

## MUSIC

# Jazz affair in Words & Music

By Cheah Ui-Hoon

A NOVEL jazz musical production will open the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Arts Festival this year – one that will showcase original songs to jazz standards, and played by small ensembles to a full band of jazz musicians.

*Words & Music: A Love Story Told in Jazz* takes its inspiration from American playwright AR Gurney's classic, *Love Letters*, and is a unique collaboration between professional and collegiate musicians. "Because it's not really a musical, but really a combination of words and music, we've decided to bill it as such," explains NUS law graduate Wang Liansheng

who came up with the structure and the words, while Singapore jazz veteran Jeremy Monteiro is directing the music.

Wang used the *Love Letters*' format – which is essentially letters written by two lovers, which they read to each other – for the piece. Then Monteiro selected the songs that moved the story along, using a combination of his compositions as well as classic jazz standards.

Wang, an NUS law graduate, first tried his hand at playwriting in 2012, also for the NUS Arts Festival. His play, *Boy Inside*, was then restaged by The Esplanade under its "The Studios" programme which gives new plays an airing. "The different format is what's interesting to me," notes Wang, who wrote scenes to fit the music and connecting text.

"So that the story will be a vehicle for the music, and vice versa – but it is about two people and their struggles in love," says Monteiro, who adds that it's also his first time directing the music at an NUS production.

Songs to be played by some 30 musicians in different formations include standards such as *Love Letters*, *All Blues* and *Everything is Beautiful*, besides *Blues for The Saxophone Club* by Monteiro, and *Swing with Me* and *Highest Land*, both co-written by Monteiro and singer Rani Singam.

"I wanted to use music that wasn't too difficult, so that we could work on smooth execution. It's not so out of reach for the musicians, so that they can give a polished delivery," explains Monteiro who's been rehearsing with the band as early as last November.

"It's a production that bridges the two models – of a variety show and a musical," adds Rani Singam, an alumni and professional singer since 2003. The last time she



**Words & Music:** A Love Story Told in Jazz takes its inspiration from American playwright AR Gurney's classic, *Love Letters*, and is a unique collaboration between professional and collegiate musicians. The show opens the NUS's Arts Festival this year and is helmed by NUS law graduate Wang Liansheng and jazz veteran Jeremy Monteiro. PHOTO: NUS ARTS FEST

was involved in the NUS Arts Festival was in 2008, and going back to the campus is like going to a new university, she adds, given the extent of changes. "So, it's a new experience in more ways than one!"

"It's so nice to work with young musicians," she adds, echoing Monteiro's sentiment.

"Especially since the university does have classes in theatre, dance and music. I remember I was quite encouraged as a musician, and had the arts enjoyed greater prominence, I might have made a different career choice then," relates Ms Singam.

The festival supplements the arts that are now being taught in the university – theatre, dance, music – and by

giving exposure to the non-arts students, that would at least give them an appreciation for the arts, so that they can be the future patrons of the arts. "It's really important to make the arts a part of daily lifestyle," she concludes.

The 10th NUS Arts Festival will be held from March 20-29, and the theme this year will be "Spirit of The Times".

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**Words & Music: A Love Story Told in Jazz** is the opening show for the 10th NUS Arts Festival, on March 20, at the University Cultural Centre Hall. For tickets and more information, please visit <http://www.nusartsfestival.com/>