



The Observatory, a four-member band which comprises (from left) Vivian Wang, Yuen Chee Wai, Cheryl Ong and Leslie Low. Below: *Vibrational* will see vibrations of shifting rhythms, synth bass space, oscillators and abused guitars, with repetition and urgency at the heart of their riff. PHOTOS: NUS

Celebrating ‘out-of-tune-ness’

Vibrational

Mar 25, 8pm, University Cultural Centre Hall

IMAGINE the strumming of over 30 guitars, and then imagine if they were all tuned just slightly off from one another – so that it’s not “one” solid wall of sound but one with a more shifting quality, and with more depth and layers to it.

“We want to celebrate “out of tune-ness” in *Vibrational*, declares Vivian Wang, vocalist, synth bassist and founding member of The Observatory, the homegrown art rock band formed in 2001. The band debuted *Vibrational* in Toulous last year, with 19 guitars. This time, they’re scaling up the “sound” with 30 guitarists from NUS Guitar Ensemble, Genus.

The concert celebrates the notion of beats, which in acoustics, is described as an interference pattern between two sounds of slightly different frequencies. “Imagine two notes tuned just a fraction apart . . . so that what you hear is like a vibrato,” she explains.

No two guitars will ever sound exactly the same even when they’re playing the same note, she points out, because the sound depends on the person playing, his or her body temperature, the room’s temperature, the wood, the string and its ten-



sion. “What more over 30 guitarists. You will have this wall of sound – that’s not necessarily loud, but really rich and full in tone and harmonics,” adds Cheryl Ong, drummer and the newest member of the band who joined in 2014.

The four-member band – which includes Leslie Low and Yuen Chee Wai – will be playing the repertoire from their latest album, *August is the Cruellest* in the first half of the con-

cert. Genus will join in in the second half, with music arranged for them, led by two of the band’s former members, Victor Low and Dharma Shan. The band has written a new piece, entitled *Vibrational*, for this concert.

Lee Chun Yat, vice-president of NUS Guitar Ensemble, says that it was a rare opportunity to work with and play alongside professional musicians. “Especially with one of Singapore’s most influential art rock

bands,” he adds. Genus is an ensemble with classical guitar music as their focus – although their work includes Japanese pop, jazz and even traditional folk music.

“The Observatory’s music has darker themes and more abstract ideas (and) this difference was obvious to most of the Genus members right from the very first rehearsal,” he notes, adding that it’s a refreshing change to work with outsiders who sound musically different from them.

The main challenges for Genus include figuring out how the parts they were given blended in with the rest of The Observatory’s music. “We’ve to listen to cues from the drums or lead singer to come in as there is no conductor; and we’re using picks instead of fingers to pluck the strings, while making do with self-written notes and tabs,” Mr Lee says.

The Observatory’s Ong chuckles as she recalls the guitar ensemble members’ shock at the first rehearsal as the band’s repertoire is as opposite to theirs as you can get. “They’re a bit stressed now but they’re trying hard!”

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■ *Vibrational* is the closing show for the NUS Arts Festival. Tickets from S\$27 are available from www.apactix.com.