

# 'Oddball' with a gift for grime

British rapper REQ, whose career took off after he moved to Singapore six years ago, embraces an electronic music style that started in Britain in the 2000s

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In Britain, rapper REQ plied his trade only at house parties and street corners. When he moved to Singapore six years ago, his music career took off.

This month, the 28-year-old Briton, whose father is Singaporean and mother is British, will perform across Asia to promote his recently released sophomore EP, *Sleeping Giant*.

The string of gigs includes an appearance at the annual 100 Festival at former Bedok Town Secondary School on Sunday and in Macau on July 28.

REQ, a full-time artist whose real name is Samuel Simpson, says: "If I had stayed in the UK, I would have still done music, but it wouldn't be in any way professional. There, it was very much a hobby for me. My hometown doesn't even have a jamming studio. I have a lot more access to music facilities here."

He is signed to AOR Studios, a home-grown music studio and record label, whose honcho, Shorya Sharma, is the main producer of most of his songs.

His debut single, *Badman*, was released last year. He released two EPs this year – *Against All Odds* in February and *Sleeping Giant* last month.

The variety of sounds in the two EPs showcases the breadth of his music.

"In *Against All Odds*, I was experimenting, so all the tracks are different. *Sleeping Giant* is a complete body of work, all the songs are related to one another and they showcase my ability as an MC."

REQ's distinctive music is known as grime, an electronic music style that started in Britain in the 2000s, with roots in genres such as hip-hop and dancehall.

He says there are no other rappers making music in the genre in Singapore, but is confident that there is an increasing number of music fans getting into grime here.

Cherry Discotheque at York Hotel, for example, recently started a monthly grime night.

While he was born in Birkenhead, Britain, the rapper's growing-up years were spent moving from country to country due to the nature of his father's job in the logistics industry.

As he rarely stayed long in one place, he described himself as an "oddball" among his peers and turned to music as a way to cope. He wrote his first rap verses at the age of 15 and started performing at house parties two years later.

After he dropped out of university in Britain at the age of 22, he



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RAPPER REQ (left) on easy access to music facilities in Singapore

ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR

decided to join his parents, who were then based in Singapore. They have since returned to Britain, but he has extended family here.

"I was meant to come here for six months, but ended up staying for good. I like the vibes here, not just the music, but life in general. I know it's a cliché, but it's a safe country

and I just felt like there are more opportunities for me here," he says.

At private education institute MDIS, where he studied mass communications and got his degree, he met fellow student and home-grown rapper Charles Enero.

A song the two of them collaborated on with singer Sheeq Luna,

called *Mother Nature's Cry*, won the 2013 Eco Music Challenge, a music competition organised by the National Environment Agency.

In recent years, Simpson has worked with home-grown hip-hop veteran Sheikh Haikel and Filipino artist Yeng Constantino, as well as volunteered to teach rap at juvenile

home Singapore Boys' Home.

While his music is making forays in the region, the rapper says he calls Singapore home.

"Singapore is my base. I just want to do more music and see what happens."

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## Learn to forage via a mobile app

WASHINGTON • What is equally as crucial as learning to read and write? For Rene Redzepi, founder of Noma and possibly the world's most influential chef, the answer is: "Everyone in the world should grow up as a forager."

"Knowing your ABCs in nature, the flora and fauna, the patterns of the landscape and the rhythm of the seasons" is important, he noted. Recently, at the World's 50 Best Restaurants' 15th anniversary event in Barcelona, he announced the launch of an international programme that aims to connect people to nature and the landscape.

The centrepiece of *Vild Mad (Wild Food)* is a free mobile app that explains how to read a landscape and unlock its culinary potential.

He said at the event: "If they see how much we depend upon it and if they grow up loving it, then they will fight to take care of it."

Redzepi's reputation was forged in Copenhagen, where Noma employed professional foragers to fill the restaurant's larder. Despite Denmark's limited bounty compared with more southerly regions, foraging and preserving are foundations of Nordic culture.

"The surprises we've had," said Redzepi, 39, include "plucking grass from rotten seaweed to find it tastes like coriander, harvesting pineapple weed from cracks in the sidewalks or biting into an ant to find it tastes just like lemon."

After figuring it out in chilly Scandinavia, he began imagining what was possible elsewhere.



The app *Vild Mad (Wild Food)* by the founder of Noma restaurant, Rene Redzepi, includes tips on identifying, harvesting and cooking wild plants.

PHOTO: NYTIMES

"How might the world look different if we all were foragers?" Redzepi asked in a telephone interview from Copenhagen.

"We hope that our programme can be an inspiration for others to do the same in different countries and cultures."

Later this summer, *Vild Mad* will update the app with more recipes from 80 influential chefs, including Daniel Humm, Magnus Nilsson and Redzepi.

The app is funded by a Danish foundation that invested US\$1.25 million (S\$1.73 million) and was developed by Mad, Redzepi's non-profit organisation which started in 2011 to produce an eponymous international food symposium.

More than 11,000 people reacted to the announcement of the app via Facebook in the first few hours and 1,000 people downloaded it before it was officially announced.

On Aug 27, Redzepi will host a gathering outside Copenhagen, with music, foraging trips and seminars on cooking with wild foods.

"It is an amazing feeling to distil 14 years of knowledge and energy into something that is open to the public," he said.

"We simply can't wait to share all of this." WASHINGTON POST

This spring, he opened a Noma pop-up in Tulum, Mexico, and designed the menu around what could be harvested locally.

Langdon Cook, a Seattle forager and author, said the surprise-and-reward aspect touted by Redzepi is one reason foraging is trending.

"It's the treasure hunt which is incredibly primal. People are rediscovering these ancestral motivations that they didn't even know

they had," Cook noted.

Foraging requires time, patience, curiosity and a keen use of the senses.

The vast majority of work has traditionally been for botanical or medicinal purposes, but *Vild Mad* and other contemporary foragers look to the ground as a grocer.

At home, wild food encourages children to try things they would not otherwise eat. Bitter greens and

herbs, for instance, can be exciting when kids collect them themselves.

More than identification, the app incorporates education, reflections and explanations by Redzepi.

Available in English and Danish, the app and website house an encyclopaedia of foraging and culinary information on 105 wild plants in the Nordic region.

Users get tips on how to identify, harvest and cook the wild plants.