

## Thailand's musician King



Most of you already know a lot about His Majesty the King as a musician, but I think some of the details in "The Jazzy King" will be new to you and may even surprise you. Let's get started.

Below is the introduction to the section. Notice how cleverly the writer catches our attention by describing a Saturday night scene at Klai Kangwol Palace in Hua Hin. What is especially interesting is that this is not a scene from a long time ago. It is a scene that still takes place on Saturdays now. Isn't it wonderful that the 78-year-old King is still an energetic musician?

**rendezvous** – a meeting that you have arrange for someone for a particular time and place

**well-seasoned** – old and very experienced

**rejuvenated** – given new energy and made to feel or look young again

**spell** a situation which seems like it is controlled by a magical power, in the case, the power of music

**exuberance** – behaviour which is energetic, excited and cheerful

**adroitly** – skillfully

**wee hours** – the early hours of the morning after midnight

**sultry** – hot and damp

**interlude** – a short period of time when an activity or situation stops and something else happens

**awed** – created a feeling of respect and amazement

**novel** – new and different than anything done, experienced or made before

**esteemed** – greatly admired and respected

**coveted** – of something that many people would like to have

**prolific** – producing a large number of works like songs, books, films, etc.

**reverberate** – to have a powerful effect which lasts a long time (reverberate can also refer to a loud sound which echoes through an area)

**prestigious** – respected and admired



You can hear this section of the feature by clicking [here](#). Remember that you can download this sound file to your computer for repeated listening by right-clicking and following the instructions. This is a big file, so it may take some time to load.

On Saturday nights, a group of some 10 professional and amateur musicians, most in their 60s and 70s, gather together at Klai Kangwol Palace by Hua Hin beach for a jazz **rendezvous**.

These **well-seasoned** musicians take their time to find their seats, with instruments in hand, lips to the mouthpiece, fingers to the keys, until the band leader looks up, “Ready? ...”

Suddenly, as if **rejuvenated** by the **spell** of the music, the gray-haired band members come alive with youthful **exuberance**, **adroitly** creating sounds as fresh as musicians in their prime.

On the saxophone is none other than 78-year-old HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

Until the **wee hours** of Sunday morning, the King and his Au Sau Wan Suk Band members fill the **sultry** air of Hua Hin with smooth jazz from a wide selection of styles — Dixieland, New Orleans, Big Band chart-toppers — sometimes with an **interlude** of one of the King’s own compositions.

Until his retirement from public performance some two decades ago, the King had **awed** Thai audiences with cool jazz, then **novel** to Thai society, in a weekly radio broadcast of concerts from university and public stages that ran from the early 1950s through to the 1970s.

As if a king blowing his sax for the joy of his subjects isn’t remarkable enough, His Majesty also made Thailand internationally famous for his role as a highly-recognised musician, particularly in the jazz world. His name has been listed in jazz websites and jazz encyclopedias, from the **esteemed** Vienna music academy in Austria to the **coveted** Yale music school in the US.

Marking the 60th anniversary this year of his first musical composition, the **prolific** King has produced 48 outstanding pieces ranging from romance to march to ballet suites, in classic, blues, jazz, pop and alma maters. Many of them have become all-time classics including Saeng Tien (Candlelight Blues) Sai Fon (Falling Rain) and Porn Phi Mai (New Year’s Greeting), to name a few. And not only in Thailand, some fine selections of his compositions have **reverberated** across the globe in **prestigious** concert halls and informal settings alike as his songs have been included in the albums of some leading jazz musicians and prestigious international orchestras.

*Boon Boonprayoon is a knowledgeable jazz lover, so she has very good qualifications to continue with our coverage of "The Jazzy King".*

From **Boon Boonprayoon**

## Improvising with Idols

What is Jazz? Louis Armstrong, one of the greatest jazz musicians, once said, "If you gotta ask, you'll never know". Actually, jazz music originated among the African slaves in the United States. The music expressed their longing for freedom. Jazz music is almost always **improvised**. Starting with only a small set of musical notes, the musicians then play them in a variety of ways, depending on their feelings and skills.

Most of the best jazz musicians are surely African-Americans and Americans. If you are really familiar with jazz music, you can tell about the musical accent. It is like when you hear the native speakers speak, you can tell which has the American, British or Australian accent. Musical tone is the same. I, as a jazz lover, have recently been able to tell whether the musician is an American or European. It would be amazing, however, if anyone could tell the difference between HM's jazz music from the American's. It has the original accent of jazz, unlike the Europeans. That is one reason why HM has long been recognised as the Musician King or the Jazz King.



