MusicSG: charting the development of National Library's digital music archive

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Abstract

Currently in Singapore, there is no known music archive of Singapore music that is readily accessible to the public. The MusicSG archive fills this gap by assembling a collection of music composed or published by Singaporeans that is accessible for research and discovery. This paper will focus on the objectives of the web archive, the types of content on the site, various challenges faced in building the archive, and will end with a detailed walk-through of a user's experience to the online archive.

Keywords: Singapore music, MusicSG, copyrights, archive, NLB, National Library Board, e-resources, digital, Cultural Medallion, Iskandar Ismail, Alex Abisheganaden, Kam Kee Yong, Leong Yoon Pin, 1960s music, X' Ho, Liang Wern Fook, The Quests, Corrinne May, Boh Chit Hee, Pan Xiuqiong, P. Ramlee, musicals, xin yao, rock, pop, classical music, tracks, scores, lyrics, biographies, videos, MusicSG Reloaded.

Editorial Introduction

This paper was invited from a presenter at the LFT 2014 conference. The main aim was to provide more detailed content that was not presented at the conference due to time allotment.

Objective

MusicSG is a digital archive project set up to digitize, archive and provide access to all forms of published Singapore musical works. It assembles a collection of music composed or published by Singaporeans, music produced or published in Singapore, and music related to Singapore.

By bringing together a suite of content on Singapore music, NLB and MusicSG aim to raise the awareness of Singapore music and provide resources for research and discovery, whilst contributing to NLB's initiative to preserve Singapore's artistic heritage and legacy.

Content highlights

The archive boasts a collection of over 20 genres of music including music from national campaigns, local musicals, xin yao, rock, pop, classical music and more. There is music by local artists including X' Ho, Dick Lee, Iskandar Ismail, Liang Wern Fook, The Quests, Corrinne May, Boh Chit Hee, Pan Xiuqiong, P. Ramlee amongst many others. All in all, our recorded works span from the 1950s to the present day.

Some famous tunes include Stand Up for Singapore, a perennial National Day favourite; tracks from musicals such as Beauty World, and Campaign singalongs like Make Courtesy Our Way of Life also make up the colourful, kaleidoscopic collection. Popular favourites include tunes by 1960s rock bands such as The Quests and The Cyclones, and music by younger stars including

Tanya Chua and Corrinne May. The archive is further complemented by scores and lyrics of some of these tunes.

MusicSG also houses several meaningful local compositions that reflect our nation's short but remarkable history. These songs contain lyrics that relate to the experience of living in Singapore. For example, the Malay folk song "Di Tanjong Katong" reminds us that Tanjong Katong was once a coastal stretch overlooking blue waters.

Other special highlights include the 1967 recording of Singapore's National Anthem, which was performed just 2 years after the Nation celebrated its first independence day, and for a taste of pre-independent Singapore, take a listen to 胶林我们的母亲 (*translation: rubber jungle our mother*), the earliest work recorded in MusicSG, composed by Boh Chit Hee in 1956.

As of October 2014, the archive has built up a total of more than 13,000 music resources including tracks, scores, lyrics, biographies, videos and more. To listen to the music and check out our entire collection, please visit http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/music/ .

How does MusicSG build its collection

MusicSG's collection is built primarily by music contributions received from the public and music industry players, who share and deposit their published works to the music archive. Intellectual property copyrights are cleared before the National Library can provide access to the music resources.

Highlights of 2013

The late local music legend and Cultural Medallion Recipient Iskandar Ismail was one of the most significant donors who contributed to MusicSG. Approximately 260 of his scores have been digitised and uploaded onto

MusicSG, including many handwritten scores of his arrangements of familiar National Day Parade tunes (eg. Medley of National Songs for NDP 1994), and those of local musicals (eg. Various scenes of Mortal Sins the musical). Scores of past Cultural Medallion winners, Leong Yoon Pin, Alex Abisheganaden and Kam Kee Yong can also be accessed in the portal.

In addition, MusicSG conducted video interviews with thirteen Independent (Indie) Singaporean artists including local veterans Jack & Rai, West Grand Boulevard, and The Sam Willows amongst others. Through this collaboration, MusicSG created a series of video profiles of these selected Indie artists, who were subsequently invited to perform gigs at the Esplanade public library as part of the archive's outreach effort. Branded as MusicSG Studios, the outreach activities were well received from the public and helped raise awareness of the local music archive. Apart from that, research articles, infographics and photographs related to personalities, organizations and performance venues have been added to the portal, thereby enhancing the comprehensiveness of content on the site.

Following which, in order to have a more user-friendly and aesthetically pleasing layout, MusicSG embarked on a website makeover in an effort to encourage continuous discovery of the site's content. Social sharing capabilities, streaming capabilities and improved search functions were added. In addition, its responsive web design enables the site to be rendered on different screens and platforms. More content formats were also able to be displayed.

With the revamping of the MusicSG website as well as exciting new content, the MusicSG web archive was re-launched on 26 September 2014 in a bid to promote greater publicity of the site. Titled MusicSG Reloaded, the event was

held at the National Library with Guest-of-Honour Minister Lawrence Wong, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth and Second Minister for Communications and Information, and guest performer Corrinne May, who wowed the crowd with her luscious vocals. Guests for the evening included former MusicSG Advisory Committee members, donors to MusicSG, and partner organisations. Following that, popular local artistes The Analog Girl, Jack and Rai, ShiGGa Shay and Nicodemus Lee from 迷路兵 performed at a public concert at the National Library's Plaza.

Challenges faced

There were challenges faced in the course of this project but these have also brought about learning points. Getting the right vendor with relevant experience and ability to work on music content was an important concern. For example, when sourcing for a vendor to produce the video profiles of the 13 Indie artists, the project team had to look for vendors that had experience dealing with musicians and were able to pick up with the nuances in musical style for each of these artists. This would be critical to making a profile video that captured the essence of the artist's work, made all the more difficult by its intangible nature. Moreover, videography expertise was not readily available in-house, hence necessitating a vendor's services.

