

Special Report

Young Kuwaiti musician seeks to make local English music relevant

# Artie finds beat in 'experimental' music

By Ahmed Al-Naqeeb  
Arab Times Staff

SOMETIMES, all you need is to turn up the volume to the max and listen to music – whether you are escaping from the painful slaps of reality, reviving a sensational moment in your life or simply setting your mood straight to tackle the world right.

No one can argue with the power of music, how one track can make you feel and how the other makes you act. But this is only for those who listen, what about those who create it? How do musicians create this portal for us to use and to escape from reality? The answer is simple, it is reality itself. Reality leaves a lot to imagination; giving birth to creativity which is then channelled through sound, thereby, creating music.

The truth is, creating music is a profession; trading beautiful arrangement of sounds for anything necessary to sustain a life of dedication. This is the reality of creating music; it is not all about being pleasant and metaphors of transcendence, as there is a constant struggle with feasibility – a battle between sustaining one of the beauties of this world and the hard reality of staying alive.

Here in Kuwait, musical talent is very evident but not relevant enough to stand on its own. Why? According to Hamad Artie – a young Kuwaiti musician, the blame lies on both sides of the spectrum. The artists who are not doing enough to make English music in Kuwait stand out, and the businessmen who do not bother themselves with local talent as they believe it is not viable.

In an interview with the Arab Times, Artie talks about his musical journey – its ups and downs, and his opinion on why English music in this part of the world is practically irrelevant.

Following is the full text of the interview:

**Question:** Tell us a little about yourself.

**Answer:** I am 28. I am a visual artist but mainly focused on music. I started as an instrumentalist. I stayed on that path for the most part of my life until I was 25, and then I decided to add vocals to my work.

**Q:** What got you into music?

**A:** I think I have always been into music. I mean there are many old videos of me banging on shoe boxes trying to make some sort of beat. I had this drum that I used to have a lot of fun with when I was three years old. When I was nine or 10 years old, me and my cousin were just walking around and we found blank cassette tapes. I do not know, but those tapes were just cool. We got a couple of those tapes, went home, grabbed some trash cans and some utensils, and then we started banging, recording the beats we made. The next time around, I thought of taking it to the next level and recorded actual tracks. I recorded stuff from TV and SEGA. When we had a lot of cassette tapes with different tracks on them, I started recording my cousin's voice over the tracks, overlaying them and writing melody. When I turned 15, I formed my first band called, "Retro Flex", with two members from the band now known as "Galaxy Juice." We had a couple of shows together but we disbanded later because we were finishing high school and continu-



Hamad Artie

ing our education elsewhere.

**Q:** How did you end up in your current genre of music?

**A:** I was with "Retro Flex" when heavy metal was popular, but that type of music at the time was not our cup of tea. We wanted to play slightly softer music and more into the pop side, so we were booed whenever we tried to play our music. But even then, I did not really know what my musical bearing was, until this day. If someone asks me what kind of genre do you play, I always answer: "I do not know." I just pick up my instrument – guitar or piano, and write something, build stuff over it. It just happens, it is hard to explain.

**Q:** But some might say that not being able to identify yourself within a genre renders you without a musical identity, what do you think?

**A:** Well, if you say I play this or that genre, you are sort of type-casting yourself and limiting yourself to that genre. I do not like limiting myself. As an artist, you should never limit yourself. I am sure there is an identity somewhere, something that binds it all together, I mean it is music. If I am forced to specify the genre, then the closest would be "experimental." But then again, I am currently working on music with a funky side.

**Q:** What instruments do you play?

**A:** Piano, guitar, ukulele and drums.

**Q:** When did you start producing music?

**A:** When I started the band at age 15.

**Q:** You are not a full-time musician, right?

**A:** I am not.

**Q:** Why?

**A:** It is not possible here. You cannot go around saying, "Yes I am a professional musician," especially for artists who play English music, you must have a day job.

**Q:** Why do you think so?

**A:** There is no industry for this. Music has been losing most of its business side, particularly in this region. They think of it as something free that you can just download from the Internet. It has become a trade where you cannot generate significant income.

**Q:** Are you saying it is not viable in this region?

**A:** It is the law of supply and demand. There are a lot of artists in Kuwait. I am not saying all of them are good, half of them are just starting and the other half have been around for so long but there are a lot of them. I am not saying there is no demand, as there is always demand for entertainment but the suppliers are way too many. At the same time, I feel the artists are not doing enough in terms of our shows. Being an artist is very difficult in general, but it is more difficult here, where English music has no sustainability.

**Q:** Is there some sort of movement towards making local English music relevant in Kuwait?

**A:** Recently, yes. With a lot of artists trying their best to put their work out there, I am still not sure if that is enough, but there is definitely a better way of doing this. For example, if money is involved, then it is business. If there is business, then there is marketing. If we use marketing correctly, people will like what you make.

Basically, artists are not addressing the business aspect of music. It is not completely the fault of artists, as I do not think business people are interested in this kind of art in general. Maybe, it is because of social media through which being famous has become easier than before. You can easily be famous by being a blogger or a 'fashionista'. Apparently, people are more attracted to these things and big businesses know this, so they are adopting to such whims for their gain, generating more money for the bloggers or 'fashionistas' and of course for themselves. In other parts of the world, like the United States or England, it is very different as business people go around scouting for talent. If they find someone really good, they will take him in and try to make as much money out of him and for him.

