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**Headline: Asia's Most Stylish 2024: Jasmine Sokko on how she blends fashion with music**

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By Hashirin Nurin Hashimi



Cover Sokko wears a Lisa Von Tang dress; Cartier Clash de Cartier earring, necklace, rings; her own facial and hand accessories

For Jasmine Sokko, fashion is an extension of her music, marking every change of season. The singer, songwriter and music producer shares insights into her creative vision and futuristic fascinations in worldbuilding and AI with this exclusive access inside the Sokkoverse

Sci-fi. Futuristic. Star Wars. Dune. These are the keywords that Jasmine Sokko shares with the Tatler team on the mood board for the photo shoot for this story. Rarely do we meet a cover subject who gives such specific input, but Sokko is faithful to her creative vision, often looking to the cinematic universe for inspiration, be it in her music or fashion.

Apart from the big picture, the singer, who is known for her monochromatic ensembles and signature masks, respectfully leaves the creative direction, including the splash of Dune-esque neutrals inspired by the two-part film adaptation of Frank Herbert's 1965 sci-fi novel of the same name, to the team. And looking at the images in the spread, we can safely say that the team, along with artificial intelligence (AI) artist Karyn Lim, who created the futuristic backgrounds, delivered to brief. "I'm a very conceptual person," Sokko tells us when we sit down for this interview. The soft-spoken soloist, who also writes and produces her own music, is chirpy and cheerful, showing no signs of tiredness despite an almost eight-hour shoot. "I always start with the big picture—and that gives me something to work towards. For the execution, it's actually not too different from what I'd imagined for a magazine shoot. I create tons of decks [and mood boards], and go to great lengths about research."

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Sokko offers further insight into her creative process. “So let’s say I’m making a song about the solar system. I’d dive into all the songs that have been written about the topic, all the books, all the fashion, and all the different projects,” she shares. “I like to think of myself as a machine learning robot. While I’m creating and working on a concept, I’m actually learning a lot on my own, as I input all of this data.” Sokko declares, “My biggest dream is to make a song—it doesn’t have to be mine; it could be [one] I write for someone else— that’s so

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popular that you could go into a convenience store in the most remote part of the world and you'd hear it playing on the radio. I think there's something so powerful about condensing a message into three minutes, with an enjoyable hook to listen to."

From a young age, Sokko has always found a kind of fascination and connection with music. "It speaks to me in a way that [nothing] else could," she says. "Throughout my childhood, we moved around a lot and I spent a lot of time alone because my parents were often working. Music was the one constant wherever I went." Some of the first artistes she listened to included Avril Lavigne and Faye Wong, but she took a shine to rock music with Queen and AC /DC, among others. Her parents sent her for piano lessons, but "I was terrible at it", Sokko says. "If anything, it didn't make me realise my passion [for music]."

Fuelled by her love of rock music, she was drawn instead to the guitar and taught herself to play. "My [elder] brother was also into music and we played in different rock bands—and would go straight to the jamming studio after school."

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Sokko later realised that “my voice is too thin; I couldn’t carry the soul of a rock band. I also played bass and wasn’t very good at it, even though I was very passionate”. It was during this time that she discovered electronic music, before it became mainstream. “I listened to [American DJ and music producer] Skrillex and was like, ‘Wait, [there’s] no one’s singing.’”

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That was so refreshing for me; it sort of redefined what I knew about music," she says. "I then read all these interviews by Skrillex about how he makes his music and the programme he uses. I'm a geek myself, so I got the programme and spent the entire [time when I was about] 17 or 18 figuring out how to use it."

#### FUTURE SOUNDS (AND VISION)

From there, she seamlessly blends electronic music with pop elements. "This is a space where no one could tell me, 'Your voice is too thin' or 'You're playing your notes out of time'," Sokko says. "I'm in control of the sound, and I feel a sense of freedom and autonomy." She reveals, however, that she "wasn't supported very much in this direction", as she grew up in "a family that was neither musical nor artistic; my parents are very pragmatic and business-oriented". Sharing more, she says: "In fact, everyone told me outright that it was just a hobby, a phase that'll pass eventually. A part of me [considered this as] a sort of motivation; it felt like a rebellion to choose a route that's so different from what society expects of you." While she wanted to study music, Sokko eventually pursued business management at the Singapore Management University to placate her parents. "For the first year, I was so upset," she recalls. "But over time, I realised that if I inherently have the willpower to learn more about music, I don't need the discipline from school to push me towards working on music."

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She channelled her frustration creatively and, in 2016, made her debut with a self-released single, 1057. A numerical way of writing “lost”, she describes “the overarching arc of the song as how we live in a society where we’re lost in numbers, [where] everyone’s using some form of metrics, from grades to money, to define you. I just wanted to vent my

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frustration of growing up in that environment". It was while shooting the music video for the song that Sokko came upon one of her biggest fashion milestones—one that her fans have come to associate her with: masks. "It was my first music video and the story was about this girl who's searching for a missing person. She was wearing a mask only [so she could] take it off to show that the person she's actually looking for is herself," she shares.

While this reveal did not make it into the final cut of the video, the masked persona has continued to stay with her for the most part of her career thus far. "[I consider] fashion [as] an extension of my music. It's one part of worldbuilding a universe ... and the mysterious identity of what I envision 'Jasmine Sokko' to be," the 28-year-old says. "In the beginning, I wanted people to focus on my music production and the quality of my music first before anything else. A lot of the music producers that I love cover their faces too, such as Deadmau5 and Buckethead. Wearing a mask also helps me separate my real life and the persona that I'm building, giving me the licence to be different."

