







PHOTO: PORNPRON SATYABHANA

SCHOOL OF HARD ROCK

Five boys aged 11 and 12 are tuning up to show their talent to the world
By Chaiyot Yongcharoenchai

They're black-clad, spiky-haired rockers who perform with jets of flame firing up the stage, and they are just starting high school.

"All we ever wanted was just to perform on the school stage and sing for everyone," said singer Thunwa "Proo" Natethai, 11, of the humble goal a group of Assumption College primary school pupils set themselves four years ago.

Little did they know that, after dedication and almost non-stop rehearsals, the group formed by seven- and eight-year-olds would turn out to be one of the brightest hopes for the future of Thailand's music industry. The band was one of two representing Thailand in *Asia's Got Talent*, and the only ones in the final, where they finished fourth. They are now eagerly awaiting word on whether they will land a record deal.

They are known across Asia as The Talento.

Before the band earned their place in the international spotlight, they were known nationwide as the young rockers who made it to the final round of *Thailand's Got Talent* last year, except they had nine members back then.

Although the band now numbers five, The Talento managed to get through the tough competition with contenders from all over Asia. As fun as it looked on the screen, The Talento went down a difficult path with a feverish rehearsal schedule to get to where they are today.

FOR THOSE ABOUT TO ROCK

Long before *Asia's Got Talent* judge Mel C gushed that she wanted to see them in stadiums, The Talento had its origins in a primary school music and glee club. Twin brothers Sethanun "Mic" and Supanut "Mac" Pornvoranich were in the schoolyard as eight-year-old Prathom 3 students when they saw senior pupils performing live on the stage.

"I want to be just like them," Mac told his brother. Mic agreed that what they saw was quite cool. They went to see Kajornpun Kaewsuwan, the music teacher at Assumption College's primary school, to enrol in the club.

The twins were among more than 60 children auditioning for the school band, and Mr Kajornpun had the task of whittling them down to a more manageable number. It would be the 15th time he had put together a school band in his 36-year teaching career. >>

>> Also at the audition was Proo, who was noticed for his natural projection and characteristic voice, while Jirapat "Ryu" Konkvilairat and Paphangkorn "Prompt" Dachawongpakin were among those whose musical talents stood out. Proo, Mic, Mac, Ryu and Prompt are the five we know as The Talento today, but singers Settanun "Boom" Tititamasak and Thanthong "Fifa" Pooplong, rhythm guitarist Jirayu "Khao Pun" Jarechaiyothin and pianist Techie "Cent" Kosonwatawong were also part of the original lineup.

All nine had the basics — they could read and play — even though Mr Kajornpun knew they still had a lot to learn. The energetic youngsters were keen to play pop songs, but the wily teacher put on a CD by Swedish rock band Europe and watched their eyes light up to *The Final Countdown*.

"This is it. This will be our band's style," Proo declared. The rest of the band agreed.

Mr Kajornpun warned them that rock music is not easy. "You will have to learn more and practise all the time," he told his students.

THE RISE OF THE TALENTO

Proo, then seven, could hit the notes and projected his voice well, so became a lead singer along with Boom and Fifa. Mic took extra music lessons to improve his skills to take on the role of lead guitar, while his twin Mac was the band's natural drummer. Ryu took on the role of keyboard player (he could be seen on TV playing the keytar) while Prompt plays bass.

Due to the vivacious characters of the members, they were named The Talento — Italian for "talent", but with the added meaning of "playful" in Thai. Enthusiastic as they were, they took the time necessary to rehearse and refine their skills before their debut performance in front of the school.

Mac said the feeling after that first show was amazing. "I felt like we had achieved our dream since this is what we always wanted," Mac explained.

But the adrenalin they felt after being onstage pushed them further. "We want more," Mic told the band.

Each band member took extra music lessons in their free time, learning technical skills they couldn't at school. "Practice makes perfect," Mr Kajornpun encouraged them every day.

After three years playing together, the band were ready to chase the spotlight in national music competitions including The Band Thailand. Then Proo went for a blind audition for *The Voice Kids* in 2013.

