

Astreal return with Laneway gig and album

Home-grown indie stalwarts Astreal are making a comeback after a quiet past few years.

Not only are they playing at Laneway Festival Singapore on Jan 21, but they are also releasing a new album, *Light* – their first in 10 years.

While Astreal played their last gig in 2015, singer and bass player Ginette Chittick, 40, says the band have been hard at work in the studio in the past year.

“We’ve been recording and working on new songs,” she says.

“We initially wanted to put out a four-song EP, but we’ve been industrious and it became a full-length album.”

The new release will be available as a digital download and in vinyl.

One of the local scene’s longest-lasting indie acts, the quartet, originally named Breed, first came together in 1992.

The line-up experienced several changes over the years and guitarist Muhammad Alkhatib is the only founding member left.

They recorded two demo cassettes, *Dive Gemma* (1993) and *Chlorine Explosion* (1994), before releasing their debut album *Ouija*

Blush in 1997. In the same year, the late BBC tastemaker and DJ John Peel played one of their songs, *Stay Awake*, on his World Service radio show.

The next few years saw the band perform at major events here, such as music festivals Baybeats and ZoukOut, as well as gigs in Malaysia and Thailand.

In 2006, the band released their second album, *Fragments Of The Same Dead Star*.

Chittick reckons that one of the reasons the band have lasted so long is that their sound, a mix of genres such as shoegaze, ambient and electronica, has remained contemporary over the years.

“The funny thing about shoegaze is that when you hear it, it brings you back to a certain time period, yet it also sounds timeless. I guess we’re lucky that we make music in this genre.”

Astreal, whose other members are keyboardist Jason Ang and drummer Joseph Chian, are one of several Singapore acts on the Laneway bill this year. Others include progressive band T-Rex, rising singer Sam Rui and DJs from two collec-

tives, Attagirl and Poptart.

The band’s set will not be the first time Chittick is appearing on the Laneway stage – she was among the DJs who played tunes in between band performances at Laneway’s inaugural outing at Fort Canning Park in 2011.

A lecturer at Lasalle College of the

Arts, she designed customised tote bags for cosmetics brand Kiehl’s which will be sold at Laneway. The proceeds will go to the Children’s Cancer Foundation.

Having experienced Laneway as a performer and as part of the audience over the years, she is looking forward to playing its stage again.

“I think Laneway typically picks bands that are left of the dial, so I think the audience are more open to music they have not heard as well as genres they are not familiar with.”

Eddino Abdul Hadi

Astreal comprise (from left) Jason Ang, Joseph Chian, Ginette Chittick and Muhammad Alkhatib. PHOTO: LANEWAY FESTIVAL