To make her point, Sokko, who is an avid reader, highlights a literary anecdote that she often shares. "In Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, there's a character called Robert Langdon, which [Brown] said is what he imagines himself to be like. That's his ideal version of himself, and he sort of built a fictional character around who he is and who he aspires to be. I think 'Jasmine Sokko' is like that for me," she says. "One part is the real me, and the other is cooler than me, which also leaves some gaps for me to aspire to improve and grow into."

Sokko made her major-label debut under Warner Music Singapore in 2018 with the single *Hurt*. A year later, the self-taught music producer rose to regional prominence following her fourth-place finish in *Rave Now*, a Chinese reality television programme for electronic music acts. She later released the single *Tired*, which has more than 11.7 million streams on Spotify to date.

The same year, she also made history as the first Singaporean to win in the Best Southeast Asia Act category at the MTV Europe Music Awards. "I went to China with a curious mind and wasn't expecting anything, so it was serendipitous that things unfolded the way they did," says Sokko. "[The experience] also got me thinking a lot about my identity as a Singaporean. I grew up in an environment where I spoke Mandarin at home and English with my friends. Should I make music that's true to myself? Having this knowledge inspires me to create a fictional universe that's based on my Asian heritage—and all things sci-fi, which I love."

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This fascination with sci-fi and futurism has informed Sokko's fashion aesthetic, starting first with the structural silhouettes of Yohji Yamamoto and Comme des Garçons, and gradually growing to edgy brands such as Mugler, Rick Owens and Dion Lee. Her impeccable style over the years has earned her a reintroduction into our Asia's Most Stylish list this year, as



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well as collaborations with global brands, including Cartier, Bottega Veneta and Gucci, in various capacities.

Apart from influencing her music and fashion, Sokko's worldbuilding serves as a form of escapism. "You just want to escape somewhere where you disconnect from reality—and that's such a comforting thought. The most direct universe is the one we escape to when we game," says the avid gamer, who is currently into Valorant and Cyberpunk 2077. "When you game, you just enter this universe and everything else doesn't matter. I want to create a safe space like that with my music. Music isn't just the sound you're listening to; it's also a whole immersive experience that you want to bring your community into."

Within this Sokkoverse, she also creates content (some of them personally) for her social media platforms, including Instagram and TikTok, that range from demos inspired by some of her favourite games to music diaries chronicling her creative process. "In an age where everyone's a content creator, I'm still navigating and trying to find something that feels genuine and is fun for me to do. I feel like I could create more—and better—content at the same time," she says. For someone who has her eyes—and ears—set on the future, it is no surprise that Sokko is enthusiastic about AI. "It has been a while since I've been so excited about a piece of technology. I know there's a 50-50 split, or even 70-30, where a lot of artistes are against it," she says. "I have a utopian lens on AI. When we find ways to use it to complement our work but not replace [us], it can be so powerful. I'm excited about the possibilities."

## TO BE HUMAN

With such dedication to her craft, performing remains at the top of the list. This January, Sokko opened for British pop-rock band Coldplay for the first three nights of its six-night Music of the Spheres World Tour in Singapore, playing to an audience of 55,000. Backed by a two-piece band, she played a half-hour set each night in what she declares as "the best week of my life". Referencing her last night, she wrote in an Instagram post: "[I] felt like a robot all my life but tonight made me feel so human." It turns out that on that night, "I cried and choked on my tears, and I couldn't continue singing", laments Sokko with a tiny hint of exasperation. "Those who know me know that I'm not expressive, I don't cry much, and I tend to come across as very robotic, very logical, and very rational all the time. But those three nights were amazing. During my last song on my last night, there was this quiet moment where the audience took up their flashlights. I didn't expect them to react the way they did. It was such a surreal moment for me."

Sokko also describes having a great chat with Coldplay frontman Chris Martin. Some of the band's concert merch feature the line "Everyone is an alien somewhere", and "I've always felt like an outlier wherever I go, so I told him about it and we had this amazing conversation about not fitting in", she shares. Her biggest takeaway from the entire experience is that "what makes a moment so meaningful is when you fully embrace being human and marinate yourself in the feeling. This is the kind of wisdom that I someday hope I'll have—to be able to discern when to be a robot and an alien, and when to be a human".

After three EPs, including one in Mandarin, Sokko is currently working on her first full-length album. "The new music is something that gives me purpose to wake up every day. This time around, I'm going to be working on more songs and they'll all fit into a concept," shares the artiste who is with Full Music, the publishing arm of fellow Singaporean singer JJ Lin's JFJ Productions. "This is the first time in my life that I'm clear about what I want. So I'm very excited. I'm also trying to find new ways to connect more with the people in my community."

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If you are one of those who have been following her music, all masks are off. Sokko made it Instagram-official in July last year, sharing images of her full face. “Over the years, I realised that the mask is getting smaller and smaller, and at the same time, it no longer serves the same purpose it did for me when I first started out and it no longer matters to me that much,” she enthuses. “The whole time I’ve been making music, I was always trying to find my sound. I never had a definitive answer. But around the time when I unmasked [myself ], I found it—and I feel so confident about this new phase.”