

PROFILE

Gods, Giants and Monkeys: Thai Music at Southwestern University

by Ellsworth Peterson

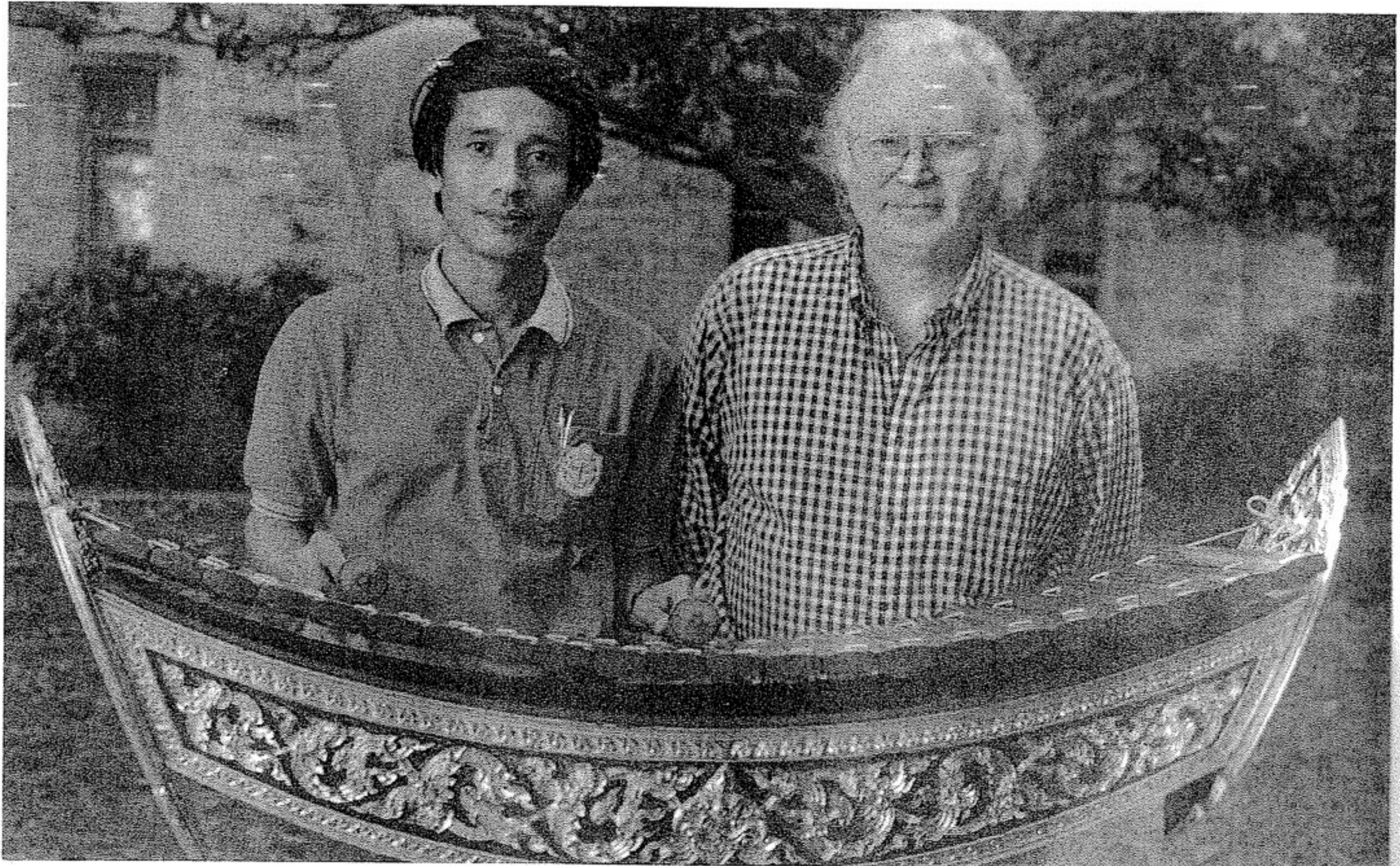
Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas, has offered a program in Thai music for the past few years. In October of 1988 we hosted a symposium called *Gods, Giants and Monkeys: the Ramakian in the Arts and Culture of Thailand*, at which a group of twenty musicians and dancers from Thailand presented excerpts from the great Thai epic. Dr. Chalermpon Ngamsutti, a professor of music at Srinakharinwirot University in Bangkok who was then in residence at Southwestern University, organized a Thai music ensemble of students from various disciplines.

The program continued under the tutelage of Rangsee Kasemsuk (1989) and Manop Wisuttipaet (1990), also from the faculty of Srinakharinwirot University. Dr. Somsak Keukkaenchaen was the Thai musician in residence in 1991.

Dr. Ellsworth Peterson is founder of the Thai music program and Professor of Music at Southwestern University.

The ensemble has proven to be very popular with the Southwestern students. During the 1990-91 academic year, 40 students studied Thai musical instruments, and most also played in an ensemble. The students performed for local universities, public schools, ethnic festivals, Thai temple celebrations, and for a local television network.

Many of the students who play in the group are not music majors; in fact, some have no experience performing Western music. Within a period of approximately two months, however, most of these students are able to play relatively simple Thai music, and some who have participated in the group for two or three years have become very proficient. The university owns a complete set of Thai instruments, making possible *piphat*, *mahori*, and *kruang sai* ensembles of various sizes. ▀



On campus: Manop Wisuttipaet and Ellsworth Peterson.