



Let's Talk About Love

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2feature
By Ellen Boonstra

Petch Osathanugrah, best known for his classic mega-hit *Pieng Chai Kon Nee (Mai Chai Pu Wiset)*, arguably Thailand's most romantic song ever written, has suddenly resurfaced after a lengthy, 20-year hiatus from the music scene with the release of his new, electro-pop album *Let's Talk About Love*.



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Into our offices – at precisely the appointed time – walks a man with a wild, somewhat disheveled looking head of black curls, goatee, blue sunglasses, casually dressed in a designer shirt and jeans, looking every inch the pop star who’s been up all night partying hard after a gig.

I confess that I’ve never heard of him – being a relative newcomer to Thailand. But Petch explains there’s no need to apologize. Although the ‘older’ age bracket – if they’re over 27 – surely remember him and *Pieng Chai Kon Nee (Mai Chai Pu Wiset)*, the classic mega-hit that first propelled this artist into national fame two decades ago, there’s a whole generation of young Thais out there who’ve probably never heard of him.

But Petch’s comeback and grand scale launch of his new album *Let’s Talk About Love*, is about to change all this. With this “life’s work”, he’s hoping to leave a legacy – just like his first album *Thammada...Mun Pen Ruang Thammada* influenced an entire generation of Thai artists.

Pieng Chai Kon Nee (Mai Chai Pu Wiset) (English title *I’m Just a Man*) is widely considered the most romantic Thai song ever written, so much so that many fans have sung it as a marriage proposal to their beloved. To this day, the song continues to be played on radio stations and is frequently covered by other artists.

“Guys used this song all the time to make girls fall in love or go to bed with them,” Petch laughs. “It really touches something in the opposite sex.”

Then Petch breaks out in song, treating us to a mini-concert of *I’m Just a Man...* in English:

*I’m not a magic man who can give you magic flowers
I’m just a man, ain’t got no superpowers
But I can give you a hand and lead you through
the night...*

After this moving serenade I can’t help but comment that Petch must be the romantic type, making me wonder ... by the way... is he married?

“I’m not a romantic person when it comes to love affairs. But I can watch romantic movies over and over. Take ‘Pride and Prejudice’ by Jane Austen – I must’ve read the book twice and seen the movie about five times!” he confides.

The singer is less forthcoming about his personal love life. “People think I’m gay ... but I prefer it to remain a mystery. On the prime-time TV show *Surviva* which airs tonight, the host asked me the same question. I said that I can look at a guy’s face for like a second, but I can look at a girl’s face for hours!” After which he lets out another infectious laugh, one of many that ensue.

So what has the singer been up to for the past 20 years when not writing classic hits?

Before he recorded his first hit, Petch was Creative Director and Chairman of Spa Advertising which is part of the family-owned Osotspa Group. This food and beverage giant is most famous for their energy drink ‘M150,’ among others. Rather than rest

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on his laurels, or lead a life of leisure, Petch has been thoroughly engrossed in a variety of activities – all of these behind the scenes rather than in the spotlight. He’s directed sitcoms, produced TV programs and run a magazine, while in between writing short stories, drawing cartoons and painting.

“I can’t sit still – I always want to do something new,” the multi-talented and multi-faceted artist discloses, adding that “my life goes in cycles— both artistically and in terms of interests. I’ve got a short attention span... or maybe no real determination.”

However, there are two things in life that Petch has always been very passionate about: art and music. Over the years, he’s become renowned for his private art collection and he’s also founder and chairman of the Art Gallery at Bangkok University, an institution established by his parents.

These strong ties have granted this 40-something-year-old access to some of the biggest and most respected names in the world of contemporary art and movie-making. Several of these artists were commissioned to direct and co-produce the music videos which accompany each of the 11 songs of his new album. This project marks the first time in Thai history that for every song— and not just for the customary title track—a music video was produced.

The album’s title track just topped Bangkok’s most trendy radio station’s charts at number 1, and music videos from the album are currently being displayed on all the giant plasma-screens all over town – at the Emporium, Siam Paragon and in the skytrain.

Rirkrit Tiravanija, the world-famous contemporary artist of Thai origin based in New York and Berlin (he’s exhibited at New York’s Museum of Modern Art and Guggenheim Museum) created the video for the song *Come with Me*. Filmed in one long shot, this amusing and captivating piece of video-art shows a four-minute-long close-up of a man’s face.

“When I asked Rirkrit about the concept, he said that I didn’t need to know. I wondered ‘Is this my work or his?’ It was crazy!” Petch says roaring with laughter.

Others who collaborated with Petch on his music video project were also given the artistic freedom to execute their own vision. They include award-winning film director Apichatpong Weerasethakul (*Tropical Malady, Syndromes and a Century*), acclaimed directors Pen-ek Ratanaruang (*Last Life in the Universe*) and Wisit Sasanathieng (*Tears of the Black Tiger*), as well as contemporary artists like Kamol Phaosavasdi, Pornataweesak Rimsakul, Sathit Sattarasart and Thaweesak Srithongdee.

With some music videos costing up to 1.5 million to produce, I can’t help thinking that to undertake an art project of such magnitude and expense must be a tough act to follow.

“I’m not concerned with creating hits. My objective is to make a historic wave – something the big labels can’t do. Something only a ‘crazy’ guy like me can do... If I wouldn’t have had the means, I would have directed every one of them myself with a small video camera,” he insists. “It’s about having unique ideas. It’s not about money.”

Petch frequently gets questioned on why he’s chosen to release a second album after all this time. The remarkably down-to earth singer claims the simple reason is that he’s written some great songs and predicts his second album will become as timeless as his first.

“I’m happiest when I’m writing or creating songs,” he smiles. “My inspiration has always been the Beatles. Ah...would I call myself the fifth Beatle? Or the reincarnation of John Lennon? No. But I’m probably the Beatles’ most prominent disciple in this part of the world!”

Check out the songs and music videos from Petch’s album *Let’s talk about Love* at www.petcho.com

