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It took time and finally her patience was rewarded. Kwanchit's father realised that his daughter was a gifted singer after all, and he let her pursue her dream of becoming an E-saew singer. Kwanchit joined the Mae Bua Phan band in Suphan Buri as a young apprentice, learning the art of E-saew performances.

She apprenticed for several years under her master and other experienced E-saew singers before winning fans outside the province.

Kwanchit became well known, and soon attracted the attention of the country musician Waiphod Phetchsuphan, who wanted to hire a new female singer for his duet songs. Kwanchit



accepted the offer, and the pair began to appear regularly on stage. Their duets became popular across the country.

"This was supposed to be a jump-start, and it took me from being a little known E-saew singer to a popular country singer," said Kwanchit.

At 20, Kwanchit signed a contract to release her debut record. Kwanchit's songs are all about the spirit of the countryside, and "Buad Nae Rue Jikko", "Sao Suphan" and

"Nang Khuan" are among her classics.

Kwanchit left Waiphod and set up her own country music band. She met her future husband; they were married and started their own concert tour. Her flirtations with the band and concert business overshadowed her performances. At heart Kwanchit is a wild and wicked country girl, and a tremendously gifted E-saew singer.

"The concert tour had trouble towards the end. There were many conflicts in show business at the time," said Kwanchit. "It ended up with gunfire and death threats. My husband and I had to run for our lives."

In 1973 Kwanchit and her husband moved from Bangkok back to her hometown in Suphan Buri. She settled down to E-saew songs and folk performances after five years of country music and concert tours.

Kwanchit now puts in every effort to preserve the traditional country performance of E-saew songs in Suphan Buri. She conducts classes to teach the younger generation – small children to college students – the E-saew style and other country performing arts.

For her great contribution to the field of traditional country performing arts in Thailand, Kwanchit was honoured with a National Artist Award in 1996.

"I want to keep the E-saew songs clean," revealed the 59-year-old national artist. "My generation were taught that the funny-smut style was the secret to winning more fans. That was because people back then expected to hear it. It is not necessary now. One might use irony or parody to crack a joke. You don't have to play dirty jokes all the time." ■