The Talento's hunger for fame pushed them to enter *Thailand's Got Talent* last year, where they won over the judges and the hearts of the public. They claimed enough votes to reach the competition's final round and, while they didn't win, are now recognised as the country's youngest rock stars.

LET ME HEAR YOU SCREAM

After *Thailand's Got Talent* came to an end, the producers got back in touch with The Talento about joining the Asian edition of the TV franchise. A bigger stage with more attractive prizes was calling.

There was a catch, however: there was a limit to how many band members could compete. Mr Kajornpun made the heart-breaking decision to cut Khao Pun, Fifa, Cent and Boom from the band.

Mr Kajornpun has trained several award-winning bands in the past. Former students of his have won the Coke Music Awards and the Hotwave Music Awards, but those were just local competitions. He wasn't prepared for The Talento to jump onto the global stage quite so quickly. Neither were the band members.

"It was a nerve-racking experience," Proo said. "The stage was huge, the crowd was bigger and the judges were very intimidating, especially David Foster."

The Talento chose *Highway Star* by Deep Purple for their first audition on *Asia's Got Talent*. The band couldn't believe the overwhelming reaction they got from the crowd.

"They were cheering and everyone, including the judges, gave us a standing ovation. I literary had goosebumps after we finished," Mac said, recalling the proud moment.

But all of that paled in comparison to a compliment from Foster. "David said 'bravo' after our performance, and for us, we had already won," Mac added.

The band made it through to the next round and Foster's words inspired them to step up their game. For their next act, they performed *It's My Life* by Bon Jovi. This time they won



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PROO LEAD SINGER

votes of fans after Proo shouted a phrase he later became famous for: "Asia! Let me hear you scream."

The Talento got votes from both inside Thailand and abroad, and their sweetheart status helped propel them into the grand final round.



THE WORLD'S A STAGE: Thunwa 'Proo' Natethai, twins Sethanun 'Mic' and Supanut 'Mac' Pornvoranich, Jirapat 'Ryu' Konkvilairat and Paphangkorn 'Prompt' Dachawongpakin make up The Talento, which came fourth in 'Asia's Got Talent'. Music teacher Kajornpun Kaewsuwan, below, is proud of their achievements.



PHOTOS: WWW.YOUTUBE.COM

**LITTLE BIG STARS**

In the final, the boys played the song that inspired them when the band was put together: Europe's *The Final Countdown*. They finished fourth, with a Filipino shadow play troupe taking the top prize.

After the month in Malaysia and Singapore for the competition, it's back to school. Proo, at 11, is the youngest member, and is finishing primary school. The others, now all 12, have graduated to the secondary section of Assumption College.

They do, however, have more homework than their peers: rock star duties.

But whatever their future holds, it will be guided by someone other than Mr Kajornpun. Since most have moved on to high school, they have to join a new club.

"My duty is over. I sent them to the destination they wanted," a proud Mr Kajornpun said.

As bright as the children's future is, Mr Kajornpun's world is becoming more dim every day. He has problem with both of his retinas, and after a wrong diagnosis and mistreatment, Mr Kajornpun can no longer see further than one metre.



PHOTOS: PRANPORN SATRAHAM

"I am basically waiting for the day I will be completely blind," Mr Kajornpun said. "But I'm not sad because at least I get to see my students perform before I can no longer see them."

Mr Kajornpun has an heir apparent to guide The Talento. His son, also an award-winning singer and former student of the club, was heavily involved in building the boys' skills and has opened a music school.

The competition has made the band realise they still have much room to develop their skills, especially when it comes to mastering their nerves. Now they are grabbing any opportunity they can to perform in front of a crowd.

"They are only 11 to 12 years old now, they still have enough time to develop themselves to be a great music band," Mr Kajornpun said.

More immediately, The Talento is waiting to hear whether their fourth place might translate into a record deal. A programme producer told the band that they were likely to know soon.

"We are keeping our fingers crossed and hoping we will get to sign the contract," the band said. "We want to make our teacher, parents, fans and Thailand proud." ■