

Star concert at Gardens by the Bay

The Star concert at Gardens by the Bay looks set to be a music, food and fun extravaganza

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Music-lovers are raving about it and some are even shouting about it. It is the Straits Times Appreciates Readers (Star) concert at Gardens by the Bay on July 15. Take Diane Chia, 19, who screamed when she heard that the line-up includes her favourite band Boys Like Girls.

Never mind that she was at her desk at work as an IT representative.

She says: 'I could not help it, I was so excited. Thank goodness there were no customers at the time.'

Ms Chia, who will enrol in social sciences at Singapore Management University next month, adds: 'I went to the back and started calling all my friends.'

She has been a fan of American punk-pop band Boys Like Girls since they released their eponymous debut album in 2006.

She began following their blogs, Facebook and Twitter accounts, where she connected with other Singaporean fans.



Boys Like Girls fans (from left) Grace Yeo, 19, Jesslyn Lim, 17, Diane Chia, 19, and Kathy Lim, 17, with their custom-made T-shirts which they will be wearing when they attend the Star concert on July 15. -- ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

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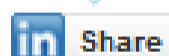
By GOH SHI TING



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Visitors to the Straits Times Appreciates Readers (Star) carnival on Sunday do not need to go hungry while enjoying top music acts like home-grown singer Tanya Chua, K-pop girl group 4Minute and American pop-punk band Boys Like Girls.



Kinara, a restaurant group serving halal northern Indian cuisine, will be one of the vendors providing delicious food at the Star carnival on Sunday. -- PHOTO: KINARA

An assortment of food - such as popiah, chicken tikka, macaroni and cheese, and tuna sandwiches - will be sold from 3pm. The stalls will be run by Peach Garden, Kinara, Harry's Bar, hic'Cup and Marble Slab Creamery.

Delectable food aside, each visitor could get two goodie bags. The one that comes with each ticket to the Star concert contains a light stick, an umbrella and snacks.

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From almost quitting as a singer, Tanya Chua bounces back and wins recognition from the music industry in a big way



Boon Chan
Media Correspondent

There can be no argument now. Tanya Chua is the most critically acclaimed Mandopop singer in Singapore of all time.

Last month, she won the prestigious Golden Melody Award for Best Mandarin Female Singer for a record third time for her latest album, *Sing It Out Of Love* (2011). She shares the record with only two other singers, Taiwanese Sarah Chen and Stella Chang.

Her previous wins at the Chinese music industry's equivalent of the Grammys were for *Amphibian* (2005) and *Goodbye & Hello* (2007).

"Winning each time, every moment is surreal for me. It was unbelievable and it was just blank blank blank all the way from getting up and going towards the stage," says the 37-year-old, who muses that it is such an elusive award.

"You never know what tugs at the heartstrings of judges. All you know is you go with your instincts and you just hope people like it."

Speaking to Life! in English at The Regent Singapore's Tea Lounge, she says, as if still trying to wrap her head around the most recent win: "I'm super f***ing lucky."

Dressed in an all-black ensemble with a cream blazer and some choice accessories, Chua looks elegant and confident. She wears success well.

Chua, Stefanie Sun and JJ Lin are currently Singapore's top pop exports, but while Chua might reap the accolades, it is the other two who lead in the popularity stakes. At the Composers and Authors Society of Singapore awards on Sunday, she received an Artistic Excellence Award while Lin won the awards for Top Local Songwriter, Top Local Artiste Of The Year and Top Local Chinese Pop Song based on royalties collected.

According to one tabulated list circulating on the Internet, Sun has sold 12 million records while Chua has sold 1.25 million records. Chua appears unruffled by the apparent disparity between her critical acclaim and popularity. She says: "If I'm popular 'Yay!'. If I'm not popular, I'll work harder. If you start thinking along the way of popularity, it would affect the kind of music you really want to do. It side-tracks you a lot because you start thinking of what the market wants instead of what you want."

Thus far in Singapore, *Sing It Out Of Love* has sold around 2,000 copies while her new English record *Just Say So* (2011) has sold close to 1,000 copies. Chua will be performing songs from both discs at the upcoming Straits Times Appreciates Readers concert at Gardens by the Bay on Sunday.

Ask her if she and Sun have a friendly bet whenever they both get nominated in the same category for the Golden Melody Awards and she looks mildly horrified. She says: "That's the last thing that happens between us. Getting nominated - nobody ever talks about it with each other somehow. We keep it real and I'm more interested in her baby. That's the thing I appreciate in my friendship with her."

