

“My artistry is packed with my culture and the flavours of what makes me, me.”

Yung Raja wears a Valentino shirt, jumper, trousers and shoes; Venna earring, from Pedder on Scotts

Photography, Shawn Paul Tan; make-up and hair, Sha Shamsi; 1st photography assistant, Melvin Leong; 2nd photography assistant, Kat Midori

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State of the Art



YUNG RAJA

Why is Yung Raja's fifth single called 'Spice Boy'? "Because I'm coming through with that spice!" he exclaims, grinning. His nails, bedazzled with the letters 'Y' and 'R,' flash as he gesticulates to drive his point home. "My artistry is packed with my culture and the flavours of what makes me, me. That's very much the picture I've been trying to paint."

In that portrait, he deftly switches between Tamil and English, dancing on the boundary between the Eastern and Western cultures he knows and loves. The track and its music video are also all about sending out good vibes—getting people to forget about their problems for three minutes, as he puts it. The rapper certainly had a good time laying down his bars, working with friends and collaborators FlightSch and Jasper Tan, who produced the song and made the video, respectively. "So much goes on behind the curtains to allow me to be the guy that I am today," he acknowledges, giving a shout-out to his team and the business of show.

Those machinations are what have allowed him to grow up with the Singapore scene and are now guiding him to set his sights on the horizon. Next, he's going to elevate his art and become more mature in his craft. "I want to know what that Yung Raja is like," he says. "I'm excited to find out."

What does a new beginning mean to a creator? A blank page, a fresh canvas, a microphone not yet spoken into—or something else entirely, perhaps. In partnership with the National Arts Council, and as part of the #SGCultureAnywhere campaign, *Vogue* Singapore invited 48 performers to create an original piece of work. Scan the QR code to see 'The Rhythm of Singapore' project. Here, four of these artists speak about what making something out of nothing has meant to them.

Words Kyla Zhao and Amanda McDougall

Fashion Desmond Lim
Styling Joey Tan

MUNAH BAGHARIB

For host and actress Munah Bagharib, a wide expanse of water seems both foreboding and cleansing. It is no wonder then that she chose to feature that imagery strongly in her monologue, written in collaboration with playwright and long-time friend Irfan Kasban. Gazing at her reflection in a puddle, she beseeches: "I can't bear to drown again... Where do I go now?"

But Munah knows the answer to that question: "The only way is forward." Life amid a pandemic is "daunting" and "scary", but if there's anything the past year has taught her, it is to lean into the unknown and become comfortable with the uncomfortable—just as she did in this piece. "I am terrified of performing something so vulnerable and sharing my innermost fears with others," she admits. "But this is also an outlet for me to explore those fears." Although the metaphorical risk of drowning is always present in life, she envisions herself as running water—going along with the flow and letting life take her where she's meant to be. As she recites in heartfelt tones: any step she makes is a new beginning. And this piece—the first time the seasoned performer created something that "came purely from myself"—marks one for her.



"I am terrified of performing something so vulnerable and sharing my innermost fears with others."



Scan the QR code to visit The Rhythm of Singapore microsite.



Munah wears a gown from Style Lease

Photography, Darren Gabriel Leow; make-up, Fiona Bennett; hair, Eri Su; photography assistant, Halid

MISS

KWOK MIN YI

Kwok Min Yi, principal dancer at the Singapore Dance Theatre (SDT), has been waltzing across the stage for as long as she can remember, but this piece for *Vogue* Singapore still marked a first for her. In this dance created by SDT artistic director Janek Schergen, the barre moves beyond a training tool to become the key prop. Used to working with the barre only for static and structured technique exercises, Kwok now had to pay extra care to integrate the hefty structure into the considerably more dynamic and fluid choreography.

Yet, she relishes this “refreshing and distinctive” element. “The barre in this piece transcends its purpose as a prop. Instead, it acts as an extension of my movement and accentuates the fluidity of this piece,” she says. It is unsurprising that Kwok took to the dance’s unique construction so readily, for she has always believed even a small change can lead to a fresh start. “When I feel like I’m not making as much progress as I hope for in life, I would tell myself that new beginnings can happen anytime, anywhere,” she shares emphatically. “As long as I have the determination to seize different opportunities and start afresh.”

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Creative producer, Vanessa Catlin; assistant producer, Jerry Ding

Min Yi wears a Repetto tulle skirt; leotard and pointe shoes, her own

Photography, Sayher Heffernan; make-up, Bobbie Ng/The Make Up Room; hair, Kelly Lau/The Make Up Room



Miss Lou wears a Gucci dress; Jennifer Behr earrings, from Pedder on Scotts; shoes, her own

Photography, Shawn Paul Tan; make-up, Bobbie Ng/The Make Up Room; hair, Katherine Wong/The Make Up Room; 1st photography assistant, Melvin Leong; 2nd photography assistant, Kat Midori

“We should **focus on what we have learnt** from the past year.”

MISS LOU

Unlike many who are eagerly anticipating a return to normalcy, vocalist and song-writer Miss Lou hopes things will not go back to the way they were. The pandemic has exposed not just the creative fatigue and relationship neglect in her life, but also wider cracks in society such

as the treatment of migrant workers, prompting her to implore in her track, ‘Prologue’: “What will we tell our children/Did we do all we could/How have we loved our neighbour?” Even as the world collectively turns the page and writes a new chapter of this book—as her song so aptly puts it—Miss Lou reminds: “We should focus on what we have learnt from the past year.”

And what she has learnt was how much her identity was rooted in her career, throwing her into a tailspin when the pandemic drastically reduced her work opportunities. It took her a long time to find herself outside her performances, and the song’s no-frills piano-and-vocals pairing reflects her new acceptance of the bare bones of herself. For Miss Lou, the pandemic is simply the cautiously optimistic prologue to what is hopefully a better future to come for not just herself, but the world at large. ●