The project team was charting new territories with the launch of a new genre of music on the site – the Indie music genre. There were many unknowns and several issues cropped up, specifically those pertaining to the industry including rights management. As a result, the team had to adapt to the situation and re-scope the work to be done.

Furthermore, to archive local music, rights had to be cleared with multiple parties including but not limited to the composer, lyricist and

publisher. This process was more complicated when it came to providing access to music tracks belonging to big recording companies. As such, there are many factors to consider in terms of copyrights and cost when it comes to archiving local music.

Conclusion

The nation's musical heritage is a gem that deserves to be documented, preserved and be made accessible to future generations to come. We look forward to the day when rights restrictions and clearances are less complex so that local music can be accessible to the broader public.

MusicSG strives to be a reliable source of reference material to those wanting to learn more about the nation's musical heritage, to be a partner recognised for championing local music talents, recognising them as jewels in the Singapore's creative history and industry, and to exemplify the rich history that Singaporeans have and will continue to create-- a legacy that all Singaporeans can be proud of.

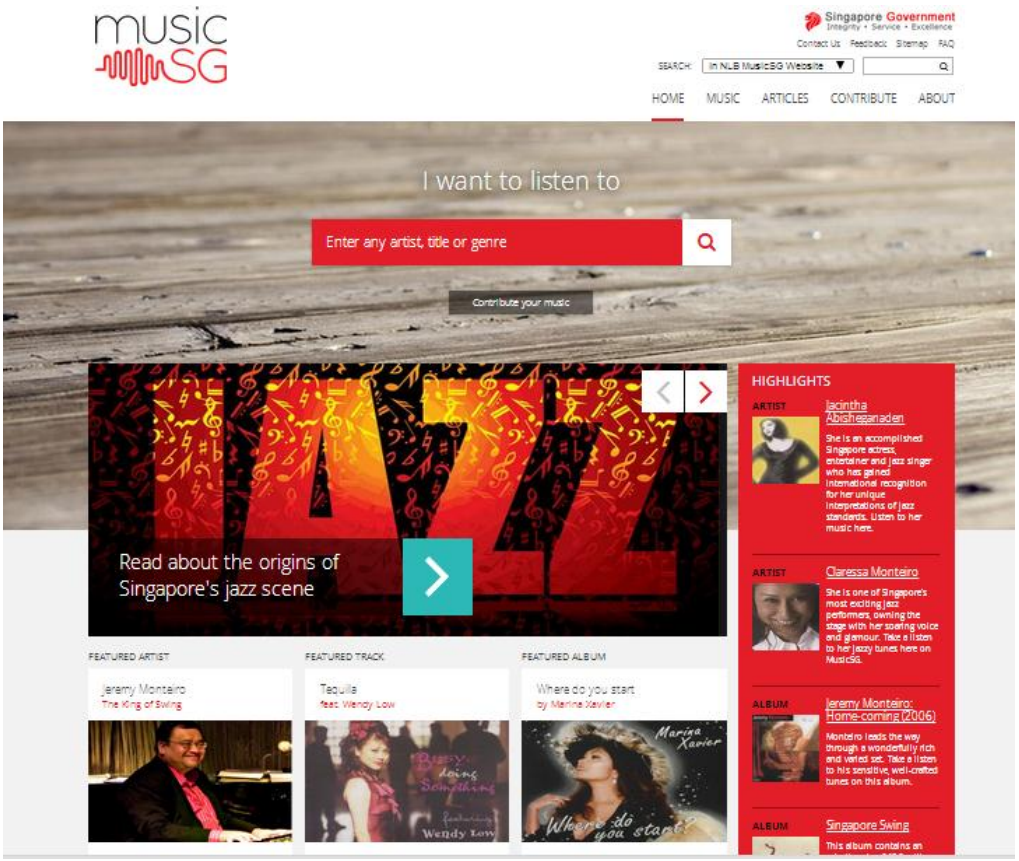
References

MusicSG website URL: http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/music

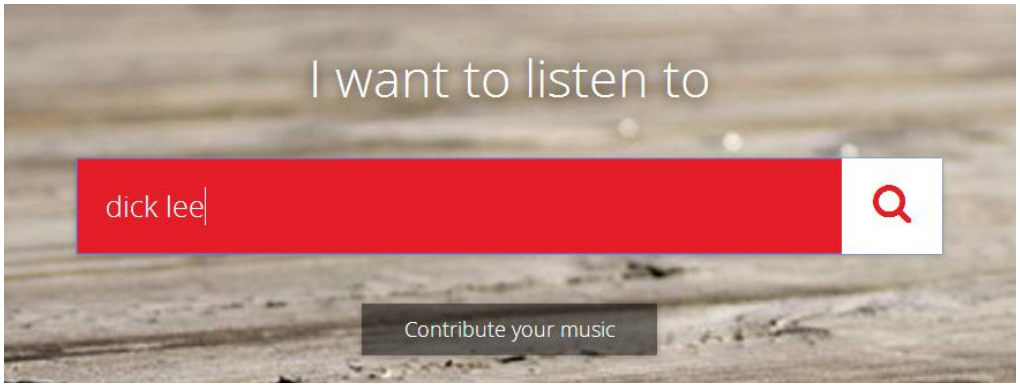
Images and additional information about site:

Here is a step-by-step guide to discovering the new MusicSG webpage.