Sun was, in fact, one of the first people to congratulate her via SMS on her win. The two friends even shared a talked-about cheeky kiss at the 2006 Golden Melody Awards.

Arriving at this point in her life and career, where Chua is clearly comfortable in her own skin and has come to terms with the kind of singer-songwriter she was meant to be, required a bumpy journey and each of the Best Mandarin Female Singer wins at the Golden Melody Awards.

The making of *Amphibian* under Warner Music was the lowest point of her career. She was beginning to lose faith in herself as a songwriter as the record company kept trying to convince her to sing karaoke-friendly numbers. "I know I could sing all those ballads, but inside, I wasn't happy because I'm not such a sad person. I couldn't relate to the songs as much although the songs are really great songs." It also meant that her compositions took a backseat.

She was about to quit the industry when she won the best female singer award and she saw it as a sign: "It was the universe telling me 'Stop there, girl, you got a long way to go. Here's a little dessert for you.'"

After *Amphibian*, she shook up her life. She moved to Taiwan, set up her own production firm Tian Ya Music Productions and acted as producer for the first time on *Goodbye & Hello*.

It was a watershed album, one which "broke the



ST PHOTO: MARIEL VICTORIA MOK

TANYA'S TIME

dam" for her and moulded her into a more complete musician who composed her music, wrote her lyrics and refined her sound. "If I just write music, I kind of feel like I'm like just a half-glass-empty kind of songwriter. I like to torment myself with things like that."

Moving to Taiwan also meant the English-educated Chua had to come to grips with the Chinese language and learn how to use it. The epiphany soon came. "I write very conversationally but this is my music because this is how I would talk and how I would think. For the longest time, I didn't really know who I was as a songwriter. When I started writing my own lyrics, everything made sense. You're listening to who I am, you're talking to me."

For going with her gut instinct on *Goodbye & Hello*, she was rewarded with awards for Best Female Mandarin Singer and Best Album Producer.

She says gratefully: "That was the kind of artist I wanted to be and they gave me this acknowledgement like 'Yes, you're doing the right thing'."

It took her a while to find her voice, so to speak, but she has remained in demand as a songwriter for other singers throughout her career. She has penned tracks for the likes of top Mandopop singers including Eason Chan, Tiger Huang and Faye Wong.

Even so, making her own albums could still be a struggle as it was for *Sing It Out Of Love*.

After so many years of making "neurotic love songs", she was eager for change. She says: "Do I always have to lament about love? If I did something really positive, would everyone think has Tanya lost it? But I just went for it."

Then her father died last year at the age of 66 from the side effects of medication for Parkinson's disease. Her parents were divorced and she had not been close to her father for a long time. "Everything was just edging me to do an album in which I had to find the strength to believe in love again."

The making of the album was plagued by unresolved emotions and technical glitches and a trip she took to Paris to clear her mind ended up exasperating her with one traffic delay after another.

The solution was to start from a clean slate. "Once you hit rock bottom in terms of your emotions and your state of mind, you just want to find a way to bounce back and focus on everything that's positive instead of feeding the belly of the beast."

That attitude extends to her search for love as well. After a dark phase she went through lamenting failed relationships, she has decided to be positive on the possibility of romance once more.

Says Chua, who is currently single: "With age, we tend to be more wary and we don't really believe in love at first sight. We're past that age, everything is so passe. But deep down, we all have this little girl's heart. I don't want to be so defensive. I just want to be swept up by this guy who melts me."

Behind the exterior of this "cool chick" beats the heart of a true romantic. She adds: "I'm still searching and everything is still possible. But I must say I'm keeping a more open mind than in the past."

Keeping an open mind is the approach she takes to life and music right now. "It's like I let myself flow along the river and when I see a log, I just grab and see where it takes me. It's kind of fun that way."

Moving to Taiwan in 2006 was a spur-of-the-moment decision and she has now lived there for six years. She even feels like a tourist whenever she comes back to Singapore once or twice a year.

She points out: "Yesterday, we drove by what used to be the Crown Prince Hotel and I went, 'What's that? When was it built?' There are very few familiar things and it's a very strange feeling." She keeps herself connected by visiting old haunts and getting her Milo dinosaur fix at a prata joint in River Valley.

While she has no idea where the river might take her next, one thing is certain, she will not be resting on her laurels.

Awards are fine and good but Chua notes: "I don't wear them like a crown on my head. I remember the second time when I won the awards. It was a big night for me and after it was all over, I told my assistant, 'Tomorrow's going to be another ordinary day'. A moment of glory - but the next day you still have to work hard making new music."

