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## Pinoy ako bamboo

It was the early 2000s. The Eraserheads had just broken, and the acoustic covers dominated it by conventional radio. With the music industry fighting piracy, record companies were busy merging. Although there were many bands thriving on the independent scene, Pinoy Rock seemed to be left to his fate, limited to his own eksena. Then, in 2004, the iconic words reached the airwaves: Today, Pinoy Ako! Noypi, the first single from Bamboo's debut album As the Music Plays, made everyone pay attention. The patriotic anthem, and the record from which he came, struck a nerve that catapulted Francisco Bamboo Manalac, Nathan Azaron, Ira Cruz and Vic Mercado to rock royalty. Not that they were strangers of greatness. Nathan and Bamboo were members of the 90s rock superstars Rivermaya, while Ira and Vic were pillars of the reliable pop group Passage. Fifteen years after its release, As the Music Plays' impact on the Philippine record industry remains. Noypi still receives some requests for this day, says Papa JT, host of the Barangay LS show on Sunday night Sakto, Himself. When I joined Barangay LS in 2009, five years after its release, it was as if As the Music Plays was released yesterday. 'Noypi' still receives requests to this day. GMA News Online spoke with band members, managers, record label executives and music industry bigwigs to tell this oral story about the band, song and album. Nathan Azarcon, the band's bassist, declined multiple requests to participate in an interview. In 2002, Nathan Azarcon had left Rivermaya and was busy forming Kapatid. He invited Ira Cruz, who had already left Passage, to join the band. Meanwhile, Pancho Gonzales, Rivermaya's former production director, was in the United States looking for Bamboo Mañalac, who had previously met Nathan in Malate during one of his first return-home trips. Ira Cruz, guitarist: Iniisip ko kung pupunta na lang ba ako sa States. Hindi ko alam ang gagawin ko. Kuwento, inom. Tapos sabi ni Nathan, Ba't 'di ka na lang sumama sa Kapatid? Sabi ko, sigé. Vic Mercado, drummer: Nauna umalis ng Passage si Ira. Sumunod ako. Sumasama ako nu'n kay Ira kasi nagre-record ang Kapatid, parang kabubuo pa lang nila nu'n. Du'n ko rin nakilala si Nates. Laging nag-ja-jam si Ira in Nates. Tapos can isang jam sila, wala si J-Hoon [Balbuena, Kapatid's drummer]. Sinabi or Ira, 'Yang si Vic nag-da-drums 'yan'. Ayun, nag-jam na kaming tatlo. Ira Cruz: During Kapatid, ginagawa kaming pseudo band kasama nila Epy [Quizon], Gio [Alvarez], Boy2 [Quizon] and Norris [Lopez]. 'Yun 'yung Makatha. The new rhythm section was Vic, Nathan, in Ako. In moment, Nates and I were talking. He said Bamboo would come back, he said, to Vic. Vic Mercado: Nathan was on the phone with Bamboo. He told us [us], Hey, may be puede We are. We've also been in jam [and that time], Bamboo hasn't been home in the Philippines for long. Bamboo Mañalac, vocalist: I came back [on vacation] beer two years ago. I met Nathan somewhere in Malate. During that time, a lot of people are telling me that I really have to go back to the Philippines and start making music again. I've already started writing too. Pancho Gonzales, Bamboo Manager: I'm in America, I'm looking for Bams. So Nathan and I talked to him, he said bams were in the Philippines, I came home. Bamboo Mañalac, singer: I guess the phone call (with Nathan) made it happen. Vic Mercado: First I meet Bamboo, we got CMMDA in the middle of Megamall because Nathan's fuel partner, Bullfrog. It's probably around 2003. Ira Cruz: When Bams arrived, a week later, we got stuck. That's all. Bamboo Mañalac: There's an instant musical connection when we get stuck. We all wanted to work. I always enjoyed the first moments more: the first rehearsals, the first sitting at the table and the creation of songs. I enjoyed our creative process. Ira Cruz: Our first traffic jam, we're fine. Suddenly Mylene (Dizon) entered the rehearsal room, said, Are you having fun? Musically, we all shoot. We've played some songs that are pretty full, bams carries. Before improvising, drink first with the guitar. We had a longer drink and a story we played on. Bamboo Mañalac: I'm playing with Nathan again, a good friend of mine, my brother. If we start, we don't think that's a long-term thing. We think it's just an album, and it's good. Vic Market: I have no expectations and everything. I had previously said that at least

