

Notes From The Heart

Our second one-on-one interview pairs another relative newcomer with a veteran performer, this time on the music scene. Dr ka-TI (Sirabhorn Muntarbhorn) is an accomplished jazz guitarist who heads the Brazilian Jazz Band in Bangkok. Dr ka-TI has made a special study of the rhythms of Brazil and her band performs numerous classic *bossa nova* songs by Antonio Carlos Jobim. Thus, we thought it only fitting that she meet with newcomer Nadia Ruthai Suttikulpanich, or "Nadia", whose new album on Bakery Music, *Welcome Sweet Music*, sees her performing Jobim's classic "So Nice". Nadia, a former cheerleader for Thammasat University, was recruited by Zomkiat of Bakery Music for his debut album as a producer.

Dr ka-TI: My band plays strictly bossa nova and I want to say I'm a big fan of your recording of the song "So Nice".

Nadia: I love bossa nova. I was so afraid that people were not gonna like that song. I read on the Internet at pantip.com: 'Oh, wow, we hope that you're not going to copy songs from other people,' but I don't think it's copying.

Dr ka-TI: It's an interpretation. That's something that people don't understand.

In Thailand everyone is really so concerned about coming up with...

Nadia: ...New things.

Dr ka-TI: Well, we all want to come up with new things. But you know what? The art of interpretation is not something that's easy.

Nadia: Exactly. That's what I think.

Dr ka-TI: That's what we've all missed out on here in the industry. Everyone is busy making so-called 'new' tunes, but actually many of the tunes are plagiarised and



DOING THE BOSSA NOVA: Dr ka-TI, left, talks with singer Nadia about the roots of the Brazilian musical form.

we can't hide that. If some of us are really not ready to write originals instead of stealing – oh, I hate to use the word stealing, but it is stealing – why don't we introduce beautiful music and interpret it to make it our own. That's what people do with classical music.

Nadia: That's right.

I think that is so true, because everyone has their own version in them. They have their own version of "So Nice".

Dr ka-TI: Like Bebel Gilberto's.

Nadia: I love her's. She's so great.

Dr ka-TI: Absolutely. If anyone asks me what Brazilian album they should get right now, I'd say, 'Go get Bebel's album,' because it's a combination of traditional bossa nova but with a new interpretation. And I think Zomkiat did a great job on your album with the song. This is my little secret, but when I do my first album, I was thinking I might ask Zomkiat to be my producer. I'm not 18, (laughs) but I think he'd be the one.

Nadia: He'd be very interesting.

Dr ka-TI: "So Nice" was beautiful. You see, Bebel did it. You did. I do it. And I'm sure we'll all sound completely different doing it. That's because we're all ourselves.

Nadia: Exactly. I think it's also a great opportunity for Thai people to listen to different kinds of music. Kinds that really haven't been introduced into Thailand before.

Dr ka-TI: I'm glad to know that you like

bossa nova. Let's talk about Latin music. There is a lot of misinterpretation, or misconception rather, on what Latin music is. Latin, theoretically, is Spanish language-based, influenced by countries with Spanish as their first language. A huge amount of incredible music is coming out of these places right now, but why are people so confused about what Brazilian music is? First of all Brazil is the only country in South America...

Nadia: That speaks Portuguese.

Dr ka-TI: (Laughs) Exactly. So it's not a part of the Latin thing because it's not Spanish, but my analysis of why people are grouping it together with Latin is because it's the only country doing its own thing. Let's say you read *Billboard*, they're not gonna put it in a 'Brazilian' section. They're gonna put it in Latin which makes sense, but please differentiate it. When did you find out about bossa nova?

Nadia: Well, it started it off with jazz, actually. When I was in America, I lived in California.

Dr ka-TI: Or you're a Californian? So am I.

Nadia: Yeah, I was in Orange County. And it was really big at that time, swing dancing and that Zooty stuff like the Cherry Poppin' Daddies.

Dr ka-TI: I don't know them. Tell me a little about them.

