

Music's in his blood

Singapore flautist Rit Xu does not like to be reminded of his modelling days and wants to be taken as a serious musician

Yip Wai Yee

Singaporean jazz musician Rit Xu does not want to be known as the Vanessa Mae of the flute world.

Even though a quick Google search of his name shows photos of him topless and showing off a solid six-pack, the 23-year-old flautist is eager to put that part of his life behind him.

Vanessa Mae is a techno-violinist who is known for her blatantly sexy image.

Xu, who was a finalist in the male beauty pageant *Manhunt* in 2009, tells *Life!*, slightly exasperated: "I did the part-time modelling thing for about six months, but I definitely don't want that image to stick around for me now."

"You can say that after having done the modelling thing, I know for sure that that is what I don't want to do."

"I don't hope to project myself in that manner. I just want to be taken as a serious, sincere musician, and make more music."

The bachelor adds that there were actually more of such photos – and even YouTube videos – available online, but he had asked the website administrators to take them down.

"I did the modelling thing because it was just a guy thing. I've always been a fitness buff and thought I'd just try it out, but no, it's not for me," he adds.

Xu will be performing at the Straits Times Appreciates Readers (Star) Concert on Sunday, which will be held at Gardens by the Bay. The joint concert will also feature the likes of home-grown singer-songwriter Tanya Chua, K-pop girl group 4Minute, American pop-rock band Boys Like Girls, and Singapore Idols Taufik Batish and Hady Mirza.

Though clearly embarrassed by his modelling days, Xu visibly loosens up as soon as the conversation steers towards his music.

He will be playing two tunes at the show: Earth, Wind And Fire's *Fantasy* and upbeat jazz tune *Samba De Orfeu*.

On the choices, he says: "I chose these songs because they are groovy and fun. It'll hopefully get the audience dancing, so I think it'll be quite a good lead-up to the other acts at the show."

He talks happily too of being a contributor to the soundtrack for Taiwanese aboriginal war epic film *Seediq Bale* (2011), which won the coveted Golden

Horse Award for Best Original Score last year.

He says: "I was asked to play several types of flutes for the soundtrack, including the traditional Chinese and Japanese flutes, so that was fun."

"When you use different flutes, you get to really play with sound – they seem similar at first across the instruments, but the feeling and atmosphere that they create are very different."

He admits sheepishly, however, that he has yet to catch the actual film.

"It didn't make it to cin-

emas here, so I haven't had the chance to see it. Of course, I've heard the soundtrack many times. I'll try to watch it soon somehow," he says with a chuckle.

Xu, who owns "about a hundred" different types of flutes, has just finished his first year of study at National University of Singapore's Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, where he is pursuing a degree in musical performance with a major in classical flute.

The flautist, whose late father was a jazz pianist, and mother is a childcare teacher-cum-Cantonese opera singer,

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says that music was "always in the blood".

He had learnt to play the flute as a child, but was inspired to consider it as a possible career only after listening to musician Paul Fried's collection of flute music.

"I heard a flute rendition of Barbra Streisand's *The Way We Were* on his album and I fell in love with it. I liked how the instrumental version of such a popular song could still convey the same emotion."

Xu hopes to release his own album of jazz flute covers and originals by "year-end".

On why he chose the flute instead of other instruments, he says: "The flute is not very loud and is easily drowned out by other instruments such as the saxophone. But it is very melodious and sounds very beautiful, and when done well, can really stand out. And that's why I love it so much."

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Rit Xu (left), on why he loves the flute