Mon Eve., MARCH 11 at 8:30

**Louise Thai-Thi-Lang**  
*Pianist - Composer*

Program: Fauré, Liszt, Beethoven, Chopin  
Variations on a Philippine Air }  
Vietnamese Poems } .....Louise Thai-Thi-Lang  
Chinese New Year's Festival }  
Steinway Piano

Figure 3: Carnegie Hall Brochure featuring Louise Thái Thị Lang<sup>61</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Ruth Kirby, ‘Pianist Best In Her Own Compositions: THAI THI LANG RECITAL’, *South China Morning Post*, 1 February 1963, <https://www-proquest-com.uoregon.idm.oclc.org/docview/1506686266/798C5F9B5EE74A43PQ/6?accountid=14698&sourcetype=Historical%20Newspapers>.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Carnegie Hall Brochure 1956 - 1957’.

From these records, we can add to the list two more original compositions performed after Louise Thái Thị Lang's time in Paris. These two pieces marked a shift from her compositional output, as she included music material beyond Vietnamese folk songs. They are the following:

11. *Twelve Variations on a Philippine Air* (1957)

12. *Far Eastern Marine Landscape* (1963)

In 1960, the Library of Congress's Catalog of Copyright Entries listed six additional works by Louise Thái Thị Lang.<sup>62</sup> The titles of the works indicate that they may have been inspired by music from the Philippines. However, it is uncertain whether these works are transcriptions of folk tunes or original compositions, as there is no surviving form of the music. The six registered works are:

13. *Atin Cu Pung Singsing* (1960)

14. *Bahay Kubo* (1960)

15. *Chua-Ay* (1960)

16. *Mahal Na Guinoo* (1960)

17. *May Isang Bulaklak Na Ibig Lumitao* (1960)

18. *Nan-Aanto-O-Ay* (1960)

In total, Louise Thái Thị Lang produced eighteen known works, with twelve of them for piano or with piano as the main instrument, and six works without a clear instrumental indication.

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<sup>62</sup> *Catalog of Copyright Entries*, July-December 1960, vol. 14, Part 5, Number 2, Music (Washington D.C: The Library of Congress, 1961), 1861.

Her compositional style relied on traditional music material from Vietnam and later from Southeast Asia, combined with the Western compositional method that she acquired at the Paris Conservatoire.

#### IV. *FÊTES DU TÊT*

##### **The importance of Tết Nguyên Đán in Vietnamese culture**

Tết Nguyên Đán – Vietnamese New Year Festival – is the most important holiday period in Vietnamese culture. It is a time for family gatherings and a signal for good luck and prosperity. The holiday's original purpose was for people to express their joy after harvest season since Vietnam had historically been an agricultural country.<sup>63</sup> The holiday typically lasted for two weeks, from the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> month to the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month in the lunar calendar. There are three holiday periods: the last week of the old year, the day of transition, and the first week of the new year. During the first period, there is a tradition of releasing carp on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day, which symbolizes sending the gods of the kitchen back to heaven to report to the Heavenly King about the previous year. Business would wrap up on the 25<sup>th</sup> day for people to travel back home to purchase flowers and make traditional food. On New Year's Eve, families would gather over dinner and reminisce about happy memories before everyone celebrates the fireworks. It is interesting to note that after the song *Happy New Year* by ABBA came out in 1980, it became a part of the Vietnamese New Year tradition for people to listen and sing the song during New Year's Eve.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Lian Songqing, 'A Study of Vietnamese Festival Tết Nguyên Đán From Perspectives of Anthropology', *International Journal of Business Anthropology* Vol.11 (2) (1 July 2021): 73, <https://doi.org/10.33423/ijba.v11i2.4941>.

<sup>64</sup> Mỹ Hà Nguyễn, 'The joy and hope of Tết', *Viet Nam News*, 19 January 2020, <https://vietnamnews.vn/talk-around-town/571267/the-joy-and-hope-of-tet.html>.

During the first week of the Lunar New Year, Vietnamese people pay respect to their close relatives and visit the graves of their ancestors. They also go to pagodas and wish for a pleasant year. Most Vietnamese are spiritual but do not follow Buddhism, although paying respect or making a wish at a Buddhist temple or pagoda is normal and traditional for New Year customs. People will give kids red envelopes containing symbolic money, indicating that it will bring good luck and prosperity for the new year. Since Vietnam and China share many historical and traditional customs, it is possible that Vietnamese Tết Nguyên Đán had some similarities with the Chinese New Year Festival in the past. However, throughout history, many of these customs have been integrated into Vietnamese culture after they were introduced in Vietnam.<sup>65</sup>

### ***Fêtes du Têt as a representation of the Vietnamese culture***

Through the title, Louise Thái Thị Lang already indicated a strong influence of Vietnamese culture in the piece. *Fêtes du Têt* can be seen as a direct representation of the Vietnamese Lunar New Year holiday in music. The title of each movement also corresponds to a specific activity or a symbolic atmosphere that we can experience during the festivities. In the solo piano version, Louise included a Vietnamese title for each movement,<sup>66</sup> which was not present in the version for piano and orchestra. The Vietnamese title in the solo piano version has an immediate cultural connotation to Vietnamese people. The translations of the French titles could not completely portray the cultural significance of *Fêtes du Têt* for non-Vietnamese audiences.

The first movement, *Joyeux Cortège*, translates to English as *Happy Procession*. The Vietnamese title for the movement is *Rước Xuân*, which translates as *Procession in Spring*. The

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<sup>65</sup> Songqing, 'A Study of Vietnamese Festival Tết Nguyên Đán From Perspectives of Anthropology', 73.

<sup>66</sup> Louise Nguyen Van Ty, *Nguyên Đán - Fêtes du Têt* (Paris - Bruxelles: Henry Lemoine, 1952).

Spring element is not implied in the French title. Similarly, the second movement's French title is *Offrandes devant l'Autel des ancêtres – Offering Before the Altar of the Ancestors*, and the Vietnamese title is *Lễ Cúng*, which has the same meaning as the French title but more succinct and immediately understood by Vietnamese. The third movement's title is *Festin - Echange de Vœux – Année du Dragon*, a three-part title comprising of *Feast - Exchange of Vows – Year of the Dragon*. For non-Vietnamese people, those activities are what Vietnamese families would do during the New Year Festival. According to the Chinese Zodiac, the *Year of the Dragon* specifies that it was 1952. The dragon is the only imaginary creature in the Chinese Zodiac system, and it holds a special place in Vietnamese culture. Legend says that Vietnamese are descendants of a dragon and a fairy. The dragon Lạc Long Quân married the fairy Âu Cơ and had one hundred children. Half of them followed the fairy mother to the mountain, while the other half followed the dragon father to the sea. Their eldest son was said to be the first king of the first Vietnamese kingdom.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, Vietnamese people are very proud of their heritage and their connection with the dragon. The Vietnamese title for this movement is *Yên Ám – Peaceful*. For Vietnamese people, being surrounded by families and loved ones during the culture's most important holiday will evoke a sense of peacefulness, which is perfectly described in the Vietnamese title. For the last movement, the Vietnamese title is *Ước Nguyện – Hope*. It is short and encompasses everything Vietnamese people would do during this period: hope for good things to happen. Compared to the Vietnamese title, the French title is both evocative and descriptive: *Chant d'espérance et départ du Cortège - Song of hope and departure of*

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<sup>67</sup> ‘Vi sao rồng là con vật duy nhất không có thật trong 12 con giáp?’, *Sức Khỏe & Đời Sống*, n.d., <https://suckhoedoisong.vn/vi-sao-rong-la-con-vat-duy-nhat-khong-co-that-trong-12-con-giap-169240205152445453.htm>.

*the procession*. Musically, the first movement's theme is repeated, but in the version for piano and orchestra, the French title is reduced to *Chant d'espérance*.<sup>68</sup>

Louise Thái Thị Lang's earliest compositions were transcriptions of Vietnamese folk tunes that she performed in the early 1940s.<sup>69</sup> Scholar Nguyễn Thị Nhung concluded that these compositions are compiled in *Việt Nam—Album pour Piano*, and each piece in the collection represents a traditional Vietnamese tune.<sup>70</sup> The theme in each movement of *Fêtes du Tết* can be found in different pieces in *Việt Nam—Album pour Piano*, which was published in 1955 and was likely a collection of pieces that Louise composed as early as 1933 and up until 1955. Of the thirty pieces, Vietnamese scholars have found nine pieces transcribed from a traditional Southern Vietnam genre: *Đờn Ca Tài Tử - Southern Amateur Style*.

