

# HYPE

FEB-APR 2013 ISSUE 36

IN THIS ISSUE **+**  
NEON-SENSICAL  
FASHION

## CHARLIE LIM

STRUMS OUR HEARTSTRINGS

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THE LITERATI SCENE  
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31 Lorong Mambong



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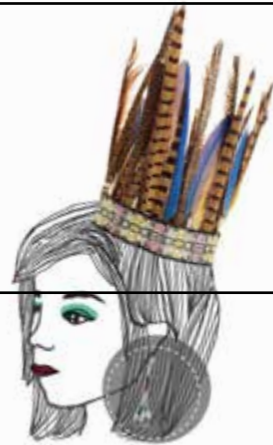


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# HYPE

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

When I mention the word **REVOLUTION**, no doubt what comes to mind is the notion of rebellion. But it also represents the idea of change, and **HYPE #36** is full of artistic pioneers who inspire that. For one, this is the first time we're featuring a local musician on the cover since our revamp in 2009, and there is no one better than **Charlie Lim** to represent the grit of forging one's own destiny. Dive into his story on pg 15 and check out the other breakthrough acts we've featured too, like **The Sam Willows** (pg 12).

If there's any institution we're going against, it's probably the practice of not reading enough. We've put together a special on **local writers** starting on pg 31, including some impressionable young authors who know a thing or two about finding the courage to put themselves out there (*Against the Grain*, pg 34). They tell you that reading is truly food for the soul, and whetting our spirits' appetites are new and familiar **independent arts venues** (*A New Visionary*, pg 39, and *Indie Power*, pg 41). Never before have we paid attention to so many local artists (wordsmiths are artists too, of course) in one issue, but that just means we know how to appreciate their spunk — and we want you to come to know and love them, too.

We haven't forgotten the voices that are a little harder to hear, though. On pg 68, check out some quirky but **original accessories** made by underprivileged families and craftsmen, brought to you by businesses with a conscience. What ties up this issue nicely is our **neon fashion** spread (pg 58). It's a standout, just like everyone we've featured here.

Now turn the page and be **inspired**.

Patricia Karunungan  
Editor

# meet the **HYPE** writers



**ALESSANDRA  
CORY MARCELO**



**ANDRIC  
THAM**



**BERNICE  
ONG**



**CHELSEA  
CHANG**



**DAVID  
ALEX LEE**



**EUNICE  
TOH**



HYPE's contributing writers are current and former Mass Communication students from Ngee Ann Polytechnic's School of Film & Media Studies. **Charmaine Lim, Chi Wan Teng, Douglas Yong, Kenneth Ang, Nadine Sarabia** and **Priscilla Lim Zi Qi** are second-year students who travelled to Chengdu on an Overseas Immersion Programme. **Joey Lee**, also a second-year student, is a writer and food editor at PoachedMag.com. **Keziah Quek**, in her final year, is currently interning in New York City with Wunderman, a renowned advertising, marketing and consulting agency.



**GRACE  
CHAN**



**JOLENE  
LEONG**



**NAWIRA  
BAIG**



**NICOL  
ONG**



**MARCUS  
LOW**



**YANG XITING  
LYNN**

## HYPE #36 PLAYLIST

*The editorial team was inspired by these songs while working on this issue.*

	01. <b>HYSTERIC</b> <i>Yeah Yeah Yeahs</i>	02. <b>SOFT ROCK STAR</b> <i>Metric</i>	
	03. <b>HONEY IN THE SUN</b> <i>Camera Obscura</i>	04. <b>BLUE IN GREEN</b> <i>Miles Davis</i>	
	05. <b>THERE IS NO LOVE</b> <i>Charlie Lim</i>		
	06. <b>WOLF</b> <i>Now, Now</i>	07. <b>WALK IN THE PARK</b> <i>Beach House</i>	
	08. <b>CONSTANT SURPRISES</b> <i>Little Dragon</i>	09. <b>SKIN</b> <i>BOY</i>	
	10. <b>MONTEZUMA</b> <i>Fleet Foxes</i>	11. <b>MOUNTAIN SOUND</b> <i>Of Monsters and Men</i>	
	12. <b>A MOVIE SCRIPT ENDING</b> <i>Death Cab For Cutie</i>	13. <b>LEPROSY [B]</b> <i>Giants Must Fall</i>	



With talented and upcoming musicians like **Charlie Lim**, **The Sam Willows** and **Trick**, who dares to say that the local music scene is dead?





# WIND *with the* WILLOWS

One of the biggest local music sensations to look out for this year,  
The Sam Willows transforms storytelling into music.  
Join **Marcus Low** as they tell him how.



"Our EP is a conceptual one — from the start to the end is a journey," begins Narelle Kheng, 19, the youngest member of local band The Sam Willows.

After putting out their own renditions of songs like "Animal" by American rock band Neon Trees and "We Found Love" by Rihanna, it was only a matter of time before this band got thrust into the limelight. Since then, the quartet has been taking local audiences by storm with their distinctive brand of soul-folk music.

The band consists of siblings Narelle and Benjamin Kheng and Sandra Riley Tang on vocals, and Jonathan Chua on guitar (although the Kheng siblings can each play a mean tune on the guitar, too). Benjamin, Sandra and Jonathan are all 22.

The Sam Willows launched their first self-titled EP, *The Sam Willows*, with a live performance at TAB last October. At the launch, their friends, family members and newfound fans bopped along to their music.

Jonathan's guitar mastery in "Crimson" flaunted the bluesy side of their music. Other numbers like "Nightlight" and "Crown", although not as upbeat, managed to soothe the masses into

a state of deep appreciation. There is no doubt that the launch was a successful one.

Their first single, "Nightlight", released online as a single, is more than just another song.

It narrates the four-year long struggle with breast cancer of Benjamin and Narelle's mother. As Benjamin puts it, "It was an intensely personal experience." This song is such a tear-jerker that you will feel like an emotional trespasser every time you play it.

The Sam Willows' interest extends beyond music. "We are not only musicians," Jonathan shares. "We see ourselves as artists."

Through collaborations, the band has been able to share their creative points with other artists. "Nightlight" is also the official soundtrack for *Hun*, a short film produced by local director Josiah Ng.

They show their love and enthusiasm for sharing music and art through always looking for collaborative projects with other local artists. Even at their EP launch, they were more than happy to share the limelight with Charlie Lim and Shigga Shay.

Local acts aside, their aspiration is to bring their music overseas — to America, in particular.

Benjamin, who was once a radio DJ with Lush FM, recalls an interview with Grammy Award-winning musician Corinne Bailey Rae, a singer whom the band puts on a pedestal.

"Her music is something we all take to. It's an amalgamation of a lot of styles yet still remains very accessible. Soul, jazz and blues all in one."

Without a frontman, The Sam Willows hold the belief that the music they churn out should be an even multitude of their music influences.

Dubbed "The Sam Willows' sound", Jonathan's music style possesses qualities reminiscent of maestros of both neo-blues like Jack White and the old school like Eric Clapton. The music that the band conjures up is brought to perfection with the blend of Benjamin's, Narelle's and Sandra's voices.

The Sam Willows have earned a well-deserved spot in the line-up at South by Southwest this March, one of the most widely known annual music festivals in the United States.





## Leap of FAITH

With so many bands in Singapore trying to make it big, it must be even tougher for soloist Vanessa Faith to hold her own. **Lydia Pang** find out how she has charmed the hearts of many.

It's a fine line to walk, carving out your niche in indie folk. Get it wrong and you could risk sounding boring and predictable. Get it right and you could distil emotional complexity into intricate and soulful ballads. Fortunately for homegrown indie singer Vanessa Faith, 24, she's got it right.

After competing in the Singapore Noise Apprenticeship and bagging the "Best Singer-Songwriter" award at the Originals Only Open Mic, a Singapore Art Café initiative in November 2010, Vanessa's talent was just beginning to get recognised.

Her debut Extended Play (EP), *Inner Voices*, released last July, boasts of dreamy soundscapes accompanied by a mix of unfamiliar — but not unpleasant — sounds.

What separates this crooner from the rest of her musical counterparts is exactly this: her penchant for introducing new instruments and sounds in her songs.

"I like experimenting with new instruments. If I find something I like, and it fits the song that I'm writing, I'll add it in to make it my own," Vanessa explains. "From the harmonica to the xylophone, pretty much everything was recorded live."

To Vanessa, making music doesn't mean remaining within her comfort zone.

One of the songs in her EP, "Green-Eyed Monster", is a testament to her open-mindedness and spontaneity as a musician.

"My friend, who's also the sound engineer, needed to label the mixer with a roll of masking tape. He tore the tape, and it made a sound. We were like, 'Hey! This fits the song!' And so we decided to incorporate it into the track. It was a total accident!"

For any indie folk fan, it's easy to feel that *Inner Voices* is an impeccable combination of both reflection and inspiration. Vanessa doesn't wear her heart on her sleeve. Instead, she expresses her emotions through the heartfelt songs she pens.

"As I grew older, I became more reflective," she shares. "My songs are a compilation of things that I actually want to tell people, like unspoken messages, or things that I find hard to express through just words alone."

"There have been certain life experiences that have caused me to reflect and come up with some kind of conclusion about it."

Just from the conceptualising of the EP to the recording alone, it took this chanteuse almost a year to see her labour come to fruition. Behind all the glitz, Vanessa admits she did not exactly have a smooth-sailing time.

Funding, especially, proved to be a stumbling block.

"I just graduated from school then, so money was the main problem. I didn't have much, but it helped that I had friends who were willing to fork out money to help me. It was kind of a loan, so I spent the first year of working just repaying debts."

Her tenacity in wanting to share her music has earned her wonderful opportunities that other musicians only wished they had.

In a joint collaboration with Starbucks last September, Vanessa wowed crowds at seven different Starbucks outlets with her clarion voice and moving lyrics.

According to her, the best thing about being a musician is meeting new people and new faces every time. When the going gets tough, being active in a community with existing musicians also gives her strength.

Being a musician entails so many perks, but what is the icing on the cake for her?

Vanessa says, "I guess it's to see people enjoy what I do. When I perform, we're actually celebrating me for being me, and them for being them."

"I am such a huge believer in how unique we all are as individuals, and that we have to come to a point where we discover our true selves and not try to be someone else."

Vanessa is not resting on her laurels just yet. Occupied with a full-time job, she can only write songs at night. But she remains optimistic, and that seems to be a trademark characteristic of hers.

"Hopefully by the end of this year, I'll get to put out another EP or album again!" she chirps.



# Strumming **THE SOUL**

Soulful crooner Charlie Lim is just back from his first tour around Asia. It was also the first time he played with a fixed line-up, and it was full of musicians who love their work as much as he does, too. **David Alex Lee** and **Marcus Low** ask them why they work so hard knowing that money doesn't accompany the passion.

STYLING AND MAKE-UP BY  
ALESSANDRA CORY MARCELO

CHARLIE WEARS A CHAMBRAY SHIRT  
FROM UNIQLO, \$34.90.



The boys huddle on the couch, conversing. Another sits a little away from them on a swivel chair, content to sink into his seat and pluck away at a guitar. From how relaxed they look, the casual observer would think that Charlie Lim and his band mates are at a family gathering — not a formal interview.

They carry on with this easy-going vibe in the four or so hours we sit together, but mellow is the last thing we would use to describe the grit behind their soulful music.

Charles Lim, better known as Charlie, first showed signs of musical talent when he started playing the piano at age 6. For the next eight years, he lent his talent as well as his vocals to his church community. At 14, he moved to Melbourne, Australia to further his studies.

“When I left for Melbourne, I left with the intention to study journalism or medicine but I couldn’t stay away from music,” the 24-year-old singer-songwriter admits casually.

Even when he had to return to Singapore to serve his two years of National Service, his love for music was never far off. He joined the Singapore Armed Forces Music & Drama Company to keep tabs on his passion.

Two years ago, Charlie launched his debut *Extended Play* (EP) in Singapore, which contained four tracks. To date, it has sold close to 1,000 physical copies and 3,000 single downloads. His music has also been played on both local and Australian radio stations.

He started out planning to stay as a solo artist, meaning that the band that accompanies him is ever-changing, but he has now found himself with a line-up that he can call his own.

## STICKING WITH CHARLIE

The band consists of Charlie on guitar and vocals, lead guitarist Mark John Hariman, 29, bass guitarist Jase Sng, 26, keyboardist Euntaek Kim, 23, and drummer Wen Ming Soh, 29. Having come from very different musical backgrounds, the five full-time musicians never saw themselves crossing paths, much less performing and touring together as a band.

“Jase is deep into the R&B stuff, Mark has got a very distinct indie post-rock sound, Wen Ming is a killer jazz drummer, and Euntaek is like a Swiss Army Knife and plays everything from straight-up pop to fusion,” Charlie says with a wry smile that does nothing to betray the glint of fondness in his eyes.

His own style skirts the territories of jazz, soul, folk and indie. “They can execute my songs and arrangements perfectly, but it’s the little nuances of their personality and musical taste that make playing together live so interesting.”

Charlie first met Jase (who was playing the saxophone back then!) while they were classmates at Caulfield Grammar School in Melbourne. They played trio gigs with another saxophone player around Melbourne and Singapore, but only Charlie and Jase’s musical chemistry stuck.

They found an accidental affinity with Euntaek when the keyboardist they were playing with went missing during a gig at Blu Jaz Café. “Our keyboardist just left without warning to have a smoke halfway through our set,” says Jase with a deadpan expression on his face while the rest of the guys burst out laughing. “I called Euntaek to attend that

**WEN MING,  
DRUMMER**



**MARK,  
LEAD GUITARIST**



particular gig and he was watching us when it happened. We had the score, and we needed someone to play the keyboard there and then.”

Euntaek became a permanent addition to Charlie and Jase’s act from that night on. Previously, Euntaek had been playing in an R&B group with Wen Ming and got him on board as well. Charlie met Mark through local musician Inch Chua and asked him to play guitar on one of his songs.

As for how the five became a band, Jase, Euntaek, Wen Ming and Mark were pulled in by Charlie’s quiet charisma and admirable work ethic.

“When he wants to get something done, he gets it done even if it takes a lot of effort,” Jase affirms.

## CHASING THE SILVER LINING

“Living on a shoestring budget” was how Charlie described their first tour around Asia. But that didn’t stop them from enjoying each other’s company — that’s how they picked up their latest addiction: the military science fiction strategy game *StarCraft*.

“There’s a lot of waiting around in between gigs, so that’s become our temporary hobby,” jokes Euntaek. “We’re all terrible at it, though.”

At this point, Mark sighs as he considers the parallels of gaming and being part of the band. “I feel like I’m getting my ass kicked all the time. It just forces me to step my game up. To me, it’s like a challenge and it’s something that I really enjoy.”

Together with their tour manager Sarah Sim, the band played to crowds in Hong Kong, Malaysia, South Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Japan over four months. Only one tiny disagreement surfaced during the trip.

“Sarah’s really nice, but she takes an hour in the shower,” jokes Euntaek.

Playing overseas was a leap of faith for the boys. They received a grant from the National Arts Council (NAC), making them the first group of musicians in Singapore to receive funding for an international tour.

Although the grant didn’t cover the cost of the entire tour, Charlie remains grateful.

He says appreciatively, “I paid for the tour out of my own pocket, so the grant really took a huge weight off my back. It helped us cover at least Japan and Korea.”

Charlie ended up breaking even on tour thanks to the grant and the sales from their merchandise and EP at the various show venues.

His story is one that gives hope to aspiring musicians worrying about the financial difficulties of kick-starting their careers.

“I don’t know any country that has more [arts] grants than Singapore,” says Wen Ming. “And I know that in countries where there are grants, the competition is much higher because everyone’s applying for these grants.”

He adds, “If you don’t live in Singapore, you’ll probably get even less.”

**JASE,**  
**BASSIST**



**EUNTAEK,**  
**KEYBOARDIST**











WEN, JASE AND EUNTAEK WEAR  
ZOHN, PLACEBO AND BEIRUT SHIRTS  
FROM HEIST. AVAILABLE AT  
BLACKMARKET NO. 2, \$69 EACH.

## THE MUSIC MAKES THE MAN

Gesturing pointedly at Charlie, the drummer continues, “If you have something that is good enough, it attracts people and you won’t be complaining about lack of opportunities. Opportunities will find you if you work hard enough.

“A lot of people don’t realise that music is a job. If someone gives you a piece of music to learn, you turn up and it’s learnt. One of the most important things you have to realise is that by the time you get on stage, nobody cares how hard you had to work to sound that good. You just have to sound good.”

“Music is just like an endless Rubik’s Cube that has that one square you will always have to try to fix,” adds Mark. “It just takes up so much of your time you don’t have any more time to play with anything else.”

The ‘struggling musician’ cliché is in fact a constant worry for full-time musicians like them. But Charlie believes with clear conviction that failure only comes when one stops trying. “Momentum is better than direction. You can’t sit in a room and decide what to do next. You’ve got to keep doing and the more you do, the better you get at something.”

Charlie knows what he’s talking about — he is always sending countless letters to venue owners and other musicians for gig and collaboration opportunities. He’s definitely not the type to just wait for opportunity to come knocking.

“I know a lot of musicians who are very good but no one knows about them,” says Euntaek. “You have to find a way to get your name out. In this day and age, you have Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and whatnot. Use them.”

## FROM DREAMERS TO DOERS

It wasn’t easy for Charlie to convince his family that he could forge a living out of pursuing a risky career in music. “My dad’s a doctor so there was that expectation, especially from the extended family, to follow in his footsteps,” he explains.

But his father eventually approved of his decision, and Charlie speculates that the validation came from realising that doctors and musicians aren’t quite so different from one another after all. “My dad was actually happy to admit that while doctors treat the physical, musicians tend to the ailments of the soul.”

“This guy whom I really respect, he said this to me once,” begins Mark. We sit a little straighter on the edge of our seats — this is the most we’ve heard the soft-spoken guitarist say at once, and we knew that he was about to breathe life into some heavy words.

“‘Unless you really aren’t meant to be a musician, if you work really hard at what you do and if you’re really sincere about what you do, you will always have enough. There is no guarantee that you’ll be rich or famous, but you’ll always have enough for comfort.’

“The older I get, the more I realise that what he said is true because there are a lot of people who don’t get ‘enough’ because they don’t understand what working really hard and being sincere at what you do means.

“If you don’t have that in your equation, then it fails. If you have that in your equation, it takes care of the ‘enough’ part.”





“

*Momentum*

IS

**BETTER THAN**

**DIRECTION**

You can't sit in a room and  
decide what to do next.

You've got to *keep doing*  
and the more you do,

**THE BETTER YOU GET**  
at something.

”

- C H A R L I E L I M

Mark didn't choose to be a musician at first—in fact, his mother had to force him into taking piano lessons when he was a child. “I hated it and I hated her for it but right now, I regret immensely that I never finished those piano lessons.”

Wen Ming didn't quite get his parents' support right away. When he was younger, the Mass Communication graduate was only allowed to play the drums he loved so much in church. “My parents were worried that I would end up doing exactly what I do now (playing in a band),” he shares. “They were not worried about the money, but about the lifestyle — the alcoholism and the womanising and drugs.”

“Which we all do on a regular basis,” Charlie jokes. (Aside: he reveals that he's actually a pretty “boring” person. “The last thing I see myself as is a celebrity,” he says.)

Jase's late father was a poet, but even so he couldn't decide whether to support his son's music career or push him towards a vocation that was more financially stable. “He had mood swings about it and at one point he wanted to run my CD player over with his car,” Jase shares. “As for my mum, as long as I don't ask her for money, she's pretty cool with it.”

Euntaek says that his parents are still fretting over his career choice. “They always check on me to see if I'm starving or dead yet,” he quips. Euntaek holds a degree in Precision Engineering that he hasn't put to use yet — and he hopes that he will never have to.

At the end of the day, Charlie adds, making music isn't so much about bucking or following trends — it's about answering a call from deep inside one's soul. “You've got to

look inward and come up with stuff that resonates within yourself first before you try to please anyone else,” he says.

