

MONTECRISTO: The Narrating Rock Band

***** Live Performance at Bentara Budaya Jakarta, 31 May 2012 !!!**

Anyone who listens to the radio regularly has probably been hit with this realization at one point or another – the music sounds very similar and is actually getting more and more homogeneous. They huddled and hoisted the banner of 'commercial' with its connotations - to be safe to be on TV. This sort of grip does not apply to a band that released its first album in 2010: Montecristo! Will they stand the test of stagnant situation and condition of the music industry today?

“We have chosen the path of non-mainstream music that may not go well with the taste of the music industry in this country and we are fully aware of the consequences of this choice. We believe that having a piece of bread alone is not enough in this life because bread does not give anything in life except that we get our stomach full and a deep sleep,” said Eric Martoyo, the vocalist. Montecristo will be doing an appreciative concert at the Bentara Budaya Jakarta, 31 May 2012. Again, Eric said, “We are collaborating with Sa’Unine String Ensemble.” According to Rustam Effendy (the guitarist), Montecristo will also share the stage with an Indonesian music living legend, Yockie Suryo Prayogo. “We have been doing preparations with such high passion,” said Rustam who first asked Eric and Fadhil Indra to form the band back in 2007.

The name montecristo itself was taken from the cigar brand of Eric’s favorite. “Easy to remember and pronounce,” he said. The three friends have different backgrounds: Eric is a businessman, Rustam is an executive of a multinational company, and Fadhil is a hyperactive musician of heavyweight bands Discus, Makara, and KJP. Later, Haposan Pangaribuan (bass), Alvin Anggakusuma (guitar), and Keda Panjaitan (drums), joined the fold and contributed a more modern sound in the rhythm department.

“Our mission is to deliver the message and it would be more effective if melted into the music,” said Eric. According to him, the lyrics are an equally important part to good music. The content of the lyrics are elements that became the soul of Montecristo’s music and they have raised the major themes of social, political, economic, humanity and romance. “Most of our

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lyrics come from true events,” said Fadhil. According to the music director, their music is hard rock with a touch of symphonic progressive, therefore the sub-genre that is closest to Montecristo’s music is symphonic progressive rock that once peaked in the ‘70s.

From Fadhil’s point of view, Montecristo was built on personal order of human senses: starting from the musical skill, the sensitivity in choosing the notes, to inter-personal and emotional closeness. Fadhil believes that good inter-personal compound will strengthen the synergies to initiate a good quality piece of music. Yet, why all the lyrics were written in English?

“We hope the message of our songs will be able to reach not only the people of Indonesia,” said Eric, Montecristo’s leading lyricist. Eric is a fan of literatures, especially the works from Khalil Gibran, Ernest Hemingway, W.S. Rendra, and Pramoedya Ananta Toer. To Montecristo, lyrics are so important, hence the tagline in the sleeve note “Life is a never ending poem.”

In the end, Montecristo is not just a band but a cultural movement. This is confirmed through the intellectuality and actualization of its philosophical lyrics and musical style that is boldly emerge from the mainstream industry. “This is like a stimulus for the development of culture in order not to be uniformed while simultaneously invites us to see diversity as a strength,” said Eric.

As a cultural movement, Montecristo strives for the album "Celebration Of Birth" so that it can be accessed by anyone, including those in foreign countries. As the result, the first album is available at the Library of Congress di Washington, DC, USA (<http://lccn.loc.gov/2010436368>) and the Cornell University’s library in Ithaca, New York (http://cornell.worldcat.org/title/celebration-of-birth/oclc/650445610&referer=brief_results). The album has also been shipped to several university libraries in Australia, particularly those campuses that offer a study of Indonesia as well as dozens of libraries and private universities throughout Indonesia.

The artwork for Celebration Of Birth was designed by Nicholas Kosasih and won the highest award in the Asian advertising competition Pinasthika Asia Award 2010 in Yogyakarta in the graphic design category.

The Tracklist

Track 1. Ancestral Land

About the story of a Chinese-Indonesian girl who was ignited by the Chinese government's propaganda and returned to the land of the ancestors aboard a ship in 1952. A few years after, socio-political conditions in China changed drastically. Famine throughout the country for many years due to crop failure prolonged so as to make the Chinese people are not welcome to the newcomers. The girl was later accused of being a spy who had come there to spy on the country. Since then, her life turned into a tragedy for a long time. Here, the music of Montecristo feels like a music score that follows the narrative pattern. Piano and orchestration provide the grim atmosphere while strengthening the storyline.

