

# Rocking S'pore hard, with orchestras and electric guitars

*Zouk tribute team and The Observatory are gearing up for ambitious performances*

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**SINGAPORE** – Two innovative music gigs are lined up for the coming weekend, and they both feature big bands struggling with complex music being put into scores for the first time.

One More Time — A Tribute to Zouk at Jiak Kim Street, organised by Selena Tan's The Henderson Project, will be on show at Capitol Theatre on Friday (March 24) and Saturday (March 25). The performances will feature dance music tunes played in a continuous mix by a 48-piece orchestra.

On Saturday, indie rockers The Observatory will present a show called Vibrational, in which the four-piece band plays music from its albums August Is The Cruellest (2016) and Oscilla (2014). They will not be alone — 30 classical guitarists from the National University of Singapore will be playing with them as well.

All the musicians involved are rehearsing aggressively in the countdown to the performances, both of which promise to be intense.

One More Time is being put through its paces under the close watch of concert director DJ Aldrin Quek, and music director Indra Ismail.

"It is everyone's first time in such an endeavour," said Quek, 47, of the orchestra — comprising wind instruments, strings, bass, percussion, brass instruments and sections — as well as singers Rani Singam, X'ho, Alemay Fernandez, Vanessa Fernandez and Hazrul Nizam. "Just from (the) rehearsals, it is going to be energetic — very powerful," he added.

The music will be presented in one 90-minute, non-stop mix. Some tunes will be played over each other — just like in a DJ mix. It is quite a feat for the classically trained musicians to take on.

"Other shows of this nature have presented the music, one song after the other," said Quek. "We wanted to make the Singapore orchestra work harder," he joked.

The Observatory have presented a show akin to Vibrational at the Made In Asia festival in Toulouse,



Conductor Indra Ismail (left) and music director Aldrin Quek (right) at a rehearsal with the Zouk tribute orchestra, which will perform popular dance music hits in a non-stop, 90-minute mix. PHOTOS: JASON QUAH/TODAY

France, with 19 musicians from guitar group Guitarkestra in 2015. But this time, the band had to learn how to work with students, many who have never played the electric guitar before.

The Observatory — a four-piece art rock, experimental and electronica band — will present Vibrational at the NUS Cultural Centre.

"Because a lot of them are classical guitarists, they required scores ... We've played these songs so many times, but we don't work with scores," said Ong. "We have been trying to convince the students to trash that idea (that you need scores), to learn (the music) as songs."

The guitarists are led by former Observatory members, bassist Victor Low and drummer Dharma.

"We are kind of obsessed with imperfection. I think what makes (a live show) really exciting is when there is imperfection," Wang said.

Like The Observatory, scores have played a big part in the One More Time show. Quek, who selected the tunes and created the mix, said that the work was down to Indra — who had no experience with dance music prior to this project — to get the musicians up to speed.

"He had to score everything for the musicians," said Quek. "But from the start, he just understood what was needed. He got it immediately."

## LET THE MUSIC MOVE YOU

The weight of expectation sits heavy on Quek's shoulders. He was cast in many roles at Zouk — he served as resident DJ, DJ booking manager, and ambassador over the course of nine years until 2005. Former owner and founder of the club Lincoln Cheng has been "very hands on" and asks for updates on how rehearsals are going, said Quek.

And he knows that there will be those who walk away from the gig — which will re-create the dance music hits played at the club in its 25 years — dissatisfied. "There have

been so many hits over the years, and so many generations walked through the doors of Zouk," he said. "So many songs have meant something to various people."

Although Quek is not at liberty to reveal what the track selections are, *Insomnia* by Faithless and *Rej by Ame* have been reported as being in the mix. Quek said that the music moves in chronological order — the first track dates back to 1991.

If the production is successful here, there are plans to take the show abroad. To recreate the vibe of Zouk, seats have been cleared to create a dance floor. Two bars will serve drinks, and a DJ set will follow performances each night.

Although no bars are reportedly going to be set up for Vibrational, The Observatory are confident that the music will sweep their audiences away.

At the show, the physicality of the music produced by the ensemble will make members of the audience "feel like things are going through your body in ways that you never experienced", Wang said.

The ensemble will also present a brand new song, *Vibrational*, written specifically for the show.

It is also the last time audiences will be able to catch The Observatory live this year. The outfit plans to take a break for the rest of the year after the concert.

"We are really going to hole up. You are not going to see us for the rest of the year. We are going into a cave. A creative cave," said Wang, who co-founded the band with Low in 2001. In the meantime, the band is also looking forward to having a good time at the show.

"The more (musicians there are on stage), the merrier. It's really very fun," Wang said.

She added: "When you make a sound together ... when you make music and play together, there is something very healing and transformative about it."

● One More Time — A Tribute To Zouk At Jiak Kim Street is on at Capitol Theatre on March 24 and 25. Tickets start at S\$88 (not inclusive of booking fees) and are available via Sistic ([www.sistic.com.sg](http://www.sistic.com.sg)).

● Vibrational with The Observatory, featuring the National University of Singapore Guitar Ensemble, is on at the University Cultural Centre on March 25. Tickets at S\$27 are available at APACTix ([www.apactix.com](http://www.apactix.com)).