



04 JAN, 2024

Dare to de the norm

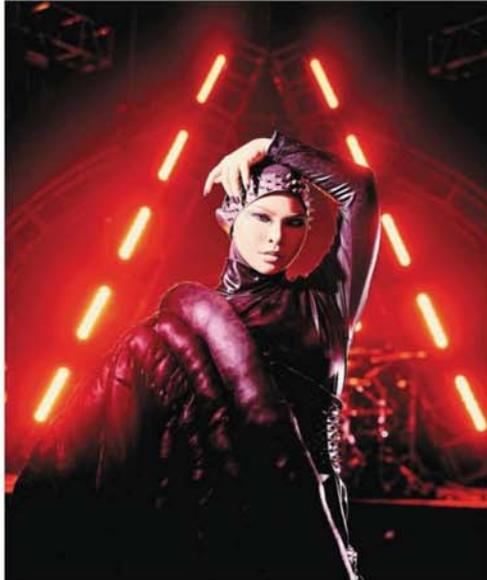
The Star, Malaysia



New year,
new dreams

Malaysian singer Aina Abdul has big plans for 2024 – winning more awards, trying her luck in Indonesia, singing for a K-drama – and she intends to tick them off the list. 2&3

Photo: Handout



Aina is known for her avant-garde stage outfits. — Handout

Dare to defy the norm

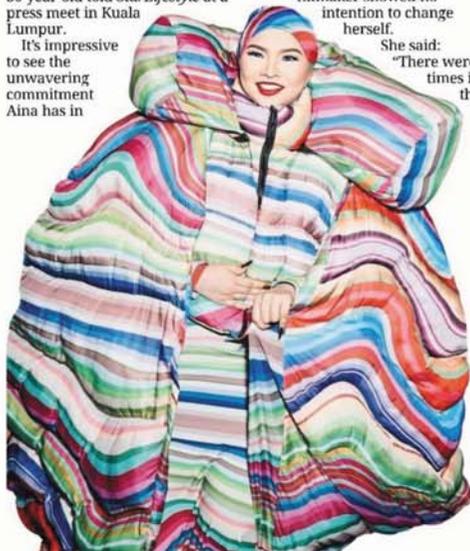
By ANNDREA A. WEBBER
entertainment@thestar.com.my

IT'S a near-impossible feat to encapsulate Malaysian singer Aina Abdul's fashion sense in a single style.

Whether it's packing her gown with dry ice or flaunting a dress made from synthetic hair, experimenting with wild costumes is something Aina never shies away from and unapologetically so.

"I love fashion as it allows me to express myself in a creative way. Each outfit I wear carries its own special meaning," the 30-year-old told *StarLifestyle* at a press meet in Kuala Lumpur.

It's impressive to see the unwavering commitment Aina has in



staying true to her fashion choices, considering the avalanche of criticisms she has faced.

Last June, she received boycott threats for wearing an outfit resembling a mattress to season five of reality show *Big Stage*.

She was accused of being "over the top" the following month after arriving at the 35th Anugerah Bintang Popular Berita Harian awards in a lorry as the size of her ensemble, measuring 120cm wide, was too big to fit into a car.

Despite all that, the *Sumpah* hitmaker showed no intention to change herself.

She said: "There were times in the



The singer will be holding her first international solo concert in Singapore. — YAP CHEE HONG/The Star

past where I'd try to follow certain trends and the standards of the masses, and it never worked well for me or got me anywhere.

"2019 was the year when I decided to just be myself, and I've gotten results out of it.

"Although there's backlash against my fashion choices, I don't see it as a threat because negative comments are good publicity sometimes."

Road to success

Aina's rise to stardom comes from humble beginnings.

She discovered her musical talent at the age of 12 and performed gamelan and caklempong with a group at weddings during her school days, earning RM50 for each gig.

Realising she could make a living through music, Aina enrolled for vocal lessons at 17 and later worked as a performer in clubs, lounges and restaurants, though the income wasn't much.

"I'd sometimes receive RM50 but even then, I have to split it among the band (members). There were also times when I didn't get paid," she has said in past interviews.

After wearing an outfit shaped like a mattress, Aina received boycott threats. — Aina Abdul/Instagram

Aina went on to participate in various singing competitions in Negri Sembilan where she hails from.

She was a finalist in Radio Television Malaysia's (RTM) 2010 *Bintang Irama 1 Malaysia* singing competition and the winner of the *Golden Voices Of PJ* contest in 2012.

Her musical journey made headway in 2014, when she clinched the Vocalist Of The World award at the World Championship of Performing Arts in the United States.

In 2015, Aina finished second in the reality show *Mentor Legend* and went on to release her debut single *Ini Yang Kau Mahu*.

From there on, she continued to release songs like *Reminiscing*, *Shadow* and *Semalam*, all the while earning her Degree in Contemporary Music at UCSI University in Kuala Lumpur.

The years that followed saw the singer rising up the popularity ladder.

Not only was she crowned the champion of *The Masked Singer Malaysia* in 2020, she also struck gold after winning the main prize and Best Vocal for her song, *Terus Hidup*, at the 37th Anugerah Juara Lagu (AJL 37) in 2022.

Despite spending over a decade in the industry, Aina only

released her first album, *Imaji*, in October last year.