Track 2. About Us

The fiery distorted guitars in the beginning of the song, followed by the piano has transformed the song into a blend of rock music expression. On the surface, this song tells about the diversity of backgrounds of personnel Montecristo, but deeply, lyrics of this song is actually telling a story of humanity. Great figures of the past such as Alexander the Great, Temujin (Genghis Khan), Julius Caesar, Brutus, Mahatma Gandhi to the philosopher Immanuel Kant reinforce the meaning of the lyrics written by Eric Martoyo and it feels like an epic that proclaims the greatness of human figures that inspired the humankind. This song serves as a statement from Montecristo: "*And now we are here separating the noise from the sound, spraying your body, mind and soul*".

Track 3. A Romance Of Serendipity

It feels like as if a rock orchestra conducted by the late Michael Kamen has slipped in this song interlude that is nuanced with progressive rock. The lyrics speak of love wasted that is preceded by an accidental meeting and then grows into a deep love. The girl finally faces the fact that her love is impossible to be united. Although bitter, she finally decides to go. At the last meeting, just before leaving, the girl turns her face to look at her lover for the last time, and then she disappears. The theme of this song as if to reinforce a phrase that we only realize the true love for someone when we lose that person.

Track 4. Garden Of Hope

This song talks about our country in the reform era where politicians are selling empty promises. A grim portrait of our country, which is still on display in front of the eye. Situations like this drive people into despair, pessimism and apathy. This song invites us to remain optimistic and to build a better life. Percussion and piano blend beautifully on the intro while the choir harmonies reminisce that of the classic style of the British progressive bands.

Track 5. Celebration Of Birth

The combination of electric and acoustic guitars tickle our hearing to explore the theme of this song, which is about the philosophical father-to-newborn-son dialogue. In this narrative tune, the father tells us about a beautiful and peaceful world at a time when the children are still small but will eventually turn into a complex world. The father orders that the child later seek knowledge and wisdom as well as contribute to the life. The child is advised to read the works of Khalil Gibran to enrich his emotions as a balance against ratio. As said by Blaise Pascal, a French mathematician and physicist, “The heart has a mind of its own which is not understood by the mind.” This is a song full of wisdom and meaningful lyrics.

Track 6. In Touch With You

This song talks about a confession. The power of the Almighty has pulled him back from the deep lung of sin and he begs for mercy because he does not want to lose the relationship with Him. Written by Fadhil Indra, the song is a blend of acoustic piano and chamber music at the intro. Guitarist Alvin Anggakusuma shows a very strong character in the interlude, and there is nothing wrong with to associate his playing with the psychedelic blues style of Pink Floyd.

Track 7. Crash

This could be the theme that is rarely thought of by the lyricists: the collapse of stock markets around the world, as it did in 2008. Eric Martoyo, the songwriter, is a stock investor, and when the song was written, the value of its investment down to only the remaining 25% of the original value. The

lyrics of this song also cites the opinion of Nobel Prize winner for Economics, Amartya Kumar Sen: “The only good reason to want wealth is because it produces freedom,” and Mahatma Gandhi: “There is enough for everybody's need but not enough for anybody's greed.” A major theme like this is supported beautifully by the sound of 70s progressive rock keyboards blending with rock guitar riffs of the 90s era.

Track 8. Forbidden Song

Written by Rustam Effendy, the song indeed wishes to speak about love that is destined not to happen and it could happen to anyone.

*Don't let the love turn to hate
If I am right or if I am wrong
It was just a forbidden song
Nothing's wrong...*

Track 9. Clean

The song is about someone's life getting free from the addiction of substance abuse with a little help from families and friends. The rhythm section was mainly an expressive blend of bass and drums, while a touch of orchestra smear some parts of the musical arrangements to dramatize the basic theme of the song.

Montecristo is:

Eric Martoyo (Lead Vocal, Lyrics)

Rustam Effendy (Guitars)

Fadhil Indra (Piano, Keyboards, Vocals)

Haposan Pangaribuan (Bass Guitar)

Alvin Anggakusuma (Guitars, Backing Vocals)

Keda Panjaitan (Drums)