Nadia: They're jazz, big band. They got really big in 1998 and I was like, 'Wow,

this thing is coming back.' Everything was coming back. Like fashions from the Fifties and Sixties.

Dr ka-TI: Retro.

Nadia: Exactly, and then I got into that movie... what's it called, that small film about Latin music?

Dr ka-TI: *Next Stop Wonderland?*

Nadia: Oh, I can't remember the name. It was an art film. That was the start.

Dr ka-TI: What else do you listen to?

Nadia: I just got the CD *Smoke City*. Do you know that one? It's by a French group called Sympatique. I think that a lot has been done in France lately.

Dr ka-TI: Yes. You know, when I started to listen to Brazilian music seriously at the Berkeley College of Music in Boston, I wanted so badly to get Brazilian music other than Jobim... all the hits.

But you couldn't get any of those albums in the US and I found that lots of Brazilian musicians went to France, to Paris.

Nadia: How come?

Dr ka-TI: Geographically, it's closer than you might think. But I wonder if another reason again isn't because of the Latin language relationship. But my own little theory is that the French are so romantic – their songs are so sensuous – I'm wondering if their lifestyle and the Brazilian don't have something in common.

Nadia: Yes.

Dr ka-TI: Tell me more about why you like bossa nova. Because I'm fascinated.

You know, we're from a completely different age range, yet were talking about and singing the same kind of music. Did you choose "So Nice" yourself?

Nadia: Yes, I did. I had heard it done by Bebel and she was so great.

Dr ka-TI: When music is so great it becomes immortalised. I'd like to try to influence all of our artists here in Thailand to write music, compose music or interpret music that can be immortalised. Don't try to please the market, because the best thing for art is to be unique - not follow trends.

Nadia: Exactly.

Dr ka-TI: And being a trendsetter is tough because you're doing something that nobody understands - because you're doing something that's never been done before. But to me that's the right thing to do - create something new.

In my case, I started a band a couple of years ago and until this stage, there had never been a Brazilian band in this country.

Nadia: Why do you think that was?

Dr ka-TI: I've asked musicians around town. I've asked jazz musicians because they can relate to what I'm trying to do. They said, 'Gee, we all love this music but it's too hard to play.' And it really is hard to play well. Harder than jazz. In clubs, it'll be played with more jazz-like harmonies. But I found when I went to Brazil that there's a lot more harmony than the jazz chords that we're used to. So I went to Brazil to research it.

Nadia: That's great! I think a lot of people have an interest in this kind of music but they don't have the opportunity to hear it, especially in Thailand. Do you think this should be changed?

Dr ka-TI: Well, that's my job now, isn't it? And yours. It's our job to stick with it and really build an audience. I've only been playing in town for two years and each time I perform, at the end of the show, I have people running up to me and saying: 'Where do you play regularly? We've been dying to hear this music and we don't have any place to hear it!' I said 'Well, you'll just have to wait because I'm working on it.' (Laughs) I could go on for a long time because I have such a passion for it, but tell me a little bit about your background. I mean, were you born and raised here?

Nadia: Yes, basically. I was an American until I was seven or eight years old and then I came back here. I went back to the US again for my senior year. I was an exchange student, really. I came back here and did a year at Thammasat, then went to England.

Dr ka-TI: To study art?

Nadia: Not really art, I'm doing marketing and advertising, to be exact. I think

England has so many interesting places for me to visit. It's such a good resource.

Dr ka-TI: Such history.

Nadia: What's your musical background.

Dr ka-TI: I went in reverse from you. I went to England first. I grew up with The Beatles. I was there for their first movie release, you know, *A Hard Day's Night*.

Nadia: Were you there for long?

Dr ka-TI: I was in England for seven years.

Nadia: You have such a strong American accent.

Dr ka-TI: And then I was in the US, forever. Would you like me to speak with a British accent?

Nadia: No thank you. (Laughs) I remember the name of that movie now. It's called *Buena Vista Social Club*?