As you read this section, notice and remember the many words and phrases that are used to describe music. Try to find out the answers to the following questions:

1. Why the writer states that 'It is here with these idols that one can observe the King at his very best. Unlike when he plays with his house band, whose members are mostly amateur.
2. What are occasions that best illustrate why the King is called the Jazz King and is praised by the great world musicians?

**idol** – a person or thing that is loved and admired very much

**improvise** – to do something without prepare or planning in advance

**impromptu** – done without preparation or planning

**session** – an occasion when people meet to play music, especially Irish music, in a pub / bar

**jam session** – an occasion when musicians perform in an informal way without practicing first

**house band** – the band that usually plays music at a particular place like a bar, restaurant or coffee shop or, in this case, the palace in Hua Hin

**amateur** – a person who takes part in a sport or other activity for enjoyment, not as a job

**master** –to control

**supremacy** – a position in which you have more skill, power, authority or status than anyone else

**encounter** – meeting or experience

**state visit** – a visit connected with the leader of a country attending an official ceremony

**estate** – a large area of land in the country

**foot-stomping, starch-melting** – enthusiastic, energetic and causing people to move their feet to the music with heavy steps

**tote** – to carry something especially something heavy

**eardrumming** – very loud

**savour** – to enjoy a feeling or an experience thoroughly

**audience** – a formal meeting with an important person

**finest piece** – of high quality work of music

**accolade** – praise or an award for an achievement that people admire

**ovation** – enthusiastic clapping by an audience as a sign of their approval

**confer** – to give an honour to someone



You can hear this section of the feature by clicking [here](#) and [here](#).

## Improvising with idols

Over several decades, the King's Au Sau Wan Suk Band has received such international jazz **idols** as Benny Goodman, Lionel Hampton, Jack Teagarden, James Moody, Benny Carter, Les Brown, Maynard Ferguson, The Preservative Hall Jazz Band, and many more as guest musicians for **impromptu sessions**.

It is here with these idols that one can observe the King at his very best. Unlike when he plays with his **house band**, whose members are mostly **amateurs**, His Majesty would **master** his jazz **supremacy** with all the techniques he has acquired to match with these visitors.

His Majesty's first **encounter** with an international jazz idol occurred in 1960 during his **state visit** to the United States. His two jam sessions with Benny Goodman in New York were reported in Time in its June 18, 1960, edition:

“His Majesty went to dinner with the King of Swing, Benny Goodman, (and 94 others) at the suburban **estate** of New York's Governor Nelson Rockefeller.... For 90 minutes after dinner, King Bhumibol and Benny led a **foot-stomping, starch-melting** jam session. Next day, the King **toted** a sax up to the 22nd story roof garden above Benny's Manhattan House apartment for the fulfillment of a jazzman's dream.... The King stood them toe-to-toe for two hours, paid his royal respects to The Shiek of Araby (in 17 **eardrumming** choruses), savoured Honeysuckle Rose, swung low On the Sunny Side of the Street....”

In the article “The King of Jazz,” by Harry Rolnick, published in Sawasdee magazine in 1987, American singer Patti Page described her audience with the King: “It was like a dream come true. I had heard about his compositions, but only when I had them in my hands did I see how fine they were....”

“For two hours,” Rolnick reported, “she sang the works of His Majesty, with her personal accompanist, while the King made changes when necessary.

The late jazz icon Lionel Hampton was also quoted in the same article as saying: “He is simply the coolest king in the land.”

Recently, the world of jazz has literally recognized the King by putting his name in one of the recent editions of the Encyclopedia of Jazz that came out some four years ago, his close aide says: “If you flip to the B index, you will find his name and a short description of his works. He is the only Thai musician to earn such an honour.”

Back in 1964, he recalls, when HM the King visited Vienna, Austria, for a state visit, he attended a concert where five of his finest pieces, Kinari Suite, Sai Fon, Yam Yen, the Royal Marines March and the Royal Guards March, were performed. Not only was the audience in the concert hall appreciative of HM the King's compositions but also music lovers across Austria, as the concert was broadcast live on radio.

After the concert, His Majesty received overwhelming **accolades** with a long standing **ovation** as the composer. Two days after the concert, he was conferred with the 23rd honorary membership of the world-renowned Die Akademie für Musik und Darstellende Kunst (The Institute of Music and Arts of the city of Vienna). He was the first Asian composer to receive such an honour.

## From Classics to Jazz

Once you start taking music lessons, you generally must study classical music. It is like when you start learning English, you have to start with the alphabet, pronunciation and basic word formation.

