

Local artiste Masia One is the first Asian rapper to be signed by Dr Dre

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YOU wouldn't normally associate Bedok with a big time hip-hop producer like Dr Dre. But that's because your name isn't Masia One (picture).

Born in Singapore but now living in Canada, it looks like Masia One is living up to her moniker.

Check this out: She's the first female to be nominated for a Much Music Video Award (Rap); the winner of the Chinese Canadian National Council Pioneer Youth Award, and, more recently, the first Asian rapper to be signed by the legendary Dr Dre.

The 20-something rapper first got into hip-hop while living in Bedok when she was eight.

"It was just after Chinese New Year," she told TODAY. "And I bought two bootleg tapes: One was Bananarama, and the other was Public Enemy. When I got home and played it, I thought, 'Oh my god, what is this?' It was the craziest sound I had ever heard!"

A year later, her family moved to Vancouver, Canada, where she found hip-hop gave her an avenue to express herself, while at the same time allowed her to pursue her academic studies.

She graduated from the University of Toronto with honours, majoring in architecture. ("My mother will want me to mention that I can study ah," she laughed).

Then one day, she volunteered to rap at a concert organised by her friend.

"One of the artistes cancelled. So I was a replacement. I'm naturally shy, so going onstage was to prove to myself that I could get over my shyness."

The rest, as they say, is history. Many gigs, commercials, teaching stints in Jamaica, and a great double-album (*Pulau*, released 2008) later, Masia One is back in town for a gig tonight at Forbidden City, as part of this year's Hennessy Artistry series.

MAKING WAVES

# She's the One



*How did you get this deal with Dr Dre?*

Producer Che Vicious apparently saw a video I had called *Return of the B-Girl* on MySpace. He's like Dre's right-hand man and he has produced Eminem, 50 Cent, The Game, Lauryn Hill. I think he called Dr Dre. And they were in Detroit recording Eminem's *Relapse* album, so they called me and said: "Toronto's pretty close by — if you want to see us, you should come".

So, I took the next plane out to see them, and I think they were surprised by how serious I was. But nothing happened after that until four or five months later, when they called and they were ready and I went to Phoenix to record the new project!

*And when is the new album coming out?*

It's not complete yet. We have eight tracks — which were done in six days! When

you're in the recording booth looking at all these plaques by Lauryn Hill and all that, you're just motivated to do a lot. I've never written anything so quickly before in my life. As soon as I leave Singapore, I go back to Los Angeles to polish up the album, add new songs and we finish up sometime next month.

*How did your parents take to your wanting to be a rapper?*

My mother almost had a heart attack! "Aiyoh, why you want to be rapper?" But many, many, many conversations later, she saw that I stuck it out, really meant what I said. I started a business, my own label ... so now they're supportive of it.

*A female Asian rapper in — is it hard being a minority of a minority?*

I get a lot of backlash. Like, "Masia One is so ugly she looks like Jay-Z" ... The weirdest comments! But you really learn. Some people don't want to see a female at the mic, so they'll come up and try to grab it from you, and you literally have to grab it back and not let go of it! You're a female playing a man's game, so you have to be as good but still bring a female perspective.

*What's your musical guilty pleasure?*

It's Rick Astley! He made two hits, but he bought himself the freedom to make whatever music he wanted to make. He can make gamelan music if he wants. That's very intelligent to me. So big up, Rick Astley! You made two songs, and made them last for five generations!

*So, what's your plan for world dominance?*

Well, if you look at the music world, everybody seems to be turning to Asia. The Asian momentum is definitely going to come, and I hope I'm helping to lead that. But I hope the new record will be a crossover success. But I don't think people listen to you until you've established your brand. So, let me establish that brand first!

Hennessy Artistry featuring Paul T, Masia One and MC Celsius, tonight, 10pm at Forbidden City, Clarke Quay. Tickets \$20, includes one glass of Hennessy VSOP.