



ARK ROYAL

Singaporean Jazz

The ARK ROYAL, a band founded by singer-songwriter Dawn Wong and jazz composer Felix Phang, has just released the first original contemporary Mandarin jazz album of its kind in their home country of Singapore. Tinged with childlike wonder and whimsy, the album 'Marco Lopo' was launched with a concert presented by Singapore's landmark arts centre - the Esplanade - as part of Huayi Chinese Festival of the Arts 2016.

We believe our music transcends language barriers and seek to share it with audiences around the world.



“Light-hearted, imaginative songs that tell universal stories.”

“Accessible compositions brought out by thoughtful, multi-layered arrangements peppered with Singaporean flavour.”

“A band comprising some of Singapore’s most well-regarded names in jazz.”



THE ALBUM ‘MARCO LOPO’

Marco Lopo is not your usual jazz album. In fact, we’re a little reluctant to slap any labels on it. The brainchild of singer/songwriter Dawn Wong and jazz composer/arranger Felix Phang, it fuses beautiful jazz harmonies with pop, folk, rock and classical elements resulting in a tasty ‘rojak’ (Singaporean salad dish).

This collection of original contemporary Mandarin jazz tunes bears hints of the multicultural metropolis of Singapore. Its lyrics draw inspiration from innocence and the imagination to create a world where rabbits can captain ships and vegetables dance the samba. But take a closer look and you may find it hard to distinguish fact from fiction.

“With ‘Marco Lopo’, I wanted to tell the stories happening around me - stories about life’s struggles as seen from our tiny Island. Singapore has one of the world’s most open economies, and hence is an ever-evolving melting pot of cultures. The lens through which we see the world is universal, yet unique.” - Dawn Wong

To bring each story to life, Berklee alumnus Felix Phang crafted and arranged each tune, adding details like the woeful howl of an overworked plush bear on Bearst Friends and the aching memory of a lullaby on Elephants Love Stargazing. The resulting music is driven by easily-digestible melodies clothed in harmonic layers and rhythmic textures, bursting with whimsy and wonder.

Live, there is a certain energy and sincerity that the band brings to the stage. Their music sets up a light-hearted atmosphere, almost acting as a decoy for adventurous improvisation by some of Singapore’s most well-regarded names in jazz, collectively christened ‘The Ark Royal’ by vocalist Dawn Wong.

But more than music, this album is about the journey taken together on unpredictable waters and the wonderful experiences along the way.

By Dylan Tan

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LIKE the Chinese zodiac,

there are more than

enough animals in Dawn

Wong's debut album Marco

Lopo to fill a mini-zoo.

They are all part of her song-

writing craft and something

which she has been doing

since young when she would

give characters to stuffed

toys.

The animals on the

10-track album have human

traits and journey through

life like us, complete with

jobs sometimes. They in-

clude stargazing ele-

phants, a shy hedgehog, a

city-dwelling rat and a lit-

tle hummingbird with a zest

for life.

"With each tune, I think of a

little story," says the former

bank executive whose musical

journey started when she joined

the second season of reality sing-

ing show Project Superstar in

2006.

The title track, for instance, is

named after a rabbit called Marco

Lopo (Lopo which sounds like

"luo po" is Mandarin for "car-

rot", if you didn't get the ref-

erence) who dreams of travelling the world

in search of adventure, much to the dis-

appointment of his farmer father who was in-

tending for him to take over the family

business.

"To write from a human perspective

might be a little too preachy or forced so I

made up these stories," chuckles the

31-year-old about her whimsical approach

to songwriting.

The all-original 10-track album will be

launched next week at a show which Wong

will perform with her new band The Ark

Royal. The indie artist has been perform-

ing with various ensembles, most notably

with the Shanghai Jazz Club since making

the crossover from pop.

But she stresses she doesn't just dabble

in one genre exclusively. "I enjoy the differ-

ent genres and wanted to dabble in jazz be-

cause you can colour the songs in different

shades," Wong explains.

Hence, while Marco Lopo can be broad-

ly classified as a contemporary Mandarin

MUSIC

Wong's debut album features a musical menagerie

jazz album, elements of soul, pop, world and swing can also be heard over the various tracks.

It is a bold move in the typically conservative Chinese music scene where most music tends to be cookie-cutter radio-friendly pop ballads but Wong says she is not trying to alienate anybody and be different just for the sake of it.

"One of our aims was to make the album accessible - we want as many people to listen to it as possible - so every song has a strong melody," she shares.

The jazz genre was something she has been interested in exploring because "it is the basis on which a lot of great work has been done" so she has been learning the language of the music and building on it.

Marco Lopo is a labour of love, to say the least, and handmade copies of it, with the cover stitched by Wong, and other merchandise designed and made by her will be on sale at the launch gig next week.

"This is a little experiment. I am trying out something that hasn't been done before," she muses. "So much time and effort

has gone into the making of the album and because we all have so little time, I chose to use mine to make original music to tell the stories I see around me."

Dawn Wong & The Ark Royal: The Adventures of Marco Lopo is part of Esplanade's Huayi Chinese Festival of the Arts in music programme. It takes place at the venue's Recital Studio on Feb 16 at 7.30pm. Tickets at \$530 (adult) and \$520 (concession) available at Sistic. For more information on Dawn Wong's music, check www.dawnwong.sg and www.mofimusic.sg.