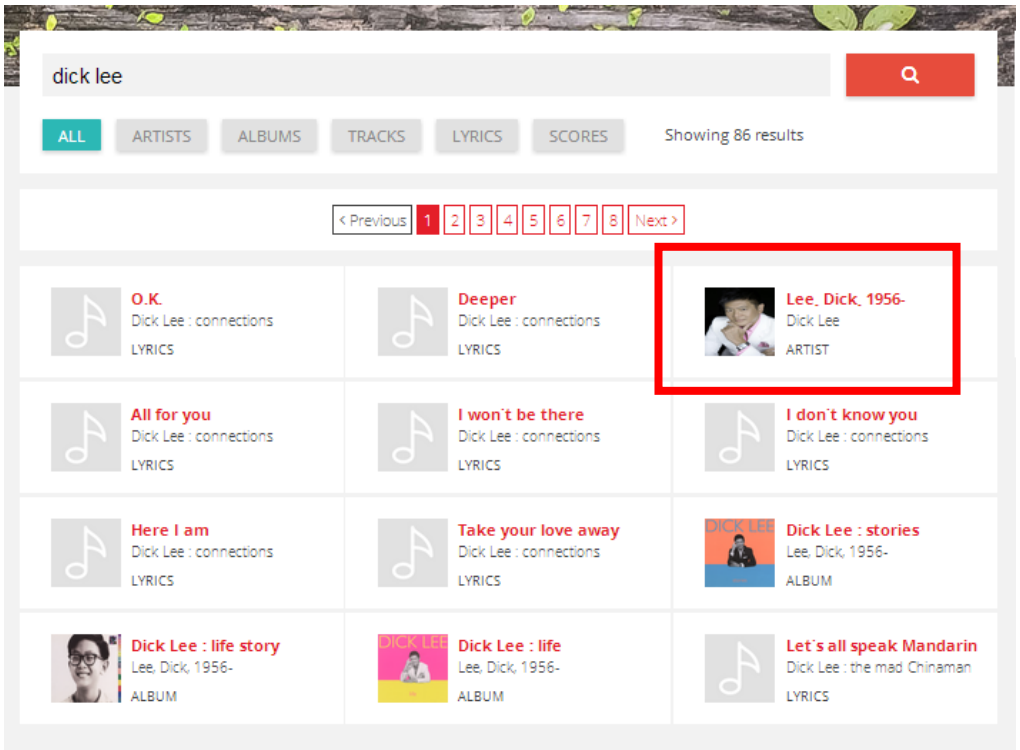
1. Conducting a search



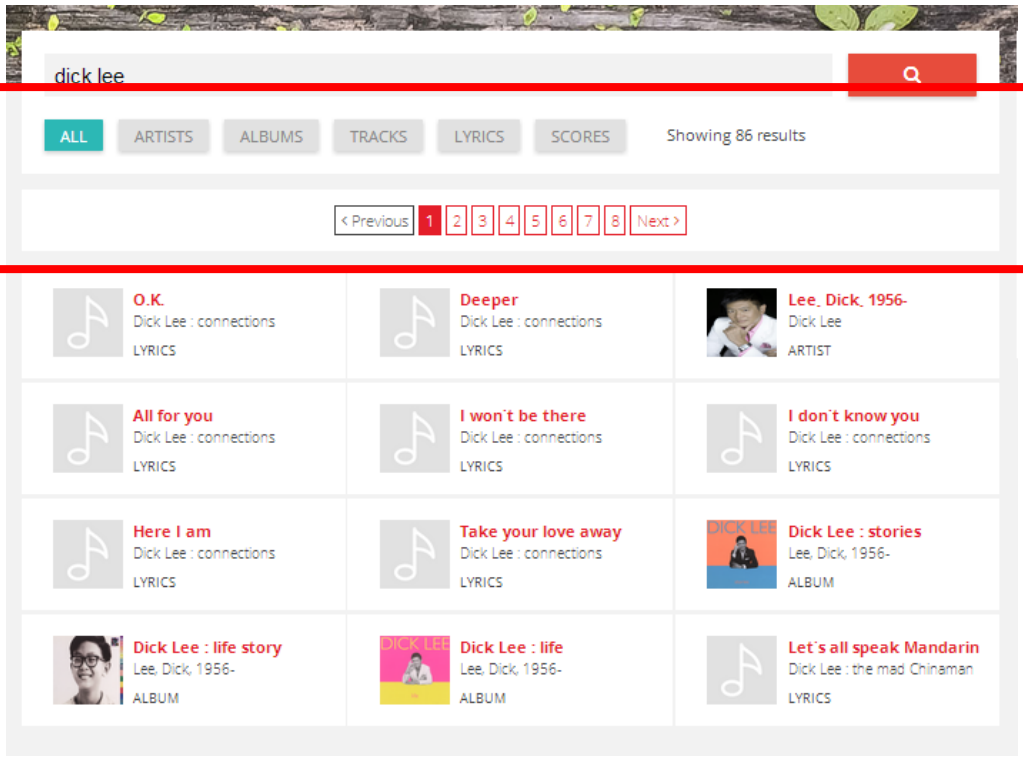
The image above shows the landing page of the archive's website.



