

[POP MUSIC]

[NON-ENGLISH SINGING]

SPEAKER: When you think about Minnesota's Hmong community, images of a friendly yet foreign and occasionally mysterious culture usually come to mind, not pop music. But now that the sons and daughters of the first Southeast Asian refugees have reached their teens and 20s in this country, some are picking up electric guitars, drums, and keyboards and are forming bands, such as the case with this Minneapolis group called Asian Invasion.

Chao, Peter, and Denny Vang, who are all Hmongs, started Asian Invasion three years ago and are one of the more popular bands in the Asian community. Chao who plays bass, Peter who plays guitar, and Denny who plays keyboards, all are self-taught musicians. And Chao says they are a collaborative songwriting team.

CHAO VANG: Peter can write his own songs, his feelings. I can write my own song about my feelings. And then he can write his song about his feelings. So we mixed together in a tape. And we help each other on how to bring up the music and how to create it to sound better. But we have our own different feelings about our songs.

SPEAKER: As far as personal taste is concerned, 26-year-old Chao prefers what he calls soul music and country. On stage, Peter, who is 25, says he likes to play rock and roll. But in the studio, he tends to write ballads. 21-year-old Denny, the keyboardist, likes to listen to the head-banging heavy metal of the group Poison. Peter Vang says Asian Invasion likes to play a little of everything when they perform.

PETER VANG: Country fans, they come to see you. Heavy metal fan, they come to see you. New wave fan, they come to see you. To get everybody in there to have fun, you know. We would like to play just heavy metal, but then you just got heavy metal people come and see you. And you miss a lot of it. So that's not in good business.

SPEAKER: Asian Invasion records its songs using its own equipment. Many of the songs on their latest cassette called Hmong [? Lung ?] [? Nong ?] or Hmong's Life are love songs with a wistful melancholy quality. All three spent time in a refugee camp in Thailand before coming here. And one song written by Peter is for his first love, a girl he met in the camp.

PETER VANG: We love [? John ?] so much, but we're still kids. And I came to this country, I have nothing. But I just miss her a lot. So I wrote the song. The song is about what we did and what you say to me. You walk by me, and we see each other every day. But why now we are apart, and we never see each other again? Why?

[POP MUSIC]

[INAUDIBLE]

SPEAKER: There's also what Chao Vang refers to as a new wave tune on the cassette called [? T'ai ?] [? Chi, ?] having something to do with short skirts. Chao says the song contains a few nasty references that could never be used in normal conversation. But he says he was trying to come up with an exciting song for the band's younger fans.

CHAO VANG: I wrote that song, because when you go to parties and you saw a lot of girls that wear short skirts and catch attention a lot. And boys go crazy. So they whistle and they talk about it. And they go crazy. And I wrote that song, and we're working on it. And it's kind of a popular song to. It catches a lot of teenagers' attention.

[UPBEAT MUSIC] Yeah, you are sexy. [INAUDIBLE].

SPEAKER: The band is also trying to expand artistically by exploring new themes and writing more socially conscious songs. Peter Vang says he has written a song that compares the Hmong community 10 years ago to the far less loving, respectful, and close-knit community he believes it is now.

PETER VANG: 10 years ago is more careful. We are more care about each other. But now, this country is too rich. You have your money. You have your own car. You have your own good clothes. And 10 years ago, we see each other anywhere. We just like to shake hands and say hi. But now, everybody is just looking at you like stranger and walk away.

SPEAKER: Knowing first hand the havoc that results for teenagers who happen to be caught between two cultures, Chao Vang says Asian Invasion is very conscious of keeping up to date but setting the right example.

CHAO VANG: There are some bad kids on the street, but there are some good kids like us, too. And we are a role model for them. If we are acting very good, we try to influence them to do good ways. They will learn. They will follow us. And they look after you.

There are some others say, guys, when are you going to have your concert again? You've got to come. We haven't seen you for a while. You're getting better. What are you doing now? Do some more party, or do some more fun. So we say, yes, we will. We're just having-- not the time yet.

SPEAKER: Right now, Asian Invasion is just a hobby for Chao Peter and Denny Vang. And they play almost exclusively in the Asian community. By day, Chao works as an Asian advocate for Pillsbury United Neighborhood Services. Peter is employed as a machinist, and Denny delivers milk.

While the cassettes sell extremely well among Asians, their goal is to become better known among Americans. And if they continue to improve, become one of the few Asian crossover bands in the Twin Cities.

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