It was an album she almost gave up on due to time constraints.

However, Aina pushed herself to finish it after song composer Datuk Ramli MS said in an episode of *Big Stage* – where they both served as judges – that one should have an album before holding a concert.

"I felt very challenged and small sitting next to him at that time.

"If I had magic powers, I'd like to return to that moment and show him my album," she said in an interview with *mStar*, *The Star's* Malay-language news portal.

Additionally, Aina wanted to silence sceptics who questioned why she wanted to hold a concert at Axiata Arena, Bukit Jalil, when she didn't have an album nor many hits.

"If an international artiste can hold concerts even though they have only a few songs, why can't a local artiste like me do the same? This stigma needs to change," she said.

Making waves overseas

Aina's resilience has gotten her far in her music career.

This Saturday, she will be holding her very first international



Aina (centre) met Moonbyul (left) and Solar of K-pop girl group Mamamoo during her time in Seoul, South Korea. — Aina Abdul/Instagram

solo concert at The Theatre at Mediacorp in Singapore.

Titled *A Night With Aina Abdul* (ANWAA) Live In Singapore, the upcoming show will see the singer presenting 26 songs, accompanied by 15 musicians from Malaysia.

Aina told *StarLifestyle* that performing in Singapore has always been on her wishlist.

"I've performed in the country twice but only at other artistes' concerts.

"After holding ANWAA 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0 in Malaysia, I noticed that I have many Singaporean fans.

"As an artiste, it's my responsibility to give back.

"These fans have travelled far and spent loads just to see me perform here. Now, it's my turn to return the favour," she said.

Aina added that preparing for the upcoming concert had been challenging as she had to come up with fresh ideas.

Her last concert was in November last year, where she had five outfit changes and performed for nearly three hours at Axiata Arena, Bukit Jalil in Kuala Lumpur.

"A Night With Aina Abdul is known for its quick outfit changes, which takes about two to three minutes backstage.

"Everyone was satisfied with ANWAA 3.0, so they are expecting crazier gimmicks in the upcoming show," she said.

As someone who consistently aims to raise the bar, Aina is unafraid of going all out for her stages.

In fact, the *Nafas Cinta* singer forked out some RM400,000 for five outfits at her ANWAA 3.0 concert last November.

One of the gowns, weighing 40kg and adorned with jewels, reportedly cost RM120,000.

While fans weren't too surprised by her decision to allocate such a huge budget, others were left perplexed and accused the singer of squandering her money.

In response to these claims, Aina said: "I'm doing this not because I want to show off or waste money.

"I'm doing this because I want results and quality.

"I've already set expectations with ANWAA 3.0, so I can't downgrade my performance".



At her ANWAA 3.0 concert in November, the bold artiste wore a gown loaded with dry ice to give out a smoke effect. — Aina Abdul/Instagram

Finding strength in loved ones

Fame and criticisms come hand-in-hand, and Aina is aware of that.

Instead of allowing the negativity to drag her down, the singer has learned to live with it.

One of the ways she deals with negative remarks is by actively ignoring comments online.

"Why involve myself in things that can't be avoided, you know?"

"Even if I do come across a negative comment, I always tell myself that there are another 10 more positive ones.

"These positive comments speak more about you than the few negative ones," she said.

Aina also expressed gratitude to her mother, who she regularly seeks advice from and credits as the person who keeps her going in the midst of adversity.

Aina's father, who suffered from a heart ailment, high blood pressure and diabetes, passed away at 55.

"My father passed away when I was 15, and my mum has been raising me on her own since.

"Seeing her determination and spirit when she's at her worst makes me feel like whatever I'm going through in life is nothing.

"There are more important things to focus on than negative comments," she said.

What lies ahead

It was an eventful year for Aina in 2023 and the singer capped it off by performing at South Korea's ABU TV Song Festival 2023 in November.

The event featured musicians from across Asia.

"When the emcee announced my name, I was expecting dead silence, no cheers or anything like that from the crowd.

"Little did I know, several Malaysian students introduced their Korean friends to my music and some of them living outside Seoul travelled all the way just to watch me perform," she said.

Although Aina is new to South Korea's music scene, she's not a complete stranger.

In 2021, she was invited as a guest on the South Korean programme, *Simply K-pop Con-Tour*, to talk about her song *Sepi*, which she also recorded in Korean.

Aina also impressed Korean netizens with her song covers on YouTube – including *DNA* by K-pop juggernaut BTS and *This Love*, originally performed by Davichi for the K-drama *Descendants Of The Sun*.

On whether she's considering expanding her career in South Korea, the singer said she's not closing any doors.

"I'd like to sing an original soundtrack for a K-drama if possible," she added.

Presently, Aina is focused on penetrating the Indonesian music market as she mainly draws inspiration from Indonesian songs.

However, she wants to ensure her career in Malaysia is stable first before venturing overseas.

Aina also wants her album, *Imaji*, to win awards this year.

"Before this I'd only write like one song a year.

"Now that I have an album out, I want to promote it as much as I can and win some awards for it. That's one of my main goals this year," she said.

A Night With Aina Abdul Live In Singapore will be held at The Theatre at Mediacorp on Jan 6 at 8pm. Tickets are priced between S\$88 (RM307) and S\$258 (RM900) and can be purchased at myticketempire.com.