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- HOME
- ASIA PACIFIC
- SINGAPORE
- WORLD
- BUSINESS
- SPORT
- TECHNOLOGY
- ENTERTAINMENT**
- FEATURES
- HEALTH
- SPECIAL REPORTS
- 30 DAY ARCHIVE

Video Photos Finance Travel Weather Discussion TV Shows About Us

Home > **ENTERTAINMENT NEWS**

A- A+

Seen Singapore? Now hear the city in music

By Francine Lim, channelnewsasia.com | Posted: 12 October 2012 11:58 hrs

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SINGAPORE: When seven local artists were challenged to compose original music inspired by seven Singapore locations, famed for their historic and artistic value, the little red dot proved anything but traditional.

Step into one of Singapore's oldest temple, and find yourself at the intersection between Chinese mythology and retro-future electric pop.

The compositions, some of which were created in collaboration with British musicians, are part of Musicity, a location-based curated music platform first launched in London, that combines architectural aesthetics and music.

Singapore's Mei Wong, well known as the Analog Girl, found herself working with the Singapore Chinese Orchestra to produce a track for the Hong San See Temple.

"I tried to put in a dance groove to the score. Then I gave it to them with a simple guideline and a mood to follow. They played it with their own musicality and they delivered," said Analog Girl.

The track for Musicity offers the synthesised sounds of Analog Girl and her ethereal voice combined with the percussions, flute, strings, gu zhen and the pi pa by five members of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra.

"It was a great collaboration. Electronic music and Chinese orchestra music sounds very different, but when it comes together, it works," said the musician who compared the ancient temple's free flowing layout to a loop.

"You can walk anywhere you want. It's not like you'll come to a dead end. So that layout reflects in the song's lyrics as well," said Analog Girl.

"I've a line in the song that says, 'The path is open for as long as you are one/everything and everyone you must belong' that lyric just came to my mind" she said of how she translated the Chinese architecture into her thoughts that people could tap into.

This global Musicity initiative that has since spread to Tokyo and with plans to further expand into cities such as Oslo, Berlin and Los Angeles, aims to inspire people to explore their city musically, architecturally and experimentally by visiting the respective buildings or places.

"Through Musicity Singapore, we aim to open eyes through ears, and encourage people to plug into the diverse and thriving cityscape around them," said Nick Luscombe, DJ and director of Musicity.

The project, added Mr Mark Howard, the director of the British Council in Singapore which coordinated the effort, is also to lend support to Singapore artists and musicians.



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UK recording artist Mara Carlyle, who collaborates with local musician Sonicbrat, plays the saw at the Musicity launch in the Flower Dome at Gardens by the Bay. (Francine Lim, channelnewsasia.com)

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At Gardens by the Bay, music blossomed through UK recording artist Mara Carlyle who collaborated with Singapore-based sound artist and composer Darren Ng, better known as Sonicbrat.

"It's about expressing my experience, how it feels for me to be in this space, not so much to speak for the building; just how it feels to be in this incredible space," said Carlyle.

Each piece of music is an original, which results as Luscombe explains, in a multi-sensory experience of the chosen location which include the ArtScience Museum, with music by Jason Tan of Octover together with UK musician Jon Hopkins, and the Singapore Art Museum put in tune by Cosa Nostra.

Of course, before you can enjoy the music, you have to physically be at the location.

Singaporean DJ Wayne Liu, better known as DJ KoFlow, created a hip-hop-infused piece for the School of the Arts to incorporate elements found in the school's environment after a visit.

"It's in the midst of the city, and it's really busy. With the whole outstanding building, I wanted something big to begin with but in the school itself, the interior is actually really peaceful," said KoFlow.

"So I wanted a second part that's quieter and more mellow."

"When you write a piece of music, you sit at home, you try to visualise on something but when you visualise it and you put your song in a certain way. When it goes on a different flow, you visualise a different part of the story," the turntable instrumentalist explained.

"This is a different thing. The visual, it's the same and you'll always have to write about that; you can't leave the topic."

"But architecture is like music. Every piece of music is different, every architecture is different."

Other artists who took part in the project include, I Am David Sparkle for the Asian Civilisations Museum, and Nick Chan of Muon for The Esplanade.

The exclusive tracks can be downloaded via the Musicity smartphone app at the respective landmarks and after the visit, you can take the experience away with you or create a new one, as the music can be played again, any time, any where.

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