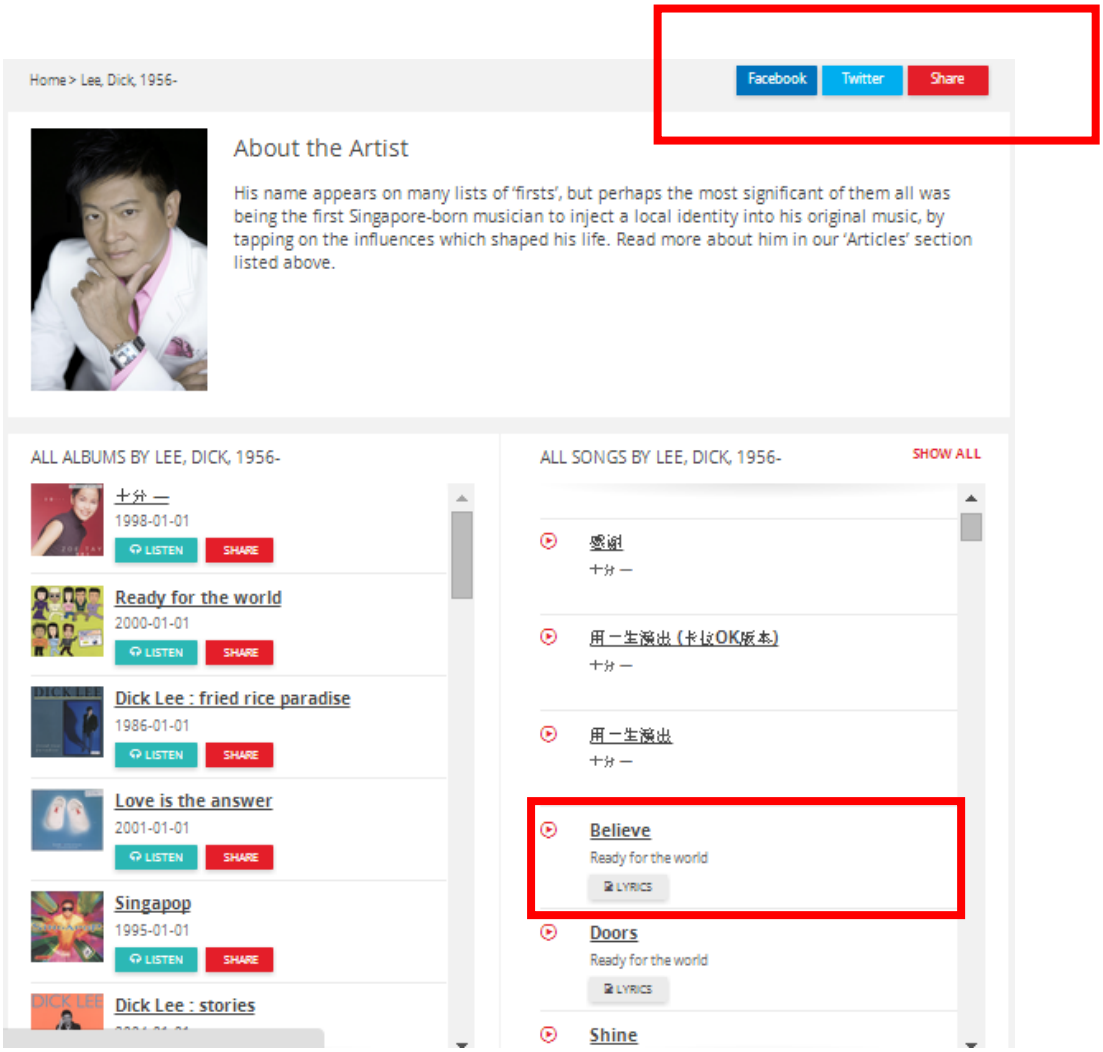
Simply type into the search bar the names of artists, titles of songs, or any other keywords. Then, hit the 'Enter' button, or press the magnifying glass icon to launch the search.



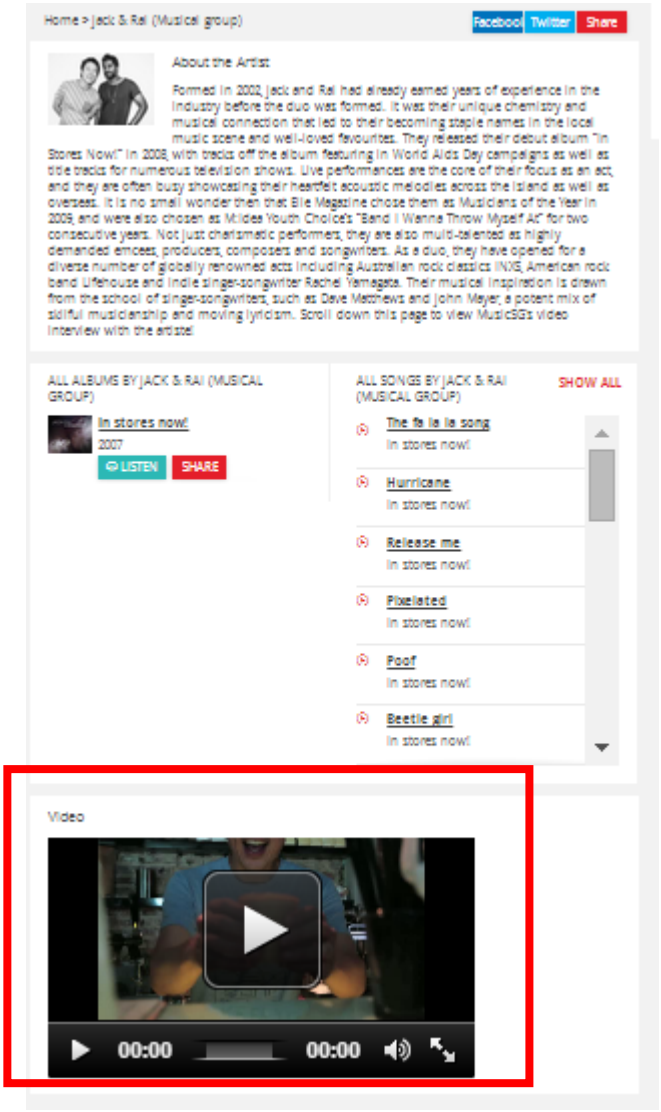
*Following that, you will be directed to the search results page as shown above. To find Dick Lee's artist profile page, click the box that indicates '**Dick Lee ARTIST'.***