once, I didn't remember talking to someone who wanted to be like that, that our songs, one. That's probably one of those things that's gotten good with us. We just want to play in no way that we did. Just happy. Bamboo: And it's time, they're telling me there's no money in this. That brought us together a friendship, which was key to me. I said if I'm going to do this again, I want to do it with friends, I want to do it with the people I like. I saw us as a collective, but my relationship with Nathan is, of course. I like Ira and Vic, but it's not even close to what I have with Nathan. We've always known everything else for so long. He's like my brother. When I left Rivermaya, with the aftermath of what was going on, Nathan and I felt we needed to make a return from the Earl of Monte Christ. Without a record deal or even a manager, the band began working on their songs. Even the packaging for the album was done with a DIY mentality. Ira Cruz: The from the beginning it was to record an album. What Nates and I did, we call Angee [Rozul from Tracks Studios]. First please record first on the Tracks, and we will settle our accounts after they are signed. Angee Rozul, Sound Engineer at Tracks Studios: I have a lot of Rivermaya albums, so I know Nathan. I met Bamboo because It's Not Easy Being Green was the first album I've ever had with Rivermaya. That's the album Bamboo made, but when it was over, I was out of the band. In 2003, Nathan asked me. When he asked, I felt like I had a lead that they had a new band. I know Bamboo is back from the U.S. Ira Cruz: It ended well with Angee, he's on board. But a year has extended us for the first few months, just rehearsals for that, no recording. We camped at vic's house for a week to make a song. Even in my house, we got stuck. We'll do it for about two or three times over the course of the pre-prod- actually album until the end we do. Bamboo Mañalac: I remember traveling every day since I lived at Ira's house and it was a daily routine. And we move very slowly as a unit, but we're still productive. There are many sessions that we sit down, talk and drink. It's a sign a year to finish that album. The first song we did was Take Me Down. It's the first song we've performed, to prove what we're going to do. Vic Mercado: That's most of my job really, I'm accidental about sho-showband, so I really don't have an idea to make an album. We had camping as if we were camping in a place in my room in Marikina. It was there that Bob Marley's song Waiting in Vain. We're also recording our demonstrations. I just remember editing it, we burn until we form original songs. We bought for the manager. Angee Rozul: I was asked to help me for that, they had no funds, so in part, I became co-producer of As the Music Plays. [Four] our first moments: Noypi, Fun and Hudás. I forgot. Vic Mercado: It's a time when I'm graphic design. I'm the one who made an album design. I've been a compilation of Du's dusty on the album, which you've ever taken everyone using a Cybershot camera. We painted edges and made pins on bond paper. Then I finished fixing it in Photoshop. Nates 'on her finger in the painting', she didn't know it, but she seemed to blow her hand on the album, quite with spaces. The order of the song, as well as the gap between the songs That depends on how the tempo and tempo ended. We have many gaps, but we have a variety of gaps for the sense of transition. Ira Cruz: It's fixed depending on what we think is ok to listen in order. It's like a setlist. Vic Mercado: Finally we have formed a demo, we have it on different labels. The band begins shopping with a four-song demo around record companies. Bamboo is playing a concert and the '70s Bistro, with A&R men Russell Eustaquio from Polyeast Records and Kiko Gueverra of EMI was part of the audience. And at this point, there are rumors that the two record companies are merging. Kiko Guevarra, EMI Philippines: Everyone is shopping for a record label, as they also approach the EMI. I talked to Nathan or Ira, I was invited to their concert at 70's Bistro. When I go 70's Bistro, and [also] Russell, Russell Eustaquio, Polyeast Records: We're separated from the table. Kiko Guevarra: But we knew each other. Russell Eustachian: But I know, Oh, they're spot-spot too. Nathan sat at my table. Kiko Guevarra: Ira was mine. But Russell and I talked to him, too. Russell Eustachian: Kiko says, Russ, let's merge. That's right, that's our first project. Chris Sy, EMI Philippines, CEO: It became easy for Russell and Kiko for when we all met, in 2003, one that is PolyEast and EMI. When I walked into the paper at the company, it looked like it's cooked eh. Officially, I'm signed into the contract, but they're talking to Kiko and they're talking to Russell, trying to decide one of them. Ira Cruz: A factor by which eMI musicians Russell and Kiko. That's important to us. We need to talk to music too. Russell Eustachian: Kiko eh and I have a term: 'terrible factor'. That's a mix of talent for composing songs, that's the talent to play, they're going to be playing well. That's when you're not niggle them, you're really looking for them. Kiko Guevarra: You've always had a legacy. You're not signing anyone unknown. Well, you're a music, you tilt them because they're all good. Supergroup is that we don't call them that. Chris Sy: When you listen to the album, you hear that you're really sorry and obviously the singles. She's actually a non-brain to sign them. Angee Rozul: They presented the EMI and immediately took over, we have completed the album. Because they have been quite planned to record As the Music Plays, they have never recorded so long ago. Maybe if I hit the day of the study, including the mix, it won't take a month. they're also in the