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ROCKIN' IN THE FREE WORLD

Thanks to talented local musicians and welcoming venues, Lantau's live music scene is alive and kicking. *Jack Page reports*

In this digital age of Spotify, iTunes, SoundCloud and even YouTube, it's never been easier to access the music you want to listen to. Gone are the days when you had to hand over HK\$120 dollars plus in a shop for a CD in order to hear something new. But what has all this accessibility done for live music? Do people still head to a bar to listen to a favourite local band? With the ever increasing popularity of electronic music and all its sub-genres, do music lovers even bother to learn to play instruments anymore?

Factor in the exorbitant price the big local venues, like AsiaWorld-Expo, charge for tickets, and you might think we Lantauers have little opportunity to enjoy live music. Added to this, there's no denying the scarcity of small Hong Kong venues that cater to local bands. But let's investigate the current state of Lantau's music scene, to find out what's going on around and about.

Festivals and venues

Lantauers are the sort of people who enjoy live music – and festival-going – and, as it turns out, there's a lot on offer locally.

Over in Discovery Bay, The Big Picnic (the festival previously

known as Picnic in the Park) is an annual treat, now performed on Tai Pak Wan and in DB Plaza, across three stages. Even closer to home, and giving The Big Picnic a run for its money, the Silvermine Bay Music Festival is always a blast, showcasing Hong Kong-wide musical talent. South Lantau music lovers have also been known to rock out at community-based local festivals, like Mother Earth Groove and Imagine Peace.

If you like your live music weekly, in small, welcoming venues, South Lantau also supplies. In Pui O, Tap Tap Bar & Restaurant is known for its rockin' weekend jam sessions, and over in Mui Wo, Bahce Turkish Restaurant headlines live music every other Friday – several bands play on a rotational basis, notably the folksy Mary Jane and Bambi's Friends. The China Beach Club and Cafe Isara in Mui Wo, and JK Club in Pui O also host the occasional band.

Long Island restaurant on Lower Cheung Sha Beach plays host to the jazzy, chilled-out sound of Pui O band Indigo every Saturday evening. These seasoned musical veterans have been playing professionally together for years in one form or another, with a focus on smooth jazz and 1960s Brazilian bossa nova.

Lastly, a shout-out to MTR commuters: Zentro Garden in Tung Chung features acoustic music Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays on the outdoor patio.

Now that you know where it happens, let's hear from three popular local bands: The Ad Hoc's, The Branded Kraits and The Folks Up.

Seasoned performers

The jam sessions, held every couple of weekends at Tap Tap Bar, featuring local musicians' collective, The Ad Hoc's, are gaining quite a bit of notoriety. Depending on who's playing, on any particular night, you could get a loose improvisational jam, or songs from across the spectrum of modern music.

"It all started back in 2013 when a triathlon buddy mentioned that he played sax, and that his then wife was a fantastic singer," explains founder member, keyboardist, rhythm guitarist and Tong Fuk resident Zoltan Feledy. "We did some standard covers at a few places like The Gallery in Tong Fuk and also at Ooh La La in Pui O [now Mavericks]. Then we bumped into a bunch of other locals who sat in, playing various kinds of music and we kept inviting them. Folks would come out of the woodwork... banjo players and fiddlers who worked at Disney."

Back then, The Ad Hoc's vibe was very folksy – bluegrass sounding at times – and the Ooh La La jams really took off. "The beach scene was fantastic," Zoltan says. "But when Ooh La La was revamped, the vibe got less local. So we started looking for spots that would take on our unrehearsed jams."

Tap Tap Bar, with its corrugated outhouse, ideal for a band stage, has been The Ad Hoc's new home for over a year now. "I love live



The Ad Hoc's: Rock-jazz drummer Kenneth Villarín, with Rob Ellis-Geiger on trumpet.

music, it's something I'm pleased to host regularly," says owner Paul Wellham. "We've had a whole heap of musicians passing through. Many are friends of Zoltan from town, the lads from Indigo join in often and we have our resident maestro, Rob Ellis-Geiger (keyboards, vocals and trumpet), who leads the band on many nights."