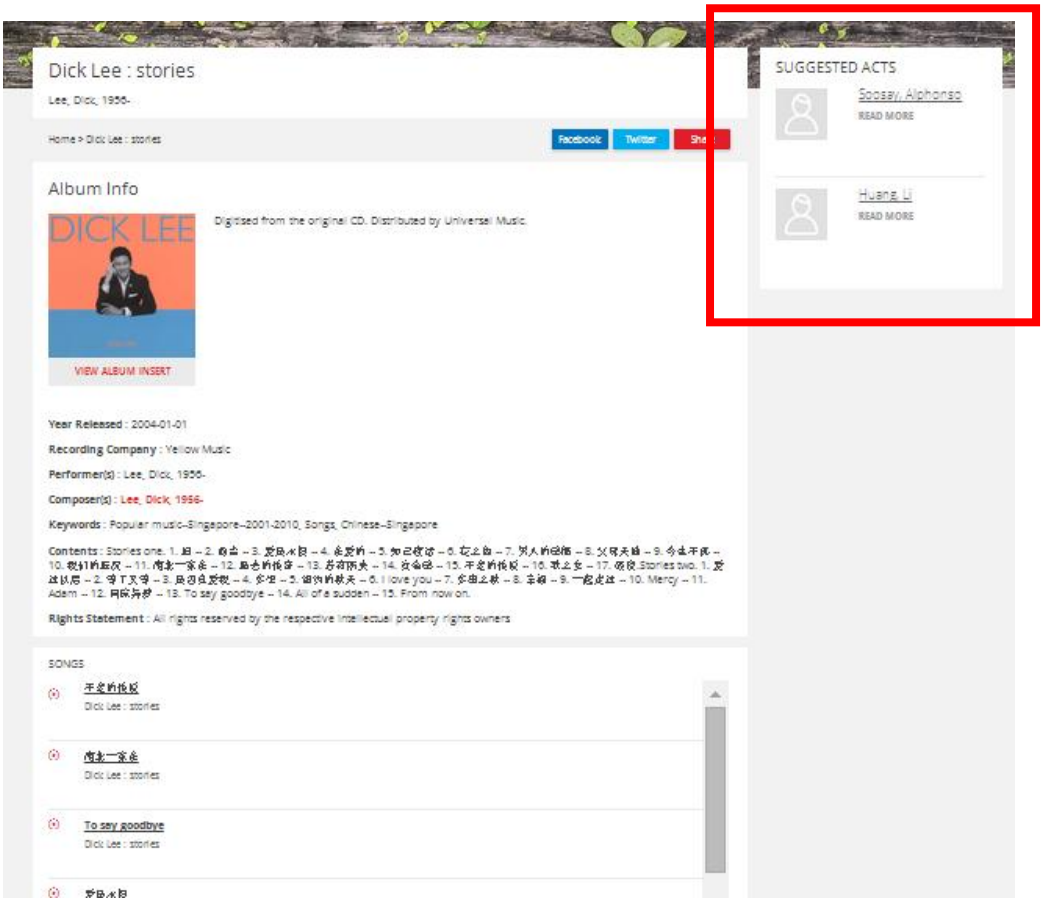
You may also wish to filter your search by artist, album, track, lyric or scores by using the filter tabs above .



Clicking on the icon 'Dick Lee ARTIST' brings you to Dick Lee's artist profile page. On this page, you can read a short biography of the artist, explore the album titles under his name, tracks he's performed or composed, and lyrics to the tracks. You can even share music on social media by clicking on any of the icons labelled 'Share', 'Facebook' and 'Twitter'.

