MUSIC ALONG THE MEKONG RIVER

MUSIC ALONG THE MEKONG reflects the cultural influences unique to each of its regions. In Yunnan, on the northern stretches of the Mekong, many ethnic groups originated from northern and central China. Although rooted in the cultures of these regions, their musical traditions have been altered by extensive government support and contact with global media. As a result, music that once had been played only for local village celebrations now is often heard in the provincial capital Kunming or even Beijing.

Along the central and southern sections of the Mekong region—in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia—music reflects Chinese, Indian, and indigenous influences. For example, in the classical Cambodian pin peat and Thai piphat ensembles, you will hear indigenous wooden xylophones and bronze gong circles. The two-headed drums and reed oboes likely came from India. The lighter mohori ensembles of Cambodia include indigenous wooden xylophones and flutes, Indian drums, and a variety of Chinese fiddles and zithers.

In the Mekong Delta of Vietnam, Chinese influences are more pronounced, while in the highlands, indigenous gong ensembles are common. The Vietnamese don ca tai tu folk singers at the Festival are accompanied by instruments also found in many Chinese ensembles, while Bahnar musicians from the highlands of central Vietnam play gongs to accompany their rituals and celebrations.