

Saving Southeast Asia's sounds

Patrons of a new museum celebrating the region's music were honoured and thanked for helping to establish a cultural landmark **By Ploenpote Atthakor**

It was a night of beautiful music in a unique concert setting at Mahidol University's College of Music. The event, "Usakane [Thai for Southeast Asia] Harmony Night for the Music Museum Founders", was held earlier this month to thank the patrons of the Southeast Asia Music Museum Building project.

Presiding over the charity gala dinner was Education Minister Chinnaworn Boonyakiat. Also turning up were former prime minister Chuan Leekpai, former Bank of Thailand governor Tarisa Watanagase, former Supreme Administrative Court president Ackaratorn Chularat, as well as diplomats and people from the business and music circles.

The museum project is the brainchild of Assoc Prof Sugree Charoensook, dean of Mahidol University's College of Music,

who beamed with great pride as he welcomed a stream of socialites and luminaries to the event, together with Dr Boon Vanasin, chairman of the fund-raising activities for the building project.

Assoc Prof Sugree said the construction of the seven-storey building will be completed in about one-and-a-half years.

The project costs 600 million baht — 400 million baht for the construction and the rest for the purchase of musical instruments from Southeast Asia. With partial financial support from the Education Ministry, the museum was designed as a new cultural and musical landmark for this region. Together with the museum project, Dr Sugree said the College of Music would accommodate a world music studies programme, offering courses in traditional music of the region. The courses will be conducted by native experts.

The "Usakane Harmony Night for the Music Museum Founders" kicked off with warm-up songs played alternately by a *khim* dulcimer group and a chorus band, while the Thailand Philharmonic Orchestra (TPO), under the baton of conductors Major Prateep Suphanrojn and Dr Christopher Hughes, dazzled guests on the main stage, which was set up in the heart of the Musica Arboretum, a garden of plants used to make musical instruments.

Vocalists, students and music instructors from the college offered a selection of beautiful songs that made the event memorable.

The evening's festivities came to an end as the music faded.

Each guest went home with a special gift — a beautiful bencharong (a type of enamelled porcelain) plate embossed with words of gratitude for their support to the museum project. ■



Tarisa Watanagase, the former Bank of Thailand governor, arrives at the gala dinner.



A treat for the ears: Traditional Thai music by a 'khim' dulcimer band.



Dr Boon Vanasin and Assoc Prof Sugree.



From left: Clinical Prof Piyasakol Sakolsatayadorn, Dr Wijarn Panich, Dr Boon Vanasin, Education Minister Chinnaworn Boonyakiat, Assoc Prof Sugree Charoensook, Lawan Kanchat, and Jaruwan Vanasin.



A 'ranad' (Thai xylophone) player presents the sounds of Usakane with backup from the Thailand Philharmonic Orchestra.



Assoc Prof Sugree Charoensook and Chuan Leekpai.



Mom Dusadee Paribatra



The chorus band welcomes guests to the 'Usakane Harmony Night for the Music Museum Founders' dinner event.