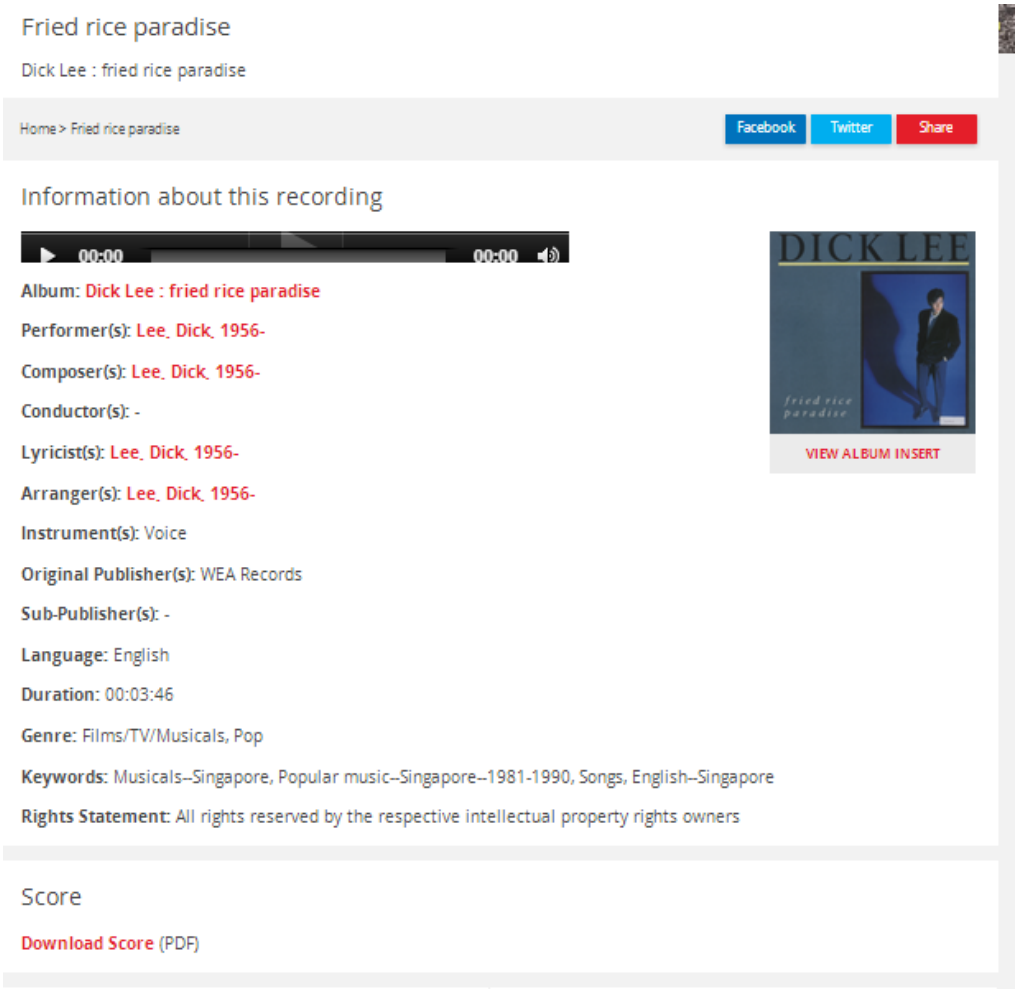


Some artist profile pages may also contain a video interview with the artist.

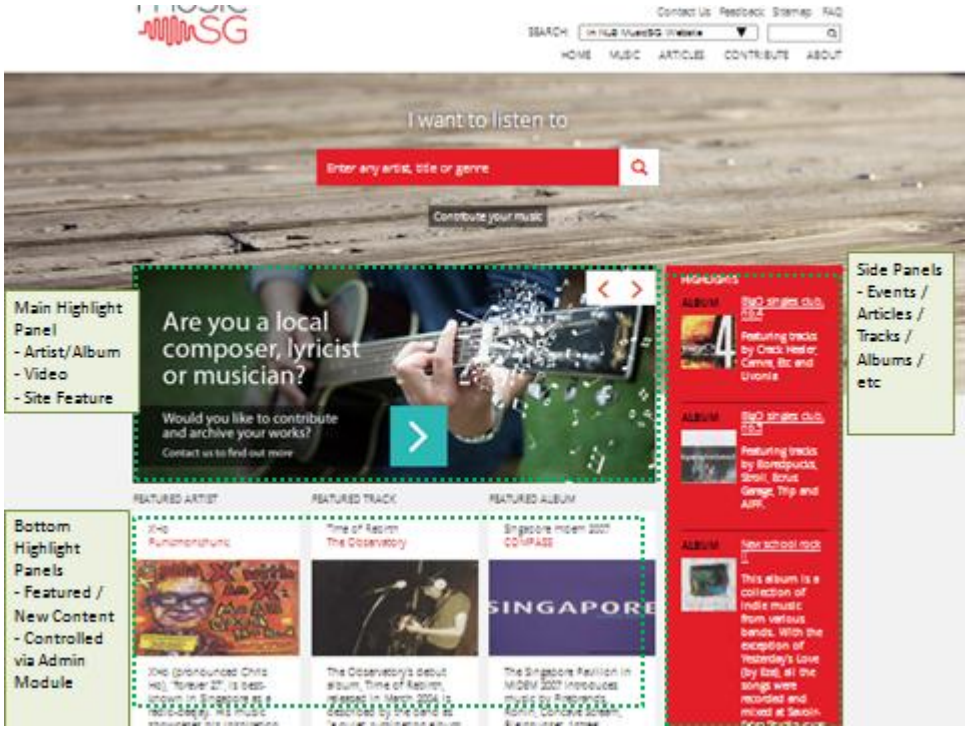


To find out more information about the album, click on the title of the album. You will be directed to the album detail page where you can find out details such as the year the album was produced, the publisher of the album, the composer and many other details. You can continue to explore the works and listen to music tracks through streaming, view and download album inserts, lyrics and scores, as well as share the content on social media.

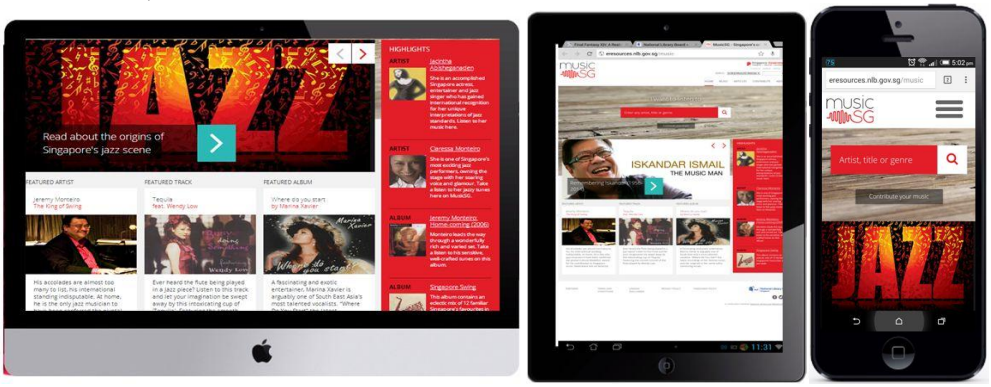
At any point in time, users are encouraged to continue exploring other artists through the 'Suggested Acts' feature, located at the top right of the screen.