## AS NATURAL AS BREATHING

These boys' parents now know better than to constantly worry. To these boys, making music is as natural as breathing — and just as essential too, it seems. They hold on to their passion with such tenacity and dedication that we're convinced that if they one day stop making music, the essence of who they are may fade away.

And perhaps that is precisely why, despite achieving what many local musicians can only dream of, they don't look back. They only look forward.

“Music is a lifestyle and I'm really fortunate that it's working out for me,” states Jase. “You don't even think about ‘what if it doesn't work out?’ You just put everything you have into it and do it.”

As for what's next for the band, Charlie discloses, “I'd like us to play more festivals in 2013. Besides working on my own solo material, we also have a few side projects lined up which involve more electronic beat-making and coming up with interesting soundscapes. We've spent a lot of time trying to master our own instruments, but you can hit a ceiling doing the same thing. It'll be interesting to venture out of our comfort zones and more into the realm of production. Anything to keep the creative juices flowing and help us make the best music we can.”

Glancing at his fellow band members, Euntaek sums up, “It's an endless journey that we've all signed up for.”

## BE MORE LIKE CHARLIE

If Charlie Lim's story has inspired you, here's a quick overview of the NAC grants you can apply for as an aspiring or full-time musician. Both Singapore citizens and Permanent Residents can apply, although priority will be given to full-time arts practitioners. As Charlie puts it, “momentum is better than direction” so grab your dreams with your own hands.

### 1. ARTS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GRANT

- For short-term training to upgrade professional skills
- Up to \$25,000 awarded

### 2. INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL GRANT

- For local artists to perform abroad
- Up to \$40,000 awarded

### 3. INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION GRANT

- For local artists to work with international artists on projects or performances either locally or abroad, or both
- Up to \$70,000 awarded

### 4. MARKETING DEVELOPMENT GRANT

- For developing the collaterals needed to promote local artists abroad
- Up to \$10,000 awarded

For full details, be sure to visit [nac.gov.sg](http://nac.gov.sg).



*Photo courtesy of Herman Rahman*

Local band The Summer State had the chance to open for Yellowcard in Singapore last year. **Bernice Ong** meets the laidback quintet and finds out about their aspirations to bring their music to foreign shores.

Right from the start, The Summer State had set their sights on conquering the hearts of listeners. The members weave their individual musicalities together to create a distinct pop-rock flavour unique to them, the band's first single, "Hush, We're Taking Over", was released in 2011.

The local outfit that's fronted by Ryan Lopez, 22, includes guitarists Victoria Chew, 20, Shaykh Enn, 19, bassist Edwin Waliman, 22, and drummer Bryan Sta Maria, 20.

Despite being a young band, The Summer State is no greenhorn. In their first year of getting together, they've already opened for renowned American bands like Mayday Parade, Eyes Set to Kill and Yellowcard.

Playful and down-to-earth, the band doesn't need to try hard to be cool. Bryan cheekily proclaims, "Someone tweeted 'The Summer State's singer can have my babies'. All the 14-year-old girls [are] at his feet!"

Ryan's boyish good looks only add to the charm of the band. However, he

doesn't want to bank on his looks for their music to "reach new shores". They are ambitious and don't fool around when it comes to music, which is evident in the premise of "Love, That's What They Call It These Days", one of the five songs that will appear in the Extended Play (EP).

"Basically, it's based on the current trend in electronic dance music and the casual use of stuff like I'm going to have sex with someone in the club," says Bryan.

Edwin continues, "Like Enrique Iglesias' song, 'Tonight I'm Lovin' You', we feel that the term love is used so loosely that its meaning is lost."

The self-titled EP is slated for release in late February, along with exclusive merchandise specially designed by the members themselves.

All five members collectively penned the songs. Edwin says, "We write songs that are like sad stories but... are about overcoming adversities".

Keeping a positive mindset helped the band to stay together in the face

of challenges and other commitments they had, like school and National Service, reveals Victoria.

The money to finance the EP came from their own pockets and they feel the pinch — but all of them, with the exception of Ryan and Edwin who are currently serving the nation — work part-time to help ease the financial strain.

This highlights their commitment to producing quality music. Ryan shares, "The EP represents us and it'll be people's first impression of us so we want to make sure that we make it as impressive as we possibly can."

Darren Lim, 20, who has known the band since their inception, enthuses, "They're such a cool band with catchy tunes...I can't wait to see if they're able to up their act in the new EP!"

The Summer State wants their presence to be felt in Asia and beyond, so expect to see more of them within the year.



# TRICK'S A TREAT

Up-and-coming local music duo Trick shows **David Alex Lee** exactly where they're headed for.



With their polychromatic body tattoos, it was no surprise that they managed to turn curious heads as they approached even though they were only dressed in casual T-shirts and jeans.

What was left of their intimidating image disappeared when they flashed a wide grin and stretched out their hands for a warm handshake. The 23-year-olds wiped off their perspiration and gave every indication of being thankful for the air conditioning as they slumped backwards on the snug couch opposite me.

Out of the music scene for months, lead singer of the now defunct local pop-rock group Quick Quick Danger, Marc Lian, sprung right back into the game along with rapper Richard Jansen to form pop duo Trick last February.

"Quick Quick Danger simply ran its course," Marc recalled as he furrowed his eyebrows. "There was no bad blood between the members, just circumstances that were out of our control."

Richard, who has been in the hip-hop scene for six years, was avoiding the public eye due to some unfortunate "betrayals" in the local scene.

"I decided to let go of everything and start afresh. But in order to do that, I had to be low-key for a while to get things figured out."

Despite their individual setbacks, Trick picked up speed. On Jul 31 last year, the duo released their first single, "BPM".

It aired on local radios like RIA 89.7FM and 987FM, and managed to clinch a spot in the latter's Top 20 charts. But Trick isn't stopping there. The duo has already begun producing their Extended Play (EP) slated for release later this year. The record revolves around their sentimental experiences on love and relationships.

"The lyrical content comes from a mix of both personal experiences and what we have observed," Marc muses. "It's a fun record. The songs have a happier sound!"

Grinning, Richard added, "But there is actually one song on breakups. It's like a ballad." Fans are in for a treat. The EP, to be produced by the duo themselves, will boast many different sounds varying from hard rock to electronic dance music.

"We have tracks with heavy guitars and drumming, and others that are similar to club music where there are huge build-ups and drops. The rest of our tracks have a traditional pop and dance feel to it," says Marc.

Of course, as musicians who take pride in their art, Trick hopes to get overseas gigs and make themselves a name internationally after the release of their EP. Says Marc, "I've never played internationally with my old band. With Trick, I want to change that. We want a place in Asia and with our EP, hopefully we will be able to play some shows overseas."

Keep an eye out for Trick because at the astounding speed they're progressing, they might not be known as just local artists in the years to come.



# SUN'S STILL SHINING

Singer-songwriter Greyson Chance, who was here recently for the fifth installment of MTV Sessions at Resort World Sentosa, talks to **Yang Xiting Lynn** about his latest EP.

If you only had \$20 to bring a girl out on a date, where would you bring her?

"I will use all the money for gas [for a car], find a cool little spot, put on some music and *boom*," enthuses American pop singer Greyson Chance.

And if you are that lucky girl, Chance will most probably be serenading you with songs such as "You Will Be The One" from his latest EP, *Truth Be Told, Part 1*.

Dressed in a plaid shirt, dark denim pants and a pair of rugged, high-cut boots, Chance looks just like your typical boy-next-door. However, after the 15-year-old was discovered on YouTube two years ago, he has been shining brightly in the music scene ever since.

Chance's newest single, "Sunshine & City Lights", has garnered more than 300,000 views on YouTube less than a month after release. With an injection of fresh elements, his latest EP is considered a departure from his usual style of music.

"New record, new times, there is definitely new stuff to write about beside heartbreaks and sorrow," explains Chance.

Chance feels that a song like "Sunshine & City Lights" needs to return to the basics. "For 'Sunshine', we wanted to keep it simple to make it feel just right. We used a very childlike musical instrument called a Whirlie, and completed the music with an acoustic guitar and kick drums."

By keeping his music raw and organic, Chance differentiates himself from other musicians. He keeps his productions uncluttered, so as to "let the music speak for itself."

Another track on the EP which has caught the attention of many fans is "Leila". Is "Leila" Chance's new sweetheart? Who exactly is Leila? Chance smiles sheepishly and clarifies, "Leila is a figment, she is not a (human) being. She is the perfect person. She has no flaws, and has the perfect personality. Leila is a nickname — she is floating around now as we speak."

Despite being an international heartthrob, Chance remains modest about his musical achievements.

"I am not a big guy when it comes to awards, charts, that sort of thing. I love making music. Whether I am making music for 20 people or 2,000 people, I will continue as long as I keep inspiring."

Just like other musicians on tour, Chance frequently misses his loved ones back home. But what keeps him going is his passion for music and his fans. One thing about Chance has not changed: that he is still the Chance fans have loved and will continue loving.

# EVERYONE FRAYS

By **Alessandra Cory Marcelo**



*Photo courtesy of Danny Clinch*

American pop-rock band The Fray is a staple on radio stations worldwide. After their hit songs “How To Save A Life” and “Over My Head (Cable Car)” propelled them to success in 2005, The Fray returns six years later with their third album, *Scars & Stories*.

The band has always captivated their listeners with emotive lyrics and vocals. Guitarist Joe King says that *Scars & Stories* is their sincere attempt at “getting outside the box and gaining more perspective.” For example, their first new single “Heartbeat”, is based on lead vocalist Isaac Slade’s travels to Rwanda, South Africa, where he visited a burial site for victims of the country’s 1994 genocide.

“[I was] at this gathering with a bunch of local [people] and expats, all standing in a circle holding hands, just kind of thinking and talking about Rwanda. This chick was standing next to me and I couldn’t tell if it was her heartbeat or mine, but it felt like the country was getting its pulse back,” recounted Slade in an interview with the Huffington Post.

For this album, the band also hired producer Brendan O’ Brien, best known for his work with Bruce Springsteen. Shares King, “He was good to have at this point of our career. He also made us believe in ourselves more.” And during their self-discovery, Slade had an epiphany.

“One of the guiding principles we live by is honesty with each other and our fans,” shares Slade. “There are a lot of ways to make money out of music, like putting it on commercials or writing music which sells even though you don’t like it. We’ve definitely done things we’ve regretted but [we’ve realised that] this isn’t us. Let’s not do it anymore.”

To which King adds, “Don’t close yourself in, be okay with being weak, and let people know that you’re a little screwed up. It’s freeing because you’ll find that they aren’t that perfect themselves and might’ve even gone through the same things.”

# PHENOMENAL PIANISTS

By **Patricia Karunungan**

Mention classical music to any teenager and the most likely response is that of scepticism — it’s ‘boring’ or ‘stuck-up’. Greg Anderson and Elizabeth Joy Roe, however, have made it their personal mission to debunk that stereotype.

It’s hard to pin the two, who are better known as the piano duo Anderson and Roe, to any genre. Despite their classical music backgrounds (they studied at The Julliard School together), they love mainstream genres like rock and R&B just as much.

Their mission is to make the experience of music as accessible as possible, and their success is evident from how they always pull such a diverse audience to their concerts. On Nov 4, Anderson and Roe played at the Esplanade Concert Hall. The



*Photo courtesy of Steinway Gallery Singapore*

day before, they whetted appetites with a short recital at a meet-and-greet at the Steinway Gallery. There, the two shared their hope that Singaporean teenagers will see that their music transcends the ‘classical’ label.

“These teenagers often give [classical music] one chance and if we blow that, or if somebody else blows it, then these kids will never come back,” Anderson reasons passionately. “So we treat every performance as if there’s somebody in the audience who’s never been to a concert before. It’s just so

important to us that we show them how potent the music can be.” And show them they did. Called “Out of this World” Duo Piano Fantasy, their concert was nothing short of electrifying. Composed of both the young and old, classical music fans and first-time listeners, the entire audience was left breathless by their dynamic musical arrangements.

If you’ve ever hesitated foraying into the realm of classical music, then Anderson and Roe provide the perfect primer for this journey.



# ROCKING THE CELEBRATION

Japandroids is a band to celebrate. Having released their sophomore album to much fanfare, **Andric Tham** asks them about being back on the road again.

2012's *Celebration Rock* may not have been their seminal work (2009's *Post-Nothing* was). The record is, however, Japandroids' finest work yet — a spectacular album that the band's drummer/vocalist David Prowse calls “a fancy way to advertise our live show.” He adds, “They are what we want people to come out to.” In January, they performed at St Jerome's Laneway Festival, the first leg of which brought them to Singapore.

Japandroids' sound is loud, fast, and all-out reckless. The music doesn't let up unless it's stopping to build up to an even louder, faster pace so you can switch dance moves on the concert floor. It's the rock music equivalent of an alcohol-fuelled frenzy that will always remind you of your teenage years.

Prowse explains, “At our shows, there's sort of this exchange happening. It's participatory. Our crowds are very involved in it. It's a very special feeling to play your music and have them singing [and] dancing along.”

He adds, “I think the main thing is to communicate a feeling to people, to share something with people, just to kinda say, ‘Sometimes I feel like this, and does anybody feel like that?’”

But the music is hardly love songs; owing to their hard-hitting, stadium-worthy, party rock sound to the grandfathers of classic rock and pioneers of the punk movement both. Drawing influences from both genres, they're able to make rock music that extols the virtues of almost all of our favourite rock tunes, from Nirvana to Bruce Springsteen, all without sounding like any other rock band that came before them.

The world would be lucky to receive them, then. Fresh off their North American tour, the St Jerome's Laneway Festival brought them to Asia Pacific for the first time. They have been so busy touring that they haven't had the time to celebrate. “We celebrate on the road,” David adds.

As a band that performs with such great fervour, there's much to celebrate. It's not difficult to understand why they appeal to rock music fans. Japandroids has made it onto virtually every “Best of 2012” list — from music blogs to established music magazines like *SPIN* and *Rolling Stone*.

How did Japandroids master their bedroom craft so well that they're now a band touring the world?

They express that the reception to their album was more than they ever expected. “[When we started] we were playing to five people. We don't love it so much then as we love it now,” David says.

“At this point we've gone so far beyond what I imagined we would do. It's amazing and surreal when we stop to think about it. When we started this band, we wanted to tour across the US and Canada. This is now pretty standard for us. We've toured so many other places beyond that.”

Despite the sheer technical sophistication of their music, the way they approach performing is remarkably simple. “You make a record that people will like, and you want to play shows. At least for me, I didn't delude myself into thinking, ‘I started a band, so in five years I'm going to be a rockstar playing in a stadium’, you know? We didn't have those goals. So far beyond what we've imagined. It's surreal.”

How does it feel to be such a success? “When they love you and they will,” the duo sings in the lead single off of their second album. “And if they try to slow you down, tell them all to go to hell.”

*Photo courtesy of Leigh Righton*



# MOSAIC GIGS TO CATCH

Can't decide which acts to catch at the upcoming Mosaic Music Festival? Fret not! **Nawira Baig** brings you six exciting gigs to attend.

Singapore plays host to a myriad of international artistes as they come together to wow music diehards at the Mosaic Music Festival. From Mar 8 to 17, head down to the Esplanade for an aural treat. **HYPE** recommends six ticketed programmes to jazz up your evenings.

## MOUSE ON THE KEYS

An underground band from Japan, Mouse on the Keys kicks up the indie scene by more than a notch. Performing with a unique blend of jazz and electronic beats, the band expresses their music through both audio and visual channels. Selected visuals and images are often screened to accompany their music at their performances. This hardcore, experimental Tokyo band is a must-watch act. Using only two keyboards and a drum kit, the band draws influences from art and philosophy.

To hear more of Mouse on the Keys, catch their performance at the Mosaic Studio on Mar 8 at 7.30pm.

## GRIZZLY BEAR

This American rock band has been belting out indie rock hits since their inception in 2002. Their antics feature both traditional and electronic instruments, ranging from the banjo to the keyboards. Having toured with Feist and played as an opening act for Radiohead, the band is no stranger to music festivals.

Be sure to attend their gig at the Esplanade Concert Hall on Mar 9 at 7.30pm.

## GRIMES

Grimes might sound like the name of a whining emo band. However, this dark moniker belongs to Canadian singer Claire Boucher. Known for her musical eclecticism, Grimes draws inspiration from an array of genres, including dream pop and industrial. Her enigmatic sound has been described as ethereal and otherworldly.

To let Grimes transport you to a mind-bending haven, catch her at the Mosaic Club on Mar 9 at 7.30pm and 10pm.

## TENNIS

This indie pop trio is a delight to watch. What makes their onstage chemistry even more powerful is the fact that two members of the band are married to each other. Despite only starting out in 2010, Tennis already has seven singles under their belt. Their most recent song, "Guiding Light", was released in September last year. The trio claims that their influences come from their own experiences in life, and so their music speaks to not just isolated individuals but rather, a collective.

Watch Tennis perform live at the Mosaic Club on Mar 15 at 7.30pm and 10pm.

## MUTEMATH

American alternative rock band MUTEMATH started way back in 2001, but they're still going strong. Having released three studio albums and toured over 25 times, this band has performed at Lollapalooza alongside Matchbox Twenty and Alanis Morissette. Besides having the ability to charge up the audience with their beat-bumping anthems, MUTEMATH is equally well-versed in the blues. With songs being featured on the *Transformers* and *Twilight* soundtracks, their versatility has only propelled them to greater heights.

Catch MUTEMATH at the Esplanade Concert Hall on Mar 16 at 7.30pm.

## MY BRIGHTEST DIAMOND

Classically trained as a singer and a songwriter, Shara Worden is My Brightest Diamond's main creative force. Despite having a background in classical music, Shara Worden chooses to indulge in pop music. Such divergent influences can either create a musical mess or something alluring and adventurous. Luckily for Shara, her unique brand of music is something to behold.

Be inspired by My Brightest Diamond at the Mosaic Studio on Mar 17 at 7.30pm and 9.30pm.

For more information about ticketing, visit [mosaicmusicfestival.com](http://mosaicmusicfestival.com).





*Singapore literature is gaining new momentum.  
Meet the veteran authors, emerging writers and  
pioneering publishers in this local writing special.*

# OUR BIRTHWRITE

Having been independent for only 47 years, Singapore's literary identity is still forming and re-forming. **Keziah Quek** speaks to local publishers to define what Singaporean writing is.

Most of us will remember reading and passing around *True Singapore Ghost Stories* books when we were in primary school. The series of locally written and published books about chilling supernatural accounts in Singapore and the region boasts sales figures of over one million copies sold since 1989, and nine out of 10 spots in the National Library's list of most-read books in Singapore, according to the publisher Flame of the Forest's website.

While horror stories will always capture our hearts and imaginations, there are also distinguished and budding writers who have lots to say about being human, everyday life and what identities they grapple with. Publishing companies such as Ethos Books, Math Paper Press (of BooksActually) and Epigram Books have been working tirelessly to give Singaporean writers a platform for their voices to be heard.

"Writers are very important to our country. By writing about it and getting it published, you are documenting what made society what it was at the time," says Mr Fong Hoe Fang, 58, who set up Ethos Books in 1997.

"If you don't publish, you don't save, then you have lost that part of society," he warns us earnestly.

Once a high-flying career man working in the Singapore Airport Terminal Services, he left his stable and well-paying job to start Pagesetter Services, and later Ethos Books.

"If I think that they have something worth saying and talking about, bring it out so that other people can see it and have other voices talking about it. It's about having conversations and resolving issues about society," he adds.

Another man who has thrown his future into the lot is Kenny Leck, 34, the co-owner of BooksActually, a local bookstore that owns Math Paper Press, a publishing arm of the company.

"I've been working seven days a week since two and a half years ago," says Leck. "I don't see it as work anymore. While I'm still alive I hope that BooksActually can be an avenue for a local literary community to form." He smiles, revealing his love for the cause.

He has since joined the fight for local writing to be more recognised and appreciated. "I take (the year) 1980 as a benchmark to say that we have a local writing scene. We have about 50 years but the fact is that a lot of people don't know that local writing exists," he laments. "It is challenging to get local lit out to the general population. The schools are not teaching it, we don't celebrate local writers as we'd do with musicians or film artists," he explains, putting into words the obstacles that local literature faces in Singapore.

