



# The Birth of Rock?

Young rocker Pham Anh Khoa is at the forefront of Vietnam's new rock revolution. His biggest ever show, at Tao Dan Stadium, highlights just how far the scene has developed. Words by Will Peach. Photos by Khoa Tran.

24-YEAR-OLD PHAM ANH KHOA HAS received a lot of attention of late. Acclaimed for creating a new style of rock, that blends both traditional and modern tunes, the Nha Trang native is keen to get his message that "rock never dies" out there for all of Vietnam to see.

Ahead of the biggest gig of his career, playing to around 20,000 fans at Tao Dan Stadium, Khoa takes time out to talk to *The Word*.

*Q: Khoa, thanks for talking to us. You're receiving a lot of credit for your style, how do you differentiate yourself from other Vietnamese artists?*

*A: My style is a little different but basically I just sing the kind of music I love. Maybe some people call this rock, or maybe they call it something else. I don't really care about labels; I just care about doing what I like.*

*Q: The way you look and dress is also quite different to other male Vietnamese artists. What do people make of that?*

*A: I don't care about what they think. Maybe I am different stylistically, but as you see in the music industry here a lot of the male singers always look like girls. Because I appear maybe a little bit tough, people think first of all, "wow is he even a singer?" But I think after a while they change their mind because they can see my passion.*

*Q: Why is your music so unique to Vietnam?*

*A: My music is new to Vietnam but not so much to everywhere else. I want to make a break from the normal way that Vietnam makes cheesy music and do something that is a little different.*

*Q: Are your songs your own?*

*A: They are my songs, but I only compose some of the music. My band and the team at Music Faces also help me. In my lyrics I talk about my life, when I feel down and when I feel good.*

*Q: Your label, Music Faces, is respected for bringing new acts to the Vietnam music scene. How did you come to sign with them?*

*A: They chose me after seeing my*

performance on TV and told me I had energy, a good voice and most importantly passion. Music Faces want to do something new and do it properly. That's why I think they chose me and not other easy listening artists.

*Q: Why isn't rock as popular here as opposed to other countries?*

*A: Many people do like rock it's just that they don't have the money to pay for the gigs. That's why for this gig the ticket price is very low. I want to pull these fans in. It also has a lot to do with the fact that in Vietnam people are still affected by traditional music and usually want something similar.*

*Q: When did you first begin making rock music?*


*A: I have loved music since I was a child, but I started listening to rock probably about 7 years ago. I think it certainly fits my personality. When I was younger I liked the rock ballads, now I like metal and heavy rock.*

*Q: How does the audience receive a Pham Anh Khoa performance?*

*A: It really depends on those I'm performing to. If the audience isn't there for me, they don't really react, but if its students or young rock fans they really love it. For this gig I've been practicing really hard, so hopefully I'll bring something new. I'll be singing 16 to 20 songs continuously and just giving it my best.*

*Q: Finally what will it be like performing with the rock bands Microwave and Unlimited?*

*A: Those bands are great. I think it's a good opportunity to bring everybody together and see true Vietnamese rock music. I think for expats and foreigners it will also be a good experience. We do what we do well and we have heart. So, surely they can only respect that.*

Together with local acts Microwave, Thao Trang and White Noise, Pham Anh Khoa will also be performing at the forthcoming Loretofest for the second year running. To find out more and to listen to his music, visit [www.musicfaces.vn](http://www.musicfaces.vn). 





# The Hi-Fi

The opening of The Hi-Fi in mid-November, a venue dedicated to bringing in bands and singers from overseas, marks the start of a new era for live music in Vietnam. Words by Trung Phan.

## IT BEGAN A YEAR AND A HALF AGO.

A team from one of Australia's premier live music venues, The Hi-Fi, was travelling through Vietnam with plans to expand from their current operations in Melbourne. Already with a 1,000-capacity venue under the heart of Melbourne's central business and shopping precinct, having more locations would help them achieve a fundamental goal – to bring in more live music from overseas.

Following their trip to Vietnam, the group was convinced that this country's live music scene was ready for something big. By having spaces in South-East Asia as well as all over Australia, they would be able to bring acts from Europe and North America over on tour and, over time, put

on live music 350 days a year. It was simple economies of scale.

### ◦ Right Time, Right Place

"The Hi-Fi team fell in love with Vietnam," says Rod Quinton, one of the organisers of LoretoFest and a consultant to The Hi-Fi. "Their first move here was to bring Regurgitator to last year's LoretoFest, and earlier in the year they returned for a second visit with the intent of establishing a proper venue under their name."

Opportunity came knocking when a local company, Thanh Dat, with space in the newly renovated Lucky Plaza on Dong Khoi – one of Saigon's veritable "what is happening to that building" sites – sent out word that they wanted to create a live

music venue with acts from overseas. The marriage was almost too perfect. The Hi-Fi Group, with their expertise and know-how, partnered with the local developers. Come this November, Lucky Plaza's second floor will be home to Saigon's own The Hi-Fi and a sister, music-themed restaurant fronted by chef Thierry Faburel of Underground fame, Rokit Bar & Grille.

### ◦ Think Big

Known in Australia for its habit of hosting big names from Ratatat to The Grates and Ghostface Killah, The Hi-Fi brings a sterling reputation to Vietnam. Indeed, browse through a list of acts who've made their way Down Under over the past two years, and the thought of these bands playing in