

A virtuoso



Kitchana Lersakvanitchakul reports on a music maestro who took control of the movement to include Western instruments in performances of classical Thai music

Eua Sunthornsanan, the late maestro and leader of Suntaraporn, one of Thailand's distinguished bands of the 1940s, did not pioneer the transition in Thai classical music that moved to include Western musical instruments, a trend which was called "*phleng Thai sakol*". He took it over when it was already an established genre.

Songwriter Phranbun pioneered the use of *phleng Thai sakol* for a musical, "Chan Chao Kha". The timeless transitional songs are "Bua Khao" and "Lom Huan" by Khunying ML Puangroy Apaiwongs. Eua, however, most effectively raised awareness about *phleng Thai sakol*, thereby taking the music industry by storm.

He made a success of *phleng Thai sakol* because Eua had a detailed knowledge of three music genres – classical, jazz and Thai classical music.

Born on January 21, 1910, in Amphur Amphawa in Samut Songkhram, Eua started studying classical music at Phran Luang School, an institute established by King Rama VI to encourage artistic expression

among Thai children. Violin was the first musical instrument he studied.

When he was nine, he joined a classical music band, conducted by Professor Phra Jenduriyang, under royal patronage. At 18, Eua went to a music school, Vithaya Sakol Dontri Sathan, founded by Phra Jenduriyang, to study harmony and arrangement.

Eua also worked as a civil servant for the now-defunct Performance Department and received Bt20 a month for playing with the big band. He also worked for the Fine Arts Department and performed at important events.

His interest in jazz began while he was working at the department. Jazz music had come to Thailand at about the same time. Eua played classical music at a sports club, and met the pianist and songwriter Nart Thavornbut, who persuaded him to play with his band and introduced him to jazz.

He was very interested in jazz and while playing classical music at an event, he noticed that the nearby jazz band was drawing a bigger audience. He realised that classical musicians

were no longer in demand and started learning to play the saxophone.

He began combining jazz and classical Thai music in 1936 when he was hired to write scores for Thai movies.

Eua inherited traditional Thai arts and the knowledge of Thai classical music, known as "*phleng Thai derm*" from his father and relatives, and learned Thai classical music from Montri Tramote.

In early 1930s, the president of the Royal Institute, His Royal Highness Prince Krom Phraya Damrongrajanuphap, was afraid that Thai classical music would die out, so he ordered Luang Pradit Pairon, the conductor of the Royal Thai Orchestra Department, to be responsible for interpreting the melodies of Thai classical music, and Phra Jenduriyang, the conductor of the Western Orchestra Department, to be responsible for recording it in a Western style.

In addition to knowing Thai and Western music, Eua had well-trained ears. One of the Western orchestra members, Eua, recorded the melody of *ranad ek* in a Western style.

He finished his recording of the melody of traditional Thai instruments in Western style in 1931.

"I was able to write many songs because I had listened to a variety of musical performances.

"As a songwriter, I started creating original songs with my knowledge, memory and experience in music. I don't want to copy anybody," Professor Dr Jetana Nakwatchara quoted from Eua's interview in the book, "Eua Sunthornsanan: Duriya Kavee 4 Paendin".

Due to his knowledge of music, Eua could come up with songs written in the *phleng Thai sakol* style for his band, Suntaraporn, which had become very popular.

In the beginning, his style of *phleng Thai sakol* faced much criticism from the media but it was later accepted with positive reviews.

The *phleng Thai sakol* style happened to agree with the philosophy of Field Marshal P Pibulsongkhram government, which set up Krom Kosanakarn in 1938 and transferred Eua from the Fine Arts Department to Krom Kosanakarn. ■