

An Interview with Mr Clarence Chan

Founder, Bandwagon Media



Clarence Chan

Image Credit: Clarence Chan

Culture Academy	Would you introduce yourself and what you do for our readers?
Clarence Chan	<p>Hi, I'm Clarence, a huge music lover at heart and I really just wanted to make a difference to the music scene in Singapore. I loved going for gigs, and back in 2011, keeping track of them was an unorganised and tedious process. Smart devices were just becoming commonplace, and I laid the first lines of code for what was a gig finder called Bandwagon. Within a year, we were recognised as the Best Contribution to the Local Scene by culture mavens JUICE magazine and started being used by hundreds and then thousands of other music lovers, both locals and tourists.</p> <p>10 years on, we've evolved into a next generation media company that champions and spotlights music in Asia. We create unique digital and physical content that helps fans and artists connect. From a hyperlocal service which catered to people in Singapore, today our top 5 markets are Philippines, United States, India, Singapore and Indonesia and as of May 2021 we reached over 620,000 unique readers a month, making us the one of largest online music media in Southeast Asia.</p>

Culture Academy	Could you tell us more about Hear65 and what inspired this national movement to celebrate Singaporean music?
Clarence Chan	<p>In 2016 The National Arts Council held an open call for an intermediary to roll out a “Singapore Music Movement”. They recognised that while digital adoption made music more discoverable, many up-and-coming artists still struggled to expand their audience and get public attention. The goal was to raise the profile of Singaporean music especially amongst youths. We toyed with many different names and eventually landed on Hear65.</p> <p>“Hear” being the action of listening, and “65” representing the country code of SG. The 1st thing we tackled was the question of “who are Singaporean artists”? Most people could only name a few prominent ones. So our immediate goal was to consolidate and organise as much of Singaporean music into “1 digital jukebox”. It was a huge effort to get clean data. Today Hear65 houses over 5,007 albums across 2,130 artists, as the digital home for Singaporean music. We also built a feature where you can filter across these albums based on genre, year, and language, and really dive into our rich music heritage.</p> <p>Alongside that there’s also insightful content produced weekly by the Bandwagon team, playlists to suit various moods, videos, and album reviews by the community. You never have to miss a beat in Singapore’s music scene with Hear65.</p>
Culture Academy	Bandwagon and Hear65 benefited from the ubiquity of the internet. Could you share your experience on how digitalisation helped connect audiences to local artists? What is the impact of both Bandwagon and Hear65 on the local music community?
Clarence Chan	<p>When people think of Singapore, they think of that one iconic building, that one delectable local dish, but how about that one definitive song or artist? The difference and beauty of music is that it's always evolving and everyone has their own favourites. And that’s what Hear65 has come to represent, being the home of Singaporean music. Before, when someone asked you what music from SG was like, you’d think of that one artist that comes to mind, but now you have one platform which houses almost everything.</p> <p>Since we started, Hear65 has been that resource pushing Singaporean music forward. We have radio shows with 938FM where we recommend a diverse palette of artists, we do articles that spotlight unique local sub-cultures like Getai, traditional music, and the history of iconic venues. We’ve produced Singapore’s first live music Jukebox at Jewel Changi, flown artists to Australia to showcase their music under the Hear65 umbrella, supported the creation of performances in secret locations and more.</p> <p>One of the best markers of impact is seeing the gradual growth in new SG releases each week. Each week we are seeing an average of 30-40 tracks, and new artists reaching out to us on email and socials to get featured. More creators, more material, more fans, more industry. That’s how we see it and our aspiration is for</p>

Singapore to become a music nation.	
Culture Academy	Covid-19 has disrupted the physical gatherings for gigs. How has that affected Bandwagon's work?
Clarence Chan	Our business took a hit as we lost our concert and nightlife clients, who had to cancel their projects and retrench staff. Thankfully our lean size and being a digital company, allowed us to focus our efforts on media and virtual shows. We were 1 of the quickest companies to adapt our Karaoke Livestream Concerts amidst COVID-19 restrictions in April 2020. During Circuit Breaker, we were able to help NAC create Sing Along SG, a fully contactless reimagined virtual concert with the community, reaching almost 3 million viewers around the world and winning 5 awards at the Marketing Events Awards 2020. More people staying home has also pushed more attention toward digital services. May 2021 was also our historical high in web viewership, clocking over 850,000 page views on Bandwagon.
Culture Academy	Would you name a song that you feel, captures a keen sense of belonging to Singapore, and why that song is important to you?
Clarence Chan	<p>To me a sense of belonging isn't only in songs necessarily "about Singapore". But that feeling is brought up when I hear good songs from my fellow Singaporeans. Having been involved in the music scene and taking the time to know the stories of our homegrown artists via Bandwagon and Hear65, it has helped me connect deeper with our musical identity - the "Singapore Sound", which to me is the amalgamation of our collective voices. We may be a young nation, but we do have an evolving sonic identity. We may not realise it but it is and will be a facet of what bonds us to our homeland. That's why the work of MCCY is so important - building culture and soft power. I know this is going out to the ministry and I wanted to share this reminder with all of you. You have a really important role. And music needs to be a greater part of our social fabric because it is a universal language which can bond our multiracial society in ways we could never imagine. Singaporeans love to eat and music (is) food for the soul. That said, here are some of the standout tracks that make me think of Singapore:</p> <p>Room at the Table- Charlie Lim Mustafa- Yung Raja Tapau- Shigga Shay No Stress- YAØ Johari Window- Plainsunset Superstructure - Reimagined - MYRNE Achilles - Gareth Fernandez 你還不知道? - Gentle Bones, Tay Kewei</p> <p>Thank you for the chance to share my story and my beliefs. To a more beautiful Singapore, Clarence</p>