

CHARLIE LIM

CHARLIE LIM (b. 1988) is a singer-songwriter/producer who has grown into one of Singapore's more prominent voices in contemporary pop music over the last 10 years. Charlie was exposed to music from an early age, singing and playing the piano for church and school bands. Moving to Australia when he was 15, he topped the state of Victoria for music performance during his final year of college. He began writing and recording his own original songs during National Service, and released his first Extended Play (EP) in 2011.

Since then, his work has garnered more than 20 million streams on digital platforms, clinching two #1 spots on the iTunes Singapore album charts for 'TIME/SPACE' (2015) and 'CHECK-HOOK' (2018). He was also awarded COMPASS Young Songwriter of the Year (2017) and the Youth Music Awards' Indie/Alternative Artist of the Year (2021).

Charlie has performed at prominent live stages across the region including Urbanscapes (Kuala Lumpur, 2012), Clockenflap (Hong Kong, 2012), Java Jazz Festival (Jakarta, 2016), Summer Sonic (Tokyo, 2018), Bigsound (Brisbane, 2018) and Wanderland Festival (Manila, 2019). He has also collaborated and performed with international artists such as Khalil Fong, Kimbra, Kan Sano, Miho Fukuhara, BIBI, Taku Takahashi and Clara Benin.

Charlie has played a central role in writing and producing for several initiatives on a national level. He is best known for his updated version of 1987's 'We Are Singapore,' which he was commissioned to write and co-produce for 2018's National Day. His prelude for 'We Are Singapore' was then developed into a full song, 'Room at the Table' (2020) – which was the opening item for 2020's National Day Parade (NDP). Charlie also co-wrote and produced 'Breathing City' (2021) for 2021's NDP, as well as two theme songs for the 2015 Southeast Asian Games and performed the closing song 'Still' (2015) at the National Stadium.

Charlie has been a mentor to younger artists for several music programmes such as SHINE Youth Festival, The Great Singapore Replay and *SCAPE Invasion. He is currently Music Director of Indigo, a new Internet radio station focused on being a platform for local artists.



Album cover of 'EP' by Charlie Lim, 2011

Photo courtesy of Charlie Lim



A CONVERSATION WITH CHARLIE LIM

Tell us about your earliest memories encountering the arts. Who or what were your key influences in music?

My earliest memory and biggest influence would be my mother, who plays the piano and used to conduct the church choir. I remember enjoying performing a lot as a kid, whether it was at the school talent show or playing in the church band. I had the opportunity to study overseas for a few years and got to do music as one of my main subjects, which I did well in and that gave me more confidence to pursue it further.

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced in your artistic journey, and how did you overcome them?

Burnout was the most common thing I faced, not just from the amount of work but also from being too hard on myself, which in turn hindered me from being free to create. Over the years I have learned to have some healthy detachment and that it is just as important to celebrate the small wins and remind myself why I do what I do in the first place.



Mosaic Music Festival 2014
Photo courtesy of Harriet Koh

What is the most rewarding aspect of what you do?

I have been privileged to be able to do this for some time, and even after so long, I still get the same feeling of satisfaction—and sometimes bewilderment—whenever I finish a song. It feels like I can never create anything using the same process twice, and a lot of how a song gets put together is a series of happy accidents. Being able to perform these songs to people who can connect with them compounds those feelings. You have released something into the world and it takes a life of its own, creating new attachments and you cannot imagine what others may get from it.

What do you want the audience to experience through your songs?

Whatever they want to get out of it, really. Everyone is different, and people like different things for different reasons. I just try my best to make something as good as it can be and not really think twice about how it will be received. Hopefully they would like a song enough to revisit it and appreciate the craft of what was required to create it.

Please share what a typical day in your life as a singer-songwriter/producer is like.

I do not think I have ever had a “typical” day, but I guess it would ping-pong between being a recluse working from home and performing for shows and touring overseas. Balance and routine are not my forte, although I try my best to make time for physical exercise. I have been doing more collaborations as well as producing and writing for other artists recently. They have been quite stimulating and given me more focus as the projects are more self-contained.

What are your vision and hopes for Singapore’s pop music scene?

I hope artists get to work on their craft without being concerned about following a global trend or model. The idea of “making it” is not about finding international validation. There is no better time to make original music than now, but we also need more people to realise how good we have it in our own backyard. We need more people in the industry too: managers, journalists, technicians, luthiers, programmers, administrators.

What advice would you give to students who want to pursue a career in your field?

Define your idea of success. The goal posts may change so it is good to manage expectations while fanning your ambition. Always remember what made you fall in love with music in the first place. Be gracious to people around you. Community is all we have.



Star Theatre 2018
Photo courtesy of Aloysius Lim

How does receiving the Young Artist Award from the National Arts Council change things for you? Tell us more about how you intend to further grow and contribute to the arts scene.

I am very grateful for it, and I hope to continue doing my part in helping newer artists get more opportunities and guidance if they need. I am currently the music director of Indiego, an online radio station launched by Mediacorp to support more local indie and alternative acts. I hope to grow it into a sustainable platform that will serve the community and also reach out to other artists in the region. I was also made writer-director on the board of Composers and Authors Society of Singapore (COMPASS), and I want to be able to make a positive impact by channelling resources to improve its infrastructure, as well as educating artists on ways they can monetise their music.



WORDS OF APPRECIATION

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