As you will find out from this section of the story, the King started his music training in classical music while he was in Switzerland. He was given the second-hand saxophone from his brother, King Ananda. Read to find out how both Kings began to take an interest in jazz.

**accommodate** – to make changes in order to allow something to happen

**inspire** - to make somebody have a particular feeling or emotion of something

**rousing** - full of energy and enthusiasm

**gramophone** – an old record player

**icon** - a famous person or thing that people admire and see as a symbol of a particular idea, way of life

**strain** - the sound of music being played or sung

**recording** - sound that have been recorded on tape

**soprano** - with the highest range of notes in its group (alto, bass and tenor have lower ranges of notes)



## From classics to jazz

As a school boy in Switzerland, His Majesty received early training in classical music. But saxophone lessons, which later became HM the King's most favourite instrument, occurred by chance. In the book, Chaonai Lek Lek, Yuwa Kasat, by HRH Princess Galyani Vadhana, the Princess recalled that it was King Ananda who bought a secondhand saxophone for 300 Swiss Francs and intended to take lessons. At the last minute, he changed his mind and sent his younger brother, Prince Bhumibol to the class in his place.

Eventually, King Ananda joined the class with his clarinet. The one-hour, twice-weekly classes with Alsace musician Mr Weybrecht were split into two half-hour classes to **accommodate** King Ananda on clarinet. For two years the classes continued and often ended with an hour-long trio session with Mr Weybrecht and King Ananda on clarinet and Prince Bhumibol on saxophone.

Despite their classical music training, both King Ananda and Prince Bhumibol were more **inspired** by the exciting beats of blues and jazz, containing **rousing** rhythms and freedom of expression. The teenage royals started collecting **gramophone recordings** of jazz icons with King Ananda preferring Louis Armstrong and Sidney Bechet, while Prince Bhumibol opted for Duke Ellington and Count Basie. King Bhumibol practiced his instruments to the strains of blues and jazz from these recordings. He played along with recordings of Sidney Bechet's **soprano** saxophone, Johny Hodges' alto saxophone and Duke Ellington's piano.

His Majesty's favourite instruments are the saxophone, clarinet and trumpet. He also plays guitar and piano.

## The Maestro

All these years, there have been numerous albums both locally and internationally of HM's compositions. A committee has also been set up to screen requests for public performance and recording of HM's compositions. Through his music, the King has expressed his love of music and his love of the many millions of his **subjects**.

In the final section of the feature you are assured that the **septuagenarian** King has not yet given up his musical interest. HM still performs to a modest audience of royal guests, and with our humble hopes, the music by HM would love be appreciated by his subjects.

**maestro** - a great performer, especially a musician

**septuagenarian** - a person between 70 and 79 years old

**subject** - a person who has the right to belong to a particular country, especially one with a king or queen

**laud** - to praise somebody

**splendid** - excellent; very good

**legacy** - a situation that exists now because of events, actions, etc. that took place in the past

**inadvertently** - by accident; without intending to

**indomitable** - not willing to accept defeat, even in a difficult situation; very brave and determined

**serenade** - to sing or play music to somebody

**linger** - to stay in a place for a longer time than necessary because you are enjoying yourself

**eternity** - forever

### The maestro

A **maestro** in his own right, the **septuagenarian** King has been **lauded** for his role not only as a great king but also a great musician. His **splendid** music **legacy** has left its mark on numerous albums both locally and internationally.

"Jack Teagarden asked royal permission to include a royal composition on his album. So did the Les Brown Big Band, which asked for six compositions, as well as the Claude Bolling Big Band from France and Ted Peace," says his close aide.

Already, a committee has been set up to screen requests for public performance and recordings of the King's compositions. "In the past, there were those who **inadvertently** adapted or changed the King's compositions, which is inappropriate," says the musician. "They should respect that anyone who composes does not wish to have their pieces rewritten. The committee, therefore, is set to screen and approve requests."

Although the King's latest composition, his 48th, called Menu Kai (Egg Menu) came out in 1995, he believes that it would not be the last. "I think the King is still working on his compositions. And more will be coming out to the public."

By Hua Hin beach on Saturday nights, the **indomitable** music maestro still **serenades** his modest audience. The strains of his sax have "echoed" throughout the country, entertaining millions of his subjects, from the past to the present, who have heard and appreciated their King's compassion through his music.

As one of his English-language compositions, Echo, goes:

"...Of it is nothing left  
But the echo  
Though time is unforgiving  
I know  
Our love will  
Linger on  
For eternity..."