

# Help! There's a bear in my garden

It's a great shame that many of Thailand's top bands and artists don't play in Phuket. One of the hottest record labels in Thailand is Panda Records, an indie label established in Bangkok in 1999 by three friends who wanted to spread their love of music.

Well respected in the capital, the guys at Panda Records have done a sterling job of putting out some great material.

Case in point: Bear-Garden, also known as June Subnai, makes pop music seemingly at odds with the Thai pop music scene. Her style of singing is so sweet you'll think it's sugar coated.

You need not look any further than her debut album, *I Am a Gardener*, released on Panda Records in 2001. It's hard to believe that anyone in Thailand was making this kind of music seven years ago.

The production work is very fresh, creating an appealing sound that retains its artistic credibility. But it's Bear's voice that is the real attraction. You'll either fall in love with it or you'll fall asleep.

Bear-Garden went on to release three more albums on Panda Records before her latest offering, *A Friend Like Me, Don't Be Afraid*, which is currently in semi-release state on Panda.

Fans of Bear-Garden can download for free one track from the album every month this year until November. The only problem with this is that once that month is over, the track becomes unavailable. It's an odd way of releasing an album because if you're new to Bear-Garden, you've already missed the tracks from January to May. Get 'em while they're hot.

Another band worth checking out on Panda Records are Meawer. Their double-CD album *In Memory of 2538*, actually released in 2546 (2003) is an odd mismatch of pop songs.

CD1 is straight-up pop with a male vocalist who could quite easily pass as the male version of Bear-Garden – just not as lovable.

Meawer make the kind of music that you imagine would confuse the hell out of live audiences, but in the confines of your own headphones, it's happy music with simple melodies and keys. It's not the sort of music you're likely to hear much of on the ra-



Bear-Garden, also known as June Subnai, is releasing her latest album one track per month for free download from the Panda Records website.

Silly Fools have that big-band sound that is so popular in Bangkok's club scene in places such as Ratchada. Silly Fools have been making music for more than 10 years and the maturity of their sound stands out in *The One*. The album was released in March, with a limited edition version in April.

There aren't many popular Thai bands who could go through the transformation of changing their lead singer, but vocalist Benjamin Jung Tuffnell is a sound performer on *The One*, which is Silly Fools' first full-length album since the departure of Natapol Puthpawana, who left because playing in venues serving alcohol conflicted with his religious beliefs.

The artwork on *The One* is all kind of i-Robot, with the band members appearing as mecha-noid versions of themselves. If you can access YouTube, check out the video for "No Regrets", which was made by a young guy named Andre Weiss, who lives in Bangkok. Access the video at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNuT22tE\\_gc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNuT22tE_gc)

On a slightly different tip, T-Bone released their latest album (available in all Phuket CD stores) in May. *Seasons* features the 10-piece's typical sound, with shades of reggae, ska, jazz and Thai country music molded into a mass of happy-go-lucky songs.

With 14 years behind them,

T-Bone have been around the block and are still producing great music. T-Bone were

also the first Thai band to be invited to play at the Glastonbury Festival, where they did their thing in 2005.

The band headlined this month's Hua Hin Jazz Festival, but, sadly, T-Bone are another act who seem to have played all over Thailand this year without making a stop-off in Phuket.

Panda Records releases can be ordered online from [www.pandarecords.com](http://www.pandarecords.com). Bear-Garden's official website is at [www.pandarecords.com/bear-garden](http://www.pandarecords.com/bear-garden). For more information about T-Bone visit [www.tbone.ska.com](http://www.tbone.ska.com). For more about Silly Fools visit [www.myspace.com/sillyfoolsmusic](http://www.myspace.com/sillyfoolsmusic)

dio, but it's fun and will make you smile.

CD2 takes a turn for the weird. The disc contains a concoction of dreamy synth sounds and glistening melodies that come to life and show signs of influences from the likes of Air and Millenia Nova. This isn't new music, but it's music you probably

won't have heard and it deserves attention.

The music Meawer make resembles the sound that has exploded into the mainstream thanks to current indie stars Crystal Castles. The second CD could easily have come from the soundtrack of an 1980s Sega video game.

That's enough for this week's retro flashback. There is still some decent, less obscure music worthy of your attention. One of the biggest albums so far this year is the latest offering from Silly Fools, titled *The One*.

**Good  
vibes**  
By Matt Crook

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