While BooksActually fights the good fight through intimate community events and spotting new and young talents through a fortnightly sharing session called Babette's



"By writing about it and getting it published, you are documenting what made society what it was at the time."

Mr Fong Hoe Fang,  
publisher of Ethos Books.

Feast, Epigram Books has taken it upon itself to make our past illustrious Singaporean writings accessible to today's readers. Mr Edmund Wee, 60, publisher and CEO of Epigram Books, explains: "Fiction shapes us, usually for the better. It enhances our ability to understand other people and society."

Last year, Epigram books re-published five Singaporean classics and is looking at another four, all of which have been out of print. Also coming up are the short stories and novels of another five Cultural Medallion winners in Chinese, Malay and Tamil, which have been translated into English. "A new generation of readers can now have access to them," says Mr Wee.

Professor Alan Riach, 55, department head of Scottish Literature at the University of Glasgow, explains the importance of literature to any country: "No matter how young the country is, there are all sorts of curiosities about the particularities of language and place." He adds that when we have writings about our home, and about other places, this comparison "makes you more aware of the good things and maybe the bad things about your own place and what you want to change and what you want to preserve."

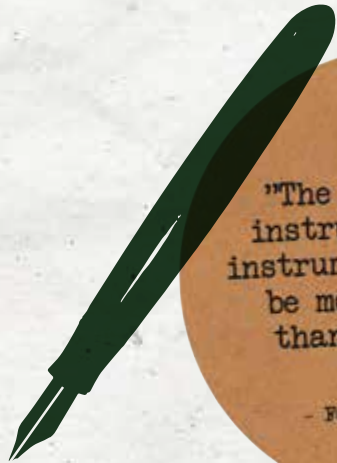
To local publishers, the presence of Singaporeans who write form our nation's voices. Local writing is a birthright and an invaluable gift that they fight to preserve and promote.

Mr Fong sums it up neatly: "Local literature helps to foster a sense of togetherness if we can hit the right note." In a rapidly changing and internationalising world, perhaps that is something to think about as we prepare to celebrate our nation's 48th birthday.



# MEET OUR LOCAL LITERATI

When you step into a bookstore, it's easy to get swept away by bookshelves brimming with international bestsellers — so much so that you forget we have great writers right here on our sunny shores. Meet three veterans of Singapore literature.



"The writer is an instrument and the instrument must never be more important than the writing."

— Felix Cheong, Poet.



## Felix Cheong: Nurturing New Writers

*This illustrious poet tells **Patricia Karunungan** that he has closed one chapter of his literary life to embark on another: fiction writing.*

He seems to have a penchant for long-sleeved shirts, so it's not immediately obvious that Felix Cheong, 47, bears a large tattoo of a typewriter on his right arm. Besides reminding him of how he started out — he wrote his first poems and short stories on "one of these old fashioned typewriters" — it symbolises a philosophy he believes in: "The typewriter symbolises an instrument, and that I am an instrument as well. So the writer is an instrument and the instrument must never be more important than the writing."

Just like the ink on his skin, Cheong's humility is indelible. Despite his numerous accolades (one of which is winning the Young Artist for Literature Award in 2000), he doesn't let himself become satisfied with his craft.

"When you're too comfortable, when things become too easy, that's when you become complacent," he explains. "In terms of my writing, I shouldn't feel too comfortable. So I'm constantly trying to find new challenges, looking for the next milestone."

And this next milestone is to "kill the poet so that the fiction writer" in him can emerge.

Since he was first published in 1998, Cheong has dabbled in both poetry and fiction, but he is best known as one of Singapore's foremost poets. His last poetry collection, *Sudden in Youth: New and Selected Poems*, released in 2009, was "supposed to be [his] last collection of poems."

He says, "The reason why I've decided to retire, so to speak, is that I've found that I am merely replicating and repeating my poems. So I've decided to take a break from poetry

and move on to something else, which is why *Vanishing Point* came about."

*Vanishing Point* is Cheong's first collection of short stories, launched in November last year. It was inspired by local missing persons cases, and explores the dark philosophical premises of how people disappear. The book's context is distinctly Singaporean with Singaporean characters, but the lack of Singlish in the dialogue throws the text's cultural roots into the grey area — is it really Singaporean? What makes a body of literature 'Singaporean' anyway?

"Singaporean writing means all kinds of things because we are a very cosmopolitan city," Cheong interprets. "We absorb influences from the East, from the West. We have writers who have been abroad, who have travelled widely. So to put a finger down on Singaporean writing is quite superfluous because we are such a multi-headed creature."

He adds, "There is no one characteristic that really pins us down to being Singaporean apart from the fact that a lot of the writing is based in Singapore or about Singapore. I don't think we have yet come to the stage where we have a distinctly Singaporean voice... So Singaporean writing is a kind of nebulous creature that still hasn't found its feet. It's still in the process of being developed and any young person who comes here to write can actually be part of this process."

As a Creative Writing lecturer at Temasek Polytechnic, Cheong also believes in nurturing young writers to build up Singapore's body of literature. "I always tell my students three pieces of advice: read, write, and read," Cheong shares. "Firstly because you need to read in order to be a writer. All writers by definition are readers first. So if you don't read, you will never build yourself."

Reading is food for the soul, he adds. "I think people who don't read are so much poorer for it."

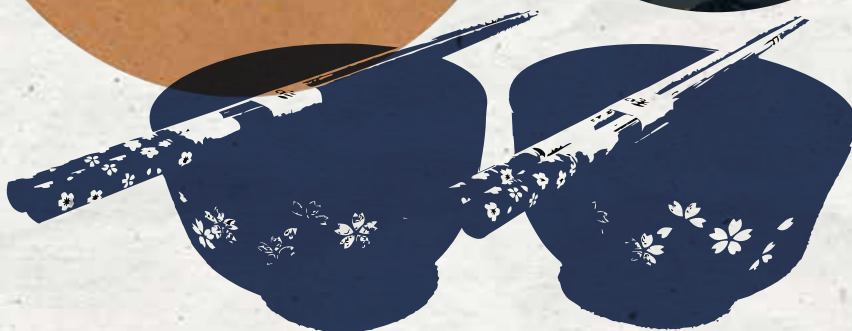


"Reading the literary  
works of a country  
is like listening  
to its heartbeat."

— Suchen Christine Lim,  
Novelist.



Photo courtesy of  
Russel Wong



## Suchen Christine Lim: Breathing Narrative

*This award-winning novelist is more than a veteran writer — she's a pioneer of Singapore literature. Lydia Pang asks her why she writes.*

It all started out with a desire to earn extra cash for a family holiday to Penang. Suchen Christine Lim, then in her early thirties, sat down to write her first children's story, *The Valley of Golden Showers*, and entered it for a national writing competition. A few weeks later, she was on her way to Penang.

It's hard to fathom that a writer as accomplished as Lim, 65, began her literary career so simply. Born in Malaysia, Lim and her family moved across the Causeway to Singapore when she was 14.

Despite studying literature at the then University of Singapore, she never felt an impulse to write — not until the writing bug bit her one afternoon while she was invigilating an exam. The result? Her first novel, titled *Rice Bowl*.

"*Rice Bowl* was the result of my scribbling while invigilating a college exam. That scribbling became a compelling force that saw me writing day after day, sentence after sentence, recording what I heard and saw in my imagination."

*Rice Bowl* shocked the nation with its brutally honest account on the regulated and pragmatic political policies of

'60s Singapore. Since then, Lim has gone on to pen other novels exploring the nation's history, including her third book, *Fistful of Colours*, which won the inaugural Singapore Literature Prize in 1992.

Lim's talent as a novelist lies in her stunning ability to weave her personal experiences together with public history to tell stories from a spectrum of perspectives. Whether she's describing the hardships endured by rickshaw coolies or the dreams of a young nun struggling to thrive in a corrupt Singapore, Lim has a knack for making the reader live and breathe her narrative.

"Fiction is created in a specific context, set in a specific time past, present or future. Reading the novels and short stories of a specific country helps us, the readers, to understand it beyond the news of its politics and economy," says Lim. "Reading the literary works of a country is like listening to its heartbeat."

Back in the '80s, the heartbeat of writing in Singapore was still shallow. Most local writers produced works that unintentionally neglected younger readers. Singaporean children were non-existent in the children's literature available then, and this to Lim was something that she had to change.

"This is the reason I write children's stories and set them in Singapore. I want to write us into existence in our own literature. We must be bold enough to imagine ourselves as the heroes and heroines of our books."

## Alfian Sa'at: Provocative Playwright

*Some have ventured calling this fearless writer the nation's enfant terrible, but **Keziah Quek** and **Patricia Karunungan** find that, sometimes, you have to read between the lines.*

Since his debut in 1998, Alfian Sa'at, 35, has proven himself time and again to be one of the most astute and ingenious voices of Singapore literature. But there is more to him than poet, playwright, and agent provocateur.

For one, he doesn't see himself as an agent provocateur. "I know what agent provocateurs are like. They're the ones who can really lampoon things that are very dear to certain people, like their faiths. I don't go there," he says. "Even if, let's say, I write confessional poems about someone I've got a very personal grudge against, it's not something I would publish."

What earned him that reputation is the social and political commentary he injects into his works — and that, to him, is a great role for the literary scene to play.

"I always think that the idea of Singapore as a discursive space needs to be larger," Sa'at explains. "It needs to be democratised, and what I mean is that usually you have articulations of what Singapore is, of its identity, its future directions and all that coming from political elites and policymakers...I think it'll be very worrying if we just left it up to these people to articulate what Singapore is all about."

"I see myself as contesting or challenging that kind of dominant meta-narrative about Singapore. I think it's always important to try to critique and even at times give alternative views. At some point as a writer, I do want to tell the stories that are not being told."

With the 2001 Young Artist for Literature Award, two Life! Theatre Awards for Best Original Script, and the title of WILD RICE's Resident Playwright under his belt, it's hard not to pay attention to this man. There's also the fact that Sa'at represents a minority, in the sense that he is a Malay writer who writes in English.

"I'm a kind of novelty in a way," he admits, "and this is unfortunate because I have been this kind of novelty for the past 10 years...I don't see it as unfortunate that I am sometimes seen as representative of a certain minority viewpoint. [But] I'm very conscious of trying to ride the token kind of bandwagon, you know?"

"When people ask me, 'Can you contribute to an anthology?' I'm always like, 'Am I the only Malay person? Is that why you're asking me — do you need a contents page that's CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Others)?' So sometimes it can be that way. If there are 10 other Malay writers, then I don't have to be so self-conscious about it."

Sa'at is careful not to fall into the role of being only a 'Malay' writer. He believes that writers can create characters and stories beyond the boundaries of their racial and religious backgrounds. But he also knows that if he doesn't write about the Malay community, no one else might. "There are times when I don't want to write about Malay subjects. But then there are times when I think, '*Aiyoh*, but who is writing about these things?' And that's why *Malay Sketches* came out."

In addition to *Malay Sketches*, *The Invisible Manuscript* was published last year. This poignant collection of his poetry catapults Sa'at beyond the arena of being just a 'Malay' writer.

When we sat down with him in May last year, he revealed to us that *The Invisible Manuscript* was never meant to be published. He wrote it when he was 22 and wanted to show it only to his friends — and understandably so. Every poem in this collection is a confession of the homosexual psyche. "I'm not as courageous as Cyril Wong, I think," shares Sa'at, "where he seems quite comfortable with all these degrees of self-exposure in his poems."

Poet, playwright and agent provocateur, it seems impossible to paint this writer into a corner. But that's perfectly fine with him. Says Sa'at with an almost secretive smile, "I realised over the years that I like being an outsider."



"As a writer, I do  
want to tell the  
stories that are not  
being told."

—Alfian Sa'at, Writer.





# AGAINST THE GRAIN

They're young and the odds are great, but clearly youth and challenges don't come in their way. They each have a story to tell. **Andric Tham** meets up with these three young authors during the Singapore Writers Festival, where they were first-time speakers.

HE PAINTS  
WITH POETRY

THEOPHILUS KWEK



Theophilus is a Singaporean writer who's not afraid to paint truthful, heartfelt scenes of Singapore with his poetry and, in doing so, lends a new voice to local literature.

"Writing is not my passion," he admits.

To be a published poet is a dream for many — but to Theophilus, who published his first poetry collection at 16, writing isn't as much a dream as a hobby. It's an itch he's always had to scratch. "For me, writing poetry begins with doubt and guilt. If I haven't been writing for a long while, I will feel the nagging sense that I should be writing something."

Belying the ever-present smile on his face, the 18-year-old former Raffles Institution student is particularly frank with his words. "I don't think I have discovered my passion. I wouldn't say writing is a central part of my life. When I have something to say, I put it down on paper," he says, matter-of-factly. Besides writing, he also dabbles in photography and likes to take long walks.

Long walks are what inspire him to write poetry, a technique he discovered accidentally after finding himself dreaming up stories to write on walks back home from school. The first time he started writing was rather unlikely, too: "When I was younger, there was an ant trail in my house. My mum wanted to exterminate the ants. I told her not to, but she went ahead anyway. I retreated to my room and wrote a story about ants."

In 2011, he published his first full collection of poetry, a book titled *They Speak Only Our Mother Tongue*, written under the mentorship of veteran poets Alvin Pang and Aaron Maniam. He was 16 then and was already eyeballed to become one of Singapore's most prolific poets. The book's provocative title, picked out by publisher Ethos Books, is taken from one of his poems reflecting the pervasive public sentiment toward foreign workers from China.

"A lot of people will think it's difficult to get published, but I think a lot of the intimidation comes from yourself," says Theophilus contemplatively (his trademark manner of speaking), "because you may feel that what you have done is not good enough and that nobody might actually want to read or buy this. A lot of the difficulty in being published comes from yourself, but I don't think anyone should write with the purpose of getting published."

*They Speak Only Our Mother Tongue* is largely about the Singaporean way of life, but also about his voice as a poet. "The landscape [of Singapore] is beyond myself, but it's filtered through my perspective." He isn't just inspired by Singapore — he paints scenes of her, and truthful ones at that.

He adds, "Aspects of Singaporean life filtered through a Singaporean writer becomes Singaporean writing. I'm quite sure a non-Singaporean writer can look at all the same things we do but write something completely different because they didn't grow up in Singapore."

To keep it interesting, however, Theophilus likes to venture beyond his personal perspective, which is where much of his poetic genius lies. "The source or the subject matter of what I'm writing about doesn't always come from my own life. I think it'll be quite boring if people kept reading poems about my own life."

He describes his creative process: "I start by thinking about the subject matter, what I'm going to portray — it can be a theme, or a relationship, then I will go and read other people's poems. That way, my poems will be less bland. The words that come out are a processed version of the words that go in."

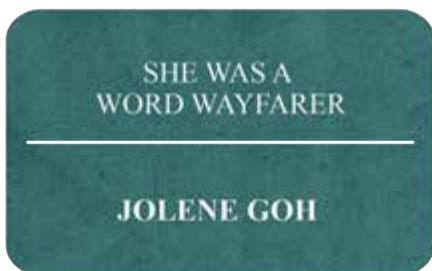
But being published isn't the end of the story. Rather, it's the beginning of a writer's career, as Theophilus realised soon after his book went on shelves. Speaking to him at the Singapore Writers Festival, he tells me that being published presents new challenges. "The first hurdle is to get people to get what I'm trying to say."



He shares another challenge that he has discovered about being a poet in Singapore — the poetry scene is too small: everybody knows each other. The people who read poetry are writers, too.

“It’s a chicken-and-egg problem,” he says, a hint of frustration cracking his calm veneer. “There’s so much emphasis on promoting young writers and not stifling them that people become scared of criticism. The only way anyone can change that is to start becoming a critic.”

There’s hope yet. For someone as practical as he is provocative, Theophilus isn’t scared of being frank, or even self-critical. “Good writing doesn’t always look or sound nice,” he reminds us.



She’s not a regular kid: born out of wedlock and into a broken family, Jolene Goh has had to cope with sexual abuse, family dysfunctions, and mixing with the wrong kind. Eventually, she found her way with writing, telling her story to the world and finally realising her lifelong dream of becoming a writer.

“Who says a wayward kid will stay a wayward kid forever?” is not only the subtitle of Jolene’s debut book, but also a bold, almost taunting question that nobody cares to ask whenever they chance upon a ‘trouble kid’.

Jolene is one of these ‘trouble kids’ — the troublemakers, the students who play truant, and the ones who dabble in drugs and play with death. She’s dropped out of school, joined a street gang, and been locked up in the Singapore Girls’ Home. You would never have expected it from first impressions. Petite and dressed in floral, the 22-year-old looks the epitome of feminine innocence and charm.

Her story of redemption and correction will inspire you, particularly because she writes her book as an answer to the very people who thought she could never get her life back on track. “For me, reading led to writing. I didn’t think it was a conscious thing, but I know that when I pick up the pen, I feel like writing,” she says.

Growing up, Jolene had always dreamt of becoming a writer. “I started writing about *Power Rangers* and all that. It wasn’t serious writing. I just liked writing.” She wrote whenever she had the chance, penning entries on her blog. “I don’t always plan to write, but it’s a place to let out my feelings. It’s very therapeutic. When I’m feeling sad or down, I’ll start writing.”

These entries she would write on her blog eventually became something bigger. After receiving positive feedback from readers of her blog, and coaxing from a friend, she decided to write a book about her life’s story.

Her story, a 156-page autobiography, was picked up by Marshall Cavendish and was published in August 2012. It did more than just fulfill her life’s dream — it also helped her come clean with what happened in her life, which she kept in the dark for a long time. “I felt very alone going through my struggles, so my book allowed me to reach out to people,” she adds.

In her book, Jolene recounts the domestic circumstances under which she was born to the myriad of problems she’s had to deal with. Her mother remarried a man who constantly abused her sexually. The despair she felt led to her doing badly in school, and she eventually dropped out to join a gang. She ended up taking drugs, sniffing glue and committing crimes; she was eventually convicted in Juvenile Court and sentenced to time at the Singapore Girls’ Home.

She writes: “I want to prove to myself, and to inspire young people who are going through what I went through, that I can rise above my broken family.”

For a story as painful as Jolene’s, it’s been a struggle to relive them. “But the end result made me happy,” she says. “My ambition has always been to be an author.”

It takes more than having a gripping story to tell to get published — luck plays a part too, admits Jolene. She didn’t have a mentor to guide her during the writing process, but an established publisher accepted her manuscript nonetheless.

Through her book, Jolene wants to empower others in similar predicaments to speak up. Whether it’s in writing or life, she only has one message to her readers, which is “not to give up.”

“I want people to believe in themselves.”



Writing under an alias, Nirrosette — whose real name is Munirah Binte Jaafar — is, at 19, a prolific fiction writer with two Malay-language novels under her belt.

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and a prolific blog, Nirrosette could very well be a master fiction writer already at her young age.

Munirah writes primarily in Malay under the alias Nirrosette, which is more like an alternate personality than just a penname. "I didn't want to be recognised," she says. Everything is made-up, from the author's identity, to the stories themselves.

"What I write is exaggerated reality," she explains. "It's 70 per cent fiction and 30 per cent experiences," she adds.

At 10, she realised, scoring high marks in school compositions, that she was talented in writing. Later, she wrote short stories and submitted them to a local Malay newspaper. She became a novelist after sending in a manuscript she had on hand to a publisher in Malaysia in response to a newspaper advertisement. This manuscript was later published in 2011 as her first novel, titled *Ikhlas A.K!.*, "a modern love story about a young girl for whom money can't buy happiness."

Nirrosette writes only in Malay, a decision that is greatly hinged on her upbringing. "I was brought up in a Muslim family, and what I write is greatly influenced by that," she reveals. She feels that what she wants to say is better expressed in Malay rather than English; neither of her novels has been translated into English so far.

A curious thing happened after she had her first book published: she found that she was no longer writing for herself, but became answerable to her readers. This, for Nirrosette, was her first brush with public relations management. "You can't please everyone," she remarks.

