

Chaos and beauty in wall of sound

By Dylan Tan

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VETERAN homegrown alternative band The Observatory is taking a much-deserved break for the rest of 2017 after a very prolific creative phase when it released three new albums in as many years.

With so much recent material behind it, nobody would think Leslie Low (vocal, guitar), Vivian Wang (synth bass, keyboards), Yuen Chee Wai (guitar, electronics) and Cheryl Ong (drums) were going to retreat quietly into hibernation.

The alt-rockers certainly didn't disappoint when they bid farewell (for now) by cranking the volume up to 11 and creating a wall of noise last Saturday at the University Cultural Centre.

The gig titled *Vibrational* was also the closing show of this year's NUS Arts Festival, and was the reprisal of a similar performance from 2015 in Toulouse which they played with 19-piece French guitar group Guitarkestra.

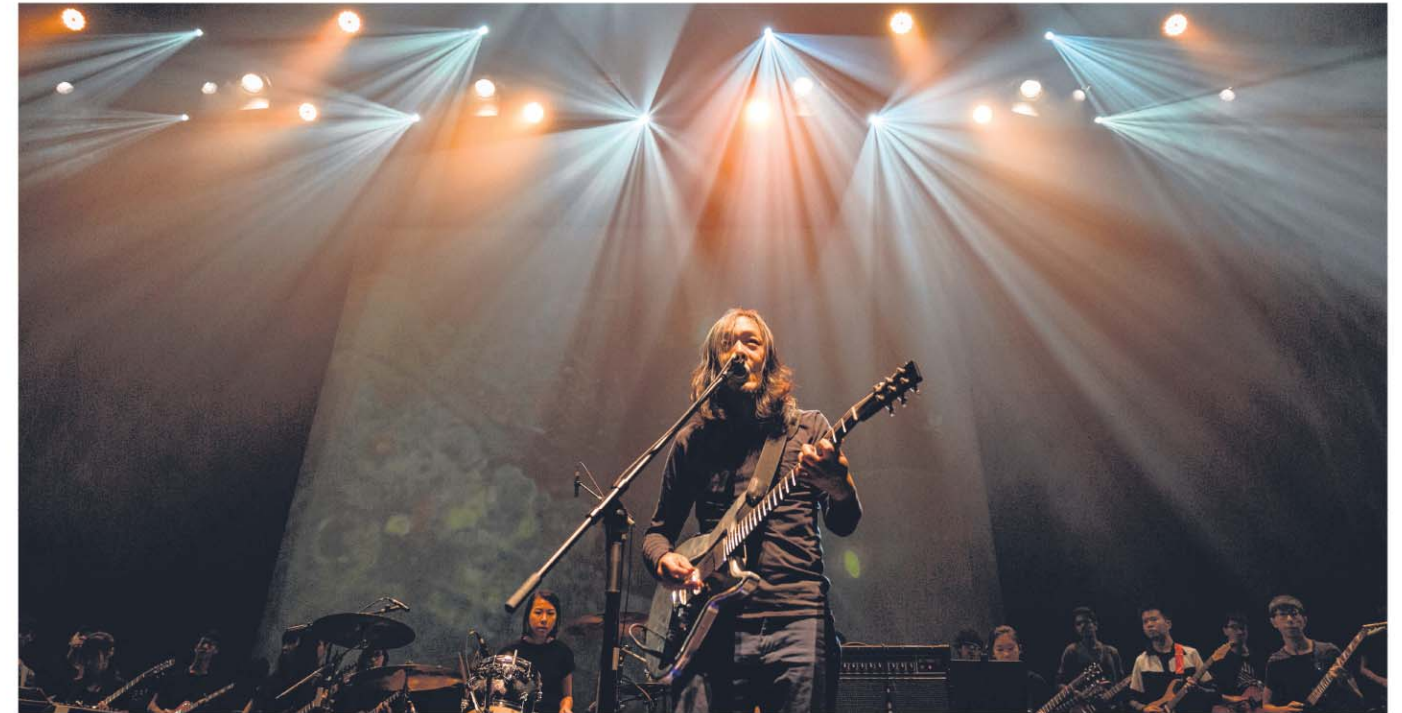
It's the kind of experiment The Flaming Lips would be proud of and The Observat-

ory went one step further last weekend by expanding the line-up to include 30 students from NUS Guitar Ensemble and NUS Talents for the second half of the concert.

Not only that, the band also reunited with two of its former members, bassist Victor Low and guitarist Dharma, for the occasion, making the show a unique one, to say the least.

The set list was made up almost exclusively of songs from 2014's *Oscilla* and 2016's *August is the Cruellest* – two of the band's rawest and most experimental albums. The group played three tracks off the latter (*You Have No Heart*, *A Ghost To You*, and *Wait for the Real Storm*) on its own and even as a four-piece, The Observatory was loud enough to fill every corner of the cavernous venue with its shape-shifting and brutally-beautiful brand of post-(insert any genre here because these guys are impossible to decipher).

But that was nothing compared to the sonic assault that awaited the audience when they brought on the 30-member-strong NUS Guitar Ensemble and NUS Talents – with Low and Dharma doubling



Above: Leslie Low of The Observatory. Right: The band brought on the 30-member-strong NUS Guitar Ensemble and NUS Talents for the second half of their gig.

PHOTOS: BACK ALLEY CREATIONS



as conductors on both sides of the stage – for the remaining hour. It was interesting to watch a younger generation of guitarists who are more used to playing diligently from score sheets push themselves out of their comfort zone – much like how The Observatory has been challenging itself musically for the last 16 years from album to album – strumming along furiously as they took part in the band's carefully-constructed

opera of chaos.

The Observatory is one of Singapore's most prolific music acts and *Vibrational* brings the first chapter of its career to a fitting fiery close. We can't wait for the next to begin.