studio every day. Dundee on the album album will record not all songs at the same time. Take Me Down Ira Cruz: Bamps carrying from the United States. Actually, it's what we want to be the first single. It's the first kind of music he sings, he's playing on the guitar. As the Music Plays the Bandira Cruz: Nathan and Adi wrote, 'that's our friend sculptor. That's when we listen to Phish. The Phish because it's like a jam band, so there are so many solohan eh. We named the album debut because we felt when we played. There's euphoria, there's a spark of joy when we play because we have so much bigger than us, that's what we're doing. I still remember that Nathan, who has been released from the album, said: It's good to be a guitar solo in the end, you don't get the distortion. People's bass solo. They're going to get better. Mr. Clay/Vic Market: Nathan's yan eh. When we stuck edges in the past, that's what we're using the introduction. Looks like the Beastie Boys albums we're listening to. Ira Cruz: Nathan wrote it but Bamps' rap. We're doing it because we need a rock song. We have a lot of work to do, there's a part here at a strange time, we want the editor to say 'that's fine but Nates told Vic it's okay to leave. Because when Vic leaves, you're really lost. Vic was really great, I remembered we were playing the first cup of uniogaic tea with us. Then he just got to the instrument. Pride and the call/Vic Market: I remember bamps playing 'to the guitar then he's going to be on the guitar then he's going to be the process he wants to happen to the song. Ira Cruz: I think it's still the [Bamboo] uh of the river. I don't think I'm sure. Match take me down eh. Asked about Nathan's what he heard Bamps play, he said, Oh, I remember. So I guess it wasn't buoy, bamps sings 'that's the first line of the song', that's its most sealed eh. That could have formed in the United States or whatever. Happy Ira Cruz: It's Nathan's. That's all before Bamps got here. It became our third single. We don't want it to be the first single because he loves songs. But I was fine with this song. Jukebox eh. Vic Mercado: I remembered the nates drinking while singing and singing, I even recorded that version. That's for me the best version. There's a lot of version of that, and that's when Ria has a piano (Osorio), andun it's in the music video. War of Hearts and Minds Ira Cruz: Nathan is also an eh, but Bamps divided them to write it. Nates is a choir and a choir, but that's the second verse that's going to happen, Bamps says, Bamps because when she makes a song, she then sings, 'that's it. He's happy. But that's how it sounds like a band, that's all. The last one was formed. He was hardly bad on the album. They didn't want to record, because we're in ham for a long time, it sounds like nothing's going on. I said one last time, and then I was afraid of that, so that's fine. Vic Mercado: They're Nates, but I'm not sure. Nates is the only one who does the song, including what he thinks he's going to play and who's going to sing, to pretend Bamps was singing, that's the rank. So it's pretty easy because what you do, you're in his head. Light years Ira Cruz: It's Nathan. It's another song like a Phish song. Stomach the way I like the brother. We've been jamming for Matha, we're playing that. Vic Mercado: It's like one of our most recent albums. These Days Ira Cruz: Kay Bamboo's. Just a bunch of letters, that's all. Naked Ira Cruz: I remembered Nathan, he told me about the concept. They were together [Quizon]. He said, What if Satan's tea were Lord, they would be friends. Then they were drinking as they decided to make the fate of humanity. His kind of fall Hudás was over. They were both guilty, but Hudás wanted to blame, he's a traitor. Noypi Ira Cruz: Mylene [Dizon] makes her film with her actor, largely from agriculture. During the meeting, the story of the film told him Nates' story. Karl [Roy] and Bamps kept singing for the soundtrack, but Karl didn't want to. In case it wasn't the subject of the film because they were in charge of the price we gave him. They don't want to pay. Vic Mercado: Those are my memories there, Bamps is not there yet. I remembered they were drinking. I'm just eating fries, orange orange because I'm not drinking. What's becoming a discussion on the table, that's what it does as lyrics with Bamboo signed, that's the question of what we've been doing on your first single. After watching the band play and Watering Hole in Nettles, there is little doubt in the minds of EMI executives. Chris Sy: While they're playing Noypi, I said to Russell, No. That's the success eh. Bamboo Mañalac: The label saw it as an anthem and it's rock. But I think what led to song to be the first single was the moment. The moment of the song that emerged in relation to a narrative of what was going on in the Philippines. Chris Sy: The bamboo itself set me aside for about 20 seconds and I said Noypi and said, Really? We're thinking 'Take me downstairs. We know 'Noypi' is a success, but maybe we can keep it as the second single. In case it can't be second because they have legacy, they're