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DOHA

FILIPINOS Anthony Austria, Sonny Lopena, Dei Dequito and Karl (Econ) Conception have been musicians most of their lives. In their teens, each envisioned living the life of a rock musician – and sustaining a living through music. Fast forward a few years, they find themselves in universities studying engineering, electronics and architecture. Although they never let go of their instruments, their music moved to the periphery. Later still, each found themselves in a foreign land pursuing non-music careers. It was here, in Qatar, where they found each other and became Glass Onion.

Glass Onion is a rock band formed by Lopena and Austria in 2007. Dequito is one of the original members, while Conception joined them in 2012, replacing original drummer Erwin Consuegra, who had to leave the country. The band enjoys recognition in the local music scene. In 2010, it won the international battle of bands ‘Battle of the Bands’ held in Doha; beating the popular United Rhythm (a band composed of Americans and Europeans) in the championship.

A band’s life is ephemeral – at least that is true for most. Yet Glass Onion has managed to remain united for eight years, becoming one of the oldest bands in Qatar. Despite being the youngest member, Conception breaks down their secret: “There is no place for pride. We do have quarrels, and there were times we thought it would be the end of Glass Onion. But once we get an invitation for a performance, we go and do it. After the show, we’re back being friends. We’re a family. We take care of our friendship; we take care of the group.”

The band’s performances include entertaining in different bars and local events. Although they have their own music, they mostly cover rock-n-roll greats like Led Zeppelin, Beatles, Rolling Stones and others in similar genre, giving the songs a fresh feel through the husky and powerful voice of Austria and often by slightly modifying the songs’ beat or rhythm. They treat each performance as a serious job, not for the money but for the joy of playing in front of an audience.

Pretty soon, however, other bands might be covering Glass Onion for – beyond their expectation – the band has released an album.

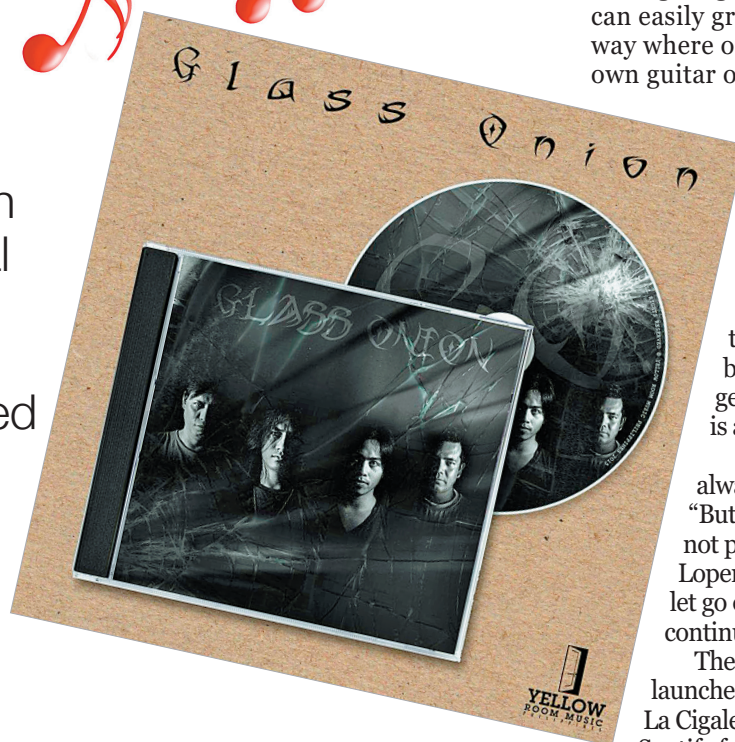
Everything happened in a blink of an eye. In April, this year, Lopena was asked by an agent from one of the biggest recording studios in the Philippines to submit a demo tape. He submitted Hanganan, a song he and Austria recorded way back with just the guitar accompanying the vocals. The following month, they were asked to submit five more and to submit them within a month.

But recording at the label’s studio is not possible since Glass Onion members could not all go to the Philippines at the same time. Also, there were technical standards to be met. One of which is for



When music is in the blood

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each instrument, and the vocals, to be recorded separately, called multi-track recording. After doing so, the tracks have to be arranged and cleaned (cutting unnecessary portions, removing background noise, etc.) and then blended into one cohesive music piece before the band can send them to the label. And since a recording studio is not available to them in Qatar, it called for improvisation.

Turning a living room into a recording studio and using borrowed equipment, the band was able to produce the additional five songs in time and up to standard. Their explanation for their speed: “I created the songs for the group,” said Lopena. “I know Conception knows how he’d apply the beats and I know Austria’s take on the song would be great. We trust each other’s approach.” They sum it up as ‘chemistry’ – each knows exactly what to do once they hear the melody.

Then the contract came. But it required the band to promote the album within a certain period in the Philippines which if they do, means requiring work breaks for at least three months. They could not meet their end of the contract and so had to dismiss it. They thought that was the end of them getting their music out to the public.

But as the old saying goes, what’s meant to be will be. Yellow Room Music Philippines, an independent record label took the band under its roof. The label has launched several bands that are now big names in the Philippine music industry. Another contract was drafted, this time with a launch and promotional performances friendlier to the members’ schedules.

The album has six tracks; two of which are English songs and four are Filipino. The band said they mellowed their music a bit for the album – that is, lowering the decibel from their usual metal rock performance. But the screaming electric guitar and the power of the drums are still in each track giving life to the lyrics. Each song can easily grow on the listener – in a way where one would want to grab his own guitar or drum set and play along.

The band finds everything that has happened “amazing!”

“We’re away from the country and there are so many artists in the Philippines and yet we were given this chance,” reflects Conception. “No success yet but to belong to a list of artists and get the trust of a reputable label is an honour.”

They also realise that there is always a chance to be discovered. “But it will not happen if you do not publicise your talent,” said Lopena. “It is important to never let go of your passion, and to play continuously.”

The album was officially launched in Qatar on December 4 at La Cigale. It is available on iTunes and Spotify for download.