

Taufik Batisah: More than a pop idol

By Stephanie Ho, written on 15 January 2014

The first Singapore Idol, Taufik Batisah, has progressed from singer to songwriter, arranger and producer to all-round entertainer. He is one of Singapore's most popular singers with four solo albums under his belt, numerous awards and a large fan base in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Born on 10 December 1981, Taufik was the youngest of three children. After his parents' divorce, Taufik was raised by his mother, Madam Normainah Bachok. His aunt, Maria Bachok, was a well-known singer in the 1960s and 1970s.¹ Taufik was educated at Boon Lay Primary School and Jurong Secondary School, after which he proceeded to complete a Diploma in Marine Engineering at the Singapore Polytechnic. After graduation, he enlisted in National Service.²

Bonafide

Taufik's start in entertainment began with *Bonafide*, a hip-hop and rhythm and blues (R&B) duo he formed with secondary school classmate, Mark Subra (performs as Mark Bonafide). Bonafide recalled that they were one of the pioneer groups that fused the hip hop and R&B genres.³ Taufiq said, "We've been performing at small gigs to the local hip-hop community and we've been working really hard making our own kind of music, producing our own songs". Their big break was opening for the Black Eyed Peas concert with hip-hop trio *Vintage Flav'r*.⁴

Singapore Idol

In 2004, MediaCorp developed *Singapore Idol*, a local version of the popular *American Idol* reality talent competition. Then a national serviceman, Taufik decided to join the contest as a means of increasing the profile of *Bonafide*. He said, "I joined for the exposure. I wanted people to take notice. I thought if I could just get on television, then it would open doors for me and my band, *Bonafide*. We had always planned to go up to KL (Kuala Lumpur) after my National Service, to try to get a record deal there".⁵

During the competition, Taufik gained fans especially for his "savvy and soulful R&B numbers".⁶ By the time the number of contestants were whittled down to five, local daily *TODAY* reviewer Razali Abdullah wrote that if the contest was purely based on talent, Taufik would have been the "outright winner". He added that with Taufik, "We're not only looking at a potential Idol, we're staring at a superstar in the making".⁷ Judge Ken Lim also described Taufik as a star performer adding that "a good performer will put up a good act. A star performer will devise a good act".⁸

¹ Thomas, S. (2004, December 5). All in the family. *Straits Times*.

² Taufikbatish.net. Background info. Retrieved from <http://www.taufikbatisah.net/site/page10/page2/page2.html>

³ Bonafide, M. *Bandwagon*. Retrieved from <http://editorial.bandwagon.sg/bandwagon-guestwriter-mark-bonafide>

⁴ Diyana Alan. Taufik's Bonafide ambitions. *Urbanwire*. Retrieved from <http://theurbanwire.com/jan05/taufik.html>.

⁵ Wee, T. (2004, December 30). Idol chat. *8 Days magazine*, p. 27.

⁶ Wee, T. (2004, December 2). Way to go. *8 Days magazine*, p. 42.

⁷ Razalie Abdullah. (2004, November 5). The Idol Review. *TODAY (Singapore)*.

⁸ Tan, J. (2004, November 18). How far have they come? *TODAY (Singapore)*.

Taufik was not without detractors, most of whom criticised him for appearing “arrogant and cocky”. In an interview, Taufik explained that actually he felt insecure. “I’m insecure about my looks and how people see me. As a result I’m afraid to make eye contact.” Despite these feelings, he did not want to come across as “amateur or lousy”. “I wanted to sound as professional as I could. I wanted to appear confident and look like I knew what I was doing,” he added.⁹

Fortunately Taufik was able to win over the majority of the Singapore audience. He became the first Singapore Idol, winning 62% of the 1.1 million votes cast. His prize included a one-year recording contract with Sony BMG records and an artiste management contract with Hype records’ artiste management arm, Artiste Network.¹⁰

11

Recording artist

Taufik’s debut album, *Blessings*, was released in January 2005, very soon after his *Singapore Idol* win. Despite his popularity at the time, there was some uncertainty about how well the album would do. Kelly Chew, Managing Director of BMG-Singapore who handled the *Idol* winner’s album, said, “The project is a daunting task for us since no local English album has sold beyond 3,000 units in recent times”.¹²

These fears proved unwarranted as pre-sales figure of the album exceeded 10,000 copies. By the third week of actual sales, the album had gone double platinum and become the first locally produced English album in over a decade to have sold over 30,000 copies.¹³

Taufik released his follow-up album, *All because of you*, in 2006. Unlike his earlier album where he had minimal input in the production aspects, Taufik wrote and produced eight of the 10 songs on the album. Of the experience, he said, “The process was tedious but really enjoyable and I learned a lot of valuable lessons...It takes a lot of hard work and dedication. You have to set a direction for yourself and write songs that people will like, not be too selfish or self-indulgent”.¹⁴

This album also included three Malay tracks including *Usah Lepaskan* (Don't Let Go), a song he co-wrote with singer-songwriter Imran Ajmain.¹⁵ The inclusion of these songs signaled Taufik’s entry into the Malay music scene. Taufik’s mentor and director of Hype Records, Ken Lim, said, “As soon as this album (*All because of you*) is finished, we will start work on the Malay one. We feel that his career has peaked in Singapore and for it to improve, he will have to go to Malaysia.”¹⁶

⁹ Wee, T. (2004, December 30). Idol chat. *8 Days magazine*, p. 28.

