

# Sia salvages rejected songs in new album

**Australian singer-songwriter's seventh album, *This Is Acting*, features compositions she had written for stars such as Adele and Rihanna**

NEW YORK • For her first album since her breakthrough hit *Chandelier*, Sia is facing off on the charts against superstars Adele and Rihanna. And they are likely familiar with some of the songs – they were written for them.

*This Is Acting*, the seventh album by the Australian singer known both for her distinctively soaring voice and her face-covering black-and-white wig, consists of tunes that she wrote, offered to other artists and, after deals fell through, salvaged.

For her, the album is a multi-dimensional paradox. She is interpreting her own songs, ones that are often highly personal. But they were intended to come from the hearts of others.

The album's first single, *Alive*, was meant for Adele's blockbuster album *25*.

It matches the mood of *25*, as Sia – playing the role of Adele – reminisces about her childhood and her survival into adulthood to a tune that opens with rich, dark piano chords before a rapid climax.

Sia, speaking to Apple Music's *Beats 1* radio, said she was surprised Adele did not want *Alive*.

"I thought this one was such a smash, but she just wasn't feeling it," she told host Zane Lowe, who described the album as playing "fantasy football with the world's popstars".

Sia similarly appears to channel Beyoncé on the more inspirational *Footprints*, a string-backed, mid-tempo pop song that uses subtle spiritual imagery to describe salvation either by a partner or God.

A more conventional pop ballad, *Reaper*, was co-produced by rap star Kanye West.

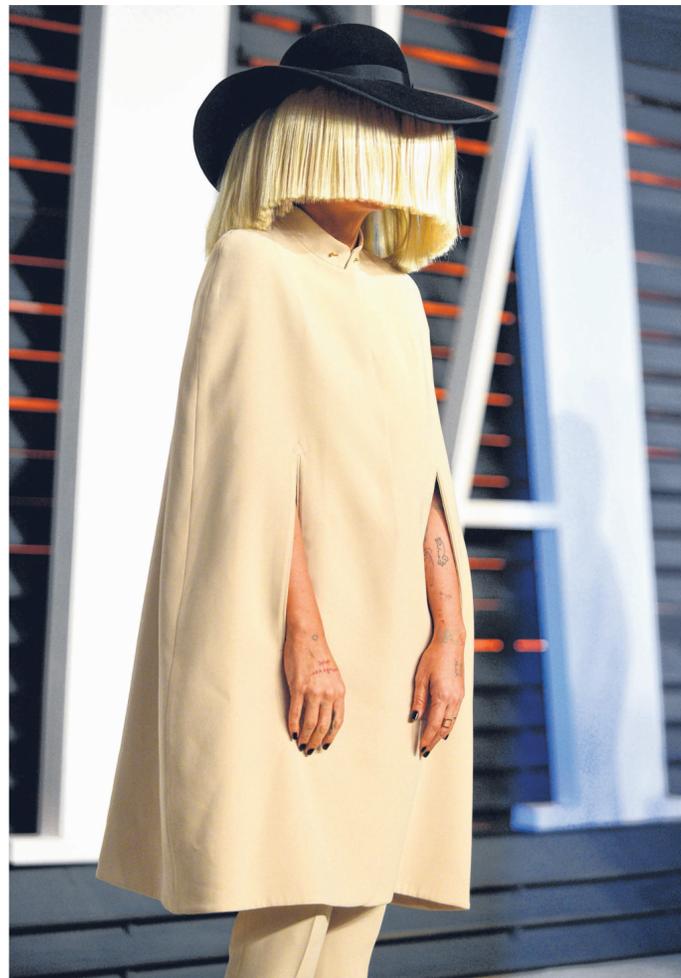
Sia wrote *Reaper* and *Cheap Thrills* for Rihanna, who released her long-awaited album, *Anti*, last Wednesday. But the R&B superstar, whose new album focuses on inward-looking ballads, rejected them.

Even giddier is *Move Your Body*, a club dance track Sia wrote for Shakira.

The 40-year-old, whose real name is Sia Furler, had her start in the jazz scene of Adelaide and remains more of an indie singer.

But she has become a major writer for pop stars, notably composing Rihanna's 2012 worldwide hit *Diamonds*.

Sia, who keeps her face hidden to preserve her anonymity, has struggled with addiction, a battle that figured prominently on her last album, *1000 Forms Of Fear*, which came out in 2014. The album's hit, *Chandelier*, an electropop ballad of a party girl's alcohol-fuelled self-destruction, was nominated for Grammys for Song of the Year and Record of the Year.



Singer Sia (above), who often hides her face (left) to preserve her anonymity, returns to dark territory on her latest album by exploring abusive relationships. PHOTOS: NEW YORK TIMES, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

She returns to dark territory on the latest album by exploring abusive relationships.

*House On Fire* is a metaphor for personal chaos.

The similarly bleak *Bird Set Free* was written for Adele, who did not find it suitable.

Speaking to *Rolling Stone* magazine, Sia said she thought most of her songs for pop stars were "terribly, terribly cheesy". But she acknowledged that she knew a successful

tune when she wrote one.

"It really seems like the general public responds well to songs about salvation or overcoming something, or that everything's going to be okay, or that things are fun," she said.

"I think that my skill is more upbeat curating, as in choosing the right tracks and then sort of trying to understand the will or nature of popular culture."