#### ***Đờn Ca Tài Tử - Southern Amateur Style.***

Beginning in the 1400s and based on the influence of the Chinese court, the Lê dynasty – the predecessor of the Nguyễn dynasty – began a movement to clearly distinguish the elegant music of the court from the commoners' music.<sup>71</sup> The legal code of 1437 prohibited the performance of theatrical and folk dance genres due to their satirical elements. Musicians and singers were not allowed to take the national civil service examination.<sup>72</sup>

Contrary to the Lê dynasty, the Nguyễn dynasty encouraged the development of music in their court. Their contributions included standardizing the royal court music ensembles, developing

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<sup>68</sup> Louise Nguyen Van Ty, *Nguyễn Đán - Fêtes du Tết - Tableaux symphoniques pour Piano principal et Orchestre* (Paris - Bruxelles: Henry Lemoine, 1952), 40.

<sup>69</sup> Nguyễn, *Âm Nhạc Tỉnh Phòng - Giao Hưởng Việt Nam: Sự Hình Thành và Phát Triển Tác Phẩm Tác Giả*, 26.

<sup>70</sup> Nguyễn, 26.

<sup>71</sup> Miller and Williams, *The Garland Handbook of Southeast Asian Music*, 249.

<sup>72</sup> Miller and Williams, 249. 272.

the traditional chamber music genre *Ca Huế*, and creating the classical Vietnamese theatre genre *Hát Bội*.<sup>73</sup> The *Đàn Ca Tài Tử - (Southern Amateur Style)* was established at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and had its roots in *Ca Huế*, *Hát Bội*, and another ceremonial music genre in Southern Vietnam called *Nhạc Lễ*.<sup>74</sup> The term has two meanings: “music and songs of talented persons” and “amateurs’ music,” of which they both describe the nature of this genre: chamber music that is performed by artists of great talents (first meaning), and not for profit (second meaning).<sup>75</sup> The repertoire of *Đàn Ca Tài Tử* includes songs from *Hát Bội*, *Ca Huế*, *Nhạc Lễ*, southern folk songs, and many new compositions. Starting in the 1920s, *Đàn Ca Tài Tử* adapted some Western instruments in performance, including the guitar and violin. The genre also received special interest from intellectuals and governmental officials in contributing to the genre. Some wrote lyrics to the tunes, and others supported the genre financially.<sup>76</sup> It is possible that this movement inspired Louise to compose and transcribe these tunes for the piano. Of the 9 pieces that were based on *Đàn Ca Tài Tử* tunes in *Viet Nam – Album pour Piano*, two of them were used in *Fêtes du Têt*.

### ***Fêtes du Têt* – version for solo piano**

The first movement, *Joyeux Cortège*, has an opening section of eighteen bars. The music is written using three staves, which is a compositional technique typically used by French composers. Examples include Debussy’s *Preludes* and *Estampes*, and earlier examples include Liszt’s *Un Sospiro* and *Mazeppa*. Louise opens the first four bars with a pentatonic sound that spans across the piano register to establish the tonality. Vietnamese music is based on different pentatonic modes,

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<sup>73</sup> Miller and Williams, 250.

<sup>74</sup> Miller and Williams, 269.

<sup>75</sup> Miller and Williams, 269.

<sup>76</sup> Miller and Williams, 270.



and the most used mode is called “Bắc,” which consists of the notes Hò, Xự, Xang, Xê, and Cống. Those notes correspond to C, D, F, G, and A when translated into modern Western notation, as Western music education in Vietnam uses the fixed “Do” method rather than movable “Do”.<sup>77</sup> The notes Louise uses in the beginning are G, A, C, D, and E, which is the “Bắc” mode transposed up by a perfect fifth. After the initial four bars, the bass voice continues with a tonic–dominant pattern of C and G and lasts for fourteen bars. This resembles a low bass drum and evokes the festive atmosphere of the processions, where we can expect a lot of drum and traditional trumpet sounds. The tonal center of the section is C, which almost sounds like C major.

**Ruóc xuân - Joyeux Cortège**

Allegro ♩ : 104

PIANO

ff sempre

8<sup>va</sup>

8<sup>va</sup>

8<sup>va</sup>

Vif ♩ : 120

8<sup>va</sup>

Figure 4: *Joyeux Cortège*, bar 1 – 18.

<sup>77</sup> Vinh Bao Nguyen, ‘Introduction to Vietnamese Music’ (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1970), 6,7, <https://www.namkyluctinh.org/a-nghethuat/vinhbao-introtovnmusic.pdf>.



Figure 5: Original melody of *Bình Bán Vãn*<sup>81</sup>

**XXV. Chant des Fêtes**

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled 'XXV. Chant des Fêtes'. It consists of two systems of music. The first system is marked 'Vif' with a tempo of 144 and a dynamic of 'f'. It features a treble clef with a melody line containing various ornaments and fingerings (e.g., 3, 1, 2, 5, 3, 4, 3, 1, 2, 3, 5, 2, 3, 1, 2) and a bass line with a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The second system continues the melody and accompaniment, also with fingerings and a 'Ped.' marking. The key signature has one flat, and the time signature is 2/4.

Figure 6: *Chant des Fêtes* from *Việt Nam – Album pour Piano*, bar 1 - 9.

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled 'Joyeux Cortège'. It consists of two systems of music. The first system is marked 'Vif' with a tempo of 120 and a dynamic of 'f'. It features a treble clef with a melody line containing various ornaments and fingerings (e.g., 3, 4, 3, 1, 3, 1, 4, 2, 2, 4, 1, 3, 5, 2, 4, 3, 2, 1, 3, 4) and a bass line with a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The second system continues the melody and accompaniment, also with fingerings and a 'Ped.' marking. The key signature has one flat, and the time signature is 2/4. Below the score, there is a copyright notice: 'Copyright 1952 by Henry Lemoine & Co. HENRY LEMOINE & Co. Éditeurs, 17 rue Pigalle, Paris 23 571 HL. Tous droits d'exécution, de reproduction et d'arrangement réservés pour tous pays.' There is also a handwritten note '8<sup>va</sup> bassa' above the second system.

Figure 7: *Joyeux Cortège*, bar 19 – 28.

<sup>81</sup> Le-Tuyen Nguyen, 'Tài Tử Music: Lost in Translation' (International Council of Traditional Music, Earth Music Press, Sydney, Australia, 2013), 16.

According to the tradition of *Southern Amateur Style*, *Bình Bán Vắn* is one of the “Twenty Ancient Pieces.”<sup>82</sup> It is one of the six pieces in the mode “Bắc” – happy and pleasant.<sup>83</sup> In Southern Vietnam, the piece has been associated with Spring and can be heard during the celebration of Tết Nguyên Đán.<sup>84</sup> It is normal in Vietnam to assign new lyrics to old tunes so that they can be “reincarnated” at different times and keep circulating among people.<sup>85</sup> By 1974, *Bình Bán Vắn* adopted a new lyric for children to sing about celebrating Spring, which is still being sung today.<sup>86</sup>

When Louise Thái Thị Lang transcribed *Bình Bán Vắn* to the piano in *Chant des Fêtes*, she put the melody on the right hand with simple accompaniment on the left hand. In *Joyeux Cortège*, the texture becomes more chordal, mostly with an open fourth sound to define the pentatonic mode. In bars 30 and 31, Louise Thái Thị Lang creates a short transition in the left hand by using the same rhythmic pattern of the theme before changing the tonal center to A. This next section is similar to the *Chant des Fêtes* in the right hand, while the left hand creates an ostinato descending motive of A, G, E, D in the lowest voice.

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<sup>82</sup> Nguyen, 14.

<sup>83</sup> Bình Thiên, ‘[Video] Bình Bán Vắn – Điệu cổ nhạc của mùa xuân’, 20 January 2020, <https://www.htv.com.vn/video-binh-ban-van--dieu-co-nhac-cua-mua-xuan-1>.

<sup>84</sup> Thiên.

<sup>85</sup> Lê, ‘Bình Bán Vắn’.

<sup>86</sup> Lê.

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Joyeux Cortège" from bars 29 to 46. It is written for piano and consists of three systems of staves. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a drum motive between G and C. The second system continues the melody and accompaniment. The third system shows the piece fading away, with a final bass line marked "8va bassa".

Figure 8: *Joyeux Cortège*, bar 29 – 46.

Starting at bar 56, the procession begins again with the drum motive between G and C. In bar 63, *Bình Bán Vắn*'s theme reappears again but in a different tonality, centered around B-flat. The procession is now only an echo and slowly fading away, preparing the listener for the second movement.

