

The Lamvong



In the din of festive sounds that engulf the pagoda grounds of a Lao boun, 3 sounds fusing into one are at once the loudest and most insistent—the throbbing beat of a drum, the shrill ring of small brass cups, and the clicking of 2 sticks, all accompanying a song.

To the Lao, this is the unmistakable tempo of their beloved lamvong whose origins they trace as far back as the 14th century when the kingdom of Lane Xang encompassed Korat in Thailand, a great part of Burma, Vietnam and Cambodia. At that time of all the many kingdoms which reigned over this continent, Lane Xang's power and glory ruled supreme. But its power waned, its frontiers shrunk to its present borders, although many of its people still live on the western side of the Mekong river, in what is known today as Northeast Thailand.

The Thais of this region still maintain close cultural links with their kin across the river for their ties with each other spring from the same ancestral blood. Thus, when the Lao used to organize their fundraising bouns, they called upon Thai dancers and musicians to stage the Thai ramvong ("to dance around").

Through the years, especially with the emergence of Lao nationhood, the Lao adapted a slower version of the ramvong (and called it the lamvong, because the Lao spoken language does not contain the "r" sound.)

The lamvong, perhaps the least intricate dance there is, by its very simplicity and charm, complements the Lao character. Its movements are languid, man and woman shuffling unhurriedly