Soon after entering the limelight, her writing was heavily criticised. Despite being written in Malay, her books contain smatterings of the English language, especially in the dialogue. People didn't like it.

Criticism notwithstanding, Nirrosette's book became a bestseller in Malaysia. This helped her realise that she could help change the popular perception that Malay books were "lousy." However, she still finds that it's difficult for authors to make a name for themselves in the Malay literature scene in Singapore. "It's not very encouraging," she says. "You need to know people in the scene in order to get in."

Before, she had written only to express herself, but she now feels that, with a readership, she can no longer be too personal with her writing. It's now a product in the marketplace — books on bookstore shelves — that needs to sell. She has a job to do now, writing novels and making an impression.

Such is the reason that she doesn't have a mentor, for she worries that having one would "constrict" her writing. She never expected that success was a double-edged sword that could restrict her creative freedom.

Nirrosette eventually became known by her real name, Munirah Binte Jaafar, which she hadn't revealed to the public previously. She wanted to remain completely anonymous by writing under an alias, but she changed her mind after being published since she was no longer writing for herself.

Following her initial success, she released a second novel in 2012 called *Nah, Untuk Awak!*, another love story of "a hopeless romantic looking for a fairytale ending." This novel was also received with critical acclaim.

Nirrosette may be a surprise success, but she doesn't let up on the writing. She's hoping to become a Malay language teacher someday, and when she isn't writing novels, she's blogging. Unlike her novels, her blog is written in English, with a smattering of Malay.

"I feel empty when I don't write," she says.

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# WRITE STUFF

The All In! Young Writers Media Festival will be held from Feb 23 to 24 at the National Library. **Andric Tham** catches up with writer Ho Ren Chun and editor Samantha De Silva before they speak to aspiring young writers at the annual event.

## A PRECOCIOUS POET

Ho Ren Chun is a veritable genius. At 17, he was the first Singaporean to top the International General Certificate of Secondary Education English examination. At 18, he has published his second book.

You'll never guess from meeting Ho Ren Chun that he's already a published poet. He's just fresh out of high school, but already winging it with words.

His debut poetry collection, titled *Shrines & Streetlights*, was published in 2012, complete with a cover he had designed himself.

"I've always believed a beautiful thing about writing is that a lot of meaning is subjective to the reader."

-HO REN CHUN

As someone who writes splendidly for his age, it's no wonder that one reason he writes is to get better at it. But he's also an artist, writing to be heard and also to reach out to people. If someone could feel "not alone" reading what he wrote, it's a great achievement for him.

"I write to make them smile or frown or think or remember. I've always believed a beautiful thing about writing is that a lot of meaning is subjective to the reader. Different people have come back to me positively about different poems, because they related to that one the most."

He recalls one of those moments that led him to start writing. "I remember being in primary school and buying one of those cheesy motivational posters that said, 'nothing can be accomplished without passion'. I still have it on my wall. I do believe an inner drive is what keeps us away from misery."

Such passion, for Ren Chun, translates to other forms of artistic expression. He has produced and acted in school drama productions, and also dabbles with music.

But he is still learning, he says. "There are things I've always wanted to write, things that occur to me through the observance of life, and emotions that well up in me that I want to capture in writing. I think it's a matter of time until I feel I have enough ability [to capture that]."

In fact, Ren Chun believes that it's only "a matter of time" until he writes his magnum opus. Specifically, he wants to pen a series of "immersive" novels. "One with interconnected worlds and that can span different genres," he explains.

## THE WORD WIZARD

Samantha De Silva, 30, is a different type of wordsmith. As a freelance editor, she works with words that have already been laid down, tweaking and perfecting them.

"To write is human, to edit is divine," Stephen King wrote in the foreword to his memoir. Editor Samantha De Silva can attest to that. A self-proclaimed "word wizard", her work has run the gamut from fiction novels to video game scripts.

Many people understand an editor to be someone who spots grammatical and spelling errors before letting books go on shelves. But, as De Silva would have us understand, the role of an editor is not just technical refinement — it is a crucial part in the process between writing and publishing. A writer would have his or her work perfected and fully realised before it goes on shelf.

To help writers and editors alike to understand the role of editing in writing projects, Samantha has been holding editing workshops as well as mentorship and coaching programmes.

Editing is a process of refining; of course, it will have to retain the essence of what the original work was trying to convey, but also help it realise its vision in a clearer way.

"It's a constant conversation, a partnership between the editor and the author to get the story in the best shape possible for people to read and enjoy," De Silva explains.

Fledgling writers will be fortunate to have her as a mentor. Both a job and a hobby to her, writing is central to her professional and personal life. "When your work is something you're passionate about, things tend to fall into place," she says.

"I think as a writer, you need to be constantly pushing yourself to see where else the page is going to take you."

-SAMANTHA DE SILVA

She observed, in meeting young writers, that there are two very broad categories of them facing different challenges. First, she explains, there are fledgling writers who need to develop their confidence and craft as writers. "Self-doubt and a lack of support can be crippling at this point, so I think any young writer would do well to seek out other writers, if only to meet for coffee and commiserate," she explains.

The other category of young writers is those who have already done some writing. "The challenge for these writers is to break out of their comfort zone. I think as a writer, you need to be constantly pushing yourself to see where else the page is going to take you." For such writers, she suggests collaborating with other writers, even across disciplines.

That said, editing isn't the easiest job in the world. De Silva explains that balance is essential in doing her job. "You have to be nurturing and encouraging while staying firm about things like bloated word counts and coaxing authors to meet deadlines."



# A NEW VISIONARY

TheLibrary is a free reference library dedicated to the arts. **Eunice Toh** sits down with its founder, **Jing Quek**, to find out where the idea originated, and how it could possibly turn Singapore into 'the New York of the East'.

He was a boy who loved books. He would go to the bookstore after school and devote his time to poring over pages. It was the same story when he left for New York City to study at 19. He spent his evenings after classes holed up in bookstores, taking in the wealth of knowledge they provided. But he also gained something different: inspiration. He brought this back to Singapore and turned it into something quite possibly revolutionary.

Meet Jing Quek, the 29-year-old founder of Singapore's first reference library dedicated to the arts. "Books have always been a huge part of my life," he recalls. "I remember sitting in a corner of Kinokuniya just browsing the books. I then spent five years in New York and the bookstores had a lot of visual arts-related material. I learnt a lot from just having access to these books."

After graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the School of Visual Arts in New York, he returned to Singapore in 2007 to start Super, a print production company that produces advertising images for commercial clients. And in October last year, he started TheLibrary as a side project funded by Super.

"Such (visual arts-related) books tend to be quite expensive, and most people are unwilling to spend on them," explains Jing Quek. "I find it a waste, as I reckon people would enjoy these books if they had the access to it."

"I feel that it is important to share the experience I had in New York with others by giving them the space where they can learn from these books." And that is how and why TheLibrary was born.

Located along Keong Saik Road, TheLibrary is dedicated to the fields of art, architecture, design and

photography, with books available there chosen by industry professionals. The 100-square-foot area is free and available for the public to use.

By pioneering this creative avenue, Jing Quek hopes that Singaporeans will garner more interest in the arts. "It starts from being exposed to these creative fields in a non-threatening manner."

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"We are not a visually trained kind of culture; we're very logical and practical ... Hopefully, this will help to catalyse a greater appreciation of visual arts among the general public."

However, Jing Quek does not view himself as a change-maker.

He says, with a chuckle, "Starting this initiative hopefully will affect some sort of benefit for the creative community...but whether that leads to change is not up to me to say. I think it's all just small steps. It takes a lot of effort on everybody's part to have a collective impact on society."

TheLibrary is also a stepping-stone to his vision: Singapore as the New York of the East.

"Singapore is now in a very dynamic period with a population filled with highly educated professionals," he explains. "There's a lot of potential for an exchange of ideas and for things to happen."

"The intellectual element is present, and I believe that appreciation for visual art forms can help to inspire new ideas and such. Hopefully, we can have a culture with thinkers and makers, people coming up with strong ideas. This is what makes New York so dynamic. That's the vision, that's the future."

And education is key. That is where TheLibrary comes in.

Says Jing Quek, "You can have all the exhibitions in the world, but people need to have an outlet that is easily accessible. Education is the first step, and books are a great way of getting people's feet wet."

He also feels that this is the most effective medium to raise the level of creativity in Singapore as it caters to our lifestyle. "Singaporeans are very 'own time, own target'. We're also quite passive. Books are good because people can immerse themselves at their own pace. It's also a resource that can serve a lot of people, and can continually be re-used."

Jing Quek aims to increase the range of books over time. His current collection consists of over 1,000 books worth about \$60,000.

"There are a lot of initiatives out there, but this is something unique. This is a way I can help to inspire the general public, and I also hope to affect Singapore in the way I desire to see it in the future."

“There are a lot of initiatives out there, but this is something unique. This is a way I can help to inspire the general public, and I also hope to affect Singapore in the way I desire to see it in the future.”

**- Jing Quek**  
*Founder of TheLibrary*





# INDIE POWER

With the closing of popular art venues such as the The Pigeonhole and Post-Museum, **Jolene Leong** takes a look at the arts as a business and its importance.



It's easy to say that you are a supporter of the local arts in Singapore but it's another thing to bring that into what you do as a business. Independent art venues have been slowly evolving in recent years to cater to a growing interest in the arts. With Singapore pushing and promoting the arts, we see festival after festival packed into our yearly schedule. Why then, do we still need to support the arts as a business?

When we say "art", we're going beyond the usual image of painting and exhibitions. Art also encompasses literature and music. Post-Museum and The Pigeonhole were some places that aimed to feature these forms of art but have, sadly, closed down recently due to financial difficulties amongst other reasons. This makes it seem as if it is futile to support the arts through business.

BooksActually, a store selling a wide range of books both local and foreign, is one of the few independent art venues that continued to push on despite having difficulties with the rental hike. Co-owner Kenny Leck, 34, still continues to look beyond the financial issues and sees creating an impact for the arts as more important.

## IT'S NOT ABOUT THE MONEY

"Money is a good thing. I don't deny that. But I think I would have more fun selling books than beer, for example," he says. "There's a certain amount of social impact to it. It's just like how Ave and Rayner started The Pigeonhole. They didn't start it just to sell you beer or alcohol. They set it up for all other reasons except those. Those were secondary.

"The primary reason was to support the arts by giving a venue for different art activities. And I think it's the same

thing with the bookstore. We're trying to sell you different books. Books that I think are worth reading and spending your money on, worth for you to pass around and sell to a secondhand bookstore."

For many of these arts avenue owners, why they set up their shops in the first place is to support local talent and create more awareness for the arts.

"If I don't support local books or the local authors, if I don't try and carry as much of their work as possible, then what's the point of me selling books?" exclaims Leck. "I can't use the word 'responsibility' but it's part and parcel of what we should be doing." He adds, "Having the bookstore enables me to not just support the literary arts. We have artists who have done small shows here. We carry CDs [from local musicians] and local art works."





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“If I don’t support local books or the local authors, if I don’t try and carry as much of their work as possible, then what’s the point of me selling books?”

- Kenny Leck,  
*Co-owner of BooksActually*



Kenny Leck, the founder of BooksActually.

Making the arts one's business is not all that glamorous and self-righteous. Leck muses, “I can’t say that [the business] is still very viable. It does require a lot of effort and a lot of thinking. We can’t just go on autopilot.”

#### YOU ARE WHAT YOU LOVE

It seems that these business owners operate on their beliefs and what they enjoy doing most. Even when apparent failure comes knocking, they don’t let their love for the arts die there. For instance, Post-Museum still organises events via its Facebook page.

In addition, the owners of The Pigeonhole said on their Facebook page that even though they were unable to raise their target amount of money to keep paying the rent, they “still have hopes” to “re-emerge as a physical space.”

The post continued, “In the meantime we’ll also be looking into how we can continue supporting the arts and civil society without the need for a physical premise.”

Being an arts avenue is risky business, but the chance to play a role, no matter how small, in the local arts scene is a more rewarding profit than any monetary gain.

#### REALITY CHECK

Sadly, public support for such venues isn’t always available. But instead of blaming the lack of support, Leck feels that if his store ever closed down, he would think that it was he who did not do enough.

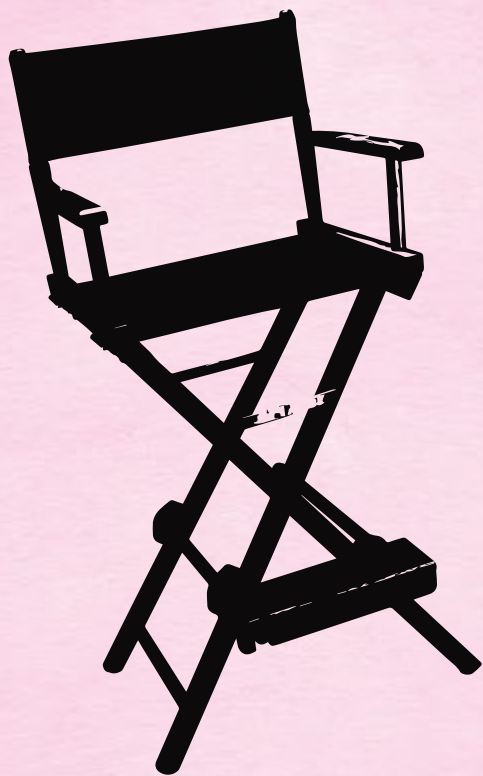
“We can’t just collectively blame others because nobody supported us because there are people [who still do]. We also can’t say that there’s not enough advertising power because we have the Internet these days.”

Leck cites Math Paper Press, the bookstore’s publishing arm, which was set up in 2011. “How many authors [have we published who] are that well-known that you can name me the top three? We haven’t reached that. Am I going to say that it’s because people are not receptive? I can’t. Because I’ve not put it out there and I’m not doing the right things. If not, these authors could have been household names by now.”

It is these independent art venues that help cultivate a spirit for the arts. They also provide a platform for emerging talents to showcase their works.

Musician Irfan Margono, 23, who once performed a DJ set at The Pigeonhole, agrees. “They’re a gem to Singapore and we need more of them!”





# From *Dolly* To DIRECTOR

Seasoned actress Pam Oei made her directorial debut last December with W!ld Rice's *Hansel and Gretel*. **Eunice Toh** caught up with her during rehearsal to find out if this is a career switch.

Dressed casually in a black T-shirt and grey slacks, Pam Oei sat with her elbows propped on a table, quietly observing the ongoing rehearsal. It was a November afternoon, just a few weeks before the curtain rose on this production.

Suddenly, she paused the action and got up from her seat. The petite woman walked towards the cast, amicably explaining how the scene should go. It was smiles all around as Oei returned to her chair.

"And... last pose!" she called.

*Hansel and Gretel* marked Oei's first time in the director's chair. As to how she ended up there, she jokes, "I was forced to take it at gunpoint! No, I mean, Ivan (founder of W!ld Rice) approached me at the end of 2011.

"My instinct was to say no as I've never actively pursued directing. But he continued to ask me about it so in the end, I relented."

And while Oei might have mentioned it in jest, that "at gunpoint" decision

actually proved to be a turning point for her.

## *Freaky 40*

Acting has been Oei's bread and butter for the past 15 years. Having worked in film, television and theatre, she is most famous for her role as one-third of the Dim Sum Dollies, a musical cabaret group. But last year, she decided to take the plunge into the unknown.

"I'm 40, and I thought it'll be a nice challenge for myself at this age to push the boundaries and do something that I'm not used to," she explains.

*Hansel and Gretel* was based on the fairytale of the same name by the Brothers Grimm, but with a local twist. After being thrown out of their Queenstown home by their evil stepmother, Hansel and Gretel find themselves abandoned in the Mandai forest. As they search for a way out, they discover a house made of goodies such as kaya toast and cookies.

Plenty of local topics and events were also incorporated into the show, which ran from Nov 22 to Dec 15. While the basic storyline stayed true to the original tale, the pantomime had no qualms about offering social commentary on the most talked about issues in Singapore last year. From Malay weddings to Sun Ho to maids falling out of windows, playwright Alfian Sa'at was spot-on with his clever zings and humorous jabs. His lyrics were pretty catchy, too.

From her calm demeanour and seamless instructions during the rehearsal, it was hard to tell that this was Oei's maiden attempt at directing a production. But, she confesses, she still gets lost in the woods.

"As an actor I only see certain aspects," she contemplates, "but now, I have to oversee the entire thing as well as all the different elements. It gets a little freaky, as there's a lot to do."

Thankfully, working with several familiar faces has helped her in finding her way around. Says Oei, "A lot of us are old friends, and I immediately

clicked with my new stage manager. "It's been a very easy-going relationship with the cast and crew. We have the same sensibilities most of the time, and I'm very open to experimentation and different types of interpretation."

The cast, too, gave their stamp of approval. Says Dwayne Tan, 35, who played Hansel, "As an actor, she understands what we go through so that's very helpful."

"Pam lets us play a lot, which is good, as playing is a great way of finding the magic of a scene," gushes Denise Tan, 37, who played Gretel. "She knows exactly what she wants, because she's done it before."

## Unexpected Delights

Dwayne and Denise played a pair of 9-year-old twins. This may raise some eyebrows considering that the actors are actually in their mid-30s, but they made playing the role of naive and immature children believable.

"We both have a youthful spirit and energy, which we bring to the characters," says Denise. "All adults secretly want to stay kids, so this is the perfect vehicle for us to just play, have fun, and be kids again."

Besides Dwayne and Denise, the production also saw well-known local personalities Sebastian Tan and Vernetta Lopez joining the hilarious cast. But what really endeared the show to audiences was the addition of children from FIRST STAGE!, a W!ld Rice children's theatre project.

The 4- to 12-year-old kids had audiences cooing in delight during the dazzling musical numbers. Unlike previous W!ld Rice pantomimes, *Hansel and Gretel* gave these children several speaking lines.

Overseeing the kids was a challenging task for Pam, and this was on top of looking after her son at home, who is about 2 years old. But it was also the kids who made the pantomime fresh and fun — not just the ones on stage, but off-stage too.

"Every night, the kids in the audience give it a new dimension. They really keep you on your toes," shares Oei with a smile on her face. Suddenly, she turns to Sebastian, 39, who played The Chef. "What's the funniest quip you've heard from a kid?"

"Oh my god!" he exclaims. "Where do I begin?"

"For me, it was when (Chua) Enlai was Prince Charming (in *Cinderel-lah!*)," Oei says excitedly. "Adrian Pang's kids, who know Enlai, just would not accept him as the Prince. They kept shouting his name and saying, 'Uncle Enlai, why are you standing there?'"

She recalls another favourite moment — when Sebastian, who was playing The Queen in *Snow White*, was holding an apple. "This kid just screamed out in the stillness of the theatre, 'It's laced with melamine!' The whole melamine thing was going on at that time, so it was really hilarious."

"Everyone is involved in the show, and there's a lot of impromptu dialogue," adds Sebastian. "That is what I think is so magical about pantomime, and that's why both adults and kids want to come and watch it because you'll never know what to expect."

The same can be said for Oei's forays into the world of directing — she has no plans for future projects as of yet. But one thing can be said for sure about her delivery of *Hansel and Gretel*: it was a solid debut.



From left to right: Dwayne, Denise, Pam, and Sebastian.



"I'm 40, and I thought it'll be a nice challenge for myself at this age to push the boundaries and do something that I'm not used to."

- PAM OEI,  
ACTRESS TURNED DIRECTOR



# A Rendezvous with Art, Love and Life



The French film industry is an enigmatic one. Some find French films complicated, while others say that they are simple. **Eunice Toh** and **Jolene Leong** speak to French directors and actresses to put a name to the charm of French cinema.

There's something about French films that make people call them "artsy" — they're in a class of their own. 'French' lends an allure of mystery to anything that's been labelled as such, making us wonder exactly what ingredients go into French films that set them apart from other genres of cinema.

French films have strengthened their presence on our shores with the recent Societe Generale Private Banking 2nd Rendezvous with French Cinema, which was essentially a three-day film festival in Singapore. French actresses and directors Sophie Marceau, Fleur-Lise Heuet, Anne Le Ny and

Anne Fassio were some popular figures that graced the red carpet event.