The image displays a musical score for the piece 'Joyeux Cortège', specifically bars 58 through 76. The score is presented in three systems. The first system begins with a treble clef and a bass clef, showing the initial melodic line and accompaniment. The second system continues the piece with similar notation. The third system concludes the piece with a final chord and a key signature change to three flats. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Figure 9: *Joyeux Cortège*, bar 58 – 76.

The theme of the second movement, *Offrandes devant l’Autel des ancêtres*, can be found in *XIX. Dans le Souvenir* of *Việt Nam – Album pour Piano*, which Louise dedicated to her mother. The title *Dans le Souvenir* translates to *In Memory* and would relate well with *Offrandes devant l’Autel des ancêtres*, since they both represent the act of remembrance in Vietnamese culture.

à ma mère

## XIX. Dans le souvenir

Sans lenteur ♩ : 54

*p gracieux*

Ped.

Figure: *Dans le Souvenir*, bar 1-4.

Lê cung

*Offrandes devant l'Autel des ancêtres*

Andante ♩ : 60

*pp*

*m.g.*

*pp*

*m.g.*

Figure 10: *Offrandes devant l'Autel des ancêtres*, bar 1-4.

In *Offrandes devant l'Autel des ancêtres*, the main theme of *Dans le Souvenir* can be seen in the top voice of the right hand. Louise Thái Thị Lang added more layers and voices on top and below the melody. The texture in the second movement of *Fêtes du Têt* is much more chordal than its counterpart in her previous composition. In bar 13, she modulates to a different tonal center, followed by a short interlude in bars 17 and 18. Traditional Vietnamese music can utilize more than one pentatonic system within one piece, with or without returning to the original system.<sup>88</sup> From bar 28

<sup>88</sup> Van Khe Tran, 'Is the Pentatonic Universal? A Few Reflections on Pentatonism', *The World of Music* 19, no. 1/2 (1977): 82, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43560446>.

to 34, an arpeggiated motive appears on the highest voice, perhaps to resemble the Vietnamese zither *Đàn Tranh*. It is possible that the original source material was performed with the *Đàn Tranh*, and the pentatonic scale could be recreated on the piano's black keys. The main theme can be seen and heard in the middle voice, with a similar rhythm but slightly different in terms of intervallic relation to the original theme. Louise Thái Thị Lang developed many new compositional ideas in the second movement compared to *Dans le Souvenir*.



Figure 11: *Offrandes devant l'Autel des ancêtres*, bar 10 – 16.

The theme of the third movement, *Festin - Echange de Vœux – Année du Dragon*, can be seen in number XIII. *Rencontre* of the *Việt Nam* collection. *Rencontre* translates as *Encounter* and perhaps it is about a meeting with a friend to whom Louise Thái Thị Lang dedicated the piece. The source material for *Rencontre* is taken from a tune in *Southern Amateur Style* called *Long Hồ Hội* (*Encounter of the Dragon and the Tiger*)<sup>89</sup>. Similar to *Bình Bán Vắn*, the tune *Long Hồ Hội* uses the

<sup>89</sup> Phương Huy, 'Những Tác Phẩm Piano Việt Nam', *TRANG VĂN HOÁ THỂ THAO VÀ DU LỊCH VIỆT NAM*, 16 October 2021, <https://vhnt.org.vn/nhung-tac-pham-piano-viet-nam/>.



mode “Bắc” and was often performed during important ceremonies of the Nguyễn court.<sup>90</sup>

*Rencontre*'s tonal center is on E-flat, with the time signature in 2/4. The theme starts in the middle of the bar instead of the beginning, resulting in a shift between the left and right hands.



Figure 12: *Offrandes devant l'Autel des ancêtres*, bar 31 - 34.

### XIII. Rencontre

Moderato  $\text{♩} = 60$

*mp*

8<sup>o</sup> bassa

*Leg.*      \* *Leg.*      \* *Leg. simile à chaque mesure*

Figure 13: *Rencontre*, bar 1 – 9

<sup>90</sup> Quang Long Nguyễn, ‘Hình Tượng Rồng Trong Âm Nhạc Dân Tộc’, *Công An Nhân Dân Online*, 11 February 2024, <https://cand.com.vn/doi-song-van-hoa/hinh-tuong-rong-trong-am-nhac-dan-toc-i721656/>.

Since the source material for *Rencontre* involves a dragon and a tiger, it is fitting for Louise to use the theme in *Festin - Echange de Vœux – Année du Dragon* to celebrate the year of the dragon. Louise changes the tonal center to B-flat and lines both hands to start together. The time signature of the third movement is 4/4, but the tempo marking is almost twice as fast as *Rencontre*, resulting in the same outcome. The left hand in both works focuses on the downbeat and the upbeat motion, but again, *Fêtes du Têt's* third movement has a thicker texture and more layers. From bar 15, the dynamic range goes from *pp* to *ff*, and Louise uses four staves to write the section from bar 17 to bar 25. Similar notation can be seen in Rachmaninoff's *Prelude in C-sharp Minor, Op. 3, No. 2*, where he expresses the climax and highest point of the piece in terms of material and dynamics.<sup>91</sup>

Yên âm  
*Festin - Echange de Vœux - Année du Dragon*

Moderato ♩ : 116

The image displays a musical score for the piece 'Yên âm' from 'Festin - Echange de Vœux - Année du Dragon'. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems of three staves each. The first system is marked 'Moderato' with a tempo of 116 beats per minute. The key signature is B-flat major. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (p, mf, ff), articulation (poco marcato), and phrasing slurs. There are also some handwritten annotations in the score, including 'prayer' and '5'.

Figure 14: *Festin - Echange de Vœux – Année du Dragon*, bar 1 – 11

<sup>91</sup> Sergei Rachmaninoff, *Prelude in C Sharp Minor, Op. 3, No. 2*, ed. Leopold Godowsky, Progressive Series Compositions, No.812 (St. Louis: Art Publication Society, 1923).

Tempo primo

RIGHT HAND

46 *fff pesante*

LEFT HAND

46 *fff pesante*

Prelude in C Sharp Minor, 4

812-6

Figure 15: *Prelude in C-sharp Minor, Op. 3, No. 2*, bar 45 – 46.

Figure 16: *Festin - Echange de Vœux – Année du Dragon*, bar 17 - 22

In the last movement of the piece, *Chant d'espérance et départ du Cortège*, Louise Thái Thị Lang again takes the theme from one of her previous compositions from the *Việt Nam* album, number XXIV. *Chant d'espérance – Song of hope*, which she dedicated to her husband Nguyễn Văn Ty. It could be her hope that the war in Vietnam would soon come to an end. Besides the fact that the melody from the source material in *Việt Nam – Album pour Piano* starts on bar 2 instead of in the beginning and *Fêtes du Têt*'s last movement has a thicker texture and faster tempo, the melodies of the two pieces are the same for seventeen bars. Starting from bar 21, the first movement's timpani motive and theme are repeated. In bar 35, Louise uses polytonality to indicate the lively, heightened procession slowly ending. The piece ends with a sweeping descending pentatonic scale and a loud pentatonic chord.

*à mon mari*

### XXIV. Chant d'espérance

A l'aise, expressif ♩ : 50

The musical score for 'Chant d'espérance' (bars 1-6) is presented in two systems. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a piano introduction. The right hand starts with a melodic line, and the left hand plays a rhythmic pattern. The tempo is marked 'A l'aise, expressif' with a quarter note equal to 50 beats per minute. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The score includes dynamic markings such as *p* and *doux*, and performance instructions like *p ma non troppo*. The second system continues the melodic and harmonic development, featuring a *pp* marking and a *\* Red.* (Reduction) instruction.

Figure 17: *Chant d'espérance*, bar 1 – 6

Ước nguyện  
*Chant d'espérance et départ du Cortège*

Sostenuto  $\text{♩} = 60$

Figure 18: *Chant d'espérance et départ du Cortège*, bar 1 – 9.

Gravé par B. Kolichanovsky      23 571 HL      Imp. CAVEL & C<sup>ie</sup> Paris  
Dépôt légal N° 255 3<sup>e</sup> Trimestre 1952

Figure 19: *Chant d'espérance et départ du Cortège*, bar 31 – 48.

