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—Loz Blain of a cappella group Suade

FOUR FUN: Suade members (from far left) Rob Latham, Chris Blain, Luke Stevenson and and Loz Blain.

HIGH-TECH A CAPPPELLA

Four-man Aussie group Suade sound like choir of 40 people and sing K-pop, too

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HOW do four voices turn into 40? With some ingenuity and a little help from technology, Melbourne-based a cappella group Suade have developed a technique to sound like a choir of 40 voices, even though they have just four guys in the group.

They bring their show – complete with covers of popular K-pop songs – to the University Cultural Centre this Sunday for the AKA A Cappella VII festival, which started its run last weekend.

Local group SMU Voix, from Singapore Management University, will open for Suade.

Over the phone from his home in Melbourne, Suade member Loz Blain, 35, told The New Paper that the idea for VocalTronics came about after member Sava Djukic left the band last year.

"It really galvanised us into action," said Blain.

The group is rounded out by Blain's brother Chris and two other members, Luke Stevenson and Rob Latham.

They had to choose between recruiting – and training – another singer, which could take up to 12 months, or diving into the future by using technology to make up for the missing voice.

"It's such a long process (to train another singer), so we thought we'd come up with a technological solution instead," said Blain.

What they eventually came up with – a system of automated loops and effects they've christened VocalTronics – has become much more than just a stand-in for a missing member.

They started off with about A\$15,000 (\$19,100) of equipment, utilising the Ableton Live software popular with DJs to program their loops.

FYI

WHAT: AKA A Cappella VII: Suade Showcase featuring SMU Voix

WHEN: Sunday, 7.30pm

WHERE: University Cultural Centre, National University of Singapore

TICKETS: \$25 and \$30 from www.gatecrash.com.sg

The technique allows them to do much more intricate a cappella arrangements for songs like Maroon 5's Moves Like Jagger and Michael Jackson's The Way You Make Me Feel.

"We feel like we're pushing a cappella into the 21st century. It's a new spin on an old form of entertainment," said Blain.

Initially, the group did run into issues where other groups thought they might be "cheating", but Blain stressed that there's no pre-recording, and the only thing they programme ahead is the timing of the effects and loops.

More work

In fact, everyone in the band takes on more work.

While a traditional a cappella performance may see one singer just singing bass for an entire song, a song that is arranged with VocalTronics involves someone like Blain moving through bass, percus-

sion and other sounds throughout a song.

Even youngest member Stevenson, 22, whom Blain described as an a cappella "traditionalist", had his doubts at first.

"He thought it wasn't going to be a cappella anymore. Now he's realised it's actually more difficult," he said.

But the work that Suade puts in behind the scenes is hardly visible during their live shows.

And surprisingly for an Australian group, the shows include some K-pop covers of the like Wonder Girls and Girls' Generation.

The group discovered K-pop "randomly" a few years ago on a trip to Korea for a festival that was cancelled, and then realised how popular the genre was becoming when they kept hearing Wonder Girls' Nobody on the radio while in Singapore for a show.

"We had no idea how crazy it was going to become," said Blain. "It's become one of the most successful things we've ever done."

"In Australia, no one knows what K-pop is, though some people now recognise the songs through our shows."

Suade have performed on TV shows and in stadium concerts in Korea with the audience lapping up their sometimes cheeky, sometimes sweet versions of songs like Girls' Generation's The Boys and classic K-pop hit Magic Castle.

Will there be a Suade version of the now ubiquitous Gangnam Style?

"We've wrestled with that, but it's unlikely," said Blain. "We tend to stick to the girl group tunes."

"We're thinking two things: Has that song jumped the shark? And is it possible to do that song any better than (Gangnam Style singer) Psy does it himself? He's just so funny."

"But you'll get a few laughs seeing us."