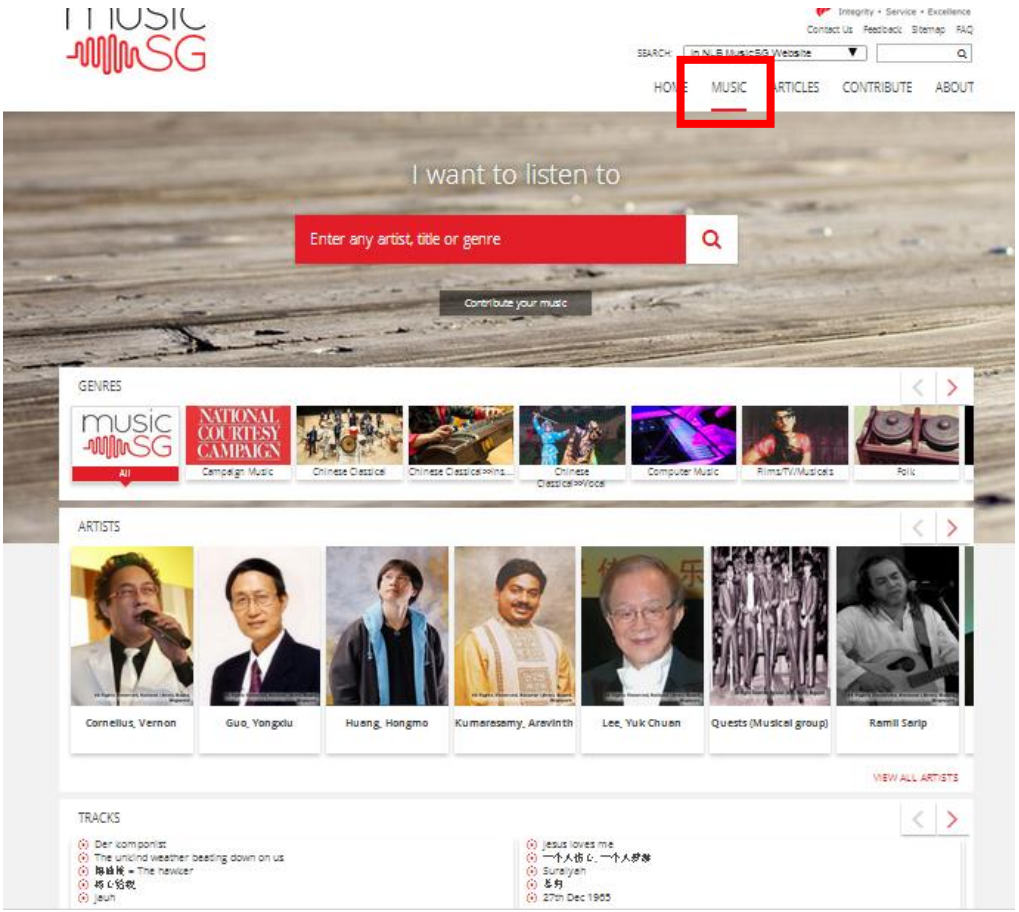
To find out more information about the track, click on the title of the track. You will be directed to the track detail page where you can find out details such as the composers, lyricist and performer of the track; the publisher of the album, the language and genre of the work, as well as many other details. You can continue to explore the works and listen to music tracks through streaming, view and download album inserts, lyrics and scores, as well as share the content on social media.



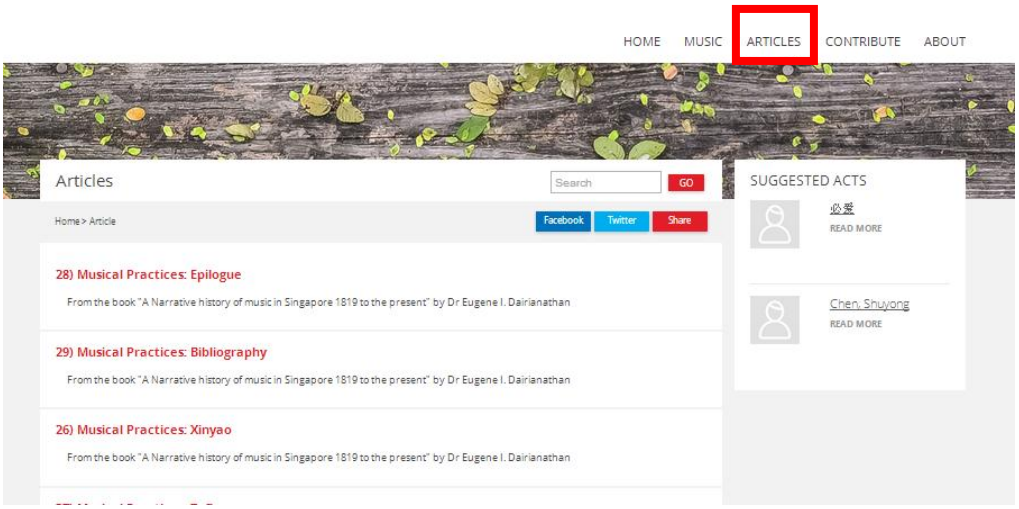
The landing page contains an updated interface and design of site to be line with popular music sites of today. The search bar is featured prominently to cater to the user pattern behaviour of this day and age, which is strongly search-centric. If viewers do not wish to conduct an independent search, there are other means to discover content. They could also be able to explore the content flashed out on the landing page. This would consist of a curated basket of featured content. MusicSG selects which artists, tracks, albums or articles to highlight every month. Some possible themes include Jazz music, Indie music, Chinese New Year celebrations etc.

