



INSIDE

- Song-era masterpiece goes on show > p26
- Movie puts spotlight on 'China's Van Goghs' > p27

Sing when you're winning

Eason Chan discusses his new Mandarin album, going back on the road and being inspired by young talent

By CHEN NAN

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Eason Chan Yik-shun is good at his job, and being a pop star is what he does best. When crowds gather at a five-star hotel in Hong Kong, he is in full work mode: Laughing, posing for the cameras and being talkative.

Wearing a white jacket, navy blue pants, red socks and a pair of white sneakers, Chan is ready to discuss his upcoming Mandarin album, *Eason says C'mon In*, set for an October release.

An 18-date tour to support the album kicked off at Tsinghua University in Beijing on Sept 22. The schedule takes in cities including Shanghai, Hong Kong, Berlin, Paris, London and Manchester, through December.

Speaking about his plans, the Hong Kong best-selling singer said: "One day, I found an old T-shirt at home which had the logo of Tsinghua University. Later, I learned that it was my father's. He went there to learn Mandarin. I will wear this T-shirt when I perform in Beijing and tell the story to the students there."

Chan's tour takes in three other universities on the Chinese mainland, including Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

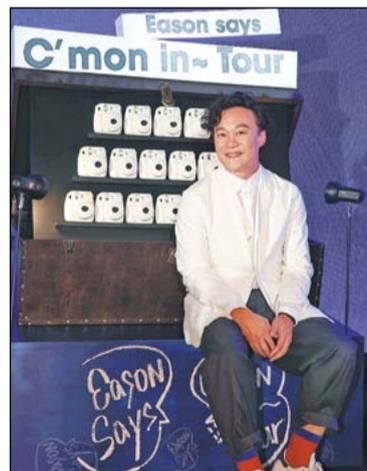
Chan, 43, is known for his dynamic stage presence and versatile voice. With more than 40 albums to his name, he has performed music from a range of genres, from pop and ballads to jazz, swing, funk, electronica and rock.

Work on the new album started a year ago and saw a reunion with producer Jerald Chan, who was a singer-songwriter with Hong Kong pop duo Swing. The duo, which was founded in 1999 and disbanded in 2002, worked with Chan on two of his Cantonese albums — *Life Continues...* in 2006 and *...3mm* in 2012.

The albums included a selection of musical styles, including funky, fresh dance songs and synth-pop sounds.

Speaking about the production process, Eason Chan said: "Usually, we get a list of songs which are candidates for the new album. Some of the songwriters have worked with me, while some have not."

"This time, when we chose songs we didn't look at the songwriters' names. It was like a game. We just listened to the music and read the lyrics," he said. "I really love songs



One of Hong Kong's best-selling singers, Eason Chan is known for his dynamic stage presence and versatile voice.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

which present something visual and have a story."

The first four songs released online in early August have become chart-toppers, including one called *Echinus*, which compares a man to a sea urchin with sharp edges on the outside but soft inside. It was written by Taiwan songwriter Ge Da-wei.

Commenting on the album, Jerald

Chan said: "A funny thing happened when we played the songs for the boss of Universal Music Group. After listening to the 10 songs on the new album, he said: 'I didn't see any hit which can kill'. And I said, 'We are not trend followers but trendsetters'."

Eason Chan noted that the new album takes time to digest, "especial-

ly in this fast-paced modern world"

"I hope listeners can take it slow and they will find what they want. That's why we called it *C'mon In*. We invite you in to take your time to listen to the songs."

Speaking about his schedule, Eason Chan said that he took a break after wrapping up his last tour in early 2016. The tour involved more

than 100 performances in cities including New York, London and Montreal over more than a year. It left him exhausted.

"I stopped receiving new information and stopped listening to music. I needed to breathe," he said. "Slowly, I recovered and started listening to new songs."

Meanwhile, he is also excited about his new role as one of the four coaches in the second season of *Sing! China*, a reality talent show aired by Zhejiang Satellite TV Station.

During the show he is exposed to many young musicians, whose performances enable him to gain a fresh perspective on music, particularly styles such as hip-hop.

"These young people are very inspiring. I learned a lot from them," he said. "Usually there is a teleprompter in front of the stage to remind me of the lyrics. But these young people do not sing from a teleprompter."

"So, now I have stopped using the machine and force myself to remember the lyrics. It feels different when I sing without the machine. I get focused."

He also credits young singers with reminding him of his earlier days.

Eason Chan, who was born in Hong Kong and later studied architecture at Kingston University, London, began his career with a singing competition in Hong Kong in 1984, in which he beat 10,000 contestants.

He appeared on Hong Kong's music scene when the market was shrinking due to rampant piracy. Then, in 1995, he released a self-titled debut album. Although it was not a best-seller, songs like *Song of the Era* and *Hurt Letter* received praise.

His second and third albums, *Tear* and *Always With Me*, earned him a large fan base, and *Time* magazine described him as a "front-runner in the next generation of Cantopop" in 2005.

In 2012, his show at London's O2 Arena sold out in 20 minutes. It was his second performance in London after performing at the Royal Albert Hall in 2010.

Eason Chan has also starred in nearly 40 movies and even performed in musicals in Hong Kong.

Speaking about his success, he said: "I am a lucky guy. From the very first day, the record company did not force me to do anything. On an album, they always allow me to choose three or four songs."

"As for the big hits, I really have no idea how those songs can go so far. Though I don't like some of the hits, I try to learn to appreciate them."