Dr ka-TI: Of course. The *Buena Vista Social Club* is Cuban music. Maybe 40-50 year ago, there used to be a club where all these artists would hang out, like in the Paris cafes. I'm not talking just musicians, but painters, poets, writers. A few years ago a musician from America, Ry Cooder, went Cuba to look for these people and who are now in their eighties to record them before they die and their art is lost forever. He went with the

director Wim Wenders to record these artists. So some of these artists made their first records in their late 70s and 80s - their first record! It's just phenomenal. I love it.

Nadia: Yes!

Dr ka-TI: I have a little surprise for you, the sound editor of *Buena Vista Social Club* is a Thai woman. She's a friend of mine.

Nadia: Really?

Dr ka-TI: She's in her 20s. She was also the sound editor of *Little Nicky*, the new film with Adam Sandler. So we have a Thai woman that's a sound editor - a sound engineer - of world class working in Hollywood on all these big films. I love talented women. I love finding women who are outstanding and Thai, you know?

Nadia: It's such a good feeling when you hear about Thai people getting something good.

Dr ka-TI: You know, sometimes when you differentiate between something that's really Thai and something's international, I hear from younger generation 'Oh ka-TI, you're so *farang*!' But being international is not being *farang*. It's being world class.

Nadia: Exactly. I think that's so true.

And I think we shouldn't ever have to say, 'If I had done this...' or 'If I had done that.' Why don't we just go and do it? And we

can all be different because difference is not wrong. Difference is uniqueness. What you're doing is great. I saw that you're involved with the Grammy Awards. How did you become a member?

Dr ka-TI: I told them what I've done and what I'm doing and I got in. I'm active as a member, but as I am here in Thailand I don't vote actively anymore. I don't want to do guess work when the ballot arrives. They don't require you to vote in every cat-

egory and they'd rather that you leave the categories blank that you really don't have knowledge of. I have a feeling I may possibly be the only member that's from Thailand.

Nadia: That is an honour.

Dr ka-TI: How did you get to meet the Bakery Gang and become their artist?

Nadia: I knew *Phi Zomkiat* and he asked me if I was interested. Because I really didn't have a background in singing, I asked him 'Do you think I can', and he said 'Yeah, why not?' Like, you know, 'Come and try'. So I tried. He picked a song called "Song Sai" from *Pizzicato Five*.

Dr ka-TI: I don't think I know them.

Nadia: They're a Japanese band. I think when they recorded their first album, they did it in New York and they launched it there. Then they went back to Japan.

Dr ka-TI: What style?

Nadia: It's lounge music.

Dr ka-TI: I've heard you mention lounge music before. I don't know how you define lounge music.

You see, I'm learning so much from you! Tell me, how do you define lounge music?

Nadia: Lounge music is a very easy listening type of music. I think the influence comes from 60s.

Dr ka-TI: You did a great job from what I heard. You sing so well. You're so natural.

Nadia: Really, do you think so?

Dr ka-TI: Yes, I think you did a great job. I'm not just sitting here complimenting you. I don't compliment, if I don't like something. If you enjoy what you're doing I think you definitely have a future, and I think *Zomkiat*'s doing a great job.

Let's talk about *Zomkiat* because he's your producer. For me, whatever *Zomkiat* does - whether it's the *Dojo* stuff or for the younger market - the music is just so nice. When you listen to it you smile. There's always something so *Zomkiat*. I can tell that it's him doing it. I think that all the producers on that label really have distinctive styles and finding your own style is a monumental task.

Nadia: Yes, I want to say that right now *bossa nova* music is welcomed here in Thailand and I hope that it won't fade away like a fashion.

Dr ka-TI: I'm going to try my best with what I can do to keep it going. I'm passionate about it and I'm so happy to be doing it. I'm so pleased that I'm starting to have a following. And I'd like to try to encourage people. If you're a musician and you want to play *bossa nova* - go for it. If you just want to enjoy, please enjoy it. Get up and dance.

Nadia: It's beautiful, so easy to enjoy.

Dr ka-TI: That's where it's at. It's from our hearts. ■

