

# THE AMAZING DR. KA-TI

Thailand's only female Jazz instrumentalist dares to go against the grain...

"Good things seem to just happen to me," mused Dr. Sirabhorn 'Ti' Muntarbhorn of the Bossa Novas band **Dr. Ka-Ti Brazilian Jazz Band** and currently the only female Jazz instrumentalist in the country. "Somebody up there is definitely looking out for me." We first met Dr. Ka-Ti last December when she was in the midst of training and putting together her band while she performed regular gigs at the **Hilton**. Her latest adventure then had been her trip to Brazil, to the heart of the music she loved, the Bossa Nova. When we met her on rainy afternoon for a follow-up interview, the musician had just made a trip to Italy to study art history.

Dr. Ka-Ti's loves include music, health and art, which is what prompted her visit to the Arts haven of the world. "We did it backpacker style," she laughed. A collector of art books and a holder of a degree in Interior Design, she fully appreciated the beauty of the art and architecture in Italy. "It was...mind boggling," said Dr. Ka-Ti in regards to her visit to the St. Mark Basilica. "I'm an architect fan. Art helps you appreciate everything you see because everything is structural."

The books shelved against the wall in her home can be easily classified into three categories: Music, art, and health. She confessed to being a "spa freak," picking the spas at the **Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit**, the **JW Marriott**, and the **Inner Chi** on Soi 39 as her favorites.

So what about her music? She is still performing regularly at the **Hilton** and on the 23 June she performed at the World Trade Center as part of the Alliance Francaise and music channel MCM's *Fete de la Musique*, or music festival, a gathering of different kinds of musicians from all over the country. At the end of June, Dr. Ka-Ti is headed for Samui to perform at a private party and to immerse herself in the spa experience down south.

Another thing that Dr. Ka-Ti still does is train young musicians. Her ultimate goal is to make a world-class musician out of one of her students. Her home leans more towards being a library, with CDs of every genre of music imaginable lining the walls and filling the drawers, while books on art and music can be found everywhere. "I can train almost any instrument," she shared, "as long as they know the basics. I don't spoon feed. Lack of proper education and the lack of a role model deprive young Thais of the opportunity to expand their talents and possible love for music."

"Those who can't make money playing music have to make it teaching music," said Dr. Ka-Ti who has no intention of teaching at schools or universities though some have approached her. "The art cannot be measured by a degree. Music was practical long before it was theoretical. If I had to choose to study music with a professor holding a degree who had never performed in front of an audience or another without proper school who has performed every night for a long while, I would choose the one without the degree. You have to be on stage. You have to live through it."



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It goes without saying that Dr. Ka-Ti is definitely a very different kind of Thai musician. Outspoken, controversial, and without fear of being disliked, she stands up for what she believes in and refuses to compromise her beliefs. "It's not about following new trends, but instead about creating new trends," she said. "People don't like new things. Older musicians here think they are 'good' when, as a musician, you shouldn't even say that! There will always be someone better than you. It's not for you to decide how good you are. It's up to the audience."

"People think that the philosophy of aiming to do your best is a *farang* thing and not a Thai thing." Seeing as how the musician has spent much of her life in the United States, her liberal views sharply contradict those conservative Thai ones that still run deep in society today. "It's all about me being me, playing music I love. When I audition for jobs I always say 'This is what I play. I can't play anything else. Don't hire me if you want me to play something else because I won't play anything else.'"

Her latest venture has to do with recording a quality album here in Bangkok with producers she picked herself. The news hasn't been popped to one of the producers just yet and Dr. Ka-Ti laughed imagining his reaction to her proposal.

Dr. Ka-Ti's house is the ultimate reflection of who she is. She decorated it herself, the main area of the house divided into two - a very cosy and beautiful living area and the office section. The CDs that line most her walls and the three guitars sitting in the room immediately tell a visitor that music is a very important part of Dr. Ka-Ti's life. Books are her other love, but you won't see fiction anywhere around her. "I'm a researcher," she said. "I read facts."

On her walls are stunning prints by Andy Warhol, Nagel, Miles Davis, and Roy Lichtenstein. A huge fan of Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture, she has an actual concrete texture block from one of the architect's home sitting in her room. "I heard they were renovating his house and I drove up there and asked the construction people if I could have a piece." Polaroids of Dr. Ka-Ti and musicians she respects can be found all over her house as well as pieces that have been personalized for her. It is difficult not to be awed by the history in the room, illustrating a full and very blessed life.

"Do you believe that there are no such things as coincidences?" she asked me when we discussed all the wonderful experiences and opportunities she has had. Perhaps Dr. Ka-Ti is around to teach us all something about integrity, honesty, and being exactly who you are. She may be outspoken, controversial, and different, but it is rare to find a woman who is so willing to go against the grain. But this is who she is.

This is the very amazing Dr. Ka-Ti.

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