**Q:** Describe the English musical talent in the local scene.

**A:** I have worked with a lot of artists from my generation and they are all talented. They work hard on their projects and invest a lot of money in their craft, just trying to make it. The only problem is diversity. We are not covering numerous genres and some of them has not been even touched. How many psychedelic bands are there in Kuwait? One or two? How about rock bands? Quite a few. How many cover musicians? A lot, and in my opinion, it is just a waste of time and talent because you are merely playing someone else's song.

**Q:** What about the government's side? Are they paying enough attention to this aspect of the Kuwaiti youth?

**A:** No, they are not paying any attention. From 2004 to 2009, I performed in 11 shows. Throughout those teenage years, around 20 shows were cancelled. To this day, everyone who attended those shows or were planning to participate, do not understand why they were cancelled. Under such circumstances, the only sort of explanation you get is from newspapers the next day stating that a show was cancelled by the government due to its Satanist nature. What does that even mean? A bunch of teenagers and young adults were simply coming together to play metal music for the entertainment of the rest, considering metal music was the thing back then. We were just trying to have fun and there was nothing harmful about it in anyway. It was simply the government's misunderstanding of the

genre. No effort was put into coming to those events and seeing what they were about. They cancelled shows because they believed those were acts of Satanism or some other kind of inappropriate behaviour.

**Q:** If you were to point out one thing that needs to be changed for local English music to boom in Kuwait, what would it be?

**A:** It needs to be monetized. At one point, if there is no money involved, most of the artists you see today will be bored and give up, saying things like, "I want to get married," "I need to focus on my day job, I did not get that promotion because I was focusing on my music" or "I am not getting anywhere." At the end, they are just going to stop. I have seen a lot of artists who gave up music, they put in everything they have and they ended up getting nowhere. Again, it is not the fault of businessmen alone. As part of the music community, I think a lot of us are not doing the best we can. We can do a lot more in terms of reaching out to listeners like what 'Daffy' from "Army of One" did. I am sure he can make music with more depth, but he knows what people want to listen to, and that is what his hit song "Samboosa" is all about. You are going to get artists who say, "I do not want to sell out." In that case, I would say, "Okay then keep making music in your bedroom."

**Q:** But is not keeping true to your music and not selling out one of the pillars of a true musician?

**A:** That is the issue everywhere, not just in Kuwait. If you want to keep true to your music and just make music, then you must create something new, something creative to the point that it will break the mainstream barrier and introduce something that everyone can fall in love with. Forget the people for a second, if you dedicate yourself and hone your skills

to the point of mastery, people will notice, recognize and appreciate you and your musical creations. How many of us are like that? Personally, I am not that kind of artist.

On the business side, they will come to whatever makes money for them, but from the artist's side, you need to be great. We have a lot of good and fun artists, but none of us have stood out and became great. We need to be dedicated to our craft.

**Q:** Do you think the rest of the music community would agree with your opinion?

**A:** I am not sure everyone will. This is my own opinion and I am sure some artists will say, "Leave me out of this, I do not want to sell out." Fine, let us see how long you can keep that up. It is not going to make any money for you, so at one point you are going to give up.

I think it is because of our culture. The older you get, the more difficult it is for you to be relevant. I am not saying it is too late because it is never too late, but it will be very difficult for you.

**Q:** Let us talk about the album you released.

**A:** The title of the album is "Moody's Shuffle" and it was self-published. It was more of an experiment – can I do this or not? When I recorded the first song and the microphone was in front of me, I sounded awful and I started sweating. It was probably one of the most embarrassing moments in my entire life. I was panicking at that point because I did not know what to do. I had this whole album that I needed to record. I just did not know I was that bad. I went back home that day and practiced my vocal skills for about three months. I came back to the studio to start recording again and people were surprised because I got way better. If you compare my recent songs to the first one entitled, "I Was Wrong," you will easily notice that my voice was slightly different then.

**Q:** What message do you want to convey through your music?

**A:** As I said earlier, the first album is about challenging myself; the tracks are more about emotional relations. I wanted to relate with people through emotions which, I am sure, everyone has gone through. But this question is something I have been thinking about recently. I would like to convey a different message the next time around. I have done "Moody's Shuffle". I know the formula and I do not want to do it again, I want to do something different. I do not know yet what it is or what kind of message it will carry. All I know is that it is going to sound different from the first album.

**Q:** Any last message to aspiring musicians?

**A:** I do not want to be negative, but be sure to know the outcomes. You are not the only ones, there are millions of people around the world who want the same thing. Keep your hopes up. It will not be easy but do not give up

**Biography**

Name: Hamad Artie  
Age: 28 (June 28, 1988)  
Albums: Moody's Shuffle – released on May 7, 2015. Available on iTunes and other online outlets.  
Notable Collaborations: Yousif Yaseen, Galaxy Juice, Hashim Al-Nasser, Reset String, TTT, Khalid Al-Mansour, Faisal Yaseen and Sandwave Productions  
Website: www.hamadartie.com



Photos show participants of the annual Run Q8 charity initiative on Nov 12.

Photos by Bassam Abu Shanab

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