

KYIT⁰²



LOVELESS

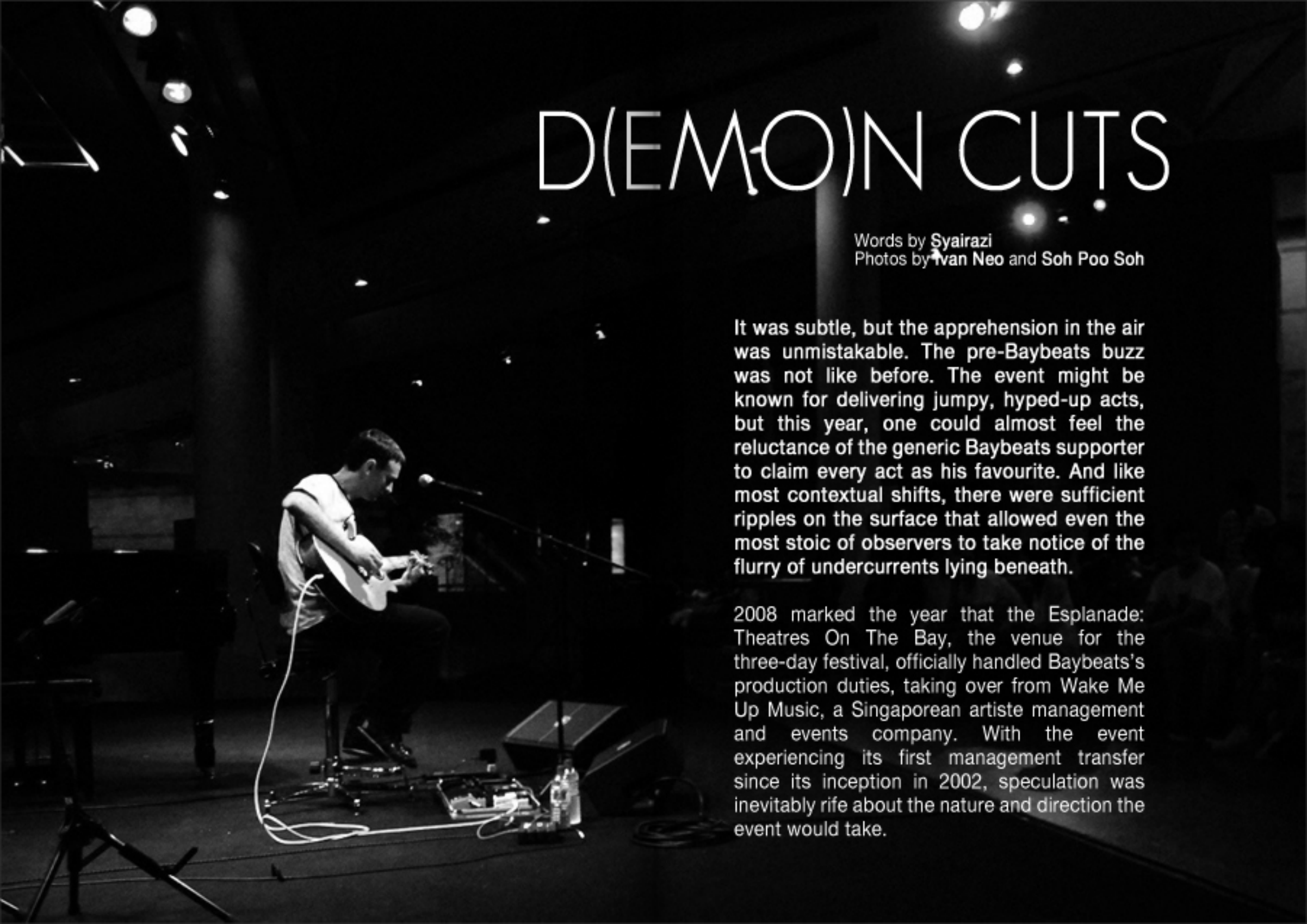


D(EMON)N CUTS

Words by Syairazi
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It was subtle, but the apprehension in the air was unmistakable. The pre-Baybeats buzz was not like before. The event might be known for delivering jumpy, hyped-up acts, but this year, one could almost feel the reluctance of the generic Baybeats supporter to claim every act as his favourite. And like most contextual shifts, there were sufficient ripples on the surface that allowed even the most stoic of observers to take notice of the flurry of undercurrents lying beneath.