From children's animations to the Oscar-nominated *Amour* (Love), the film fest immersed locals in the French cinema experience. Many may think that French films are only for the 'atas' crowd, and any degree of truth in that sentiment probably stems from the fact that these films are quintessentially, well, French.

"French movies are very immersed in European architecture and literature," Heuet, the lead actress of Fassio's *Ma bonne étoile* (My Lucky Star), explains.

"When people outside of France take in all this rich history and culture, such movies can be perceived as too complicated."

University student Ryan Thng, 24, who caught *Le jour de les corneilles* (The Day of the Crows), however, believes that French films actually have simple storylines — and that's where he reckons their charm lies. "French films are more stripped down and lovely. They're so tightly written, and every single scene is important."

"I find that the stories in French cinema are more personal," adds



Jean-Christophe Dessaint, the director of *Le jour de les corneilles*. "They are usually written by the director, so he or she has more freedom and greater control over the story. Whereas in Hollywood, there are more people deciding the production and casting."

If the charm of French cinema lies in the intimacy with which they are produced, then it is not quite as exclusive as we think. Film enthusiast Jean-François Danis, 47, believes that Singaporean films and French films share a similar style.

A fan of many local productions like Eric Khoo's *Be With Me* and Royston Tan's *881*, he believes that the directing styles of Singaporean filmmakers are close to that of European directors, especially in how they choose to portray human beings. "They make films that talk about humanity. They don't try to impress with special effects. So in many ways, Singaporean cinema is much closer to French cinema than American cinema."

"Asian films are quite well-represented in France, and I dare say they are even more complicated than ours in terms of relationships and social context," adds Fassio, director of *Ma bonne étoile*.

Says Jeannie Tan, 25, a researcher who caught *Ma bonne étoile* during the film fest, "After watching so many blockbusters, it (*Ma bonne étoile*) was a refreshing change. It's more real, more 'human', and it managed to capture all the different emotions perfectly."

"French films are not formulaic; they don't look like each other," explains Mr Danis. "We try to be more personal and unique. We like dialogues because it's important for people to talk to each other."

And the main themes of French films — are they love, family, and relationships?

Says Heuet, with a smile, "Life."



INTOUCHABLES



AMOUR

Photos courtesy of Societe Generale Private Banking

## The Hottest Names in France

Even if you are no avid fan of French cinema, here are some actors that are worth taking note of.

### SOPHIE MARCEAU

One of France's biggest stars, Marceau's acting career began when she was just a teenager. She rose to international fame in 1995 when she starred in Mel Gibson's *Braveheart*. This was followed by the James Bond film *The World Is Not Enough* in 1999, where she played the villainous Elektra King. Marceau led the delegation of French celebrities at the Societe Generale Private Banking 2nd Rendezvous with French Cinema last year. The renowned actress was in town to promote her newest film, *Un bonheur n'arrive jamais seul* (*Happiness Never Comes Alone*).

### MARION COTILLARD

This fast-rising actress is definitely one to watch out for. In 2007, Cotillard won an Academy Award for her role in *La Vie en Rose*. She made film history by being the first to win an Oscar for a French language performance. Cotillard then

appeared in a slew of Hollywood hits such as *Inception*, *Midnight in Paris*, and *The Dark Knight Rises*. Her latest film, *De rouille et d'os* (*Rust and Bone*), was a box office hit in France, and was one of the 12 films screened at the film fest here. Up next for this breakout star is *Blood Ties*, a thriller film which also features Clive Owen and Mila Kunis.

### AUDREY TAUTOU

Best known for her role in one of the most internationally successful French movies, *Amélie* (2001), Tautou is definitely a familiar name among the French. Having debuted with a César Award in France, Tautou was recognised for her talents in Hollywood as the cryptologist in *The Da Vinci Code*. Seeing that international fame did not suit her, she moved back to acting in her home country. The talented actress is set to hit the screens this year with Michel Gondry's *Mood Indigo*, which is based on Boris Vian's 1947 novel *L'Ecume des jours*.

### VINCENT CASSEL

For the most sought-after male stars in France, look no further than Vincent Cassel. The César Award-winning actor appeared in *Ocean's Twelve* and

*Ocean's Thirteen* as François Toulour aka laser-dodging thief 'The Fox'. He also starred in critically acclaimed films *The Black Swan* and *A Dangerous Method*. Cassel's upcoming movie *Trance* is a drama thriller where he appears alongside James McAvoy.

### A POWERHOUSE IN EUROPEAN CINEMA

"France is the top European film producer, and cinema is part of French DNA," says French language school Alliance Francaise's Executive Director Claire-Lise Dautry.

She knows her stuff. The New York Times reported in November last year that France's domestic movie industry is the largest in Europe, with hundreds of films shot annually. The French cinema industry is also ranked one of the top 10 in the world, amongst the likes of the USA, India, Japan, South Korea, and China.

"It (the French cinema industry) is quite energetic in the European market. We've got a strong country policy, and I do think we're one of the strongest," says Fassio.

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\*As compared to ordinary manual toothbrush. \*\*As compared to ordinary toothpaste.  
 \*When used together with toothbrushing. Source: Journal of Japanese Society of Periodontology (1998) 110-112



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*The darker the story, the sweeter the treat.*



# A Fairly Dark Tale

And they all lived happily ever after... not. It seems that our favourite fairytale characters aren't living that happily after growing up. **Grace Chan** and **Nicol Ong** explore how the big screen has helped these once naïve characters develop their own brand of teenage angst.



Don't try to deny it — when we're wronged, a part of us wants revenge. We lust for it. And apparently, it's no different for even the fairytale characters from our childhood. Just last year, we saw Kristen Stewart as Snow White taking the life of her wicked stepmother in *Snow White and the Huntsman*.

For those of you who adore such twisted tales, don't stop counting your blessings, as there are two new films set to perverse the innocence of what were once our favourite bedtime stories. Out now is *Hansel & Gretel: Witch Hunters* while *Jack the Giant Slayer* hits cinemas on Feb 28. Both centralise on the increasingly popular theme of vengeance.

## VENGEFUL SIBLINGS

We all know the story of the brother and sister Hansel and Gretel, who wandered into the woods in search of food. There, they stumble upon a nice old lady living in a gingerbread house. Weary and hungry, they let themselves be stuffed silly with sweets without even knowing that the nice old lady is actually a witch fattening them up to eat them. They eventually realise the trouble they're in and manage to escape successfully, but they don't go back to living normal lives.

*Hansel & Gretel: Witch Hunters* is

a take on what the siblings have grown up to be like 15 years after the gingerbread house incident. They're no longer innocent, gullible children — they've become witch hunters, their blades always hungry for the blood of the kind who wronged them.

"I don't think people realise how dark fairytales are," remarked director Tommy Wirkola in an interview with YouTube channel TvShowsandseries. *Hansel & Gretel: Witch Hunters* is Wirkola's first Hollywood film.

It's hard to condemn the once naïve siblings for their actions, though, since puberty has turned the two into a visual treat for the eyes. Hansel is now a muscular gunslinger (played by Jeremy Renner of *Avengers*) while Gretel (played by English beauty Gemma Arterton) is a voluptuous femme fatale in a leather catsuit.

## THE HAPLESS HERO

*Jack the Giant Slayer* is based on the fairytale *Jack the Giant Killer* (not to be confused for *Jack and the Beanstalk*). In the original tale, which is told more popularly in Europe than Asia, a clever boy named Jack lures an evil giant into a death trap. The kingdom celebrates his bravery and he goes on killing many more wicked giants throughout the land.

Director Bryan Singer tweaks the original fairytale liberally in his movie adaptation. Instead of having Jack be a violent killer of evil giants, he is portrayed as a guileless farm boy who unknowingly unleashes bad things upon his world.

Jack (played by Nicholas Hoult of *X-Men: First Class*) accidentally opens a magical gateway between his world and the world that the wicked giants were banished to eons before. The giants are more than eager to make use of his blunder to exact their revenge upon the humans for taking away their land.

Fairytales are often socio-political commentary that have been retold for children, said Singer to TotalFilm.com. Which then begs the question: what are fairytales *really* about?

## OUTGROWING INNOCENCE

When the Brothers Grimm first penned our classic bedtime stories, could they actually have been protesting the cruelty of the world they lived in?

As children, we probably never thought deeply about the subliminal messages weaved into our favourite fairytales. But these movie adaptations are giving us a chance to revisit their implications — this time, as adults.

Our fairytale characters have grown up in these movies too, and that makes them more relatable to us since we've experienced how values grow brighter and darker as life throws more challenges at us. "Happily ever after" is nothing but a bitter fantasy, but it's endearing to see the heroes of our childhood try to strive for it anyway, in their own ways.

But, of course, there's always the option of just enjoying the new spins on fairytales. Says Kimberly Tan, 18, "I really like how our childhood stories are getting retold on the big screen. Generally, the stories are now darker and [more] sinister, which makes it all the more interesting to watch."

Catch *Hansel & Gretel: Witch Hunters* and *Jack the Giant Slayer* for a chance to revisit our childhood and understand that courage, tenacity and magnanimity weren't the only lessons that fairytales were trying to teach us. Both movies, shot in 3D, don't skimp on violence and gore — you'll be experiencing a world completely different from the one your mother told you about while you lay in bed.

## The Real Snow White

The Brothers Grimm were the original purveyors of fairytales, and they were much darker than the Disney cartoons and children's storybook versions we probably grew up watching and reading. For example, in their version of *Snow White*, there is neither handsome prince nor 'happily ever after'.

In this version, the evil Queen goes after Snow White's lungs and liver. It took the Queen three attempts to capture and kill Snow White before finally succeeding and yes, Snow White still bites into a poisoned apple.

The dwarves place Snow White into a glass coffin and while there is a prince, he does not give Snow White a magical kiss. Instead, he wants her for her beautiful body. Necrophile much?

It is only when the coffin is dropped that the poisoned apple was dislodged from Snow White's throat, bringing her 'back to life'. Instead of pushing the Queen off a cliff, Snow White orders her to dance in a pair of red-hot iron shoes 'til she's dead. Looks like the vengeful streak isn't such a new twist to modern-day fairytale adaptations after all.

*Photos courtesy of United International Pictures (Singapore)*



*Hansel & Gretel: Witch Hunter and Jack & The Giant Slayer open in cinemas on Jan 24 and Feb 28 respectively.*



# The Darker The Better

This year sees sequels and standalones from three of the biggest and most successful superhero universes, and they've all taken on a darker hue. **Grace Chan** and **Nicol Ong** take a peek at the epic treat.

And the world is saved! Thanks to the X-Men? The Justice League? Or the Avengers? So continues the never-ending debate amongst comic book fans.

Whether you're a devoted reader or a movie buff, as long as you're a superhero fan you're in for a treat this year. 2013 sees nearly back-to-back movie releases from the big three superhero universes.

From the X-Men franchise come *X-Men: Days of the Future Past* and *The Wolverine*. The Avengers are scoring a hat trick with *Thor: The Dark World*, *Iron Man 3*, and the highly anticipated *Avengers 2*. The Justice League intends to compete with *Man of Steel*, a reboot of the Superman franchise and a primer for the long overdue *Justice League* movie. Unfortunately, the latter won't be out until 2015.

Kevin Ho, a fervent DC and Marvel comics fan who has been avidly following all the superhero movie releases, is absolutely dying to catch this blockbuster showdown. "So far, the trailers look promising and though

the movies don't always do justice to the comic series, it's exciting and refreshing to see how the directors bring the comics to life."

While fans debate which superhero universe is the best, the moviemakers gear up for more epic chapters of the three series. All of these sequels (or even prequels) have become more action-packed and 'darker' in terms of storyline. It seems like films really are like chocolates: the darker, the better.

Perhaps everyone's just bored of the same old story of the hero saving the day and getting the girl. Let's take a look at the three earliest releases from the superhero universes.

## AN ARMoured HEART

Robert Downey Jr dons Tony Stark's high-tech suit of armour once more in *Iron Man 3*, slated for a May release. According to the official synopsis, Stark will be going on a quest to find the one responsible for ruining his life. At the same time, he'll be asking himself some hard questions, like "Does the man make the suit, or does the suit make the man?" We can't wait to see the oh-so-perfect Stark face his

emotional shortcomings instead of his physical ones, for once.

## THE LONELY BEAST

Hugh Jackman reprises his role as Wolverine this June, but this isn't another prequel — it's set *after* the events of previous *X-Men* films. That means no more team of mutants. Wolverine, alone once again, heads to Japan to train and encounters a mysterious figure from his past. If that doesn't convince you of a darker premise, consider that this movie was initially given to Darren Aronofsky to direct.

Aronofsky is none other than the director of *The Black Swan* (2010), the psychological thriller that haunted audiences with its controversy and beauty. However, Aronofsky has given the project to director James Mangold, of *Walk the Line* (2005) fame.

Mangold told the film blog *The Playlist* that *The Wolverine* will be "like a foreign-language superhero movie that's as much a drama and a detective story and a film noir, with high-octane action."



We hope that Mangold delivers what the producers and writers had in mind when they first hired Aronofsky to direct *The Wolverine*.

#### WHAT MAKES A SUPERMAN

Set to hit cinemas in July is the Superman reboot *Man of Steel*. What more can be said about the nearly invincible leader of the Justice League, whose body of steel and awesome powers have been portrayed over and over in various adaptations?

That's exactly why *Man of Steel* will be delving deeper into Superman's past — or, to be exact, Clark Kent's painful story of growing up. Kent/Superman will be played by Henry Cavill. For the first time, the role is being played a non-American, which may be apt considering that many of Kent's struggles involve being ostracised for being different.

Directed by Zack Snyder and produced by Christopher Nolan, expect a superhero film epic enough to contend with the likes of *300* and *The Dark Knight*.

#### PERFECT MEN

Prepare yourself for a monumental showdown this year, since these three films promise to deliver nothing but stunning visuals, darker storylines and, of course, exceptional acting.

Speaking of exceptional acting, the success of these superhero franchises have to be credited heavily to their stellar leading men.

Christopher Reeve played the original Superman — the actors who took up the red cape after him continue to be highly scrutinised and compared to each other by the public. From Reeve to Tom Welling in *Smallville*, we're excited to see what new facet of the man of steel that Cavill will bring to the table.

With regards to *Iron Man*, we've noticed that Downey Jr is so at home in his role as the billionaire playboy that we can't help but wonder: is Downey Jr playing Tony Stark, or is Tony Stark playing Downey Jr? Hugh Jackman fits the bill as Wolverine perfectly as well — no one but he can bring this ferocious yet compassionate man-beast to life with such colour.

With state-of-the-art technology and fresh concepts accompanying a star-studded cast, this new generation of superheroes is bound to thrill you in their fierce contest to see who emerges as champion.



*The Wolverine (left) and Iron Man 3 (above) photos courtesy of Walt Disney Motion Pictures International*

## Your Guide to the Supers

Even if you've never been that familiar with the Avengers, Justice League or X-Men, you must have heard names like "Jean Grey", "Wonder Woman" and "Captain America" thrown about.

We don't recommend offending super fans by thinking that Storm is from the Avengers and that The Hulk is actually one of the X-Men, so check out our quick guide to which heroes belong to which power-packed team.

### Avengers:

Iron Man, Thor, Captain America, The Incredible Hulk, Spider-Man, Hawkeye, Black Widow

### Justice League:

Superman, Batman, The Green Lantern, Wonder Woman, The Flash

### X-Men:

Professor X, Wolverine, Cyclops, Beast, Magneto, Storm, Jean Grey, Rogue

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# A Study in Sherlock

Everyone's favourite consulting detective might be 126 years old this year, but the characters, concept, and lore of Sherlock Holmes and his world never get old.

**Andric Tham** and **Grace Chan** take a look at the television shows that Sherlock has claimed as his new playground.

"There is nothing new under the sun. It has all been done before," Sherlock Holmes says in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*, first published in 1887. Not surprising, then, is the resurgence of the Sherlock Holmes character in popular culture — re-imagined, modernised, and even relocated.

"I think if you transport Sherlock into any major capital city, it'd still work — the hustle and bustle of the crowd, the vastness of the landscape, the constant movement and potential to be found and lost," says Catherine, 18, a Sherlock fan from the United Kingdom who blogs at [howdoyoufeelabouttheviolin.tumblr.com](http://howdoyoufeelabouttheviolin.tumblr.com).

The Sherlock character is an idea, one that even Conan Doyle took much liberty with. Malleable and resilient, Conan Doyle's Sherlock solved mystery after mystery and finally faced his nemesis. He was killed, and then brought back to life.

It's because of the flexibility of such a character that, through the years, the Sherlock Holmes character has been a mainstay in popular culture, mostly in a conceptual form. And in its many adaptations, Sherlock's namesake has been used with great artistic license.

In his various incarnations, Sherlock Holmes has fought Nazis (*Sherlock Holmes and the Voice of Terror*), went to boarding school (*Young Sherlock Holmes*) and was even a trained boxer (Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes*). Recently, he's even taken on different aliases in popular culture. Dr Gregory House in *House, M.D.* is a snarky, cynical play on the character. Mike Ross in *Suits* is a genius lawyer. And who can forget Batman/Bruce Wayne, the genius detective who's also a superhero?


For those who remember the classic Sherlock Holmes character from Conan Doyle's books, he's a brilliant and analytical detective with excellent skills of deduction who's a little cocky and temperamental, but also caring and 'human' — in his own subtle and eccentric ways. It's a charming archetype. Take these elements and put them into the modern day Sherlock character adaptations and they can still work. But with a twist.

In 2012, we had not one, but two television shows that portray Sherlock Holmes. Unlike its big screen counterpart played by Robert Downey Jr, they have uprooted Sherlock and friends, relocating them to a different place and time. The first is BBC's highly successful cult favorite *Sherlock*, helmed by *Doctor Who* show creator Steven Moffat and set



Elementary photos courtesy of CBS Broadcasting Inc.



A full-page photograph of Sherlock Holmes (played by Jonny Lee Miller) and Watson (played by Lucy Liu) from the CBS series *Elementary*. They are standing in a doorway, looking out. Sherlock is in the foreground, wearing a dark coat and a red and black plaid scarf. Watson is behind him, wearing a dark jacket over a plaid shirt. The lighting is warm and dramatic, highlighting their faces and the textures of their clothing.

in 2010s London — complete with the London Eye, Metro trains, and *James Bond*-esque tech to assist Sherlock's investigations. The second is CBS' *Elementary*, a complete reimagining of Sherlock Holmes, dubbed as "New Holmes, New Watson, New York."

What makes sense about both of these adaptations is how relevant they are to present-day audiences. In the BBC series, the creators acknowledge that Sherlock Holmes has reached a renaissance of sorts as a character archetype, and sought to bring back what they felt needed a major overhaul in setting, much like what they did for *Doctor Who*. It worked because it felt wholesome. It's not just Sherlock this time around — it's the entire cast of characters and lore that made the original Sherlock Holmes what it was. It's not just a genius detective with a kickass sidekick, because we've already got *Batman* and *The Mentalist* (but alas, they're not Sherlock and Watson).

For *Sherlock*, Holmes and the accompanying character archetypes and dynamics all stay true to the classic Sherlock Holmes formula. Some of the other characters get a more modern twist, but only in context — a lot is different in the 2010s and so the idea remains, with varying plot devices. For one, we see Watson standing up to Sherlock whereas in the books Watson was written to be a meek little puppy following Holmes around. We also see a greater development in Sherlock's relationships with other characters, like with his older brother Mycroft.

In the CBS adaptation, the cast is kept the same while the setting was tweaked. It made sense, since New York City is the new global city. Sherlock has always been playful and irreverent, and where *Elementary* succeeds is in portraying how New York City amps up all of Sherlock Holmes' traits. He's playful without being infantile.

What else has changed with Sherlock Holmes as a New York City transplant? *Elementary* puts a different spin on the character archetypes. Yes, Sherlock's still your brainy know-it-all detective, but he's also sleeping around with prostitutes and recovering from his drug addiction. (Curiously, this isn't the first series where Sherlock is portrayed to be a womaniser and drug abuser. See: made-for-television movie *Sherlock: A Case of Evil*.) And what of his sidekick? The biggest change yet applies to Sherlock's sober companion, Dr John Watson — now known as Dr Joan Watson.