### ***Fêtes du Têt* – version for piano and orchestra**

According to the interview with *Times*, Louise began composing the orchestra part of *Fêtes du Têt* when she arrived in France in 1951.<sup>92</sup> The version for piano and orchestra was published in 1952 with orchestration for piano, strings (violins, violas, cellos, double basses,) woodwinds (flutes, clarinets, oboes, bassoons,) brass (trumpets, trombones, French horns,) percussions (timpani, bass drum, military snare drum, gong, xylophone, cymbals, glockenspiel, celeste.) In 1954, Louise supplied another version for two pianos, with the second piano as the orchestra reduction. This document will address the two-piano version. Many themes and motives were transferred from the solo piano version, but the piece underwent significant revisions, particularly in the relationship between piano and orchestra. In terms of form, three movements were numbered: *I. Joyeux Cortège*; *II. Offrandes devant l'Autel des ancêtres*; *III. Chant d'espérance*. The first movement *Joyeux Cortège* is repeated in its entirety after the third movement, and *Festin - Echange de Vœux – Année du Dragon*, which is the third movement in the solo piano version, becomes an interlude between the second and the third movement in the version for piano and orchestra. The overall structure thus is similar to the solo version, but there is no explanation for the numbering of different movements. The action of offering respect to the ancestor and exchanging vows can happen simultaneously in Vietnamese households, and grouping the second and the third sections of the piece as one movement would make sense from a cultural perspective. In the concert brochure of the Southeast Asian Music Conference in the Philippines in 1955, the orchestra version of *Fêtes du Têt* was described as having four movements.<sup>93</sup> Perhaps it could have been a mistake from either the publisher

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<sup>92</sup> 'Music: An Oriental in Paris'.

<sup>93</sup> 'Music and Dance Festival'.

Henri Lemoine when they first published the piece or the conference organizer when they wrote the program in 1955. In order to keep the consistency, the piano and orchestra version of *Fêtes du Têt* will be treated as having three movements.

It is common for composers to transform or recompose their older works after the initial publication. Examples in solo piano music includes' Liszt's *Transcendental Etudes* that got its final version in 1852 after two earlier attempts in 1837 and 1826; and Rachmaninoff's *Piano Sonata No. 2*, which was published in 1913 and revised in 1931. Many times, composers would rearrange older pieces to different instrumentation. Ravel is famous for his orchestra arrangement of solo piano works, including *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, *Valse Nobles et Sentimentales*, *La Valse*, and many more. Examples of works written originally for solo piano and rearranged for piano and orchestra are Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody 14*, Faure's *Ballade, Op. 19*, Bartók's *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussions*, and Villa-Lobos's *Momoprecoce*.<sup>94</sup> Louise Thái Thị Lang was well acquainted with Faure's *Ballade*, as she would perform the solo piano version in America and Hong Kong in 1957 and 1963. The *Ballade* could have been Louise's source of inspiration to write the piano and orchestra version of *Fêtes du Têt*.

In the first movement, the piano takes the accompaniment role in the opening section with long alternating tremolo chords in both hands. The orchestra foretells the theme by playing a partial section in a different tonality in rehearsal 3. The piano performs the *Bình Bán Vắn* theme just like in the solo version in rehearsal 4 before the orchestra has a transitional passage in rehearsal 5, after which the theme passes on to the orchestra in rehearsal 7. The piano and orchestra keep on passing

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<sup>94</sup> Vanessa Rodrigues Cunha, 'The Symbiosis Between Villa-Lobos's Carnival Das Crianças And Momoprecoce: A Comparative Study' (New York, City University of New York, 2015), 4, [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc\\_etds/896/](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/896/).

materials back and forth until rehearsal 13, where Louise applies augmentation and diminution techniques to the motives, resulting in a stretto or canonic effect in the music. The piano finishes the movement and later the whole piece with a descending two-hand glissando.

Figure 20: *Joyeux Cortège*, Piano & Orchestra version, rehearsal 14.

The second movement in the piano and orchestra version receives extensive structural revision. Louise includes a long introduction section featuring a solo for cellos from rehearsal 1 to rehearsal 5, during which the piano only performs repeating pentatonic scales to support. The main theme of the second movement appears first in the orchestra in rehearsal 5, which is quickly followed by an echo of the first movement's theme before rehearsals 6, 7, and 8. The section from rehearsals 9 to 13 is a short interlude featuring trumpet solos. Louise rearranges the tonality to move away from the pentatonic color and towards a neo-classical sound. The complete theme of *Dans le Souvenir* returns to the piano from rehearsal 13 until the end of the movement

In the next interlude, *Festin - Echange de Vœux – Année du Dragon*, the orchestra introduces the theme partially from rehearsal 17 to 19 while the piano supports with descending arpeggiated



tetrachords. The main motive from the first movement briefly appears in the orchestra at rehearsal 19. The interlude formally starts at rehearsal 20 in the orchestra, and the piano takes over the theme in rehearsal 21. In rehearsal 24, the piano performs the theme in a different tonality, while the celeste has a counter melody that creates a striking polyphony result. The piano finishes the section with a solo at rehearsal 27, similar to an improvisation on the Vietnamese zither *Đàn Tranh*.

The third movement, *Chant d'espérance*, also begins with an introduction featuring the first movement's theme in rehearsals 1 and 2. The theme starts at rehearsal 3 on the piano, which the orchestra reiterates at rehearsal 4. Starting from rehearsal 6, the piano assumes the soloist role, with the right hand playing the melody and the left hand performing arpeggiated pentatonic scales to support. The orchestra and piano engage in call-and-response from rehearsal 7 until the end of the movement in a soft and delicate atmosphere before returning to the first movement to finish the procession.

Besides the obvious difference in structure, perhaps the biggest distinction between the solo piano and piano with orchestra versions is how Louise connects the material. While the *Bình Bán Vãn* theme is only used once in the first movement of the solo version, it serves as the connecting thread between all movements in the version for piano and orchestra. This treatment gives a sense of continuity and coherence to the latter version. Louise spent one year working on the orchestration of *Fêtes du Têt*,<sup>95</sup> during which she had to rewrite sections of the pieces to accommodate the new instruments. It is interesting for us to relate her orchestration process as a kind of synesthesia. In the interview with *the Times*, Louise mentioned that she sees the orchestra as a painter's palette and

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<sup>95</sup> 'Music: An Oriental in Paris'.

instruments as colors: trumpets are red, violins are green, and flutes are blue.<sup>96</sup> She perceived the music as a picture, with trombones representing “menacing tigers” and drums representing “creeping dragons.”<sup>97</sup> This might have come from Louise’s own experience when she heard the tune *Long Hồ Hội* in the Lunar New Year celebration and saw the traditional instruments being used.

### **Why this work is important**

Louise Thái Thị Lang was among the first generation of Vietnamese to study Western classical music seriously. She was the first woman and the first Vietnamese person to go abroad and graduate from a prestigious Conservatory. She was one of the first composers to compose music using Western methods and traditional Vietnamese source material. She was the first Vietnamese composer to publish and perform her work internationally. *Fêtes du Tét* held a significant place in all her published works.

From a historical perspective, Vietnamese musical textbooks and encyclopedias attributed the first orchestral works for piano and orchestra to be written and performed after 1975.<sup>98</sup> *Fêtes du Tét* was, therefore, the first orchestral work for piano and orchestra written by a Vietnamese composer and performed by one of the leading international orchestras then. The premiere of the piece received both favorable national and international news coverage and showed Louise’s ability as a performer and composer. She subsequently became a leading figure in the musical development in South Vietnam by leading the South Vietnamese delegation to the first music conference in Southeast Asia and performing worldwide.

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<sup>96</sup> ‘Music: An Oriental in Paris’.

<sup>97</sup> ‘Music: An Oriental in Paris’.

<sup>98</sup> Tú et al., *Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam - Tiến Trình và Thành Tựu*, 851; Nguyễn, *Âm Nhạc Thánh Phòng - Giao Hưởng Việt Nam: Sự Hình Thành và Phát Triển Tác Phẩm Tác Giả*, 342.

In terms of musical elements, Louise successfully synthesized traditional Vietnamese material with Western compositional techniques. The result was a piece full of traditional Vietnamese sounds that appealed instantly to the native listeners. At the same time, the use of pentatonic modes, chordal texture, and colorful orchestration resembled the French impressionist style by Debussy and Ravel. The solo piano version is suitable for intermediate and advanced students to learn techniques such as glissandi, arpeggiated chords, polyphony, and polytonality. It is a piece that teachers can assign to replace or complement pieces by impressionist composers, a suitable piece for concert pianists to include in their repertoire in addition to the canon, and a good starting piece to further explore Vietnamese music.

## V. CULTURAL PRESERVATION – INCORRECT CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS

### **Cultural Preservation**

Louise Thái Thị Lang’s compositions can be seen as an effort to preserve Vietnamese culture through music. The traditional Vietnamese folk tunes had an immense influence on her earlier works.