DAWN WONG

// VOICE

Over the years, Dawn Wong has made a name for herself in local circles, earning invitations to perform at the inaugural Spring Wave E-Le Music Awards by Radio Station UFM1003 and Taiwan international music festival Spring Scream, among others. She also developed a taste for jazz, working with and learning from some of Singapore's most respected musicians.

Dawn was headed for a quiet life in finance, until her father's passing made her decide to grab life by the horns. After completing her undergraduate studies at the University of New South Wales in Australia, Dawn returned home and enrolled herself in almost every pop music programme she could find, unfazed by her late start.

In 2007, Dawn began her musical journey proper on television singing competition Project Superstar 2, and went on to impress renowned musicians such as Sandee Chan on Taiwan's Super Idol 5 singing competition. In 2012, she released her debut eponymous EP to positive reviews, and it was nominated for Best Local Music Work at the Freshmusic Awards in 2013.

// DIRECTION, BASS

Felix Phang is a composer, bassist and music producer from Singapore whose work has injected a much needed fresh sound and energy in the local jazz scene. His 2015 album of original jazz compositions for his 10-piece band drew praise from music veterans and contemporaries, and support from the National Arts Council.

Since graduating from Berklee College of Music, the jazz composition major has chalked up performance credits for musicals like Beauty World and December Rains, festivals such as Java Jazz and Singapore International Jazz Festival, as well as composition and arranging credits for musicals, a 50-piece orchestra, to name a few.

As a producer, Felix has created numerous projects spanning live concerts, genre-specific bands, community outreach programmes and music album recordings.

Felix currently holds an adjunct position at LASALLE College of the Arts and is the founder of a year-long composition workshop where he mentors young writers to produce their first project.



FELIX PHANG

A portrait of Wei Tan, a man with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the left. The portrait is framed by a thin white border.

WEI TAN

// KEYBOARDS

Wei is a jazz pianist who is a first-call musician in his country of origin, Singapore. A latecomer into jazz, Wei started piano studies at 15 and jazz at 21 when he was in law school.

A protege of Thelonius Monk alumni Victor Gaskin (Cannonball Adderley, Billy Taylor, Duke Ellington Orchestra etc), Wei's musical career has skyrocketed since his first gig at a hotel lounge. In the span of 12 years, he has performed with numerous international mainstream jazz icons, Grammy award winners and world music giants, and has toured extensively around the world.

Residing in New York City in the fall of 2007 to 2010, Wei quickly established himself as a musician of note, performing at hallowed jazz venues like the Blue Note and 55 Bar, with Grammy Award winners Brian Lynch and Joe Lovano. He also shared the stage with the new generation of rising jazz stars, including Rob Scheps, Quincy Davis, Greg Glassman, Bill Saxton and Grant Stewart.

Wei has taught as an adjunct professor in New York University, and is currently a member of faculty at LASALLE College of the Arts.

// GUITARS

A graduate of Berklee College of Music, Alvin Wong performs regularly with a number of local jazz groups at Singapore's music hotspots. He founded and leads jazz group the Spiral Quartet which celebrates the genre's ability to innovate and evolve.

Alvin counts as his influences jazz guitar greats from Wes Montgomery to Joe Pass and Pat Martino, to modern-day heroes like John Scofield and Pat Metheny, and has a penchant for haunting guitar effects.

In 2012, Alvin recorded an album of his post-rock compositions at a Boston studio, but these tracks will never see the light of day in his pursuit of perfection. Alvin is also active as an educator.

A portrait of Alvin Wong, a man with dark hair, wearing a dark beanie and a dark jacket over a dark shirt. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The portrait is framed by a thin white border.

ALVIN WONG

// DRUMS

Tamagoh has been playing in the Jeremy Monteiro Jazz Band since 1989 and has also appeared regularly with international and local stars like Laura Fygi, Dick Lee, Frances Yip, Eric Moo, and Sandy Lam.

Throughout his career, Tamagoh has performed at top regional festivals and with numerous orchestras like the Singapore Chinese Orchestra and Singapore Festival Orchestra.

In 2005, Tamagoh was conferred the Compass Artistic Excellence Award for his outstanding artistic contribution to Singapore, as well as the Singapore Street Festival Tribute Award.

Tamagoh recently held his first solo concert 'It's About Time' at the Esplanade Recital Studio as part of the Singapore Street Festival 2015 and will perform on tour with Hong Kong superstar Sandy Lam in 2016.



// VIOLIN

After living and touring in America and Europe for almost 20 years, cross-cultural violinist, multi-instrumentalist, teacher, composer and producer Kailin Yong continues to spread his musical creed across borders and art forms from his hometown, Singapore.

He believes in the power of music to bring about positive changes in our world, which is why he has dedicated his life to making music with the intention of building cultural bridges and promoting peace.

Apart from regular invitations to perform and conduct workshops in the region, Kailin's most recent work includes collaborations with notable names in dance like Maya Dance Theatre for performances in America and China.

In between his travels, Kailin teaches at LASALLE College of the Arts and SOTA.

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