Yes, a female Watson. Given New York City's reputation of being a 'melting pot', one can appreciate the much-needed gender diversity that a modern adaptation can lend to a

classic series. The relationship between Sherlock and Watson in *Elementary* is a refreshing take, and an amusing one at that. You'd think that with a female companion, sparks are bound to fly between Holmes and Watson but rest assured, die-hard Sherlock fans — their relationship is nothing but platonic. For now, at least. Feminists will be pleased to learn that Joan can also hold her own: she isn't overly sexualised (another sigh of relief from the fans) and she definitely doesn't allow Sherlock to walk all over her. In fact, their friendship is often tenuous with the occasional power struggle.

Comparing modern day adaptations of Sherlock characters to Conan Doyle's originals, one will notice that Sherlock and his cadre of accompanying characters are no longer 'perfect'. They're all flawed, each with his or her own weaknesses — our reality in the present isn't perfect, after all, so why should anyone, even in fiction, be excluded? What makes these modern day characters so appealing is how relatable and realistic they are to audiences, but at their core, still essentially Sherlock, Watson, Moriarty, Mycroft and Irene — all the same ones we've grown to love.

## A Case for Identity

There are many versions of Sherlock Holmes, with or without Watson, Baker Street or Scotland Yard. What is transplanted is the concept of Sherlock — the eccentric genius with a fatal flaw.

We look at the four most popular Sherlock Holmes spinoffs:

### House, M.D. (2004–2012)

*set in New Jersey*

*Sherlock is: a drug-abusing doctor with a wicked sense of humour*

He's played by a British guy who is himself a veritable Sherlock Holmes (*Guardian* called Hugh Laurie a "renaissance man"). He diagnoses your illnesses without so much as breaking out the stethoscope, including deadly diseases you've never heard of. Now *that's* genius.

### Batman (1939–present)

*set in Gotham City*

*Sherlock is: a sad superhero with a kickass sidekick*

Like Sherlock, this is a character with heritage and many incarnations. But in all of them, he's got a collection of hi-tech gadgets at his disposal and a great sense of deduction. Just like Sherlock, Batman thinks he's only got himself to rely on. Fortunately, he has his trusty sidekick Watson (we mean Robin).

### The Mentalist (2008–present)

*set in Sacramento, California*

*Sherlock is: a consulting "mentalist" for the police*

This Sherlock-esque consultant for the police solves crime with a team, not just a sidekick. He's got a nemesis too, a mysterious serial killer named "Red John" who killed his wife and kids, which has prompted him to join the fight against crime to ultimately avenge the death of his family.

### Suits (2011–present)

*set in New York City*

*Sherlock is: a hipster lawyer without a license*

He has eidetic memory. He sits for law exams for you. He knows the law like the back of his hand, even without a license to practise. *Suits'* Mike Ross is an unconventional Sherlock. In fact, this time around, he's the sidekick, and smokes something other than a pipe.

ON ULI: MASH-UP @ PARCO NEXT  
NEXT ROMPER, PRICE  
UNAVAILABLE. QUAINTHOOD @  
PARCO NEXT NEXT SNAKESKIN  
CLUTCH, \$119. UNIQLO BRAIDED  
LEATHER BELT, \$34.90. FOURSkin  
BEADED EARRINGS, \$15.90,  
STUDDED CUFF, \$12.90.  
SOCKS, STYLIST'S OWN.  
WEDGES, MODEL'S OWN.

# NEONSENSE

STYLING: ALESSANDRA CORY MARCELO & NICOL ONG  
HAIR AND MAKE-UP: MICH MAKEOVER  
MODELS: NICHOLAS YEAM & ULI CHAN  
PHOTOGRAPHY: KLIX





ON NICK: MASH-UP @ PARCO NEXT  
NEXT HALF KNIT SHIRT,  
PRICE UNAVAILABLE. SURFACE TO AIR  
@ THE EDITOR'S MARKET  
SHORTS, \$199. SOCKS, SHOES  
AND BANGLES, STYLIST'S OWN.

You can never go wrong with black as a wardrobe staple, but where's the fun in that? This Spring, head-turning neon is the tone of the season. **Alessandra Cory Marcelo** and **Nicol Ong** show you how to inject those lethal hues into your outfit without going over the top.



**MILS @ PARCO NEXT** SNAKE PRINT TOP, \$109.  
**FEIST HEIST** PORTIA DRESS, \$79. **FOREWORD @**  
**BLACKMARKET NO. 2** SOJOURN NECKLACE, \$89.

Once Spring/Summer '13 collections hit the stores, window displays around Orchard Road will be bathed in a myriad of floral prints and pastel shades. No surprise there, though, since spring is when the flowers bloom and the birds begin to sing again. This season's fashion collection promises to deliver something different, however — it will scream colour.

Burberry, for example, sent models down the runway in neon-coloured outfits — but with a tasteful twist. There were metallic cropped jackets and translucent, pastel-coloured bags amidst the sea of brightness. The boys from Proenza Schouler also managed to surprise us, blinding audiences with shades of cobalt blue and hot red. Labels like Balmain, Viktor & Rolf and Louis Vuitton sent a luminous treat down the runway with lots of sequins — a daring choice.

We're strong believers that high fashion always manages to influence 'masstige' brands like H&M and Topshop. With the fashion world going gaga over bright colours, be ready to see neon take over your favourite 'masstige' stores. We're not asking you to don the seven colours of the rainbow, though — a statement piece would often suffice. HYPE slides down the rainbow to show you how to adapt the neon trend to your own style.





MASH-UP @ PARCO NEXT NEXT HALF KNIT SHIRT, PRICE UNAVAILABLE. GAP OXFORD SHIRT, \$80. SURFACE TO AIR @ THE EDITOR'S MARKET SHORTS, \$199. UYII @ THE EDITOR'S MARKET LAPTOP SLEEVE, \$55. SOCKS, SPECTACLES AND BANGLES, STYLIST'S OWN. SHOES, MODEL'S OWN.



## FOR THE LADIES

Girls, we've got more leeway than the boys in the colour department, which means a license to really play with the neon palette. As the designers behind headband brand Sereni & Shentel would say, "Go big or go home!"

The fashion warrior, unafraid of standing out, can go all-out with a neon dress or a colour-blocked outfit. These beautiful clothes are perfect for the ladies with fearless attitudes.

## FOR THE GENTS

For those who love a good thrill, go for a bright pair of shorts and pair that with a top in a lighter shade of colour. Never fear looking too eccentric, though — the appeal of this combination lies in playing up any quirky personality traits you have. It's bound to make you stand out and grab the interest of the ladies.

ON ULI: **MASH-UP @ PARCO NEXT NEXT** MERMAID DRESS, \$199.  
**FOURSKIN** BEADED EARRINGS AND STUDDED METAL DOUBLE-FINGER RING, \$15.90 EACH. WEDGES, MODEL'S OWN.

ON NICK: **WSDM @ PARCO NEXT NEXT** JUSTICE SHIRT, \$149.  
**ALL THE THINGS THAT I'VE DONE @ BLACKMARKET NO. 2** MUMBAY SKY SWEATER, \$89. **UNIQLO** SLIM FIT CHINO FLAT FRONT PANTS, \$49.90.  
NECKLACE, STYLIST'S OWN. SHOES, MODEL'S OWN.



## FOR THE GENTS

Though we do encourage colour this season, moderation is still the most palatable flavour in a gentleman's style — boys, please don't dress in bright colours from head to toe. We suggest foolproof statement pieces.



GAP CABLE CREW KNIT SWEATER, \$80. LIBERTINE @ THE EDITOR'S MARKET HUNTER SHIRT, \$159. UNIQLO SLIM FIT FLAT FRONT PANTS, \$49.90. SOCKS, SHOES AND SPECTACLES, STYLIST'S OWN.



## FOR THE LADIES

For those who appreciate the art of subtle style, learn the statement piece trick. A big, bright bag could spice up an otherwise tame outfit. Accessories and colour are the two best tools to transform an outfit from 'get it off now' to 'wow!'



**FEIST HEIST BLEEKER DRESS, \$79. FOREWORD @ BLACKMARKET  
NO. 2 SOJOURN NECKLACE, \$89. VEIRA @ PARCO NEXT NEXT, PINK  
ENVELOPE CLUTCH, \$99. QUAY @ THE EDITOR'S MARKET YELLOW  
SUNGLASSES, \$65. HEELS, MODEL'S OWN.**



**THE EDITOR'S MARKET**  
HOUNDSTOOTH PULLOVER, \$45.  
GAP CHINO PANTS, \$80. SOCKS,  
STYLIST'S OWN. SHOES,  
MODEL'S OWN.

## FOR THE GENTS

Opt for bright blazers or sweaters that come in pop-out colours like sunkissed orange. Wear these with plain or black clothes for a tasteful contrast. You can even try printed houndstooth pants to inject an element of danger in what would normally be a 'safe' getup.

## FOR THE LADIES

A bold necklace or even colourful socks could do the trick, too. Plus, it rewards the observant eye.

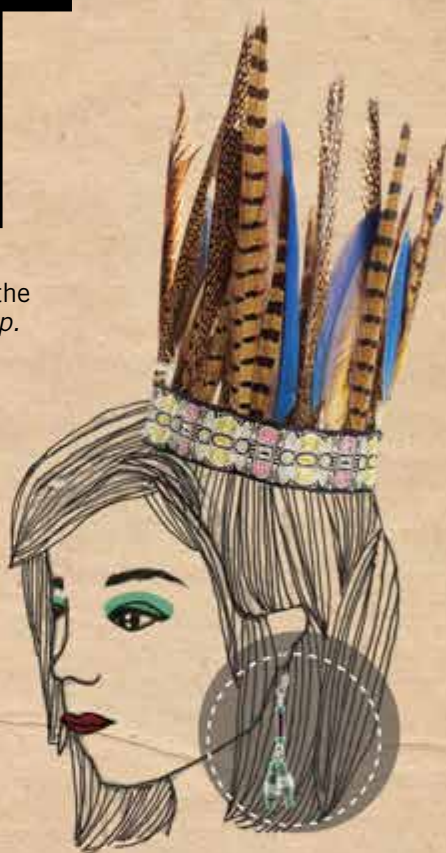


QUAINTHOOD @ PARCO NEXT NEXT  
CUT-OUT SHIRT, \$139. 20:TWO THREE @ PARCO  
NEXT NEXT PASSAGE SKIRT, PRICE UNAVAILABLE.  
MASH-UP X LEGION OF AARON @ PARCO NEXT  
NEXT FOLDABLE CLUTCH, \$89.90. FOURSKIN  
STUDDED CUFF (WORN ON HAIR), \$12.90. STUDDED  
METAL DOUBLE-FINGER RING, \$15.90. SOCKS,  
STYLIST'S OWN. WEDGES, MODEL'S OWN.



# ADORN-ABLE ART

Based in the Chinese province of Yunnan, the Kangqiao Trading Company (*kangqiaogroup.com*) provides earrings that are as pretty as they are thoughtful.



These comely accessories are handcrafted by low-income families as part of the Company's sustainable livelihood programmes.



But even though they're made of paper, these earrings have been lacquered to last. Priced at RMB 25 (S\$5) each, drop a line at the website to purchase a pair for yourself.



# IMMORTAL BAGGAGE

When something breaks, we often don't think twice about discarding it — even at the cost of the environment. But small businesses around the world have found innovative ways to turn 'unwanted' items into trendy and wearable bags. They also go the extra mile by employing craftsmen from underprivileged areas.



**Mar Y Sol Jujube in Natural**  
What It Used to Be: Raffia Fibres  
Made in Madagascar

\$125



**Smateria Rock Backpack**  
What It Used to Be: Fishing Nets  
Made in Cambodia

\$68.90



**Feuerwear Walter in Black**  
What It Used to Be: Fire Hoses and Seatbelts  
Made in Germany

\$229





**Rubber Souls Small Travel Bag  
in Red Flower**

What It Used to Be: Tyre Inner Tubes  
Made in Indonesia

\$219



**Smateria Hip Hop in Blue**

What It Used to Be: Fishing Nets  
Made in Cambodia

\$52.90



**Smateria Smoto Free Jazz  
Ladies' Sling Bag**

What It Used to Be: Motorbike Seats  
Made in Cambodia

\$62.90

Each bag has its own story to tell — from the lives old seatbelt straps have saved to the unique imperfections embossed on recycled surfaces. SimplyLivingLifeShop.com, a local retailer run by a husband and wife team, has selected noteworthy pieces from these eco-friendly businesses to sell. Don't let the price tags turn you off these unusual accessories, though — durable and one-of-a-kind, these are investments in the conscience.

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\*The Academic Ranking of World Universities, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, 2011

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An illustration of a bowl of soup. The bowl is light gray. The soup is a dark brown color. A silver spoon is on the right side of the bowl. Steam is rising from the center of the soup. The word 'FEATURES' is written in large, bold, brown letters across the top of the bowl. There are some small, light brown circles on the left side of the bowl.

# FEATURES

An artisanal wave is underway in the Lion City!  
What else is rippling the surface? J-Rock.





# A Thirst For Revolution

Soon gone will be the days when the word “craft” refers to do-it-yourself art projects — a new breed of artisans is redefining the term. With an emerging global revolution, **Andric Tham** explores the local ateliers that are serving up the next hip thing in town — craft coffee and beer.

Artisan. Boutique. Craft. Specialty. These words are used interchangeably to convey an idea. They’re testaments to independence. They’re a silent protest, a throwback to a time before dull, mass-produced goods.

“‘Craft’ is when you can go up to a craftsman and ask if he can customise something for you,” explains Daniel Goh, a self-proclaimed beer geek. On weekdays, he runs The Good Beer Company, a hawker stall in Chinatown that sells craft beer from all over the world. Goh opened The Good Beer Company after returning from a trip to Irvine, California — he enjoyed the taste of the exotic beers he had there so much that he felt compelled to open his own beer stall. On weekends, he can be found curating a selection of over 150 beer labels at 99 Bottles, his retail store at East Coast Road.

“If I go to a guy who makes bags and ask him, ‘You’ve been making this style of bag. It’s nice, but can you customise something for me?’ and he tells me ‘yes’, that’s a craftsman,” Goh

continues. “But if you go to G2000 (a retail chain that sells business attire) to buy a jacket, you can’t possibly ask them to design a different one for you.”

In Singapore, this idea of ‘craft’ has arrived in droves of niche cafés and kitsch bars, serving artfully brewed coffee to small-batch fruit beers.

But keep your eyes peeled — these delicious artisan delights aren’t exactly as easy to find as a Starbucks joint. And that’s kind of the point.

## CRAFT BEER: A SKILLFUL SEDUCTION

Speaking over a glass of Czech pilsner, Goh reveals that the allure of craft beer is the exclusivity of its taste — an experience that commercial, ‘one-taste’ beers fail to offer.

Because craft beers are usually made in smaller batches, they offer a richer experience in terms of flavour complexity. Aditya Challa, the founder of local microbrewery Jungle Beer, says that it takes three to five weeks to brew a batch of beer and get it bottled.

Jungle Beer is one of about a dozen local microbreweries that make and bottle small batches of beers, which include fruit beers, stouts, specialised ales, and even beers with low alcohol content. With Beerfest Asia in June and the inaugural Craft Beer Week in October last year, Jungle Beer and other microbreweries like Archipelago and Brewerkz have enjoyed an increase of public interest in craft beer. As of November, Jungle Works sells 4,000 litres of beer a month.

True to its name, a microbrewery is much smaller than a commercial brewery. Goh explains that it’s run with very little automation, and mostly under the supervision of a brewmaster. This brewmaster has the liberty of crafting his own recipes and brewing them by hand, and a lot of tweaking in the process is allowed — hence the term ‘craft’ beer. The result is that no two batches of the same beer recipe taste the same. But it’s precisely this lack of consistency that gives craft beer character.

"Every sip doesn't just convey flavour, but a sense of history, a sense of belonging to a greater community, a sense of the brewer's passion and love," enthuses Marcus Wong, a fan of craft beer. "That's what compels me to keep on enjoying craft beer, because it's a beverage with heart and soul."

Goh brandishes a \$138 bottle of beer, which technically isn't even beer anymore. It has been distilled triply so that it has become as strong as a spirit with an alcohol content of 32 per cent. Not all craft beers cost as much as that, however. Some cost no more than a bottle of Carlsberg commercial beer, which costs \$3.20 at supermarkets.

Chris Leow of The Muffinry at Telok Ayer Street sells craft beer from various labels at the store. "More small bars and pubs are bringing in craft beer due to the increasing demand," says the café cum bakery co-owner. The possibility of Singapore importing more exotic beers is, to him, an exciting future.

"Singaporeans love new things," adds Goh. "We like to be seen as cosmopolitan and well-travelled."

#### **SPECIALTY COFFEE: FOR DISCERNING DRINKERS ONLY**

Speaking of cosmopolitan, craft or specialty coffee — what the initiated refer to as 'third wave' coffee — is brewed from what seems to be a universal desire to make and taste an exceptional cup of Joe. Stumptown Coffee Roasters in Portland, Oregon is the poster child of third wave coffee.

"The third wave is a movement towards better coffee," explains Joline Wan, the owner of Le Bon Vivant in Bukit Merah. The café, which serves handmade cupcakes, cakes, various pastries and sandwiches in addition to specialty coffee, opened in May last year. She and her business partner Amanda Ang learnt their trade as baristas in Australia.

"The first wave is the consumption of coffee," Wan continues, "the second wave is the evolution of coffee, and the third wave, to us, is the artisanal way of drinking coffee."

In other words, specialty coffee is what comes after Starbucks, the second wave. And what makes it different from Starbucks — and even *kopitiam* coffee, for that matter — is the effort

that goes into the brewing techniques. Many hours of practice go into making "that perfect cup of coffee," explains Ang. "The frothing of milk to get that silky finish, the tamping of coffee beans, the grinding of beans, et cetera... So much thought goes into a cup of coffee! It's really not just milk poured into coffee."

Leow believes that a barista is part engineer, part artist, and part performer. He began experimenting with coffee as a university student in Sydney and ran his first café in his own dormitory.

"You'd be surprised. Coffee can smell like smoked duck, taste like maple syrup or even fresh berries," he supplies. "Very complex and interesting flavours and aromas can be achieved, and that is the allure of third wave coffee. It's the entire movement of embracing the journey of coffee, from seed to cup."

Largely independent and somewhat out of the way, the specialty cafés that serve third wave coffee are characterised by their humble, understated and edgy vibe — a stark backdrop to the almost too-perfect coffee you'll find in them.

The pioneer of the third wave in Singapore is probably Papa Palheta (now more commonly known as the Chye Seng Huat Hardware Store Coffee Bar at Tyrwhitt Road), which first opened its doors to discerning coffee drinkers in 2009. Back then, it was difficult to imagine Singapore as a cosmopolitan coffee haven, but with the emergence of specialty cafés, we've become exactly that.

"People love travelling, having new and exciting experiences, or reminiscing about something they tasted overseas," Leow muses. "For instance, when you drink Belgian beer...you think about the monks that brewed them and you go, 'Hey, that's pretty cool!' It becomes more than just a drink."

The real allure of craft beverages goes beyond the mastery of the ones who make them. The heart of the revolution lies in the experience of taste: each sip transports you.

## **Where to Get Specialty Coffee and Craft Beer**

**The Muffinry**  
112 Telok Ayer Street

**Société Canteen**  
501 Bukit Timah  
#01-05B Cluny Court

**Mason Ikkoku**  
20 Kandahar Street

**Chock Full of Beans**  
4 Changi Village Road

**Le Bon Vivant**  
164 Bukit Merah Central

**Strangers' Reunion**  
37 Kampong Bahru

**Chye Seng Huat Hardware Store  
(CSSH Coffee Bar)**  
150 Tyrwhitt Road

**99 Bottles**  
217 East Coast Road,  
TIDES #02-08

**The Good Beer Company**  
335 Smith Street

**Jibiru**  
313 Orchard Road

**Red Dot Brewhouse**  
25A Dempsey Road

**Archipelago Craft Beer Hub**  
79 Circular Road

**Brewerkz**  
903 Bukit Timah Road  
2 Stadium Walk  
30 Merchant Road  
65 Airport Boulevard





With the overwhelming K-Pop craze nowadays, we often forget that J-Rock pioneered the international appeal of Asian music. **Jolene Leong** looks for what remains of the J-Rock fan base in Singapore.