In an interview with *Radio Indochine* in 1943, she said:

“Annamite, je donne naturellement la préférence aux émotion que je ressens à l’audition des mélodies du folklore, dont la source inépuisable est un trésor pour le compositeur.” (As a Vietnamese, I naturally give preference to the emotions I feel when hearing the melodies of folklore, whose inexhaustible source is a treasure for the composer.)<sup>99</sup>

Traditional Vietnamese music had been passed down orally through generations, but notating the folk tunes using the Western method emerged as a way to preserve and share them with a broader

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<sup>99</sup> Nguyễn, ‘Solo Piano Music by Vietnamese Composers: A Performative and Historical Perspective’, 17.

audience. In a review of the *Bulletin of the Institute of Traditional Cultures* in 1957 Louise Nguyễn Văn Ty's contribution to music in Việt Nam was recognized as that of a person with "a solid musical background and a talent developed through years of patient study. She has absorbed much from the West but remains authentically Vietnamese."<sup>100</sup> However, the article also warned that she relied too much on traditional themes.

One word of caution. She harks back too much to folklore themes; this is not really necessary to the national character of the music and may lead to stagnation and consequent negation of art if the tendency is not checked. Debussy and Fauré in France do not harmonise old French Chansons to make their music French.<sup>101</sup>

In Hungary, Bartók and Kodály had embarked on a multi-year project to record and transcribe Eastern European folk tunes. An example of using traditional tunes is Bartók's *15 Hungarian Peasant Songs*, in which he took the source material from Hungarian folk songs and harmonized them with Western classical music methods.<sup>102</sup> Vietnam was in the early stage of adapting the Western notational system and methods to music, and Louise Thái Thị Lang was among the first generation of composers to do so. At the Southeast Asian Music Conference in 1955, the Vietnamese delegation's presentation mentioned that the new practice of studying and notating music using the Western method started around 1937, which coincided with the time Louise Thái Thị Lang was about to complete her studies in Paris. The Vietnamese students at the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* in Hanoi were in favor of the movement to modernize music after a lecturing tour by famous singer Nguyễn Văn Tuyên in 1938, which the French governor of Cochinchina

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<sup>100</sup> Pierre Faucon, 'Reflexions à Propos d'un Concert, Present et Avenir de La Musique Vietnamienne.', *Bulletin of the Institute of Traditional Cultures*, 1957, 116.

<sup>101</sup> Faucon.

<sup>102</sup> 'Tizenöt Magyar Parasztdal Zongorára (1914–1918)', Bartók Archivum, accessed 24 June 2024, [https://www.zti.hu/bartok/ba\\_hu\\_06\\_m.htm?0101](https://www.zti.hu/bartok/ba_hu_06_m.htm?0101).

sponsored.<sup>103</sup> The students advocated for creation of a new kind of music, blending European compositional techniques, Vietnamese lyrics, and even traditional melodic idioms.<sup>104</sup>

Louise Thái Thị Lang significantly contributed to promoting Vietnamese culture through her concerts and various activities. In 1955, she led the South Vietnamese delegation at a conference, displaying her expertise in both Vietnamese traditional and Western classical music. At the meeting, the Vietnamese representatives discussed forming a Musical Art Association. This was during a tense period following the Geneva Accord when Vietnam was divided into two separate countries. North Vietnam referred to the situation as “the war against America to liberate the country”<sup>105</sup> and South Vietnam as “the National Revolution.”<sup>106</sup> The agenda of South Vietnam’s Musical Art Association included “fighting all subversive propaganda tending to lead astray the Vietnamese culture,” and “establishing friendly relations in the musical field with democratic nations of the free world.”<sup>107</sup> It is possible that Louise’s concerts in the US and later in Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong were part of this project and agenda, as her husband was a diplomat representing South Vietnam, and she was introducing Vietnamese music and establishing diplomatic relations through music. The National Museum of Korea has a copy of *Fêtes du Têt* with Louise’s signature in its collection. The description said it was a gift to composer Ahn Eak-tai’s concert in Paris, 1961.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Miller and Williams, *The Garland Handbook of Southeast Asian Music*, 286.

<sup>104</sup> Miller and Williams, 286.

<sup>105</sup> Đức Vọng, ‘Cuộc Kháng Chiến Chống Mỹ, Cứu Nước - Một Chân Lý Lịch Sử’, *Công An Nhân Dân Online*, 1 May 2015, <https://cand.com.vn/Su-kien-Binh-luan-thoi-su/Cuoc-khang-chien-chong-My-cuu-nuoc-mot-chan-ly-lich-su-i349760/>.

<sup>106</sup> *Music in Southeast Asia*, 76.

<sup>107</sup> *Music in Southeast Asia*, 76.

<sup>108</sup> ‘뫼의 축제’, n.d., <https://www.emuseum.go.kr/detail?relicId=PS0100100102200009600000>.

Louise further collected music beyond Vietnam with her trip to Malaysia and Singapore to collect native folk materials and to compose the *Far Eastern Marine Landscape*.

### **Incorrect cultural assumptions**

Louise Thái Thị Lang included *Fêtes du Têt* in her American concerts, along with the *Twelve Variations on a Philippine Air*, likely as an effort to introduce herself as a pianist-composer and to introduce the American audience to the sound of Southeast Asian music. Regrettably, her efforts as a cultural ambassador were not well-received during these concerts. Partially, it was because of her underwhelming performance, but largely and sadly, it was how American writers portrayed her, to the point of marginalization and very inappropriately.

In 1957, the *New York Times*, *New York Herald Tribune*, and *Musical Courier* wrote reviews about Louise's New York concert,<sup>110</sup> which included works in the standard repertoire by Faure, Chopin, and Beethoven, along with Louise's own compositions, "Variation on a Philippine Air," "Vietnamese Poems," and "Chinese New Year Festival."<sup>111</sup> According to the program brochure from the National Gallery of Art concert later in 1958, we know that the "Chinese New Year Festival" was *Fêtes du Têt* because of the title of each individual movement,<sup>112</sup> and the "Vietnamese Poems" might have been the *Suite de Poems*. Translating *Fêtes du Têt* as "Chinese New Year Festival" was inappropriate and gave an incorrect perception of the piece. We do not know if that was the idea of the concert management agency or why Louise decided to leave it that way. The traditional Chinese New Year and the Vietnamese Lunar New Year -*Tết Nguyên Đán* – have many similar aspects but

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<sup>110</sup> 'Louise Thai-Thi-Lang Gives Recital'.

<sup>111</sup> 'Woman Pianist in Recital Debut', *New York Herald Tribune*, 12 March 1957.

<sup>112</sup> 'Louise Thai-Thi-Lang, Pianist'.

are fundamentally different because of the two different cultures. The modification of the title thus resulted in a misinterpretation of Vietnamese music and culture and led to assumptions that may not be accurate.<sup>113</sup>

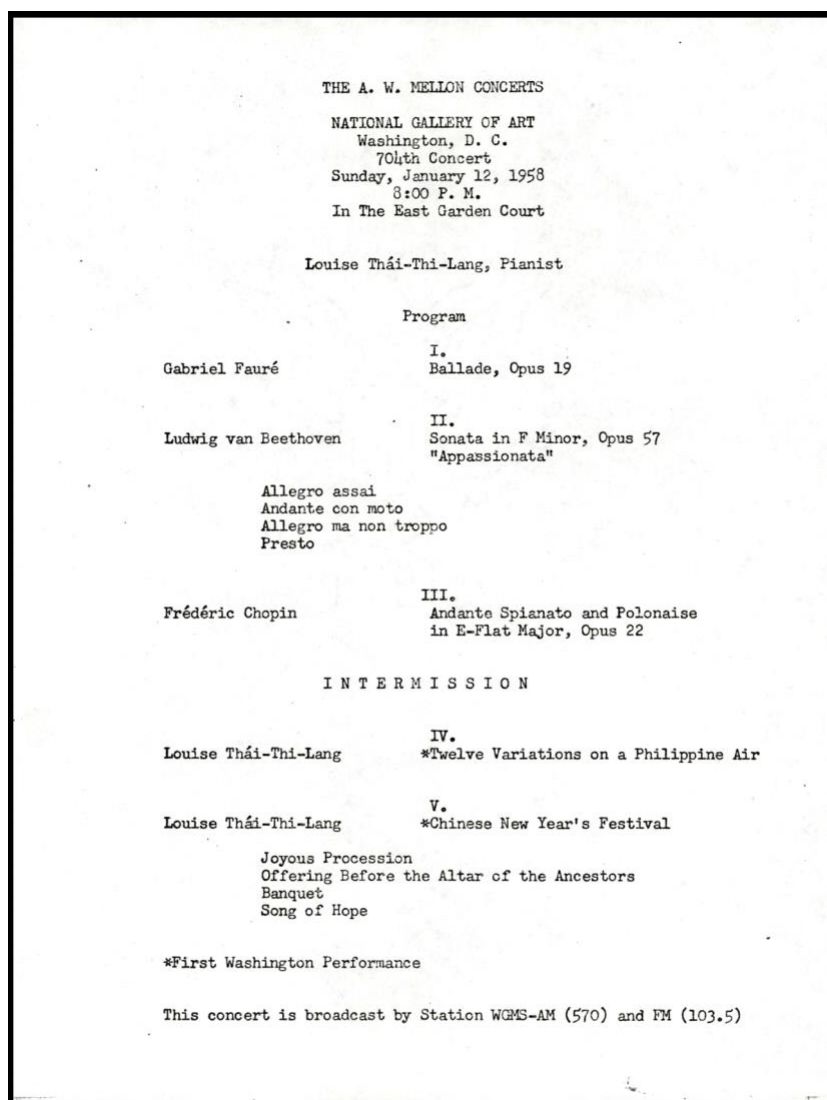


Figure 21: National Gallery of Art Concert Brochure.

