



The guitar kept him at home and out of trouble, says Mr Sano, 24, who has graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in music with first-class honours from the Lasalle College of the Arts. ST PHOTO: MARCUS TAN

## Saved by the electric guitar

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### Rahimah Rashith

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Mr Muhammad Sanoccima Shaiful Bahar chuckles when asked about his early years in music.

“I remember picking up the guitar when I was 14 but I didn’t consider pursuing music seriously until I had been playing for about four or five years,” said the musician, who prefers to be called Sano.

“Where I grew up, at my secondary school, and at that age, you get into trouble with drugs and gangs. But it was the guitar that kept me busy, and kept me at home.”

Last week, Mr Sano graduated with a bachelor of arts in music with first-class honours from the Lasalle College of the Arts.

At 24, he is already an established musician, regularly playing his electric guitar alongside local household names such as Gentle Bones and Linying here and abroad.

“I picked up the guitar after watching the movie, Back To The Future,” he said, adding that his father was supportive and enrolled

him in Yamaha Music School.

“But I had to learn the classical guitar because, in my father’s mind, the classical guitar is like an angel and the electric guitar is the devil,” said Mr Sano.

However, after just a year, he dropped out of music school. “I realised classical guitar just wasn’t for me so I just left,” he said.

But instead of abandoning music altogether, he had his eye on something else. “I went to the devil,” said Mr Sano with a laugh. “I really wanted to learn the electric guitar.”

He said he also wanted to explore more of genres like jazz and blues.

Hungry for an electric guitar, Mr Sano served food at KFC for four months to save up for it.

“At that time, saving up \$300 for the electric guitar was a lot to a 15-year-old,” he said. He would work for \$3.10 an hour, earning about \$15 at the end of a five-hour shift.

“Once I got the electric guitar, I just spent a lot of time at home practising,” he said. “It was around the time when YouTube started to grow popular, so everything I

learnt was based on the Internet and practice.”

In 2010, after completing secondary school, he felt the tug of the guitar again. A friend got him to apply to Lasalle, he said. “The day I was accepted was one of the happiest days of my life. I went right away and signed the papers.”

He immersed himself in classes, studying everything from music business to theory and ear training.

In no time, he was acing them.

Dr Joseph Curiale, Mr Sano’s lecturer at Lasalle, said: “In addition to being a fine guitarist, Sano has developed his own local-flavoured, American blues-based hybrid that makes him stand out from the crowd. This, combined with his sensitive playing, clean sound and thoughtful compositions, afford him a very special place in Singapore popular music.”

Mr Sano, who moves between playing the guitar for artistes as a session musician and being a music director, said: “From then till now, it is the guitar that has guided me.”

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