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SSO's anniversary concert was conducted by Darrell Ang (left) and featured pianist Melvyn Tan (standing). PHOTO: SSO

## Bold and spirited SSO concert featuring home-grown talent

### REVIEW/CONCERT

SSO 37TH ANNIVERSARY CONCERT: EIN HELDENLEBEN  
Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Darrell Ang – conductor, Melvyn Tan – piano  
Esplanade Concert Hall  
Last Friday

### Mervin Beng

The inclusion of 19-year-old Juilliard School junior year composition student Koh Cheng Jin's *Horizons For Orchestra* in such a high-profile Singapore Symphony Orchestra concert is a bold move and a welcome signal to other aspiring Singaporean composers.

The nine-minute work exudes a sense of adventure, opening with a chorale for string quartet, joined by percussion and orchestra with increasing intensity. A quiet section featuring solo violin follows, which gradually grows into a finale that brings back the opening theme. The work was an impressive debut for Koh, even if the finale did not fully deliver the exuberantly triumphant and optimistic conclusion that she described in her programme note.

Since his time as the orchestra's young associate conductor, Darrell Ang has led the orchestra as guest conductor with considerable success. His focus and control throughout the opening work were sharp and confident, and the orchestra responded well to his direction.

Pianist Melvyn Tan's interpretations of Mozart on fortepiano, the precursor to the modern grand piano, are world renowned. Performing Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 22 on a modern concert grand piano, he retained all the wit, sensitivity and character that audiences have come to love in his playing.

Many great pianists have performed on the Esplanade's Steinway, but none have come close to producing the unique crispness and nimble sound that came from his fingerwork and measured pedalling. He gave each movement of the concerto its own character, and there was an overall sense of grace and lightness of being that made it a special performance.

Ang and the SSO provided very able accompaniment, although Tan's liberties with tempo were occasionally challenging. The clarinet section, however, seemed oblivious to the playfulness that

the soloist lent to the irrepressible final movement, consistently outplaying the piano and the rest of the orchestra.

The tone poem *Ein Heldenleben* (A Hero's Life) by Richard Strauss is a work that places huge demands on the conductor, with solo passages for principal violin that call for musicianship of the highest level. Concertmaster Igor Yuzefovich's solos depicting the hero's female companion were exceptional – expressive and beautifully phrased.

Scored for eight horns, two tubas and three offstage trumpets, a strong reading of the piece requires much care and thought, and Ang had clearly prepared well for this performance. His growing maturity as a conductor shows and the steadiness with which he directed was impressive.

Through the most demanding passages there was little wavering or loss of momentum, although the sound tended to harden in the loudest passages. Greater freedom in tempo and attention to orchestral balance from Ang would have made this performance even more compelling.

Daringly programmed and featuring a spread of home-grown musical talent, this year's SSO anniversary concert was a bold, spirited concert to be proud of.

## Glittery welcome for Chinese New Year

### REVIEW/CONCERT

RHAPSODIES OF SPRING 2016  
Singapore Chinese Orchestra  
The Star Theatre  
Last Saturday

### Chang Tou Liang

*Rhapsodies Of Spring* is the Singapore Chinese Orchestra's way of celebrating Chinese New Year in concert, and, for the first time, it was performed in The Star Theatre.

As with previous editions, the concert took on the form of a variety show and was hosted by television personality Marcus Chin.

He and conductor Yeh Tsung displayed good chemistry in their playful banter in Mandarin, peppered with a few English phrases. There were no skits from radio personalities this year, but more music, which began with Li Huan Zhi's *Spring Festival Overture*.

This familiar work was accompanied by visuals of the orchestra projected on a giant screen behind the stage and was soon overtaken by the entrance of the nine-member

ZingO Festival Drum Group.

Its synchronised drumming in *Soar* and Xu Chang Jun's *Dragon Dance* was an impressive show of precision and togetherness.

The first half was otherwise the Marcus Chin show. He had four costume changes and enthralled the auntsies with his crooning in the *Nostalgic Song Medley* (arranged by Tan Kah Yong) and *Mix Match Song Medley* (Phang Kok Jun). He does not have an operatic voice for songs such as *Man Chang Fei*, *Azaleas Bloom*, *Yue Qin* and *The Traveller With A Bamboo Pole*, but his tenor comfortably scaled the heights with lots of personality and some dancing.

The Chinese Folksong Medley curiously included a Russian song, *Under The Shimmering Moonlight* (but sung in Mandarin) and concluded with *Radiant With Joy*, rendered in an authentic Sichuan accent.

Then the concert took on the feel of an episode from variety show *Saturday Night Live*. With the lights dimmed, the main orchestra dispersed, leaving behind the 16-strong SCO Pop Ensemble, which resembled and played like a

jazz combo.

TV Golden Medley (arranged by Law Wai Lun) revived melodies such as *Striving* (from local television serial *The Awakening*), *Good Morning, Sir!* and *Kopi O*.

Suona principal Jin Shi Yi had a field day with his assorted reeds in the Taiwanese song *Tian Hei Hei*, alternating between jazzy riffs and Donald Duck imitations. Not to be outdone was Han Lei on guanzi in Beijing jazz pianist Kong Hong Wei's *Summer Palace*, with a stirring display that brought on loud cheers.

The two-hour concert concluded by bidding farewell to the Year of the Goat and ushering in the Year of the Monkey.

Wang Li Ping's *Shepherd Song* gave way to Xu Jing Qing's *Gan Wen Lu Zai He Fang* from *Journey To The West*, which saw Chin imitating the moves of the Monkey God. Joined by four women dancers, the glittery ensemble got the audience singing and clapping along to Sim Boon Yew's *Spring Suite VI*.

Have there been that many Chinese New Year songs in circulation? The Singapore Chinese Orchestra under Yeh has played them all.

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