<sup>113</sup> Songqing, 'A Study of Vietnamese Festival Tết Nguyên Đán From Perspectives of Anthropology', 77.

The reviews in New York gave different opinions regarding Louise's technical ability. The *New York Times* wrote, "It could not be said she had the temperament or the technical resources for her major selections from the standard repertory."<sup>114</sup> In the *New York Herald Tribune*, she was described as a pianist with adequate technique, with her tonal resources restricted in color.<sup>115</sup> The *Musical Courier* said that she "seems an accomplished artist in several respects, with above average technique and comprehension."<sup>116</sup> In her 1958 concert at the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C, John Haskins from the *Washington Post* not only criticized her performance with a condescending tone but further mislabeled Louise as a "diminutive Chinese composer-pianist,"<sup>117</sup> appeared "in Chinese dress instead of the bouffant strapless gown usually favored by feminine artists."<sup>118</sup> He concluded that "pianistic composers like Beethoven left musical documents full of roast beef and beer, not lotus blossoms."<sup>120</sup> Notwithstanding Louise's technical challenges in her program, the reviews in New York and by Haskins showed a lack of understanding and a general assumption of Asian music and culture. Haskins marginalized Louise into the idea of "Lotus Blossom," a stereotype that originated from Orientalism and was made popular in Hollywood movies in the 1900s.<sup>121</sup> The "Lotus Blossom" stereotype presents Asian women as fragile, quiet, and submissive, contrary to the "Dragon Lady" stereotype that is barbaric, dominant, and destructive.<sup>122</sup> Regarding Louise's compositions, *New York Times* focused on the use of Debussy's firework effects

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<sup>114</sup> 'Louise Thai-Thi-Lang Gives Recital'.

<sup>115</sup> 'Woman Pianist in Recital Debut', *New York Herald Tribune*, 12 March 1957.

<sup>116</sup> 'Louise Thai-Thi-Lang, Pianist, Mar. 11', *Musical Courier*, May 1957.

<sup>117</sup> Haskins, 'Musical Given Exotic Flavor'.

<sup>118</sup> Haskins.

<sup>120</sup> Haskins, 'Musical Given Exotic Flavor'.

<sup>121</sup> Isa Liams, 'THE DRAGON LADY, THE LOTUS BLOSSOM, AND THE ROBOT: ARCHETYPES OF ASIAN WOMEN IN WESTERN MEDIA', *Her Campus*, n.d., <https://www.hercampus.com/school/american/the-dragon-lady-the-lotus-blossom-and-the-robot-archetypes-of-asian-women-in-western-media/>.

<sup>122</sup> Liams.



in “Chinese New Year Festival,”<sup>123</sup> and *New York Herald Tribune* concluded that her compositions were “superficial and devote themselves in the the [sic] main to a rather improvisatory exploration of keyboard sonority effects.”<sup>124</sup> *Washington Post* reviewed “Chinese New Year Festival” as something “difficult to assess by Wetsem [sic] ear, it left an uncomfortable impression of a Broadway or Hollywood composer’s background score for an exotic senario [sic] with limited action.”<sup>125</sup>

All reviews of Louise’s concerts in America indicated a general expectation among North American audiences for a traditional repertoire and technically proficient performers capable of producing powerful sounds to fill large American concert halls. When we look at the Carnegie Hall program brochure for the 1957-1958 season, Louise's concert followed performances by Artur Rubinstein and Gina Bachauer. Rubinstein presented an all-Chopin program, while Bachauer performed pieces by Bach, Haydn, Chopin, Scriabin, and Taneyev. Perhaps Louise's concert management decided to have her include showpieces by Fauré, Liszt, Beethoven, and Chopin to meet the expectations of American audiences.

On the contrary, listeners and reviewers from Europe and Asia enthusiastically received Louise’s compositions. In the 1953 premiere of *Fêtes du Têt* with *Orchestra Lamoureux* in Paris, in addition to the review by *Times*, Louise also received a review from the *Le Monde* newspaper. René Dumesnil from *Le Monde* reviewed the performance very positively:

...The four movements, in their variety, correspond fairly well to the classical cut of the symphony but retain an originality of the highest quality in their developments. To render, without falling into the

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<sup>123</sup> ‘Louise Thai-Thi-Lang Gives Recital’.

<sup>124</sup> ‘Woman Pianist in Recital Debut’.

<sup>125</sup> Haskins, ‘Musicales Given Exotic Flavor’.

hackneyed procedures of easy exoticism, the strange flavor of Far Eastern music seems a challenge. Mrs. Louise Nguyen Van-Ty faced and overcame that challenge. We are grateful to her for having played honestly and for understanding that it was a translation, an evocation, as difficult as to convey from one language to another - and fundamentally different - the untranslatable perfume of a poem. Her orchestral palette is colored with the most subtle nuances, and the hand that applies them knows how to avoid blotches, and it puts a great deal of delicacy into the illumination of these four movements...<sup>126</sup>

Dumesnil wrote about *Fêtes du Têt* on two additional occasions: the first was on April 14<sup>th</sup>, 1954, after Louise's performance with *Orchestre Pas de loup* conducted by Albert Wolff;<sup>127</sup> and the second was the review of her Philips recording in 1955 with Henri Tomasi and *Orchestre Lamoureux*.<sup>128</sup> Both reviews were positive and commended her knowledge of two cultures to produce what would have been an "impossible challenge" for others.<sup>129</sup>

The premiere of *Fêtes du Têt* also received a positive review by Edgard Schall from the *Schweizerische Musikzeitung* in April 1953. Schall described each movement in great detail with regard to the sound effects, instrumentations, and appropriate cultural context.

... The studies she completed at the Paris Conservatory gave her the opportunity to give a poetic performance of the music of her homeland in classical form with European instruments. Her performance has been aptly compared to a perfect translation. "La fête du Têt" is held on the first day of spring. The first part describes the procession of the participants. After a tumult presented by the brass instruments, rhythmic tam-tam

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<sup>126</sup> Dumesnil, 'LA FÊTE DU TÊT'.

... Les quatre mouvements, dans leur variété, répondent assez bien à la coupe classique de la symphonie, mais conservent en leurs développements une originalité du meilleur aloi. Rendre, sans tomber dans les procédés rebattus de l'exotisme facile, l'étrange saveur de la musique extrême-orientale semble une gageure. Mme Louise Nguyen Van-Ty l'a tenue et gagnée. On lui sait gré d'avoir joué franc jeu d'avoir bien compris qu'il s'agissait d'une traduction, d'une évocation, aussi difficile que de faire passer d'une langue dans une autre - et foncièrement différente - l'intraduisible parfum d'une poésie. Sa palette orchestrale est colorée des nuances les plus subtiles, et la main qui les applique sait éviter le bariolage, et elle met beaucoup de délicatesse dans l'enluminure de ces quatre mouvements...

<sup>127</sup> Dumesnil, 'LES CONCERTS'.

<sup>128</sup> René Dumesnil, 'Lalo - Louise Nguyen Van-Ty David Oïstrakh - Chœurs Religieux', *Le Monde*, 16 April 1955, [https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1955/04/16/lalo-louise-nguyen-van-ty-david-oistrakh-ch-urs-religieux\\_1959683\\_1819218.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1955/04/16/lalo-louise-nguyen-van-ty-david-oistrakh-ch-urs-religieux_1959683_1819218.html).

