



# MELODIES FROM THE MOUNTAINS



During the new year, Hmong Tsai boys in Laos demonstrate their musical skills on the "gheng" reed pipes.

**EACH** one of us comes from a long chain of ancestors, who, no matter where our family originated, once used only songs, stories and ceremonies to communicate everything they knew about the universe. Passed from mother to daughter, father to son, **shaman** to apprentice, history and culture were kept alive for thousands of years through oral tradition. This way of life can still be found in many traditional villages around the world.

## Life Marked By Music

High in the mountains and forests of Southeast Asia where Laos, Myanmar and Thailand meet lies a region called the Golden Triangle. This is home to some of world's oldest civilisations. It is also one of the most culturally exciting places in Asia, because it harbours more than 130 different groups and subgroups. This makes for a dazzling mix of people with different languages, customs, arts, beliefs, clothing and, of course, music. Each group – whether Hmong, Mien, Lahu, Akha, Lisu or Karen – has cultivated a rich, age-old tradition of songs and instrumental music that is unique to their community.

The hills of the Golden Triangle resound throughout the year with the melodies and rhythms of songs, strings, winds and percussion, because it is through music that these people celebrate their world. To them, music is sacred and important in every aspect of life. Every boy and girl, man and woman participates in musical ceremonies throughout their lives, singing, playing and dancing.

Music follows the changing of the seasons. As villagers live by farming and hunting and depend on nature for survival, big communal festivals lasting many days are held during



In Myanmar, a sleeping Lahu Shi baby absorbs vibrating rhythms in his dreams as his grandfather plays the "jegkho" drum to celebrate the harvest.



Young Eng women strike metallic gongs, cymbals and drums to invite nature spirits to the Festival of the Hunt in Myanmar.



In Thailand, Akha Ulo women guide the soul of their beloved headman to the afterlife through song.

planting, harvesting and the new year to honour the spirits of the land. The booming vibrations of wooden drums and metallic cymbals and gongs mark the beat for festival dancing.

Music and ritual also mark events that happen in daily village life. A mother hums lullabies to lull her

newborn to sleep. Villagers make offerings accompanied by songs and prayers of good luck when a new house is built, a spirit gate is dedicated or someone goes on a long journey. Shamans chant sacred melodies and play instruments that have been specially blessed to restore good health to those who are ill.

From birth to death, the cycles of each person's life are **heralded** with music. Protective chants are performed when a baby is born to ensure a long, healthy life. A boy and girl enchant each other with courting music, playing the soft, sweet tones of flutes, reeds, mouth harps, lutes and harps. Weddings are magnificent occasions celebrated with fanfare and sacred music to bring together a young couple and their clans. When a person passes away it is necessary to perform funeral rites using special instruments that guide the soul of the deceased to the spirit world.

For the traditional communities of the Golden Triangle, music plays an important role in connecting each person to those who have gone before and those that will follow. Music is the soundtrack of their lives. To have a listen to that soundtrack, visit [www.tribalmusicasia.com](http://www.tribalmusicasia.com). AGJ



## LOVE SONGS

In Hmong tradition, boys and girls play lyrical melodies back and forth to each other on the "nja" mouth harp to find their future mate. This is a perfect instrument for courtship because the soft tones imitate the consonants and vowels of speech. So when a boy plays music to win a girl's heart, he is actually reciting love poems to her.