

## A Wicked (Aura) world

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SINGAPORE — Getting long-time friends together for a meet-up can be somewhat tricky, given personal commitments, family and work.

So, we were curious to find out how Singaporean percussion group Wicked Aura get all of their 10 to 14 members to attend every rehearsal and performance. With that many people in their roster, they are, quite literally, one of Singapore's biggest bands. (Only orchestras and a few big bands have more members.)

"It's quite a pain in the a\*\* but somehow we manage to get it done," said Wicked Aura frontman Idham Budiman. "The band functions like an army unit, you need everyone or else it would be like a failed orchestra. We can function as a 10-piece, but we can't function as a five-piece. It just wouldn't be Wicked Aura because a lot of it is dependent on certain instruments in the band."

Wicked Aura have performed six times this year, mostly for shows held overseas, and are preparing to release their next album, *Beginning The End*. And come Nov 30, the band will be opening for American rock band, Hoobastank, during their concert in Singapore. We had a chat with Budi.

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Q: Wicked Aura are now more than 10 years old. What's the most important lesson you've learnt after all this time?

A: With any band, no matter what its size, it's about getting along with one another. It's about understanding one another. At the end of the day, it's like family. (It's also important) to have some sort of business acumen to know how to keep yourself afloat.

Q: We hear you teach when you're not performing. Can you tell us more about that?

A: I'm the director of a club called Samba Masala (at Singapore Management University). I've been teaching there for almost 11 years. It's basically one year younger than Wicked Aura because I started at SMU about a year after we formed Wicked Aura.

Q: Are your students surprised when they see you? You look more like a rock star than a teacher with your mohawk.

A: They are kind of used to having a freak teacher. I guess when I am with Wicked Aura, the so-called image has always been a little over the top. I have a penchant for wearing kilts on stage. Other than that, I think we're pretty much the same people on and off stage. We're just driven by the music. Things get chaotic and out of control in a really nice way.

Q: There are so many members in Wicked Aura. How do you split the cheque?

A: It's not that much about money, anyway. Money will come. (But) even if it doesn't, we still do it because we love it. Nobody completely goes into the music business and says: "I want to be a millionaire." We just want to do something we love and be good at it. If you become a runaway success and get a bit of money, then it's a bonus. It's the same reason Hemingway kept writing until he went crazy and died. I don't think Hemingway would have stopped writing if the cheques stopped coming in.

Wicked Aura opens for Hoobastank on Nov 30 at The Coliseum, Hard Rock Hotel, Resorts World Sentosa. Tickets from S\$78 to S\$188 from SISTIC.