¹⁰ Taufik Batisah received 62% of votes in Singapore Idol final. (2004, December 6). *Channel NewsAsia*.

¹¹ Siti Rohani. (2004, December 9). Win, lose, draw. *8 Days magazine*, p. 38.

¹² Wee, T. (2004, December 2). Way to go. *8 Days magazine*, p. 42.

¹³ Tan, M. (2005, May 7). Taufik or Tau-fake. *The New Paper*.

¹⁴ Yap, G. (2006, November 22). Taufik delves within so that he can reach out to his fans. *TODAY (Singapore)*.

¹⁵ Narayanan, S. (2006, November 24). Wish list for his perfect woman. *The New Paper*.

¹⁶ Narayanan, S. (2006, April 12). But is it too little, too late, Taufik? *The New Paper*.

Taufik's next two albums, *Teman Istimewa* (2007) and *Suria Hatiku* (2008), were both Malay albums that helped Taufik break into the Malaysian and Indonesian music scenes. Taufik produced all the songs on *Teman Istimewa* and felt that it was important to take the time to produce a good album. He said, "I told myself that if I wanted to be accepted by Malaysians, I must prove to them that I'm not just your typical manufactured product. I want full control when it comes to my music".¹⁷

Suara Hatiku was an album of ballads and love songs with an acoustic feel that were different from the R&B songs Taufik was known for. Explaining the shift, Taufik said ballads were challenging for him to write but he did it to "show a different style" and avoid pigeonholing himself in one genre. He called the album a journey of self-discovery.¹⁸

Successful performer

Even after his appearances on *Singapore Idol*, Taufik continued to be one of Singapore's most popular performers. In 2006, he won the award for most popular male artiste at *Anugerah Planet Muzik* (APM), a regional music award show celebrating the best Malay music in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia.¹⁹ In 2008, he picked up three awards at the APM: Most Popular Act, Most Popular Song and Best Act in Singapore.²⁰ He also scored big in the *anugerahHitz.sg* awards for local Malay artists. In the inaugural show in 2010 he won six out of the 14 awards presented.²¹

Taufik attributes much of his success to his fans and sees their support as reason to continue to expand his musical career. He said, "For me, it's (winning awards) good recognition, good motivation to keep doing what I do. When it comes to music, there are ups and downs. It's never easy."²²

Although successful in the pop Malay music, Taufik was never one to rest on his laurels. In 2010, Taufik took to the stage with a role in Dick Lee's musical *Fried Rice Paradise*. Explaining why he was venturing into new territory, Taufik said, "I like to try something new every year, and this will be it. It will definitely prepare me for other parts of the entertainment industry which I'm looking to explore."²³

In 2013, Taufik was back on television in another reality singing competition named *The Final One*. But this time, Taufik was a judge rather than a contestant. On his role, Taufik said, "My approach is as big brother. I am basically older than all of the contestants — which is sad. I'm going to be really encouraging and I'm just going to be on their side all the way."²⁴

Role model

In addition to his musical accomplishments, Taufik has become a role model to young Singaporeans. He was appointed Smoke-Free ambassador for the Health Promotion

¹⁷ Singapore idol hits Malaysia. (2007, September 15). *Weekend Mail*.

¹⁸ Toh, C. (2008, December 4) This one's for Aishwarya...*TODAY (Singapore)*.

¹⁹ Rasul, J. J. (2006, March 27). Taufik, rappers Ahlifiqir win big at Anugerah Planet Muzik. *TODAY (Singapore)*.

²⁰ Eddino Abdul Hadi. (2008, April 22). Taufik's the big winner. *Straits Times*.

²¹ Rasul, J. J. (2010, April 6). The Taufik Batisah awards. *The New Paper*.

²² Noor Ashikin Abdul Rahman. (2012, December 17). 'I came with no expectations. *The New Paper*.

²³ Rasul, J. J. (2010, May 17). From TV to stage. *The New Paper*.

²⁴ Seah, M. (2013, April 23). Judging the judges. *TODAY (Singapore)*.

