

His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej and His Passion for Music

One of the most iconic portrayals of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej is the image of His Majesty playing His beloved saxophone. Here we see a man deeply concentrated as He blows into the wind instrument and places His fingers precisely on its keys.

The essence of this image is found within the various melodies composed by King Bhumibol. Each of the compositions have its own unique charm and ability to create a range of emotions. Whether performed live or played on tape, whether heard for the first time or repeatedly, His Majesty's soulful tunes have always left audience members and listeners deeply impressed by such an exceptional display of musical talent.

Music, especially Jazz and Blues, was a major part of His Majesty the King's life. Not only did He perform- but also composed, conducted and instructed. It all started with a spark of passion for the 13 year old boy growing up in Switzerland, who was encouraged to learn how to play the saxophone and pursue musical theory by a certain Mr. Weybrecht, a native of Alsace.

From that point, it was not long until His Majesty the King began composing his own original pieces at age 18. His first piece, known in English as "Candle Light Blues", contained subtle hints of the main influencers of His work: Berchet, Armstrong and Ellington. Yet, at the same time, the piece expressed a certain depth of melancholy that stood out originally. This unique composition marked the birth of a musical career that ultimately brought about 48 compositions across a number of musical genres.

As the musical works continued to attract significant international recognition, His Majesty King Bhumibol eventually became the first Asian person ever to be granted an Honorary Membership of the Institute of Music and Arts of Vienna in 1964. In 1980, UNESCO named His Majesty's composition "Falling Rain" as the "Song of Asia".

Today, the legacy of the jazz-loving King's musical compositions has found its way back to the origins of classical music. In Europe, performances of the King's works by renowned Thai orchestras on tour, including the Bangkok Symphony Orchestra, Siam Symphonic Band, Bangkok Pro Musica, Thailand Philharmonic Orchestra and the Siam Sinfonietta, have taken place at historical landmark venues such as the Musikverein in Vienna, the Berlin Philharmonie, Französischer Dom in Berlin, Schloss Nymphenburg in Munich, Hotel Taschenbergpalais Kempinski in Dresden, the Schönbrunn Palace, the concert hall in The Hague, and many others. The Royal Guards March generally known as " March Rajawallop" always receives a big round

of applause whenever this piece of His Majesty's composition is performed on international stage.

Although music was a personal passion of the talented King, He always displayed an eagerness to share the pleasure with others. Initially, this came in the form of teaching His children to play musical instruments. Then, His Majesty took on a number of students from His own entourage which led to the formation of the “Sahai Pattana” band, consisting of a group of friends and students who would play and produce music alongside the Monarch.

Another effective way of encouraging others to join in His love for music was through establishing the “Aw Saw” Radio Station in 1952- the year in which His Majesty returned to live in Thailand permanently. The purpose of this station was to broadcast to the general public compositions played by the musical King and to communicate His ideas and words in order to break down pre-existing barriers that prevented communication between a monarch and his people.

However, for the extraordinary King, music was not merely a pleasurable pastime. His Majesty believed it had the power to inspire, unify and bestow strength to the people. This is reflected in His music's repertoire composed to remind soldiers, civil servants and citizens of their values and to inspire them in the performances of their duties to the country. Perhaps the most touching piece within this category is the song “Yim Su” (“Smiles”) which was composed in 1952 in order to give hope to students at a school for the blind and to encourage them to make the most out of their lives in spite of their misfortune.

A moving story about the inspirational effect of His Majesty’s music could perhaps illustrate the relationship between the King and His subjects. His Majesty the King once strived to teach a blind student to play an instrument. Although it was a challenging task for the pupil who was unable to see the movements required to play, His Majesty patiently persisted until his pupil understood. As soon as the pupil was able to play the first correct note of the melody, his face lit up with pride and joy. For the blind pupil, the sound of a correct note was more than just pleasure to his ears; it was an inspiration to his soul.

The same is true when the King’s people listen to His Majesty King Bhumibol’s songs. Their faces, too, light up with pride and inspiration. For when they hear His music and are reminded of His legacy, they unite in the common realisation that they are indeed one truly blessed nation.