<sup>129</sup> Dumesnil.

accompanies the dance of the lions with which the New Year's wishes are expressed. A piano arpeggio in the highest register, some flute and celesta sounds over an indefinite string tremolo transport us to a distant, foreign world. The second part deals with the performance of the sacrifice on the altar of the ancestors. While the visitors bow to the sound of the gong, the dreamy, expressive song of the cellos rises in memory of the dead in an atmosphere of perfume expressed by the rising sounds of the strings. During the feast (3rd movement), the benevolent, rain-bringing dragon, personified by the bass clarinet and ruling the new year, descends, while the tiger, a symbol of strength and intelligence, makes its presence known in a not at all frightening way with the help of the trombone. The song of hope (4th movement) begins gently like a lullaby. A new, cheerful procession forms to enter the new year to the sound of birds chirping. The themes, surely taken from Indochinese folklore, seem to blend into seemingly uniform sections rather than change significantly. A very charming, captivating work.<sup>130</sup>

In the February issue of *Le Conservatoire - Revue Officielle de Musique et de Théâtre* published in 1955, Serge Lancen wrote a short review about Louise Nguyễn Văn Ty's *Album pour Piano* which was published in the same year. Lancen mentioned about the successful premiere of *Fêtes du Têt* and gave favorable comments on *Album pour Piano*.

It is perilous to pass judgment on a work so different from what we Europeans are used to hearing. I do not believe I am wrong in attributing to Louise Nguyen Van Ty a poem for piano and orchestra which was

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<sup>130</sup> Edgard Schall, 'Berichte Aus Der Schweiz Und Dem Ausland', *Schweizerische Musikzeitung*, April 1953, 185–86.

... Die am Pariser Konservatorium absolvierten Studien gaben ihr die Möglichkeit, in klassischer Form mit europäischen Instrumenten von der Musik ihrer Heimat eine von Poesie erfüllte Vorstellung zu geben. Man hat ihre Leistung treffend mit einer vollendeten Übersetzung verglichen. «La fête du Têt» wird am ersten Tage des Frühlings abgehalten. Der erste Teil schildert den Aufzug der Teilnehmer. Nach einem von den Kupferinstrumenten dargebotenen Getümmel begleitet rhythmisches Tam-tam den Tanz des Einhorn, mit dem die Neujahrswünsche ausgesprochen werden. Ein Pianoharpeggio in der höchsten Lage, einige Flöten- und Celestaklänge über einem unbestimmten Streicher-tremolo versetzt uns in eine ferne fremde Welt. Der zweite Teil behandelt die Darbietung des Opfers auf dem Altar der Ahnen. Während die Besucher sich unter Gongschlägen verneigen, erhebt sich der verträumte ausdrucksreiche Gesang der Celli zur Erinnerung an die Toten in einer von aufsteigenden Streicherklängen ausgedrückten duftgeschwängerten Atmosphäre. Im Laufe des Festmahls (3. Satz) steigt der von der Baß-klarinetten personifizierte das neue Jahr beherrschende wohlthätige regenbringende Drache herab, während der Tiger als Symbol der Kraft und der Intelligenz in keineswegs furchterweckender Weise seine Anwesenheit mit Hilfe der Posaune zu erkennen gibt. Der Gesang der Hoffnung (4. Satz) hebt sanft wie ein Wiegen-lied an. Ein neuer fröhlicher Zug bildet sich, um unter dem Zwitschern der Vögel in das neue Jahr einzutreten. Die sicherlich der indochinesischen Folklore entnommenen Themen scheinen sich eher in gleichmäßig anmutende Abschnitte zu vermischen als sich erheblich zu wandeln. Ein sehr reizendes fesselndes Werk.

successfully given to us two years ago.

In a style that has the power to disorient us, it is easier to listen to a half-hour symphonic poem than the same length of piano music, the orchestra keeping us awake with its colorful exoticism. But the piano is a cold instrument. How much my Western education makes me regret the rarity of modulations! However, the more I reread the short pieces in this collection, the more I feel that charm emerges from them, a lot of charm. My preferences go to the “Trois Bonzes” and the “Berceuse”.<sup>131</sup>

Her concert at the City Hall Theatre in Hong Kong 1963 also received a pleasant review, particularly on her compositions. The reviewer, Ruth Kirby, had previously listened to *Fêtes du Têt* and regarded it as an engaging and well-played work. However, Kirby addressed the piece as “Chinese New Year Festival,”<sup>132</sup> which still contributed to the misrepresentation of Louise’s music.

The different reviews from Europe and America presented two different perspectives on new Asian music and Asian composers. While European critics and audiences received Louise’s music with an open-minded and positive attitude, American critics either showed reservations or marginalized her music and herself as a person. Had Louise stayed in France and Europe, her music might be able to reach a wider audience and be more accessible internationally.

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<sup>131</sup> Serge Lancen, ‘L Nguyen Van Ty - Album pour Piano’, *Le Conservatoire - Revue Officielle de Musique et de Théâtre*, February 1955, 46.

Il est périlleux d'émettre un jugement sur une œuvre si différente de ce que nous, Européens, avons l'habitude d'en-tendre. Je ne crois pas faire erreur en attribuant à Louise Nguyen Van Ty un poème pour piano et orchestre qui nous fut donné avec succès il y a deux ans.

Dans un style qui a le pouvoir de nous dépayser, il est plus facile d'écouter un poème symphonique d'une demi-heure que le même temps de musique de piano, l'orchestre nous tenant éveillé par son exotisme si coloré. Mais le piano est un instrument froid. Combien mon éducation d'Occidental me fait regretter la rareté des modulations! Pourtant plus je relis les courtes pièces de ce recueil, plus je sens que du charme s'en dégage, beaucoup de charme. Mes préférences vont aux « Trois Bonzes » et à la « Berceuse ».

<sup>132</sup> Kirby, ‘Pianist Best In Her Own Compositions: THAI THI LANG RECITAL’.

## VI. THE DISAPPEARANCE AND REEMERGENCE OF LOUISE THÁI THỊ LANG

### **Disappearance**

Louise Thái Thị Lang's presence in the Vietnamese musical scene should have been more significant based on her published works, concerts, and activities. However, her compositions are virtually unknown today, and the available resources are scattered in various places worldwide. I propose that the chain of historical and political situations in Vietnam from 1954 to 1975 contributed greatly to the disappearance of her music.

The Vietnam War ended in April 1975, with North Vietnam emerging as the victor. Right after the victory, the North Vietnam government launched a campaign to “destroy subversive cultural materials” in May 1975.<sup>133</sup> Because Louise was born and raised in Cochinchina, which later became South Vietnam, any material about her works could likely have been destroyed as part of the war consequence. It is impossible to confirm how many materials were destroyed during this process. Regretably, Louise’s efforts to promote her music abroad achieved limited success. All her published music in Paris through Henry Lemoine is now out of print because of a lack of publishing agreement. As Louise’s husband worked as a diplomat, he traveled frequently with the whole family, and she could not settle and promote her music to the public.<sup>134</sup>

Before 1975, Louise Thái Thị Lang was probably not mentioned in North Vietnam. Louise’s sister, Marcelle Thái Thị Liên, became one of the founders of the Vietnam School of Music (the predecessor of the Vietnam National Academy of Music) in 1956 after her studies in

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<sup>133</sup> ‘Kỷ Niệm 47 Năm Ngày Giải Phóng Miền Nam, Thống Nhất Đất Nước (30/4/1975 – 30/4/2022)’, *Thông Tấn Xã Việt Nam*, 27 April 2022, <https://vnanet.vn/vi/anh/anh-chuyen-de-1053/ky-niem-47-nam-ngay-giai-phong-mien-nam-thong-nhat-dat-nuoc-3041975--3042022-thanh-pho-sai-gon-song-trong-niem-vui-chien-thang-6074780.html>.

<sup>134</sup> Gibbs, ‘Phụ nữ Việt Nam với đàn piano đầu thế kỷ XX’.

Czechoslovakia. Because of the difference in political agendas between North and South Vietnam, as well as Western and Eastern Europe at the time, correspondence between Louise and her sister Marcelle ceased in 1951.<sup>135</sup> Louise Thái Thị Lang was living in Paris from the Western Block, and Marcelle Thái Thị Liên finished her studies at the Prague Conservatory from the Eastern Block. The two sisters each married a diplomat from opposite sides and political alignment.

Furthermore, after returning to North Vietnam, Marcelle Thái Thị Liên's husband, Trần Ngọc Danh, passed away shortly after due to illness. She remarried to poet Đặng Đình Hưng, who later was branded as a dissident by the Communist Party of North Vietnam due to his involvement in a group of intellectuals that criticized the Party.<sup>136</sup> As a result, Marcelle's family was put under constant surveillance by the government, which made it difficult for her to keep contact with her immediate family members who were either living abroad or in South Vietnam. She stopped using her French Catholic name, Marcelle, and went by Thái Thị Liên by that point.

