

# Nothing else but Cheer

Taiwanese songbird Cheer Chen does it best with no gimmicks

review concert

**CHEER CHEN**  
Singapore Indoor Stadium  
Last Saturday  
andy chen

At the emotional peak of Cheer Chen's biggest concert in Singapore, more than 1½ hours into the performance, there was a sudden, stunned silence.

The Taiwanese singer-songwriter was riding a crescendo on the jaunty rhythm of her first hit in Singapore in 1998, *Let Me Think*, when she stopped singing so her fans could fill in the blanks.

Where the lyrics "Give me some space so that I can think" should have been, there was, briefly, dead air. The audience had completely missed their cue.

You could say the embarrassing incident exemplifies what some say is Singapore music fans' notorious lack of spontaneity during concerts.

Or, more kindly, read the situation as one where the 4,000-strong crowd was so caught up dancing and pogo-ing along with Chen and her five-piece band that they did not see the interactive gesture coming. The truth was a little of both.

But the miscommunication, perhaps, was also aptly emblematic of Chen's die-hard fans' mixed reaction to her metamorphosis from a waifish Pollyanna folk-pop singer to a wannabe rock chick.

Most likely, like me, many wondered how the intimate confessionals she writes, such as *Let Me Think*, *The Meaning Of Travel* and *Lying In Your Closet*, would translate to stadium-sized anthems, and how her wispy, wistful girl-woman whisper of a voice would handle going rock.

Pyrotechnics, abstract video images, electric guitar fuzz, polyrhythmic drumming, a general cranking up of the volume to 11, grungy-looking torn pants and, indeed, the tattoo sleeve on her left arm which she got in recent years, do not a rock chick make.

As exciting for fans as most of the concert was, the first half saw everyone just sitting down with an occasional and scattered waving of light sticks. For the first eight songs, her famous Gibson Hummingbird acoustic guitar did not even make its appearance.

When it finally did show up for an acoustic segment with Chen and her guitar and a guest accordion player, fans were still reserved.

It was only when Chen appeared in the middle of the auditorium singing *Waiting on a mini-crane* and then walking through the crowd for several photo opportunities, that the audience came to life.

This was the Chen they wanted and had long been accustomed to: up close and personal, for that has always been her appeal.

Her appearance among fans finally assured them she was still in touch. And so the crowd redeemed themselves and later sang along heartily with *I Still Get Lonely* and *Tell Me*.

Nearing the end of the concert, which was over 2½ hours long, her voice weakened undeniably.

Chen has to do what she has always done: Forget the stadium. Forget how many thousands flock to her concerts. Just play her Hummingbird and sing from the heart, minus the big-show elements. That she did during the third encore at 11pm.

She pulled a chair to the front of the stage and performed the remaining songs like she would in a coffee shop, never mind that the "coffee shop" has grown immeasurably.

andychen@sph.com.sg



PHOTO: ROCK RECORDS

No big-show antics but just Cheer Chen singing her heart out.