going to be watching the release of this album, you have to go right away. Noypi is obviously the biggest song on the album. They're obsessed with a big problem. Cris Hermosima, Station Manager, NU107: The first track I heard from As the Music Plays was Noypi. I remember Chris Syll bringing me the demo. The first thing I noticed was Noypi's strong anemic elements, which was a good character of a hit song. Ira Cruz: The positive statement is that we want to be there. Vic Mercado: First language, more relatable and understanding. Chandelier for a long time, songs about The Filippings and sadness. Noypi because, even if we're proud to play with him. When we play abroad, there really is a lot to watch fromWs. Cups come to us, tell their stories of their lives. That's the song that was the other fine. They were inspired by the song that also inspired us with the living and the stories. You'll really see that effect in real time with Fine nu eh's song, when we play. You'll rarely see that, maybe in love songs? Pope JT: It's beautiful that you made the first appearance. They have Fine's heart. I'm still not sure if I'm going to be here to help. You feel like uh. He talks about Fine and how powerful the fine is. I think that's it. Maybe if any other songs were released, you could have had a different influence. Cris Hermosima: Noypi was a very good rock track, it was fair to fit that NU107 was the first station to break it in the air. Our listeners loved it. I remember the station doing a tour of the campus that featured Bamboo and the reception from the public was fantastic. Chris Sy: It was played by Magic 89.9. They've never played it when we're serving it. They probably want to take a chance. CJ Rivera, Director of Music and Programming at Magic89.9: I remember, one of the most important reasons why Magic in Noypi and the first [was] passed to The Too heavy - leaning towards the NU107 level. The magic was a pop radio station and its failure to accept the change that goes to the OPM of that direction and that time. I think it's really an honest mistake. To compensate for the foul, insert it into the playlist. The station realized that the mistake, so Bamboo came out after Noypi topped immediately. They have so much aerial play. He received many requests and votes from our listeners. Chris Sy: 'The second single was Mr. Clay. It's a continuation that because rock bands and they have to keep that rock edge to set better rock it ha! Vic Mercado: We are not given priority to divide what people are listening to. We didn't have a target. What are our songs? None of us expected that to be number one. It's nice to play our songs. Chris Sy: The single that was super-released was Fun. Magic to Yes FM was played to LSFM. By then, they're famous. With the success of Noypi and the rest of the album, Bamboo was suddenly in demand, and members had to adjust on the fly. Ira Cruz: I don't remember being okay with that he's not too busy, with concerts every once in a while we all got busy. Suddenly we met every day. I knew, we were even banned from the SM because we were noisy and bamps went down the escalator while we were playing. Vic Market: It's hard because we take care of it so much. It's a time when we play and at the same time we're building our team. I took Bogs with me, my technician at Passage. Imagine that we had laughed before, we brought all the lines, all the amplifiers, guitar, drums, microphones, everything. We, the mall shows, out of town, that's how we do it. I enjoyed our promotional album because I love danczling and watching our team. That's a time consisting of our setup, that's what the technical requirements we've learned, I've learned a lot. I'm riding Pancho's stage and I'm looking for a sound. Pancho Gonzales, Bamboo Manager: I finally arrived at the hours when they were alerting promoting As the Music Plays. They signed with the IME. I took care of business. It's a double danger to me because I'm also overseeing the technical aspects of the band. The hardest part of traveling with them is that the early stage of our career will be waking them up to a scheduled flight or traveling for a concert. Because sometimes you don't seem to be just a manager, you're still invited. Bamboo Mañalac: We had no strategy... What we knew we were good and, that's what we played well. As long as we're off that stage, it's something we can go to battle with anything we're going to do. Bamboo's furious live performances translated directly into the album's hit for As the Music Plays. Kiko Guevarra: When you look, you really buy and you really buy an album. Chris Sy: As the music plays I think it ends up selling about 75,000 copies, which that time was a lot. Kiko Guevarra: Double platinum 'yung As the Music Plays. It was very strong. Pancho Gonzales: It was their debut album that defined them: their music and their place in the music industry. It was his breakthrough. CJ Rivera: I really felt that the album was going to be a hit because you can never take away Bamboo's voice power; it's very different. Sa ganda nu'ng pagka-eclectic and various songs