"Gangnam Style" was a music video by Korean singer PSY that became the first YouTube video in the world to hit 1 billion views. But in the worldwide phenomenon known as the Korean wave, it was just another milestone.

Korean music seems to have invaded our world — it has become common to hear K-Pop songs being played in shops all across Singapore. This begs the question: where has the Japanese music craze gone?

Many say that J-Rock is what paved the way for K-Pop. According to Mr Lee Shing Lam, 27, the director of 1HKO Entertainment, J-Rock was most popular in the '90s, meaning that the teenage fans then are now in their twenties and thirties. His company co-organised Luna Sea's The End of the Dream concert in Singapore in February 2013; Luna Sea is one of Japan's most prominent and internationally successful rock bands.

On the other hand, the Korean wave only invaded Singapore's shores around 2002, observes Esther Huang, 29, the owner of a Facebook fan page called L'Arc~en~Ciel (another prominent J-Rock band) Street Team Singapore. "It started with dramas, which slowly evolved into musical influence after three to four years," she feels that J-Rock has been "overshadowed" in recent years by K-Pop.

"It was around 2002," she continues. "That's when Korean dramas really invaded because there used to be a lot of Japanese dramas on television [and suddenly there weren't]."

#### MUSIC ON THE EBB

"Despite the decrease in popularity, we feel that the J-Rock fan base is still very strong and we would like to act on their demand," says Mr Lee.

Over the last two years, more prominent J-Rock bands have been landing on Singapore's shores to perform. L'Arc~en~Ciel and Luna Sea are just two of such bands.

While this marks a progression in Singapore's market for Japanese music, it does not necessarily mean a comeback for the 'J-wave'.

In the '90s, Japanese music — especially J-Rock — was all the rage in the world; Singapore was no exception. Even local free-to-air channels broadcasted Japanese dramas and music programmes like *Music Station*, which featured both established and upcoming bands.

"I think that even if you go online, you won't be able to find [episodes of *Music Station*]," says Huang. "You have to search for sources, join forums and wait for people to put it up online. But it gets removed very quickly."

Even getting their favourite J-Rock band's music albums is a little inaccessible for fans. According to Mr Lee, J-Rock music albums are sold at about \$90 each at HMV, which stocks a wide genre of music. In the past, Mr Lee explains that fans who couldn't afford these albums had to "stay up late at night to watch *Music Station*, the only source of Japanese music back then in Singapore, to get an update of what is new in Japan."

Cheryl Tan, 19, a Temasek Polytechnic student who enjoys both K-Pop and J-Rock, doesn't believe that J-Rock will become more popular amongst people her age.

"K-Pop is seen and heard almost everywhere but J-Rock promotions are barely seen," she reasons. "And even if there are any, it will only be on

channels like *Animax*, which not many will tune in to unless they are avid fans of Japanese animation."

The J-Rock scene in Singapore seems to have died down due to lack of exposure and disappearing outlets, but thanks to some faithful fans, J-Rock has continued its march.

#### STILL WATERS RUN DEEP

"While K-Pop might seem to have a larger fan base, Japanese music [relies] on a group of hardcore supporters, much like the cult-like influence Apple had during its earlier days," remarks Mr Lee.

Shannen Lim exemplifies the term "hardcore supporter". The 31-year-old has been a fan of J-Rock for the past 12 years. She even takes time off from her job to fly to Japan to catch live performances by her favourite bands. To date, she has seen 33 concerts in Japan.

The advent of social media has also given J-Rock fans hope — Japanese bands use social media to reach out to international audiences and promote their music and concerts. "Having social media gives fans a direct platform to the bands and allows the bands to build rapport with the fans," Lim explains. "It works very well in getting people interested. Facebook and Twitter really do help a lot — especially Twitter. The spread of information becomes very quick."

"Those who love [J-Rock] will be so loyal they would live and die for it," Mr Lee remarks astutely. "Perhaps we can expect a turnaround in five years."

If there's a perfect time for J-Rock fans to come out of hiding, it is now.





# TRAVEL & APPETITE

*Which city is well-known for its  
zesty spices and deep flavour?*

*That's right - Chengdu.*

*Welcome to this laid-back capital  
of the Sichuan province.*

# Lan Kwai Fong: magic at midnight

As darkness falls and sleep beckons, Chengdu's Lan Kwai Fong gets set to sizzle.

By Douglas Yong

Whether you are sipping beer at a pub or grooving in a club, Lan Kwai Fong's nightlife digs deep into your skin. Boasting a wide array of clubs, pubs and restaurants, the district keeps your night young.

"Prior to Lan Kwai Fong, Chengdu was already popular for its nightlife," says Mr Wu Bo, manager of Lan Kwai Fong's Ming Ren Tang pub. "Lan Kwai Fong brought our nightlife to a whole new level, mainly because it is already a well-known district in Hong Kong."

This world-renowned nightlife district used to exist only in Hong Kong but now, another one sits on Chengdu's Shui Jin street. According to Lan Kwai Fong Group Chairman, Dr Allan Zeman, the 43,000-square-metre Lan Kwai Fong in Chengdu opened in 2008, and is 18 times bigger than its forerunner.

## ARRIVAL OF LAN KWAI FONG

Before Lan Kwai Fong's arrival in Chengdu, Shui Jin Street was a district full of Chinese wine-makers. The area was then bought over by the government to build a shopping district.

"The Secretary General of Chengdu contacted me because they did not know what to do with buildings in the shopping district," Dr Zeman said in an interview with Hong Kong's *Marketing Magazine*.

Dr Zeman said he fell in love with the city of Chengdu and agreed to bring his well-established 28-year-old nightlife district here. Though Dr Zeman was requested to replicate Hong Kong's Lan Kwai Fong in Chengdu, the idea was rejected. He felt that people in Chengdu were "not westernised enough" to experience the operators they have in Hong Kong.

Instead, Dr Zeman assembled reputable operators from across the Chinese cities, and Chengdu's Lan Kwai Fong became an "almost overnight instant success."

*Photos courtesy of Jerome Lau*





#### ATTRACTION OF LAN KWAI FONG

Lined up with the theme bars and Western-style restaurants in Chengdu are the Chinese specialties such as the tea houses and hotpot restaurants.

This amalgamation of local flavour and Hong Kong-style nightlife boosts the popularity of Chengdu's Lan Kwai Fong, outshining the older prime night districts such as Jiu Yan Qiao (Nine-Eyed Bridge), and Shao Lin Lu (Shao Lin Road).

One of the top clubs in Lan Kwai Fong, Club Center — or better known as CC — is arguably the best-looking club in Chengdu with a full house every weekend. The state-of-the-art lighting and audio-visual equipment, coupled with the bumping hip-hop and trance music, will be sure to transport dancers to a dreamy world.

#### FESTIVE CELEBRATIONS AND EVENTS

Other than pubs and clubs, Lan Kwai Fong is known for hosting festive celebrations and international events.

In May last year, the “Hottest Summer Love Party 2012” was held on Lan Kwai Fong's grounds. The event attracted more than 3,000 people with Lady Gaga headlining the event. Immersed in the live music and alcohol, the crowd danced through the night.

“Lan Kwai Fong's celebrations and events are incredible,” Mr Wu exclaims. “Just recently in September, the Wonderful Carnival was held and that was the biggest event I've seen thus far.”

From sensual Brazilian Latin dancers to beat-bumping African drummers performing along the streets in the district, the Wonderful Carnival lasted for four days.

“Additional small stages were even added for acrobatic performances!” Mr Wu enthuses, smiling. “You should have seen the carnival for yourself. It was spectacular!”

Lan Kwai Fong will dazzle you with its impressive clubs and pubs. Its stunning array of international events and celebrations has become a significant part of the city of Chengdu, and will continue to flourish.

As dawn approaches, parties and beats begin to die down. The few knocked out by alcohol lay their heads on bar tables, while other night owls retreat for some snooze before taking on another night of music, dance and alcohol.

Lan Kwai Fong  
蘭桂坊成都  
CHENGDU





# Tea-riffic City

It is said that the teahouses in Sichuan are the best in the world, and those found in Chengdu, its capital, are the finest. **Priscilla Lim Zi Qi** looks at how the 5,000-year-old culture is still an essential element of the city.

Leaning back into a bamboo armchair, legs crossed and hands resting on a red velvet pillow on her lap, Madam Cui Yen looks at the scenery outside one of many the teahouses in Chengdu. With cars honking and scooters passing by, the bustle of the morning traffic is a counterpoint to the calm ambience inside the teahouse. Yet nothing distracts Madam Cui from sipping her tea, a morning ritual of hers.

"I grew up drinking tea," she shares. "Whenever I had free time, I'd drink tea. Now that I'm older, I continue to drink tea." She encourages her grandchildren to drink tea as well.

"The youngest one really likes Snowflakes tea (*piao xue cha*) and would always ask for more," says Madam Cui, smiling softly as she thinks about her youngest grandson.

Chinese both young and elderly enjoy tea; China is the birthplace of the tea culture after all, which has spread all over the globe. "Tea has about 5,000 years of history," says Zhang Li Hong, the wife of a local tea seller.

Chinese legend has it that Emperor Shen Nong invented tea during the Xia Dynasty (2070-1600 BCE). Emperor Shen Nong was knowledgeable about hygiene beyond his time, and decreed that water must be boiled before drinking it. One day, while he was boiling water, leaves from a nearby tree fell in and gave the water a sweet fragrance. The emperor was intrigued and tasted the fragrant water, which he found to be delectable and refreshing. Since then, the Chinese have made drinking tea a part of their daily routine.

Mrs Zhang only fostered a love for tea after marrying her husband, with whom she moved to Chengdu for his tea business. "I was slowly influenced by the environment here," she recalls. "I come from Chongqing and the tea culture there is not as strong as the one here. In Chongqing, drinking tea is more of a personal preference rather than a practice or culture."

According to the city's archives, Chengdu's tea culture has been around for ages. There were 454 teahouses in 1909 and this number increased to 599 in 1939, meaning that there were at least two teahouses per street.



“When I was younger, my grandmother brought me to teahouses to drink tea with her. I guess that that is how I discovered my love for tea,” says Lu Jun Zu, who works at a teahouse in Jin Li Street, a popular tourist spot in Chengdu.

To her, what the Chengdu tea culture means is having meaningful conversations over a cup of tea. “In Chengdu, you realise that our pace of life is very slow. We have a lot of time to sit around and drink tea with our friends so I guess one can say that we ensure that our friendships last through our frequent tea sessions.”

“Tea sessions are not for one to spend alone. They are for meeting new people, catching up with friends, or playing *mahjong*,” reminisces Madam Li Meng, a retiree. “If you frequent teahouses, you’ll make lots of new friends.”

“Young people thrive on friendships and tea serves as a common topic for them to get to meet new friends,” adds Mrs Zhang.

“Nowadays, more young people are choosing to drink tea for the health benefits,” observes Li Yan, another teahouse employee. “As the Chinese saying goes, better to be deprived of food for three days than tea for one.”

“Tea has always been and will continue to be a part of Chengdu,” concludes Madam Cui sagely.



*Photos courtesy of Lam Wei Quan Dennis and Priscilla Lim Zi Qi*





Photos courtesy of Jerome Lau

Tucked away in Chengdu's most famous park is a teahouse that proves that the city's tea culture is more than just about the tea they offer. **Nadine Sarabia** takes a sip.

# Tea for Thought

People would think that parks are for picnics, flying kites or gatherings with friends and family. However, the Heming Teahouse (*He Ming Cha She*) is also the focus of Chengdu's People's Park (*Ren Min Gong Yuan*).

The People's Park is located near the city's centre at 12 Shaocheng Lu (*Shaocheng Lu Shi Er Hao*). According to freelance tour guide Tray Lee, the Heming Teahouse is Chengdu's "only surviving traditional teahouse since the beginning of the last century."

He explains, "Most traditional teahouses are already gone because of the Cultural Revolution, and because of the expansion and changing of the city after China was officially opened in the late 1980s." The Cultural Revolution is the term given to Communist Leader Mao Zedong's elimination of anti-communist beliefs in 1965. This resulted in political, social and economic chaos and purges of intellectuals.





It was about 3pm and almost all the bamboo chairs at the teahouse were occupied. Indeed, according to the waiter there, the teahouse is busiest between 2pm and 4pm. Some of the customers — other than just drinking tea — were playing card games, chatting with friends and snacking on melon seeds. At one of the tables, some were even playing mahjong.

The menu did not have a large range of teas. But the plus point is that it had English translations so non-Chinese speakers can know what they are ordering. The waiter recommended drinking green tea since it is summertime, so I ordered the Snow Lake Jasmine Green Tea for RMB 25 (S\$5).

While waiting for orders, we were approached by ear cleaners, massagers and even fortune-tellers, all willing to offer their services for a fee. Mr He Guoqing, the manager of the teahouse, says that the teahouse does not hire them and they gain their income solely through whatever they do by using the teahouse as a base.

Mr He says, speaking in Mandarin, “They come here for business and we don’t ask them to give us a part of what they earn. But a teahouse in Chengdu without ear cleaners or massagers loses its appeal. In some way, they help us get business.”

Though these individuals are a common sight in teahouses all over Chengdu, they constantly come and ask whether you want to use their services and continue to persist despite getting rejecting multiple times. At one table, one customer already had his ears cleaned yet other ear cleaners still pestered him to engage their services.

The waiter came back with dried tealeaves placed in a porcelain cup and a large flask filled with hot water. Pouring hot water into the cup, he said he would leave the flask on the table so that I could refill the teacup myself.

*People's Park is located southwest of the city centre at 12 Shoucheng Lu (Shoucheng Lu Shi Er Hao) and is about five minutes away from Tian Fu Square (Tian Fu Guang Chang). It is accessible by bus numbers 61, 113, 45 and 54. A taxi ride from anywhere in the city to People's Park costs about RMB 15 (S\$3). The Heming Teahouse is open from 6am to 7pm and the busiest times are from 2pm to 4pm. The tea is priced from RMB 10 (S\$2) onwards.*

Although there isn't a wide selection of tea, teahouses in Chengdu are seen more as places for social gathering. From the chatter and the laughter, and with people gathering for card games and mahjong, tea seems to only be an excuse for visiting the teahouse. It would seem that the social activities are the very essence of Chengdu's teahouse culture.

Tourists Shira Moscovitch and Dorit Dekel from Israel say that they came to know about the Heming Teahouse from tourism websites like Lonely Planet and tourist agencies back in Israel. However, they usually drink tea from tea bags and have never tried tea brewed from dried tealeaves before. However, they enjoyed the “peace and quiet” that the teahouse provides.

If you are hungry, grab a cup of noodles or some dumplings at the snack bar right next to the teahouse as the teahouse only sells tea. Do not worry about bringing outside food in as the staff usually does not mind.

If you want to live the traditional teahouse experience, the Heming Teahouse is a great place to visit.

# SMASHING Street Snacks

Even amidst towering shopping malls housing a variety of cuisine, food lovers still call Chengdu's street stall snacks ambrosia. **Kenneth Ang** visits Jin Li Street to take a bite out of the city's heart.

Strong aromas, vibrant hues of colour and a sea of curious sights will be among the first things you notice about Chengdu's street food. The capital city of Sichuan province is strewn with traditional street snack stalls (*jie bian xiao tan*) that offer some of the most splendid infusion of flavours for the cheapest of prices. The city's ornate Jin Li Street, in particular, is a food lover's paradise.

Chengdu's myriad of street snacks is diverse yet unique in the way they are prepared — specific techniques are passed down through generations of road vendors to prepare them.

"Street snacks have made a name for themselves globally," says local chef Yu Ming Jun. "They encompass truly curious and explosive flavours that you must try at least once in your life."

However, local food enthusiasts Zhang Yang Lin and Yu Xiao Lin claim that there have been governmental efforts to sweep away street stalls in a bid to make Chengdu "China's most cultured and civilised city." But fret not — Jin Li Street has been sanctioned as a historical and cultural district to be preserved. There, you can still get a taste of good ol' Chengdu.

Located east of Wu Hou Memorial Temple, Jin Li Street regularly pulls visitors from all over the world to try Chengdu's street snacks. For a visitor with little time to spare, this is the best place to try a wide variety of local snacks in the same area.

The food lane is hidden deep within Jin Li. To get there, you have to walk past a Starbucks outlet that is so imposing that it's impossible to miss. Continue past sidewalks displaying small souvenirs and works of art and head deeper into the lane.

Photos courtesy of Jerome Lau



One of the first stalls you will notice is the one selling barbecued delights (*tie ban shao kao* or *shao kao chuan*). But these chunks of meat on sticks aren't any kind of satay or kebab that you can find in Singapore. Instead of dipping sauce on the side, the skewered meat is coated generously in five spices powder (*wu xiang fen*), chilli paste, sesame seeds and fine salt.

The tender, juicy meat blends with the roasted aroma of this trademark seasoning to make each bite a satisfying one. Each skewer is sold for RMB 5 (S\$1).

The most popular skewered combinations are beef and lamb, and squid and tofu. For the more daring, give your taste buds an adventure with chicken gizzard, pigeon meat, and smelly tofu (*chou dou fu*) fermented to a heavenly reek.

Besides sizzling skewered treats, be sure to try the steamed dumplings (*shui jing bao*). The handmade dough for the skin is steamed to translucence, retaining its natural sweetness. There are also specialty buns (*bao*) filled with seasoned meat. The sweet white bread and fragrant coating of sesame oil serve as the perfect foil to the spicy and sour chicken and pork.

Jin Li Street is full of flavours that can only be found in Chengdu, so you can't say that you've been to this city without knowing how it tastes.

## MUST-TRY SNACKS

Jin Li Street has a wide variety of food to offer, but for those looking for a quick fix on a busy schedule, try any of these exotic snacks.

**Pig Intestine Noodles**  
RMB 10 (S\$2)  
**Sweet Water Noodles**  
RMB 8 (S\$1.60)  
**Silk Peanut Candy**  
RMB 5 (S\$1)



# A TASTE FOR THE BIZARRE

**It's a shocking snack, Chengdu's favourite food, but Charmaine Lim acted on a dare to chomp on a rabbit's head.**

While it is not unusual to hear about unconventional dishes in China, one exotic dish in Chengdu caught my attention — rabbit's head. Like most of Sichuan's specialty dishes, rabbit's head is marinated with a variety of spices, red chillies, and the peppercorns that are unique to the province.

"It's a common dish that people eat with rice and other dishes," says Wang Zhan, a Jiangsu native who moved to Chengdu.

Madam Wei, the owner of a small rabbit head eatery, explains that selling this dish is lucrative since rabbits reproduce quickly.

Rabbit's head can be cooked in a variety of ways, but locals love the dry pot rabbit head (*gan guo tu tou*) the most. The spices eliminate any odour that one might expect the rabbit meat to have. In fact, it tastes remarkably like duck meat.

Many start with the rabbit's cheeks for the more tender meat. They then remove the jaw to reach the meat inside the skull. Each bite is filled with the aroma of spices, and the peppercorn leaves your tongue with a tingling sensation.

Last comes the brain, what many would call the best part. It is roughly a quarter of the size of a ping-pong ball, and its taste is reminiscent of a hard-boiled egg yolk. The brain is soft and creamy, mashing up slowly against the roof of your mouth and tongue as you chew.

Rabbit's head can be found in most eateries and hotels, where they are sold per pot from RMB 30 to RMB 50 (S\$6 to S\$10) at the former, and from RMB 50 to RMB 70 (S\$10 to S\$14) at the latter. Grilled rabbit's head can also be bought at tourist hotspots like Jin Li Street.

Forget about culture shock and squeamishness — you must try rabbit's head to experience Chengdu's culture in full.





