

FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC

REVIEW

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FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC

REVIEW

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SOUNDS LIKE THIS: Hucky Eichelmann (*left*) and Richard Harvey bridge the musical worlds of East and West



THAILAND

Command Performance



Meet Hucky Eichelmann and Richard Harvey, or Hucky and Harvey—two Western artists who have become favourites at the Thai royal court

By Rodney Tasker/BANGKOK

IT MAY NOT have been a marriage made in heaven. But royalty has provided a backdrop.

Since starting their two-man ensemble in Bangkok in 1996, two Western musicians have become regulars in the Thai royal court. Hucky Eichelmann, a German, plays classical guitar and other stringed instruments. Richard Harvey, an Englishman, plays mainly woodwind instruments.

Both are world class, but stuck on the musical language of the East. Together they purvey a musical hotchpotch of East and West, an alchemy of styles that is difficult to pigeonhole.

The relationship reached a crescendo in Bangkok on October 8, when the two were honoured to give a royal command performance to Thailand's Queen Sirikit. The programme, with Harvey's almost acrobatic display on a number of

woodwind instruments meshing with Hucky's guitar, included the duo's trademark diverse collection of Western and East Asian folk, classic and jazz numbers.

There was also the main theme from the recently released Thai epic movie *Suriyothai*. That was the key to the special performance, because Queen Sirikit sponsored the film based on the life of a heroic 16th-century Thai queen. And Harvey had composed the *Suriyothai* score. This underscored a royal connection begun by Hucky shortly after his arrival in Thailand in 1980. Back then he cut an album,

One Night, of guitar interpretations of mainly light-jazz compositions by King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who is an accomplished jazz saxophonist.

From then on, Hucky, and later both of them, became regular guests at the



palace. Another more successful album by Hucky is *Candelight Blues*, which again feature renditions of the king's music. As Harvey sums it up: "Hucky has his time-honoured links with the king and *Suriyothai* started mine with the queen."

But this is only one facet of the pair's unusual career together. Both were accomplished, well-known performers in their own fields when they met in Bangkok in 1996, shortly after Harvey's first trip here. Harvey, 48, recalls: "I had heard Hucky was the most outstanding guitarist in the region." Not surprising, because the German guitarist has played with the best in his line, including guitarist John Williams and famous sitar-player Ravi Shankar, who later called Hucky a "sensitive and wonderful musician."

"HUCKY HAS HIS TIME-HONOURED links with the king and *Suriyothai* started mine with the queen"

RICHARD HARVEY, MUSICIAN

So Harvey went to Hucky's Bangkok home. Adds Hucky, 45: "Everyone knew Richard as a composer—I didn't know he was a fantastic instrumentalist."

Indeed, Harvey still describes himself as "primarily a composer," having written the scores for 27 films including *Jane Eyre* and *Animal Farm* and a large number of British television series. He has also conducted the London Symphony Orchestra and, as he says, his house back in Britain brims with some 600 musical instruments, half of them woodwind. He adds: "I will turn my hand to any ethnic instrument, anywhere."

Ethnically, also, much of the two's musical repertoire is based on Southeast Asian music. Which is why, ever since their first joint concert in Germany in 1996, they have sometimes been dubbed "musical ambassadors between East and West." In fact, they are fluent in many musical languages. As Harvey sits in his Bangkok hotel, he says he visits the region at least twice a year, adding: "I never feel homesick here."

Another milestone achieved by Hucky and Harvey early this year was a winter tour they made of Thailand, called *Silk and Bamboo*. As the name suggests, the programme comprised many kinds of East Asian melodies. The tour received enthusiastic local reviews, and it was not unusual to see the pair surrounded by Thai fans after a performance. And so the album *Silk and Bamboo* was cut, and is still selling well around the region.

Where do they go from here? Harvey would like to write a symphony, and both would like to do a concert at London's Royal Albert Hall, or New York's Carnegie Hall. Charity performances are an important part of their work. And as the Thai palace has spotted, their unique chemistry works splendidly in musical diplomacy. ■

BEAT ON THE STREET

Drums have long held a special place in Japanese culture, but since its debut in 1997 the percussion group Gocoo has been offering far more than the traditional beat that is often at the centre of Japanese festivals. The 13-member ensemble uses some 30 *wadaiko*—Japanese drums—plus bells, bamboo brushes and even a didgeridoo.

And, unlike many other *wadaiko* groups, Gocoo also includes several women.

On a recent Sunday evening in Tokyo, the ensemble performed a two-hour show before a packed house of 500 fans. The 13 drummers produced an air of tranquillity with their flow of slow-pulse rhythms, and then excitement with up-tempo beating.

For 26-year-old audience member Kyoko Mizoguchi, it was an exhilarating experience: "I feel swept up when the drum beating goes fast and reaches the liveliest part. I like that part the most," she said. That comes as no surprise to Kaoly Asano, the leader of the group, who says *wadaiko* "has a power to eliminate borders between people."

Next year, Gocoo is scheduled to pay its second visit to the United States and tours to Europe and Hong Kong will likely be organized.

"A festival needs the sound of drums, probably because the power of the sound is needed. We want to create a festival to share the sense of such power with the audience," Asano says.

They certainly reached the audience in Tokyo—everyone stood and swayed with the music, transfixed by its power.

For performance details, contact Beacon Production in Tokyo, tel: 5498 2900, e-mail: noa@kiwi.ne.jp

Ichiko Fuyuno



BANGING ON: Gocoo features eight women