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Top spins

TANYA (1999)

Tanya Chua's debut Mandopop album built upon her English debut *Bored* (1997).

Even so, the eponymous album manages to be impressively coherent in its own right, balancing commercial dictates with a singer-songwriter's distinctive voice. It sold more than 200,000 copies in the fiercely competitive Taiwan market.

Apart from the fact that she could pen memorable hooks, the use of the harmonica on several tracks also gives the album a distinctive folk-pop sound.

She admits that her Mandarin was not quite up to scratch then and adds: "I tried as much as I could to understand the lyrics but I could not appreciate them to their fullest extent then."

Nevertheless, the record has a special place in her heart. She says: "It was still me. Me in the freshest, most unknown, naive part of me, which I love. Sometimes, the most heartfelt albums are when you're most unassuming."

GOODBYE & HELLO (2007)

This is a milestone album in her career. For the first time, she was taking on producing duties and could call the shots on exactly how she wanted her album to sound. She wrote all of the music and contributed lyrics to six tracks.

It was a gamble that paid off in spades as she was rewarded with Golden Melody awards for Best Mandarin Female Singer and Best Album Producer.

The mature and assured album also contains Darwin, a collaboration with local lyricist Xiaohan, that is one of her best-known songs. Chua says of their friendship: "It's a women's relationship. We would talk about very girly stuff and she's really like me. We're pretty similar in the sense that we're very neurotic and we overthink all kinds of situations."

They click so well that Chua would hand Xiaohan a composition and say: "Just write whatever you want. I trust you completely."

JUST SAY SO (2011)

Her Mandarin album *Sing It Out Of Love* (2011) has been getting all the attention but this was not the only album Chua released last year.

Just Say So has a looser and more laid-back groove to it and the record also feels more cohesive as it charts the trajectory of a relationship from desire to love to break-up.

It was a spontaneous impulse that led to her flying to Los Angeles to make the album there. She says: "I had no plans, no nothing. I thought I would just do it first. All my friends thought I was crazy."

She held all-English gigs in Taiwan and Hong Kong on the back of this album and she was gratified to have the shows selling out. She could well be bringing the show here if a suitable venue can be found.

While she has been hard at work on her Mandarin music all these years, she has never forgotten her English roots. And she wants to do both: "I want to fully utilise the fact that I'm this bilingual person. That I do not just sing in Chinese, I can do it equally well in English. I'm just an overachiever, I think."

She adds: "If I can have my music one day brought to the Western market, that would be cool as well. After all, it's a bona fide United States-made album."



3-in-1 ticket

Each Star concert ticket (priced at \$67 for Straits Times readers and \$75 for non-readers) gets you...



1 A three-hour concert featuring local singer-songwriter Tanya Chua, US rock band Boys Like Girls, Korean pop group 4Minute and Singapore Idols Taufik Batisah and Hady Mirza

Bonus A one-time redemption for a 20 per cent discount off regular admission prices for the two domes at Gardens by the Bay, valid from July 15 to Aug 15



2 Free entry to all rides at Universal Studios Singapore, worth \$74, from 7.30 to 11pm on either Aug 18 or 19

3 A free ride on the Singapore Flyer worth \$29.50, valid till Aug 15

Where to buy tickets:

Go to www.starevent.sg, call 6319-2368/2087 or e-mail csd@sph.com.sg

Tickets can also be bought and collected at Singapore Press Holdings News Centre at 1000, Toa Payoh North, Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm

Where: The Meadow, Gardens by the Bay, 11 Marina Gardens Drive

When: July 15, Carnival, which is open to the public, starts at 3pm, and ticketed concert from 6.30pm to 9.30pm

Life and times

1997: Tanya Chua makes her English-language debut with the album *Bored*.

1998: Wins Best Music Composition at the Asian Song Festival for *Hear Me*.

1999: Makes her Mandarin debut with *Tanya Bored*, one of the songs in the album which she wrote, is named Best Local Music Composition at the Singapore Hit Awards.

2005: Her duet with Stefanie Sun, *Original Point*, is named Most Popular Duet at the Global Chinese Music Awards.

2006: Wins her first Golden Melody Award for Best Mandarin Female Singer for her fifth Mandarin album *Amphibian* (2005), edging out Sun, among others.

2008: Wins big at the Golden Melody Awards with Best Female Mandarin Singer and Best Album Producer for the album *Goodbye & Hello* (2007). It is a bumper year that sees her harvesting 21 awards in total.