Photos courtesy of Jerome Lau and Douglas Yong

# Simply Seductive Noodles

Slurp them or twirl them, noodles have always been a distinctly Chinese dish and Chengdu has paid tribute to its versatility with its unique creations.

By Douglas Yong

The Chinese have been feasting on noodles for centuries — a wide array of noodles and soup bases have been born from years of culinary sophistication. Chengdu is no exception from adopting this delicacy — Sichuan's signature taste of numbing spiciness (*ma la*) can be found in its noodles, too.

## 1 MIAN TIAO, THE EXTRAORDINARY ONE

Dough without yeast is kneaded, rolled, and sliced or pulled into different shapes to form different types of noodles. Long, thin circular strips known as *mian tiao* are the most common. Ground soybeans are added to the dough mix for extra fragrance, and sometimes duck eggs are added for a crispy texture. Although a bowl of *mian tiao* may seem ordinary, its taste can be customised to keep your mouth watering.

The yellowish-beige noodles are served in a steaming hot soup base, which is usually either chilli oil (*la jiao you*), which gives a numbing spicy broth, or clear soup (*qing tang*), which is usually boiled with pork or chicken bones. The dish is topped off with a spectrum of ingredients to choose from: braised beef, diced chicken, mutton cubes, fried eggs, spicy vegetables, dumplings and more.

## 2 GOU HUN MIAN, THE SULTRY ONE

Slightly thicker than *mian tiao*, these chewy dry noodles originate from a local legend — a band of flesh-eating demons created this aromatic noodle to lure villagers so that they could devour them. Hence, the villagers dubbed it the Soul-Seducing Noodle, or *gou hun mian*. Of course, this is only folklore.

*Gou hun mian* is served hot with a thick brown sauce made of minced meat and sesame oil — the sesame oil is what gives this dish its alluring aroma. The topping of pork floss and spring onions lends the soft noodles a light crunch. Liu Feng, a visitor from Hangzhou in his thirties, jokes, "I will definitely offer myself to the demons if that is what it takes to savour this bowl of noodles again!"

## 3 LIANG MIAN, THE COOL ONE

*Liang mian* is made from *mian tiao*, according to Guizhou housewife Madam Cen Ping. She has been making noodles domestically for 20 years. After the noodles have boiled, they are cooled immediately with a fan — hence the name 'cold' noodles. Oil may be added during the cooling process to give the noodles extra shine.

After cooling, the noodles are flavoured with chilli, vinegar, soy sauce, peanuts and bean sprouts. The crunchy peanuts and bean sprouts complement the chewy noodles. Unlike most noodle dishes, the spicy and salty *liang mian* is considered a snack rather than a main dish.

## 4 LA MIAN, THE CLASSY ONE

For a delicious bowl of *la mian*, dough has to be pulled repeatedly by hand into strips to make the dish's characteristic flat and thin noodles.

Barbecued pork ramen (*cha shao la mian*) is a favourite amongst both tourists and locals. Served with a piping hot and rich soup of pork bones, the noodles are topped with slices of red barbecued pork that have been grilled to perfection. The sweet and slightly burnt taste of the barbecued pork goes well with the lightly salted *la mian*. The fragrant soup also leaves a sweet aftertaste in your mouth.

The Chinese's innovations of the humble noodle are simply amazing. From being stirred in spicy sauce or slurped in sweet soup, noodles can be served in countless methods and topped with numerous types of ingredients. It is no wonder that, even after thousands of years, noodles still remain a part of the Chinese diet.

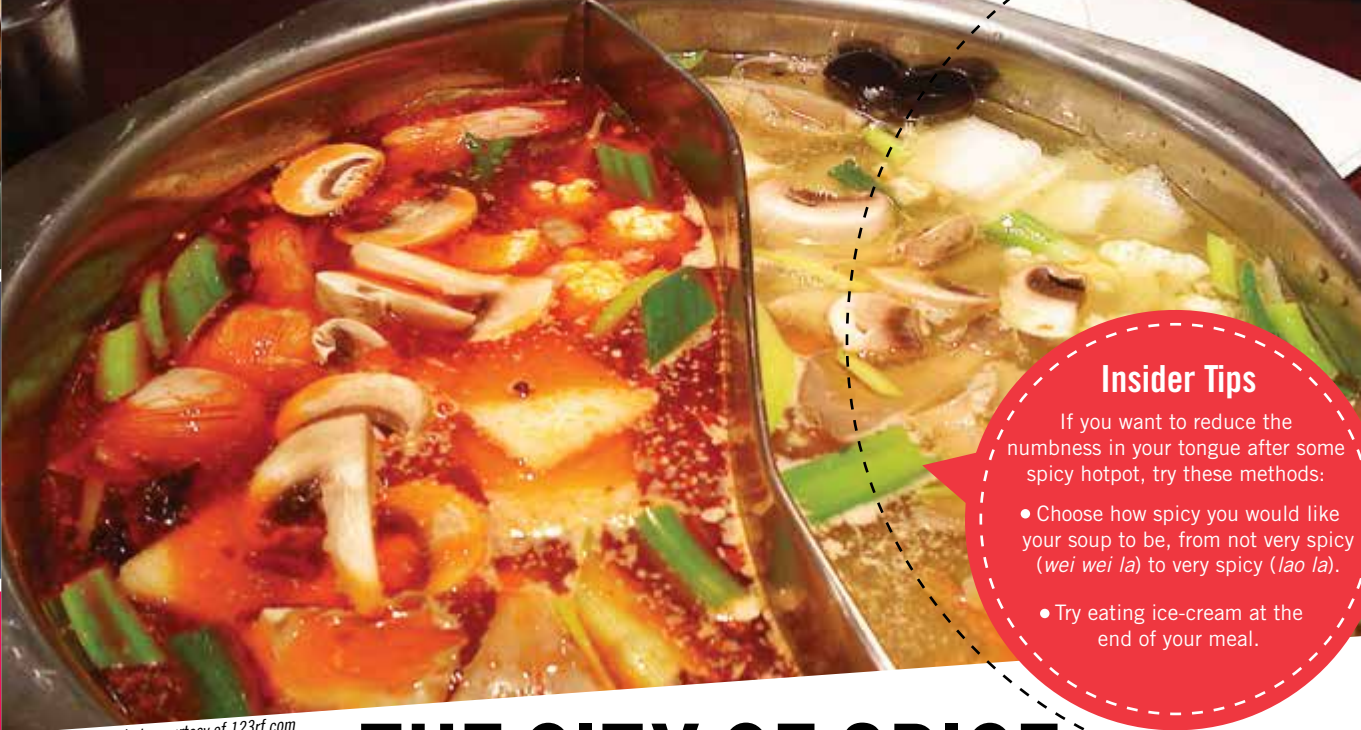


Photo courtesy of 123rf.com

### Insider Tips

If you want to reduce the numbness in your tongue after some spicy hotpot, try these methods:

- Choose how spicy you would like your soup to be, from not very spicy (*wei wei la*) to very spicy (*lao la*).
- Try eating ice-cream at the end of your meal.

# THE CITY OF SPICE

If you've never been to Chengdu, you've never tasted real hotpot!  
Chi Wan Teng checks out the different variations of the spicy hotpot.

Sichuan is the home of the spicy hotpot (*ma la huo guo*). When visiting any of this province's cities, having spicy hotpot is a must, especially during winter. But the people of Sichuan eat it all year round.

As it tends to be mostly wet and humid in Chengdu, locals eat spicy hotpot to prevent rheumatism. The most characteristic ingredient in this dish is the tongue-numbing Sichuan peppercorn. It gives the soup a rich flavour and aroma, and also reduces the fishy smell of the other ingredients.

What makes the spicy hotpot different from the typical steamboat one can find in Singapore are the ingredients used in the spicy soup base. Besides Sichuan peppercorn, broad bean paste, dried chilli, dried tangerine peel, cumin, cinnamon, cloves, and ox bone stock make up the base.

### THE TWIN HOTPOT

As Chengdu becomes a more popular tourist spot, food vendors are coming up with more creative flavour combinations to cater to the increasingly varied taste buds of the people. The Twin Hotpot (*yuan yang guo*) is an example of that. As its name suggests, this hotpot gives diners the chance to enjoy both the spicy soup base and the plain broth — the best

of both worlds. The two soups are partitioned in the same pot.

"The *yuan yang guo* is great as I'm able to try two different soup bases," shares Xu Xi, a student from the University of Sichuan. "Also, the plain broth soup base reduces the spiciness and numbness in my mouth."

### FOOD ON A BAMBOO STICK

Another variation is called food on a bamboo stick (*chuan chuan xiang*). As the name suggests, the food is skewered like a kebab. One popular store in Chengdu selling this is called Yu Lin Chuan Chuan Xiang. Skewer prices range from 20 cents to RMB 1 a stick (S\$0.05 to S\$0.20).

To Singaporeans, this may seem cheap but local shopkeeper Liu Rui finds it too expensive for only three pieces of meat on one stick. He and his wife usually spend around RMB 150 (S\$30) on bamboo stick hotpot.

Zhang Ying, another local, holds a different view. She says, "It's a lot easier to eat and it's less messy compared to the usual way of eating spicy hotpot."

### THE NINE-SQUARE HOTPOT

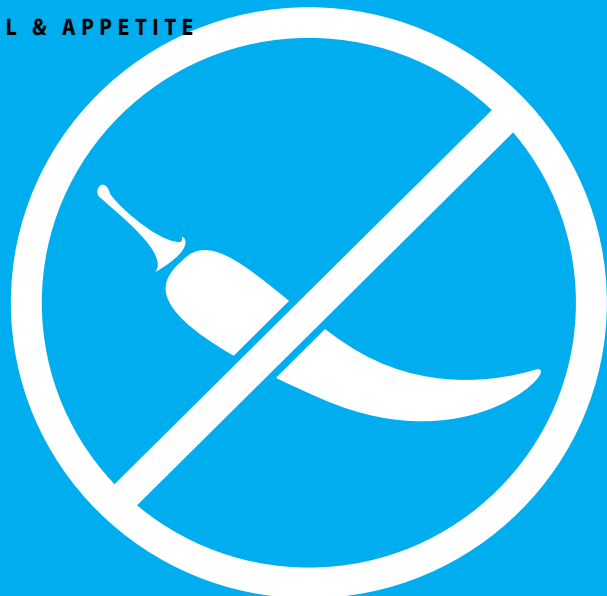
Nine-Square Hotpot (*jiu gong ge hong guo*) is also another variation of the

traditional hotpot. It is the specialty of Shu Jiu Xiang Hotpot Restaurant. This dish gets its name from the pot it is served in, which is divided into nine squares filled with dried chilli and Sichuan peppercorn. The soup base is called red pot (*hong guo*).

One special ingredient in the Nine-Square Hotpot is the bullfrog — it is still alive when the dish is served, meaning that the meat still tastes fresh after being cooked. There is also a special sauce made of sesame oil, minced garlic, oyster sauce and coriander that really enhances the flavour.

"The nine squares make it interesting. Separating my food into the different squares [also allows] me to find my food easily," remarks Li Fei, a frequent patron of the Shu Jiu Xiang Hotpot Restaurant. The Nine-Square Hotpot can be enjoyed at RMB 68 (S\$13.60) per serving — portions are quite large so it is an ideal dish to share with a friend or two.

Each of the different hotpot variations in Chengdu offers a unique dining experience. Give your taste buds an exciting treat by trying all the kinds in the city of spice.



# Non-spicy, Please?

**Mention “Sichuan food” and cauldrons filled with fiery red spices immediately come to mind. Chelsea Chang uncovers three Sichuan dishes found locally which are mild on the palate.**

Welcome to the world of Sichuan cuisine. As Asia's first (and globally second) city to be bestowed UNESCO's 2011 “City of Gastronomy” title, Sichuan food is well-known for its assault on the tastebuds. While this city may be renowned for its spice and sizzle — since notable creations like *mapo doufu* and *gong bao* chicken are indeed picante — multi-faceted Sichuan offers more than just the red hot stinging peppers.

We're talking about tantalising, strongly flavoured foodstuffs. Be it salty or sweet, greasy or even garlicky, as long as it's pungent enough to cause a reaction, that's Sichuan for you. China Internet Information Center noted that, 200 years ago, Sichuan had no spicy food inventions. It is the recent fusion of different flavours and seasonings that have created the uniquely Sichuan taste.

Here we present three traditionally prepared dishes that prove Sichuan foodfare need not taste spicy to impress.



*Photos courtesy of Bernice Ong*

# 1

## Pork Belly & Chicken Herbal Soup in Claypot at Lao Si Chuan Restaurant

Small: \$15.80, Large: \$29.80

On the first sip, a clash of bitter and sweet from the *dang gui* root and wolfberries hits you.

Though small in size, the wolfberries pack a sugary punch. This dish is peppery without being overwhelming, enabling the appreciation of other elements hidden in the milky broth.

The ingredients in this brew are all beneficial to the body. It's also one of the restaurant's bestselling dishes, so that's good news for the regular customers there.

Relentlessly emphasised as highly nutritious, even a small-sized serving offers a generous amount of ginkgo nuts (which are rich in vitamin A), iron-giving honey dates, and pig innards topped off with jelly-like bamboo fungus for added texture.

Simmering under the watchful eye of Chef Tang De Hai, a Sichuan Native, this flavourful concoction is suited for those looking for an interesting clash of Sichuan-style goodness without burning a hole in their pockets.





# 2

## French Bean with Minced Pork at Chengdu Sichuan Restaurant

Small: \$8.80, Large: \$16.80

Normally a platter which induces a burning sensation, it was a relief to find one served without the heat. Uninspiring at a glance but powerfully fragrant upon a whiff, this hometown classic's a reason why we should never judge a book by its cover.

The secret lies in using a unique Sichuan cooking technique known as dry-frying. This culinary method forces moisture out of the beans, leaving them browned and crisp. We recommend eating it piece by piece, just to savour the unexpected burst of juices hidden in each French bean.

Toss into the mix some minced meat, a smattering of spring onion, and a copious amount of dried olives, you're bound to get weak in the knees. More discerning palates might even detect hints of ginger, which gives the dish a refreshing taste.

As with most Sichuan dishes, the meal is no doubt flavourful with its saltiness. But it may possibly be too oily for some. Once you get accustomed to the taste, however, you'll uncover a gem that suits good company and drinks.

# 3

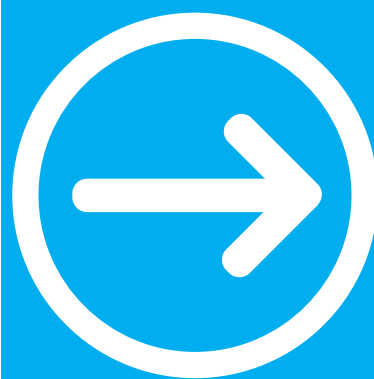
## Camphor Tea Smoked Duck at Seletar Hill Restaurant

Half Duck: \$19.80, Whole Duck: \$39

Marinated with Sichuan peppercorn and aromatic spices like anise seed, cumin seed and cinnamon, this restaurant's signature specialty boasts a subtle sweet yet peppery taste. Expect a delightful smoky feeling while sinking your chompers into tender flesh. The duck, worth ten hours' of preparation time, undergoes a rigorous smoking and steaming process which seals in the flavour.

Having been around for more than two decades, this homey restaurant prides its ducks on tasting crispier than that of other eateries. True to its reputation, the duck's skin is paper-thin and brittle, complementing the firm and succulent meat. Some of the bits were lightly charred, but they were the best parts. For a sweeter taste, try lightly coating the pieces with the restaurant's in-house sauce.

Artfully presented with an orchid, this crowd-pleaser is subject to availability. To avoid disappointment, it's best to place an order beforehand.



## GETTING THERE

**Lao Si Chuan**  
249 Outram Road  
5am-5pm daily  
Tel: 6222 9489

**Chengdu Sichuan Restaurant**  
243 Outram Road  
3pm-5am daily  
Tel: 6222 5335

**Seletar Hill Restaurant**  
16 Jalan Selaseh  
Lunch (11.30am-2.30pm);  
Dinner (5.30pm-10pm) daily  
Tel: 6483 0348

# NOCTURNAL

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Put a starlit twist on the usual Valentine's Day date.  
We show you how.

# Cupid's Arsenal

Valentine's Day is always a pickle for both halves of a relationship. Thinking of surprises, executing the surprises, and having to pretend like you enjoy the surprises are part and parcel of it all, but regardless of whatever goes on in the day, **Joey Lee** believes that it all boils down to the dinner.



Love  
in every  
Bite  
@  
ToTT



Want to bare your unadulterated love on a clean slate? Why not try sneakily heading down to Tools of the Trade to learn how to whip up a sumptuous meal for your date? There, you'll learn how to whip up a full three-course meal for your loved one. Don't worry too much about your klutziness in the kitchen because under the expert tutelage of Chef Veronica Cherry in a MasterChef-like studio, you'll be dishing up a delicious starter of Steamed Mussels with White Wine and Shallots and Parsley with ease on that important night.



# A Picnic in Eden @ Gardens by the Bay

If you have better plans for your cash than paying for ambience in a fine dining restaurant, why not channel the funds to assembling a spectacular picnic dinner and swapping the white-clothed table for the beauteous Gardens by the Bay? With the extra cash, you could pack together a star-studded romantic dinner of champagne, deluxe versions of the Croque Monsieur sandwich, and chocolate-coated strawberries. And with any leftover cash, why not go all-out for a taxi (or limo) ride too? Beats going budget in a fine dining restaurant with tap iced water and a round trip of MRT and buses.





# Starlit Nostalgia @ 38 Martin Road

Put a romantic twist on the classic movie-dinner combination by bringing your partner to Graze at 38 Martin Road, where they screen black and white films at the outdoor lounge to cast a unique ambience as you indulge in some classic American fare. With a taste for monochromatic colonial architecture, this restaurant will bring you back to the 19th century when romance revolved around nothing but you and your other half. Just make sure you don't run out of things to say if it's your first date.

*Photo courtesy of tipsforphotographers.com*



*Photo courtesy of Jewel Box*

## Dining in the Skies

@ Jewel  
Box

To put it bluntly, those of us who are either loaded with cash or simply great scrooges want the very best for our loved one on Valentine's Day. With that in mind, there is no more magnificent dining experience than at the Jewel Box. Along with a moving view of the city skyline, you'll experience immaculate service after every course with every round your cable car finishes. With only starlight privy to your time together, you and your partner can indulge in a first-class meal and the intimacy of feeling like you're dining in the skies.





# Old School Dinner @ Ku Dé Ta

Sometimes we just want a no frills experience — apart from delicious food and a breathtaking view, of course, which is what you get when you take your date to Ku Dé Ta. Perched high up in the Marina Bay Sands North Tower, half of the restaurant is practically carved away to give way to an amazing balcony with a mesmerising view of the city. Match that view with top-notch grub and the fact that the restaurant transforms into a classy lounge/club as the night progresses, and you know you're set for a rocking good night.





# BEFORE YOU GO...



We've got a real treat for you this issue, loyal readers, thanks to Eastern Holiday — your go-to for quality tours and exquisite service.

We're giving away a pair of round-trip economy class tickets to Hong Kong. But of course, we're not giving them away to just *anybody*. Show us how much you love **HYPE** and the most passionate reader could be on the next Cathay Pacific Airlines flight out to the food and shopping paradise of the Orient.

Sound good? Just follow the steps below.



**1** Snap a picture of yourself with this issue of **HYPE**.



**2** Tell us, in a hundred words or less, which story you like the most and why.



**3** Send both the picture and your answer to [contests@fmsmidea.com](mailto:contests@fmsmidea.com). Don't forget your full name, contact details and IC number!

Contest ends on Mar 31.

Tickets are valid until Jun 30. Terms and conditions apply.



# npTribune is 21

Established in 1992, **npTribune** is the oldest student-run newspaper in Singapore. It's also the foremost, noted by even industry professionals for its investigative journalism. With in-depth campus news, commentaries and opinion pages, this newspaper is truly  
The Student Voice  
of Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

**m:idea** congratulates  
**npTribune** on its  
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