nung album sa, really congratulated each other. People were looking forward to hearing Bamboo after so long and here comes a band na hindi katonung ng dating Niya band. Ang ganda lang talaga. Cris Hermosisima: If I remember correctly, Bamboo won the Artist of the Year Award at the 2004 Nu107 Rock Awards. They also performed Noypi live. Papa JT: Noon, in 2004, when As The Music Plays was released, lahat na touch: mayaman, mahirap. Pinoy ka eh. Na-antig ka. Kaya ang ganda ng release noon, inantabayanan na sila ng lahat. He was very stubborn. Ira Cruz: The album did very well, better than I expected. Actually, the whole experience and I don't think we could have done it with a different set of people. Vic Mercado: Kung hindi pa ako maging masaya sa success nu'ng album, sobra naman na. Ang agreement namin ng nanay ko noon tapusin ko lang daw 'yung high school, pwede na akong magbanda. Nu'ng nagawa pa lang namin 'yung album alam ko na lagpas-lagpas na 'yung narating ko. Kulang 'yung pagpapasalamat ko sa mga nangyayari. For sa akin, lahat ng blessings na natanggap namin, there is plenty of talaga. Bamboo would create three more albums, top the charts, win prizes, tour the Philippines and the rest of the world. But the pressures of acting and creative differences would take its toll on the band, which would dissolve in 2012, eight years after their debut album. Ira Cruz: If I had done something I had done differently, I would have taken more breaks. We had breaks, but once a year lang, before Christmas until the second week of January. Pagkatapos nu'ng break na yun, tugtog talaga na matindi. Kasi ang nangyari, naiipon nang naiipon 'yung mga hindi OK na bagay. Isipin mo, magkakasama kayo halos araw-araw. After a while, 'yung mga maliit na bagay, nagiging nakakaasar na. Ang prank nga namin O kapag break na, walang tawagan ha. We were tired and, at the same time, there was a building of animosity. Obviously we had communication problems. We were so busy that we all valued the free time we could get. Bamboo Mañalac: That decision to dissolve, to move on from each other, I think we're all better at it. I think we all became men. The last few months, it only got to a point where it wasn't healthy for all of us, both mentally and physically. He showed us that it was very, very time to move on. Pancho Gonzales: I enjoyed your process of doing They are very talented and passionate people with different and strong personalities. Probably the hitch to handle them was the stress he brought from the tours. Russell Eustachian: That's because it's usually, especially when touring bands. Something will happen there personally, and something will happen there. Angee Rozul: You know he's here in the Philippines and that's announcing that dissolution. In America just because they're going to stop making the album and surprise you a few years ago. It's normal for the band to be incompetent. On the one hand he doesn't fight, that means boring he's a band. That means there's no passion because of that. Because of course it's four artists, that doesn't agree. Of course there are your own friends in your art. His self-criticism. But I didn't think they were going to be separated, I hope they didn't. Mañalac Bamboo: Probably one of our failures is that we talk about unity in our songs and we can do our job. It's one. I came with the ideals that's going to be my band for life. I came in with a commitment. But and certainly the critics, we're very good at the time. It's hard to navigate. Vic Mercado: I've seen it's the height and the end of everything that happens so you know where you should be now. You have already experienced that you don't know the security you are in front of the gate and don't want to let you in and that's why the security guards around you. Not all bands pass, we've tried to get over that and, at some point, we have to put it to good use. We made people happy. Ira Cruz: That's why you can succeed on your own terms. Otherwise, you always have to commit, but maybe it's a great set of commitments that happened musically. Bamboo Mañalac: Just the moment with them, I became a better artist. I have so many things I collected from each of them that they did to me what I am today. I can say the same thing to everyone I've worked with all these years as Rivermaya and the guys I work with today. It piles up, you have to be a sponge, take everything, learn and grow. They're a big part of my growth. Ira Cruz: Reunion? Fortunately, the conversation should be the first sitting and talking. I'm going to do the meeting if everyone wants to do it, and not just for money. But if that happens, it's fun. It's fun. It's been fun playing at least once. It's a four-stakes sitting at the table, and a bottle of wine and a couple of beers, and that's a meeting for me. He's not getting up. performing on stage. We are at different points in our lives and have different responsibilities. It doesn't help when you get back. It's counterproductive of what you do as an artist trying to move on. But again, you never say never. Never.

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