

MUSIC



ANGLE, by ELEPHANT GYM – If American Football gave birth to contemporary math-rock by crafting earnest emo tunes with subtle virtuosity, then the Japanese band **toe** is probably its equivalent in Asia, becoming the undisputed figurehead of the region’s math-rock scene. Often singled out as a seminal stalwart in Asian math-rock, toe’s clean guitar tones and off-kilter melodies became a staple in many musicians’ repertoire. Several bands like **Chinese Football** (China), **tfvsjs** (Hong Kong) and **mutosite** (Malaysia) serve as its votaries, blending the stylings of Fugazi-esque emo and progressive rock with their local aesthetics. Their sounds are distinct from the West’s often abrasive and raw expressions, leaning towards polished, discordant but still catchy hooks.

But the roots of math – Asian or Western – are still largely similar: the rhythmic bedlam, the haphazard time signatures changes and the sheer wizardry involved in composing these songs. All these traits are proficiently applied by **Elephant Gym**, a Taiwanese math-rock outfit that focuses on bringing out the heady textures and melodies in its music, while weaving in influences from traditional

Taiwanese music. Mix in the aerobatics of its basslines – courtesy of bassist and front-woman Tif Chang Kai-ting, who somehow manages to belt out tunes while noodling on her instrument – and the result is a breezy, heavily bass-driven brand of math-rock bliss. Even its moniker is a nod to this, with “Elephant” referring to the centrality of the bass guitar in its sound, and “Gym” hinting at the musical gymnastics often required of math-rock bands.

Of course, Tif didn’t do these alone; she was joined by her brother and guitarist, Tell Chang Kai-hsiang, and drummer, Tu Chia-Chin, whose mastery in their respective instruments cleverly plays off Tif’s infectious riffs. Classically trained since childhood, the trio soon discovered their love for post-rock and the experimental melodies of toe. These culminated into a mixing session with Mino Takaaki, the guitarist of toe, for its first full-length album, *Angle*.

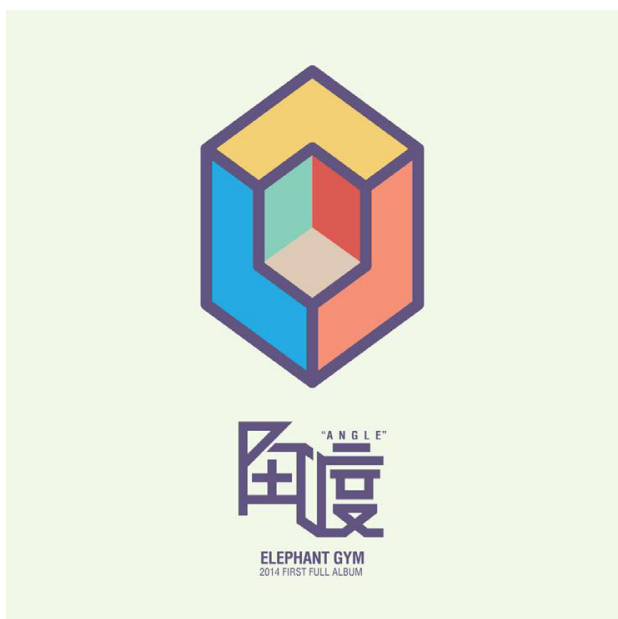
Despite its admiration of toe, Elephant Gym is more than just an imitation of the Japanese titan’s music; *Angle* showcases its tremendous versatility, from the heart-pounding, fragmentary composition of “Frog” to

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the lighter, jazz-infused harmonies in “Day Time”, featuring Tif’s dreamy, almost saccharine vocals. Elements of folk singing are also incorporated in “Swan”, featuring Panai Kasui, a singer-songwriter and social activist from the Puyuma and Amis tribes of south-eastern Taiwan. Ultimately, they all lend to a vivacity and vigor that’s unmistakably theirs.

In an interview with music site **Fecking Bahamas**, Tell spoke about the difference between math-rock in Asia and the West. “Speed change, meter switch and cross rhythm used in math-rock are very common in Taiwan, Indonesian, Japanese and Indian traditional music,” he shared. “I think the reason why math-rock in Asia is usually more fluent and tender is that the key elements of math-rock coincidentally match the original sound concealed in Asian people, rather than the attempt to create experimental music.” These geographic and cultural differences may explain why Elephant Gym’s brand of math-rock – like the region’s interpretation of the genre – is so distinctively colorful.

– KHEE HOON CHAN



PLAYLIST

- “Slide,” by Missy Elliott
- “Chemical Warfare,” by Dead Kennedys
- “In My Feelings,” by Lana Del Ray
- “Ocean,” by Sebadoh
- “Hoppipolla,” by Sigur Ros
- “Untitled,” by Sisters of Mercy
- “Pattycake,” by Self
- “Wild West,” by Lissie
- “Meet Me in the Woods,” by Lord Huron
- “Rut,” by The Killers
- “Spinal Remains,” by Misfits
- “Bodak Yellow,” by Cardi B
- “International You Day,” by No Use For A Name
- “King,” by Tesseract
- “Paper Lung,” by Underoath
- “Road to Nowhere,” by Greensky Bluegrass
- “Blindsided Again,” by Turin Brakes
- “Paramedic!” by SOB X RBE
- “We Will Fall Together,” by Streetlight Manifesto
- “Trust the Sun,” by Elbow
- “Silhouettes,” by Herman’s Hermits
- “God’s Plan,” by Drake
- “Sheep,” by Pink Floyd

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