

Ca Tru:

Ceremonial/Festival song.

*Ca Trù, an original art performance of academic character, has been preserved for the past 10 centuries. To appreciate Ca Trù is to appreciate poetry and music. Ca Trù appeared officially under Nhà Hậu Lý (11th century). First, it served royal and religious rituals and was called Hát Khuôn. Later, it was used in banquets, weddings, friendly meetings and it was called Hát Hàng Hoa. Ca Trù had bamboo castanets as principal instrument. By beating time on tomtoms, spectators accompanied and praised the singer. Ca Trù was also called Hát Nhà Trò (singing or dancing while pulling funny tricks), Hát Thường (Singing to be rewarded by king or mandarins), Hát Cửa Quyền (singing in royal palaces), Hát Cửa Đình (singing for religious rituals), Hát ả đào (name of a famous songstress in the Lý times)... Under the French domination, Ca Trù declined. Nowadays, it is restored as a type of original popular art.

Ca Trù - A Patch of the Vietnamese Soul?

Here is Hương Sơn Pagoda - the beauty spot that I have dreamt of for so long
There is mountain after mountain, river along river, and cloud upon cloud
Is it the number one Grotto, may I ask?

By this poem, Chu Mạnh Trinh (1862-1905) takes us to a Buddhist world - a fairyland where we are imbued with each word that sounds like a pealing bell. Later, the famous poet Tản Đà (1889-1939) gave us the following masterpiece. Here, the poet thoroughly revives the declamation when the singer sings of an "unexpected meeting" between man and nature, between man and spring, between man and the immense universe:

You see me now, please don't you be amazed
My heart stays the same, though my hair is greyed.
Since I first fell in love-forty nine long years ago
I've been a friend to wine, and art, and scenes.
And so at fifty years of age
I've spent half my life span
How many springs in the latter half will there be?
I do not ask - Let God's decision it be
Available now is wine, with me, Spring, have a drink
As friends - No host and guest distinct!

*What is a Ca Trù declamation?

Originally, Ca Trù was like chèo singing and served at ceremonies and festivals in the northern delta. When these ceremonies and festivals were no longer held, Ca Trù became a type of chamber music serving as intellectual food for those who would like to enjoy music and poetry. Music and poetry are the basis of Ca Trù and decide which ensemble

of principal instruments, musicians and subordinate instruments should provide the accompaniment. Ca Trù has many melodies that are sung differently, but the chief is singing-reciting: A singer and a musician playing a long-necked lute-like instrument. Also taking part is a member of the audience who expresses his appreciation and response by beating a drum. A rather special description fits the songstress of former days: "Fine clothes, velvet turban, delicate bobtailed hair, a moon-shaped face, knife-sharp eyes, refined manners, with sweet words, mild as flowers, transparent as snow, her beauty and charm are second only to Kim Vân Kiều's..."

To perform as expected, the singer must practice very hard and know many tunes. A male musician accompanies the singer. He too practices hard so as to be in perfect harmony with the singer. The music accompaniment consists of a "phách" - a bamboo instrument beaten with two wooden sticks - and "trống châu" - a drum beaten by a member of the audience in appreciation or comment. Of course, this member of the audience is very experienced at beating the drum - a single beat, three or five successive beats and nine beats at the climax to be "in tune" with the lute. A timely response by the drummer encourages the singer who knows that she has met someone who both understands and appreciates her talent. These three instruments: The lute, the "phách" and the "trống châu" are inseparable. Being a subordinate instrument, the drum is essential as a bridge between the performer and audience. The harmonious combination of the lute, the "phách" and the human voice makes it a perfect performance as praised in these lines by Vũ Hoàng Chương :

Sweet phách, passionate lute mild smoke cushion
The sad voice lingers on in the middle of night.

To enjoy Ca Trù is to enjoy both music and singing. The art of Ca Trù is both high and original. Its sound range originates from that of the lullaby in the Red River delta. Ca Trù - with water puppetry - is indigenous to Vietnam. It is a valuable legacy for Vietnamese culture.

Many talented poets like Chu Mạnh Trinh, Nguyễn Công Trứ, Tú Xương, Dương Khuê and Tân Đà composed excellent tunes, extraordinarily pure and high-falutin to charm the audience. At the beginning of the 20th century, before the 1945 Revolution, there were many places where Ca Trù was performed: Khâm Thiên, Bồ Đề, Lộ Khê (Hanoi); Quan Ba Mau, Quỳnh Cư (Hải Phòng) and throughout Bắc Ninh, Hải Dương and Nam Định provinces. But then, Ca Trù became Cô Đầu - performed by a sing-song girl or type of geisha. The art of Ca Trù was forgotten because it was thought to be a product of the ruling class; the singers whores and the audience no more than hedonists. Singers abandoned their careers because of this bias and inhabitants of the Khâm Thiên area even left their homes because of it. Before 1976, musician Nguyễn Xuân Khoát was the only Vietnamese musicologist to study Ca Trù. Ca Trù artists are still rare now, but attention is being given to their art. Lộ Khê village, Phu Do (in Hà Nội) is considered the cradle of Ca Trù and on the 6th of the 4th lunar month and the 13th of the tenth lunar month each year, members of the Ca Trù circle hold initiator-worshipping celebrations. Artists young and old sing the Ca Trù, always beginning with two pieces: Non Mai and Hồng Hạnh.

The artist who deserves most praise for the revival and world-wide spread of Ca Trù is Doctor-Professor Trần Văn Khê. He has recorded Ca Trù, Quan Họ and chèo songs and declamations and sent them to France for the UNESCO Musical Committee to study. As a result, many recordings of Ca Trù and Quan Họ songs have been made. The support of eminent artist Quách Thị Hồ has made the recordings a great success. All the original features of Ca Trù are prominent, and Hồ was evaluated by the Musical Committee and awarded with an honorary commendation with these lines: "We thank you for your contribution to the keeping of an original, traditional art legacy of Vietnam and an exceptional delicacy of mankind". Since then, Vietnam has sent a delegation to an Asian tribute held in the People's Democratic Republic of Korea where Hồ's recordings were among the most honoured. A Ca Trù club has been established in Hà Nội, a place for all of Vietnam's excellent Ca Trù artists. It not only revives an old musical form, but attracts foreign musicologists: American, English, German and Japanese. American researcher Mirada Krenzen has written a persuasive study, Vietnam's Traditional Music Process. It was presented at a seminar to discuss Vietnam's traditional music in Hà Nội in 1994. Krenzen possesses a deep knowledge of Ca Trù and has gained the admiration of Vietnamese musicologists. She wrote: "Ca Trù seems to have a magic power, a fermented substance to charm the listeners. Once I understood Ca Trù, I understood the Vietnamese people better". It is possible that Ca Trù is a patch of the Vietnamese soul that Krenzen has understood? (VNS)

Ca trù (also known as *hát ả đào* or *hát nói*) is an ancient genre of chamber music featuring female vocalists, with origins in northern Vietnam. For much of its history, it was associated with a geisha-like form of entertainment. Ca trù is inscribed on the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage in need of Urgent Safeguarding in 2009

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ca_tr%C3%B9