

Jack & Rai

With a solid live following and a debut album creating a stir, Singapore's Jack & Rai are readying their studio for new sessions. **Stephen Bruel** reports



Second home – Jack & Rai at one of their many regular gigs

WITH LIVE PERFORMANCES ON TV, songwriting credits for film and TV programmes, a recently released album and regular live performances five nights a week on the Singapore bar circuit, the vocal/guitar-playing duo Jack & Rai are living and breathing the music dream.

Formed in 2002 when Jack Ho

hooked up with Sivadorai Sellakannu to secure regular work at the Wala Wala bar in Singapore's Holland Village, the local duo have gone from strength to strength. Since then, they have performed on local TV programmes *Live and Loud* and *Asia Uncut*, and are scheduled to appear on an episode of *Sony Style* TV in July. The dynamic duo have

also written music for popular local TV programmes *School House Rock*, *Junior Jams*, *First Class*, and are in the process of composing for a movie version of *School House Rock*, and TV series *Red Thread*.

In September 2008 Jack & Rai released their first album – *In Stores Now* – and are planning to begin work on their next later this year. When they are not performing one of their numerous gigs on the island, they regularly open for international artists – to date, these include Rachael Yamagata, Chris Daughtry and Lifehouse – in some of Singapore's largest performance spaces and venues.

As a professional songwriter, guitarist and singer, and without a day job to supplement his income, Jack Ho chooses his studio equipment and songwriting tools carefully. Self-taught in the skills of music production through a culmination of recording his album, observing the gear that other professionals use and how they

use it and asking lots of questions, his studio is centred around Logic Pro 8 running on an Apple Mac Pro computer. 'I started using Logic as a songwriting tool, to get my ideas down quickly,' he says. 'I did try another well-known programs but after seeing the Midi functionality and audio power of Logic, I was instantly blown away.'

He appreciates the Logic interface and how it allows him to work quickly and effectively on his laptop. 'I love the interface of Logic 8 as it allows you to work efficiently, even if you don't have a lot of screen space,' he says. 'You can see the arrange window and the mixer window without having to go through a million steps – unlike other programs I've used.'

For onboard effects, he uses the Focusrite Liquid multichannel mix processor Melodyne for pitch and time manipulation, Native Instruments Guitar Rig 3 for guitar sounds and Stylus RMX for beats and grooves. He also enjoys

using the effects that come with Logic including the EQ, reverb and compressors, but his particular favourites are the Space Designer convolution reverb and the array of award-winning synthesiser sounds. 'Logic comes as a complete system, and by that I mean you get all the basic tools to help you cut your first demo and a whole lot more,' he says. 'I found some other programs only came with basic plug-ins, and you always have to purchase additional ones.'

Outboard gear includes a Focusrite Red 3 compressor/limiter, along with Universal Audio's Solo 610 and the Groove Tubes Brick microphone preamplifiers. For microphones, Mr Ho uses a Groove Tube MD1B vacuum tube condenser, Blue Baby Bottle large diaphragm condenser, a Neumann KM pencil microphone and a Neumann U87 clone. (He says that he'd love a real one – wouldn't we all.) He also has a Shure Beta 57A dynamic and Shure Beta 87A condenser for those quick studio



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demo cuts as well as playing live. 'I find the metering section in Logic really helpful, particularly using outboard gear,' he says. 'I can quickly see if it's too hot on the left side and not the right, if there's something out-of phase, beats per minute tempo changes and readings, and also whether my guitar is still in tune.'

Although both Jack and Rai have different working styles when it comes to writing and producing their own music, their ability to fuse these creative differences is what creates 'their' sound. Jack Ho likes to use Logic's inbuilt presets to quickly record these ideas as closely as possible to the sounds he hears in his head, as well as what the final sounds are likely to be. 'Rai focuses on properties and elements of the song as a whole, whereas I like to zoom in quickly on the vocal flavour, guitar sounds and other sounds I think we should build upon,' he explains. 'The ability to quickly enhance what we have just recorded so that it is already close to the sound we are after through triggering presets is extremely useful and keeps those creative juices flowing.'

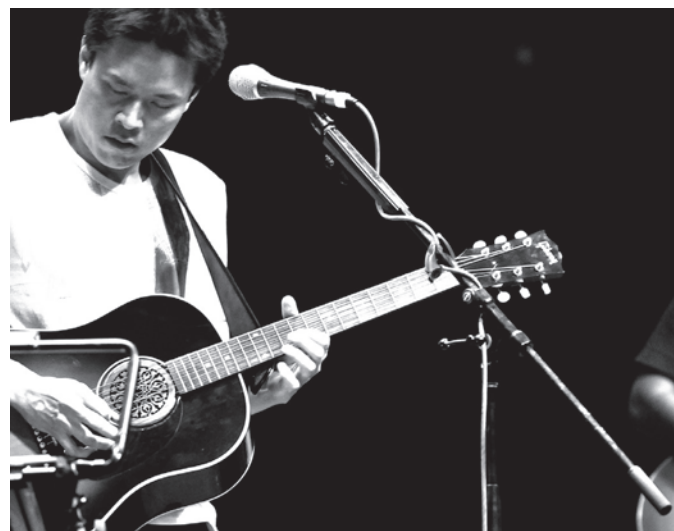
Other sounds that help him get his creative ideas down quickly include the Logic virtual synthesisers, Ultrabeat drum synthesis function, and the vast number of royalty-free Apple loops available. 'I absolutely love the sounds generated from the ES1 classic analogue-style synthesiser, the ES2 powerful modulation synthesiser and Ultrabeat,' he says. 'Combined with Apple Loops, I can use and create instant sounds in seconds. It is so easy to set up, trigger and work with, and the sounds just blow me away.'

The album *In Stores Now* features 11 original tracks including a single release, 'The Fa La La Song', and 'Fiona', inspired by a Singapore celebrity. With the first album track titled 'Beetle Girl', it's not hard to see where the duo draw their inspiration or musical influences. 'I believe that in some way or another, you learn from good song writing, good arrangements and good productions,' says Jack Ho. 'So, of course, The Beatles are a major influence, as are The Rolling Stones. I also like modern artists Counting Crows, John Mayer and Jason Mraz.'

Jack & Rai are keen to continue to build upon their already impressive accomplishments. They have work lined up writing music for TV, a new album in the pipeline and a hectic live performance schedule – just how they like it. However, they also have aspirations to produce other artists, and with their wealth of experience and impressive credentials gained so far, this should soon come to fruition. www.jackandrai.com



Jack & Rai's Jack Ho in the studio the duo use for writing and recording



Acoustic appeal – away from the studio, the guitars are the stars

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