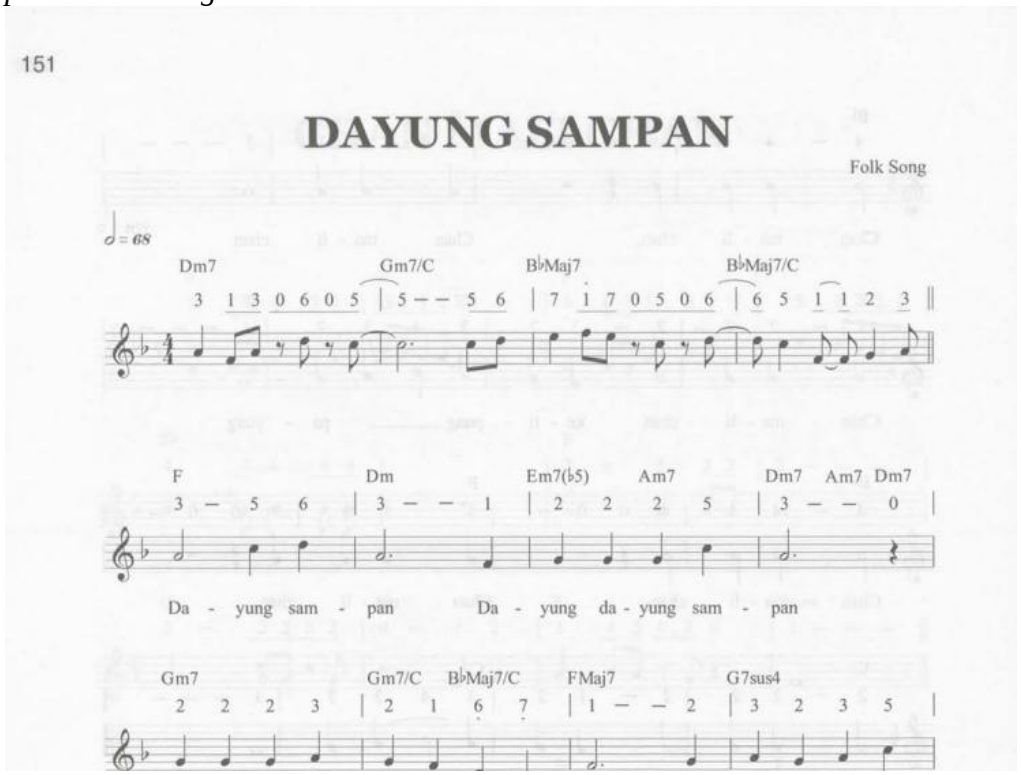


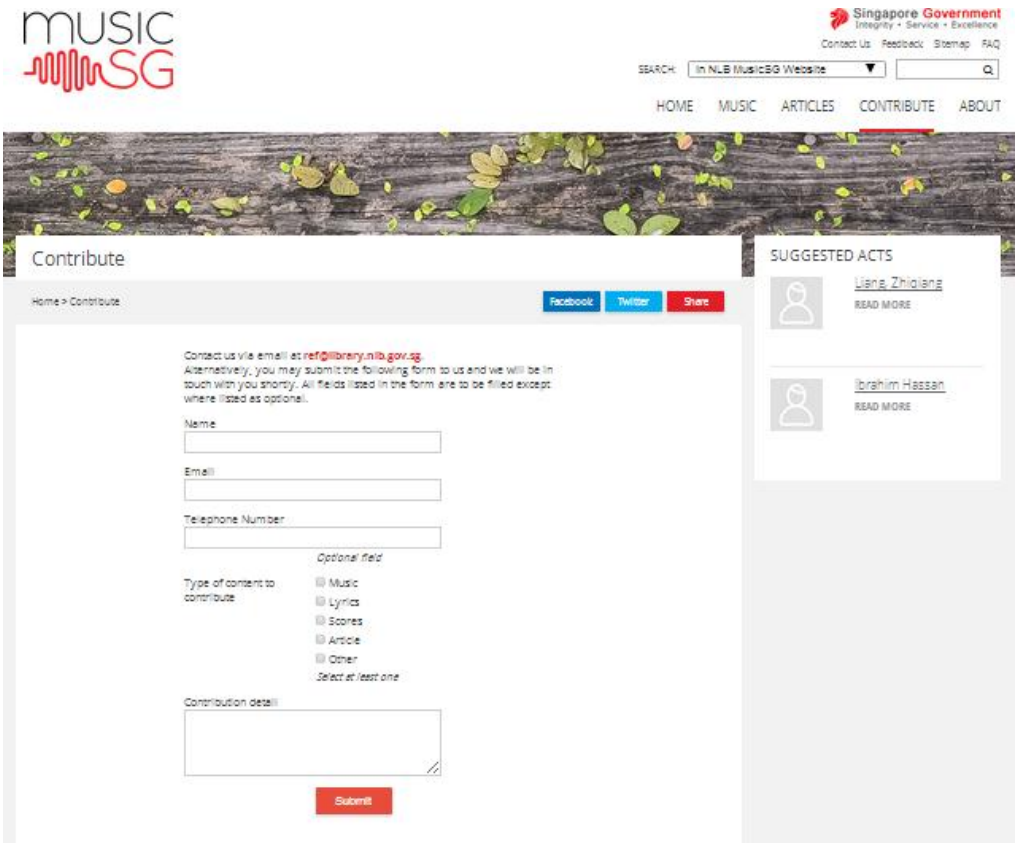
The website also boasts responsive web design technology, which enables the site to adjust itself according to the device you are using with no loss in functionality.



Apart from conducting a specific search, users can also click on the 'Music' tab at the top to browse the contents according to genre. Simply scroll through the genres to explore the various artists, tracks and albums associated with each genre of music.



By clicking on the 'Articles' tab, you can search, read and download our articles via pdf viewers. These specially commissioned articles cover topics such as local music personalities, Singapore's music history, and musical practices amongst others.

MusicSG contains a variety of content formats, including tracks, lyrics, scores, videos, articles and more. To search for a particular score, simply type in the title of the music score you wish to search for.



For those who wish to get in touch with MusicSG or donate their published works to the archive, they may do so by clicking on the 'Contribute' tab at the top of the page. The user would simply have to fill in a handful of required fields to provide more details about their contribution. The form gets filtered to the National Library's Reference Point system, and the MusicSG project manager will follow up accordingly. This form encourages greater public participation to MusicSG, and facilitates the growth of content in the archive.

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