Rob, from Pui O, a professor of music at City University of Hong Kong, is well known locally, having composed music for Hong Kong filmmaker Johnny To's *Election 2*. "With my background in teaching, music production and having conducted the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra several times, The Ad Hoc's is a great way to stay grounded and not be too serious about playing and enjoying music," he says. "I like to play the old Joe Cocker songs with a bit of Elton John, Eric Clapton and old blues standards. It goes down well with the customers and we all have a good time."

While a handful of Pui O locals play regularly for The Ad Hoc's, like Barrie Roebuck (bass), Jason Pagliari (electric guitar), and John Zel Valerio and Lambert Azur (drums, guitar and vocals), other performers come and go. "We had an amazing fiddle player from Hong Kong Island a while ago," Rob recalls. "One night, he managed to break his fiddle and the next time he came over, beer got spilled on his amplifier which proceeded to smoke and had to be unplugged. We haven't seen him since, but he was really great."

New on the scene

Since they teamed up a year ago, Steve Gardner and Jason Pagliari of The Banded Kraits have been making quite a name for themselves, playing not just locally at Tap Tap Bar and JK Club, but also Hong Kong-side at The Wanch, at Orange Peel, and even at this year's Rugby Sevens.

Guitarist and singer Steve, a long-time Peng Chau resident,



The Banded Kraits: Barrie Roebuck, Jason Pagliari, Oz Walker and Steve Gardner

It's well rehearsed and our styles complement each other, so it's not a competition to see who can 'out-shred' the other guy

has been composing his own music since the 1980s, and he programmes backing rhythm tracks for the band's songs in his home studio. Alongside fellow guitar player Jason, Barrie of The Ad Hoc's fame (bass) and Oz Walker (congas and percussion) bring up the support. Steve's fluttery jazz solos with synthesiser effects offset Jason's classic blues-rock playing style. "It's well rehearsed and our styles complement each other, so it's not a competition to see who can 'out-shred' the other guy," says Jason, a Ham Tin resident. Steve chimes in: "Also, our backing tracks mean we don't require a stick drummer, which gives us flexibility in the types of places we can play."

About 75% of The Branded Kraits' music is original, and they do covers by classic artists like Traffic, Hawkwind, Frank Zappa and The Doors. Think extended guitar improvisations and song lyrics that critique social norms and you sort of get the idea.

Right at the other end of the musical spectrum, teenage folk duo The Folk Ups – Jasmine Kelly and Ryan Harling – are another exciting, up-and-coming act, who started writing music a year-and-a-half ago. The 17-year-old Mui Wo residents are both in the midst of study for final exams but still manage to jam weekly, alongside Shelby the Suitcase-drum. "Ryan made 'her' in a stairwell a year back with a saw, his bare hands and a lonesome suitcase," says singer Jasmine.

"We've been described as a toe-tapping, foot-stomping folk-duo," Jasmine adds. "We've got six originals on our self-titled EP, which you can find on Spotify, iTunes, YouTube and basically any other website you get your music from. Right now, we're recording our second EP which will have a lot more textural depth than the stripped-down sound of our first recordings."

The pair performed at this year's Rugby Sevens and were the sole student band at Clockenflap in 2016 thanks to a Battle of the Bands competition organised by YRock, the pop-culture platform for local teens. Their next scheduled gig is on June 3 at The China Beach Club. See you there. 🎧



The Ad Hoc's: John Zel Valerio, Lambert Azur and Barrie Roebuck



Bossa-nova band Indigo



The Folk Ups: Ryan Harling and Jasmine Kelly

FIND IT

- Bahce Turkish Restaurant, Mui Wo, 2984 0222
- Cafe Isara, Mui Wo, 3101 9876
- JK Club, Pui O, 2984 0220
- Long Island, Cheung Sha, 2320 2001
- Tap Tap Bar & Restaurant, Pui O, 2984 9091
- The China Beach Club, Mui Wo, 2983 8931
- Zentro Garden, Tung Chung, 2802 8000