### **Reemergence**

Thái Thị Liên and Đặng Đình Hưng had together a son – Đặng Thái Sơn, who became the winner of the 10<sup>th</sup> International Chopin Competition in Warsaw in 1980. The achievement was unprecedented, and Đặng Thái Sơn and Madame Thái Thị Liên were regarded as national heroes of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Sơn was able to ask for three things: to resume his studies in Moscow, to have Madame Liên accompany him to manage his career, and to get medical treatment for his father, who was homeless and ill.<sup>137</sup> After Sơn's victory, more and more Vietnamese were

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<sup>135</sup> Trần, 'TÀ ÁO DÀI VIỆT NAM VÀ BẢN SYMPHONY SUITE TRÊN SÂN KHẤU PARIS'.

<sup>136</sup> Richard Koci Hernandez, 'The Cannon and the Flower', accessed 15 June 2024, <https://cannonandflower.s3-us-west-1.amazonaws.com/index.html>.

<sup>137</sup> Hernandez.

allowed to go abroad to study, and Son was allowed to travel to the West and give concerts. He said it was “a new epoch for the Vietnamese.”<sup>138</sup> Đặng Thái Sơn and Marcelle Thái Thị Liên got to visit Louise Thái Thị Lang in Paris on the way back to Vietnam after the competition. It was Marcelle and Louise’s first reunion after thirty-four years, and probably it was the first time Đặng Thái Sơn had met his aunt.



Figure 22: Thái Thị Liên (blue) and Thái Thị Lang (red) with Đặng Thái Sơn in Paris, after the Chopin Competition in 1980<sup>139</sup>

Thanks to Đặng Thái Sơn’s victory at the Chopin Competition, cultural censorship of his family was relaxed in some way, and information about Louise Thái Thị Lang started to appear in Vietnamese official newspapers and journals. Some of her pieces, particularly from the *Việt Nam – Album pour Piano* became teaching pieces in the Vietnam National Academy of Music.<sup>140</sup> According to the recollection of Marcelle Thái Thị Liên’s son Trần Thanh Bình, in 1951, Marcelle wrote to

<sup>138</sup> Hernandez.

<sup>139</sup> ‘Bà Thái Thị Lang Khi ở Pháp’, *VnExpress*, 15 January 2020, <https://vnexpress.net/thai-thi-lang-nguoi-di-tai-danh-cua-dang-thai-son-4041792-p3.html>.

<sup>140</sup> Nguyễn, *Âm Nhạc Thánh Phòng - Giao Hưởng Việt Nam: Sự Hình Thành và Phát Triển Tác Phẩm Tác Giả*. 27

Louise, expressing her wish for a Vietnamese composition to perform in her graduation concert. After receiving Marcelle's letter, Louise sent two of her compositions to Prague, but they arrived too late after Marcelle's graduation concert.<sup>141</sup> Marcelle returned to North Vietnam in 1955, carrying the two pieces from her sister as a treasured gift. She recorded those two pieces under the label Supraphon from the former Czechoslovakia, on a vinyl titled "Folk Songs from Vietnam."<sup>142</sup> The two pieces that Marcelle received from Louise were *Con Ngựa Ô – Le Cheval Noir – The Black Horse* (1951) and *Hành Vân: Marche des Nuages* (1953).

Despite the recent material about Louise Thái Thị Lang in the mainstream media, information about her life, activities, and compositions is still limited. In *Âm nhạc mới Việt Nam - Tiến trình và thành tựu* (New music in Vietnam – Progress and result) published by the Vietnamese Institute of Musicology in 2000, the entry about Louise Thái Thị Lang was limited to her education in Paris and listed some of her compositions, including *Nguyễn Đán, Hành Vân, Lý Ngựa Ô, Bình Bán Vắn*.<sup>143</sup> This particular entry did not include any sources to support the claim. Another publication in 2001, titled *Âm nhạc thính phòng - giao hưởng Việt Nam: Sự hình thành và phát triển tác phẩm tác giả* (Chamber Music and Symphonic Music in Vietnam: The creation and development of these works and their composers,) Louise's entry was expanded and included some of her activities in 1942, where she performed transcribed folk tunes, including *Lý Ngựa Ô* and *Bình Bán Vắn*.<sup>144</sup> The entry included a brief analysis of Louise's work *Le Lentille et le Lotus* from *Việt Nam – Album pour Piano*.

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<sup>141</sup> Trần, 'TÀ ÁO DÀI VIỆT NAM VÀ BẢN SYMPHONY SUITE TRÊN SÂN KHẤU PARIS'.

<sup>142</sup> 'Golden Century Concert Honours a Centurion', *Viet Nam News*, 16 November 2017, <https://vietnamnews.vn/life-style/417592/golden-century-concert-honours-a-centurion.html>.

<sup>143</sup> Tú et al., *Âm Nhạc Mới Việt Nam - Tiến Trình và Thành Tựu*, 55.

<sup>144</sup> Nguyễn, *Âm Nhạc Thính Phòng - Giao Hưởng Việt Nam: Sự Hình Thành và Phát Triển Tác Phẩm Tác Giả*, 26.



Judging from the lack of written documentation up to 2001, it is possible that the *Việt Nam – Album pour Piano* was the only work by Louise that Vietnamese musicologists knew.



Figure 23: Back cover of “Folk Songs from Vietnam”<sup>145</sup>

Louise’s recording of *Fêtes du Têt* with *Orchestre Lamoureux* was uploaded to Remus Platen's YouTube channel on October 2nd, 2019.<sup>146</sup> It is the only surviving recording of the piece, and no physical record has been found. Vietnamese musicologists discovered the recording at the beginning of 2020, contributing greatly to musicological research activities in Vietnam.<sup>147</sup> In 2021, Nguyễn Hoàng Nam from Temple University completed his dissertation *Solo Piano Music by Vietnamese Composers: A Performative and Historical Perspective*, which gave a comprehensive overview of piano music by Vietnamese composers. Nam included formal analyses of some of

<sup>145</sup> ‘Golden Century Concert Honours a Centurion’.

<sup>146</sup> ‘Golden Century Concert Honours a Centurion’.

<sup>147</sup> Nguyễn, ‘The joy and hope of Tết’.

Louise Thái Thị Lang's works, including selections from *Việt Nam – Album pour Piano* and *Après la Sécheresse, la Pluie*.

After Nam's dissertation, Dr. Lisa Yui from the Manhattan School of Music published an article about piano music by composers from Asia in 2023, which mentioned works by Louise Nguyễn Văn Ty.<sup>148</sup> Most recently, in March 2024, French-Vietnamese pianist Julie Nguyễn performed the solo version of *Fêtes du Tết* in Hồ Chí Minh City.<sup>149</sup> These activities show that Louise's music and her role in Vietnamese music history are starting to receive more recognition, even prompting musical textbook revisions to reflect her achievements. Materials in Vietnam and worldwide are still limited, but hopefully, these research and performances will give opportunities to further studies on the subject.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Louise Thái Thị Lang's *Fêtes du Tết* has all the elements for a faithful representation of Vietnamese culture. She presents the most important holiday for Vietnamese people in her music with proper regard to all the customs and activities in the contemporary Western musical language. The musical sources are taken directly from traditional music in Vietnam and thus recognizable by many Vietnamese, and is a good addition to every pianists' repertoire in terms of musical language and technical challenges. Louise actively promoted Vietnamese culture through *Fêtes du Tết*, her other compositions, and her activities in the 1950s and 1960s. Despite receiving favorable reviews

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<sup>148</sup> Lisa Yui, 'Piano Music by Composers from Asia: A History of Self-Discovery', *Piano Magazine*, 2023, 50.

<sup>149</sup> La - A Different Way of Music, '5 TÁC PHẨM LẦN ĐẦU ĐƯỢC BIỂU DIỄN TẠI VIỆT NAM', *Facebook* (blog), 2 March 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/lamusicvn/posts/pfbid02V1YhBVjX31nYrvSbzqCneDap9FyqZtS9uDEKJx1wQjxgGXeZZJ6C2TPFcVM5xdLfl>.

in Europe and Asia, her music and activities could not reach a wider audience due to external circumstances, primarily political and historical events, and partially because of incorrect cultural assumptions from foreign listeners and reviewers. Thanks to her nephew Đặng Thái Sơn's international success, new information about Louise Thái Thị Lang is being discovered, and she is slowly earning her rightful place in Vietnamese music history.

*Fêtes du Têt* is a work that should be known to more pianists and musicians, especially those from Vietnam. It is my wish that Louise Thái Thị Lang's compositions will be performed more often worldwide, and one of my future projects is to collect and categorize Louise's published works and make them widely accessible. I hope this research will prompt more people to discover Vietnamese music in general, considering the complex historical and political situation that happened in my country and the rich musical tradition that Vietnam has had and will have to offer.

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