Board in 2005²⁵ and a Malay language ambassador in 2010.²⁶ Taufik received the Singapore Youth Award in 2006. He hoped that the award would inspire other young people to pursue their dreams like he did.²⁷

Quote

“...you can do anything if you believe in yourself, and never give up easily. Keep telling yourself that if you work hard enough for what you believe in, and what you really want, nobody can tell you otherwise.”²⁸

Selected awards²⁹

2006

- Anugerah Planet Muzik - Most Popular Male Artiste
- MTV Asia Awards - Favourite Artiste Singapore
- Pesta! Pesta! Pesta! Awards – Most Saleable Artiste
- Nickelodeon Kids’ Choice Award 2007 - Kids' Choice Award Wannabe Award (Singapore)

2007

- Pesta Perdana 9 Awards- Most Popular Male Personality
- Nickelodeon Kids’ Choice Award 2007 - Kids' Choice Award Wannabe Award (Singapore)
- Anugerah Planet Muzik - Most Popular Singapore Artiste; Most Popular Song (Singapore) and Best Popular Song (Singapore) for *Usah Lepaskan*

2008

- Anugerah Planet Muzik 2008 - Most Popular Singapore Artiste; Most Popular (Singapore) for *Berserah*; Best Singapore Artiste
- Singapore Youth Award 2008 (Arts and Culture)

2009

- Composers and Authors Society of Singapore (Compass) Award - Top Local Malay Pop Song for *Usah Lepaskan*
- Anugerah Planet Muzik - Most Popular Artiste (Singapore)

2010

- AnugeraHitz.sg 2010 - Best Artiste; Best Composer ("Nafasku"); Best Album ("Suria Hatiku"); Most Popular Song ("Nafasku"); Most Popular Song ("KepadaNya"); Most Popular Artiste

2012

²⁵ Meet the newest Smoke-Free Ambassador. (2005, August 18) *TODAY (Singapore)*.

²⁶ Taufik Batisah among ambassadors for Malay language month. (2010, June 11). *Channel NewsAsia*.

²⁷ Outstanding young Singaporeans honoured at youth award ceremony. (2008, July 6). *Channel NewsAsia*.

²⁸ Outstanding young Singaporeans honoured at youth award ceremony. (2008, July 6). *Channel NewsAsia*.

²⁹ Taufikbatish.net. *Background info*. Retrieved from <http://www.taufikbatisah.net/site/page10/page2/page2.html>

- Anugerah Planet Muzik 2012 - Most Popular Singapore Artiste; Most Popular Regional Artiste; Best Collaboration with Indonesia's Rossa in the song *Aku Bersahaja*
- Mnet Asian Music Awards 2012 - Best Asian Artist (Singapore)

Solo albums

- 2005 Blessings (Sony BMG)
- 2006 All because of you (Hype Records)
- 2007 *Teman Istimewa* (Hype Records)
- 2008 *Suria Hatiku* (Hype Records)

References

Bonafide, M. *Bandwagon*. Retrieved from <http://editorial.bandwagon.sg/bandwagon-guestwriter-mark-bonafide>

Diyana Alan. Taufik's Bonafide ambitions. *The Urban Wire.com* Retrieved from <http://theurbanwire.com/jan05/taufik.html>.

Eddino Abdul Hadi. (2008, April 22). Taufik's the big winner. *Straits Times*.

Meet the newest Smoke-Free Ambassador. (2005, August 18) *TODAY (Singapore)*.

Narayanan, S. (2006, April 12). But is it too little, too late, Taufik? *The New Paper*.

Narayanan, S. (2006, November 24). Wish list for his perfect woman. *The New Paper*.

Noor Ashikin Abdul Rahman. (2012, December 17). 'I came with no expectations. *The New Paper*.

Outstanding young Singaporeans honoured at youth award ceremony. (2008, July 6). *Channel NewsAsia*.

Rasul, J. J. (2006, March 27). Taufik, rappers Ahlifiqir win big at Anugerah Planet Muzik. *TODAY (Singapore)*.

Rasul, J. J. (2010, April 6). The Taufik Batisah awards. *The New Paper*.

Rasul, J. J. (2010, May 17). From TV to stage. *The New Paper*.

Razalie Abdullah. (2004, November 5). The Idol Review. *TODAY (Singapore)*.

Seah, M. (2013, April 23). Judging the judges. *TODAY (Singapore)*.

Singapore idol hits Malaysia. (2007, September 15). *Weekend Mail*.

Siti Rohani. (2004, December 9). Win, lose, draw. *8 Days magazine*.

Taufik Batisah received 62% of votes in Singapore Idol final. (2004, December 6). *Channel NewsAsia*.

Taufikbatish.net. *Background info*. Retrieved from <http://www.taufikbatisah.net/site/page10/page2/page2.html>

Tan, J. (2004, November 18). How far have they come? *TODAY (Singapore)*.

Tan, M. (2005, May 7). Taufik or Tau-fake. *The New Paper*.

Taufik Batisah among ambassadors for Malay language month. (2010, June 11). *Channel NewsAsia*.

Thomas, S. (2004, December 5). All in the family. *Straits Times*.

Toh, C. (2008, December 4) This one's for Aishwarya...*TODAY (Singapore)*.

Wee, T. (2004, December 2). Way to go. *8 Days magazine*.

Wee, T. (2004, December 30). Idol chat. *8 Days magazine*.

Yap, G. (2006, November 22). Taufik delves within so that he can reach out to his fans. *TODAY (Singapore)*.