

# Musical Elephants

## Did you Know?

Every November, thousands of people watch elephants dance and play soccer at the Surin Elephant Round-Up Festival in Thailand.

1 In the town of Lampang in northern Thailand, there is an unusual<sup>1</sup> group of musicians. They play many different kinds of music—everything from traditional Thai songs to music by Beethoven. Both children and adults love this group. What makes them so popular? Is it their music? Their looks?<sup>2</sup> Yes, it's both of these things, but it's also something else: they're elephants.



These musical elephants started at the Thai Elephant Conservation Center (TECC) in Lampang. The TECC protects elephants. It teaches people to understand and care for these huge, but gentle, animals. And, like many zoos around the world, the TECC encourages elephants to paint.

▲ Sangduen Chailert helps elephants at a nature park near Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Richard Lair works with the TECC. He knows a lot about elephants. He says some of the animals' paintings are very good. But, in fact, elephants hear better than they see. And so he had an idea: if elephants are intelligent and they have good hearing, maybe they can play music. To test his idea, Lair and a friend started the Thai Elephant Orchestra.<sup>3</sup> During a performance, the elephants play a variety of instruments, including the drums and the xylophone. The animals also use their voices and trunks to make sounds.

But can elephants really make music properly? Yes, says Lair. They're very creative. Humans encourage the animals to play, but the elephants make their own songs; they don't just copy their trainers or other people. There are now CDs of the group's music, which earn money for the TECC. And the music these artists create is pretty amazing.



<sup>1</sup> If something is **unusual**, it does not happen very often or you do not see it or hear it very often.

<sup>2</sup> When you refer to someone's **looks**, you are referring to how beautiful or ugly they are.

<sup>3</sup> An **orchestra** is a large group of musicians who play a variety of instruments together.