

MUSIC SUPERSONIC TAKES OFF



Timbre+ resident band Supersonic is made up of Mohamed Faizal, Fathullah Ayob, Mohamed Shah, Khairul Afwan, Mohamed Rafi and Cassandra Jean Spykerman. PHOTO DAVID TAY

BY DAVID TAY

Supersonic is the resident band at Timbre+, where for almost 1½ years, it has charmed audiences with energetic covers of Top 40's hits, rock favourites and evergreen classics.

While some of the most requested songs in the band's repertoire include Despacito by Luis Fonsi, Shape Of You by Ed Sheeran and Sweet Child Of Mine by Guns N' Roses, the band also plays covers of Cantopop songs by artists such as Beyond and Teresa Teng.

The band is made up of Khairul Afwan, 35 (male lead vocals), Cassandra Jean Spykerman, 27 (female lead vocals), Fathullah Ayob, 36 (lead guitar), Mohamed Shah, 42 (keyboard), Mohamed Faizal, 42 (bass) and Mohamed Rafi, 38 (drums).

With a growing following, the band is now aspiring towards the heights reached by popular home-grown musicians The Sam Willows, Gentle Bones and Shigga Shay.

Supersonic's story is that of a band that thrives on a love for music, loyalty to one another and the need to delight the audience.

Afwan said: "We have been doing what we do simply because we enjoy music and we want to pass the love of the music to our audiences as well."

"Good music can be enjoyed by everyone. That's why we perform Cantopop, and even Thai and Tagalog songs, because there are no boundaries to music."

IN spoke to three members of the band.

GRADE A VOICE

Khairul Afwan did not do well in secondary school. He recalls not particularly being engaged by the subjects he took.

The fact that he was already the family's breadwinner at the age of 15 did not help his grades either. "To make ends meet, I had to work odd jobs. When I was in secondary school, I had already worked as a sales assistant in Metro department store and a bartender at a pub. I even worked as a workman to erect tentages alongside workers from Bangladesh," he said.

"When I failed my O-levels, some of my teachers said that I had no hope."

Afwan entered the Institute of Technical Education (ITE), where he discovered his passion for the arts through the ITE Arts Talent Development programme. There, he honed his theatre and stage skills in the Centre for the Music and the Arts in ITE Dover, which aims to promote artistic talents among students from different ITE campuses. All the while, he was still working part-time to help with the family finances.

After graduating from ITE, Afwan performed in music and acting gigs to support himself. Coincidentally, the theatre company that he freelanced with was booked by his alma mater, Boon Lay Secondary School, for an assembly programme in 2014, some 15 years after he left the school.

Imagine the surprise felt by some of Afwan's former teachers when he showed up to give a drama education talk to his secondary school juniors.

FROM KAMBING TO KEYBOARDS

Mohamed Shah, who barely passed his N-levels, was eager to leave his books behind as an 18-year-old.

After serving his national service, he helped out his parents at their nasi briyani stall in the former Tanjong Pagar KTM train station in 2000.

"I enjoyed helping out my family's business and was doing that for a very long time. In fact, I think I could have sold nasi briyani forever if I did not become a musician," said Shah.

His change in career plans was thrust upon him by his brother, Singapore footballer Rafi Ali, who was part of the team which won the Malaysia Cup in 1994.

Other than coaching football, Rafi was also the leader of local band The Vibes and a talented drummer.

"One day, my brother suddenly gave me a keyboard and asked me to play for his band. I did not even know a single thing about playing it, but he asked me to learn by watching how others played," said Shah.

After struggling for a few months to follow the fingerings of other keyboardists and learning informally from a friend, he was confident enough to play in his brother's band.

Over time, Shah continued to hone his musical techniques by learning from mentors, attributing his skills to experienced musicians such as Ramli Sarip, local Malay rock scene pioneer.

"Until today, I do not know how to read the dao gei (a Hokkien reference to music score notations that look like bean sprouts)," he said.

PLUCKED FROM THE AUDIENCE

Even with an advanced diploma in mass communications from the Management Development Institute of Singapore (MDIS), Cassandra Jean Spykerman had always been drawn to acting.

It all started with a non-paying gig at The Arts House in 2009 with a role as a Hispanic-American girl in the play Proscenium. She enjoyed it so much that she went for more auditions and, subsequently, took on irregular acting jobs for a living.

In 2013, Spykerman's family experienced cashflow problems and she had to take a full-time job as a customer service officer at a mall to help her parents out. After a year, she left that stable job and went back to freelancing.