2009: Wins the rights to her songs from her former music publisher, Music & Movement, in a high-profile court case.

2011: Holds her first major concert here at the Singapore Indoor Stadium, selling more than 90 per cent of the 5,500 tickets available.

Tanya & The Cities tour is also held at the 13,000-seater Taipei Arena, among other venues. Also releases English album *Just Say So*, her fourth, eight years after the last one.

2012: Notches third Golden Melody Award for Best Female Singer. Her eighth Mandarin studio album, *Sing It Out Of Love* (2011), is up for seven awards. The record cracks the top 10 on Taiwan's album charts.

An eye-catching way to win Star concert tickets

Reader sends contest form stuck on striking green envelope to snag tickets

By GOH SHI TING

TO BOOST her chances of getting picked to attend the Straits Times Appreciates Readers (Star) concert on Sunday, Ms Emily Peng Shihui sent in a contest form stuck on a striking green envelope with stickers and embellishments.

The 27-year-old business analyst is among 20 winners of a pair of tickets each to the event at the Gardens by the Bay.

The contest drew more than 3,000 entries.

Ms Peng intends to go with her fiancée, and buy one ticket as a birthday gift for his mother.

"We intend to head down after her birthday lunch. We are really very excited about this event," said Ms Peng, whose fiancée sent in three entries for the draw.

She said she is looking forward to the segment featuring K-pop girl group 4Minute, as she did not get to catch any Korean acts when she was travelling in South Korea last year.

Other acts in the show include home-grown singer Tanya Chua, Singapore Idols Taufik Batisah and Hady Mirza, and American band Boys Like Girls.

Contest participants had to answer the question, "What does STAR stand for?", to win a pair of tickets to the concert, an exclusive night party at Universal Studios Singapore and a ride on the Singapore Flyer.

The contest may have ended, but readers can still get the three-in-one tickets at \$67 each.

Ms Peng said she and her fiancée enjoy taking part in lucky draws.

She recently won a bag of Black Gold garlic from a contest in The Straits Times' Mind Your Body magazine, and he got free hair products



Ms Peng holding the envelope on which she stuck her contest form. She plans to attend the Star concert with her fiancée, and buy a ticket as a gift for his mother. ST PHOTO: JOYCE FANG

from its Urban magazine.

Getting featured in the newspaper for this lucky draw win is an added bonus.

"We are going to keep this article and show it to our children in future. How often do you get to appear in the papers?" she said with a laugh.

Ms Peng said she started reading The Straits Times about three years ago when she signed up for a gym membership. After morning workouts, she would cool down by reading the copy available in the gym.

She enjoys the pullout magazines - Urban, Digital Life and Mind Your Body - as they offer bite-size information before she rushes off to work.

Her fiancée, who is a Straits Times print subscriber, shares his Saturday newspaper with her.

"I'm getting married next year, and I've been getting a lot of ideas from The Straits Times about how to renovate my house," said Ms Peng.

She pays close attention to the coverage on homes and gardens in the Life! section on Saturdays, especially stories on unique homes.

She has already picked up ideas on decorating her balcony, and is interested in getting the retro furniture that Life! had featured.

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Star concert ticket winners

HERE are the winners of Star concert tickets, which include tickets to the Singapore Flyer, tickets to a sundown party at Universal Studios Singapore in August, and Jay Gee Melwani discount vouchers:

- Chng Zihui SXXXX799A
- Seah Poh Poh SXXXX683A
- Teo Shao Wei SXXXX411C
- Sim Ong Choo SXXXX430D
- Lim Juay Kiang SXXXX754B
- Sharon Thien SXXXX129F
- Winfred Wee Wen Hsia SXXXX303I
- Wee Eng Ngh SXXXX925F
- Shirley Yeo P.H. SXXXX378E

- Steven Sia SXXXX443F
- Favacho Scott Nigel SXXXX25II
- Elizabeth Lim Ee Lee SXXXX296A
- Tan Suat Peng SXXXX990E
- Lim Leok Kee SXXXX620B
- Lim Kion Kok SXXXX659J
- Teo Phee Siong SXXXX095C
- Tok Hwee Ching SXXXX895B
- Yeo Poh Gek SXXXX319B
- Tan Kim Chen SXXXX738I
- Emily Peng Shihui SXXXX451Z

* To be eligible, winners cannot be SPH employees or immediate family members of SPH employees.

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When: July 15.

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