2008 marked the year that the Esplanade: Theatres On The Bay, the venue for the three-day festival, officially handled Baybeats's production duties, taking over from Wake Me Up Music, a Singaporean artiste management and events company. With the event experiencing its first management transfer since its inception in 2002, speculation was inevitably rife about the nature and direction the event would take.





In a simple but delicate move, Baybeats had consciously altered its traditional expectations by re-labelling itself from an “*indie* music festival” to an “*alternative*” one. Anyone hoping for a continuation of the unflinching indie and emo-centric ideologies of old would only be dwelling in needless naiveté.

A fresh addition to the event’s festival-oriented theme was the new Chillout Stage, set in the Esplanade Concourse. It was to hold, in Baybeats’s own words, “unconventional, experimental and electronic” music. KVLТ embraced this welcome comfort in the cosy setting, insulated from the disconcerting hullabaloo that was the Arena and Powerhouse stages outside the main walls of the Esplanade.

A curious figure clad in purple leggings and rainbow socks stepped up and let fly an array of digital bleeps to an intrigued, silent crowd of onlookers. The familiar sub-bass humming and digital xylophone staccatos of “Hello Machina” filled the huge space, accompanied by haunting and hazy whispers into the microphone.

The Analog Girl has been churning out beats since 2004, but here she struck a shy and withdrawn character, seemingly uncomfortable in engaging her crowd. The strong electro-pop hooks were undeniably catchy and her control over the array of MIDI controllers impressive, but the experimental nature of her performance felt incongruent and fell flat at times.

As the crowd dispersed and returned a few hours later, diseased music settled in for a debut set. It was a simple configuration – just a man and his guitar. Once a quartet, the line-up’s paring down meant just one member remained, leaving the Baybeats audience wondering how this one-man setup would be able to reproduce their eclectic mix of soft electro, folk and pop. The set, however, turned out to be an acoustic folk extravaganza with articulated nihilistic tendencies. Not that many lyrics possess the reality-negating quality of “Our whole lives down the drain” with fluid ease, despite the inherent restraint. Imagine Thom Yorke’s despair, voiced by a deeper-than-usual Billy Corgan drone.



Arguably one of the most anticipated acts finally took the stage when Amberhaze, the solo project of Giuliano Gulloti, came in with a guitar, MacBook Pro, synthesizer, and grand piano in tow. All deep and reflective, Amberhaze's music possessed a plaintive resonance, suggesting a return to more inner emotions. It might be doing his music an injustice by labelling his tunes as 'sad', but they did display a pronounced melancholy that captured the more serious side of The Album Leaf's synth embraces.

Shoegazing appeared almost as second nature to him, forming a dense background layer for the beat to trudge upon. There were some loud cheers as the smiling dude in glasses broke into the familiar hip-hop-inspired beat of Radiohead's "All I Need". Courageous? Most definitely. But Amberhaze had nothing to fear when he wittingly quipped, "I hope they don't mind."

Other acts that deserved mentions were Indonesia's Elemental Gaze and Agrikulture, two bands that exhibit startlingly different sounds. Where the former might expound a dreamy landscape of intertwining soft and harsh analogue synths, the latter's explosive 80s disco, electro and soul combined for a gleefully explosive effect.

The presence and appearance of these bold, original and forward-thinking musicians has definitely indicated a displacement of Baybeats's original tenets as an "indie" event. Will the new organisers be able to sustain and even increase the Singaporean musical palette for Baybeats *and* keep it free at the same time? Only time will tell.

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