One night, in 2015, Spykerman was enjoying a night out with her cousin and best friend when they decided to pull a prank on her by shouting out to the members of Supersonic that it was her birthday when it was not.

The band then invited her on stage to sing and was dazzled by her voice and showmanship.

Mr Afwan knew there and then that she was "the one".

"After we met that day, I went overseas for a holiday and Afwan kept texting me non-stop. He couldn't even wait until I came back to Singapore," said Spykerman.

"For years, my parents did not fully approve of my career in acting and singing, which they deem as unstable, until they saw my performance with Supersonic at Timbre+," she said.

"It was then that they realised that the audience loved our performance and that we were doing something significant there."

POP CULTURE RELAX WITH SOME LIGHT BUZZ

ARCHIE UNIVERSE TAKES OVER TEEN AWARDS

The teens have spoken. Comic books are definitely in when it comes to screen adaptations, at least, judging by the big winners at the 2017 Teen Choice Awards on Aug 13.

Riverdale, a dark and edgy take on the Archie Comics universe, easily took down all its rivals in the television category.

The TV show took home seven awards, which included Choice Drama TV Show and Choice Breakout TV Show.

The stars of the show scored big, with Cole Sprouse (Jughead Jones), who won Choice Drama TV Actor, Lili Reinhart (Betty Cooper), who won Choice Breakout TV Star, Madeleine Petsch (Cheryl Blossom), who won Choice Hissy Fit, and Camila Mendes (Veronica Lodge), who won Choice Scene Stealer.

The immensely popular "Bughead", which referred to the Jughead/Betty relationship on the show, won the Choice TVShip Award.

Meanwhile, in the movies category, superheroes were the name of the game.

Wonder Woman, Guardians Of The Galaxy Vol. 2 and Spider-Man: Homecoming each walked away with three awards.



The cast of Riverdale accepting the award for Choice Drama TV Show at the 2017 Teen Choice Awards in Los Angeles on Aug 13. PHOTO REUTERS

PROMINENT SHOWRUNNER JOINS NETFLIX

Television mega-producer Shonda Rhimes (right) will move her production company Shondaland from broadcast network ABC to Netflix.

The massive multi-year deal will see her producing new series for the streaming service. Shows by Shondaland that are already airing on ABC will remain there. These include constant favourites such as Grey's Anatomy, Scandal, and How To Get Away With Murder.

The move comes just days after ABC's corporate parent, the Walt Disney Company, announced that it will be removing all its content from Netflix in 2019 to focus on its own streaming service, putting pressure on Netflix to produce more of its own content.

The loss of Rhimes is a significant one for ABC. Not only did her company's shows make more than US\$2 billion (S\$2.7 billion) for the network, its shows were also much-hyped among both viewers and the media, a rarity for network TV content.

While Rhimes said in an official statement that her company's current shows "will continue to thrive on ABC", she told the Wall Street Journal that she was "thrilled" to no longer be beholden to "the necessary grind of network television".



POTTER HOME FOR SALE

Have you been hoarding gold Galleons in your Gringotts account? Well, the time has come to spend it all.

The 14th-century cottage where Harry Potter lived as a baby is up for sale for a cool £995,000 (S\$1.76m). The De Vere House was featured in Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows Part One as the house where the Potters were killed by Lord Voldemort. This is the second time in five years that the six-bedroom period home has been put up for sale. The cottage takes its name from the De Vere family, known to be the second richest family in the county after the royal family. It is located in Lavenham, Suffolk, which is considered the best preserved medieval village in England.

The house has retained its period features, including a massive timber frame, fireplaces, wall paintings and a rare stone spiral staircase with a carved brick handrail.

But fans all know what's the best part of owning this property: the possibility that Harry may drop by for a visit.

SUITE LIFE TWINS MAKE SCREEN COMEBACK

Fans of The Suite Life Of Zack And Cody must be in heaven right now.

Not only is Cole Sprouse (who played Cody) lighting up TV screens as Jughead Jones in TV show Riverdale, his twin Dylan Sprouse is now returning to acting after a six-year hiatus.

The 24-year-old is reportedly making his comeback in a new indie film, Carte Blanche, which is directed by Eva Dolezalova, according to MTV News.

While there is no official summary of the movie yet, the actors and crew have been posting behind-the-scenes sneak peeks on Instagram and Snapchat.

After their Disney Channel series ended in 2011, the Sprouse twins enrolled as students at New York University. Dylan majored in video game design and graduated in 2015. Cole's degree is in humanities and archaeology.

BBC, WSJ, MTV News, E!Online

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